

Suggested APA style reference:

Jezzini, A. T. & Guzmán, C. E., & Grayshield, L. (2008, March). *Examining the gender role concept of marianismo and its relation to acculturation in Mexican-American college women*. Based on a program presented at the ACA Annual Conference & Exhibition, Honolulu, HI. Retrieved June 27, 2008, from <http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas08/Jezzini.htm>

Examining the Gender Role Concept of *Marianismo* and its Relation to Acculturation in Mexican-American College Women

Andreana T. Jezzini
New Mexico State University

Cynthia E. Guzmán
New Mexico State University

Lisa Grayshield
New Mexico State University

Grayshield, Lisa, PhD., is an Assistant Professor in the Counseling & Educational Psychology department at New Mexico State University. Dr. Grayshield teaches classes in psychology of multiculturalism, school counseling, and counseling research.

Jezzini, Andreana T., MA, is a Clinical Specialist at Southwest Counseling Center, Las Cruces, New Mexico. Ms. Jezzini's research interests are women's issues and the psychology of ethnic minorities. She co-leads women's empowerment groups at Southwest Counseling Center.

Guzmán, Cynthia E., MA, is a PhD candidate at the Counseling & Educational Psychology program at New Mexico State University. Ms. Guzmán's research interests

are women's/gender issues and psychology of ethnic minorities.

Based on a program presented at the ACA Annual Conference & Exhibition, March 26-30, 2008, Honolulu, HI.

Introduction

Frequently under-investigated in psychological research, *marianismo* is a Latina gender role phenomenon based on traditional cultural norms, and the values of Catholicism. Encompassing the concepts of self-sacrifice, passivity, caretaking, duty, honor, sexual morality, and the Latina's role as a mother; the implicit socialized concept of *marianismo* is often likened to martyrdom of the Virgin Mary (Comas-Diaz, 1988, Ramirez, 1990, Ginorio, Gutiérrez, Cauce & Acosta 1995, Gil & Vasquez, 1996; qtd. in Rivera-Marano, 2000). Comparatively, the concept of *machismo* is a male gender socialization phenomenon, encompassing the concepts of exaggerated masculinity, physical prowess, dominance, patriarchal authority, and male chauvinism (Baca Zinn, 1994). The body of research in Latino gender role studies, however, had predominantly been on the phenomenon of *machismo*. An under-investigation of Latina literature is noted by researchers. Boyd (1986) commented that early research on international migration was focused mostly on the experiences of male immigrants, which resulted in female immigrants' becoming "invisible or stereotyped". Current research suggests *marianismo* plays an integral, reinforcing role in the psychosocial adjustment of Latina women in the United States (Gil & Vasquez, 1996).

Acculturation is a social process composed of changes in cultural patterns that occur after individuals of different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact with each other (Laroche, Kim, Hui, & Tomiuk, 1998). The empirical literature on acculturation shows that rapid assimilation can be an important risk factor for many Latino immigrant families, and that biculturalism may function as a useful protective factor to buffer the stress of the acculturation process (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005).

One of the factors that correlate with gender role attitudes is the level of acculturation. Acculturation researchers also suggest that negative health behaviors, such as alcohol and substance use, may be undertaken as a strategy for coping with acculturation stress (Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000; qtd. in Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005). Additionally, current research on Latinos indicates a high prevalence of depression in Latinas, as well as a high risk of suicide for Latino adolescents (Rivera-Marano, 2000).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the gender role concept of *marianismo* and its relationship with acculturation level in a sample of Mexican-American women enrolled

in a college in the Southwest borderlands. Two instruments will be administered – the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (Marin & Sabogal, 1987) and the Latina Values Scale (Rivera-Marano, 2000) which is intended to measure the presence of *marianismo*.

Our research question is: “What relationship will acculturation have with *marianismo*?”
The study explores the following hypotheses:

H1: Mexican-American college women, who score higher on the Short Acculturation Scale (Marin & Sabogal, 1987) for Hispanics, will score lower in the Latina Values Scale (Rivera-Marano, 2000).

H2: Mexican-American college women, who score lower on the Short Acculturation Scale (Marin & Sabogal, 1987) for Hispanics, will score higher in the Latina Values Scale (Rivera-Marano, 2000).

H3: Mexican-American college women from first and second generations will score higher on the Latina Values Scale (Rivera-Marano, 2000), than Mexican-American college women from third and fourth generations.

