Hispanics’ Self-Esteem, Acculturation, and Skepticism of Women’s Work

SEAN VALENTINE

Department of Management and Marketing
University of Wyoming

This study investigated the relationships among Hispanics’ self-esteem, acculturation, and skepticism of women’s employment. Using a sample of Hispanic students, mediated regression analysis was initiated to determine whether acculturation mediated a proposed negative relationship between self-esteem and traditional gender attitudes. The results indicated that self-esteem and acculturation were positively related; self-esteem and employment skepticism were negatively related; and self-esteem was unrelated to employment skepticism in the presence of acculturation, which supported full mediation. Organizations should consider using a combination of diversity training, employee assistance programs, career counseling, and job-enrichment policies to facilitate Hispanics’ self-esteem and acculturation, and these efforts might lead ultimately to greater acceptance of women’s employment.

The number of Hispanic workers and business owners is steadily increasing in the United States (Alderete, Vega, Kolody, & Aguilar-Gaxiola, 2000; Blea, 1992; Carson, Carson, & Irwin, 1995). More specifically, the “economic and social changes of the past several decades” (Herrera & Del-Campo, 1995, p. 50) have also increased the “number of Hispanic wives in the labor force” (Herrera & Del-Campo, 1995, p. 50). Hispanic women are involved in public and political activities and launch home businesses (Blea, 1992), and their increased representation in different occupations and organizations suggests that new research should explore their unique employment experiences.

Despite such activity, Hispanic men are sometimes better represented in the workplace than are Hispanic women (Reskin & Padavic, 1994), and such

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2Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sean Valentine, Department of Management and Marketing, University of Wyoming, P.O. Box 3275, Laramie, WY 82071-3275. E-mail: Valentin@uwyo.edu
disparity is possibly linked to Hispanics’ traditional outlook with regard to gender roles (Blea, 1992; Hofstede, 1991; Reskin & Padavic, 1994; Valentine & Mosley, 1998; Vasquez, 1984). Indeed, Hispanic culture prescribes *marianismo* (i.e., submission to men) and support roles for women in society (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Herrera & Del Campo, 1995; Levine & Padilla, 1980; Marin & Marin, 1991; Sugihara & Warner, 1999; Valentine & Mosley, 1999; Vasquez, 1984), while men are expected to be more dominant through *machismo* (Aramoni, 1972; Garza & Lipton, 1984). Based on these values, Hispanic men often assume work, family, and societal leadership roles; and women frequently adopt nurturing or household roles (Blea, 1992; Del Castillo, 1980).

Hispanic gender roles seem to be tempered somewhat by the acculturation process (Berry, 1980; Blea, 1992; Gordon, 1964; Marin & Marin, 1991; Murguia, 1975; Sam, 2000; Valentine & Mosley, 1999), or “the extent to which an individual originating from another culture has integrated in the host culture” (Manrai & Manrai, 1995, p. 120). For example, previous research has indicated that various indicators of acculturation are related negatively to Hispanics traditional orientation (O’Guinn, Imperia, & MacAdams, 1987; Soto, 1983) and familism (see Rodriguez & Kosloski, 1998, for discussion; Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987), suggesting that traditional gender attitudes might be affected by factors such as acculturation or generation level.

Soto (1983), using a sample of Puerto Rican American women, concluded that generation and education levels were associated with decreased traditional gender beliefs. Sabogal et al. (1987) concluded that acculturation was related negatively to beliefs about familism, while O’Guinn et al. (1987) found that Mexican American wives felt more in charge of family purchases as acculturation increased. Finally, Valentine and Mosley (1999) determined that Hispanics’ gender beliefs were less traditional over time and across apparent generational level.

