

Foreigner objectification, English proficiency, and adjustment among youth and mothers from Latinx American backgrounds

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Tables appear at the end of this formatted article.

Abstract:

Objectives: Understanding the experience of foreigner objectification is relevant given the possibility of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and mistrust of immigrants in the United States. The present study examines main and interactive effects of objectification and English proficiency on developmental outcomes among immigrant mothers and children. Method: Our study includes 173 youth from Latinx backgrounds (52% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 12.86$ years, $SD = .68$; 87% United States-born) and their mothers ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.26$ $SD = 5.65$; all foreign-born) from emerging immigrant contexts. Results: Bivariate and regression analyses suggest that lower English proficiency was associated with more objectification for youth; whereas higher English proficiency was associated with more objectification for mothers. For youth only, English proficiency was positively correlated with American identity. For both parents and youth, foreigner objectification was linked with negative psychological outcomes (e.g., mothers' depressive symptoms, youths' low self-esteem). Conclusions: Being subjected to assumptions that challenge individuals' social status can be psychologically harmful. Nuanced developmental variation, and implications regarding the dual role of objectification and English proficiency are discussed.

Keywords: adjustment | foreigner objectification | English proficiency | American identity | Latinx families

Article:

Foreigner objectification, or the experience of being treated and/or viewed as “foreign” irrespective of nativity or citizenship, has gained attention because of its ubiquity and implications for adjustment (Armenta et al., 2013). The experience can be discerned through blatant rejection or discrimination, with perhaps the most egregious historical example of objectification illustrated through the forced displacement of Japanese Americans to internment

camps during World War II (Takaki, 1998). Foreigner objectification is also manifested through daily experiences and subtle social interactions that presume foreigner status with ostensibly harmless assumptions and remarks (e.g., you speak English well; where are you from). Such microaggressions reflect a covert form of discrimination that is unique from blatant denigration (Juang et al., 2016; Sue et al., 2007). This ambiguity makes it all the more challenging to understand and cope with microaggressions, and both subtle and blatant objectification experiences are highly relevant stressors (Pituc, 2013). Thus, there exists a pressing need to better understand processes and correlates of these experiences, particularly among Latinx adults and youth who represent a rapidly growing demographic in the United States that is commonly subjected to the foreigner objectification stereotype (Chavez, 2013).

Among Latinx, as well as other U.S. immigrant groups, widespread consequences have been linked to foreigner-based bias, including low quality relationships and social interactions, low self-esteem, and heightened anxiety, stress, helplessness, disengagement, anger, and identity confusion (Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011; Tran & Lee, 2014). Yet, despite the growing literature, more work is needed to understand how the foreigner stereotype shapes development. The timely study of these issues is crucial given ongoing, if not amplified, ethnocentrism among the U.S. mainstream (Gómez Torres, 2014). The Southern Poverty Law Center (2017) documents that anti-immigrant sentiments and hate groups are on the rise; hate crimes against Latinx have tripled since 2012. One explanation for such increases in public unrest and discordance is xenophobia and perceived threat from foreigners (either real or presumed). Notably, these already staggering numbers are likely underestimations because of individuals' fear or reluctance in reporting these experiences, as well as because of the idea that microaggressions could be particularly underreported because of their possible ambiguity.

The primary goal of the current research was to broaden the field's understanding of foreigner objectification through several understudied areas. First, given that much of the existing literature has focused on adults, we examine youth as well as their parents (i.e., mothers). Second, we explore the role of self-reported English proficiency, which can be viewed by others as a marker of foreigner status, in the processes and outcomes related to foreigner objectification. Third, we examine main and interactive effects of foreigner objectification and English proficiency on a range of adjustment outcomes (e.g., self-esteem, depressive symptoms), as well as a general positivity about and connectedness to being American (i.e., American identity measured via regard and centrality). Our theoretical lens is the integrative model of developmental competencies in minority families (Coll et al., 1996), which considers the impact of prejudice and discrimination (such as foreigner objectification) on youth and families as they work toward positive developmental outcomes.

We draw on understudied Latinx Americans residing in emerging immigrant areas, defined by communities in the United States that have only recently experienced rapid growth in its immigrant population (Massey, 2008). Patterns of immigrant settlement have shifted in the last few decades, with Latinx families increasingly settling in rural and semirural communities in the Midwest and South (Lichter, 2012). Although research is scarce, some work suggests that youth in these areas report higher levels of racial/ethnic discrimination than their counterparts in traditional receiving areas (Potochnick, Perreira, & Fuligni, 2012). These experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination can then hinder academic outcomes (e.g., school belonging,

achievement) and heighten poor adjustment (e.g., depressive symptoms; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang, & Supple, 2013; Stein, Gonzalez, & Huq, 2012); hence, more research to gain insight on racial/ethnic bias among these understudied contexts is needed (Stein, Gonzales, Coll, & Prandoni, 2016). Our unique focus on contemporary experiences of foreigner objectification among youth and adults in these geographic areas is particularly vital given that the racial majority in emerging immigrant areas is still newly adapting to hosting newcomers, and existing resources to facilitate immigrants' community integration are often limited (Bailey, 2005).

