EXAMINING ETHNIC IDENTITY, BILINGUALISM, AND GENDER

AS PREDICTORS OF MEXICAN AMERICAN

ADOLESCENTS' CONNECTION

by

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DEDICATION

For my dad. Everything I am, you helped me to be. There will never be a day I don't think of you.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As the youngest and largest ethnic minority group in the U.S., Latino adolescents make up a continually growing portion of the United States population (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Existing empirical work often focuses on why Latino adolescents fare poorly (e.g., socially, academically; Barrera, Baglan, Ary, & Li, 2001) instead of seeking to understand what factors help this population succeed (Geldhof, Bowers, Mueller, Napolitano, Callina, & Lerner, 2014). As a result, it is important to understand what factors contribute to Latino adolescents' positive development, such as to the "5 Cs" of positive youth development (PYD), competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring (Gootman & Eccles, 2002). Connection (i.e., strong bonds to others), in particular, might be a salient feature of positive youth development to consider among Latino adolescents given that the majority subgroup of Latinos consists of Mexican American individuals (54%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), a highly marginalized group (DeGarmo & Martinez Jr., 2006). We know that having strong bonds or relationships with others, such as with peers, family members, school, and community, is important for positive outcomes, such as academic achievement (Delgado, Ettekal, Simpkins, & Schaefer, 2015; Plunkett, Henry, Houltberg, Sands & Abarca-Mortensen, 2008) and overall life satisfaction (Edwards & Lopez, 2006). As such, it is important to identify assets that promote connection for marginalized groups.

Little work identifies culture-specific assets such as ethnic identity; however, ethnic identity has been shown to be a promotive factor (i.e., predict positive outcomes) for normative development (Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Drawing from social identity theory, which posits that individuals feel connected to their social

group based on shared characteristics (e.g., ethnicity; Tajfel, 1981), it is possible that ethnic identity promotes connection among Mexican American adolescents. Thus, the main purpose of this study was to examine whether higher levels of identification with the Mexican American group, namely ethnic identity, predict higher levels of Mexican American adolescents' connection (Figure 1).

Yet, bilingualism might also play a role in predicting connection. For example, when adolescents are bilingual, they may feel more connected in multiple facets of their lives (i.e., at home, at school, in their neighborhood); however, for monolingual adolescents, feelings of connection may be lower because communication in some areas may be limited (Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007). Furthermore, the connection might also depend on adolescent gender due to the gender socialization these adolescents typically receive (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Mexican American females are typically socialized to adhere to strict guidelines, be caretakers in the home, and pass on their cultural values to future generations (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Males are expected to leave the home for work or exploration and have more lenient rules to follow (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). As such, Mexican American females may feel less connected to the outside world, whereas males may feel more connected. Therefore, additional aims of the study were to explore bilingualism and gender as predictors of connection (Figure 1).

Theoretical Foundations

Positive Youth Development. Historically, adolescent development has been viewed from a deficit perspective (Geldhof et al., 2014). Adolescence has been seen as a time burdened with physiological changes (e.g., puberty), problematic behaviors (e.g., drinking, smoking, unsafe sex) and hazards to avoid (e.g., teenage pregnancy; for a

review, see Damon, 2004). Adolescents have been seen as "broken" and as a problem to be fixed (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 1998). Professionals working with adolescents have been charged with the task of diverting major problems before they could do serious harm (Damon, 2004). Instead of studying and cultivating the positive aspects in adolescents' lives, "positive development" was no more than the absence of such problem behaviors (Geldhof et al., 2014).

Fortunately, over the past two decades there has been an increased focus on the positive aspects of youth development as a framework for studies (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006). The term "positive youth development" is a blanket term, widely used in theory, research, and practice (Benson et al., 2006). Whereas the positive youth development framework recognizes that problems do exist during adolescence, it concentrates on building up each child's potential (through understanding, education, and programs) to position him or her for success (Damon, 2004). The positive youth development perspective posits that understanding adolescent development should come from a strengths-based approach, rather than focusing on negative aspects (e.g., problem behaviors; Damon, 2004). It looks at the "other side of the coin," focusing on the positive attributes, skills, competencies, and potential necessary for adolescents' future success (Benson et al., 2006). Proponents of this positive approach agree that all adolescents have the potential to grow and develop, and this growth and development is enhanced in the presence of relationships and support (e.g., from family, friends, & communities; Benson et al., 2006). Further, this positive approach can be used for all adolescents, regardless of background, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Damon, 2004).

