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Puerto Rican Early Adolescents' Self-Esteem Patterns

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Abstract

This study examines self-esteem as a multidimensional construct in 1 Latino subgroup, Puerto Rican girls and boys during early adolescence, using Harter's (1985b) Self-Perception Profile for Children. The results show that in its English and Spanish versions—the latter developed by the present research team—the Self-Perception Profile for Children has adequate reliability for use with 13- to 14-year-old Puerto Rican youth living on the mainland. Results obtained in this study of Puerto Rican early adolescents, which contrasts with the results from the combined data of "Hispanics" in the American Association of University Women (1991) survey of 3,000 youth, strongly suggests that Latino subgroups need to be studied separately. The mean levels of self-esteem found among Puerto Rican girls and boys were generally similar to those found among Harter's sample of predominantly Anglo middle school students from the suburbs of Denver except that Puerto Rican youth did not show gender differences in overall self-esteem. Gender differences in mean levels of self-esteem in different domains were similar to those of Anglo youth, regardless of the Puerto Rican youth's individual level of psychological or behavioral acculturation. When differences by acculturation emerged, psychological acculturation appeared to play a more protective role for girls (Hispanic- or Latino-oriented girls reported being better behaved and having greater confidence in their scholastic abilities) and behavioral acculturation operated as a risk factor for boys (boys with preference for English reported low Behavioral Conduct and Scholastic Competence scores). On the other hand, greater acculturation (both psychological and behavioral) was associated with girls' lower confidence in their physical attractiveness. Finally, the structure of self-esteem varied by gender, and psychological and behavioral acculturation.

There has been much academic and popular interest in gender differences in self-esteem among middle-school-age adolescents (see American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1991; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Orenstein, 1994; Phillips & Zimmerman, 1990; Pipher, 1994). Although some research has indicated that both boys and girls maintain their self-esteem during the adolescent years (Hirsch & Dubois, 1991; Marsh & Gouvenet, 1989), other studies have found that many girls' self-regard declines beginning in early adolescence (AAUW, 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 1990; Phillips & Zimmerman, 1990). In this article, we examine patterns in levels of self-

esteem among mainland Puerto Rican girls and boys during early adolescence, using the multidimensional approach to measuring self-esteem developed by Harter (1985b). We compare the findings from our sample of 13- to 14-year-old Puerto Rican youth from the greater Boston area with Harter's primarily Anglo, eighth-grade sample from the Denver suburbs. Additionally, we investigate whether acculturation, as suggested by Gibbons, Brusi-Figueroa, and Fisher (1997), and Martinez (1988), is related to the observed patterns of self-esteem.

Research on self-esteem has focused primarily on White (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan et al., 1990; Harter, 1985, 1990; Phillips & Zimmerman, 1990) and, to some extent, African American samples (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972; see also Simmons, Brown, Bush, & Blyth, 1978). Information regarding Latino adolescents' self-esteem had been missing until the publication of the AAUW-sponsored survey (1991) described in *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*. This study of 3,000 students, between Grades 4 and 10 at 12 sites nationwide, measured self-esteem using evaluative statements indicating satisfaction with the self in general and also with competencies in specific areas such as academics. One of the widely quoted results of this study (e.g., Schuster, 1991) showed a 38% difference between elementary and high school Hispanic girls responding "always true" to the item "I am happy the way I am," compared with a 33% difference for White girls and a 7% difference for African American girls. Although with White girls the largest disparity in general self-esteem scores was observed between elementary and middle school, among Hispanic girls, the largest discrepancy was between middle school and high school girls. The AAUW (1991) study found a general pattern of lower self-esteem scores among middle and high school boys as well, but not to the same extent of that observed among White and Hispanic girls. Hispanic boys' self-esteem scores were not as high as those of African American boys, but were higher than those of White boys and higher than those of Hispanic girls.

A major difficulty with interpreting the AAUW (1991) findings lies with the term "Hispanic." That is, to whom are the findings on Hispanics applicable? Latinos encompass considerable diversity across, as well as within, different Spanish-speaking subgroups on the mainland. The designation of Hispanic lumps together white-collar and professional Cubans who arrived in the United States following the Cuban revolution and the marginally employed Cubans who came with the Mariel boat lift in the 1980s; Central American refugees; Mexican American migrant workers; Spanish-speaking residents of the Southwest (who have populated the area since the arrival of the early Spanish colonizers in the 1600s); Latin Americans, who come from differing mixtures of indigenous, African, and European origins; and Puerto Ricans with their own internal diversity and frequency of immigration to and from the mainland. There is large variation among different Latino subgroups with respect to income, marital status, sexual attitudes, fertility patterns, health status, school completion, and women's participation in the labor force (see, e.g., Darabi, 1987; Oboler, 1995; Schur, Bernstein, & Minkler, 1987). In view of the diversity within and across Latino subgroups, Hispanic is not a meaningful research population without further delineation into national-origin based subgroups or by important demographic and social stratification variables such as education, recency of immigration, urbanization of residence, socioeconomic class, education, or occupation. There is a clear need for normative data on different Latino subgroups

Thus, the goal of this study is to measure self-esteem as a multidimensional construct in one Latino subgroup, Puerto Rican girls and boys during early adolescence, using a well-established instrument. Harter's (1985b) Self-Perception Profile for Children incorporates a multidimensional approach to measuring self-esteem and has established acceptable psychometric properties with respect to both reliability and validity.

Harter (1988a, 1990) has provided a theoretical background to her multidimensional approach to self-esteem that is grounded in James's (1892) notion that self-evaluations are influenced by one's self-perceived competencies in important domains. Harter (1990) distinguished between evaluations of specific domains of competence, on the one hand, and global self-evaluation on the other. Marsh and Gouvenet (1989), and Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, and Rosenberg (1995), concurred with Harter on both that global self-esteem and competence in specific domains cannot serve as surrogates for one another, and that overall self-esteem and competencies in specific domains are interrelated.