Foreigner Objectification Among Latinx Americans

Daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, slights, and insults, whether intentional or not, are often found in Latinx communities, and some scholars argue that everyday discrimination is one of the most important issues that Latinx face (Sue & Sue, 2012). Rivera, Campón, and Herbert (2016) discuss and provide many examples of the diverse types of interpersonal and structural barriers that plague Latinx, including being denied services or resources, having their intelligence, cultural values, or language ability questioned and denigrated, and being treated like a perpetual foreigner.

Much of the work on foreigner objectification has been conducted among adults, largely neglecting experiences or correlates of objectification among youth, much less comparatively among youth and adults from within the same family. Given that parents of Latinx families, in emerging immigrant communities especially, are likely to be of the first generation while their children are of the second generation, we can use such within-family comparisons to gain insight into possible generational differences in how discrimination is perceived or interpreted (Stein et al., 2016). For example, Armenta et al. (2013) found that U.S.-born individuals were more vulnerable to foreigner objectification compared with their foreign-born counterparts. Similarly, Sirin and colleagues (2015) found that discrimination was associated with internalizing symptoms, but only for youth with U.S.-born versus foreign-born parents. Indeed, consistent with the "immigrant paradox," perhaps some resiliency can be found among immigrants who still have their dual frame of reference with their home country, whereas risks in awareness and perceptions of racism and bias might increase as those of the second generation begin to feel more American (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009).

Hence, while we expected that reports of foreigner objectification would be prevalent among our sample as a whole, we anticipated that youth, who are more likely to be U.S.-born compared with their first-generation parents, would be especially sensitive to such treatment. Youth could also report more objectification overall because of the salience of navigating identity formation amid peer interactions (Erikson, 1968). They might also be more attuned to race-related issues in the context of identity exploration processes (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). Alternatively, it is important to recognize the possibility that perceptions of foreigner objectification could increase with age as individuals gain ethnic awareness (Kiang, Witkow, & Thompson, 2016; Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005). Moreover, the workforce might place Latinx adults in contexts where their presumed foreigner status stands out. Although foreigner objectification is based on stereotypes and overlooks nativity, many parents of today's Latinx

youth are often of the first-generation and could, therefore, experience more foreigner objectification compared with their children.

English Proficiency and Foreigner Objectification

Given the notion that immigrants who lack English proficiency are “unwilling to assimilate” and are a societal “burden,” the implications of language proficiency run deep (Fennelly, 2008). Linguistic characteristics such as proficiency or accented English can be readily observable markers of heritage background, as well as common dimensions of foreigner objectification (Armenta et al., 2013; Rodriguez, Myers, Mira, Flores, & Garcia-Hernandez, 2002). For example, among Chinese American youth, low English proficiency linked to their perception of being treated like a perpetual foreigner (Kim, Wang, Deng, Alvarez, & Li, 2011). Similarly, Asian immigrant adolescents reported peer harassment because of poor English skills or speaking with an accent (Qin, Way, & Mukherjee, 2008).

Although language proficiency and foreigner assumptions appear related, the foreigner image is notably a stereotype that can occur without any verbal interactions to start. Hence, experiences with the stereotype and self-perceived English proficiency could confer independent effects on outcomes. Prior work does suggest that proficiency is linked to academic and psychological adjustment, even after controlling for demographic variables, socioeconomic and immigration-related factors, and discrimination (Kang, Haddad, Chen, & Greenberger, 2014; Rodriguez, Flores, Flores, Myers, & Vriesema, 2015; Zhang, Hong, Takeuchi, & Mossakowski, 2012).

Moreover, these key variables could interact. In light of the promotive effects of English proficiency on diverse outcomes such as quality of life and physical and mental health (Kim et al., 2011; McElvain, 2015), we largely expected that proficiency would help individuals withstand foreigner objectification threats. The nature of foreigner objectification presumes outsider status and the message that one does not belong in the mainstream United States. In the face of such messages, we anticipated that English proficiency would provide some comfort or validation for belonging. Self-perceived facility with English could be also related to coping mechanisms that help individuals process their experiences (e.g., they could effectively communicate with others, including perpetrators, about the incidents). At the same time, the negative effects of low English proficiency and foreigner objectification could exacerbate each other.

Our hypotheses regarding the positive and possibly protective effects of English proficiency could be countered by the idea that, in the context of foreigner objectification experiences that peg individuals as being foreign, low English proficiency could give targets a reason for their experiences and potentially attenuate any detrimental effects. That is, to the extent that low self-perceptions of English ability might provide an external explanation for foreigner objectification, such individuals could rationalize and not internalize unfair treatment. This competing hypothesis was, therefore, considered as well.

Collectively, based on prior work, we expected English proficiency to have positive, direct effects on adjustment for both mothers and youth. We also expected English proficiency to serve as a buffer against foreigner objectification. However, given contradictory evidence, we also

considered the opposing possibility that low English proficiency could have a hand in ameliorating any negative effects of objectification.