The "5 Cs". One approach to positive youth development is the "5 Cs" approach (Gootman & Eccles, 2002). In this approach, positive youth development is divided into five subcategories, competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion (Gootman & Eccles, 2002). This model places an emphasis on adolescents' strengths in these five core areas of development. Using the 5 Cs approach, positive development is directly and positively related to the alignment of adolescents' strengths and access to growth- promoting resources (Benson et al., 2006). Recent studies indicate that whereas the 5 Cs model continues to be a strong framework for positive youth development (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittian, Lerner & Lerner, 2010), examining the 5 Cs individually provides a better overall picture of positive youth development than using a composite score (Geldhof et al., 2014).

In terms of the 5 Cs of positive youth development, *competence* encompasses social, academic, cognitive, and vocational domains (Lerner et al., 2005). Another aspect of the 5 Cs of positive youth development is confidence. In this context, *confidence* describes one's overall self-regard (Lerner et al., 2005). The subcategory, *connection*, includes positive bonds and relationships with neighborhood, family members, school, and peers (Lerner et al., 2005). The final two aspects of the 5 Cs model are *character* and *caring or compassion.* Character refers to adolescents' standards, morals, and integrity (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000), and caring/compassion is characterized by adolescents' sympathy and empathy for others (Lerner et al., 2005).

This study focused on one of the 5 Cs, connection. Previous work suggests that connection is salient for Mexican American adolescents because it is a predictor of positive adjustment (e.g., academic achievement, Delgado et al., 2015; Plunkett et al.,

2008; and overall life satisfaction, Edwards & Lopez, 2006), but we know little of what processes contribute to connection. Therefore, finding a strong predictor of connection for Mexican American adolescents is important.

Ethnic Identity. Ethnic identity is a culture-specific asset that may predict connection for this population. According to Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, individuals feel connected to their social group based on shared characteristics (e.g., ethnicity). This is a sense of belonging (i.e., identity with one's ethnic group) that may contribute to positive development by fostering connections between group members.

As adolescents begin to understand their ethnicity, they take cues from their environment (e.g., families and communities) and individual experiences (e.g., discrimination; Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota, & Ocampo, 1993). Ethnic identity development occurs over time and is shaped by situations that take place naturally (Yip, 2006). There are multiple ethnic identity conceptualizations, and in order to better understand how ethnic identity was approached in this study, it is necessary to briefly mention a few of these conceptualizations. One widely-used approach to ethnic identity is through a progression of phases or stages. In this approach, individuals progress through three main phases or stages during the ethnic identity process, diffusion/foreclosure, moratorium, and achieved (Phinney, 1989). Drawing from Phinney's (1989) work on ethnic identity processes and Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, Umaña-Taylor (2011) introduced the construct of affirmation. Ethnic identity affirmation refers to individuals making sense of their ethnic identity by examining what it means to them; specifically, affirmation refers to a person's feelings (positively or negatively) about one's ethnic

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group (Umaña-Taylor, 2011). Ethnic identity affirmation is also referred to as private regard (e.g., Yip, 2014).

Much empirical work uses this approach to separate ethnic identity into multiple processes (Phinney, 1989; Umaña-Taylor & Shin, 2007). However, in an attempt to more thoroughly examine aspects of race and identity, Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998) posited the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). The MMRI does not ignore the fluid progression of ethnic identity. Instead, it examines an individual's identity with his or her ethnic group at one point in time (Sellers et al., 1998). Instead of seeing the MMRI as a competitor to other approaches regarding ethnic identity (e.g., Phinney's, 1989, processes), it can be seen as complementary, providing a snapshot of an individual's ethnic identity at a given point in time (Sellers et al., 1998).

The MMRI framework, focusing on African Americans, consists of four basic dimensions: racial salience, the centrality of the identity, the regard in which the person holds the group associated with the identity, and the ideology associated with the identity (Sellers et al., 1998). Salience and centrality refer to the significance individuals place on their race/ethnicity when defining themselves. Regard and ideology refer to individuals' perceptions of what it means to be a part of their ethnic group.