As James (1892) maintained over a century ago, a general sense of self-worth is derived from self-judged competencies in the domains that a person views to be important components of the self. He referred to self-esteem as the ratio of one's *successes* over one's *pretensions*. That is, people who are successful in domains they deem important will have high self-esteem. For example, James's formula suggests that a boy who believes it is important to excel academically but perceives himself to be doing poorly in school will have a lower overall self-esteem than a classmate who also values academic excellence but judges herself to be an academic success. Conversely, another boy who does not see getting good grades as important, and who is, in fact, failing in school may have high self-esteem if he judges himself to be good in other domains he deems important such as physical appearance or athletic ability.

This approach to self-esteem not only identifies different dimensions but also suggests the presence of an overall sense of self-worth. In this article, following Harter (1985a), James (1982), and Rosenberg et al. (1995), we make a distinction between the global sense of self-confidence and self-evaluations on specific dimensions of competence. Unless otherwise specified, we use the terms *self-esteem*, *self-confidence*, *self-worth*, and *positive self-regard* interchangeably, referring to a *global* or overall sense of one's worth. We identify the specific domains (or dimensions) of competence by the names Harter (1985b) has given them—for example, athletic competence, behavioral conduct, or physical appearance.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SELF-ESTEEM

Studies of gender differences in self-esteem during early adolescence have generally, but not exclusively (see Hirsch & Dubois, 1991), shown boys to have higher overall self-esteem than girls (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Nottelman, 1987; Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). With respect to specific domains of competence, however, research shows that prevalent gender stereotypes play a role in whether boys or girls excel on a particular dimension. Boys report greater self-confidence in traditionally male-identified domains such as athletics, and girls show greater confidence in traditionally feminine domains such as literature and reading (Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Wigfield et al., 1991). Harter's (1985b) findings also support the role of prevalent gender stereotypes in gender differences in self-esteem. For her middle school sample (Grades 6 to 8), she reports a general, if weak, effect favoring boys in Global Self-Worth and gender effects in specific domains, which follow the outlines of the dominant gender role ideologies prevalent in mainstream American culture (see Bern, 1985; Boldizar, 1991; Meece, 1987): Whereas boys report greater levels of confidence in athletics and physical appearance, girls report higher scores on being well-behaved.

Because Harter worked with predominantly lower to upper middle class White adolescents in suburban Denver, it is not known whether the pattern of mean gender differences she observed are evidenced among other socioeconomic and racial or ethnic groups. Erkut, Marx, Fields, and Sing (1999) conducted an exploratory study of 161 seventh- and eighth-grade girls from four racial or ethnic groups using Harter's (1988b) Self-Perception Profile

for Adolescents. Erkut, Marx, et al.'s research with African American, White, Chinese American, and Puerto Rican girls noted that girls from diverse socioeconomic and racial or ethnic backgrounds display different patterns of strength in the dimensions of self-esteem. For example, African American girls scored the highest on the Social Acceptance and Scholastic Competence dimensions of self-esteem, whereas White and Chinese American girls rated themselves the highest on the Close Friendships dimension. Moreover, for African American girls, Global Self-Worth was most closely related to their Scholastic Competence ratings, for Chinese American girls to Close Friendships, and for White and Puerto Rican girls to Physical Appearance. Unfortunately, the number of Puerto Rican girls in the study were too few ($n = 19$) to lend confidence to the reliability of the patterns observed in this subsample.

ACCULTURATION

Research on gender differences in self-esteem among mainland Puerto Rican early adolescents has been lacking. On the other hand, Gibbons et al.'s (1997) research among island-dwelling Puerto Rican adolescents' gender-related ideals is germane to a discussion of gender differences in dimensions of self-esteem. The researchers studied 417 adolescents, between the ages 12 and 16 ($M = 13.4$, $SD = 1.03$), from two public and two private schools on the western part of the island. Participants were asked to rate 40 characteristics of the ideal man or woman. The results of principal components analyses showed the emergence of two distinct dimensions that they labeled Sociable Personality and Physically Attractive.

The Sociable Personality dimension encompassed items related to traditional Puerto Rican values: proper personal conduct and respectful attitudes toward others (*respeto*). This dimension is similar to Harter's (1985b) Behavioral Conduct domain of self-esteem. The Physical Attractiveness dimension contained items related to appearance, which makes it similar to Harter's (1985b) Physical Appearance domain but it was also broader in scope. It included characteristics associated with being an appealing person, for example, having fun, being modern, popular, sexy, or romantic. The researchers noted that the Physical Attractiveness dimension encompasses characteristics more closely associated with mainland United States values. Although Puerto Rican early adolescents rated this dimension as less important than the Sociable Personality, they did see it as more important for the opposite, rather than the same, gender ideal.

Gibbons et al. (1997) also found that boys attending private schools assigned less importance to qualities associated with the more traditional Sociable Personality, especially when describing the ideal man. They suggested that this finding points to a possible interplay among gender, gender ideals, socioeconomic status, and acculturation—the latter referring to espousing traditional Puerto Rican versus mainland values. The implication of the results of this study to the present work on mainland Puerto Rican youth is that Behavioral Conduct scores may be negatively related to acculturation. That is, the more acculturated to the mainland ways they become, the less Puerto Rican boys and girls will uphold values associated with the traditional values of proper conduct and respect.

The interplay between a traditional Puerto Rican cultural orientation versus a mainland orientation has been incorporated into some studies of mainland Puerto Ricans' self-esteem. Martinez (1988) studied 367 mainland Puerto Rican college students' self-esteem, acculturation, and skin tone, but he did not report any gender differences. His results showed that a bicultural orientation, in which the individual embraces and synthesizes both the Puerto Rican and Anglo cultures, is the best predictor of general self-esteem. Martinez interpreted his finding that a bicultural orientation is associated with high self-esteem in terms of a bicultural orientation allowing individuals to stay connected to their cultures of

origin and to be nurtured by that connection while being able to effectively negotiate life in mainstream Anglo society.