The precise role that English proficiency plays is particularly important to examine across youth and adults. Whereas adults might acquire language and culture more slowly, school-age children might have more opportunities for learning with practice. Children might be more frequently immersed in contexts (e.g., school) in which they are exposed to English and have no choice but to acquire these language skills. Perhaps English proficiency is especially vital as youth struggle to fit into the limited social circles around them (Perreira, Kiang, & Potochnick, 2013). Yet, an alternate perspective is that, because of contextual factors such as education, workforce involvement, career settings, and use of public benefits (Batalova & Fix, 2010), opportunities for language acquisition and the strength of associations between proficiency and other life factors could be more variable and perhaps less salient for adults. Certainly, language acquisition is embedded in individuals' unique social contexts (Norton, 2012), which emphasizes the need to explore English proficiency's possible differential role in adult versus youth development.

Links With Adjustment and American Identity

Another strong reason for better understanding foreigner objectification rests in its implications for well-being and adjustment. Evidence for negative consequences of race-related bias, including overt discrimination as well as stereotypes, microaggressions, and foreigner objectification abound (e.g., Armenta et al., 2013; Huynh et al., 2011). Among both Latinx and Asian American college students, awareness of the foreigner stereotype has been associated with identity conflict, in particular, a low sense of belonging to American culture and trends toward depression (Huynh et al., 2011). Similarly detrimental links, both cross-sectional as well as long-term, have been made between racial bias and academic disengagement, depression, anxiety, mental health, stress, and negative affect in college students and adults (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014; Rivera et al., 2016). Although Nadal et al. (2014) focused on ethnically diverse adults, including Latinx, who experience microaggressions, and Rivera et al. (2016) centered on multiple ways in which Latinx Americans experience race/ethnic related stress, existing work remains limited in its neglect of foreigner objectification, especially among nonadult samples.

The current study extends prior literature by examining two primary markers of overall adjustment—depressive symptoms and self-esteem. For both adults and youth, foreigner objectification was expected to be associated with less positive adjustment (e.g., higher depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem). These expectations were grounded in prior empirical work (e.g., Huynh et al., 2011; Rivera et al., 2016) as well as conceptual frameworks (e.g., integrative model; Coll et al., 1996) that highlight race-related stress and social stratification as developmental risk factors.

Above and beyond these traditional indicators of adjustment, assumptions about who is “American” and who is “foreign” can also have implications for self-concept or national identity (Devos & Mohamed, 2014). The very experience of foreigner objectification presumes an outsider status (Rivera et al., 2016), and being treated as a foreigner could undermine targets' feelings of American identity or sense of belonging. Social dominance theory (Sidanius,

Feshbach, Levin, & Pratto, 1997) suggests that, based on the relative power of societal groups, ethnic and national identities do not always coincide. While the ethnic and national identities of the dominant group (e.g., White Americans) converge, distinctions or conflict might exist in the identities of immigrants and ethnic minorities (Devos, Gavin, & Quintana, 2010). That is, as members of the dominant group, White Americans tend to be seen as the exemplar of being American (Devos & Mohamed, 2014). In contrast, Latinx Americans are consistently seen as less American than are White Americans and this implicit bias has been documented among both ethnic majority and minority participants (Devos et al., 2010). To the extent that Whites are associated with being American and Latinx are not, the national or American identity of Latinx Americans could be hindered. Foreigner objectification was, therefore, expected to impede individuals' American identity.

Notably, the expected links between foreigner objectification, adjustment, and identity could be particularly pronounced among those who were actually born in the United States, as in the case of second- versus first-generation immigrants (Tran, 2016; Wang, Minervino, & Cheryan, 2013). Research has suggested that foreigner objectification is more detrimental for U.S.-born rather than foreign-born immigrants (Armenta et al., 2013), perhaps because of the latter being more likely to anticipate and cope with these experiences (Stein et al., 2016). Because children in contemporary Latinx American families tend to be of the second generation who are born to foreign-born parents, we expected that effects of foreigner objectification would be especially impactful for youth. Moreover, mainstream interactions and developmental period could leave youth particularly vulnerable to race-based bias (Perreira et al., 2013). However, competing views must again be considered in that some prior work suggests that the effects of foreigner objectification might be cumulative, and so it could be that adults with a longer history of bias exhibit more notable effects than do their children (Juang et al., 2016). Negative effects of foreigner objectification could be also greater for adults simultaneously facing financial stress, social separation, and documentation issues (Pulgar et al., 2016). We investigated the possibility of this alternative view in our analyses.

The Present Study

Our primary goal was to gain insight into foreigner objectification by examining direct and interactive effects of objectification and self-perceived English proficiency on diverse outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms, self-esteem, and American identity). In doing so, we focused on understudied Latinx families residing in understudied emerging immigrant communities. We compared youth-parent experiences to explore differences by generational status. We also examined gender as a covariate and possible moderator because of prior work that has pointed to gender differences in discrimination experiences as well as in the key outcomes of interest (Perreira et al., 2013; Stein et al., 2012). For example, Kim et al. (2011) found that pathways from English proficiency to foreigner objectification to depressive symptoms were different for males versus females, with chronic discrimination mediating the effect for girls and victimization experiences mediating the effect for boys. More directly, women from immigrant families have been found to report higher levels of depression than do men (Dion & Dion, 2001). Also, among immigrant families including Latinx, sons tend to be granted more freedom than daughters, which could result in how much children are exposed to American culture and, in turn, have

implications for both identity and discrimination experiences (Nesteruk & Gramescu, 2012; author citation).

