

DEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOSOCIAL CORRELATES OF BICULTURAL  
COMPETENCE AMONG LATINX EARLY ADOLESCENTS

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

SCHOOL OF FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

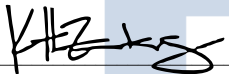
In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA


2020

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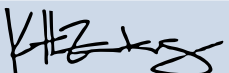
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### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge my committee, Drs. Katie Zeiders, Melissa Delgado, and Russ Toomey. Dr. Zeiders, I am grateful for your support and belief in my success since I began my journey; you have held me together. Dr. Delgado, I appreciate your continuous support of my work and presence as a Chicana graduate student. Dr. Toomey, thank you for your constant support for students like me who often feel that we are rendered invisible in academia. Thank you all for reminding me that I belong when at times it didn't feel as such.

### **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my *amá y apá*, Francisca y Ignacio Carbajal, who have continuously helped me pursue my dreams with unconditional love and support. I dedicate this to my siblings, nephews, and niece who bring me joy and courage from afar.

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### **Abstract**

Theories posit that bicultural competence, the ability to negotiate between U.S. mainstream and ethnic cultures, is an important developmental process relevant to Latinx adolescents. Although limited empirical research has suggested that bicultural competence is broadly associated with psychosocial outcomes, more research is needed to identify the associations of distinct dimensions of bicultural competence. The current study examined demographic and psychosocial correlates of dimensions of bicultural competence (i.e., comfort, facility, and advantages) among Latinx early adolescents ( $N = 207$ ). Bicultural advantages differed by generational status. No differences emerged by gender on dimensions of bicultural competence. Bicultural facility was associated with higher academic-self efficacy and better grades, whereas bicultural comfort was associated with fewer depressive symptoms. These findings have important implications for later developmental outcomes as they suggest that dimensions of bicultural competence may benefit Latinx early adolescents differentially.

*Keywords:* bicultural competence, acculturation, Latinx early adolescents, demographics and psychosocial correlates

## Introduction

A developmental process related to Latinx early adolescents' psychosocial outcomes is *bicultural competence*, which is the ability to negotiate between two distinct cultures (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Different models of bicultural competence posit that bicultural individuals have academic and psychological advantages compared to monocultural counterparts because being part of two cultures enhances the ability to integrate and engage in a broader set of behaviors (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Ward et al., 2018). Limited empirical work supports these assertions, documenting that bicultural competence relates to higher academic achievement (López et al., 2002; Santiago et al., 2014) and fewer depressive symptoms (Carrera & Wei, 2014; David et al., 2009; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). This work, however, has focused primarily on late adolescence or young adulthood, limiting our knowledge of the benefits of bicultural competence during early adolescence. Further, limited work has examined how demographic correlates, such as generational status and gender, play a role in bicultural competence. Drawing from frameworks of dual-cultural adaptation (Berry, 1997, 2008) and bicultural competence (LaFromboise et al., 1993), the current study examined the demographic and psychosocial correlates of bicultural competence among Latinx early adolescents. Specifically, I focused on dimensions of bicultural competence, *comfort, facility, and advantages*, to better understand how they differentially relate to demographic and psychosocial correlates among Latinx early adolescents.

### Examining Bicultural Competence During Early Adolescence

Bicultural competence is one of the skills that ethnic-racial minority adolescents, including Latinx adolescents, develop to adapt to their environments (García Coll et al., 1996). Research and theory on cultural and ethnic identity development posit that adolescence is a time

when cultural values are negotiated or internalized; thus, early adolescents may still be in the beginning stages of developing a sense of identity, affiliation, and pride to their cultural group (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). It is important to examine bicultural competence during early adolescence. When adolescents become bicultural, they also experience further development of social-cognitive abilities (Carlo et al., 2016; Tadmor et al., 2012; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). As bicultural competence begins to develop during this time, it has implications for Latinx adolescents' developmental course (García Coll et al., 1996). Indeed, limited longitudinal work suggests that bicultural competence is related to better outcomes later in life (i.e., higher self-esteem, optimism, prosocial behaviors, family relationships; Schwartz et al., 2015). The purpose of the current study is to provide knowledge about bicultural competence as a cultural process among Latinx early adolescents.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural adaptation occurs when two cultural groups interact, and cultural changes occur at the group level for either or both groups (Berry, 1997). Cultural adaptation involves both acculturation and enculturation processes (Berry, 1997, 2008). Acculturation processes refer to individuals adapting to mainstream culture; enculturation processes refer to individuals maintaining or adapting to an ethnic culture (Berry, 1997, 2008). Some individuals simultaneously engage in both acculturation and enculturation processes, which is referred to as dual-cultural adaptation (Gonzales et al., 2004). These simultaneous processes are theorized to result in four acculturation styles: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1997). Assimilation is when individuals exhibit high levels of acculturation and low levels of enculturation; they adopt the mainstream culture and reject their culture of origin. Separation is when individuals exhibit low levels of acculturation and high levels of