In our research on mainland Puerto Rican early adolescents (Puerto Rican Adolescents Study; PRAS) reported here, we have operationalized two dimensions of acculturation to examine if patterns of self-esteem are related to differences in acculturation. The first is psychological acculturation, measured by a 10-item scale that taps the cultural identification with, and perceived competence in, cultures (Tropp, Erkut, García Coll, Alarcón, & Vázquez García, 1999; described more fully in the Methods section). The second is behavioral acculturation. We have used an unobtrusively measured proxy for behavioral acculturation as the adolescent's preference to be interviewed in Spanish or in English. The rationale for using language of interview as a measure of behavioral acculturation is that facility in the host country language gives an indication of extent of exposure to the Anglo or American culture that is mediated by language. Indeed, many of the current multidimensional models of acculturation include language use (Burnam, Hough, Karno, Telles, & Escobar, 1987; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; Keefe & Padilla, 1987).

In the foregoing review of the pertinent literature, we emphasized the need to consider self-esteem data from different Latino subgroups separately. This raises doubts about the validity of the gender differences obtained on Latinos lumped together as an undifferentiated group. We also brought up the issue that self-esteem is a multifaceted construct and should be examined through using a multidimensional measure. Next, we examined gender differences in dimensions of self-esteem among Puerto Rican and Anglo adolescents. We also proposed the possibility that acculturation moderates differences in dimensions of self-esteem among Puerto Rican young adolescents.

The hypotheses we propose to test are (a) Puerto Rican adolescents who are more acculturated to mainland culture will exhibit patterns in mean levels of self-esteem in its different dimensions that are similar to the patterns found among Anglo youth, and (b) the behavioral conduct dimension of self-esteem is negatively related to acculturation to mainland culture. We also examine the joint influence of gender and acculturation on mean levels of self-esteem as well as on the structure of correlations among dimensions of competence and general self-esteem.

METHODS

Participants

A total of two hundred and forty eight 13- and 14 year-old Puerto Rican adolescents (128 girls and 120 boys) living in the Greater Boston area participated in a longitudinal interview study along with their primary caregivers. The data reported here are from the adolescents who participated in the first wave of data collection, which were comparable in age to Harter's (1985b) sample. The demographic profile of the girls and boys in the sample is presented in Table 1. Their average age was 13.4. At the time of the interview they were distributed in Grades 6 through 9. Forty-six percent of the girls and 34% of the boys in the sample were born in Puerto Rico.

Participants were recruited as a family unit (adolescent and caregiver) by a mixed recruitment or referral strategy through schools, neighborhood health clinics, and other social service agencies serving Puerto Ricans, youth organizations, and door-to-door screening in Puerto Rican neighborhoods. The mixed strategy yielded a pool of 302 families that met the screening criteria—an adolescent in the family age 13 or 14 at the time of the interview who self-identified as Puerto Rican or had at least one parent born in Puerto Rico, and was able to hear and understand interview questions and able to see and read answer

cards. Of the 302 eligible families enumerated, 96% volunteered to take part in the study. However, among the volunteer families, two moved before interviews could be scheduled, and 33 families (11% of those eligible) eventually withdrew their consent, actively or passively, after more than 10 missed and canceled appointments. Additionally, we were not able to interview both the adolescent and his or her caregiver in five families. In our first wave of data collection we have self-esteem data from 248 adolescents. Thus, we can claim a volunteering rate of 96% and a final, full participation rate of 86% among the adolescents. The high volunteering rate suggests that the sample is not self-selected, hence we can make reasonable claims for external validity (see Erkut, García Coll, & Alarcón, 1999). Moreover, in Boston, where 78% of the sample lived, fully 21 % of the city's eligible 13- to 14-year-old Puerto Rican youth participated in the study. This 21% inclusion rate lends confidence to the assertion that the self-selection bias is minimal. However, the lower (but still high) full participation rate suggests that the results obtained might be somewhat less representative of the Puerto Rican youth whose families have highly erratic, unpredictable schedules.

The families of the adolescents in the sample are similar to the Puerto Rican population nationwide with respect to living in households headed by a single parent—48.4% nationwide (Current Population Survey, 1994) and 51% of the sample—and Puerto Rican children under 18 living in poverty—51% nationwide (Montgomery, 1994) and 45% of the sample.

Procedures

Trained bilingual and bicultural interviewers conducted 1-hr structured, face-to-face interviews in the adolescents' homes. Participants were given a choice of being interviewed in Spanish or in English (40% chose Spanish and 60% chose English). Adolescents received \$10 for their participation.

Instrument

The data were collected by means of a questionnaire set that included sociodemographic questions, experiences with family and peers, ethnicity, acculturation, risky behaviors, and two scales developed by Harter (1985b). These were the Self-Perception Profile for Children and the accompanying scale for rating the importance of each domain.

The Self-Perception Profile for Children is a 36-item scale that taps domain-specific judgments of competence in five separate subscales: scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct, plus a scale of global self-worth. The items are rated in a structured format in which the respondent first chooses which of the two types of kids he or she is most like, then decides whether this likeness is "sort of" or "really" true. The responses are scored on a 4-point scale in which 1 indicates the lowest level of competence and 4 indicates the highest.

The Scholastic Competence subscale taps respondents' perception of competence in doing class work and how smart or intelligent they feel in school. Social Acceptance measures perceptions of how well they are accepted by peers and whether they feel popular. Athletic Competence taps perceptions of their competence in sports and athletic activity. The subscale of Physical Appearance measures happiness with their looks, body image, and perceptions of attractiveness. Behavioral Conduct measures perceptions of individual behavior, such as whether kids like the way they behave, do the right thing, act the way they are supposed to, and avoid getting into trouble. Finally, Global Self-Worth is a separate subscale, which measures the overall global judgment of personal worth, instead of competence in specific domains. This subscale taps the extent to which respondents like themselves, are happy with the way they are leading their lives, and their general happiness.

The reason we chose the children's version of the Self-Perception Profile for this sample of 13- and 14 year-olds, rather than the adolescent version, was the unacceptably low internal consistency estimates obtained on several subscales from a small sample of Puerto Rican seventh- and eighth-grade girls using the adolescent version (Erkut, Marx, et al., 1999). Moreover, the adolescent version includes two subscales, Romantic Appeal and Job Competence, which pretesting revealed to be tapping behavior not relevant to 13- and 14-year-olds' lives.