Regarding specific hypotheses, we expected that foreigner objectification would have direct, negative consequences for both youth and adults (i.e., mothers), while English proficiency would have direct, promotive effects. We also expected that the positive benefits of English proficiency would protect against any negative effects of objectification. However, based on the limited and inconsistent literature, we also explored evidence for the competing hypothesis that participants with limited English proficiency would be able to explain away their objectification experiences and preserve their well-being. Notably, our focus on individuals' perceived proficiency is arguably more relevant than actual proficiency when examining direct and interactive effects, particularly because others' perceptions could be biased because of the foreigner stereotype itself.

Another consideration is the exploration of possible differentiations across youth and mothers. Although we expected similar main effects (e.g., negative consequences of objectification, positive consequences of proficiency), variations could be found in terms of means as well as in the strength of associations. Based on existing, but limited, literature (e.g., Stein et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2013), we expected that mothers would report more experiences of objectification and lower English proficiency compared with children. However, we also expected that the implications of these variables would be more pronounced among youth, who are in the crux of a developmental period in which fitting in and standing out is particularly salient.

Method

Participants

Using surveys and interviews, we analyzed associations separately across 173 youth from Latinx backgrounds (52% female; $M_{age} = 12.86$ years, $SD = .68$; 87% U.S.-born) and their mothers ($M_{age} = 38.26$, $SD = 5.65$). All of the mothers were foreign-born, with an average length of time in the United States of 15.67 years ($SD = 4.61$). The majority of families had Mexican heritage (89%). Other countries of origin included Columbia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico. Mother education, included as a covariate, was categorically coded with 45% reflecting less than an 8th grade education, 47% with education that ranged from 8th grade to high school or GED, and 8% having completed or having at least some posthigh school education.

Procedures

Project staff visited two public middle schools in a semirural area of the Southeastern United States to discuss the study and to distribute information about the study to school personnel. The area itself is considered an emerging immigrant community having recently experienced new and fast growth in its immigrant population. Per Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, and in collaboration with the schools, flyers and letters about the study were mailed home to students. Using school call lists of 7th and 8th graders who were identified as Latinx by the school, project

staff recruited interested and eligible families based on the following criteria: (a) both biological parents were also from Latinx backgrounds, (b) the mother was the resident caregiver of the participating child, and (c) youth ranged between 11 and 14 years of age. A second phase of recruitment included door-to-door home visits to target families who could not be reached via phone. A total of 597 families were contacted via phone or door-to-door recruitment. Of these, 16 families had moved (3%) and 217 were not located (e.g., disconnected numbers, families not home; 36%). Of the families who were contacted ($n = 364$), 47 were not eligible (13%), 125 declined (34%), 16 consented but did not complete interviews (4%), and 176 families consented and completed interviews (48%).

Upon study enrollment, and regardless of whether families were initially recruited via mail, telephone, or door-to-door, research assistants (including at least one Spanish speaking RA) visited families' homes to administer consent forms and then questionnaires separately, but simultaneously, to mothers and youth. Our focus on mothers was based on the broader study's goals to target the primary caregiver who, in these communities, tend to be the maternal caregivers (author citation). All assessments were available in Spanish and English and administered according to participants' preference. All but two youth chose to complete the materials in English, and all but one mother chose to complete the materials in Spanish. Existing Spanish versions of the measures were used, if available. Otherwise, measures were translated through a process of translations and back-translations by bilingual speakers. Youth were administered questionnaires presented via a laptop computer that was provided by the researchers. A research assistant was in the room to answer questions, but youth completed questions independently using this computer-assisted interview format, which lasted 1.5–2 h. Bilingual research assistants read responses out loud to mothers and then recorded responses on the survey. The use of different formats of survey completion was based on our prior work with similar samples, supporting the effectiveness of these data collection strategies (author citation). After survey completion, research assistants distributed a \$10 gift card to the child and \$20 gift card to the mother.

Measures

Foreigner objectification. The Foreigner Objectification Scale (Armenta et al., 2013) is a 9-item measure that asks participants to indicate whether they experienced specific events in the past year. Originally validated with ethnically diverse college students, including Latinx, sample items include, "Asked by strangers, 'where are you from?' because of your ethnicity/race" and "Had someone speak to you in an unnecessarily slow or rude way." Items are scored on a 1 = *never* to 4 = *five or more times* scale. Cronbach's α s were .87 for mothers and .85 for youth.

English proficiency. Three items from the Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AAMAS; Chung, Kim, & Abreu, 2004) measured English proficiency. Youth and mothers were asked, "How well do you speak English," "How well do you understand English," and, "How well do you read and write English?" Items were rated on a 1 = *not very well* to 6 = *very well* scale. Cronbach's α s were .89 for mothers and .78 for youth.

American identity. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) was adapted to measure American identity. Items were revised to assess regard and centrality with regards to

being American rather than “Black,” as successfully done in prior work with ethnically diverse youth, including Latinx American (Kiang, Witkow, & Champagne, 2013; Yip, Kiang, & Fuligni, 2008). The shortened 4-item forms of the scales were used (Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006). The regard subscale measures positive feelings toward being American (e.g., I feel good about being American). The centrality subscale assesses whether being American is central to one’s self-concept (e.g., In general, being American is an important part of my self-image). Items are scored from 0 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree* with higher scores reflecting higher regard and centrality (α range = .77–.89).