Self-esteem, which is commonly defined as the “favorability of an individual’s characteristic self-evaluation” (Pilegge & Holtz, 1997, p. 17), is also likely associated with Hispanic acculturation (Champion, 1996; Negy & Woods, 1992; Sam, 2000; Valentine, 2001b; Valentine & Mosley, 1999; Yu & Berryman, 1996) and traditional gender attitudes (Valentine, 1999; Valentine & Fleischman, 2003). Self-esteem and acculturation both appear to be related to self-definition (Berry, 1980; Manrai & Manrai, 1995; Rosenberg, 1965), and an individual’s self-concept could enhance the willingness to connect with a culture, set of values, or group of people. A person’s self-esteem is based partly on social achievement (Baumeister, Dori, & Hastings, 1998; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Rosenberg, 1965), and an increased self-image achieved by connecting with immediate others could
prompt a more substantial adoption of this cultural group’s values and norms (Baumeister et al., 1998; Becker, 1977). Acculturation might be considered a more advanced reflection of the social adaptation and affiliation originally conveyed in a more positive self-image (Berry, 1980).

According to Rosenberg (1965), a “positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self” (p. 30) also should impact a Hispanic’s beliefs about gender roles (Champion, 1996; Valentine, 1999; Valentine & Fleischman, 2003). The management literature shows that positive self-esteem can enhance the manner in which people think and behave at work (Rand, 1968; Rosenberg, 1965; Stake, 1979; Tharenou, 1979; Verkuyten, 1996). Research also indicates that self-esteem can be related more directly to beliefs about gender and employment, partly because of the self-serving gender biases insecure individuals might possess (Trentham & Larwood, 1998).

For example, Valentine (1999), using a sample of young men from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, concluded that self-esteem was associated with reduced stereotypes of employed women. Valentine and Fleischman (2003) also found that self-esteem impacted different traditional work-based attitudes about gender using a national sample of legal professionals. Based on these findings, Hispanics with low self-esteem might not accept women’s employment because the situation represents an opportunity for women to succeed in organizations and to mitigate the status quo. Additionally, traditional Hispanic culture more directly prescribes that women are better suited for domestic life (e.g., Del Castillo, 1980), and Hispanics supporting this outlook might not be comfortable with such changing gender roles and expectations (Champion, 1996). This implies that increased self-confidence increases Hispanics’ willingness to challenge traditional thinking and to accept women’s employment, but it should affect gender attitudes indirectly through the acculturation process.

Since these issues are not considered comprehensively in the literature (McHugh & Frieze, 1997; Sam, 2000; Vasquez, 1984), the purpose of this research is to explore the manner in which Hispanics’ self-esteem, acculturation, and gender attitudes are interrelated (Figure 1). Evidence suggests that these factors are associated, and further examination is needed to clarify better the nature, direction, and magnitude of these apparent associations (Negy & Woods, 1992; Valentine, 2001b; Valentine & Fleischman, 2003; Valentine & Mosley, 1999). This study is essentially an extension of an investigation of Hispanics conducted by Valentine (2001b), which concluded that Hispanic acculturation was enhanced through positive self-esteem, reduced cultural identity, and elevated generation status. The same data will be utilized in this examination to determine whether self-esteem is associated with both enhanced acculturation and decreased skepticism of women’s
employment outside of the home, as well as whether acculturation fully mediates the relationship between self-esteem and employment skepticism.

Method

Sample

Data were collected as part of a larger examination of Hispanic American cultural attitudes and individual wellness. Information for this investigation was gathered at three universities and a junior college located in the southern or southwestern United States. Students were recruited from business, English language, and cultural studies classes to finish voluntarily a survey measuring their wellness and work perspectives, and Hispanic participants completed an additional section that ascertained their cultural affiliation. A few Hispanics not enrolled in one of the focal classes were asked to provide information to increase the sample size for this study. Language assistance was given to Hispanics when necessary. Hispanic participants completed 110 of the 418 surveys that were submitted.

A summary of the sample characteristics is presented in Table 1. Participants were young, single, and most were female. A majority had either some college or a college degree; and first-, second-, and third- or later generation Hispanic Americans were all well represented in the sample. With regard to workplace experiences, participants averaged over 2 years of job tenure and organizational tenure in their current or most recent jobs, and nearly half worked part time, while a small percentage of individuals were employed in management positions. A majority of the individuals worked for organizations that had fewer than 100 employees.

