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Business Report

The Influence of Cultural Motivation on the Academic Satisfaction and Persistence of Ethnic Minorities

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Research Context

Immigrants comprise one-third of the "Commission Scolaire de Montréal's" students. Similarly, in the English Montreal School board, 43% of students have a first language other than French or English (Lambert, 2002). Thus, in order for the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec to accomplish its goal of having 30% of young Québécois earn a bachelor's degree by 2010 (Indicateurs de l'Éducation, 2003) there needs to be a thorough examination of the factors that influence ethnic minorities to persist in school.

University aged students are in a developmental stage referred to as "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2002). It is a time for them to resolve the questions of "who am I" and "how do I want to act in the world." However, for ethnic minorities this time may be further complicated by the need to independently assert and define their cultural identity. They must consider for themselves how they want to relate to their heritage, or natal, culture as well as decide how they will engage and relate to the dominant host culture in which they are living (i.e. Canada).

Bicultural competence, or the ability to successfully interact in one's own heritage culture as well as one's host culture, has been found to be critically important to the well-being and adjustment of ethnic minorities (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000). More recently researchers have begun to consider how motivation to engage in the heritage and host cultures influences well-being (Chirkov et al., 2003). Motivation can be distinguished along a continuum ranging from highly controlled to highly volitional (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, a Korean-Québécois girl may attend Korean classes because her parents monetarily reward her for attending. This girl would be considered *externally motivated*. She has not come to personally value the activity and

will likely discontinue participating as soon as the external reward is removed. Alternatively, if another Korean-Québécois girl attends language classes because she truly enjoys the experience of learning more about the Korean language and culture, she would be *autonomously motivated*. That is, she volitionally participates in the activity and she is not dependent on outside rewards or constraints to motivate her participation. Thus, despite the fact that both girls may ultimately be completely fluent in Korean, we would expect that the girl who is autonomously motivated to speak the language will derive greater well-being from the experience and she will be much more likely to persist at speaking the language over the long term.

Previous research has found support for the importance of autonomous motivation towards immigrants' heritage and host cultures. Ethnic minorities who indicate that they are autonomously motivated to participate in their heritage and host culture have higher self and peer reported well-being (Downie et al., 2004; Downie et al., 2006). Given the significance of autonomous motivation for the well-being of ethnic minorities, the factors that can promote this form of motivation have been studied. In particular, ethnic minorities who have parents who support their autonomy with respect to their heritage culture report that they are more autonomously motivated towards their heritage culture (Downie et al., 2007). An autonomy supportive parent would take their child's perspective, provide a rationale for why their child should engage in particular cultural activities, and offer their child choice as to how they negotiate their cultural identities. The critical element of autonomy support is that a parent does offer guidance, but ultimately the parents are willing to respect their child's choice, when the decision is one that the child is developmentally capable of making.

Most of the research examining the adaptation of ethnic minorities has focused on immigrants who are adapting to a singular host culture. But, what would happen if the task was made even more challenging by expanding the number of cultures that one has to simultaneously function within? Immigrants and ethnic minorities in Québec are faced with this situation, in addition to having a heritage cultural identity they are also living in an environment that can itself be considered bicultural, with a majority Québécois culture thriving beside a traditional English-Canadian culture. The purpose of the present study was to examine how ethnic minorities in Québec relate to the dual host cultures and the implications that this has for them in terms of their well-being, their choice to attend university in either language and their satisfaction and intent to persist in their chosen environment. School indicators were specifically selected as outcome variables for three reasons: (1) as previously mentioned university completion has been identified by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec as a priority, (2) adaptation to the school environment should be a good indicator of how well immigrant and ethnic minority youths are adapting to the host culture, and (3) because Québec is in the unique position of offering students a choice in terms of language to pursue there studies in it provides an opportunity to determine the factors that differentially influence students adaption to each host culture.