Youth internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Youth’s internalizing and externalizing symptoms were assessed using the Youth Self-Report Form (YSR; Achenbach, 1991). The broadband internalizing scale assessed anxiety, withdrawn behavior, and depressive symptoms indicated by 21 items whereas the broadband externalizing scale assessed rule-breaking and aggressive behavior indicated by 30 items. Sample items included, “I feel worthless or inferior” (internalizing) and, “I am mean to others” (externalizing). Responses are on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (*not true*) to 2 (*very true or often true*). Items were summed and scored such that higher values indicated higher internalizing ($\alpha = .89$) and externalizing ($\alpha = .90$) symptoms.

Youth self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured using the 10-item Rosenberg (1979) self-esteem scale. Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with higher values indicating higher self-esteem. A sample item reads, “I feel that I have a number of good qualities” ($\alpha = .83$).

Mother depressive symptoms. The 10-item depression scale (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale-10; Radloff, 1977) assessed mothers’ depressive symptoms experienced within the previous week. Items are scored from 0 = *rarely or none of the time* to 3 = *all of the time*. Higher scores reflect higher symptoms ($\alpha = .91$).

Results

Bivariate Correlations, Descriptives, and Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 lists correlations and descriptives across mothers and youth. Demographic variables such as participant age, years in the United States, and child gender are included in the table and, as shown, mothers’ age was significantly correlated with lower English proficiency, and years in the United States was associated with higher proficiency. For youth, age was significantly and positively correlated with objectification and externalizing symptoms. Also, more time in the United States was associated with lower perceptions of foreigner objectification. Significant links between gender and outcomes were also found whereby lower internalizing symptoms and higher self-esteem tended to be associated with boys.

One notable difference in the patterns of bivariate correlations between English proficiency and foreigner objectification was found across mothers and youth. As shown, lower English proficiency was associated with more foreigner objectification for youth but, for mothers, *more* English proficiency was associated with more objectification. To further explore the robustness of these bivariate associations, we conducted a series of multivariate analyses.

More specifically, for youth, we regressed foreigner objectification on English proficiency while also controlling for key demographic variables (i.e., gender, immigration age, mother's education as a proxy for socioeconomic status). Results showed that the effect of English proficiency was statistically significant ($b = -.15$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = -.17$, $p < .05$) with 5% of the variance in objectification explained by these variables. Similarly, the effect of English proficiency on foreigner objectification remained in the positive direction and was statistically significant for mothers above and beyond their years in the United States and education levels ($b = .10$, $SE = .04$, $\beta = .22$, $p < .01$), with 8% of the variance explained.

Bivariate associations with youth outcomes were generally as expected with objectification hindering positive outcomes (e.g., lower self-esteem, higher internalizing, and externalizing symptoms) and greater English proficiency serving to promote positive outcomes (e.g., higher self-esteem). For youth only, English proficiency was positively correlated with American identity (as defined by centrality and regard). For mothers, foreigner objectification was linked with more depressive symptoms. The correlations between objectification and American identity were not significant for either youth or mothers. Moreover, bivariate links between English proficiency and outcomes (i.e., American identity, depressive symptoms) were not found for mothers. These associations will be further explored through primary regression analyses.

In terms of means that could be directly compared across mothers and youth, experiences of foreigner objectification for both groups fell between *never* and *once or twice*. A paired samples *t* test confirmed that these means were not significantly different from each other, $t(163) = .71$, *ns*. However, youth reported significantly higher levels of English proficiency than did their mothers, $t(172) = 23.06$, $p < .001$. American centrality, $t(168) = 9.64$, $p < .001$, and American regard, $t(168) = 10.16$, $p < .001$, were also significantly higher among youth than among mothers, but it is worth noting that all means were above the midpoint of the identity subscales.

Preliminary analyses also explored differences in variable means across categorical demographic characteristics. Differences based on mother education were examined and found through a series of analysis of variances (ANOVAs), $F(2, 171)$, $range = 3.66-18.24$, $p < .05$. Specifically, higher education levels were associated with incrementally higher foreigner objectification and English proficiency, and highest levels of American centrality were found among mothers with both high and low levels of education. No other differences based on mother education were found. Mean differences by youth gender were explored through independent samples *t* tests. Only one difference was found whereby girls ($M = 8.58$, $SD = 5.28$) reported more internalizing symptoms than did boys ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 5.47$), $t(168) = 3.41$, $p < .001$.

Main and Interactive Effects of Objectification and Language on Mothers' Outcomes

Hierarchical multiple regressions were used to examine main effects of foreigner objectification experiences and self-reported English proficiency, as well as their interaction, on mothers' American identity and depressive symptoms. Given prior work pointing to acculturation differences in constructs such as mental health and identity (Finch & Vega, 2003; Kiang et al., 2010), as well as the results of our preliminary analyses reported above, we included mothers' reported number of years in the United States and their education levels as controls. These two

covariates were also explored as possible moderators in our primary analyses, but no consistent evidence for moderation was found.

