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The present study employed a bioecological model of human development to examine how experiences within the *individual*, *school*, and *family* contexts affect the endorsement of familism values in a sample of 179 Latino adolescents. The results show that the variables assessed within the individual and family bioecological contexts held the overall greatest predictive value on the endorsement of familism, but the school context did not prove to be a significant predictor. Across the entire model, ethnic identity (i.e., private regard and centrality) and parent-child warmth and support displayed consistently significant positive associations with the endorsement of familism.

FAMILISM IN CONTEXT: A MULTISYSTEMIC  
EXPLORATION OF PREDICTORS

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTON

Latino immigrant families must navigate the sociological process of acculturation (Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000), which includes multiple challenges that threaten family unity and psychological wellbeing (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). These challenges are typically associated with acculturative stress, and have been associated with psychological distress (Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2011), physical illness (Smart & Smart, 1995), and decreases in family unity (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007), and substance abuse (Unger, 2014). Latinos often face these challenges by relying on a number of heritage-cultural values (e.g., familism, respeto, filial obligations, etc.). Among these values, familism has received the greatest attention in the literature, and is consistently considered the most protective heritage-cultural value for Latino families (Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers, 2007). The literature remains unclear on what influences the endorsement of this value among acculturating Latino adolescents. The confusion largely stems from insufficient forms of measurement (i.e., language use or nativity status) that do not consider the entirety of an acculturating adolescent's experience (e.g., Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000). Whereas several studies have assessed how the process of acculturation affects familism among Latino adults (Rodriguez & Kosloski, 1998; Marin, 1993; Negy & Woods, 1992; Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin & Perez-Stable, 1987), fewer studies have focused on this process earlier in

development, and to my knowledge, no study has broken down the process into contextual spheres of influence in order to systematically assess the roles that individual, family, and school contexts play in an adolescent's endorsement of familism.

### **The Conceptualization and Measurement of Acculturation**

The conceptualization of acculturation has changed dramatically over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Berry, 1980). One of the first definitions of acculturation was formulated by anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits (1935) who posited that acculturation represents “phenomena which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact subsequently resulting in changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups.” (p.148) Subsequently, the bidirectional emphasis in this early definition was discarded in favor of assimilation theory, which came to define acculturation as a process in which a cultural group that has immigrated comes into contact with the dominant host culture and progresses from a tradition-oriented mindset to an assimilated one (Gordon, 1964). The process following immigration was described as unilinear, nonreversible, and continuous (Suarez-Orozco, 2001), ultimately resulting in what Alba and Nee (1997) refer to as “the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it” (p. 863).

Assimilation theory appears to have emanated from early views on European immigration to the U.S. in which a clean geopolitical and cultural break with the homeland was made. However, modern Latino immigration constitutes a much more fluid and continuous immigration that constantly replenishes its social capital, thereby

aiding in the maintenance of the origin culture's social practices and norms (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). More recent views on acculturation have reemphasized the bidirectional exchange among immigrant and host cultures through what has come to be collectively known as alternation theory. The alternation model treats the cultural exchange taking place during acculturation both orthogonally and bidirectionally, which allows for individuals to have the simultaneous sense of belonging in either culture necessary to be able to alter behavior depending on the social context (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Alternation theory associates biculturalism with the best psychosocial outcomes as individuals displaying high levels of both traditional and host-culture orientations are able to participate in the external host-culture environment while retaining the protective values of the traditional culture as well (Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991).

In spite of our best efforts to capture acculturation under the prescriptions of alternation theory, acculturation remains a complex construct that is difficult to pin down. In a recent review of the acculturation literature Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, and Szapocznik (2010) posit that acculturation generally involves multifaceted changes in the acculturating individual in terms of their cultural practices, values, and cultural identification, and that these changes, although often related, can take place independently of one another and at different rates at any given time in the acculturative process. Furthermore, often used proxy measures of acculturation (e.g., language use, generation status, nativity status, etc.) may not necessarily capture the internal changes in cultural identity that they purport to measure. For example, in some cases, adolescents who speak little Spanish have been found to endorse a strong identification with Latino

culture (Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007). In conclusion, the authors suggest that acculturation research ought to either measure the process in a manner that is sufficiently comprehensive or address hypotheses surrounding specific processes taking place within acculturation. The present study will aim to do the latter by focusing on specific aspects of the acculturative experience and their effects on the endorsement of familism.