Thus, the objective of the research study was to determine how motivation influences students' academic decisions and satisfaction. Students were recruited from a French speaking, English speaking and bilingual university in order to fully explore the factors that may have led to their decisions to pursue studies at each type of university as

well as the factors that will influence their well-being, academic satisfaction and persistence within each university. Specifically we hypothesized the following:

1. Ethnic minority students attending a French speaking university will report higher levels of motivation, competence and parental autonomy support towards Québécois culture. Parallel results are expected for students attending an English speaking university, with respect to English-Canadian culture. Students at the bilingual university are expected to report equal levels of motivation, competence and parental autonomy support across Québécois and English-Canadian culture.

2. Parental autonomy support for the respective culture where their child is attending university (i.e. English-Canadian, Québécois, or both) will be associated with the students' motivation towards that culture. Both autonomy support and motivation towards the dominant culture of the university will be associated with positive outcomes.

3. Across all three universities motivation towards the dominant culture of the university will be associated with adjustment, academic satisfaction and persistence, even after controlling for how competent ethnic minority participants feel interacting in the respective culture.

4. For ethnic minority participants whose cultural motivation and choice of university do not match there will be a cost in terms of their well-being, academic satisfaction and persistence. That is, an ethnic minority student attending a French university, who is not motivated towards Québécois culture and prefers English-Canadian culture will experience decreased well-being, academic satisfaction and persistence.

Potential Solutions and Results: Impact and Implications of the Research

The potential results of the present study are relevant to a broad audience. At an organizational level the findings can inform citizenship and immigration decision-makers as well as university administrators and educators.   In addition, potential findings from this project are also highly relevant to multicultural parents and their children.

For decision-makers, managers and stakeholders the conclusions from the present study have the potential to contribute to an understanding of the factors that influence ethnic minority students' choice for postsecondary education and their success within their chosen institution. This is particularly relevant for the Québec context where immigrants and ethnic minorities must choose between attending either a French or English university. The present study will thus shed light on the differences between students who have chosen to attend either an English, French, or bilingual university. It will also explore the factors associated with well-being, academic satisfaction, and persistence in each context.

The present research serves to reinforce Canada's multiculturalism policy. The results highlight that immigrants and ethnic minorities are actively engaging in Canadian culture. However, the results also indicate that the well-being, academic satisfaction and persistence of ethnic minority young adults are maximized when they are autonomously motivated to engage the host culture. As demonstrated by previous research and with the current results, autonomous motivation can be fostered by having parents who support the decisions of their children. Having parents who attempt to control or pressure their child with respect to Canadian cultural practices is associated with poorer motivation and well-being outcomes. While not explored in the present study, these results can be extended to

other socializing influences. If individuals and organizations act in such a way to encourage and foster autonomous motivation in those they are responsible for, they will find that their charges or constituents will develop greater autonomous motivation and will have more positive outcomes. Controlling individuals and practices however, will thwart the motivation of ethnic minorities towards Canadian culture and will be associated with worse outcomes for these individuals.

The present study has limitations which must be noted. First, the study is correlational, which means we are not able to infer causation. While we have found associations between variables, it is impossible to say with certainty the absolute direction of these associations. A second limitation is that the data is a self-report at one time-point. A future study could build on the present results by gaining access to independent data regarding students' grades, academic program and whether they re-registered for their studies in the following years. It should also track students' motivation towards English-Canadian and Québécois culture over time. Additionally, as noted in the results section the questionnaire was only available in English at the bilingual university, this may have biased the sample thereby skewing the results at that university. Ideally, the study should have been offered in French and English at the bilingual university. Finally, it must be noted that the present study relied on a sample of university students. Arguably these students would have a high degree of choice when it comes to selecting their specific university. Future research should consider how cultural motivation impacts the well-being of ethnic minority youth attending high school or even Cégep where their choices may be more limited.

As mentioned earlier in this section the potential results of the present study are relevant to at least four distinct groups. First, for departments of citizenship and immigration the results indicate that Canada's multiculturalism strategy which encourages ethnic minorities to retain their heritage culture while participating in the host culture is feasible and is an effective means to promote well-being and other positive outcomes for ethnic minorities. In particular, to the extent that ethnic minorities perceive that they have some choice in how they engage in Canadian culture their well-being is more likely to flourish.

