Acculturation, Enculturation, Ethnic Identity, and Conscientiousness as Predictors of Latino Boys’ and Girls’ Career Decision Self-Efficacy

Lizette Ojeda¹, Brandy Piña-Watson¹, Linda G. Castillo¹, Rosalinda Castillo¹, Noshaba Khan¹, and Jennifer Leigh¹

Abstract
This study examined the role of culture and personality on the career decision self-efficacy of 338 Latino seventh-grade public middle school students. Specifically, we examined the role of acculturation, enculturation, ethnic identity, and conscientiousness on career decision self-efficacy. Findings indicated Latina girls were more acculturated and enculturated than Latino boys. For Latino boys and Latina girls, respectively, 34% and 25% of the variance in career decision self-efficacy was accounted for by the predictors. Acculturation, ethnic identity, and conscientiousness significantly predicted career decision self-efficacy for girls. For boys, however, only ethnic identity and conscientiousness were unique significant predictors. As expected, enculturation did not significantly predict career decision self-efficacy for either boys or girls. An interaction effect between acculturation and enculturation did not significantly predict career decision self-efficacy for boys or girls. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

¹ Texas A&M University

Corresponding Author:
Lizette Ojeda, Texas A&M University, 710 Harrington Tower MS 4225, College Station, TX 77843, USA
Email: lizetteojeda@tamu.edu
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Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). In fact, the 24% Latino population growth rate is almost four times the general U.S. population’s growth rate of 6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Due to the increasing Latino population in the United States, scholars predict Latinos will have a larger impact on the workforce than any other demographic group (Lucero-Miller & Newman, 1999). Over time, the changing demographics of increasing racial/ethnic minorities will force employers, educators, and helping professionals to rethink their practices and policies (Leong, 1991).

Despite the growth of Latinos in the United States, there continues to be a discrepancy between Latino academic achievement rates compared to other racial/ethnic groups. For instance, Latino middle school students scored lower on school curriculum compared to Whites and Asian Americans (Farkas, Sheehan, & Grobe, 1990). Furthermore, Latino adolescents drop out of secondary education at 28% compared to 13% among African Americans and 7% among Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Dropout rates in Texas, where the current study took place, show rates for Latinos are higher than for the general population (14.4% vs. 10.5%; Texas Education Agency, 2008). Similar discrepancies continue into the college years, with only 33% of Latinos compared to 42% of the general population enrolled in college (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). In fact, among 25–29-year-olds who completed high school, only 16% of Latinos obtained bachelor’s degrees compared to 21% of African Americans and 37% of Whites.

Educational achievement disparities could be due to cultural differences between Latinos and the school system (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). For example, cultural differences could be accounted for by a person’s level of acculturation, enculturation, and the salience of their ethnic identity. Individual differences, such as conscientiousness, have also predicted academic achievement. One study related conscientiousness, one of the Big Five personality traits (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), to school success among ethnically diverse college students (Kaufman, Agars, & Lopez-Wagner, 2008). In turn, academic success has been linked to a person’s confidence in their ability to make future career decisions. To address this issue, we examined the role of culture (acculturation, enculturation, ethnic identity) and personality (conscientiousness) on Latino middle school students’ career decision self-efficacy.

Career Decision Self-Efficacy
Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) is the belief that one can complete specific tasks related to making a career decision (Betz & Luzzo, 1996). The CDSE is an...
important construct to examine among Latino middle school students because of its role on career development variables such as interests, outcome expectations, and intentions (Fouad & Smith, 1996). Further highlighting the role of self-efficacy in career-related outcomes among Latino students, one study found Mexican American middle school students’ math and science self-efficacy predicted outcome expectations, interests, and goal intentions in math and science (Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007). In addition, lack of confidence in one’s ability to choose a career could have negative effects on other career outcomes such as overlooking a postsecondary education (McWhirter, Rasheed, & Crothers, 2000) and having low-educational goals (Flores, Ojeda, Huang, Gee, & Lee, 2006). Research has shown racial/ethnic minority college students had lower CDSE than did White students (Gloria & Hird, 1999). One possible explanation for Latino students’ lower CDSE may be due to psychological factors such as acculturation and ethnic identity. For instance, Gloria and Hird (1999) found ethnic identity significantly and positively predicted CDSE among racial/ethnic minority. These findings support the author’s assertion that ethnic identity development is a vocational task used by racial and ethnic minorities. They report that ethnic identity may be necessary for this group to incorporate their self-concept into their career identity as well as to be efficacious in their abilities to make career decisions. The relationship between these two variables deserves further consideration.