Importance scales provide data for interpreting the relation between domains of self-esteem and global self-worth. Based on James's (1892) notion that people who are successful in domains they deem important will have high self-esteem, other things being equal, Global Self-Esteem scores will be more closely associated with scores on specific domains rated by participants as important compared to domains rated as low in importance. When there is a mismatch between the importance rating of a dimension and its correlation with Global Self-Worth, there is the likelihood of a conflict in how important a dimension ought to be and how important it is to one's self-worth. For example, Erkut, Marx, et al. (1999) found, in focus group discussions, that White girls in middle school disavowed the importance of physical appearance as a determinant of one's self-esteem. However, the correlation between their Global Self-Worth scores and ratings on Physical Appearance was very high, $r = .82, p < .01$. These findings were interpreted as an indication of a conflicted attitude toward physical appearance among White girls—the conflict of publicly acknowledging that looks are superficial, hence unimportant, but privately believing that looking good is essential to liking one's self.

The English and Spanish versions of the interview protocol were prepared using the dual-focus approach to creating and adapting bilingual or bicultural instruments (Erkut, Alarcón, et al., 1999). In this approach, a bilingual or bicultural research team, whose members include researchers indigenous to the cultures being studied, jointly decide on the conceptual bases and operational definitions of the constructs to be measured and generate items simultaneously in both languages that are equivalent in level of difficulty, affect, and clarity. The questions are then evaluated in successive groups of bilingual and monolingual informants (from the specific linguistic or cultural group from which the sample will be drawn) who provide feedback for revisions. The final version is achieved when the last group of informants and the researchers are satisfied that the two language versions are conceptually and linguistically equivalent.

The same approach is used when adapting scales originally developed in English to arrive at conceptual and linguistic equivalence with respect to language of the group being studied. In the case of Harter's (1985b) Self-Perception Profile for Children, knowing the age range of the sample to be 13- to 14-year-olds, we rendered *kids* not as *niños* but as *muchachos* or *muchachas*. Similarly, we rendered *trouble* as *problemas* because we saw it as more age-appropriate than *travesuras*, which actually implies *mischief* in English. Moreover, we rendered the words *true for me* in the answer format, which reads, "Really true for me" and "Sort of true for me" as *Se parece a mí*, even though *Verdadero para mí*, would be a more literal translation. The Spanish answer format we used became *Se parece mucho a mí* and *Se parece un poco a mí*, which we believe was a less awkward rendition in the vernacular. The internal consistency estimates showed the Spanish and English versions to be nearly identical (with one exception), which suggests that the Spanish measure we developed was adequate to the task. The exception was the Spanish version of the Social Acceptance subscale, which had an estimated alpha coefficient of .58. Eliminating the weakest item (have many friends/*liene muchas amistades*) did not improve the estimate beyond .58. Respondents who completed the Spanish version scored an average of 3.3 on this question (compared to 3.0 on the English), creating a ceiling effect whereby information from this

item did not enhance the Spanish subscale's internal coherence. Therefore, we do not view this to be a problem of linguistic nonequivalence. Rather, it suggests a need for future research to incorporate items into a self-esteem measure that is more likely to elicit response variability among Puerto Rican youth.

Harter (1985b) reported the internal consistency estimates (alpha coefficients) for each of the six subscales on her Sample B as ranging from .77 to .86. Sample B was composed of 193 girls and 197 boys in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, which is the sample closest in grade level to our sample of two hundred and forty eight 13- and 14-year-olds. Harter reported that approximately 90% of the youth in her samples were Whites, drawn from primarily lower middle class to upper middle class neighborhoods in Denver (p. 12). Even though our sample is Puerto Rican and the majority comes from families in the lower income brackets, the internal consistency estimates for the six subscales are acceptable (.67 to .78), in that the alpha estimates are near or above the traditional cutoff of .7 (see DeVellis, 1991; Nunnally, 1978).

The 10-item Psychological Acculturation Scale (PAS) created for this study (Tropp et al., 1999) was used to measure psychological acculturation. It is a measure of self-perceived identification with, and competence in, Hispanic or Latino and Anglo or American cultures. The English and Spanish versions of the scale were prepared using the dual-focus approach to creating and adapting bilingual or bicultural instruments (Erkut, Alarcón, et al., 1999) previously described. Estimates of internal consistency range between .83 and .90 in its Spanish and English versions. The construct validity of the scale was examined through testing specific hypotheses suggested by the acculturation literature regarding the impact of exposure to Anglo culture and greater fluency in English, all of which were confirmed (see Tropp et al., 1999). Sample items include "With which group of people do you feel you share most of your beliefs and values?" and "In your opinion, which group of people best understands your ideas, your ways of thinking?" and are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale along a single dimension: 1 (*Only Hispanic or Latino*), 3 (*Equally Hispanic or Latino and Anglo or American*), 5 (*Only Anglo or American*). Although this scale yields scores that can approximate an interval level of measurement, they can also be recoded to indicate a predominantly Hispanic or Latino orientation (scores less than 2.5), a bicultural orientation (scores between 2.5 and 3.5), and an Anglo or American orientation (scores higher than 3.5). This feature of PAS, which allows respondents to indicate being bicultural by responding "equally Hispanic or Latino and Anglo or American," contrasts with other acculturation scales that measure Hispanic and Anglo orientations separately on two dimensions in which biculturalism is presumed if the respondent gives the same or similar responses on the two dimensions.

We used the preference for English or Spanish as the language of the interview as a proxy measure of behavioral acculturation. Behavioral acculturation is mildly related to psychological acculturation (ϕ coefficient = .22) but is also distinct. Although the average psychological acculturation score of the sample ($M = 2.31$) indicates a more Hispanic or Latino orientation, 60% of the adolescents preferred to complete the interview in English.

RESULTS

Gender Differences

Table 2 presents the means and within-group t tests for each of the dimensions of self-esteem and of global self-worth for the Puerto Rican girls and boys. The Puerto Rican youth's highest scores are on Global Self-Worth (overall $M = 3.15$, $SD = .63$) in which there are no significant gender differences. Significant differences favoring boys are found on Social Acceptance, $t = 2.71$, $p < .01$, Athletic Competence, $t = 7.59$, $p < .0001$, and Physical

Appearance, $t = 3.15, p < .05$. Behavioral Conduct is the only dimension on which girls had significantly higher scores than boys, $t = 1.98, p < .05$.