Literature Review

Marianismo

Evelyn P. Stevens (1973) wrote in her article *on marianismo*, “No self-denial is too great for the Latin-American woman...no limit can be divined to her vast store of patience for the men in her life.” A traditional gender code of behavior for Latinas, *marianismo*’s roots can be traced to Catholicism and the gender ideal embodied by the Virgin Mary (Gil & Vasquez, 1996; Rivera-Marano, 2000; Cofresi, 2002). This phenomenon encompasses sacred duty to family, subordination to men, subservience, selflessness, self renouncement and self sacrifice, chastity before marriage, sexual passivity after marriage, and erotic repression (Zayas, 1987, pg 6; Gil & Vasquez, 1996; Rivera-Marano, 2000; Cofresi, 2002). In fact, a leading researcher on *marianismo* has condensed this gender role concept to ten rules, aptly called the Ten Commandments of *Marianismo*, “Don’t forget the place of the woman; don’t give up your traditions; don’t be an old maid, independent, or have your own opinions; don’t put your needs first; don’t wish anything but to be a housewife; don’t forget sex is to make babies, not pleasure; don’t be unhappy with your man, no matter what he does to you; don’t ask for help; don’t discuss your personal problems outside the house; and don’t change” (Gil & Vasquez, 1996; Marano-River, 2000; Cofresi, 2002).

The *marianismo* gender role affords Latinas of previous generations a level of protection in society as a wife and a mother in their respective countries of origin (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). This confers an indirect measure of power and respect, and in some way, assures a

life that is “free from loneliness and want” (Gil & Vasquez, 1996).

However, researchers in *marianismo* has suggested that amongst today’s acculturated Latinas in the United States, *marianismo* is often akin to “invisible yoke which bind capable, intelligent, ambitious Latinas to a no-win lifestyle, because *marianismo* insists that Latinas live in a world which no longer exists and which perpetuates a value system equating perfection with submission” (Gil & Vasquez, 1996). In fact, it has even been contended that *marianismo*’s call for the noble sacrifice of self is the force which has prevented generations of Latinas to entertain the notion of personal validation. (Gil & Vasquez, 1996).

Acculturation

Acculturation is a social process composed of changes in cultural patterns that occur after individuals of different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact with each other (Laroche, Kim, Hui, & Tomiuk, 1998). Successful acculturation has been defined in terms of mental and physical health, psychological satisfaction, high self-esteem, competent work performance, and good grades in school (Liebkind, 2001; qtd. in Phinney, et al., 2001). Many have cited the difficulties that one might experience within the acculturation process. Empirical research has illuminated problematic outcomes for the acculturation process, showing that increasing levels of assimilation are associated with negative health behavior and mental health difficulties (Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000; qtd. in Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005).

For Latinos, the process is further compounded by various socioeconomic disparities. Poverty, substandard housing, unemployment, limited access to adequate health care and resulting poor health are just some of the reasons behind low rates of utilization of mental health services of Latinos (Zayas, 1987).

Utilizing Mexican-Americans as a Research Population

The choice of utilizing Mexican-Americans as a population to study *marianismo* and its relationship with acculturation is a compelling one.

First, Mexican-Americans are the largest the largest Latino group, in the United States – accounting for approximately 58% of the American Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Mexico has been the number one source of legal immigrants to the United States, and the population has been steadily climbing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Second, the Mexican-American population has a clearly delineated pattern of sex role differentiation that is typical of its hierarchical culture – emphasizing family interdependence over the individualism that is typical of the dominant majority culture (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994; qtd. in Phinney & Flores, 2002). This is especially prevalent in

Mexican-American families in the Southwest borderlands.

Third, researchers have noted that Mexicans who immigrate to the U.S. are more likely to retain their cultural identity than are other immigrant groups. Rueschberg & Buriel (1989) have noted that Mexican-Americans, especially those residing in the Southwest, may experience pressure to maintain their Mexican values for several reasons: the Southwest was once part of Mexico; the U.S. is geographically connected to Mexico; and much of the immigration from Mexico is fairly recent. Therefore, in the Mexican-American population, it would be reasonable to assume that both overall attitudes toward career and family, as well as gender differences in these attitudes should remain similar to those of Mexican nationals (Rueschberg & Buriel, 1989).

In the area of acculturation, there is additional support for the utilization of Mexican-Americans in the research sample. The high likelihood of Mexican-Americans retaining their cultural identity has been well-documented (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Keefe, 1980; Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Penaloza, 1994; Segura & Pierce, 1993; qtd. in Valentine & Mosley, 2000). Mexican-Americans, especially those residing in the Southwest, may experience pressure to maintain their Mexican values for several reasons: (1) the Southwest was once part of Mexico, (2) the U.S. is geographically connected to Mexico, and (3) much of the immigration from Mexico is recent (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Keefe, 1980; Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Penaloza, 1994; Segura & Pierce, 1993; qtd. in Valentine & Mosley, 2000).