Surprisingly, few studies have specifically examined CDSE among Latino middle school students. Understanding Latinos’ CDSE at an early stage in career development such as during adolescence could impact Latinos’ future career avenues. For instance, Latino immigrants in particular are overrepresented in low-skilled, labor-intensive “brown-collar” jobs (Catanzarite, 2002). Perhaps increasing their CDSE during youth could encourage them to pursue occupations with higher financial compensation. In essence, it is important to consider CDSE during adolescence in preparation for entering the future workforce to ensure Latinos do not lag behind in their potential to impact the U.S. labor force.

**Acculturation and Enculturation**

Acculturation refers to the multidimensional processes of adapting to the host majority culture (Berry, 1980). Within the acculturation process, a member of one cultural group changes his or her behaviors, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes to become more in-line with the norms of another culture. Enculturation, a related construct, refers to maintaining aspects of one’s culture of origin while living within another culture (Gonzales, Knight, Morgan-Lopez, Saenz, & Sirolli, 2002)

Berry (1980) developed classification systems for ethnic minority individuals, which incorporate both the individual’s acculturation and enculturation level. Four categories are proposed: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration occurs when a person is high on both acculturation and enculturation.
An integrated individual has an interest in both maintaining his or her culture of origin while simultaneously successfully interacting with the mainstream culture. This individual is considered bicultural in that he or she integrates two cultures into his or her identity. Assimilation occurs when the individual does not maintain his or her culture of origin. Instead, this individual seeks to become part of the dominant culture at the expense of his or her culture of origin. This individual would score high on acculturation and low on enculturation. An individual in the separation category avoids interaction with other cultures while keeping a strong connection with his or her culture of origin. This individual would score high on enculturation and low on acculturation. Finally, an individual who is in the marginalization category has no interest in either his or her culture of origin or other cultures. This individual would score low on acculturation and enculturation.

Limited research and mixed findings exist on the role of acculturation and enculturation on educational and career development. Some researchers found acculturated Latino youth are more likely to attend college (Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997). Other studies indicated negative outcomes associated with acculturation that put youth at risk of negative mental health and academic outcomes (Bernal, Saenz, & Knight, 1991; Berry, 1988). These youth experience internal conflict because they find themselves in unfamiliar situations and struggle to make decisions about how to behave in such scenarios (Gonzales, Knight, Birman, & Sirolli, 2004). Additionally, internal conflict can impact adolescents’ self-concept, identity formation, and mental health (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). To complicate findings further, a study on Mexican American middle school students concluded no indirect effect between acculturation, enculturation, and math/science self-efficacy (Navarro et al., 2007).

Nonetheless, enculturation and a strong ethnic identity serve as protective factors for ethnic minorities (Parra & Guarnaccia, 1998; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Zimmerman, Ramirez, Washienko, Walt, & Dyer, 1998). Individuals who feel proud of their heritage and have a strong ethnic identity may have improved well-being and a greater resilience against stressful life circumstances because of the social support and sense of belonging provided by their extended families (Gonzales et al., 2004). Gonzales and colleagues stated individuals who have a strong ethnic identity and who feel pride in their heritage may have greater self-esteem, which in turn can increase confidence in making future career decisions. In contrast, however, research has found enculturation and CDSE are not significantly correlated (Flores et al., 2006). Given the mixed findings on acculturation and enculturation, we explored how these variables contributed to the CDSE of Latino youth.

**Ethnic Identity**

According to Erikson’s (1968) identity development theory, a person enters a stage of identity versus identity confusion during adolescence. The major task for
adolescents during this identity stage is to learn academic, social, physical, and practical skills needed to navigate the adult world including their choices in future career decisions. Ethnic identity is an important contributor to a person’s overall identity. Ethnic identity is the part of an individual’s self-concept that derives from his or her knowledge of membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1981).