Measures

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured with 10 items modified slightly from their original format (Rosenberg, 1965; Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989) using the language found in the variable titles of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth codebook (e.g., Valentine, 2001b; Valentine & Fleischman, 2003). Statements were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), and after five items were reverse coded, higher scores indicated greater confidence.
Table 1

Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid percentagea</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.47</td>
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<td>Organizational tenure (years)</td>
<td>2.63</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>Educational level</td>
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<td>High school</td>
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<td>Some college</td>
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<td>61.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some graduate work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
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<td>Marital status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>77.3</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16.4</td>
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<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Separated, divorced</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<td>Generation status</td>
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<tr>
<td>First-generation Hispanic</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>American</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-generation Hispanic</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29.6</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Third- or later generation</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
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<td>Temporary</td>
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<td>16.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>47.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36.0</td>
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</table>
An initial principal components exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation was utilized to determine the factor structure of the scale, and the items loaded on three factors and explained 58.4% of the variance. While all eigenvalues were above 1 and each factor explained greater than 10% of the variance, the first factor was comprised of two items that had factor loadings in the pattern matrix above .80 and had an overall eigenvalue of 3.21 and explained 32.1% of the variance. Consequently, these two items were used to measure generalized self-esteem in this study. These statements were “I feel useless at times” and “I sometimes think I am ‘no good’ at all.” A final factor analysis of these two items indicated that one factor emerged with factor loadings above .88 and an eigenvalue of 1.57 with 78.3% of the variance explained. The measure had a coefficient alpha of .72. The scores for the two items were averaged so that increased composite values represented greater self-esteem.

**Hispanic acculturation.** Acculturation was measured with a brief four-item scale (Marin & Marin, 1991; Marin, Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, & Perez-Stable, 1987). According to Marin and Marin (1991), the scale has exhibited acceptable validity, and the measure’s “psychometric characteristics, its short length, and the fact that it works equally well with all Hispanic subgroups” (p. 37) demonstrates its efficacy. The scale is comprised of four items measuring language preference that were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (only Spanish) to 5 (only English), with higher scores showing...
greater adoption of the English language. Sample items are “What language(s) do you speak at home?” and “In which language(s) do you usually think?”

An initial principal components exploratory factor analysis indicated that the items loaded on one factor with loadings greater than .85, and the associated eigenvalue was 3.23 with 80.7% of the variance explained. The coefficient alpha for the scale was .91. The item values were combined and divided by the total number of items.

Skepticism of women’s employment. Skepticism of working women was measured with a three-item scale (Valentine, 2001a, 2003). The items were “Women lack the skills and abilities needed at work,” “Women are not suited for work outside of the home,” and “I am skeptical about women’s effectiveness in the workplace.” The items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with higher values indicating a more traditional orientation.

A principal components exploratory factor analysis was utilized to determine the factor structure of the scale, and the items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 1.95 and 65.1% of the variance being explained. The third item had a factor loading just below a .60 benchmark, so it was deleted from the measure and another factor analysis was initiated. The final exploratory factor analysis of the remaining two items indicated that one factor emerged with factor loadings above .92 and an eigenvalue of 1.74 with 87.0% of the variance explained. The measure had a coefficient alpha of .82. The item scores were averaged to reflect an overall aversion to women in organizations.

Social desirability. A 10-item social desirability measure was included in the study (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Fischer & Fick, 1993; Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) because Hispanic research is sometimes threatened by such bias (Marin & Marin, 1991). The measure includes statements such as “I like to gossip at times” and “I always try to practice what I preach” that were rated either 1 (No) or 2 (Yes). After several items were reverse coded, values were combined so that higher scores represented greater social desirability, with a range of 10 to 20.

Additional Preliminary Analysis

The items used to measure the constructs were subjected to an additional principal components factor analysis using varimax rotation to determine whether the measures were assessing unique constructs. Results indicated that a three-factor solution emerged from the analysis with 81.4% of the variance explained. The eigenvalue for the first factor (Hispanic acculturation) was 3.97 and explained 39.8% of the variance; the eigenvalue for the
second factor (skepticism of women’s employment) was 1.46 and explained 18.2% of the variance; and the eigenvalue for the remaining factor was 1.09 and explained 19.5% of the variance.