enculturation; they reject the mainstream culture and retain their culture of origin. Integration is when individuals exhibit high levels of both acculturation and enculturation; they adopt the mainstream culture and retain their culture of origin. Marginalization is when individuals exhibit low levels of both acculturation and enculturation; they reject both the mainstream culture and their culture of origin. In this model, the integration strategy is analogous to bicultural competence – the ability to integrate and negotiate two different cultures. Early models of bicultural competence have been based on these acculturation styles, where someone would be considered bicultural if they exhibit behaviors of more than one cultural group (Berry, 1997, 2008). However, recent research suggests that bicultural competence is more complex than previously conceptualized.

Traditionally, bicultural competence has been researched from a content-based approach (Meca et al., 2019). Bicultural competence has been conceptualized as exhibiting high levels of cultural content or behaviors from two cultures. For example, an individual who speaks two languages would be considered bicultural from this approach. Although behaviors are important indicators of cultural adaptation, the process of negotiating the endorsement of values and beliefs, that often occur later in the process of cultural adaptation, is not always captured in the assessment of these behaviors (Berry, 1997). From a process-based approach, bicultural competence extends beyond cultural content (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Meca et al., 2019). Bicultural individuals can differ in the ways that they negotiate the behaviors (roles), languages, and sense of belonging of both of their cultures (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Meca et al., 2019). From a process-based approach, bicultural competence involves a negotiation that allows individuals to move fluidly (or not) across domains relating to cultural content. For example, two individuals may be bilingual but may have different levels of comfort and strategies when

switching between languages. One individual might report that they are highly confident in speaking and switching between English and Spanish, whereas another individual may be highly confident in speaking both languages, but less ease in having to switch between them (Gumperz, 1972). In all, from a process-based approach, research has focused on how bicultural individuals blend and alternate between the cultural content of two cultures (Meca et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2018).

### **Assessment of Bicultural Competence**

Before reviewing the limited research linking bicultural competence to Latinx adolescents' psychosocial outcomes, it is helpful to understand how researchers have conceptualized and assessed bicultural competence. Historically, measures have varied in capturing the complex process of bicultural competence, which includes several dimensions or domains (see Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013 for a review). Most assessments have focused on content-based approaches such as language use (e.g., whether individuals speak English, Spanish, or both). For example, a study assessed bicultural competence as language fluency (i.e., Spanish and English; Love & Buriel, 2007) where an adolescent was considered bicultural if they frequently spoke both English and Spanish. Although language fluency is an important aspect of bicultural competence, relying solely on it overlooks the complexity of bicultural competence. In a more nuanced approach to measuring bicultural competence, researchers have examined behaviors that relate to both acculturation and enculturation (Basilio et al., 2014; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). For example, a study assessed bicultural competence via separate, behavioral indicators of acculturation (e.g., enjoying American music, food, TV) and enculturation (e.g., enjoying Hispanic music, food, TV) among Latinx adolescents (Smokowski et al., 2008). Although this approach captures more than just

language use, measuring cultural involvement separately may still overlook the process of navigating two cultures simultaneously (Basilio et al., 2014; Meca et al., 2019).

A more recent assessment of bicultural competence has used a process-based approach, in that, researchers have focused on the process of switching between the two cultures to capture the differences of being bicultural (Basilio et al., 2014). Basilio and colleagues (2014) proposed three dimensions: comfort, facility, and advantages. Bicultural comfort is an affective dimension that refers to the *ease* of having two cultures—bicultural individuals feel comfortable being part of and switching between mainstream and ethnic cultural contexts. Bicultural facility is a behavioral dimension that refers to the *confidence* of having two cultures—bicultural individuals feel confident in being part of and switching between mainstream and ethnic cultural contexts. And finally, bicultural advantages are an attitudinal dimension that refers to the *benefits* of having two cultures—bicultural individuals feel that it is advantageous being part of and switching between mainstream and ethnic cultural contexts.

These three dimensions of bicultural competence are related, but distinct (Safa et al., 2019). For instance, individuals may be highly confident (i.e., facility; they believe that they have the skills needed to switch from one context to another), but may see few benefits in being bicultural (i.e., advantages; Safa et al., 2019). Someone might report that they are highly confident in speaking English and Spanish, but may report less ease (comfort) in having to code-switch (e.g., switch between Spanish and English in a situation; Gumperz, 1972). Or, it could be that individuals see great benefits in being bicultural; however, they feel less comfortable or confident in being bicultural. Hence, it is important to understand how each dimension of bicultural competence may differentially relate to Latinx early adolescents' outcomes.

