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Predictors of Hispanic Adolescents' Academic Aspirations English Proficiency

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PREDICTORS OF HISPANIC ADOLESCENTS' ACADEMIC ASPIRATIONS:  
ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

BY

Yanexy Vera

A Directed Research Project

Submitted to the Faculty of  
Barry University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Specialist in School Psychology

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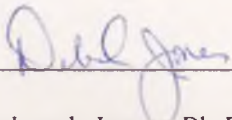
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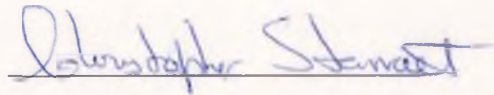
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## Abstract

Hispanic youth have higher high school dropout rates and are less likely to earn a college degree than other minority and majority groups. Identification of the factors that influence Hispanic students' aspirations may elucidate ways to increase postsecondary educational pursuit. This study examined English proficiency, social-evaluative anxiety, and acculturation as primary predictors of students' academic aspirations. Seventy-four middle school students enrolled in English-as-a-Second-Language classes were recruited. Students completed questionnaires on social evaluative anxiety, acculturation, and academic aspirations, and their scores on an English proficiency test were obtained from their school records. Correlation analyses showed a relationship between students' social avoidance/distress and (1) their educational aspirations and (2) preference for speaking Spanish and engaging in Hispanic activities. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses showed that English proficiency, social-evaluative anxiety, and acculturation accounted for 37% of the variance and that parental income and level of education accounted for 49% of the variance when controlling for those factors, but the results were not statistically significant.

## English Language Proficiency as a Predictor of Hispanic Adolescents'

## Educational Aspirations

## Introduction

The Hispanic population in the United States is growing at a rapid pace. As of July, 2006, the United States Census Bureau reported that Hispanics comprise the largest minority group, at 44.3 million or 14.8% of the total population. This trend poses an important problem in terms of the adequate representation of Hispanics in government and in other positions of leadership, particularly when considering that over two out of five Hispanics living in the U.S. aged 25 and older do not have a high school degree and that a very small number of Hispanics (11.1%), as compared with non-Hispanic Whites (29.4%), have Bachelor's degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). In addition, current Hispanic students have higher high school dropout rates and lower high school completion rates than either White non-Hispanic or African American students (Llagas, 2003).

The relationship between Hispanic ethnicity and educational attainment is complicated by the heterogeneity of the Hispanic population in the United States. Hispanic-Americans come from over 20 countries, most notably from Central and South America and the Caribbean, and represent a wide variety of cultures. In addition, the term Hispanic includes people who have emigrated to the U.S. (i.e., first-generation) and their descendants (e.g., second- and third-generation). Therefore, factors that have been studied within this context include extrinsic or environmental factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, parental factors), as well as generational and individual factors (e.g., academic motivation, emotional factors, and language proficiency).

Given the predicted ethnic distribution of the U.S. population and the importance of education in the attainment of social power and social mobility, an analysis of the sources that hinder as well as promote educational attainment in Hispanic-American youth is warranted. The following review of the literature will illustrate that proficiency in the English language has an overarching effect on Hispanic youth's socioemotional adjustment and academic goals. The proposed study seeks to examine the relationship between English language proficiency and the academic aspirations in understudied Hispanic samples (e.g., South Americans and Cubans). In addition, the role of social evaluative anxiety in this relationship will be investigated.

#### *Hispanic Immigrants' Stressors*

Although the experiences of Hispanic immigrants are as diverse as their countries of origin, they do share some of the same issues. Hispanics have higher unemployment rates, earn less, and are more likely to live in poverty than are non-Hispanic Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). In addition to low socioeconomic status, they face psychosocial stressors related to separation from immediate relatives, adaptation to new cultural norms (Izzo, Weiss, Shanahan, & Rodriguez-Brown, 2000), and the experience of trauma during migration (Partida, 1996), including fear of imprisonment and exploitation by authorities (Vega, Kolody, & Valle, 1987) and witnessing the loss of loved ones during dangerous journeys to the United States. Furthermore, a major source of stress for adult Hispanic immigrants is English language acquisition, particularly as it relates to educational aspirations and employability (Buttaro, 2004) and the ability to effectively communicate with their U.S.-born children and their children's teachers (Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff, 2000; Ramirez, 2003).

Immigrant children and adolescents experience many of the same stressors as their adult counterparts, in addition to the challenges typical to their developmental stage. Many immigrant youth are exposed to trauma (Williams & Butler, 2003) and to racial categorization (Perkins, 2000). Additionally, they face the tasks of adjusting to new cultural norms and unfamiliar school environments while simultaneously attempting to engage in the process of socialization with their same-age peers from the host culture (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999). In consequence, immigrant children are at risk for psychological maladjustment, including anxiety (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999; Spomer & Cowen, 2001) and loneliness due to social isolation (Leondari, 2001) as well as behavior problems (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999; Vega, Khoury, Zimmerman, & Gil, et al., 1995), though the latter finding has mixed results (see Spomer & Cowen, 2001).

#### *Academic Achievement of Immigrant Youth*

Given that long-term educational attainment (e.g., post-secondary education) is probably heavily influenced by achievement in the primary and secondary grades, it is disappointing that Hispanic immigrant students have lower academic achievement than both their non-Hispanic immigrant peers and non-immigrant peers. For example, Hispanic ethnicity is related to low academic achievement whereas Asian ethnicity is related to high academic achievement, in fact, Mexican-American students demonstrate the lowest level of achievement and East Asians the highest (Fuligni, 1997; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998).