In the final models shown in Table 2, none of the main effects of English proficiency were statistically significant. However, they were all in expected directions, and some of the coefficients approached significance. The predictors did not explain a significant amount of variance in mothers' sense of American identification, but a significant portion of the variance in mothers' depressive symptoms was explained (8%), which constitutes a small to medium sized effect (Cohen's $f^2 = .09$). As expected, more reported experiences with objectification was associated with higher depressive symptoms ($\beta = .27, p < .001$). No interactive effects between language and foreigner objectification were found for any of the outcomes. Notably, the main effect of objectification on depressive symptoms remained significant even when the language*objectification interaction term was removed.

Main and Interactive Effects of Objectification and Language on Youth Outcomes

Table 3 lists the regression results for youth outcomes. Again, based on prior work and preliminary analyses, child gender, years in the United States, and mothers' education (as a proxy for socioeconomic status) were included as covariates. These variables were also explored as possible moderators of primary effects, but no consistent evidence for moderation was found.

As shown in Table 3, with the exception of American centrality, the models accounted for significant amounts of variance for all outcomes. English proficiency was the only significant predictor of both American regard ($\beta = .36, p < .001$; 13% of the variance explained; Cohen's $f^2 = .15$) and centrality ($\beta = .23, p < .01$), and effects were in the positive direction. Approximately 24 and 21% of the variance in Internalizing and Externalizing symptoms, respectively, was explained, which represented medium to large sized effects (Cohen's $f^2 = .27-.32$). These models appeared largely driven by foreigner objectification whereby reports of objectification were linked with more internalizing ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) and externalizing ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) symptomatology. Gender also emerged as a significant predictor of internalizing symptoms, with girls exhibiting risks for symptoms compared with boys ($\beta = -.29, p < .001$). In addition, externalizing symptoms were associated with more years spent in the United States ($\beta = .21, p < .01$). In terms of self-esteem, both English proficiency and foreigner objectification were significant predictors, with language skills promoting self-esteem ($\beta = .32, p < .001$) and objectification hindering it ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$). The model explained 18% of the variance in self-esteem (Cohen's $f^2 = .22$), a medium to large sized effect. No other main or interactive effects were found. As with the models with mothers, removal of the proficiency by objectification interaction terms did not change any of the main effects that were found.

Discussion

The contemporary experiences of individuals from Latinx families, regardless of nativity, can be fraught with messages and unfair treatment because of foreigner objectification. The assumption that, American is synonymous with the dominate White United States majority while people of color are allocated to categories of foreign or "otherness," has vital social consequences, particularly as xenophobia, violence toward immigrants, and hate groups have been on the rise

since the turn of the century (Devos & Mohamed, 2014; Gómez Torres, 2014). Theoretical models of development suggest that such experiences of discrimination and social disparity can have vital implications for health, well-being, and individuals' broad sense of cultural identity and belonging (Coll et al., 1996; Sidanius et al., 1997).

The present study investigated some of the correlates related to the experience of foreigner objectification among Latinx youth and their mothers residing in the unique context of United States emerging immigrant communities. These communities are characterized as having only recently experienced large growth in their immigrant population, which often results in few community resources to support newcomers and potential tension as host community members are still becoming accustomed to increased ethnic diversity (Bailey, 2005; Stein et al., 2016). For immigrant parents who are adjusting to these contexts, as well as for their children, many of whom were born into these communities, dealing with ongoing stereotypes and unfair treatment because of their ethnic background and forging a strong sense of identity and well-being are particularly salient processes to understand.

Our results point to negative outcomes associated with foreigner objectification. For youth, perceived foreigner objectification was associated with more internalization and externalizing problems and lower self-esteem. Objectification was also a hindrance for mothers as reports of these experiences were linked to greater symptoms of depression. For both youth and mothers, it appears that being treated as foreigners and being subjected to assumptions and microaggressions that challenge their social status can be psychologically harmful. These results are consistent with existing literature (Armenta et al., 2013; Huynh et al., 2011; Tran & Lee, 2014), but extends knowledge to a younger age group and to both youth and adults residing in understudied geographic contexts. The results also build the existing knowledge base by suggesting that foreigner objectification has similarly negative links despite the different developmental periods and generational statuses exhibited by youth and their mothers. Moreover, the negative effects that emerged seem particularly striking given that overall rates of foreigner objectification were relatively low. These results are in line with existing work suggesting that even "one small dose" of discrimination can be harmful. For example, Huynh and Fuligni (2010) assessed general perceptions of and daily experiences with discrimination and found that, despite relatively low frequencies of such negative race-related interactions, their developmental consequences ran deep. Similarly, daily diary work has found that experiences of discrimination can have sustained, lagged effects on negative affect and somatic symptoms even days after the event was actually experienced (Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013).

Some of the patterns in the current study did diverge across youth and parents, however, with respect to the role of English proficiency in relation to both objectification and outcomes. At the bivariate level, less reported proficiency with English was correlated with more frequent reports of foreigner objectification for youth, but the opposite pattern was found for mothers in that more English proficiency was correlated with more frequent reports of objectification. Although further research is needed to replicate and fully understand these findings, it is possible that the social contexts for youth and adults invoke qualitatively different experiences and assumptions. Perhaps youth and their peers rely on concrete and easily observable markers of foreigner status whereby struggles with the English language automatically equate to the assumption of

otherness, as might be expected by some of the items on the foreigner objectification measure and by prior work (Qin et al., 2008).