### **Demographic Correlates of Bicultural Competence**

Two relevant demographic factors related to bicultural competence are generational status and gender. Research on bicultural competence, using a content-based approach (i.e., indicators of language use), has found some differences by generational status. For example, second-generation adolescents report being more bilingual (a content-based indicator of bicultural competence; 50%) than first-generation (35%) and later-generation adolescents (23%; Krogstad & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015). Related, a study with early-to-middle Latinx adolescents (ages 11 to 15 years old) found that adolescents experienced different bicultural stressors by nativity (Romero & Roberts, 2003). U.S.-born adolescents reported more language stressors related to needing to speak better Spanish from immigrant family members whereas foreign-born adolescents experienced more language stressors related to lower English proficiency at school. The study did not specify the generational status of the U.S.-born adolescents even though they were the majority of the sample (~80%); thus, it is unclear whether differences in generational status may emerge for bicultural competence between second-generation and later-generation adolescents. From a process-based approach, the few studies that have examined nativity differences of bicultural competence among Latinx adolescents have found no significant associations (Basilio et al., 2014; Carlo et al., 2016). Given the inconsistencies in past research, I explored whether generational status was a demographic correlate of bicultural competence.

Another relevant demographic factor for bicultural competence is gender. Research has suggested that there are gender differences in cultural involvement. Girls often take on more responsibilities, compared to boys, that are related to cultural involvement (e.g., language brokering; Buriel et al., 1998; Love & Buriel, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). Some research has suggested that girls report higher levels of bicultural involvement (i.e., English and Spanish language use and exposure) than boys (Love & Buriel, 2007; Piña-Watson et al., 2015), and

other research suggests that boys report being more acculturated than girls (López et al., 2002). Thus, there may be gender differences in bicultural competence among Latinx early adolescents because of the way that gender expectations are culturally maintained. Given this, I hypothesized that girls would report overall higher levels of bicultural competence than boys; however, there are no directional hypotheses for gender differences by each dimension of bicultural competence.

### **Bicultural Competence and Psychosocial Correlates**

The study also examined the psychosocial benefits of bicultural competence, focusing on academic self-efficacy, grades, and depressive symptoms. From a content-based approach, extant empirical findings have suggested that there is a wide range of academic benefits among Latinx adolescents who have greater bicultural competence (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Research has suggested that bicultural competence, as indicated by language use of the adolescent and their household (i.e. monolingual vs. bilingual) and immigrant household structure (i.e., having immigrant vs. U.S.-born family members), found that Latinx adolescents who reported being bicultural (i.e., bilingual and came from immigrant and bilingual households) were less likely to drop out of high school than those who were monolingual and came from monolingual households (i.e., English-only or English-limited households; Feliciano, 2001). Bicultural competence has also been linked to adolescents' grade point averages. For instance, one study found that those who were bicultural (as defined as being bilingual and frequent interactions with members from both cultures) had higher grade point averages compared to those who were not bicultural (López et al., 2002). Other research has also found that among Latinx early adolescents, those who were low in bicultural competence (i.e., higher endorsement of mainstream values or low English language proficiency) reported lower grade point averages (Santiago et al., 2014).

To date, limited work has examined bicultural competence from a process-based approach. However, based on prior work that has used a content-based approach, I hypothesized that each dimension (i.e., comfort, facility, and advantages) would be associated with higher academic self-efficacy and grades. A close look at the content-based research does suggest that bicultural comfort or facility may be especially beneficial. In a study focused on Latinx young adults, researchers found that those who reported being biculturally competent, which largely focused on bicultural comfort (e.g., comfort speaking Spanish and English, and interacting with members of both cultures), reported more school effort than those who report being less biculturally competent (Moní et al., 2018). The researchers also measured academic motivation/self-regulation and found that it was significantly associated with reports of being bicultural. In a study with Latinx young adults, bicultural facility was associated with greater interactions with university faculty (Carbajal et al., under review). Thus, there is some empirical support for both bicultural comfort and facility being associated with better academic outcomes. Within the school setting, bicultural comfort and facility may help Latinx early adolescents adapt to the mainstream culture maintained in schools and the ethnic culture in their family and therefore able to meet the demands within and across their environments (Carrera & Wei, 2014; Tadmor et al., 2012; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006).

In terms of depressive symptoms, extant research using content-based approaches has found that bicultural competence is associated with fewer depressive symptoms (Carrera & Wei, 2014; David et al., 2009; Wei et al., 2010). For example, one study found that for Latinx early adolescents, bicultural content (i.e., language use and interactions with members of either culture) was associated with fewer depressive symptoms (Love & Buriel, 2007). Another study with ethnic-racial minority young adults, including Latinx young adults, found that bicultural

competence was negatively correlated to depressive symptoms (David et al., 2009). In sum, research that has used content-based approaches has suggested that bicultural competence is related to better mental health; however, examining how each dimension of bicultural competence relates to psychosocial correlates will add to current knowledge of the benefits of bicultural competence because most of the literature has focused on behavioral dimensions of dual-cultural adaptation (i.e., English and Spanish use; Basilio et al., 2014).