The rotated component matrix indicated that all factor loadings were above .83 and that no cross-loadings were present. The items, therefore, appeared to be suitable for further analysis of the study’s framework. Finally, several one-way ANOVA models were initiated to determine whether participant sex was related to the study’s three focal constructs. The three separate models indicated that sex was unrelated to self-esteem, Hispanic acculturation, and skepticism of women’s employment ($p > .25$), suggesting that an additional control for participant sex was not needed in the testing of the study’s framework.

Analysis of Framework

Variable descriptive statistics and correlations were evaluated initially to determine the magnitude of the study’s focal variables, as well as the apparent bivariate relationships among these factors. The social desirability measure also was included in the correlation analysis to determine whether the study variables were associated with the tendency to provide socially correct responses. Mediated regression analysis was used to test the framework presented in the study (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Results

The variable descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 2. The mean scores associated with self-esteem and acculturation show that participants were relatively self-assured and comfortable with the English language. The mean score for employment skepticism implies that the respondents embraced relatively nontraditional gender beliefs.

The correlation analysis reveals that self-esteem was associated with increased acculturation and decreased skepticism of women’s employment, suggesting that Hispanics’ self-concept might enhance social-connectedness acceptance to some degree. Hispanic acculturation also was related negatively to skepticism of women’s employment, implying that such gender beliefs decrease as Hispanics identify more readily with American culture. Hispanic acculturation was the only variable related to the social desirability measure, which suggests that social desirability bias was not a serious drawback.

The regression models used to test the proposed mediation in the study are presented in Table 3. The first regression equation shows that self-esteem
was related significantly to Hispanic acculturation, which satisfies the first condition of mediation, according to Baron and Kenny (1986). The second equation indicates that self-esteem also was related to skepticism of women’s employment, and this satisfies the second condition of mediation. Finally, the last regression model indicates that self-esteem was unrelated to gender-based skepticism in the presence of Hispanic acculturation \((p = .058)\), verifying that Hispanic acculturation fully mediated the negative relationship between self-esteem and skepticism of women’s employment. The results support the study’s framework and advance several noteworthy research and managerial implications.

Table 2

**Variable Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self-esteem</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hispanic acculturation</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Skepticism of women’s employment</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Social desirability</td>
<td>15.26</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*\(p < .05.\)** \(p < .001.\)

Table 3

**Results of Mediated Regression Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equation</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>(\beta)</th>
<th>Adj. (R^2)</th>
<th>(F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hispanic acculturation</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>4.63*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Skepticism of women’s</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>5.85*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Skepticism of women’s</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>16.54**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>employment</td>
<td>Hispanic acculturation</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*Note. Sample sizes \((N)\) for regression equations ranged from 105 to 110 because of missing data. *\(p < .05.\)** \(p < .001.\)
Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to provide further insight into the manner in which Hispanics might better connect to Americanized values and nontraditional gender roles. The results indicate that both self-esteem and acculturation need to be considered when evaluating Hispanics’ gender attitudes, but that acculturation has a more direct affect on such beliefs. Self-esteem appears to influence gender attitudes indirectly through the acculturation process and Hispanics’ willingness to adopt American cultural tendencies and language customs.

Companies need to recognize that Hispanics face many challenges as they accept mainstream American cultural norms and gender attitudes. In particular, Hispanics’ apparent recognition of two diverse value systems that must be blended might create a social duality that complicates the development of an overall self-identity (Bell, 1990). These difficulties seem to be particularly perplexing for Hispanic women.

According to Vasquez (1984), “it would appear that Mexican-American women face and will continue to face rapid changes in expectations and, while many are able to do so, a consequence may be at least temporary anxiety and conflict” (p. 273). At the same time, “traditional sex-role expectations in the Mexican-American culture may lead to depression, anxiety, and psychophysiological symptoms” (p. 280) including psychological distress, frustration, and disappointment. This could further perpetuate Hispanics’ traditional preferences.