Similar to ethnic identity stages, regard may be examined holistically, but further dividing it into public and private regard might paint a more accurate picture of what is driving the relations. Ethnic identity-public regard distinguishes the way an individual believes that others feel (positively or negatively) about one's ethnic group (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Public regard occurs in a social context, placing emphasis on society's views of one's ethnic group (Sellers et al., 1998). On the

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other hand, ethnic identity-private regard is one's own positive or negative perceptions about one's ethnic group (Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006; Yip, 2006). That is, private regard is one's personal feelings about being a member of his or her ethnic group, regardless of others' views (Sellers et al., 1997).

Looking through the lens of these theories, we can gain a better understanding of how ethnic identity relates to connection. Previous models of ethnic identity (e.g., Phinney, 1989 and Umaña-Taylor, 2011) place individuals in a particular stage in the continuous ethnic identity process. Acknowledging these stages and processes, the MMRI helps researchers understand individuals' ethnic identity. For this study, I drew from the MMRI framework, which suggests that ethnic identity (i.e. public and private regard) relates to individuals' construal of situations (i.e. perceptions of connection) at a specific point in time.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic Identity as a Predictor of Connection

The current study attempted to understand whether ethnic identity contributes to overall connection. Connection (i.e., to neighborhood, family, peers, and school) is salient for Latino adolescents' development as it is positively linked to prosocial behaviors that foster success for this population (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Schwartz et al., 2007), such as academic achievement (Delgado et al., 2015). Connection can be conceptualized in a vast number of ways, such as friendship intimacy (i.e., connection to peers; Delgado et al., 2015), support (i.e., connection to family and peers; Alfaro & Umaña-Taylor, 2015), or school belonging (i.e., connection to school; Plunkett et al., 2008). Existing research has studied connection in these many facets, but we know little about the predictors of connection.

Previous work from a deficit perspective suggests that connection (e.g., to peers) may be related to deviant behaviors and substance use for Mexican American adolescents (Barrera et al., 2001). However, more recent work has examined positive outcomes of connection for these adolescents. For example, Mexican American adolescents report connection to family and friends as salient factors relating to life satisfaction (Edwards & Lopez, 2006). Similarly, connection to friends, parents, and school actually contributes to positive outcomes such as greater school belonging, academic motivation, and academic achievement for these adolescents, suggesting that connection (i.e., to family, friends, and school) is particularly salient for Mexican American adolescents' positive development (Alfaro & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Delgado et al., 2015; Plunkett et al., 2008). However, Latino students may have difficulty cultivating close relationships with others (e.g.,

friendships; Vaquera, 2009), thus, having a better understanding of how connectedness is fostered is warranted.

Existing empirical work has shown that ethnic identity is positively related to psychological characteristics (e.g., happiness; Kiang et al., 2006), academic self-confidence, and overall positivity in daily life (Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Umaña-Taylor & Shin, 2007). Similarly, positive ethnic identity relates to increased self-esteem for Mexican American adolescents (Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Umaña-Taylor, 2004). Drawing from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), which posits that feelings of connectedness to one's group and self-esteem are related, it is possible that how one feels about oneself might relate to individuals' openness to connect with others, particularly given that those with high ethnic identity already feel a sense of belonging to their ethnic group. Indeed, ethnic identity has been associated with psychological well-being (Kiang et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor, 2004) in Latino adolescents, which indicates ethnic identity as a positive process for these youth. As such, ethnic identity (a positive process) might relate to individuals' positive development, namely, connection.

Bilingualism and Gender as Predictors of Connection

Connection to multiple domains (i.e., family, peers, school, and community) may also be predicted by bilingualism (i.e., in English and Spanish). Similar to a monolingual individual feeling or seeming different when speaking to different individuals (e.g., a grandmother vs. a best friend), bilingual individuals may be seen differently by themselves or others depending on the language they are speaking (Pavlenko, 2006). For Mexican American adolescents, adopting mainstream culture (i.e., speaking English) may

enable them to better connect with peers, teachers, and others they come in contact with who only speak English (Schwartz et al., 2007) while still being able to communicate freely with those who speak Spanish. Therefore, it is possible that bilingualism predicts connection for these adolescents.