### **Familism**

Familism is generally characterized by “strong identification and attachment of individuals with their nuclear and extended families, and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity among members of the same family” (Sabogal et al., 1987). However, familism has not been consistently defined in the literature, with some studies focusing on global assessments, whereas others have focused more on subcomponents such as family networks and support (Rodriguez et al., 2007). Furthermore, two additional aspects of familism have been distinguished in the literature: internalized familistic attitudes (i.e., attitudinal familism) (Steidel & Contreras, 2003) and the behavioral manifestations of these attitudes (i.e., behavioral familism) (Kuperminc, Jurkovic & Casey, 2009). Considering attitudinal familism has been the most widely used measure in recent research, as well as the fact that it best captures the internalization of values surrounding familism (e.g., Cupito, Stein, & Gonzalez, 2014; Zeiders et al., 2013; Umaña-Taylor, Updegraff, & Gonzales-Backen, 2011), this study will focus on the

prediction of attitudinal familism in order to understand how contextual experiences influence the beliefs of acculturating Latino adolescents.

### **Familism, Adolescence, and Acculturation**

Latino adolescents are particularly vulnerable to aforementioned dangers (e.g., psychological distress, decreased family unity, substance abuse, etc.) posed by acculturative change due to the fact that they face the simultaneous challenges of establishing a newfound identity within a novel sociocultural context while also facing the normative developmental process of individuating from the family (Zimmerman & Becker-Stoll, 2002; Knight et al., 2011). Torn between Latino cultural values and acculturative challenges that demand family unity on the one hand, and the need to individuate from the family and the adoption of U.S. individualistic values on the other, Latino adolescents often find themselves in a difficult position as a result of the acculturative process (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2009).

As previously stated, the majority of the research on Latino adolescents has found that the endorsement of familism serves a critical protective role against the poor psychosocial outcomes that can stem from the challenges of acculturation (Ayón, Marsiglia, Bermudez-Parsai, 2010; Germán, Gonzales, & Dumka, 2009; Horton & Gil, 2008; Marsiglia, Parsai, & Kulis, 2009; Polo & Lopez, 2009). However, recently immigrated Latino youth also have a tendency to acculturate quickly to U.S.-culture and language (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007). In some instances, rapid acculturation in conjunction with an increasing developmental drive to establish reciprocal peer relationships during adolescence can result in the rejection of heritage-culture in

exchange for a U.S.-centered monocultural orientation (Epstein, 1983; Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008); this outcome is widely associated with negative psychosocial outcomes in Latinos (Szapocznik, Santisteban, Kurtines, Ferez-Vidai, & Hervis, 1984). Research on the natural trajectory of the endorsement of familism across adolescence appears mixed, with some research finding that it decreases as adolescents attempt to assimilate and establish autonomy from the family (Updegraff, Umaña-Taylor, McHale, Wheeler, & Perez-Brena, 2012) and other research finding that certain aspects of familism (i.e., family obligations) increase in adolescence as individuals' responsibilities increase normatively with development (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Rodriguez & Kosloski, 1998; Negy & Woods, 1992). Thus, further research is necessary to develop a more nuanced understanding of how Latino adolescents' experiences in different acculturative contexts may come to influence the endorsement of familism.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study will employ a bioecological systems model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) as its theoretical framework. The model dictates that human development takes place through repeated and reciprocal interactions, referred to as *proximal processes*, between the individual and different environmental systems. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1998) outlined five environmental systems that may influence development at any given time: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Whereas all environmental systems are relevant to the study of acculturation, the scope of the present study will focus only on microsystems (i.e., the individual, family, school) and mesosystems (i.e., intersections of different

microsystems). Regarding acculturation, the impact of these proximal processes varies as a function of both the individual and the relevant social contexts, an idea which Szapocznik and Kurtines (1993) expanded upon in their work with Latino adolescents and the theory of ‘embeddedness of contexts.’ This is a process in which the individual is embedded within the context of the family that is itself also embedded within a culturally diverse context. The authors cite that employing this theoretical approach to their research has been crucial in gaining a deeper understanding of the acculturation process for Latino adolescents. In light of this research, I believe that a bioecological systems framework is best suited to capture the dynamic nature of the acculturative process as well as the differential contributions that each microsystem makes in the endorsement of familism.

### **Individual Microsystem: Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity is a multifaceted construct consisting of specific components that connote one’s sense of self as a member of an ethnic group (e.g., self-identification as a group member, attitudes and evaluations relative to one’s group, attitudes about oneself as a group member, extent of ethnic knowledge and commitment, ethnic behaviors and practices) (Phinney, 1991). Of the three larger factors that make up ethnic identity (i.e., private regard, public regard, centrality), private regard (i.e., attitudes and evaluations towards one’s ethnic group) and centrality (i.e., salience of one’s ethnic identity to a sense of self) may be particularly important for the study of the endorsement of familism as they could be the driving factors in its internalization (see Rivas-Drake et al., 2014 for a comprehensive review of ethnic identity research in minority youth).

