



Is Acculturation in Hispanic Health Research a Flawed Concept?

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how some health researchers use the concept of acculturation to try to explain health behaviors or illnesses prevalent among Hispanics. The “Hispanic culture” has often been represented as being associated with inadequate health beliefs and behaviors of poor health. Previous research viewed Hispanic culture as hindering healthy practices. On the other hand, other acculturation studies find that Hispanic culture provides health-enhancing elements, such as less permissive sexual behavior, better birth outcomes, or less smoking and substance use. The effect of Hispanic culture on individual health could prove to be an important social element to scrutinize. The authors believe that acculturation studies are seriously limited by several basic conceptual and methodological problems that need to be addressed before such knowledge can be achieved. Acculturation researchers generally neglect the fact that a vast range of cultures fit under the term Hispanic, and fail to deal with the enormous variety of languages, religions, customs, economic status, social organizations that they represent. In this paper the authors have outlined some of the reasons why the efforts to quantify culturally based attitudes and beliefs need to be reevaluated. The explosion of quantitative projects in social science has produced some important results, but this trend neglects a full understanding of the complex context of the processes they seek to report.

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Carlos Ponce has been a research associate at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio for 10 years. He holds a Master's Degree in Sociology from the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico and a Masters Degree in Public Administration from the University of Texas-San Antonio. His research has focused on elders and health, with a special emphasis on the process of aging with wisdom.

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