For university administrators and educators the results of this study will highlight the factors associated with academic persistence. Given the potential costs to universities of student turnover, a greater understanding of the variables that influence academic persistence would be highly valuable. In particular the results of this study indicate that ethnic minority students are more likely to persist in a university if they perceive a match between their motivational preferences and the culture of the university they are attending. Given that autonomous motivation can be increased by the autonomy supportive behaviour of those in authority, to the extent that universities can offer their students choice (e.g. universities that allow students to submit papers in French or English), they may improve the motivation and outcomes of their students.

The results of this study are also relevant to immigrant parents. Previous research has found that parents who support their children's autonomy with respect to their heritage culture have children who are more competent and more motivated towards the heritage culture (Downie et al., 2007). Similarly, the results of this study indicate that parents who are autonomy supportive of Canadian culture have children who are more

motivated towards Canadian culture and their school satisfaction and persistence is improved. For many immigrant parents education is one of their key priorities, as such if they support and enable their child to make choices regarding how they will engage with Canadian culture, the child is more likely to have positive academic outcomes.

For ethnic minority youth the results of the present study demonstrate the importance of minorities being open to Canadian culture and volitionally engaging in Canadian cultural practices. More specifically, for ethnic minorities in Québec it is essential that if they have a strong motivational preference towards either Québécois or English-Canadian culture they need to identify that preference and orient their education towards their strengths. However, they also need to recognize that motivation is malleable and therefore should not be the ultimate deciding factor when it comes to making academic decisions.

Methodology

Participants were recruited from two universities in Québec: one French speaking, and one English speaking. A third sample was recruited from a bilingual university located on the Ontario-Québec border. Participants at the English and French universities were recruited via classified ads; these participants were compensated with a $10 electronic gift certificate. Participants at the bilingual university were recruited from a participant pool and were compensated with extra credit in their psychology course. The questionnaire was administered in French (see Appendix 1) at the French language university and in English (see Appendix 2) at the other two universities. Participants completed the self-report questionnaire online at www.surveymonkey.com. Participants were first required to give their informed consent to participate in the study. They then provided basic demographic information. Participants completed scales assessing their competence in Québécois and English-Canadian culture, their motivation towards each culture, parental attitudes, well-being, academic satisfaction and persistence.

PARTICIPANTS

Four-hundred and fifty-eight ethnic minority students participated in this study. One-hundred and twenty-five (51 Males) attended the English university, 102 (21 Males) attended the French university and 231 (72 Males) attended the bilingual university. Participants were an average of 21.03 years old (SD = 4.76). Fifty-five percent of participants were first generation immigrants; they had been living in Canada for an average of 8.87 years. The remainder of the participants were second generation immigrants. Sixty-one percent of the sample spoke a language other then French or English at home.

Results

HYPOTHESIS 1: *Ethnic minority students at the English and French universities will report higher levels of motivation, competence and parental autonomy support towards the corresponding culture. Students at the bilingual university will not differ in their ratings of Québécois and English-Canadian cultures.*

RESULTS

To test our first hypothesis that there would be motivational differences as a function of whether the ethnic minority participants had chosen to attend a French, English or Bilingual institution we conducted separate t-tests on each sample. The results supported our hypotheses (see Table 1). Ethnic minority students attending a French university reported feeling greater autonomous motivation towards Québécois culture compared to English-Canadian culture, they also reported feeling more competent interacting in Québécois culture. In contrast, students at the English university reported greater autonomous motivation and cultural competence in English-Canadian culture compared to Québécois culture. Interestingly, participants at the bilingual university scored very similar to the English university such that students reported greater motivation and cultural competence for English-Canadian culture compared to Québécois culture.

Significantly, we also found that student's reports of their parents' attitudes also differed according to the language of instruction at the university (see Table 1). For participants at the French University parents were perceived as more autonomy supportive of Québécois culture compared to English-Canadian culture. While the reverse was true for both the English and bilingual university, students at both of these

institutions reported that their parents were more autonomy supportive of English-Canadian culture.

