The role of mainstream and ethnic social connectedness in the adjustment of Canadian and international undergraduates

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Introduction

- International students face numerous challenges when arriving to study at a Canadian university, which may lead to poor psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011)
- Social connectedness has been found to act as a buffer against acculturative stress. However, no study to date has examined the differential effects of social connectedness on psychological versus sociocultural adjustment (Zhang & Goodson, 2011)
- Furthermore, although interactions with host nationals have been associated with better adjustment outcomes, the mechanisms guiding these “interactions” are unclear (Geenert, Demoulin, Stephanie, & Dernis, 2014)
- The current study examined Mainstream Social Connectedness and Social Connectedness with the Ethnic Community separately, to determine whether they uniquely influence outcomes in psychological and sociocultural adjustment.

Method

H1. Among international students, higher levels of ethnic social connectedness (SC) will be associated with greater subjective well-being.

H2. Among domestic students, higher levels of mainstream social connectedness will be associated with greater subjective well-being.

H3. For both groups, higher levels of mainstream SC will be associated with greater sociocultural adaptation (lower SCAS).

H4. For international students, higher mainstream SC at Time 1 will predict (1) greater well-being and (2) greater sociocultural adaptation at Time 2.

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (% female)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years): mean</td>
<td>19.12</td>
<td>18.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic student (%)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>18.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International student (%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha (Time 1)</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>International</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream SC</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic SC</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES-D</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCAS-15</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

- These findings suggest that mainstream and ethnic social connectedness make unique contributions to the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of both domestic and international students.
- Mainstream social connectedness was correlated with better sociocultural adjustment, supporting the theory that more interactions with host nationals may lead to better adjustment outcomes.
- Ethnic social connectedness predicted fewer symptoms of depression approximately 3 months later, with implications for campus interventions targeted at international students.

Results

- Preliminary analyses: Ran correlations on each of the hypotheses to test for significance. Correlations significant at the 0.01 level were then included in multiple regression analyses.
- Significant findings are reported below.

H1. SCETH at Time 1 was negatively correlated with CES-D at Time 2 (r(22) = .58, p < .01).
SCETH at Time 1 significantly predicted lower CES-D at Time 2 (β = -3.63, t(20) = 2.14, p < .05), controlling for Time 1 CES-D scores.

H2. Time 1: SCMN among domestic students was significantly correlated with higher SWLS (r(212) = .36, p < .01), and lower CES-D (r(212) = .19, p < .01). SCMN was still significantly associated with higher SWLS (β = 1.98, t(207) = 4.14, p < .0001), after controlling for SCETH, gender, English fluency, and acculturation.

H3. Time 1: SCMN in both domestic and international students was significantly correlated with lower SCAS (r(212) = .20, p < .01); (r(22) = .33, p < .05), respectively.

Key limitations

- Small sample size for Time 2
- Predominantly female sample (3 male participants excluded from Time 2)
- Small proportion of international students
- Diverse campus

References

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