It is important to examine the role that gender may play in predicting connection for Mexican American adolescents. We know that taking gender into account matters when studying this population due to the gender role socialization that is particularly salient for Mexican Americans (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). According to this socialization, females are expected to stay close to home, learn how to take care of the family, and teach cultural values (i.e., ethnic identity) to future generations (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004; Umaña-Taylor, Alfaro, Bámaca, & Guimond, 2009). On the contrary, Mexican American males are expected to learn to be the "breadwinners" as the head of the household and are encouraged to spend more time outside the home interacting with others outside the family (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). It stands to reason that Mexican American boys and girls have different experiences due to gender role socialization and that gender may predict feelings of connection.

III. THE CURRENT STUDY

As this population continues to grow, it is important to understand what factors foster their success. Positive youth development occurs during the same time that ethnic identity is being formed (through interactions and experiences; Knight et al., 1993; Damon, 2004; Benson et al., 2006). We know that relationships (e.g., peer and family) are related to one's feelings of connection (Delgado et al., 2015), but we know little on the individual processes involved in predicting this connectedness to others. As a result, this study examined ethnic identity, bilingualism, and gender as predictors of connection among Mexican American adolescents.

Goal one of this study was to examine ethnic identity, bilingualism (i.e., bilingual in English and Spanish), and gender as predictors of connection for Mexican American adolescents. I expected a positive, significant relation between ethnic identity and connection as well as for bilingualism and connection for Mexican American adolescents. Additionally, I expected a negative relation between gender and connection, such that boys would have a higher likelihood of feeling connected than girls. Goal two of this study was to explore what aspects of connection (i.e., neighborhood, family, school, and peers) are predicted by ethnic identity, bilingualism, and gender. I expected the relations for each aspect to be similar to relations with overall connection, yielding positive, significant results in each individual category, with one exception. I expected a positive, significant relation between gender and connection to family, such that girls would have a higher likelihood of higher feelings of connection to family.

IV. METHOD

Data came from a study of adolescent positive youth development and academic success, including 453 adolescents recruited from a public school district in a suburban city in the south central United States. Criteria for participation was that participants were in 6th grade. Based on district-reported demographics, 68.3% of the 6th graders in the district identified as Latino, and 75% of all students were eligible for the free or reduced price lunch programs.

Participants

Of the total 536 6th graders in the district, 83 students were absent during the survey or did not receive parental consent. Therefore, the total sample collected consisted of 453 6th grade students (85% of total 6th grade student population; 52% female; M_{age} = 11.68 years, SD = .62; 31.2% bilingual in English and Spanish). However, for this study, only those who identified themselves as Mexican/Mexican American (N=218; 53% female; M_{age} = 11.65 years, SD = .62; 49% bilingual in English and Spanish) were included.

Procedure

Recruitment letters were sent to all of the 6th graders' homes in English and Spanish. Bilingual staff made follow-up phone calls to all parents to provide more information about the project, confirm eligibility, and answer any questions. Passive consent was obtained, and members of the research team went to the 6th grade center to distribute pencil-paper questionnaires during a social studies class period. All questionnaires were completed in English, and research assistants were available to answer any questions during the survey. It was expected that the questionnaire would last

approximately 10 minutes; however, students took considerably more time (about 45 minutes) to complete the questionnaire. The Texas State Institutional Review Board approved all procedures of this study.

Measures

All measures were forward- and back-translated for local Mexican dialect according to a procedure developed by Foster and Martinez (1995). Measures have demonstrated validity with Latino samples in other studies (e.g., Yip, 2014).

Demographics. Demographic information was obtained from all participants. Adolescents were asked to report on their age, gender, language use, place of birth, and ethnicity. Age of participants was included as a control due to the possibility that older adolescents may have higher levels of connection given their life experiences (Knight et al., 1993).

Ethnic Identity. Ethnic identity was measured using a 9-item scale adapted from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1997). The MIBI was created as a way to measure the MMRI (Sellers et al., 1998). Similar to multi-ethnic work by Yip (2014), items from the MIBI were shortened, and "Black people/community" was replaced with "my ethnic group" to be relevant to any ethnicity. Adolescents rated agreement to the items on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This scale measures participants' feelings towards their ethnic group. The measure includes subscales for public and private regard to measure each construct separately.