Purpose of Study

Our research question is: “What relationship will acculturation have with *marianismo*?” It is the authors’ proposition that generation level and thus the individual’s place in the acculturation process will impact the woman’s level of *marianismo*.

The hypotheses being measured in this research are the following:

H1: Mexican-American college women, who score higher on the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (Marin & Sabogal, 1987) will score lower in the Latina Values Scale (Rivera-Marano, 2000).

H2: Mexican-American college women, who score lower on the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (Marin & Sabogal, 1987) will score higher in the Latina Values Scale (Rivera-Marano, 2000).

H3: Mexican-American college women from first and second generations will score higher on the Latina Values Scale (Rivera-Marano, 2000), than Mexican-American college women from third and fourth generations.

Two measures will be utilized – the assessment tool that will be utilized to assess the

acculturation level is the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics by Marin & Sabogal (1987). The Latino Values Scale (Rivera-Marano, 2000) will be used to assess the woman's level of *marianismo*.

Latina Values Scale

Rivera-Marano's (2000) Latina Values Scale was developed as a cultural-specific instrument to measure the phenomenon of *marianismo*. The scale was created by incorporating the "How Marianista Are You?" table in Gil & Vasquez (1996) and other key areas identified in the *marianismo* literature.

The scale has an inter-item reliability of .87, based on the 37 items extracted from the 40-item scale. Included in the Latina Values Scale is a satisfaction scale, which measures the respondents' satisfaction with their responses to the *marianismo* scale. The satisfaction scale has an inter-item reliability of .86.

Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics

The Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (Marin & Sabogal, 1987) was chosen to measure the level of acculturation due to its shortened administration time and high reliability ($\alpha = .93$). The Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics was also recommended for its frequent use in the literature, allowing for comparability. Further, the scale was specifically normed for Latinos in the U.S.

Methodology

Sample Population

The participants for this study will be garnered from college students currently enrolled in a university and a community college located in the Southwest borderlands, where nearly half of the student population is Latino, and a majority of them is of Mexican-American ethnicity, due to the university's geographic proximity to the U.S./Mexico border.

Participation in this study will be solicited through word-of-mouth, and flyers posted around the campuses. Potential participants will encompass undergraduate students who self-report Mexican-American ethnicity, and will include all generations of immigration. Participants will also include a heterogeneous mix of marital status and religious denominations.

Method of Research

This data for this research will be collected through the use of a short demographic information sheet, formal assessments (Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics and

Latina Values Scale), and a focus group. All collection of the data from the participants will be in one meeting and may involve 5-7 participants at a time.

Initial contact with the participant will involve informed consent to the research. The participant will also be asked to consent to an audio recording of the focus group. The demographic information sheet will ask the participants to disclose, anonymously, their age, generation of immigration, country of origin, place of birth, religious domination, marital status, and more.

The Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics and Latina Values Scale are the formal assessments utilized within the research study. Participants will be asked to complete these assessments at the beginning of the session with the researcher. Following the completion of the assessments, the participants will engage in a thirty-minute focus group session. The focus group will solicit participant feedback regarding *marianista* values and their acculturation experience. The focus group session will be audio-recorded. Data gathered from the focus group will provide the researchers with testimony and experiences for this qualitative study.

Collection of Data

The collection of data as well as focus groups will be conducted in fall 2007. The data from the participants will be collected at the end of the session and be randomly coded for research purposes and tracking of responses. The data gathered from the demographic information sheet will allow the researchers to accurately describe their sample size and account for any extraneous variables, as well as further implications of study. The responses of the formal assessments will undergo statistical analysis in the spring 2008, where the correlation between acculturation and *marianismo* will be examined. The qualitatively information garnered from the focus groups will also be examined and coded for common themes in participants' responses during this period.

Limitations of Proposed Research Design

Since this sample is comprised of college women, more research will be needed on the relationship between the gender role concept of *marianismo* and acculturation in adolescent and adult Mexican-American populations. In addition, since this study is only conducted on Latinas of Mexican-American ethnicity, more research will therefore be needed on Latinas of Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other ancestries.

Another possible limitation of this study is the unspecified age range of our participants. Uneven distribution of participants' generation levels is also a possible limitation. Further, many of the demographic items were not controlled for as variables.

Implications of Research

The purpose of this study is to examine the gender role concept of *marianismo* and its relationship with acculturation level in a sample of Mexican-American women enrolled in a college in the Southwest borderlands.