As individuals come into contact with U.S. cultural contexts that may be incongruent with their own values, those who endorse high levels of private regard and centrality are more likely to endorse heritage-cultural values irrespective of broader societal influences, as suggested by Seller's model of racial identity (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Indeed, studies have found that ethnic identity predicts familism values across acculturation (Rodriguez et al., 2007; Gaines et al., 1997). Most of these studies, however, have not controlled for other contextual influences (e.g., Kiang & Fuligni, 2009) in order to understand their relative contribution to familism endorsement, which the present study will attempt to improve upon.

### **Individual Microsystem: Language Use**

Language preference has often been cited in the literature as a reference point for cultural attachment (Vega & Gil, 1998) due to the fact that language preference can impact the degree to which individuals are able to engage with and learn from different cultural contexts (Allen et al., 2008). Therefore, it is likely that if Latino adolescents are able to maintain their Spanish-speaking abilities throughout the process of acculturation they will be able to interact with socializing agents of the heritage-culture (i.e., parents, family members, heritage-culture events) and thus go on to internalize familistic values.

However, Latino adolescents living in the U.S. will likely experience the acculturative process through a bilingual lens that allows for differential influences (i.e., American and Latino) on their endorsement of values. This is especially true in emerging communities where recently immigrated families will have children who learn English much faster than their parents (Smokowski et al., 2008). As Schwartz and colleagues

(2010) have pointed out, acculturation involves changes in many areas within the individual (e.g., language, practices, values) that may be changing at different rates and at different times throughout the process. Therefore, it is possible that, as cited by Schwartz, Zamboanga, and Jarvis (2007), Latino adolescents who have become language-acculturated to English may still endorse high levels of heritage-cultural values such as familism. Given these findings, it seems clear that research on Latino adolescent familism should move away from previous limited binary methods of measurement for acculturation (i.e., assimilated vs. not-assimilated via measurements of language, nativity status, generational status, etc.) in exchange for a deeper understanding of how language and cultural influences interact and come to affect trajectories of familism endorsement. The present study will aim to do just that in assessing how, in line with alternation theory and the aforementioned research, language-preference need not necessarily connote acculturation in terms of the endorsement of heritage values such as familism.

### **Family Microsystem: Family Functioning Throughout Acculturation**

Parents serve as the primary socializing agents of cultural values for Latino adolescents (Hughes et al., 2006). As such, research has found that positive family dynamics that promote the enactment of cultural socialization practices amongst family members have been associated with higher endorsement of heritage-cultural values such as familism (e.g., Knight et al., 2011; Umaña-Taylor, Alfaro, Bamaca & Guimond, 2009). Conversely, if the trust and respect that is necessary for parents and children to communicate effectively is disrupted through parent-child conflict, these socializing messages and practices may fall on deaf ears. Indeed, research has found that parent-child

conflict predicts a disruption in cultural practices and a decrease in the internalization and protective value of familism for Latino adolescents (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007).

Conversely, the literature on family warmth and support has consistently found that it promotes the endorsement of familism (Gamble & Modry-Mandell, 2008; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007; Updegraff, Umaña-Taylor, Perez-Brena & Pflieger, 2012). However, these constructs have previously been analyzed in isolation. As such, other acculturative processes and contextual influences have not been allowed to interact with family dynamics in a manner that more closely mirrors the experience of Latino adolescents. Therefore, the present study will aim to capture how family dynamics (i.e., parent-child conflict and parental warmth and support) affect the endorsement of familism in light of other processes taking place simultaneously during a Latino adolescent's acculturation.

### **School Microsystem: Peer Discrimination**

The literature has been mixed regarding the degree to which experiences of discrimination impact the endorsement of familism, with many studies suggesting that discrimination leads to a rejection of ethnic identity, potentially in favor of assimilation (e.g., Molina Phillips, & Sidanius, 2014; Fuller-Rowell, Ong, & Phinney, 2013). However, Berkel and colleagues (2010) have found seemingly paradoxical results indicating that higher levels of perceived discrimination result in the internalization of Latino values, including familism. These findings are in line with research citing that instances of discrimination can precipitate the process of ethnic identity exploration, resolution, and affirmation leading to an increase in levels of internalized heritage-

cultural values as a result (e.g., Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Johansson, & Turrisi, 2004; Allen et al., 2008; Pahl & Way, 2006; Knight et al., 2011). Therefore, it may well be that higher levels of perceived discrimination could lead to an increased endorsement of familism. This is of particular interest in emerging Latino communities such as North Carolina, as previous research has found that Latino adolescents within emerging communities are more likely to report being discriminated, believe the chances of being discriminated against are higher, and to report being more anxious about discrimination than their counterparts in established ethnic enclaves (i.e., Los Angeles, CA) (Pereira, Fuligni, Potochnik, 2010)

Therefore, a portion of the literature appears to suggest that as Latino adolescents acculturate to life in the U.S., experiencing high levels of perceived discrimination may trigger greater degrees of ethnic identity exploration leading to the internalization and increased endorsement of familism. However, it could also be the case that as youth experience discrimination they may come to reject their heritage values as they attempt to distance themselves from what makes them targets of discrimination. It is evident that the effect of peer-discrimination on a Latino adolescent's endorsement of cultural values remains in question, so the present study's hypothesis surrounding this construct remains exploratory.