Harter (1985b) also found gender differences favoring boys in Athletic Competence and Physical Appearance and favoring girls in Behavioral Conduct. Figure 1 illustrates that the patterns in both the levels of esteem on each dimension and mean gender differences in the Puerto Rican sample are similar to Harter's Sample B. The Puerto Rican girls' and boys' Global Self-Worth are slightly higher (3.10 and 3.21 for girls and boys, respectively) than their Anglo counterparts (2.97 and 3.13), but the differences are not significant. The only significant differences between the two samples are that the girls in our sample scored significantly higher than did the Harter girls in Scholastic Competence, $t = 2.23, p < .05$, and the boys in our sample scored significantly higher than did the Harter boys in Physical Appearance, $t = 2.37, p < .05$.

As predicted from James's (1892) theory of self-esteem, high correlations between global self-worth and scores on dimensions of self-esteem corresponded with high importance ratings respondents gave each dimension (see Table 3). Among the girls, physical appearance and behavioral conduct were the dimensions most strongly related to global self-worth, $r = .62, p < .001$, and $r = .69, p < .001$, respectively. For girls, the domains that received the highest importance ratings were Scholastic Competence ($M = 3.41$) and Behavioral Conduct ($M = 3.24$). On the other hand, Physical Appearance, which had a strong correlation with Global Self-Worth for girls, received the lowest importance rating of all five dimensions ($M = 2.12$). Among the boys, Scholastic Competence and Behavioral Conduct were the most strongly related to Global Self-Worth, $r = .59, p < .001$, and $r = .53, p < .001$, respectively. For boys, these strong correlations correspond with the high ratings they gave to the importance of Scholastic Competence ($M = 3.25$) and Behavioral Conduct ($M = 3.07$).

Acculturation

The general hypothesis regarding acculturation was that Puerto Rican adolescents who are more acculturated to mainland culture will exhibit mean levels of self-esteem that are similar to those found among Anglo youth. We tested this hypothesis using two operationalizations of acculturation: psychological and behavioral.

Psychological acculturation—The mean psychological acculturation score for the Puerto Rican sample was a 2.31 ($SD = .62$), indicating a more Hispanic or Latino orientation. We divided the sample into two groups such that those scoring less than 2.5 on the Psychological Acculturation scale were classified as having a Hispanic or Latino orientation and those with scores 2.5 and above having a bicultural orientation. Because there were only six respondents who could be classified as predominantly Anglo or American (a score of 3.5 and above), their information was included in the bicultural group. Table 4 presents the mean scores on each of the dimensions of self-esteem, as well as global self-worth, by gender and by both psychological and behavioral acculturation. These means show gender to be the source of differences in Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, and Physical Appearance, all of which favor boys, and Behavioral Conduct, which favors girls. These differences by gender and psychological acculturation generally follow the mean levels of self-esteem revealed by the gender analyses in Table 2. However, testing for the main effects of both gender and acculturation (as well as any interaction effects) suggests more refined distinctions. For example, a difference in Scholastic Competence emerges between girls who have a Hispanic or Latino orientation ($M = 2.99$) and bicultural boys ($M = 2.67$). There is a main effect of both gender and psychological acculturation in Physical Appearance (but no interaction effects). The main effects, which are additive, are evidenced

by the very low scores of bicultural girls that differ¹ significantly from the other three groups and in Behavioral Conduct, in which the high mean score of the Hispanic- or Latino-oriented girls differs significantly from the other three groups.

Behavioral acculturation—The findings from Behavioral Acculturation, measured by preference to be interviewed in Spanish or in English, were similar to those obtained by examining gender effects by psychological acculturation with minor differences. When the sample was divided by language preference, the gender difference in Scholastic Competence became nonsignificant. The gender difference that favors boys on Social Acceptance is due to the significant gender difference between boys and girls among those who prefer Spanish, with the boys and girls who prefer English falling somewhere in between. The difference on Physical Appearance is related to gender only among those who preferred English: girls with preference for English, $M = 2.74$; boys with preference for English, $M = 3.15$, $F(3, 246) = 4.46$, $p < .01$. Finally, the gender difference favoring girls in Behavioral Conduct is seen to be due primarily to English-preference boys' lower scores.

These data do not support the general hypothesis that Puerto Rican youths who are more acculturated to mainland culture will exhibit mean levels of self-esteem that are similar to those found among Anglo youth because the mean levels are similar regardless of Puerto Rican youths' level of psychological or behavioral acculturation.

The specific hypothesis regarding acculturation is that the behavioral conduct dimension of self-esteem is negatively related to acculturation to mainland culture. The results, which were previously discussed, show that this holds true for girls with respect to a difference in psychological acculturation and holds true for boys with respect to a difference in behavioral acculturation.

Structure of Self-Esteem

We examined potential variation in the structure of self-esteem, as expressed in the correlations of each of the dimensions of self-esteem with global self-worth, due to both psychological and behavioral acculturation and gender (See Table 5). Although the magnitude of the correlation varied slightly, the effect of behavioral acculturation mirrored that of psychological acculturation, therefore we have decided to discuss only the results pertaining to psychological acculturation.

Among the girls with a Hispanic cultural orientation, behavioral conduct, $r = .74$, $p < .001$, and physical appearance, $r = .60$, $p < .001$, were the dimensions most strongly related to global self-worth, with the other three dimensions weakly correlated; whereas for the bicultural girls, only athletic competence was weakly correlated, $r = .29$, $p > .05$, with the other four dimensions being equally strong (from $r = .46$ to $.58$). These correlations are illustrated in Figure 2. Among the Hispanic or Latino boys, as is demonstrated in Figure 3, two findings emerged. One is that the pattern in the magnitude of correlations was similar except that all correlations with Global Self-Worth were higher for boys with a Hispanic cultural orientation than boys who were bicultural. For both groups, the highest correlations were observed for Scholastic Competence and Behavioral Conduct: $r = .66$, $p < .001$, and $r = .57$, $p < .001$, for Hispanic boys; and $r = .51$, $p < .001$, and $r = .49$, $p < .001$, for bicultural boys; respectively. The second finding is that for bicultural boys the correlations between

¹Unfortunately, Harter (1985b) does not report the bivariate correlation among the dimension of self-esteem and global self-worth for Sample B by gender. In the total sample, the correlations suggested a somewhat lessor importance for athletic competence with the remaining four dimensions about equal in strength. The estimated correlations, in descending order, for the entire Sample B were Physical Appearance, $r = .66$; Scholastic Competence, $r = .54$; Behavioral Conduct, $r = .47$; Social Acceptance, $r = .43$; and Athletic Competence, $r = .47$.