Limited work that has used process-based approaches has suggested that bicultural competence has been associated with psychosocial benefits among Latinx adolescents and young adults. Bicultural competence has been associated with higher self-esteem (Carlo et al., 2016; Schwartz et al., 2015), lower externalizing symptoms (Safa et al., 2019), and lower anxiety and depressive symptoms (Schwartz et al., 2019). Specifically, there is some support for the link between bicultural comfort and depressive symptoms. A study among ethnic minority young adults found that depressive symptoms may be related to the construct of bicultural comfort (i.e., bicultural blending; Schwartz et al., 2019; Tikhonov et al., 2019). The idea that two cultures are not compatible may be associated with less ease in having to engage in the distinct behaviors of both cultures. That is, depressive symptoms may be experienced when there is an inability to blend two cultures (Tikhonov et al., 2019). Another study found that among Latinx adolescents, bicultural competence (as defined as bicultural hybridizing and blendedness) was differentially related to psychosocial outcomes (Schwartz et al., 2019). To explain, hybridizing (i.e., perception of uniquely blending two cultures) was only related to better well-being (i.e., self-esteem, life satisfaction; psychological well-being) whereas blendedness (i.e., perception of two cultures as compatible) was related to fewer internalizing symptoms. Based on this work, I hypothesized that dimensions of bicultural competence (i.e., comfort, facility, and advantages)

would be differentially associated with positive psychosocial correlates among Latinx early adolescents. Again, it is important to study each dimension of bicultural competence because they may emerge differentially Latinx early adolescents as they begin (or continue) being exposed to two cultures (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

### **Current Study**

The current study examined demographic (generational status and gender) and psychosocial (academic efficacy, grades, and depressive symptoms) correlates of bicultural competence among Latinx early adolescents. In terms of demographic correlates, I examined differences in bicultural competence by generational status and gender. Given the inconsistent previous findings on generational status, this was an exploratory research question with no specific hypotheses. In terms of gender, I hypothesized that girls would report higher levels of bicultural competence than boys. In terms of psychosocial correlates, I hypothesized that dimensions of bicultural competence (i.e., comfort, facility, and advantages) would be differentially associated with higher academic self-efficacy, better grades, and fewer depressive symptoms. In all analyses, I controlled for acculturation and enculturation to demonstrate that the benefits of bicultural competence from a process-based approach extend beyond separate, behavioral indicators of cultural adaptation (Basilio et al., 2014; Tikhonov et al., 2019).

## **Method**

### **Procedure and Sample**

Data from the current study were collected at middle schools in the Southwest. Families, who were of Latin American descent with a child between the ages of 11 to 14, were invited to participate. The study was conducted using online surveys which lasted approximately 1 hour. Participants were compensated \$20 for completing the survey and an additional \$5 if they

completed the survey within 24 hours of receiving the link. All surveys were administered in English. The study used data from the adolescent participants ( $n = 207$ ). Participants were, on average, 12.39 years old ( $SD = 0.15$ ). The majority of the participants were female (52.7%), U.S.-born (96.3%), and identified their ethnicity/race as Mexican American (45.6%), followed by Hispanic (26.6%), Mexican (15%), Latino(a) (3.9%), Chicano/a (2.4%), or Other (6.3%). One adolescent did not report their ethnicity/race. Adolescent participants reported their mother's highest level of education as high school/GED ( $SD = 1.97$ ) and their father's highest level of education as some college, vocational, or technical school ( $SD = 1.71$ ).

## Measures

**Demographic correlates.** Generational status was assessed from self-report of the birthplace of the adolescent, both parents, and both maternal and paternal grandparents. Specifically, generational status was defined into four groups: first-generation ( $n = 5$ ; foreign-born adolescent; either or both foreign-born parents), second-generation ( $n = 61$ ; U.S.-born adolescent, either or both foreign-born parents), third-generation ( $n = 54$ ; U.S.-born adolescent and both U.S.-born parents), and fourth-generation ( $n = 62$ ; U.S.-born adolescent, both U.S.-born parents, and both U.S.-born maternal and paternal grandparents). Gender was assessed from adolescents' self-reports.