### **School Microsystem: School Belonging**

School belonging refers to the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported at school (Goodenow, 1993). A sense of school belonging has been found in the past to share a positive association with Latino youth's

endorsement of attitudinal familism (Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang, & Supple, 2013) as well as with positive psychosocial outcomes (e.g., higher GPA, promotion of prosocial behaviors, and social competence) (Calderón-Tena et al., 2010; Kuperminc et al., 2009). However, establishing a sense of school belonging is not always easy for acculturating Latino youth and their families due to incongruities in language and culture (Hill & Torres, 2010). As such, Latino adolescents who do not experience a sense of belonging may perceive the rejection as an indictment against their heritage-cultural values, potentially causing them to be discarded in an effort to assimilate and feel accepted.

For those Latino adolescents who are able to achieve a sense of school belonging, they will likely feel accepted and validated by their school context for being who they are and will therefore go on to continue to endorse high levels of familism. Furthermore, greater school belonging may also result in an increase in parental involvement that could generate greater opportunities for fulfilling familial obligations, reciprocity, and using family as referents for behavior within the academic realm, all of which are primary components of familism (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008).

### **Goals and Hypotheses**

The goal of the present study will be to employ a bioecological model of human development to examine how acculturative experiences within the *individual*, *family*, and *school* contexts affect the endorsement of familism in a sample of Latino adolescents living in immigrant families in North Carolina. Specifically, this study will assess how language-use and ethnic identity (i.e., processes within the individual microsystem), parent-child warmth/support and conflict (i.e., processes within the family microsystem),

and peer discrimination and school belonging (i.e., processes within the school microsystem) exert differential and hierarchically distinct levels of influence on the endorsement of familism.

Following Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, the study hypothesizes a model of contextual influences on the endorsement of familism in which the individual microsystem will hold the greatest influence, followed by the family and school microsystems. Within the individual microsystem it is hypothesized that high levels of ethnic identity, and English as well as Spanish-language use will predict higher levels of attitudinal familism. Within the family microsystem, it is predicted that parent-child conflict and parent-child warmth and support will have negative and positive associations with familism, respectively. Finally, within the school microsystem, it is hypothesized that peer discrimination and school belonging will have negative and positive associations with familism, respectively.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### **Participants**

The sample consisted of 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th graders ( $n = 190$ ) with a mean age of 14 years. The sample consisted of 52.9 % females. The adolescents were primarily of Mexican origin (78 %), with the rest of the sample consisting of Latino mixed (i.e., parents from different countries of origin; 8 %), Nicaraguan (2 %), Dominican (2 %) and Salvadorian (2 %) backgrounds. Other individuals identified being from Guatemalan, Colombian, Costa Rican and Cuban backgrounds. Although the sample is majority Mexican-American, Latino was used for parsimony. There were missing data for 11 adolescents on some of the predictor variables. One adolescent's survey was determined to be invalid due to inconsistent responses throughout the survey. Thus, the sample utilized for the present study included 179 Latino adolescents in total.

#### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited in all 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms from three schools in North Carolina (Two middle schools and one high school). All survey administration was completed in the participating schools' cafeteria in the fall of 2010, during periods determined by the principal and the teachers. The participants had the option to have an English or Spanish version of the survey. Only one student chose to take the survey in Spanish. Measures not available in Spanish were translated and back

translated, and then the research team resolved discrepancies jointly. The team also encouraged participants to ask for assistance at any point during the survey and checked each questionnaire to ensure the quality of the data.

## **Measures**

**Language Use.** In order to measure both English and Spanish-language use, only items specifying language in the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans--II (ARSMA-II) (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) were used. Separate mean scores were generated for English-language use (e.g., “My thinking is done in English”, “I enjoy speaking English”, “I enjoy watching English language TV”) and Spanish-language use (e.g., “I enjoy reading (e.g., books) in Spanish”, “I write (e.g., letters) in Spanish”, “I enjoy listening to Spanish language music”). Items for the English and Spanish scales were identical to each other with only the target language (i.e., English and Spanish) changed. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale rating the frequency with which participants endorsed each item, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely often or always*). Both the Spanish ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and English ( $\alpha = .75$ ) language-use scales displayed adequate internal reliability in the current sample.