Social Acceptance and Physical Appearance with Global Self-Worth are so low as to not be statistically significant, $r = .24$ and $r = .17$, respectively; the corresponding correlations among Hispanic boys are lower relative to the magnitude of the correlations found for the other dimensions but not as low as those found among bicultural boys, $r = .54$, $p < .001$. and $r = .54$, $p < .001$, respectively.

DISCUSSION

This study describes gender-related patterns in dimensions of self-esteem among mainland Puerto Rican early adolescents from the greater Boston area using Harter's (1985b) Self-Perception Profile for Children. The measure proved to have adequate internal consistency in its English and Spanish versions—the latter developed by the present research team. We believe that allowing respondents to choose to complete the Self-Perception profile in English or in Spanish, and the quality of the Spanish version we developed using the dual-focus approach, contributed to the success of the measure in this sample of 13- to 14-year old Puerto Rican youth.

Gender Differences

The results showed that mainland Puerto Rican adolescents generally have high self-esteem and that there were no statistically significant differences between boys and girls in overall self-esteem. This finding suggests that we were correct in our reluctance to accept the results of the AAUW (1991) study that showed Hispanic girls to have lower general self-esteem than Hispanic boys' as generalizable to all Latino subgroups. The general self-esteem of these Puerto Rican middle-school-age girls, with a mean score of 3.1 on a scale of 1 to 4 (in which 4 is the highest score) is not low, and it is not significantly lower than that of their male peers. Our results under-score the importance of studying Spanish-speaking subgroups separately.

We found gender differences in four dimensions of self-esteem. Boys reported greater confidence in their athletic abilities, being socially accepted, and physical appearance, and girls had higher scores on behavioral conduct. Being good at athletics is the domain in which we found the largest gender differences among Puerto Rican adolescents. The same magnitude of gender difference found among Puerto Rican youth, in which boys' athletic competence ratings are much higher than the girls' ratings, was found in Harter's (1985b) Sample B. It appears that similar to Anglo girls studied by Harter 15 years ago, excelling in sports is not an important aspect of contemporary Puerto Rican girls' gender role. Gibbons, Lynn, and Stiles (1997) reported finding boys' greater interest in sports in a cross-national study of youth in Cyprus, the Netherlands, India, and the United States. They also attributed boys' greater athletic interest to widespread gender stereotyping, as did Harter (1985b).

Acculturation

Contrary to the general hypothesis that Puerto Rican youth who are more acculturated to mainland culture will exhibit patterns of self-esteem similar to those found among Anglo youth, the results showed that Puerto Rican youth's self-esteem patterns are very similar to Harter's (1985b) sample regardless of their level of acculturation. In fact, when the sample is divided into two groups by acculturation, the more bicultural respondents and also those who prefer English do not look more similar to Harter's White sample than the full sample does already. The Puerto Rican boys and girls in this study are not very different in terms of the levels of self-esteem, neither in each dimension nor in their patterns of gender differences, when compared to young Anglo adolescents from the suburbs of Denver. As can be seen in Figure 1, the patterning of gender differences are nearly identical for both

Puerto Rican and Anglo adolescents. However, in contrast to Harter, we found no gender differences in Global Self-Esteem.

Basically, both Puerto Rican and Anglo boys give themselves higher Social Acceptance, Physical Appearance, and Athletic Competence ratings, whereas girls rate themselves higher in Behavioral Conduct. The only differences of note are Puerto Rican girls' greater confidence in their scholastic abilities than Anglo girls and Puerto Rican boys' greater confidence in their looks. Puerto Rican boys give themselves significantly higher ratings in physical attractiveness than Anglo boys and both groups of boys see themselves as more attractive than Anglo girls. We speculate that with greater acculturation, Puerto Rican girls may risk approaching the low self-regard in their physical attractiveness that seems to be characteristic of Anglo girls.

The specific hypothesis predicting lower Behavioral Conduct scores among more acculturated adolescents was partially supported. The support is partial because the impact of acculturation differs by type of acculturation and by gender. We found significantly lower Behavioral Conduct scores for Puerto Rican boys who preferred to do the interview in English. Conversely, a more Hispanic or Latino psychological acculturation orientation is associated with higher Behavioral Conduct scores, especially for girls. In other words, becoming more exposed to mainland values through a greater facility in English is a risk factor for boys' perceptions of being well-behaved, whereas remaining closer to a Hispanic or Latino orientation psychologically seems to be a protective factor for girls. On the other hand, we do not know if this is an acknowledgment by the English-preference boys that they, indeed, behave poorly. The way the items are structured in the Self-Perception Profile suggests that more acculturated boys know the standards of proper conduct and rate themselves as not quite living up to that standard. For example, an item in the Behavioral Conduct subscale reads as follows: "Some kids usually do the *right* thing BUT Other kids often *don't* do the right thing" (emphasis in the original). The respondent is asked to indicate which kid he or she is more like. We do not have information on the nature of these standards against which the adolescent is judging himself or herself. Before we can conclude that greater acculturation leads to bad behavior, future research should address whether it is related to external measures of conduct such as engaging in risky behaviors.

The same lack of information on standards against which bicultural Puerto Rican boys judge their academic competence clouds the interpretation of the low self-perceptions of academic competence in this group. Future research should examine if acculturation is indeed associated with lower academic performance among Puerto Rican adolescents.