HYPOTHESIS 2: *The degree to which parents support their child's autonomy with respect to the dominant culture of the university they have chosen to attend will be associated with the students' motivation towards that culture and with the outcome variables of interest (adjustment, academic satisfaction and persistence).*

RESULTS

Beyond anticipating mean differences in the cultural variables based on which university a participant was attending, we also expected to find significant relations among the cultural variables. Cultural motivation, parental autonomy support and cultural competence were expected to be associated with well-being, school persistence, and school satisfaction (see Table 2). Accordingly, for students at the *French university*, parental autonomy support for that culture was associated with the students motivation (r = .36, p <.001) and cultural competence (r = .46, p <.001). Additionally, having parents who were autonomy supportive of Québécois culture was associated with better adjustment (r = .32, p <.001), academic satisfaction (r = .35, p <.001) and intentions to persist at the present university (r = .32, p <.01). Participants motivation towards Québécois culture was similarly associated with academic satisfaction (r = .31, p <.01) and intentions to persist (r = .30, p <.01).

At the *English university*, English-Canadian parental autonomy support was associated with motivation (r = .42, p <.001) and cultural competence (r = .36, p <.001). Additionally, having parents who were autonomy supportive towards English-Canadian

culture was associated with better adjustment ($r = .43$, $p <.001$) and academic satisfaction ($r = .39$, $p <.001$), it was unrelated to intentions to persist at the present university (see Table 3). Motivation towards English-Canadian culture was similarly associated with improved adjustment ($r = .47$, $p <.001$) and academic satisfaction ($r = .36$, $p <.01$), once again academic persistence was unrelated.

Finally, at the *bilingual university*, autonomy support was related to motivation and competence for both Québécois ($r_{motiv.} = .31$, $p <.001$, $r_{comp..} = .38$, $p <.001$) and English-Canadian ($r_{motiv.} = .22$, $p <.001$, $r_{comp..} = .44$, $p <.001$) culture. Additionally, autonomy support for English- and Québécois cultures were associated with adjustment, and school satisfaction; while, motivation towards Québécois and English-Canadian cultures was associated with adjustment, academic persistence and school satisfaction (see Table 4). Overall, at each university motivational factors towards the dominant cultures of the respective universities were associated with students' well-being and academic outcomes.

HYPOTHESIS 3: *Across all three universities motivation towards the dominant culture of the university will predict adjustment, academic satisfaction and persistence, even after controlling for how competent ethnic minority participants feel interacting in the respective culture.*

RESULTS

The next step was to examine whether motivational processes with respect to the dominant culture of the participant's university would impact the outcomes variables after controlling for an indicator of cultural competence. In other words, we wanted to

determine whether participants' motivation towards the specific host culture of the university would impact academic outcomes, even after controlling for how competent the participant feels engaging in that culture. The results supported our hypothesis. Using a hierarchical regression we entered age as well as the dummy-coded variables for gender and university. At the second step we entered cultural competence. Finally, cultural motivation was entered at the third step. The analysis was repeated for each of our three outcome variables: adjustment, school persistence and academic satisfaction. The results supported our hypotheses (see Table 6). In each analysis, motivation remained a significant predictor of adjustment ($\beta = .27$, $p <.001$), academic satisfaction ($\beta = .21$, $p <.001$) and persistence ($\beta = .15$, $p <.01$). Thus, ethnic minority students' motivation towards engaging a specific host culture was associated with positive outcomes even after the effects of being competent in that culture were taken into account.

HYPOTHESIS 4: *For ethnic minority participants whose cultural motivation and choice of university do not match there will be a cost in terms of their well-being and academic satisfaction and persistence.*