Ethnic identity-private regard was based on the mean of five items. Examples of items measuring private regard are "I have a strong attachment to other members of my

ethnic group" and "I am happy that I am a member of my ethnic group". This subscale measures participants' internal feelings about their ethnic group. Higher scores for these items indicated higher levels of private regard. Cronbach's alpha for private regard is .95.

Ethnic identity-public regard was based on the mean of the remaining four items from the ethnic-adapted MIBI scale. Examples of items measuring public regard are "Overall, my ethnic group is considered good by others" and "In general, others respect members of my ethnic group". This subscale measures participants' feelings about others' views of their ethnic group. Higher scores for these items indicated higher levels of public regard. Cronbach's alpha for public regard is .93.

Connection. Overall connection was based on the mean of eight items. This scale measures participants' feelings of connection to multiple facets of daily life. Scores were averaged and lower scores indicated a higher sense of connection. Cronbach's alpha for overall connection is .78.

Connection to neighborhood was based on the mean of 2 items (e.g., "Adults in my town or city make me feel important"). Items were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree. Cronbach's alpha for connection to neighborhood is .80. For two-item measures, especially with marginal Cronbach's alpha levels, it is appropriate to examine inter-item correlations (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2011). The inter-item correlation for the connection to neighborhood measure is .67.

Connection to family was based on the mean of 2 items (e.g., "In my family I feel useful and important"). Items were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 =

strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree. Cronbach's alpha for connection to family is .61, and the inter-item correlation is .44.

Connection to school was based on the mean of 2 items (e.g., "I get a lot of encouragement at my school"). Items were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree. Cronbach's alpha for connection to school is .62, and the inter-item correlation is .45.

Connection to peers was based on the mean of 2 items (e.g., "I feel my friends are good friends"). Items were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 = always true and 5 = almost never true or never true. Cronbach's alpha for connection to peers is .69, and the inter-item correlation is .53.

Analytic Plan

Means and standard deviations for all study variables were calculated using SPSS. Gender (0 = male; 1 = female) and bilingualism (0 = English monolingual; 1 = bilingual in English & Spanish) were coded as dichotomous variables. Connection scores were reverse coded so that a score of 5 indicated high feelings of connection and a score of 1 indicated low feelings of connection. Then, scale scores were computed for public regard, private regard, and connection. Next, regression analyses were used to test the relation between ethnic identity, bilingualism, and gender and connection. Lastly, regression analyses were used to test the relation between ethnic identity, bilingualism, and gender and each subcategory of connection (i.e., neighborhood, family, school, and peers).

V. RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Correlations were conducted on all study variables (Table 1). Because private and public regard were so highly correlated, these two variables were not included in the same model in order to reduce the risk of multicollinearity (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991). Demographic variables were also included in correlations to determine which variables should be included in the model as controls. Age was significantly related to overall connection, connection to school, and connection to family. Therefore, using guidelines suggested by Aiken et al. (1991), age was included as a control only in models including these outcome variables.

Primary Analyses

Regression analyses were conducted using SPSS to test the goals of this study (Tables 2 & 3). First, for goal one, I tested the relations of private and public regard, bilingualism, and gender on overall connection using two separate regressions. For the first regression, the first step included age as a control variable. Step two included tests for the main effects of bilingualism, gender, and private regard on connection. Consistent with previous work (e.g., McHale, Kim, Kan, & Updegraff, 2011; Updegraff, Kim, Killoren, & Thayer, 2010; Updegraff, McHale, Whiteman, Thayer, & Delgado, 2008), marginal results are reported at the trend level for *p* values less than .10. Private regard was positively related to connection at the trend level. No significant results emerged for bilingualism or gender. To test the other half of goal one (i.e., public regard) I ran a second regression. While again controlling for age, public regard was positively related to connection. No significant results emerged for bilingualism or gender.

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In order to more deeply understand connection, goal two of this study was to explore the relations between private regard, public regard, bilingualism, and gender and each subscale of connection (i.e., neighborhood, family, school, and peers). To test these, I used individual regressions for each model. Using separate regressions for private and public regard, I first tested the relation between the study variables and connection to neighborhood. Because age was not correlated with connection to neighborhood, I did not include age as a control in this model. Private regard was positively related to connection to neighborhood (Table 2). A similar model was tested with public regard, and public regard was positively related to connection to neighborhood (Table 3). No significant results emerged for bilingualism or gender in either model.