**Familism.** The 18-item Attitudinal Familism Scale (Steidel & Contreras, 2003) was used to assess the adolescents’ endorsement of familism. Responses are on a 10-point Liker-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*). The measure taps into four different aspects of familism. The first subscale is *familial support*, which includes six items such as, “A person should always support members of the extended family, for example, aunts, uncles, and in-laws, if they are in need even if it is a big

sacrifice”. *Family interconnectedness*, a second subscale, is composed of five items including, for example “A person should cherish time spent with his or her relatives”. A third scale, *family honor*, is made up of four items such as “A person should feel ashamed if something he or she does dishonors the family name”. The fourth scale, *subjugation of self* for the family consists of three items, such as “A person should be a good person for the sake of his or her family” for example. The internal consistency reliability for the overall scale was high in the current sample ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Ethnic Identity.** Data was originally gathered assessing for ethnic identity by using shortened 12-item version of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Sellers et al., 1998). However, for the purposes of the present study, only 9 items assessing for centrality and private regard were used together to assess for ethnic identity as these two components have been shown to be particularly important in the internalization of heritage-cultural values (Knight et al., 2011; Sellers et al., 1998). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) indicating the degree to which individuals endorse items such as “I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group” or “In general, being a member of my ethnic group is an important part of my self-image” indicative of centrality, and items such as “I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments” or “I have a strong attachment to other people in my ethnic group”, indicating private regard. The 9 items displayed high internal reliability in the current sample ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

**Peer Discrimination.** A 21-item discrimination measure developed by Rosenblum and Way (2004) was used to assess experiences of peer discrimination in

school. Adolescents reported on the frequency with which they experienced different instances of discrimination on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all the time*). Sample items include “How often do you feel that other students in school call you names because of your ethnicity?” and “How often do you feel that other students in school expect that you will get bad grades because of your race or ethnicity?” A mean score of total discrimination was generated for each participant. The scale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Greene et al. 2006) and displayed high internal reliability in the current sample ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

**School Belonging.** The 18-item Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale was used to measure adolescents’ sense of belonging to their school via both their perception of being accepted by teachers and peers and their individual sense of comfort and pride for their school (Goodenow, 1993). Adolescents reported on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*completely true*). Sample items regarding teachers and peers include “I am treated with as much respect as other students” and “Other students at this school take my opinions seriously”, and items regarding comfort and pride include “I feel like a real part of my school” and “I feel proud of belonging to this school.” The scale showed adequate reliability in the current sample ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Parent–Child Conflict and Warmth and Support.** Three items from the NRI-Relationship Qualities Version (NRI-RQV) (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985) measuring parent–child conflict were used. Participants rated the frequency of conflict with their mother and father separately on Likert scales ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The

items included were: “How often do you and this person disagree or quarrel with each other?” “How often do you and this person get mad at or get in fights with each other?” and “How often do you and this person argue with each other?” The items were averaged to represent conflict with parents overall. The scale has shown adequate psychometric properties (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) and the three items selected for both mothers and fathers were internally reliable in the current sample ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

To measure parent-child warmth and support, six Items from the NRI-Relationship Qualities Version (NRI-RQV) (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985) were used for both mothers and fathers. Again, the Likert rating scale was applied and sample items included “How much does this person have a strong feeling of affection (loving or liking) toward you?” “How often do you depend on this person for help, advice, or sympathy?” and “How often do you turn to this person for support with personal problems?”. The items were averaged again to represent warmth and support from both parents, and the six items for both mothers and fathers were internally reliable ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

### **Plan for Data Analysis**

A hierarchical linear model was employed to capture how portions of the process of acculturation (i.e., experiences within different bioecological microsystems) predict the endorsement of familism in Latino youth. In the first step of the model, demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, nativity status) were entered into the model to control for their effects. In the second step of the model, the individual microsystem, consisting of language use and ethnic identity, was entered into the model. In the third step of the model, the family microsystem, consisting of parent-child warmth and support and

conflict, was entered into the model. Finally, in the fourth step, the school microsystem, consisting of school belonging and perceived peer discrimination, was entered into the model.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### **Descriptive Results**

Diagnostic analyses were conducted and, no instances of collinearity were identified amongst the variables in the model. However, an outlier was identified due to inconsistent responding across several scales. The outlier was removed and the data was re-analyzed to assess for the outlier's influence. Given that the removal of the outlier resulted in significant changes to the results, the survey in question was removed such that the final sample included 179 adolescents.