A few studies have examined the relation between ethnic identity and career decision making. Rollins and Valdez (2006) found that among a sample of Latino and African American adolescent females, career decision self-efficacy mediated the relation between ethnic identity and gender traditionality in career choice goals. Among predominantly ethnic minority adolescents, ethnic identity related to math self-efficacy (O’Brien, Martinez-Pons, & Kopala, 1999). Duffy and Klingaman (2009) found importance of ethnic identity for African American and Asian American students related to confidence in making decisions about future careers. In Gushue and Whitson’s (2006) study on the relation between ethnic identity and CDSE among African American and Latina girls, they suggested self-efficacy might be improved through a person’s integration of self. They proposed a positive salient ethnic identity may give girls more confidence to deal with racism and sexism as they explore career options.

Conscientiousness

Social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) suggests person inputs such as personality are related to self-efficacy beliefs through its relation to learning experiences. Nevertheless, vocational researchers have just recently begun to examine the role of personality on career outcomes (Jin, Watkins, & Yuen, 2009; Reed, Bruch, & Haase, 2004). For instance, many of the Big Five personality constructs are associated with career decidedness, career choice, career interests, and career commitment (Jin et al., 2009; Lounsbury, Tatum, Chambers, Owens, & Gibson, 1999; Newman, Gray, & Fuqua, 1999; Shafer, 2000). Of the five personality variables, conscientiousness has been the most consistently associated with career-related variables (Wolfe & Johnson, 1995).

Conscientiousness reflects persistence, responsibility, and a need for achievement. Conscientious individuals typically demonstrate thinking and reasoning, and thus are able to fully establish goals, be motivated, be sociable, and be adaptive (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Among college students, conscientiousness has been related to career decidedness (Lounsbury et al., 1999). Adolescents who scored high on career decidedness were more orderly, rule following, dutiful, reliable, and structured (Lounsbury, Hutchers, & Loveland, 2005). Despite these findings there is limited research focused on conscientiousness and career development in early adolescence. Perhaps, this is because adolescence is the time when young people are developing their identities and experiencing changes that lead to consistent personality traits (McCrae et al., 2002).
Purpose of the Study

Most career development research has focused on high school and college students whereas research with middle school populations is sparse, especially with racial/ethnic minorities. In response to a call for more career research with early adolescents (Fouad & Smith, 1996), the current study focuses on Latino middle school students’ CDSE. Given the growing impact Latinos have on the workforce, as well as the impact CDSE can have on their progression toward a career, the cultural variables of ethnic identity, acculturation, and enculturation were explored to determine their relation to Latino youth’s CDSE. Using Berry’s (1980) acculturation classification system, we also examined if varying acculturation strategies through an interaction effect between acculturation and enculturation predict CDSE. Additionally, given the role of conscientiousness on career selection and progression, conscientiousness was investigated to determine its role on CDSE among Latino youth while controlling for culture. We chose to explore the effect of conscientiousness on CDSE above and beyond the effect of culture to determine the unique contribution of personality despite cultural factors.

The present study tested four hypotheses. First, we hypothesized acculturation and ethnic identity would positively predict CDSE. We also hypothesized an interaction effect between acculturation and enculturation would significantly predict CDSE. Third, we hypothesized conscientiousness would contribute to the variance accounted for in CDSE above and beyond the cultural variables. Finally, we hypothesized enculturation would not significantly predict CDSE.

Method

Participants

Participants were 338 Latino seventh-grade public middle school students in a mid-sized, urban city in central Texas. This sample was 54% female and 46% male. Participant’s ages ranged from 12 to 15 years ($M = 12.72$ years; $SD = .68$ years). All participants were from low-income families as defined by eligibility for free or reduced-price meals under the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National School Lunch Program (USDA, 2008).