Next, I tested the relation between the study variables and connection to family. Step one included age as a control variable for this model. Bilingualism (i.e., in English and Spanish) was positively related to connection to family at the trend level when included in the model with private regard (Table 2). Similarly, when included in the model with public regard, bilingualism was positively related to connection to family only at the trend level (Table 3). No significant results emerged for private regard, public regard, or gender.

The next step was to test the relation between the study variables and connection to school. Age was again included as a control for this model. No significant results emerged for either model (private or public regard; Tables 2 & 3).

The final regression analyses tested the relations between the study variables and connection to peers. Age was not correlated to the outcome variable and, as such, was not included in these models. The first regression in this set tested the main effects of private

regard, bilingualism, and gender on connection to peers. Bilingualism was negatively related to connection to peers at the trend level, and private regard was positively related at the trend level (Table 2). Gender was positively related to connection to peers. The second regression in this set tested the main effects of public regard, bilingualism, and gender on connection to peers. Similar to the previous model, bilingualism was negatively related to connection to peers at the trend level, and public regard was positively related at the trend level (Table 3). Gender was significantly related to connection to peers such that girls have a higher likelihood of having higher feelings of connection than boys.

VI. DISCUSSION

This study extends the literature by examining the links from ethnic identity, bilingualism, and gender to connection among Mexican American adolescents, suggesting that these variables inform how youth connect to others in their environment. Further, this study adds to the literature by looking at individual domains of connection (i.e., neighborhood, family, school, and peers) showing differences for structural (i.e., neighborhood) and relationship-based (i.e., peers) connection patterns. Results highlight gender and ethnic identity (a culture-specific asset) as factors that help promote Mexican American adolescents' sense of connection and help inform culturally sensitive intervention strategies.

Hypotheses were partially supported for goal one, examining the relations between private and public regard, bilingualism, and gender and connection. Drawing from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981), I expected both private and public regard to be positively related to connection. Whereas public regard emerged as a significant predictor of connection as a whole, results indicated that private regard is positively related to connection as a whole only at the trend level. It is possible that this is because private regard is internal whereas public regard involves thoughts and perceptions of others' views (Sellers et al., 1997). Consistent with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) which posits that connectedness is based on shared characteristics with others, this study contributes to the literature by suggesting that perceptions of others' thoughts about one's ethnicity (i.e., public regard) are salient for Mexican American adolescents' connection. As such, more thought should be given to these perceptions and how they can be

improved or strengthened during early adolescence to ensure connection for these adolescents.

Contrary to my hypothesis, bilingualism was not significantly related to connection. This is inconsistent with previous work suggesting bilingualism as a cultural asset that individuals can draw from to strengthen connection (Schwartz et al., 2007). It is possible that this is due to the cultural context of these adolescents; they are in a location that has a high Latino population. As such, ethnic identity may be salient for these adolescents as their main connection to their culture, and bilingualism alone is not significantly related to connection. Additionally, when looking at overall connection, gender was not related. It is possible that differences in context may be canceling out results for overall connection, such that whereas gender matters for one subscale of connection (i.e., connection to peers), it is not significant for other subscales of connection (i.e., connection to neighborhood, family, and school). Therefore, it is important to examine predictors of different aspects of connection (i.e., subscales) to better tailor intervention efforts.

Looking at connection as a whole can give an overview, whereas separating connection into individual domains provides additional insight into the driving factors of connection for these adolescents. When examined individually, significant findings emerged for two of the four individual domains of connection. For connection to family, results for public and private regard were positive at the trend level. The only domain without any significant findings was connection to school. It is possible that connection to these domains (i.e., family and school) is more complex and involves other factors (e.g., familism; Updegraff et al., 2005). Familism is related to Mexican American

adolescents' feelings of connection to family (e.g., sibling relationships; Updegraff et al., 2005). However, familistic values and practices are outside the scope of this study, and as such, should be researched further. Yet, this study contributes to the literature about the link between ethnic identity and connection by looking at individual domains (Goal 2).