Among adults' social and work contexts, higher English proficiency could lead to their increased integration into American culture, which could then incite more opportunities for objectification because of mainstream exposure and awareness of bias. Similarly, it could be that adults in the workforce are held to particularly high standards with respect to their appearance, mannerisms, or general ease of interactions with the mainstream community. As such, greater frequencies of interactions with the mainstream, which could come from having higher levels of English proficiency, could have a backlash in greater probabilities of being judged and mis-judged. Another explanation is that youth and adults simply vary in how attuned they are to discrimination experiences. Prior work has found that awareness of bias and discrimination can increase with age (Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005); hence, continued comparisons across age groups and more longitudinal work could be helpful in further disentangling these possible developmental effects. It is also important to recall that our measure of English proficiency was based on participants' self-perceptions of skills and abilities; it could be that different correlates would be found with respect to more objective measures of proficiency. Moreover, our measure focused on proficiency and not specific speech patterns. It would be informative for future work to more specifically examine the role that linguistic characteristics, such as speaking with an accent, might play in development and in the associations with foreigner objectification and outcomes.

Some variation across youth and mothers was also found in terms of correlations between English proficiency and adjustment. For youth only, greater English proficiency was positively associated with both American regard and centrality, as well as higher levels of self-esteem. For mothers, the direct links between English proficiency and outcomes were in expected directions, but the associations were either not statistically significant or only approached significance. One of the reasons why the links between proficiency and outcomes were more prevalent and consistent among youth could be because of the salience of English acquisition among youth and school contexts (Perreira et al., 2013; Qin et al., 2008). The results and trends found are consistent with prior work pointing to positive benefits of English language proficiency, particularly in terms of self-esteem, as well as in how strongly youth feel connected to the American culture (Rodriguez et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2012).

In fact, it is interesting that English proficiency was the only significant predictor of youth American identity, whereas foreigner objectification experiences were not related to feelings of American pride or centrality. Although we expected that individuals who are frequently reminded of their immigrant status through subtle forms of racism like being perceived by others as foreigners would sense lower mainstream cultural belonging, these hypotheses were not supported. These results are uplifting, in a way, in that social rejection or exclusion as measured through foreigner objectification does not appear to hold back youths' or adults' mainstream identity. Perhaps other social or intrapersonal factors, such as English proficiency, more strongly contribute to feelings of national pride and to other outcomes. For example, we have found through other analyses with this sample that other stressors for mothers (e.g., acculturation gap stress) overshadowed the effects of objectification and were predictive of depressive symptoms (author citation). More work that uncovers markers of mental health and American identity that

potentially stem from social interactions and perceived community reception could help to further inform critical processes of self-identity formation among understudied immigrant youth and families. Such issues would be especially relevant during adolescence given that, developmentally, the cognitive and social maturation that is uniquely tied to this period allows for a rich understanding of discrimination processes that face youth (Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005). Future work should also continue to examine the role of primary demographic variables in directly or indirectly predicting development. For instance, even though we found only one significant main effect of gender with girls reporting more internalizing symptoms than did boys, prior empirical work has found consistent evidence for gendered effects that tend to favor boys (Dion & Dion, 2001; Kim et al., 2011; Stein et al., 2012).

Taken together, our work suggests that there are similar cultural processes that face both youth and their mothers, despite differences in developmental period and generational status. At the same time, the development of youth and mothers transpires across distinct social contexts, which could help to explain some of the variation in terms of the way in which foreigner objectification experiences and English proficiency are related to each other and to other adjustment outcomes. Yet, despite the importance and implications of these findings, it is important to note some limitations. First, our study was cross-sectional in nature. Thus, it remains unclear whether, for instance, foreigner objectification contributes to poor outcomes for youth and greater depressive symptoms for mothers, or whether these initial levels of adjustment foster greater perceptions of social exclusion through objectification experiences. Longitudinal research could provide insight into directionality, as well as determine how long lasting any effects might be. More nuanced pathways to developmental outcomes could also be explored in future work. Although we focused on interactive effects between foreigner objectification and language proficiency, in preliminary analyses we explored but found little evidence for mediational processes. However, as suggested by Kim et al. (2011), it is possible that foreigner objectification mediates linkages between language characteristics (e.g., proficiency, accented English) and youth outcomes.

Another limitation is that our measurement of objectification itself could have been biased because of our reliance on self-reported perceptions. English proficiency and outcome variables were also based on self-report and, as discussed earlier, we focused on self-rated language skills and abilities rather than other linguistic markers that could be entwined with discrimination, such as speaking with an accent. In our effort to compare experiences of youth and mothers, there were some overlapping, distinguishing variables that could have also confounded our results. For example, the different patterns that we found could be because of age, length of time in the United States, generational status, or a combination of these important factors. Again, further investigation, perhaps incorporating dyadic analyses or systematic comparisons, would be informative. More strategic dyadic analyses could also be important because of the possibility of shared variance in experiences, given that youth and mothers were drawn from the same family. It would also be fruitful to incorporate more direct measures of acculturation in further clarifying the associations between English proficiency (that is sometimes seen as an acculturation marker), discrimination, identity, and well-being. In addition, although our focus on understudied regions of the United States helps to provide insight into the experience of families residing in emerging immigrant communities, this also limits the generalizability of our results to those in different contexts that might be more or less ethnically diverse. In emerging immigrant areas, it is often

more common for immigrant families to be of the first generation (e.g., foreign-born; Kiang et al., 2012). Although the nature of foreigner objectification disregards actual nativity, it is possible that the host community members in these areas are more likely to make assumptions and stereotypes about newcomers. It would be important for future work to determine whether our findings can be replicated in other areas of the United States, and whether similar processes are found in emerging immigrant communities versus those with a long history of hosting newcomers.