The Structure of Self-Esteem

The relation between Global Self-Worth and dimensions of self-esteem found for Puerto Rican girls and boys illustrated that "being good" and being a good student are essential aspects of their self-esteem. These findings echo the results obtained by Gibbons et al. (1997) that showed that respectful attitudes toward others and proper personal conduct were the highest rated values among early adolescents on the island. The centrality of proper conduct in this mainland sample and adolescents on the island is further borne out by the fact that the average psychological acculturation score of the sample is closer to the Hispanic or Latino than to the Anglo or American end of the scale.

The findings on the relation between Global Self-Worth, and Behavioral Conduct and Scholastic Competence, were corroborated by the high importance ratings both boys and girls gave to these two domains. Puerto Rican young adolescents who have high self-esteem tend to believe it is important to be well-behaved and to do well in school and see themselves as being well-behaved, good students. In other words, just as James (1892)

predicted, self-esteem is higher among those who see themselves as excelling in domains they deem are important. Conversely, not doing well in a domain deemed unimportant does not affect overall self-esteem. This is evidenced by the pattern wherein the girls did not view Athletic Competence as an important aspect of self-esteem and did not seem to suffer negative consequences from seeing themselves as athletically less competent.

On the other hand, we did observe an exception to importance scores' general pattern of being in line with correlations between Global Self-Worth and dimensions of self-esteem. This concerns girls' contradictory attitudes toward the importance of Physical Appearance. The girls in the sample gave very low importance ratings to Physical Appearance, indicating they believed being good looking is not important for being happy with oneself. However, the correlation between their Global Self-Worth and Physical Appearance ratings was strong, showing that girls who thought they were good looking also gave themselves high self-esteem scores and vice versa. This finding parallels the results of Erkut, Marx, et al. (1999) with White girls who also disavowed the importance of looking good but had highly correlated global Self-Worth and Physical Appearance scores. The self-esteem of Puerto Rican girls on the mainland appears to be tied closely to being attractive yet they have also learned that physical attractiveness is properly regarded as a superficial virtue.

The role played by acculturation in creating conflicted attitudes among girls toward being attractive is supported by our finding that Puerto Rican girls who have a more mainland orientation—both in terms of being bicultural (psychological acculturation) and preferring English (behavioral acculturation)—reported perceiving themselves as less attractive than girls with a more Hispanic or Latino orientation in both psychological and behavioral acculturation. It appears that being acculturated to mainland values is a risk factor for Puerto Rican girls' confidence in their physical appearance. Moreover, a gender-based double standard seems to operate in being attractive and behavioral acculturation. Whereas English-preference Puerto Rican girls give themselves the lowest Physical Attractiveness scores, highest scores are found among boys who prefer English. It appears that exposure to the mainland Anglo culture through greater facility in English is good for boys' confidence in their looks but it is detrimental for girls' confidence.

Finally, we examined whether gender and acculturation jointly played a role in the structure of self-esteem in influencing the pattern of correlations between Global Self-Worth and the other dimensions of competence. The results were similar for psychological and behavioral acculturation so we focused on the gender patterns revealed in the correlations with psychological acculturation. Among boys, the pattern of correlations was generally similar between those who showed a Hispanic and those who showed a bicultural orientation, suggesting a similar underlying structure. However, all correlations obtained on the bicultural sample were lower than those obtained in the Hispanic sample. It appears that the general self-esteem of boys with a Hispanic cultural orientation is tied up with doing well on different domains of competence. The lower correlations found among bicultural boys suggest that, for them, general self-esteem is less dependent on specific competencies. The lowest correlations for bicultural boys were in the domains of Social Acceptance and Physical Attractiveness. Ironically, bicultural boys gave themselves high ratings on these two dimensions. It seems that although they are confident that they are well-liked and good looking, these characteristics do not matter so much for how they feel about themselves in general.

The underlying structure of self-esteem was different for girls with a Hispanic versus a bicultural orientation. The most notable difference was that although the magnitude of correlations was similar for Athletic Competence and Physical Appearance for both groups of girls, and Scholastic Competence and Social Acceptance were higher for bicultural girls,

a divergence was observed on Behavioral Conduct. The Global Self-Worth scores of girls with a Hispanic cultural orientation were highly correlated with Behavioral Conduct. It appears that for girls with a Hispanic orientation, being well-behaved is the most important underlying influence on their general self-esteem, beyond the influence of being attractive, which is also an important influence. This is not so for bicultural girls. Bicultural girls are equally influenced by their competence in academic work, being well-liked, and being attractive, but being well-behaved is second to athleticism in being unimportant to their general self-esteem. Thus, it appears that acculturation influences the structure of self-esteem differently for boys than for girls.

CONCLUSION

The results show that Latino subgroups in the contiguous United States need to be studied separately. During early adolescence, Puerto Rican youth do not show gender differences in overall self-esteem. Other than general self-esteem, their patterns of gender differences are similar to those of Anglo youth, regardless of the Puerto Rican youth's level of psychological or behavioral acculturation. Where differences due to acculturation do emerge, psychological acculturation appears to play a more protective role for girls (Hispanic- or Latino-oriented girls report being better behaved and having greater confidence in their scholastic abilities), and behavioral acculturation operates as a risk factor for boys (English-preference boys report low Behavioral Conduct and Scholastic Competence scores). On the other hand, the dimension of physical attractiveness contradicts these patterns. Greater acculturation (both psychological and behavioral) is associated with lower confidence in girls' physical attractiveness, and behavioral acculturation is associated with higher confidence in boys' physical attractiveness. Finally, both gender and acculturation play a role in influencing the structure of self-esteem, as revealed by the patterns of correlations between global self-worth and different dimensions of competence.

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FIGURE 1.

Mean scores on each of the dimensions of self-esteem for the PRAS Puerto Rican sample ($n = 248$) and the Harter Anglo sample ($n = 142$). *Puerto Rican girls ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .70$) significantly higher than Harter girls ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .68$, $t = 2.23$, $p < .05$). **Puerto Rican boys ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .61$) significantly higher than Harter boys ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .64$, $t = 2.37$, $p < .05$).

FIGURE 2.
Bivariate correlations among the dimensions of self-esteem with global self-worth by psychological acculturation for Puerto Rican girls ($n = 128$).