All participants indicated they were Latino. No further information was collected to determine specific Latino subgroup membership. The Latino population in this region is 28% of the total population. More specifically, 80.7% is Mexican American, 0.6% is Puerto Rican, 0.3% is Cuban American, and 18.3% is classified as “Other Hispanic or Latino” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). A similar breakdown for this study can be extrapolated from the region’s demographics. Within the school district’s middle schools that participated in this study, 47% of the students were Latino.
Instruments

Career decision self-efficacy. The Middle School Self-Efficacy Scale (Fouad & Smith, 1997) is a modified version of Taylor and Betz’s (1983) CDSE Scale. Modifications included having fewer items and more understandable wording for children in middle school. This 12-item scale measures adolescents’ confidence in the ability to make career-related decisions. A sample item includes “I resist attempts of parents or friends to push me into a career I believe is beyond my abilities or not for me.” Responses were recorded using a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Mean scores were derived, with higher scores indicating more confidence in ability to make decisions about a future career.

In a validity study of the CDSE measure with middle school students, Fouad and Smith (1997) found this modified scale was valid and reliable with this group. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted with a similar population as this study’s (i.e., middle school students, low socioeconomic status [SES], and predominately Hispanic) demonstrated good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.96, p < .001$, AGFI = .91, RMR = .05). Fouad and Smith (1997) also reported a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .79$. For the present study, the scale resulted in an $\alpha$ coefficient of .74.

Acculturation and enculturation. A revised, shortened 12-item version (Brief ARSMA-II; Bauman, 2005) of the 30-item Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II; Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) was used to measure acculturation and enculturation. It contains two subscales: a 6-item Mexican Oriented Scale (MOS) measures enculturation and a 6-item Anglo Oriented Scale (AOS) measures acculturation. Sample MOS and AOS items include: “My thinking is done in the Spanish language,” and “My thinking is done in the English language,” respectively. Responses are recorded on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (almost always/extremely often).

The Brief ARSMA-II is significantly correlated with the ARSMA-II ($r = .89$; Cuéllar et al., 1995). The MOS and AOS were positively correlated with the following Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS; Stephenson, 2000) subscales: ethnic society immersion (ESI) and the dominant society immersion (DSI), respectively. ESI was positively correlated with MOS ($r = .87, p < .01$) and DSI was positively correlated with AOS ($r = .49, p < .01$). Bauman (2005) surveyed two samples with the Brief ARSMA-II and the following coefficient $\alpha$s were obtained: for Sample 1, on the MOS scale, $\alpha = .93$; for the AOS scale, $\alpha = .69$; for Sample 2, $\alpha = .84$ for the MOS scale and $\alpha = .75$ for the AOS scale. For the present study, $\alpha = .91$ for the MOS subscale and $\alpha = .75$ for the AOS subscale.

Ethnic identity. The revised, shortened 6-item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R; Phinney & Ong, 2007) is a revised version of the 14-item MEIM (Phinney, 1992). This scale measures ethnic identity on a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A sample item includes
“I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.” Mean scores are computed, with higher scores indicating greater salience of ethnic identity within an individual. An open-ended question was given to inquire about the child’s self-labeled ethnic identification as part of the MEIM-R. This question was omitted from the analysis due to a large proportion of missing data and participant confusion about the question.

Results of a confirmatory factor analysis conducted by Phinney and Ong (2007) indicated an excellent model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.91$, $p < .001$, AGFI = .96, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .04). The MEIM-R used in their study resulted in a coefficient $\alpha$ of .81. For the present study, the coefficient $\alpha$ was .80.

Conscientiousness. The conscientiousness subscale is taken from a larger scale, the Big Five Inventory, which measures five personality traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (John et al., 1991). This 9-item scale is measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (agree strongly). Negatively worded items are inversely scored. A sample item includes “I am someone who perseveres until the task is finished.” All items are summed to determine total score. A higher total score on this scale indicates higher levels of conscientiousness traits within the individual. A study by Benet-Martínez and John (1998) found the scale yielded $\alpha = .82$. For the present study, the coefficient $\alpha$ was .74.

Demographic questionnaire. A questionnaire was used to gather demographic information about age, grade level, gender, and race/ethnicity.