Limitations notwithstanding, the results of our research support theoretical models that highlight the role of social bias and unfair treatment (Coll et al., 1996; Mistry et al., 2016) in influencing the lives of immigrant and ethnic minority youth and families. Continued investigation into how the nature of such bias takes shape in contemporary times (e.g., shifting from overt discrimination through more subtle microaggressions) and affects the development of youth and adults from immigrant families would be vital in ensuring and optimizing their full integration and adjustment as the mainstream and others are simultaneously adapting to their changing social worlds.

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Table 1. Bivariate Correlations and Descriptives

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	Mother means (SDs)
(1) Age	—	.21**	.00	-.16*	-.07	-.07	-.04	NA	NA	38.26 (5.65)
(2) Years in United States	.35***	—	.02	.22**	.09	.08	-.04	NA	NA	15.75 (4.71)
(3) Foreigner Objectification	.20**	-.16*	—	.26***	-.11	-.03	.24***	NA	NA	1.53 (.56)
(4) English proficiency	-.06	.11	-.17*	—	.01	.11	-.08	NA	NA	2.27 (1.25)
(5) American centrality	-.05	-.01	.01	.22**	—	.80***	.01	NA	NA	3.04 (.92)
(6) American regard	-.04	.00	-.02	.33***	.79***	—	.02	NA	NA	3.09 (1.07)
(7) Depressive/internalizing symptoms	.04	-.01	.38***	-.13 [†]	-.10	-.13 [†]	—	NA	NA	12.51 (11.10)
(8) Externalizing symptoms	.15*	.05	.40***	-.11	-.09	-.12	.66***	NA	NA	—
(9) Self-esteem	-.03	.03	-.16*	.32***	.06	.20*	-.36***	-.23	NA	—
(10) Child gender (0 = girls, 2 = boys)	.05	.24**	-.06	.14 [†]	.04	.06	-.26***	-.08	.16*	—
Youth means (SDs)	12.86 (.68)	.48 (.50)	4.55 (.60)	1.50 (.54)	3.89 (.75)	4.10 (.74)	7.02 (6.48)	6.97 (6.71)	3.75 (.78)	

Note. Youth correlations are shown below the diagonal. Mother correlations are shown above. [†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Multiple Regressions Predicting Mothers' Outcomes

Variables	American regard				American centrality				Depressive symptoms			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>sR</i> ²	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>sR</i> ²	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>sR</i> ²
Years in United States	.01	.02	.05	.00	.02	.02	.08	.01	-.04	.18	-.02	.00
Education	-.21	.14	-.13	.01	-.25	.12	-.18*	.03	.90	1.37	.05	.00
English proficiency	.14	.08	.16 [†]	.02	.07	.06	.10	.01	-1.41	.77	-.16 [†]	.02
Foreigner objectification	-.09	.16	-.05	.00	-.16	.13	-.10	.01	5.39	1.57	.27***	.07
Eng*Foreign	-.01	.10	-.01	.00	-.01	.08	-.01	.00	-.04	.99	.00	.00
<i>R</i> ²		.03				.05				.08*		

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Multiple Regressions Predicting Youth Outcomes

	American regard				American centrality				Internalizing				Externalizing				Self-esteem			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>sR</i> ²	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>sR</i> ²	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>sR</i> ²	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>sR</i> ²	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>sR</i> ²
Gender	.02	.12	.01	.00	.04	.13	.03	.00	-3.72	.96	-.29***	.07	-1.50	1.02	-.11	.01	.16	.12	.11	.01
Years in United States	-.02	.05	-.03	.00	-.02	.05	-.03	.00	.59	.37	.13	.09	1.01	.39	.21**	.04	-.02	.05	-.03	.00
Mother Education	-.14	.09	-.13 [†]	.02	-.11	.09	-.10	.01	-.10	.72	-.01	.00	-.35	.76	-.03	.00	.07	.09	.06	.00
English proficiency	.44	.10	.36***	.12	.28	.10	.23**	.05	-.30	.80	-.03	.00	-.06	.85	-.01	.00	.41	.10	.32***	.10
Foreigner objectification	.04	.11	.03	.00	.04	.12	.03	.00	4.89	.91	.41***	.14	4.93	.96	.39***	.14	-.28	.11	-.19*	.03
Eng*Foreign	-.09	.17	-.05	.00	-.05	.18	-.03	.00	.84	1.40	.05	.00	-2.44	1.49	-.13 [†]	.01	-.16	.17	-.08	.00
<i>R</i> ²		.13***				.06				.24***				.21***				.18***		

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.