RESULTS

The regression analyses highlighted the importance of participant's motivation for participating in the dominant culture of the university they were attending. However, the question remains what would happen if participants felt more motivated to participate in the alternate host culture (e.g. English-Canadian for students at the French University, etc)? We hypothesized that individual's who felt more autonomously motivated towards

the other host culture would be more likely to indicate decreased well-being, academic satisfaction and persistence. This hypothesis was tested by calculating a difference score (i.e. Québécois motivation – English-Canadian motivation) which was then correlated with our key outcome variables. For ethnic minority students attending an English university, being more motivated towards Québécois culture was associated with lower intentions to persist ($r = 21$ $p < .05$) at their current university. Similarly, at the French university, greater motivation towards English-Canadian culture was also associated with reduced intentions to persist ($r = 23$ $p < .05$) at the student's present French university. Interestingly, at the bilingual university the discrepancy between motivations towards English-Canadian and Québécois cultures was not related to intentions to persist.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the present study was to consider the role of motivational processes in the well-being and academic decisions of ethnic minority youth. Minorities in Québec are in the unique position of having two host cultures that they can participate in (i.e. Québécois and English-Canadian). Subsequently, they have the choice of attending a reputable French, English or bilingual university. The present study indicates that there are significant motivational differences in students who choose to attend each type of university. Specifically, ethnic minority students attending a French university indicated that they felt more motivated towards Québécois culture, perceived themselves as more competent in this culture and indicated that their parents were more likely to support their participation in this culture compared to English-Canadian culture. In contrast, ethnic minority students attending an English university were more motivated

towards English-Canadian culture, felt more competent in that context and reported that their parents were more supportive of their participation in that culture compared to Québécois culture. Surprisingly, the profile of ethnic minority students at the bilingual university was identical to that of the students at the English university. One explanation for that unexpected finding is that due to the timing of the study we were only able to offer the study in English at the bilingual university. The lack of a French questionnaire may have biased our sample and thereby skewed the results.

The present study highlights the role that parents play in influencing how ethnic minority youth relate to the host culture. This is particularly significant given that previous research has emphasized the influence of parents solely on the heritage culture. This research has presupposed that parents have less sway compared to peers, school and the media when it comes to the host culture. However, the present results indicate that how supportive parents are of each culture is related to how motivated their child is towards the culture, how culturally competent they are, and it has an impact on their school experience.

Motivation was also determined to be critical to an ethnic minority's well-being and academic experience. While there is no doubt that cultural competence is essential for an ethnic minority to function successfully in the school environment, it is important to note that motivation further enhances positive academic experiences. However, if an ethnic minority is more motivated by the alternate culture (e.g. English student prefers Québécois culture) this appears to influence their plans to persist at their current university. Thus, it is important for ethnic minorities, if given the choice, to ensure that their motivational preferences match their environment.

Taken together the present study highlights the critical role that motivation plays in the well-being and academic satisfaction and persistence of ethnic minority youth. Motivation towards a specific host culture is associated with improved well-being and positive academic outcomes. However, it must be noted that due to the correlational nature of this study we are unable to infer causation. While we note the significant relationships between the variables, prospective research is needed to determine the exact direction of these associations.

SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENT

The present research has contributed to the advancement of science. A major component of this study was to translate several well-established scales from English into French. This was done in collaboration with researchers at several universities. The new French versions of the questionnaire will be made accessible to other researchers in the field. Additionally, as part of this study we developed a new measure of parental autonomy support to assess parents support for the host culture. Previous research had solely examined the heritage culture. Our subsequent research has fond that parental autonomy support for the host culture additionally influences family functioning and merits further consideration.

Research Approaches

The present research has served to identify areas that require further examination. To the best of our knowledge, the present study is the first to consider how parental autonomy support for an ethnic minority's host culture influences a person's adaptation and well-being. The finding that parents can influence the motivation of their children with respect to the host culture may be somewhat surprising given that parents are thought to have little influence on this culture in comparison to peers, the media and school. As such, future research should consider how these outside sources can similarly influence the motivation of ethnic minorities towards the host culture. An interesting research question is whether parents, or outside influences have a greater impact in setting the tone for how ethnic minorities relate to the host culture. Such information would help to further elaborate on where to direct efforts to best ensure that ethnic minorities develop positive attitudes towards the host culture, as this appears to be critical to their well-being and ability to thrive in a new culture.