FIGURE 3.
Bivariate correlations among the dimensions of self-esteem with global self-worth by psychological acculturation for Puerto Rican boys ($n = 119$).

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	Girls^a	Boys^b
Mean age in years	13.4 (<i>SD</i> = .53)	13.4 (<i>SD</i> = .49)
Mean age at migration to mainland	7.3 (<i>SD</i> = 4.1)	5.3 (<i>SD</i> = 4.0)
Born in Puerto Rico	46%	34%
Grades		
6th–7th	30%	40%
8th	51%	40%
9th	17%	14%
Annual family income range		
Less than \$10,000	45%	44%
\$10,000–\$19,999	28%	25%
\$20,000 and up	27%	31%

^a
n = 128.

^b
n = 120.

TABLE 2

Mean Scores on the Dimensions of Self-Esteem and Global Self-Worth by Gender

Dimensions	Girls ^a		Boys ^b		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Scholastic competence	2.92	.70	2.77	.69	1.69	<i>ns</i>
Social acceptance	2.97	.63	3.17	.57	2.71	<.01
Athletic competence	2.46	.60	3.05	.62	7.59	<.0001
Physical appearance	2.80	.73	3.08	.61	3.15	<.002
Behavioral conduct	2.98	.69	2.81	.64	1.98	<.05
Global self-worth	3.10	.65	3.21	.61	1.33	<i>ns</i>

Note. Scale of 1 to 4: Higher mean scores indicate greater self-esteem.

^a
n = 128.

^b
n = 120.

TABLE 3

Sample Bivariate Correlations Among the Dimensions of Self-Esteem and Global Self-Worth by Gender With Corresponding Mean Importance Ratings

Dimensions	Global Self-Worth		Importance Ratings			
	Girls	Boys	Girls		Boys	
	r	r	M	SD	M	SD
Scholastic competence	.450	.592	3.41	.65	3.25	.76
Social acceptance	.385	.386	2.89	.69	2.70	.67
Athletic competence	.269	.479	2.36	.80	2.83	.82
Physical appearance	.619	.379	2.12	.67	2.51	.85
Behavioral conduct	.684	.527	3.24	.73	3.07	.84

Note $n = 248$ All correlations are significant at $p < .001$.

TABLE 4

Mean Ratings on Dimensions of Self-Esteem by Gender, Psychological Acculturation, and Behavioral Acculturation

Psychological Acculturation	Girls		Boys		Overall F Statistic
	Hispanic or Latino (n = 89)	Bicultural (n = 39)	Hispanic or Latino (n = 61)	Bicultural (n = 58)	
Dimensions					
Scholastic competence	2.99 ^a	2.74 ^{a,b}	2.87 ^{a,b}	2.67 ^b	2.89 [*]
Social acceptance	2.94 ^b	2.98 ^b	3.12 ^{a,b}	3.23 ^a	3.20 [*]
Athletic competence	2.46 ^b	2.56 ^b	3.06 ^a	3.06 ^a	17.71 ^{***}
Physical appearance	2.91 ^a	2.63 ^b	3.11 ^a	3.06 ^a	4.68 ^{**}
Behavioral conduct	3.07 ^a	2.78 ^b	2.84 ^{a,b}	2.79 ^b	3.07 [*]
Global self-worth	3.13 ^a	3.01 ^a	3.25 ^a	3.16 ^a	1.20
<i>Behavioral Acculturation</i>	<i>Spanish (n = 64)</i>	<i>English (n = 64)</i>	<i>Spanish (n = 35)</i>	<i>English (n = 84)</i>	
Dimensions					
Scholastic competence	2.86 ^a	2.97 ^a	2.97 ^a	2.67 ^a	2.47
Social acceptance	2.91 ^b	2.98 ^{a,b}	3.22 ^a	3.15 ^{a,b}	3.09 [*]
Athletic competence	2.39 ^b	2.58 ^b	3.08 ^a	3.05 ^a	18.70 ^{***}
Physical appearance	2.92 ^{a,b}	2.74 ^b	2.94 ^{a,b}	3.15 ^a	4.46 ^{**}
Behavioral conduct	3.05 ^a	2.92 ^{a,b}	3.14 ^a	2.69 ^b	5.60 ^{***}
Global self-worth	3.12 ^a	3.07 ^a	3.36 ^a	3.14 ^a	1.76

Note. Means with the same superscript are not significantly different. Psychological Acculturation scores were recoded, in which scores of 1–2.4 indicated a Hispanic or Latino cultural orientation and scores of 2.5 and above indicated a bicultural orientation. Six respondents whose scores were above 3.5, in the Anglo or American range, were included with the bicultural group.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

**** $p < .0001$.

TABLE 5

Sample Bivariate Correlations Among the Dimensions of Self-Esteem and Global Self-Worth by Gender, Psychological Acculturation, and Behavioral Acculturation

Psychological Acculturation	Girls		Boys	
	Hispanic or Latino ^a	Bicultural ^b	Hispanic or Latino ^c	Bicultural ^d
Dimensions				
Scholastic competence	.39***	.57***	.66***	.51***
Social acceptance	.31**	.58***	.54***	.24
Athletic competence	.22*	.29	.56***	.39**
Physical appearance	.60***	.60***	.52***	.17
Behavioral conduct	.74***	.46**	.57***	.45***
Behavioral Acculturation	Spanish ^e	English ^f	Spanish ^g	English ^h
Dimensions				
Scholastic competence	.31*	.61***	.55***	.59***
Social acceptance	.29**	.47***	.53***	.33**
Athletic competence	.30*	.18	.56***	.44***
Physical appearance	.58***	.64***	.62**	.31**
Behavioral conduct	.66***	.69**	.52***	.49***

Note. Psychological Acculturation scores were recoded, in which scores of 1–2.4 indicated a Hispanic or Latino cultural orientation and scores 2.5 and above indicated a bicultural orientation. Six respondents whose scores were above 3.5, in the Anglo or American range, were included with the bicultural group.

^a $n = 89$.

^b $n = 39$.

^c $n = 61$.

^d $n = 58$.

^e $n = 64$.

^f $n = 64$.

^g $n = 35$.

^h $n = 84$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.