According to the Census Bureau's official population estimates (2003), the Latino community has grown to become the nation's largest minority. As a population, the Latinos have traditionally been overlooked in mental health research and underserved in mental health counseling. A need of gender-specific studies to help address underutilization of mental health services is imperative. Clinical literature shows that Latinas in treatment often present with complaints involving cultural conflicts or differing sex roles expectations (Comas-Diaz, 1988; Guanipa, Talley, & Rapgna., 1997). It is the authors' hope that this research will add to the crucial body of knowledge for clinicians and mental health counselors so that they may provide culturally competent and relevant service through augmenting their knowledge of Latinas' psychosocial adjustment and gender role identification process.

References

- Baca Zinn, M. (1994). Adaptation and continuity in Mexican-origin families. In R.L. Taylor (Ed.), *Minority families in the United States: A multicultural perspective*. (pp. 64-94). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bacallao, M. L., & Smokowski, P. R. (2005). "Entre dos mundos" (Between two worlds): Bicultural skills training with Latino immigrant families. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 26(6), 485-509.
- Bean, F. D., & Tienda, M. (1987). *The Hispanic population of the United States*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- between linguistic acculturation and ethnic identification. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 29, 418-433.
- Boyd, M. (1986). Immigrant women in Canada. In R. J. Simon & C.E. Brettell (Eds.). *International migration: The female experience* (pp. 45-61). Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld.
- Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce (2003). *Hispanic population reaches all time high of 38.8 million, new Census Bureau estimates show*. Retrieved December13, 2006, from http://www.census.gov/PressRelease/www/releases/archives/hispanic_origin_population/001130.html
- Cofresi, N. I. (2002). The influence of Marianismo on Psychoanalytic work on Latinas: Transference and countertransference implications. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the*

Child, 57, 435-451.

Comas-Diaz, L. (1988). Mainland Puerto Rican women a sociocultural approach, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 16(1), 21-31.

Gil, R. M., & Vazquez, C. I. (1996). *The Maria paradox: How Latinas can merge old world traditions with new world self esteem*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Ginorio, A., Guttierrez, L., Cauce, A.M. & Acosta, M. (1995). The psychology of Latinas. In C. Travis (Ed.), *Feminist perspectives on the psychology of women* (pp. 89-108). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Guanipa, C., Talley, W. & Rapagna, S. (1997). Enhancing Latin American women's self-concept: A group intervention. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 47(?), 355-371.

Keefe, S. E. (1980). Acculturation and the extended family among urban Mexican Americans. In A. M. Padilla (Ed.), *Acculturation: Theory, models and some new findings* (pp. 85-110). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Keefe, S. E., & Padilla, A. M. (1987). *Chicano ethnicity*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Laroche, M., Kim, C., Hui, M. K., & Tomiuk, M A. (1998). Test of nonlinear relationship

Marin & Sabogal, G., Sabogal, F., Marin & Sabogal, B. V., Otero-Sabogal, R., & Perez-Stable, E. J. (1987). Development of a short acculturation scale for Hispanics. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 9(1), 183-205.

Penaloza, L. (1994). Atravesando fronteras/Border crossings: A critical ethnographic exploration of the consumer acculturation of Mexican immigrants. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21, 32-54.

Phinney, J. S., & Flores, J. (2002). "Unpackaging" acculturation: Aspects of acculturation as predictors of traditional sex role attitudes. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 33(3), 320-331.

Phinney, J. S., Horenczyk, G., Liebkind, K., & Vedder, P. (2001). Ethnic identity, immigration, and well-being: An interactional perspective. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(3), 493-510.

Ramirez, O. (1990). Mexican American children and adolescents. In J.T. Gibbs & L.N. Huang (Eds.), *Children of color* (pp. 224-250). San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Rivera-Marano, M. (2000) The creation of the Latina Values Scale: An analysis of Marianismo's effects on Latina women attending college. (Doctoral Dissertation, Rutgers University, 2000). *Dissertations Abstracts International*, 61(5-B), 1741.

Stevens, E. D. (1973). Marianismo: The other face of machismo in Latin America, in

A. Decastello (Ed.). *Female and male in Latin America*. Pittsburg:

University of Pittsburg Press.

Valentine, S., & Mosley, G. (2000). Acculturation and sex-role attitudes among Mexican Americans: A longitudinal analysis. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 22(1), 104-113.

Zayas, L. H. (1987). Toward an understanding of suicide risks in young Hispanic females. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 2(1), 1-11.

VISTAS 2008 Online

As an online only acceptance, this paper is presented as submitted by the author(s). Authors bear responsibility for missing or incorrect information.