My findings on private and public regard suggested that higher levels of private regard and public regard predict higher feelings of connection to one's neighborhood. Interactions in an adolescent's neighborhood include adults in his or her town or city, and these relationships are often built with individuals outside of one's core family or friend group. In closer relationships (i.e., with close family or friends), adolescents draw from many assets, such as personality traits and shared characteristics (Tajfel, 1981), to understand and evaluate these relationships (Pavlenko, 2006). However, when interacting with adults in one's town or city, an adolescent may perceive judgment or acceptance based on fewer assets or characteristics, such as adolescent social position (i.e., ethnicity; García-Coll et al., 1996). Drawing from MMRI framework (Sellers et al., 1998), this study suggests that race/ethnicity is salient for adolescents' internal and external assets (i.e., private and public regard) as promoting factors of connection to neighborhood. Therefore, attention should be given to fostering private regard and public regard in order to increase connection in the neighborhood.

The relations for private regard, public regard, bilingualism, and gender to connection to peers looks different than for other domains. Bilingualism, private regard, and public regard were positively related at the trend level, suggesting that these factors are not particularly salient for connection to peers for this population. In fact, connection to peers is the only domain for which positive, significant findings emerged for gender. In

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other words, gender matters for Mexican American adolescents' feelings of connection to peers, such that girls report a higher connection to peers than boys. Although this finding is contrary to my hypothesis that boys would have a higher likelihood of higher feelings of connection than girls, it is consistent with previous work suggesting gender as a salient indicator for this population (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004; Umaña-Taylor, Alfaro, Bámaca, & Guimond, 2009). In this study, feelings of connection to peers are higher for girls than for boys. It is possible that this is due to the relational nature of Mexican American girls (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). When connecting with friends, Mexican American girls are more likely to be more sensitive, engage in prosocial interactions, and perceive and express emotions than boys (Rose & Rudolph, 2006).

Despite the strengths of this work, this study is not without limitations. These include age of the participants, number of items per subscale of connection, the cultural context of these adolescents, and the possibility of bidirectional relations. Ethnic identity is a process that starts during adolescence and occurs over time (Yip, 2006), and participants in this study were all young adolescents (6th graders). As such, it is possible that levels of public and private regard can be attributed to the young age of the participants. As 6th graders, these young adolescents may be only beginning to explore their ethnic identity. It is possible that these participants' public and private regard will change significantly over the next few years (Yip, 2006), and future studies should include older adolescents. Further, given the cross-sectional nature of this study, longitudinal studies should be conducted to account for these changes in adolescents over time. Moreover, it is possible that the relation between levels of ethnic identity and feelings of connection is bidirectional. For this study, higher levels of ethnic identity

predicted higher feelings of connection, but perhaps connection predicts ethnic identity. As such, future work should address this, and other, possible bidirectional relations.

Additionally, the measure for connection as a whole included only eight items. In order to divide connection to examine the subscales individually, analyses included only two items per subscale. Although these 2-item measures demonstrated good reliability for this study, further studies should include additional items to really disentangle these individual domains of life (i.e. neighborhood, school, family, and peers; Aiken et al., 1991). Furthermore, the adolescents in this study were from a predominately Latino community. Other studies should be conducted in other areas of the US where Latino populations vary to better understand connection in other cultural contexts (e.g., minority vs majority contexts; Umaña-Taylor, 2004). All in all, this study provides important first steps and future directions for understanding what factors foster connection for Mexican American adolescents.

As this population continues to grow, it is important to understand factors that contribute to success for Mexican American adolescents. These adolescents are capable of succeeding, and programs, policies, and events should focus on the positive aspects of development. We know that Mexican American adolescents' connection is important for positive outcomes (e.g., academic success and overall well-being; Delgado et al., 2015; Edwards & Lopez, 2006), and ethnic identity is salient for this population (Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Umaña-Taylor & Shin, 2007). This study ultimately contributes to the existing literature by identifying ethnic identity as a culture-specific predictor of overall connection and of individual domains of connection for Mexican American adolescents.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	--	-.09	-.04	-.08	.03	-.19**	-.10	-.20**	-.19**	-.06
2. Gender		--	-.08	.11	.16*	.14*	.06	-.03	.06	.31**
3. Bilingual			--	.08	.04	.02	.07	.13	-.02	-.14*
4. Private Regard				--	.87**	.17*	.18*	.07	.09	.14
5. Public Regard					--	.17*	.18*	.06	.11	.17*
6. Connection						--	.78**	.74**	.74**	.63**
7. Neighborhood							--	.47**	.43**	.33**
8. Family								--	.44**	.22**
9. School									--	.30**
10. Peers										--
Mean			0.54	3.88	3.77	3.70	3.13	3.73	3.79	4.12
SD			0.50	1.10	1.11	0.71	1.03	1.01	0.89	0.97