**Bicultural competence.** The 27-item Mexican American Biculturalism Scale (MABS; Basilio et al., 2014) was used to assess bicultural competence. The scale has three subscales: *bicultural comfort*, *bicultural facility*, and *bicultural advantages*. Bicultural comfort (9 items, e.g., "Sometimes you may need to make an important decision on your own, and other times you may need to ask your family for advice. Which of the following best describes you?") responses were assessed using a 5-point response scale (1 = *I am only comfortable when: I need to speak in*

*Spanish/I need to speak in English; 5 = I am always comfortable in both of these situations*). Higher scores indicated higher bicultural comfort. The bicultural facility (9 items; e.g., Being obligated to satisfy my family's needs sometimes, and satisfying my own needs other times is \_\_\_\_\_.) responses were assessed using a 5-point response scale (1 = *Very easy*; 5 = *Very difficult*); scores were reverse coded, with higher scores indicating higher bicultural facility. Bicultural advantages (9 items; e.g., For me, being able to make important decisions myself sometimes, and being able to ask my family for advice other times has \_\_\_\_\_.) responses were assessed using a 5-point response scale (1 = *Many advantages*; 5 = *Many disadvantages*); scores were reverse coded, with higher scores indicating higher bicultural advantages. Bicultural comfort, facility, and advantages subscales all demonstrated adequate reliability in the current study ( $\alpha = .86, .87, .90$ , respectively).

**Psychosocial correlates.** The 7-item Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (Midgley et al., 1996) was used to assess *academic self-efficacy* on a 5-point response scale (1 = *Not at all true*; 5 = *Very true*); higher scores indicated higher academic self-efficacy. An example item included: "You can do even the hardest schoolwork if you try." The scale demonstrated adequate reliability ( $\alpha = .82$ ). *Grades* were assessed using 1 item, "What grades do you mostly get in school?" on a 9-point response scale (1 = *Mostly A's*; 9 = *Mostly F's*); scores were reverse coded with higher scores indicating better overall grades. The 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale (Radloff, 1977) was used to assess *depressive symptoms*. Participants were asked to choose a statement that best describes how they have been feeling during the last week. Responses were on a 4-point scale (1 = *Rarely or none of the time*; 4 = *Most or all of the time*); higher scores indicated more depressive symptoms. An example item included: "You felt lonely." The scale demonstrated adequate reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Covariates.** An 8-item Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II; Cuéllar et al., 1995) was used to assess *acculturation* and *enculturation*. A 4-item American Orientation subscale was used to assess acculturation on a 5-point response scale (1 = *Almost never or never*; 5 = *Almost always or always*); higher scores indicated higher levels of acculturation. An example item included: “How often or much do you speak English?”. The scale demonstrated adequate reliability ( $\alpha = .73$ ). A 4-item Mexican Orientation subscale was used to assess enculturation on a 5-point response scale (1 = *Almost never or never*; 5 = *Almost always or always*); higher scores indicate higher levels of enculturation. An example item included: “How often or much do you speak English?” The scale demonstrated adequate reliability ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

### **Analytic Plan**

To test the study hypotheses, ANOVAs, and regression analyses were conducted in SPSS Statistics Version 26 (IBM, 2019). Specifically, an ANOVA was used to explore differences in overall bicultural competence and each dimension of bicultural competence by adolescents' generational status and gender. Three regression analyses were run; the first analysis regressed academic self-efficacy on each dimension of bicultural competence (i.e., comfort, facility, advantages), controlling for acculturation, enculturation, age, and gender. The second and the third regression analyses were similar but included grades and depressive symptoms as dependent variables.

### **Results**

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of the study variables. As expected, the study variables were correlated in the hypothesized direction. Specifically, the three dimensions of bicultural competence (comfort, facility, advantages) were

associated with psychosocial correlates in expected directions. All dimensions of bicultural competence were positively associated with academic self-efficacy. Bicultural facility and advantages, but not comfort, were positively associated with grades. All dimensions of bicultural competence dimensions were negatively associated with depressive symptoms.

### **Demographic Correlates of Bicultural Competence**

An ANOVA revealed that there were no significant differences by generational status on bicultural comfort,  $F(3, 178) = 0.592, p = .621$ ), bicultural facility,  $F(3, 177) = 0.605, p = .613$ , or overall bicultural competence,  $F(3, 178) = 0.884, p = .451$ . There was, however, a significant difference between groups on bicultural advantages,  $F(3, 178) = 2.841, p = .039$ . As seen in Table 2, the means suggest that bicultural advantages were highest among first-generation adolescents and declined across generations. A Bonferroni post hoc test was conducted to examine which groups differed from each other; however, the test revealed no statistically significant differences between groups. As for gender, no differences emerged between boys and girls on bicultural comfort,  $F(1, 198) = 1.798, p = .182$ ), bicultural facility,  $F(1, 197) = 0.079, p = .778$ , or bicultural advantages,  $F(1, 198) = 0.028, p = .868$ , or overall bicultural competence,  $F(1, 198) = 0.820, p = .366$  (see Table 3).