Correlations, means, and standard deviations among all predictor, control (with the exception of dichotomous variables), and outcome variables are presented in Table 1. Participants in general endorsed relatively high levels of familism across the sample, with an average score of 7.28 ( $SD = 1.50$ ). The sample displayed a slightly greater language-acculturation to English ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) than Spanish ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .95$ ), which is consistent with what previous research has found in samples of immigrant Latino families (e.g., Bacalao & Smokowski, 2007). No significant differences were found between U.S.-born and foreign-born adolescents for any of the predictor or outcome variables. Male participants in the sample reported significantly lower levels of ethnic identity,  $t(179) = -3.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , familism,  $t(179) = -2.02$ ,  $p < .05$ , and English language acculturation,  $t(179) = -5.46$ ,  $p < .001$ . Examining the bivariate relationships, familism

was significantly and negatively correlated with age, peer discrimination, and parent-child conflict, and displayed significant positive associations with English and Spanish-language use, school belonging, parent-child warmth and support, and ethnic identity, which is in line with the aforementioned research and the hypothesized directions of these correlations.

### **Regression Analysis**

A hierarchical linear regression for the endorsement of familism was modeled with the predictors separated into contextual blocks (i.e., individual, family, and school) in order to determine how these factors interact together in a model. The resultant standardized regression coefficients, adjusted  $\Delta R^2$ , and total adjusted  $R^2$  are presented in Table 2.

Once control variables (i.e., age, gender, nativity status) were entered into the model at step 1, the individual block (i.e., ethnic identity, English-language use, Spanish-language use) was entered into the model at step 2. As was hypothesized, the individual block predicted a significant amount of the variance in familism,  $R^2 = .137$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .110$ ,  $F(3, 171) = 7.54$ ,  $p = .000091$ , over and above the variance predicted by the control variables entered at step 1,  $R^2 = .040$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .056$ ,  $F(3, 174) = 3.46$ ,  $p = .018$ . Among the variables comprising the individual block, only ethnic identity ( $\beta = .256$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and English-language use ( $\beta = .227$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significantly associated with familism.

Family variables were entered at the subsequent step, and the block significantly predicted additional variance in familism,  $R^2 = .232$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .100$ ,  $F(2, 169) = 11.55$ ,  $p = .00002$ . Of the two family variables, parent-child warmth and support ( $\beta = .325$ ,  $p <$

.001) was significantly associated with familism, whereas parent-child conflict was not (see Table 2). When the family context variables were entered into the model, the association between English-language use and familism was no longer significant, and only ethnic identity remained significant ( $\beta = .229, p < .01$ ).

Finally, the school context did not predict a significant amount of variance in familism over and above the variance predicted by the previous contexts of influence,  $R^2 = .239, \Delta R^2 = .016, F(2, 167) = 1.80, p = .168$ . Overall, in the final model about 24% of the variance in the endorsement of familism was explained by the predictors, with parent-child warmth and support ( $\beta = .298, p < .001$ ) and ethnic identity ( $\beta = .204, p < .01$ ) remaining significant predictors of familism in the final model.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

This study expands upon previous research on the endorsement of familism in Latino youth by moving beyond the analysis of predictors in isolation and instead analyzing them in conjunction with one another in theoretically relevant blocks guided by a bioecological model of development. As hypothesized, the study provided evidence that more proximal microsystems were more influential on familism endorsement compared to more distal experiences. Specifically, experiences within the individual and family microsystems significantly predicted the endorsement of familism, whereas the school microsystem did not. Nonetheless, the model overall predicted about a quarter of the variance in familism endorsement, suggesting that the variables tested were significant influences on these Latino youths' endorsement of familism. The current findings are in line with Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's (1994) bioecological model, in which the microsystems with the greatest physical and emotional proximity (i.e., individual and family microsystems) hold the greatest influence on an individual's development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Within the individual microsystem, as hypothesized, possessing high levels of ethnic identity (i.e., private regard and centrality) was significantly predictive of higher endorsement of familism. However, contrary to hypotheses, neither English nor Spanish-language use proved to be significant predictors of familism in the final model. Taken

together, the findings indicate that for Latino youth in this sample, language acculturation (or enculturation) proved to be an insufficient predictor for the internalization of familism, and it is really ethnic identity processes that are more closely linked to familism endorsement. This is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Phinney & Ong, 2007, Schwartz et al., 2007) suggesting that language use is often an insufficient proxy variable for the study of acculturation and, in reality, it is the internalization of a resolved ethnic identity that remains central to heritage value internalization and endorsement. These results were particularly striking in light of the sample's overall high level of English-language acculturation ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) which may lead one to believe that participants were highly acculturated to U.S.-culture by the proxy of language. Instead, these results indicate that even though it is likely that recently immigrated Latino youth will invariably learn English (i.e., Smokowski et al., 2008), this does not necessarily dictate the development of a monocultural ethnic orientation towards U.S.-culture as these are likely independent processes taking place within an individual. Therefore, the present study seems to align more with recent research (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2010) proposing that acculturation is a nonuniform process involving many aspects of an individual (i.e., cultural values, practices, language preference) that may be changing at different rates independently of one another. Thus, these results highlight the importance taking a more nuanced contextual approach to the study of acculturation by analyzing acculturative variables in conjunction with one another in order to capture the complex process of acculturation in its entirety.