Organizations should develop programs that help Hispanic women overcome these cultural dilemmas, build greater acceptance of Hispanic women’s roles in the workforce, and enhance appreciation and tolerance for the Hispanic community’s cultural transformations. According to Gilbert and Ivancevich (2000), “The rationale for managing demographic diversity includes moral, ethical, and results-based reasons, such as fairness, upholding the dignity of every person, and optimizing the full range of skills and abilities of the workforce” (p. 93). As Mirvis (1997) indicated, companies interested in diversity management “are more likely to have issued a statement from senior management that values diversity, to offer diversity training for managers and employees, and to operate mentoring programs for women and minorities” (p. 51). Management should first implement diversity training that increases employees’ understanding of Hispanic cultural characteristics (Cox, 1991; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; Mirvis, 1997). According to Cox and Blake (1991, p. 53):

Managing and valuing diversity (MVD) training is the most prevalent starting point for managing diversity. Two types of
training are popular: awareness training and skill-building training. Awareness training focuses on creating an understanding of the need for and meaning of MVD. It is also meant to increase participants’ self-awareness on diversity-related issues, such as stereotyping and cross-cultural insensitivity. Skill-building training educates employees on specific cultural differences and how to respond to differences in the workplace.

Awareness training ideally would build greater understanding of the Hispanic culture, as well as convey the challenges that Hispanic women face as they separate from the gender roles specified in this culture (Cox & Blake, 1991). Sessions should enable Hispanics to communicate their cultural views and develop a more positive outlook about women’s employment. Skill-building training would further identify employees’ different cultural and gender attitudes and could teach people to reconcile these differences at work (Cox & Blake, 1991). According to Gilbert, Stead, and Ivancevich (1999, pp. 68–69), there is reason to believe “that simply a one- or two-day diversity training program is insufficient to create the cultural change necessary for minority individuals to feel fully integrated in the workplace. Under the rubric of diversity management, entire personnel systems (e.g., compensation, performance appraisal, mentoring, career pathing) are modified (Morrison, 1992; Cox, 1991).”

Dass and Parker (1999) indicated that “Organizations may assimilate members of diverse groups via socialization” (p. 75). Socialization efforts such as orientation should introduce Hispanics to Americanized corporate values that support women’s employment, which could facilitate their acculturation. Employee assistance programs and counseling sessions that concentrate on women’s changing organizational roles and Hispanics’ adjustment to these cultural reformulations might enhance socialization (Holm & Hovland, 1999; Joo & Grable, 2000). Mentoring programs that provide Hispanics with individualized guidance might be used to improve Hispanics’ employment experiences (Carson, Carson, Griffeth, & Steel, 1993; Naff, 1995). Dass and Parker also indicated that “Organizations may institutionalize like-to-like mentoring relationships; for instance, Hispanic mentors for Hispanic mentees” (p. 75).

Company jobs should be redesigned in a manner to build teamwork among men and women. Previous research has shown that enriched jobs are associated with enhanced individual satisfaction and reduced turnover (e.g., Glisson & Durrick, 1988; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Parker & Wall, 1998; Spector & Jex, 1991). It also seems likely that such enriched and team-oriented work would increase Hispanics’ acceptance of women’s work by developing greater company loyalty and superior individual confidence.
Hispanics with high corporate commitment and self-esteem would appear to be more open to new experiences outside of their traditional culture, as well as more likely to accept nontraditional gender roles.

The present study has several limitations. A relatively small sample of young adults was used to test the proposed relationships, and this likely limits external validity. The study did not identify different Hispanic subgroups, and different findings might be obtained if more homogeneous Hispanic samples are utilized. Hispanics’ responses could have been affected by lack of understanding of the English language, which increases concerns over measurement equivalence. Individuals’ simultaneous adoption of Hispanic and Anglo cultural values or biculturalism was also not ascertained in this study (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980).

Future research should address these limitations by utilizing larger heterogeneous samples of Hispanic subgroups, and bicultural acculturation measures should be utilized in new assessments of the study’s framework. Future research also should identify other dispositional characteristics, such as locus of control and self-efficacy that potentially affect Hispanics’ acculturation and gender attitudes. Further examination of Hispanics’ employment experiences ideally should enhance the management of a diverse workforce.

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