The present study is also one of the few studies to make use of the unique context that exists within Québec wherein the host culture is itself bicultural (i.e. Québécois and English-Canadian culture coexist). Future research should consider tracking the trajectory of recent immigrants to Québec to determine how their motivation towards each culture develops as well as their competence in each culture. We would anticipate that individuals who strike a balance such that they have positive motivation towards both Québécois and English-Canadian cultures will have the most positive experience.

Table 1

Mean Differences Across the Three Universities

	Québécois Culture		English-Canadian Culture		Significant Differences
French University					
Motivation	36.86	(21.66)	28.92	(22.10)	Qué. > Eng-C
Cultural Competence	6.37	(1.49)	5.48	(1.37)	Qué.> Eng-C
Autonomy Support	4.74	(1.36)	4.49	(1.29)	Qué.> Eng-C
English University					
Motivation	24.39	(19.81)	30.93	(17.40)	Eng-C > Qué.
Cultural Competence	5.24	(2.05)	6.79	(1.38)	Eng-C > Qué.
Autonomy Support	4.30	(1.37)	4.72	(1.16)	Eng-C > Qué.
Bilingual University					
Motivation	13.61	(18.51)	24.42	(19.78)	Eng-C > Qué.
Cultural Competence	5.08	(1.76)	6.83	(1.32)	Eng-C > Qué.
Autonomy Support	3.96	(1.32)	4.46	(1.30)	Eng-C > Qué.

Table 2

Correlations among the Key Variables for the French University Sample

	2	3	4	5	6
1. Parental Autonomy Support	.36***	.46***	.32**	.35***	.32**
2. Motivation		.58***	.17	.31**	.30**
3. Cultural Competence			.38***	.34***	.31**
4. Adjustment				.30**	.05
5. Academic Satisfaction					.10
6. Academic Persistence					

*** *p* < .001

** *p* < .01

Table 3

Correlations among the Key Variables for the English University Sample

	2	3	4	5	6
1. Parental Autonomy Support	.42***	.36***	.43***	.39***	.08
2. Motivation		.34***	.47***	.36***	.05
3. Cultural Competence			.06	.14	.18*
4. Adjustment				.50***	.03
5. Academic Satisfaction					.10
6. Academic Persistence					

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Table 4

Correlations among the Key Variables for the Bilingual University Sample

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Qué. Parental Autonomy Support	.72***	.31***	.24***	.38***	.32***	.31***	.30***	.13
2. E-C Parental Autonomy Support		.11	.22***	.17**	.40***	.35***	.25***	.07
3. Qué. Motivation			.61***	.42***	.19**	.20**	.22***	.22***
4. E-C Motivation				.23**	.39***	.32***	.21**	.22***
5. Qué. Cultural Competence					.48***	.13*	.23***	.13
6. E-C Cultural Competence						.34***	.23***	.14*
7. Adjustment							.51***	.30***
8. Academic Satisfaction								.27***
9. Academic Persistence								

Note: Qué. refers to Québécois culture. E-C refers to English-Canadian.

*** *p* < .001
** *p* < .01
* *p* < .05

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analyses examining the relationship between Host Competence and Motivation on the Key Outcome

Variables

		Adjustment[1]			Academic Satisfaction[2]			Academic Persistence[3]		
		ß	*t*	*p*	ß	*t*	*p*	ß	*t*	*p*
Step 1										
	Gender	.08	1.54	.12	-.02	-.37	.71	.04	.78	.43
	Age	-.01	-.10	.92	.11	2.03	.04	-.01	-.13	.90
	University 1	-.18	-3.14	.002	-.18	-3.07	.002	-.14	-2.38	.02
	University 2	.04	.70	.48	-.02	-.35	.73	-.20	-3.26	.001
Step 2										
	Host Competence	.27	5.67	.001	.22	4.57	.001	.17	3.54	.001
Step 3										
	Host Motivation	.27	5.20	.001	.21	4.06	.001	.15	2.66	.01

Note:

[1] $R^2 = .05$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for Step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .05$ for Step 3 (*p*s <.001).

[2] $R^2 = .05$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .04$ for Step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .04$ for Step 3 (*p*s <.001).

[3] $R^2 = .03$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 3 (*p*s <.01).

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