Within the family microsystem, as hypothesized, high levels of parent-child warmth and support were predictive of the endorsement of familism. These results are consistent with previous research that has found links between warmth and support and familism (Cohen, Holloway, Dominguez-Pareto, & Kuppermann, 2014; Morcillo et al., 2011; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007; Updegraff, Umaña-Taylor, Perez-Brena & Pflieger, 2012). They are also consistent with the manner in which familism has been defined by prior research as consisting of strongly shared feelings of solidarity, reciprocity, support, and loyalty among family members (Sabogal et al., 1987). However, it remains unclear if familial warmth and support are manifestations of familism or whether they provide the necessary foundations under which familism is fostered. Recent research has found mixed results of moderating and indirect effects that familism can have on parental warmth and support, and vice versa (Santiesteban, Coatsworth, Briones, Kurtines, & Szapocznik, 2012; Gamble & Modry-Mandell, 2008). More work is needed to tease apart the relationship and chronicity of these two variables which is beyond the scope of the present study. Nonetheless, the present results suggest that positive family interactions are important contributors to the endorsement of familism values even when controlling for other aspects of the acculturative experience.

Contrary to hypotheses, however, parent-child conflict was not a significant predictor for the endorsement of familism. The latter suggests that regardless of the family's level of conflict, familism is still likely to be endorsed by Latino adolescents in this sample, as evidenced by the sample's overall high levels of familism ( $M = 7.28$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ). This is consistent with previous research that has found evidence for the

endorsement of high levels of familism in the contexts of both low parent-child conflict (Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2010; Bush, Supple, & Lash, 2004) as well as high parent-child conflict (Kuhlberg, Peña, & Zayas, 2010; Hernández, Garcia & Flynn, 2010; Nolle, Gulbas, Kuhlberg, & Zayas, 2012). Therefore, the present study lends further support to the idea that familism represents a value that is separate from family warmth whose endorsement may not be solely dependent on family functioning. In all likelihood, familism involves a more complex mixture of variables and processes that may include adolescent acculturation and familial obligations (Telzer, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2014), as well as economic or emotional needs within the family (Tsai, Telzer, Gonzles, & Fuligni, 2013) that may supersede the effects of positive or negative parent-child relationships.

Also contrary to hypotheses, the school context did not prove to be a significant predictor of the endorsement of familism within this sample. However, the results did lend peripheral support to the hypothesis stemming from the study's bioecological theoretical framework, which proposes that the degree of contextual influence decreases as one extends beyond the individual (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci's, 1994). However, as the bioecological model suggests, this does not mean that the school microsystem holds no bearing on the endorsement of familism for Latino youth in this sample, as both school belonging  $r(179) = .33, p < .001$ , and peer-discrimination,  $r(179) = -.25, p < .001$ , were significantly and moderately correlated bivariately in the expected directions with familism. This may indicate that the predictive variance for familism present in the school microsystem variables may have been shared with other predictors already input into the model at earlier steps, and thus the variance explained by the school microsystem

proved insignificant in the final model potentially due to an underpowered sample size. These results suggest that proximal processes taking place within the individual and the family may be more influential in the endorsement of familism, and how these youth feel within a majority context (i.e., school) may have less of an impact.

Beyond the primary analysis, some surprising results were found within this sample. For example, parent-child warmth and support displayed significantly positive correlations with English-language use but not with Spanish-language use. It is possible that the sample's significantly higher endorsement of English-language items ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) than Spanish-language items ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) indicates that adolescents in the sample tended to be more proficient in English, and thus behaviors indicative of parent-child warmth and support were still carried out despite potential intergenerational differences in Spanish-speaking abilities. These results could also indicate that some English-language items (e.g., "I write (e.g., letters) in English"; "I enjoy reading (e.g., books) in English") may have been assessing the degree to which adolescents were engaging in academic tasks, which research has shown adolescents are more likely to engage in within the context of warm and supportive parenting (Lowe & Dotterer, 2013). This result serves as further evidence that, contrary to what some researchers have found (e.g., Bacallao & Smokowksi, 2007), intergenerational differences in language acculturation may not necessarily connote differences in intergenerational cultural orientation that result in conflict and a lack of support and warmth between parents and their children. Therefore, this result further supports the view that language-use is a limited proxy variable for the study of acculturation.