Procedure

Data for this study were taken from an evaluation of a local independent school district Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). GEAR UP is a federally funded discretionary grant program designed to prepare low-income students for college. Participants were required to have an informed consent signed by a parent. Permission of the Institutional Review Board at a major Southwestern university was obtained to conduct the evaluation. Approximately 1,050 low-income seventh-grade students from four middle schools in central Texas participated in the GEAR UP project. Since the focus of this study was on Latino students, our sample was reduced to 345 based on demographic information.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The data met statistical assumptions for multivariate normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. In analyzing multivariate outliers, we detected three outliers based on Mahalanobis Distance scores. Listwise deletion procedures were used to omit four
cases with missing data. Only cases with complete data were retained for this study (Pigott, 2001). Therefore, only 338 of the original 345 participants were included in further analyses.

To examine potential gender differences, a one-way multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. Findings revealed significant gender differences across the variables, Wilks $\Lambda = .94, F(5, 331) = 4.18, p < .001$. Specifically, there were gender differences in acculturation, $F(1, 335) = 10.40, p < .0001$, and enculturation, $F(1, 335) = 3.87, p < .05$. These results indicated Latina girls were more acculturated and enculturated than Latino boys. Given the Wilks $\Lambda$ demonstrated significant gender differences in the variables taken together, we conducted the remaining analyses separate by gender. The means, standard deviations, and univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) results for each measured variable by gender are presented in Table 1. See Table 2 for means, standard deviations, and partial correlations for the full sample.

### Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Univariate Analyses of Variance by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Girls ($n = 183$)</th>
<th>Boys ($n = 155$)</th>
<th>F(1, 335)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td>3.21 .68</td>
<td>2.96 .71</td>
<td>10.40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enculturation</td>
<td>2.36 1.18</td>
<td>2.11 1.11</td>
<td>3.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td>2.97 .59</td>
<td>2.91 .57</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>3.41 .49</td>
<td>3.34 .40</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDSE</td>
<td>3.10 .39</td>
<td>3.07 .40</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Variables with subscripts indicate means differed significantly between girls and boys. CDSE = Career decision self-efficacy. *$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.*

Main Analyses

Two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine the role of acculturation, enculturation, ethnic identity, and conscientiousness on career decision self-efficacy for Latino middle school boys and girls separately. We also tested for a possible interaction effect between acculturation and enculturation on CDSE. In the first step, the three cultural variables were entered. For the second step, we added the interaction variable to determine whether CDSE would differ among the four acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization). Both acculturation and enculturation were centered before the interaction effect was computed. Finally, we entered conscientiousness in the final step to determine the extent to which conscientiousness accounts for variance in CDSE above and beyond the cultural predictors.
For Latino boys, 34% of the variance in CDSE was accounted for by the predictor variables, $F(5, 154) = 15.18, \ p < .001$. Table 3 reveals that the cultural variables accounted for 28% of the variance in CDSE for boys, with ethnic identity being the only statistically significant predictor ($\beta = .51, p < .005$). The addition of the interaction between acculturation and enculturation in Step 2 did not account for a statistically significant increase in variance ($\Delta R^2 < .02, p > .05$). Finally, as predicted, conscientiousness accounted for an additional 4% of variance ($p < .001$) in CDSE above and beyond the cultural variables and their interaction. In this final step, there were only two significant predictors; ethnic identity was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .44, p < .001$) followed by conscientiousness ($\beta = .22, p < .005$).

For Latino girls, 25% of the variance in CDSE was accounted for by the predictor variables, $F(5, 181) = 11.86, \ p < .001$. Table 3 reveals that the cultural variables accounted for 21% of the variance in CDSE for girls, with ethnic identity and acculturation being significant predictors ($\beta = .40, p < .001$ and $\beta = .21, p < .005$, respectively). The addition of the interaction between acculturation and enculturation in Step 2 did not account for a statistically significant increase in variance ($\Delta R^2 < .01, p > .05$). Finally, as predicted, conscientiousness accounted for an additional 3.5% of variance ($p < .01$) in CDSE above and beyond the cultural variables and their interaction. In this final step, ethnic identity was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) followed by acculturation ($\beta = .22, p < .005$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = .20, p < .01$).