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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Table 2.
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses using Private Regard, Bilingualism, and Gender to Predict Connection

	Connection			Neighborhood			Family			School			Peers		
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1															
Age	-.18	.08	-.17*	--	--	--	-.31	.11	-.19**	-.25	.10	-.18*	--	--	--
R2		.03			--			.04			.03			--	
Step 2															
Age	-.16	.08	-.15*	--	--	--	-.30	.11	-.19**	-.24	.10	-.18*	--	--	--
Bilinguals	.02	.10	.01	.12	.15	.06	.24	.14	.12†	-.02	.12	-.01	-.25	.14	-.13†
Females	.11	.10	.08	.04	.15	.02	-.15	.14	-.07	.04	.12	.03	.52	.14	**.26*****
Private Regard	.09	.04	.14†	.15	.07	**.17***	.05	.06	.05	.05	.06	.06	.11	.06	.12†
R2		.06			.03			.06			.04			.11	
F for change in R2		2.86*			--			3.15*			1.91			--	

Note: Private regard was centered at the mean. "--" means step was not included in the model; step 1 begins at "Step 2".
For bilingualism, 0 = English monolingual; 1 = bilingual in English and Spanish. For gender, 0 = male; 1 = female.
†*p* < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 3.
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses using Public Regard, Bilingualism, and Gender to Predict Connection

	Connection			Neighborhood			Family			School			Peers		
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1															
Age	-.18	.08	-.16*	--	--	--	-.30	.11	-.19**	-.24	.10	-.18*	--	--	--
R2		.03			--			.04			.03			--	
Step 2															
Age	-.18	.08	-.16*	--	--	--	-.30	.11	-.19**	-.24	.10	-.18*	--	--	--
Bilinguals	.02	.10	.01	.13	.15	.07	.24	.14	.12†	-.03	.12	-.02	-.24	.14	-.12†
Females	.09	.10	.07	.03	.15	.01	-.17	.14	-.09	.02	.12	.01	.49	.14	**.25***
Public Regard	.10	.04	**.16***	.15	.07	**.17***	.06	.06	.07	.07	.06	.10	.12	.06	.13†
R2		.06			.03			.06			.04			.11	
F for change in R2		3.01*			--			3.16*			2.01			--	

Note: Public regard was centered at the mean. "--" means step was not included in the model; step 1 begins at "Step 2".
For bilingualism, 0 = English monolingual; 1 = bilingual in English and Spanish. For gender, 0 = male; 1 = female.
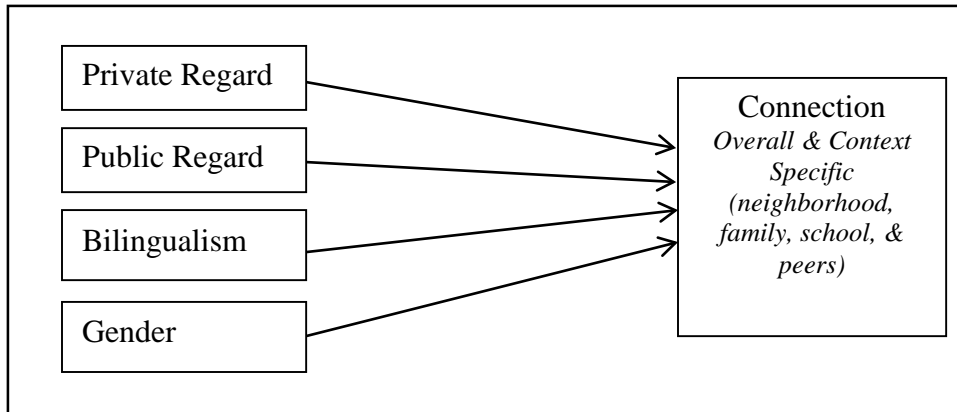†*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

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