### **Bicultural Competence and Psychosocial Correlates**

Regression analyses revealed that bicultural comfort and advantages were not significant predictors of academic self-efficacy (see Table 4). Bicultural facility, however, was significant,  $\beta = 0.25$ , suggesting that adolescents with higher facility reported greater academic self-efficacy. Bicultural comfort and advantages were not significant predictors of adolescents' grades. Bicultural facility, however, was a marginally significant predictor of grades,  $\beta = 0.17$ , suggesting that adolescents with higher facility reported better grades. As for depressive

symptoms, bicultural comfort emerged as a significant predictor; adolescents with higher levels of comfort reported fewer depressive symptoms,  $\beta = -0.31$ . Bicultural facility and advantages were not significant predictors of depressive symptoms.

### **Discussion**

Bicultural competence is a process that has rarely been examined among Latinx early adolescents despite theoretical discussions of the numerous benefits of bicultural competence among ethnic-racial minority adolescents (García Coll et al., 1996; LaFromboise et al., 1993). Utilizing a sample of Latinx early adolescents from Southwestern middle schools, the study examined dimensions of bicultural competence (i.e. comfort, facility, advantages) and their relations to concurrent demographic and psychosocial correlates. The findings suggested that bicultural competence is important for Latinx early adolescents' psychosocial outcomes. Specifically, bicultural facility was linked to higher academic self-efficacy, whereas bicultural comfort was related to fewer depressive symptoms. These findings suggest that dimensions of bicultural competence are differentially related to psychosocial outcomes among Latinx early adolescents. Understanding how each dimension of bicultural competence differentially relates to early adolescents' adjustment is a necessary step in understanding the impact of bicultural competence on later outcomes (García Coll et al., 1996; LaFromboise et al., 1993).

### **Demographic Correlates of Bicultural Competence**

The study examined how generational status and gender are related to bicultural competence. In terms of generational status, no differences emerged on overall bicultural competence, bicultural comfort, and bicultural facility; first-, second-, third-, and fourth-generation adolescents all self-reported similar levels. There was, however, a difference in bicultural advantages by generational status, with descriptive information revealing that

advantages were highest among first-generation adolescents and then declined across later generations. It is important to note, however, that post hoc testing of the difference across the groups was not significant, so caution in interpreting the pattern of means is warranted. The lack of difference of means by generational status may be explained by differences in sample size. The first-generation group had a smaller sample size compared to the other groups and may have lacked statistical power. Even though there were no statistical findings, the pattern of findings suggests that first-generation adolescents may be more aware of the advantages that come from being bicultural than later-generation adolescents. This may be explained by general trends of endorsing mainstream culture (e.g., higher acculturation levels) that help Latinx adolescents adapt to their environments. That is, first-generation adolescents may rapidly develop levels of acculturation similar to later-generation adolescents to succeed in mainstream culture (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Buriel et al., 1998). Thus, they may be more aware of how being bicultural is advantageous compared to later-generation adolescents who may have earlier exposure to mainstream culture (i.e., U.S.-born households; Feliciano, 2001).

In terms of gender, no differences emerged on overall bicultural competence or each of the specific dimensions of bicultural competence, suggesting that girls and boys report similar levels of bicultural competence. Past research suggests that there are differences in cultural involvement by gender. Specifically, girls tend to be more bicultural (López et al., 2002; Piña-Watson et al., 2015) and engage more often in language brokering compared to boys (Buriel et al., 1998; Love & Buriel, 2007). However, bicultural competence has been heavily assessed by reliance on content-based approaches (e.g., bilingualism; Love & Buriel, 2007), whereas the current study assessed bicultural competence using a process-based approach (e.g., comfort, facility, and advantages; Basilio et al., 2014). The lack of differences in the current study may

point to the ways that the process of being bicultural differs from behavioral indicators of cultural involvement (e.g., bilingualism; Love & Buriel, 2007). Hence, it provides some support that bicultural competence may develop among Latinx early adolescents in similar ways regardless of gender.

### **Bicultural Competence and Psychosocial Correlates**

The current study also examined academic self-efficacy, grades, and depressive symptoms as psychosocial correlates of bicultural competence. Bicultural facility, but not comfort and advantages, was associated with higher academic self-efficacy. Latinx early adolescents who report more confidence in being bicultural also reported higher efficacy in managing academic demands. There were also similar findings for grades; bicultural facility, but not bicultural comfort or bicultural advantages, was associated with better grades (marginally significant). These findings suggest that Latinx early adolescents who reported greater confidence in being bicultural also reported better grades. These findings align with theory and past empirical research (Carbajal et al., under review; LaFromboise et al., 1993; López et al., 2002; Moní et al., 2018; Santiago et al., 2014) and suggest that being bicultural has academic advantages. Extant research points to English language proficiency as a predictor of academic adjustment among Latinx adolescents (López et al., 2002; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Santiago et al., 2014). These findings point to the importance of confidence in being bicultural to academic success; Latinx early adolescents can be academically successful by being confident in meeting cultural demands and being able to endorse cultural values and not just being bilingual. Future research should examine longitudinal associations to assess whether confidence in being bicultural has an impact on academic success later in life (García Coll et al., 1996; LaFromboise

et al., 1993), as few studies have assessed how bicultural competence relates to academic outcomes over time (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013).