**Discussion**

The adolescent years are a time when identity development (Erikson, 1968) and career development become salient in an individual’s life (Fouad & Smith, 1996). As such, this study contributes to the career development literature by examining the
Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Results (Change in $R^2$, Unstandardized $B$ Weights, Standard Error, and Standardized $\beta$ Weights) for Career Decision Self-Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>SE $B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
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<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
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<td>.51***</td>
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<td>.28***</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
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<td>-.13</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Acculturation $\times$ enculturation</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01.

**p < .005.

***p < .001.

The role of culture and personality on Latino middle school students’ CDSE. Specifically, we examined the role of acculturation, enculturation, ethnic identity, and conscientiousness on Latino adolescent boys’ and girls’ CDSE. We also examined the role of Berry’s (1980) four acculturation categories (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization) on CDSE. Gender differences were found in acculturation and enculturation, with girls scoring higher than boys on both variables. This suggested
Latina girls were more bicultural than Latino boys. For girls particularly, “fitting in” socially is important during adolescence (Freyberg, 2009). The Latina girls in our study may have believed that to fit in with their peers at a predominantly White school they would have to act more like the majority of their peers and thus acculturate. At the same time, girls may have been more enculturated than boys because Latinas may experience more pressure from their family and community to be a traditional Latina than boys.

In assessing the CDSE of Latino boys, only ethnic identity and conscientiousness were significant predictors. Among Latina girls, CDSE was predicted by acculturation, ethnic identity, and conscientiousness. For both boys and girls, ethnic identity was the strongest predictor of CDSE. This finding is consistent with previous research concluding ethnic identity predicted academic and career self-efficacy among early adolescents (Phillips Smith, Walker, Fields, Brookins, & Seay, 1999). Consistent with our findings, Quintana’s (2007) overview on ethnic identity research demonstrated a strong relation with positive outcomes such as better mental health and academic success. Duffy and Klingaman (2009) noted the relation between ethnic identity and career development outcomes may be due to a developed self-concept (Fouad & Arbona, 1994), a task initiated during adolescence (Super, 1990). Because ethnic identity is an important component of self-concept for ethnic minorities (Quintana, 2007), adolescents’ secure ethnic identity may yield a stronger self-concept, and in turn lead to greater career maturity (Duffy & Klingaman, 2009). In essence, when Latino youth are secure in what their ethnicity means to them they are more secure in their ability to navigate the career decision-making process.

Conscientiousness significantly predicted CDSE for both Latino boys and girls. That is, students who were more organized, self-disciplined, and careful were more confident in their ability to make decisions about their career. This finding is consistent with a study that found conscientiousness predicted college students’ CDSE (Hartman & Betz, 2007). These researchers suggest conscientious students have high CDSE because they are able to tap into their self-regulatory resources such as goal orientation and self-determination. Thus, it seems students who have such character strengths would know how to be resourceful when making career decisions. Conscientiousness is an important personality trait not only for career outcomes but also for well-being (Lounsbury et al., 1999). Lent’s (2004) social cognitive model of well-being, a model partly based on the social cognitive career theory, suggests personality predicts career outcomes which in turn predict life satisfaction. Indeed, conscientiousness is an important predictor of Latino youth’s future career trajectory and overall mental health.

Although acculturation has predicted CDSE for both men and women (Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998; Patel, Salahuddin, & O’Brien, 2008), this was confirmed for girls but not boys in our study. Logically, the more students speak, read, and write in the English language, areas tapped into by the acculturation measure, the more access they would have to resources useful in helping them make career decisions (Patel et al., 2008). Perhaps acculturation predicted CDSE for girls but not for boys.
because Latina girls are traditionally expected to be submissive and sacrifice their own needs (Castillo, Perez, Castillo, & Ghosheh, 2010) Therefore, less acculturated Latinas may not feel efficacious about exploring career options and making career decisions more independently. As they acculturate, however, they become more individualistic and in turn develop confidence to think about their own career goals as opposed to succumbing to expectations imposed on them by family. Latino boys on the other hand, do not necessarily need to be acculturated to feel confident about their career decision making because they are traditionally socialized to make decisions for themselves and for their families, a privilege or responsibility that comes with being male. Given these significant gender differences in the role of acculturation on CDSE, future research should examine the mediating role of gender roles on this relation.