## **Limitations and Future Directions**

One of the main limitations of this current study is the lack of a longitudinal analysis. Acculturation is a dynamic phenomenon taking place over time, therefore the current study's cross-sectional data falls short of being able to capture its full complexity. A longitudinal analysis would likely have provided a fuller understanding of how different microsystems interact with one another in an acculturating Latino adolescent's life to shape the trajectory of familism endorsement over time. Also the use of qualitative data to complement quantitative data is imperative when dealing with such complex and nuanced phenomena as Latino adolescent acculturation. Such data could have provided some much needed clarity into the attributions that may be driving some of the results. For example, qualitative data may have provided some explanations as to why experiences within the school microsystem did not affect the endorsement of familism as heavily as experiences within the family and individual contexts, which seems to run counter to normative development in which adolescence is a time when school and peers take precedence over one's family. Additionally, qualitative data may have clarified how Latino adolescents in the sample conceptualized their endorsement of familism and ethnic identity in spite of parent-child conflict or a decreased ability to engage with their families due to being more language-acculturated to English. Finally, the current sample displayed limited variability with regards to generation status, as all participants in the study were born to foreign-born parents, which limits the study's ability to generalize the current results to the acculturative experience of 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> generation Latino youth living in more established Latino enclaves in the U.S.

Despite these limitations, this study highlights the importance of trying to analyze the process of Latino adolescent acculturation in more nuanced and comprehensive manner in order to ensure researchers truly capture what they proclaim to be measuring. Future acculturation research should move away from either analyzing acculturation via proxy variables (e.g., nativity status, language) or analyzing single predictors in isolation from one another in such a way that fails to encapsulate the full complexity of the process. By moving away from these traditional methods of acculturation research, our findings could help direct research towards gaining a clearer understanding of this complicated construct.

### **Clinical and Research Implications**

Results from the present study provide some interesting implications for clinical practice when working with Latino adolescents in emerging communities. For example, given that the sample's overall high level of English-language acculturation was accompanied by high endorsement of both familism and ethnic identity, it is important that clinicians do not make assumptions about individuals' levels of acculturation based solely on language use. Furthermore, given that familism and a resolved ethnic identity have been well-documented as protective values for Latino youth against psychosocial maladjustment (Umaña-Taylor, Updegraff, & Gonzales-Backen, 2011), it is important for clinicians to understand that language-acculturated youth may still endorse these values, or in the very least may be struggling to resolve them in light of acculturative pressures. Finally, given the overall significance within the sample of both the individual and family contexts in relation to the endorsement of familism, it may be important for clinicians to

find ways to foster these values in therapy and to employ approaches to treatment that involves the family as well (i.e., Interpersonal Therapy, Family Systems Theory). Furthermore, schools should implement practices and events that aim to incorporate family involvement and cooperation in order to foster greater opportunities for familism among immigrant Latino families as well as lowering potential inter-generational conflict among parents and their children through cooperation and supportive interactions related to school.

### **Conclusion**

The current study highlights the importance of individual and family processes to the endorsement of familism among Latino adolescents living in immigrant families in the U.S. Specifically, the current sample indicated that achieving an established sense of ethnic identity and living within a family context in which parents and children share a warm and supportive relationship are particularly important to the endorsement of familism. The study also serves as further evidence that language is a poor proxy variable for understanding an individuals' level of acculturation, echoing previous research calling for a deeper understanding of the complexity and multifaceted nature of the acculturative process. Given that acculturation can be a particularly difficult process for immigrant Latino adolescents and their families, it is my hope that future research analyzes the process in manner that captures its complexity in full, leading to a more nuanced understanding of acculturation that could inform intervention and treatment aimed at aiding individuals navigating this process

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APPENDIX A

TABLES

*Table 1*

*Hierarchical Linear Regression of Predictor Variables on Familism (n = 180)*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Variable	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Age	-.168*	-.158*	-.102	-.078
Gender	-.116	.039*	-.014	-.008
Nativity Status	.059	.039	.054	.052
Ethnic Identity		.256***	.229**	.204**
English-language use		.227**	.117	.078
Spanish-language use		.018	-.018	-.010
Family Conflict			-.054	-.027
Family Warmth/Support			.325***	.298***
Peer Discrimination				-.099
School Belonging				.081
$\Delta R^2$	.056*	.110***	.100***	.016
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.040	.137	.232	.239

Note: \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 2

*Summary of Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	-								
2. English Language Use	-.076	-							
3. Spanish Language Use	.089	.121	-						
4. School Belonging	-.231**	.430***	-.069	-					
5. Conflict	.130	-.067	-.004	-.167*	-				
6. Warmth and Support	-.138	.299***	.150*	.338***	-.246**	-			
7. Ethnic Identity	-.102	.134	.271***	.254***	-.010	.120	-		
8. Familism	-.199**	.262***	.093	.333***	-.152*	-	.300***	-	
9. Peer Discrimination	.225***	-.173*	.092	-	.253**	.411***	-.205**	-.087	-
Mean	14.01	4.45	3.75	3.76	2.14	3.83	4.29	7.28	1.57
Std. Deviation	1.34	.55	.95	.61	.69	.87	.80	1.48	.71

Note: \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$