In terms of depressive symptoms, bicultural comfort, but not facility and advantages, was associated with fewer depressive symptoms. These findings are consistent with both theory and previous work (Berry, 1997, 2008; Carrera & Wei, 2014; David et al., 2009; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Wei et al., 2010) and suggest that the ease of being bicultural may help Latinx early adolescents feel less unhappy or dejected. Adolescents may benefit from the ease of being bicultural because they have social support networks in both cultures (Carrera & Wei, 2014; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). These findings point to the importance of ease, rather than confidence, as having the most benefits to Latinx early adolescents' mental health. Future research should examine longitudinal associations between ease in being bicultural and well-being later in life and other mental health indices (i.e., self-esteem; Schwartz et al., 2015).

### **Limitations and Conclusions**

The current study is one of the few research studies that have examined the nuance of bicultural competence among Latinx early adolescents while acknowledging that bicultural competence is a process that is more complex than assessing the endorsement of cultural content (e.g., language use). The study examined how three dimensions of bicultural competence may be differentially beneficial for Latinx adolescents while accounting for separate indicators of acculturation and enculturation. My findings point to aspects of specificity of dimensions of bicultural competence by generational status and psychosocial outcomes. Generational groups reported different levels of benefits in being bicultural, but not ease and confidence. Also, dimensions of bicultural competence differentially related to psychosocial benefits. Together, the

study contributes to a larger understanding of how ease and confidence in being bicultural, specifically, relate to better psychosocial outcomes during early adolescence.

Despite these strengths, there are limitations worth noting. First, the study utilized cross-sectional data, limiting our understanding of directionality. For example, someone who is less depressed and more academically successful may be more likely to be bicultural in that they may perceive less effort or less burden in being part of both cultures in day-to-day living (Schwartz & Unger, 2010). Understanding how bicultural competence may benefit Latinx early adolescent's later outcomes is needed, especially since Latinx students still lag in high school completion rates (Gramlich, 2017) and experience higher rates of depressive symptoms compared to non-Latinx adolescents (Gonzales et al., 2004). Second, given that the majority of adolescents in the current study were of Mexican origin, our findings may not generalize to other Latinx subgroups that have a larger representation in different regions of the U.S. (Puerto-Ricans in New York; Noe-Bustamante & Shah, 2019). Migration and acculturation patterns can shape the experience and development of bicultural competence (García Coll et al., 1996). For example, a study with nationally representative data suggests that birthplace (i.e., born outside the continental U.S.) is related to higher depressive symptoms for Puerto Ricans, but fewer depressive symptoms for Mexicans which may be explained by different migration processes (Stone et al., 2004). Related, the majority of adolescents in my sample were U.S.-born (96.3%) and third-generation or later (62%), therefore the findings may not generalize to Latinx adolescents who are immigrants or come from immigrant families. Limited research has suggested that those who are more bicultural are from immigrant and bilingual households (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Feliciano, 2001); however, by examining primarily later-generation adolescents in the current study may not be assessing variability in levels of bicultural competence.

Despite these limitations, the study is important from a prevention perspective. Considering the current findings, efforts to improve Latinx early adolescents' psychosocial outcomes in school settings could focus on improving dimensions of bicultural competence (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2005, 2017; Gonzales et al., 2004). Even though Latinx populations have experienced a significant decrease in high school dropout rates, they still lag being other ethnic-racial groups in high school completion rates (Gramlich, 2017). Hence, schools can offer classes that can facilitate building confidence in being bicultural such as Spanish language or ethnic studies classes, and thus increase academic success. Further, Latinx adolescents also report higher depressive symptoms compared to other ethnic-racial minority adolescents and White adolescents (Gonzales et al., 2004; Romero & Roberts, 2003). Accordingly, school personnel can promote an inviting environment via cross-cultural competence to help Latinx students feel at ease about being part of their ethnic culture within the school setting. Taken together, Latinx early adolescents may benefit from bicultural competence; specifically, ease and confidence in being bicultural. The findings highlight the need to help Latinx early adolescents maintain their ethnic culture while adapting to the mainstream culture of the school setting to improve their academic success and well-being.