As expected, enculturation did not significantly predict CDSE for either Latino boys or girls. This is consistent with previous research that concluded no relation between enculturation and educational goals among Mexican American adolescents (Flores et al., 2006). This does not suggest adherence to behaviors of the Latino culture is detrimental to the career development of Latinos, but to acknowledge behaviors such as reading, writing, and speaking in Spanish may not suffice in navigating the tasks necessary to feel efficacious in making decisions about one’s career in the United States where career success often requires knowledge of the English language.

Our findings also indicated no interaction effects between acculturation and enculturation and CDSE for Latino boys or girls. That is, confidence in ability to make career-related decisions did not differ for Latino adolescents categorized as culturally integrated, assimilated, separated, or marginalized. Although this particular analysis was primarily exploratory, we expected integration (high acculturation and high enculturation), also referred to as biculturalism, to positively predict CDSE given biculturalism would allow Latino adolescents to navigate between two cultures (Birman, 1998). It could have also been expected for biculturalism to have a negative effect on CDSE if bicultural stress (stress related to navigating between two cultures) were present. For instance, if a Latino adolescent experiences conflict between the mainstream and Latino culture despite familiarity with both cultures, such stress may trigger career indecision if career goals based on either culture’s values conflict. No other known studies have examined Berry’s (1980) four acculturation strategies in the career development research among Latino adolescents. Thus, more studies that examine the role of these various strategies on career outcomes are encouraged.

Limitations

The limitations of this study should be addressed. First, the scale used to measure enculturation and acculturation (ARSMA-II) focuses on behaviors associated with language development, such as reading books in English or listening to Spanish
music. Although the ARSMA-II is the most frequently used measure of bilinear acculturation among Latinos in the career development literature (Miller & Kerlow-Myers, 2009), other scales may be able to measure enculturation and acculturation by addressing cultural customs, beliefs, values, and attitudes such as the Latino/a Values Scale (Kim, Soliz, Orellana, & Alamilla, 2009) and the Multidimensional Measure of Cultural Identity (Félix-Ortiz, Newcomb, & Myers, 1994). Our study also is limited because we did not distinguish between Latino subgroups in our sample. However, we can assume that the majority of participants were of Mexican descent given the statistics on Latinos in this region. Thus, generalizability to other Latino subgroups is limited. Finally, there are a few environmental limitations that may be causes for consideration, such as the classroom atmosphere, interruptions while completing the surveys and the dynamics of the students involved during the survey completion.

Future Research

Future studies on factors that affect CDSE might weigh in on gender role adherence. In particular, it would be interesting to see how Latinos’ gender role expectation, along with ethnic identity and acculturation affects CDSE. Researchers could include measures of Latino gender role beliefs such as the Marianismo Belief Scale, which assesses how strongly Latinas feel they should enculturate into their heritage culture’s ideals encompassing the construct of marianismo (Castillo et al., 2010) and the traditional machismo and caballerismo measure (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008) which assesses behavioral or cognitive aspects of the cultural construct of machismo and caballerismo. Given family unity is an important component of Latino culture, perhaps students who identify more with their heritage culture may benefit from Latino cultural values such as familismo/familism. If students have strong family values and family support, they may develop skills to feel confident in their career decision making. Additionally, given the dearth of research on conscientiousness during early adolescence, and in particular with Latinos, research should expand on the role of conscientiousness on CDSE for possible solutions on how to identify this type of personality trait in adolescents. Finally, since the current research did not highlight a significant relationship between Latino boys’ acculturation status on CDSE, it would be worth exploring why acculturation significantly predicts CDSE for Latina girls but not Latino boys.