**Table 1**  
*Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	--										
2. Gender	0.01	--									
3. Generational Status	0.13†	-0.04	--								
4. Bicultural Comfort	-0.11	0.10	-0.00	--							
5. Bicultural Facility	-0.08	0.02	-0.10	0.43**	--						
6. Bicultural Advantages	-0.05	0.01	-0.20**	0.24**	0.60**	--					
7. Academic Self-Efficacy	0.08	0.04	0.02	0.19**	0.27**	0.15*	--				
8. Grades	-0.00	0.15*	0.05	0.02	0.16*	0.14*	0.46**	--			
9. Depressive Symptoms	0.17*	0.11	0.03	-0.33**	-0.20**	-0.13†	-0.23**	-0.02	--		
10. Acculturation	0.07	-0.08	0.23**	0.08	0.04	-0.00	0.02	0.07	-0.03	--	
11. Enculturation	-0.01	0.26**	-0.50**	0.08	0.13†	0.24**	0.09	0.12	0.04	-0.27**	--
<i>M</i>	12.39	0.53	2.93	3.16	3.79	3.87	3.67	7.26	1.87	4.76	2.24
<i>SD</i>	0.15	0.50	0.89	1.00	0.74	0.72	0.75	1.61	0.55	0.44	1.00
Min	10	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Max	19	1	4	5	5	5	5	9	4	5	5
Skewness	0.95	-0.14	-0.10	0.03	-0.45	-0.56	-0.24	-1.17	0.72	-2.66	0.83
Kurtosis	4.15	-2.00	-1.27	-0.95	0.48	1.34	-0.59	0.99	-0.02	8.44	-0.03

*Note.* N = 207. Gender (0 = Boys, 1 = Girls). Generational Status (1 = First-generation, 2 = Second-generation, 3 = Third-generation, 4 = Fourth-generation).

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 2***Means and Standard Deviations of Bicultural Competence by Generational Status*

Generational Status	<i>n</i>	Bicultural Comfort		Bicultural Facility		Bicultural Advantages		Bicultural Competence	
		M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>
First-Generation	5	2.96	0.71	3.87	0.50	4.47	0.49	3.76	0.41
Second-Generation	64	3.27	1.07	3.88	0.81	4.02	0.79	3.72	0.75
Third-Generation	52	3.05	1.01	3.78	0.59	3.89	0.53	3.57	0.51
Fourth-Generation	61	3.24	0.98	3.70	0.80	3.75	0.70	3.56	0.65
<i>F (df)</i>		0.59 (3, 178)		0.61 (3, 177)		2.84 (3, 178)*		0.88 (3, 178)	

*Note.* N = 207. Generational Status (1 = First-generation, 2 = Second-generation, 3 = Third-generation, 4 = Fourth-generation).

\*  $p < .05$

**Table 3***Means and Standard Deviations of Bicultural Competence by Gender*

Gender	<i>n</i>	Bicultural Comfort		Bicultural Facility		Bicultural Advantages		Bicultural Competence	
		M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>
Boys	93	3.07	1.08	3.78	0.79	3.87	0.77	3.57	0.68
Girls	107	3.26	0.94	3.81	0.70	3.89	0.68	3.65	0.61
<i>F(df)</i>		1.80 (1, 198)		0.08 (1, 197)		0.03 (1, 198)		0.82 (1, 198)	

*Note.* N = 207. Gender (0 = Boys, 1 = Girls).

**Table 4**  
*Regression Analyses of Bicultural Competence to Psychosocial Correlates*

Variable	Academic Self-Efficacy			Grades			Depressive Symptoms		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	2.87**	0.95	--	3.53†	2.04	--	1.53*	0.67	--
Bicultural Comfort	0.06	0.06	0.08	-0.13	0.13	-0.08	-0.17**	0.04	-0.30**
Bicultural Facility	0.26**	0.10	0.25**	0.37†	0.21	0.17†	-0.03	0.07	-0.03
Bicultural Advantages	-0.04	0.10	-0.04	0.10	0.21	0.05	-0.03	0.07	-0.04
Acculturation	0.03	0.14	0.02	0.38	0.29	0.10	0.03	0.10	0.02
Enculturation	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.13	0.13	0.08	0.03	0.04	0.05
Age	-0.04	0.05	-0.06	-0.00	0.10	-0.00	0.07	0.03	0.14†
Gender	0.02	0.11	0.01	0.44	0.24	0.14†	0.14	0.08	0.12†
$R_2$	0.09			0.07			0.15		
$F$	2.47*			1.96†			4.56*		

*Note.* N = 207. Gender (0 = Boys, 1 = Girls). Generational Status (1 = First-generation, 2 = Second-generation, 3 = Third-generation, 4 = Fourth-generation).

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

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