Implications

School counselors, career counselors, and university counselors alike should be aware of the impact ethnic identity and conscientiousness have on adolescents’ CDSE. Including these variables into the development of intervention programs can help promote healthy career decision making. For instance, school personnel could target students low in conscientiousness to teach them career decision-making skills.
given our findings indicate a negative relation between conscientiousness and CDSE. When counselors administer career assessments they should also include instruments that effectively assess for strength of ethnic identity. Our study found ethnic identity significantly predicted CDSE for both Latino boys and girls. Assessments and dialogue with students would shed light on how comfortable they are with their ethnicity. This would afford counselors a more complete conceptualization of students’ career decision-making beliefs and expectations. For students who are more enculturated and less acculturated, counselors and teachers should invest time with students’ families, which can prove to have a positive effect on the individual’s confidence in career decision making, as it is often the case that Latino families’ support is paramount for decision making (Hernandez, Vargas-Lew, & Martinez, 1994; Jackson & Healy, 1996).

The present study highlights the importance of a healthy ethnic identity and students’ orientation to the mainstream culture. Curricula that include programs such as dual language programs (not to be confused with bilingual programs) that begin in elementary school and continue onto middle school are appropriate for enhancing this type of needed identity development. Dual language programs help foster the development of additive bilingualism whereby students emerge with high levels of proficiency in two languages, higher self-esteem, and a positive cross-cultural attitude (Christian, 1996) with the possible outcome of earning higher levels of academic proficiency commonly measured by statewide assessments (Lopez Estrada, Gomez, & Ruiz-Escalante, 2009). Furthermore, research has shown teachers working under this type of program reported their students had higher academic motivation (Lopez Estrada et al., 2009). Additionally, English language learners in dual language programs had greater long-term academic and linguistic success in English than did their native English-speaking peers educated in monolingual English programs (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Not only would Latino students be afforded the opportunity to appreciate two cultures, they would also have the added benefit of academic success. School counselors, teachers, and principals can promote these types of programs to enhance student identity and academic achievement.

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Note
1. The term “Latino” refers to individuals of Latin American descent living in the United States.
References


**Bios**

**Lizette Ojeda** is an Assistant Professor in the Texas A&M University Counseling Psychology program. She received her doctorate from the University of Missouri. Lizette focuses on issues related to Latino culture, gender, education, career, and mental health. She enjoys salsa dancing, playing the piano, and photography.

**Brandy Piña-Watson** is a doctoral student in the Texas A&M University Counseling Psychology program. Brandy’s research interests include depression, suicide prevention and intervention, suicide bereavement, acculturation, ethnic identity, cultural values, and gender
role issues with Mexican American adolescents and adults. Her practical interests include community and school mental health counseling with underserved youth and families. Personal interests include spending time with family and friends, swimming, going to the beach, movies, live concerts and comedy shows, camping, hiking, fishing, reading, and making arts and crafts.

Linda G. Castillo received her doctorate in counseling psychology at the University of Utah. She is an Associate Professor in the Texas A&M University Counseling Psychology program. Linda’s expertise and research focuses on her professional and personal commitment to reduce the educational disparities of Mexican Americans. Her current work involves studying the influence of acculturation and enculturation on educational persistence and mental health of Mexican American adolescents and college students.

Rosalinda Castillo is a doctoral candidate in the Texas A&M University Counseling Psychology program. Her dissertation involves revalidating a Latina gender role assessment on an international sample in Mexico. Her research interests include Latina gender role beliefs, career decision-making self-efficacy in Latinos, acculturation and enculturation, as well as Latino educational gaps. For fun, Rosalinda enjoys spending time with family, exercising, and reading.

Noshaba Khan is a first-generation Pakistani American. She holds a Masters in Counseling Psychology from Marquette University and received her Bachelors in Psychology and Mathematics from the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests include multicultural counseling; specifically among low-income minority populations, substance abuse among marginalized populations, psychosocial and health aspects of gay, lesbian, bisexual adolescents, and adults, and HIV/AIDS health preventions and interventions among adolescents and young adults. Her counseling experience began in 7C’s Clinic in which she counseled homeless men with cooccurring disorders. She then went on to work with parents and children who were involved with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. When Noshaba is not working or attending class, she enjoys spending time with family and friends.

Jennifer Leigh graduated in May 2010 with a master’s degree in School Counseling from Texas A&M University. She lives in Moscow, Russia, and is taking additional graduate courses to qualify for the Licensed Professional Counselor examination. Her research interests include career development in secondary education and conduct disorder in adolescents. Jennifer enjoys traveling with her husband, sailing, downhill skiing, and photography.