Studies with immigrant groups in countries other than the United States have also shown that immigrant students generally have lower achievement in school than their



non-immigrant peers but have suggested that there are ethnocultural differences as well. Leondari (2001), for example, found that Russian and Albanian immigrant children residing in Greece had lower achievement than their non-immigrant peers. In addition, a study with Australian immigrant adolescents from twelve countries revealed that adolescents from Greece had the lowest achievement while adolescents from Malaysia had the highest (Marjoribanks, 2004). These results, like those obtained in studies with Hispanic immigrants in the United States, not only suggest that immigrant children are at risk for academic failure but that there are intercultural factors that influence this relationship. In addition to cultural differences, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors may mediate the ethnicity-achievement relationship (Marjoribanks, 2004).

#### *Environmental and Individual Factors Related to Achievement*

According to Bourdieu's Field Theory of educational outcomes (cited in Marjoribanks, 2004) eventual educational attainment depends on the interaction between the child's social environment (i.e., extrinsic factors such as family and social conditions) and his or her individual dispositions. One particular extrinsic variable found to be a major determinant of numerous psychosocial outcomes is socioeconomic status (SES). Not surprisingly, low SES has been associated with low academic achievement among different minority groups (Fuligni, 1997; McLatchie, 1997; Marjoribanks, 2004). Other environmental predictors of achievement include cultural issues (McLatchie, 1997); the school environment (Marjoribanks, 2004); parental factors, such as high expectations and emphasis on education (Fuligni, 1997; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998); and peer value of academics (Fuligni, 1997).

The role of individual factors in the academic achievement of immigrant young people has also been examined. For example, female gender has been associated with higher achievement (Marjoribanks, 2004) in Australia. Studies of Hispanic immigrant samples in the US yielded the same gender effect not for achievement, but for academic expectations and motivation (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). Academic expectations and aspirations, in turn, are individual factors that have predicted academic achievement among Hispanic immigrants (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Marjoribanks, 2004). Other individual factors directly related to immigrant children's achievement include perceived and actual competence in the area assessed, such as in learning a new language (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997; McLatchie, 1997), and generational status (i.e., first- or second-generation immigrant), though findings for the latter vary (see Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Fuligni, 1997; Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003).

### *Educational Aspirations*

#### *Environmental Factors*

That educational aspirations and expectations have been demonstrated to be linked to achievement (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998) and to later attainment is not surprising. However, the relationship between these variables is complex. For example, Marjoribanks (2004) found that educational aspirations had the largest correlation with educational attainment but that achievement continued to be related to attainment even after controlling for aspirations. Furthermore, and most importantly, the strength of the relationship between aspirations and attainment varied across the twelve immigrant groups in Australia that were studied, but the cultural variables that moderated this

relationship were not defined. Perhaps, as has been demonstrated in cross-cultural studies examining achievement (see Fuligni, 1997), the differential value attached to education by the immigrant adolescents and their parents has the primary impact. Other researchers (Kao & Tienda, 1998) contend that sociological factors—extrinsic to culture—have the greatest impact on these between-groups differences.

Sociological moderators of the immigrant-aspirations relationship include socioeconomic status (SES) and discrimination. Parental SES was found to be the strongest predictor of academic aspirations in a sample of Mexican-origin immigrant students (St. Hilaire, 2002). In addition, SES has been shown to account for ethnic differences in the level and maintenance of educational aspirations from middle school through high school (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Kao and Tienda demonstrated that African-American and Hispanic adolescents had lower and less stable educational aspirations than their White and Asian peers due to their lower family SES. In addition to these adolescents being less informed about college, African-American and Hispanic adolescents had lower odds of reaching their educational attainment goals. The final social factor examined in the educational aspirations literature is perceived and experienced discrimination. Though not as strong a predictor as is SES, perceived or actual discrimination by school peers was positively related to level of aspirations in Mexican-origin adolescents (St. Hilaire, 2002), suggesting that high-achieving Mexican-origin students experience pressure from peers related to educational aspirations.

Another extrinsic variable that has been found to have an impact on immigrant students' educational aspirations is parental behaviors. In addition to the importance of parental warmth and control on immigrant children's socioemotional adjustment (Izzo,

Weiss, Shanahan, & Rodriguez-Brown, 2002), support (i.e., help with assignments and monitoring) from both mothers and fathers has been positively related to Mexican-origin adolescents' academic motivation (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). Similarly, greater levels of child-parent interactions in learning activities—which also strengthen the parent-child bond—have been shown to increase the educational expectations of both parents and their adolescents from different immigrant groups (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). Parental involvement in school activities has been demonstrated to have a stronger impact than SES on Hispanic and African American students' educational aspirations, as compared to their White non-Hispanic and Asian-American peers (Qian, 1999). Despite the importance of parental involvement in minority immigrant students' educational goals, the extent of parental involvement in their child's school life is often complicated by language barriers (i.e., when parents do not speak English), which restrict parents' ability to help with school work and to communicate with their own children and with children's teachers (Ramirez, 2003).

#### *Individual Factors*

In addition to environmental factors, several individual characteristics are related to academic aspirations and motivation. Immigrant boys from different cultures have been found to have lower academic expectations (i.e., realistic report of long-term attainment) (Gillock & Reyes, 1999; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998) and motivation (i.e., effort in school) (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003) than immigrant girls. Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez (2003) explain the occurrence of this phenomenon in Mexican-origin immigrant students as a function of greater peer pressure among boys to engage in deviant behaviors. Other individual variables related to aspirations are length of residence

in the United States and generational status. Contrary to previous findings with the same population (see Zhou, 2001), among Mexican immigrant students, length of residence in the U.S. was negatively related to educational aspirations (St. Hilaire, 2002).

Generational status was also related to educational expectations but only for Chinese and Korean immigrant adolescents, such that first and second-generation adolescents had higher expectations than those belonging to the third-generation and beyond, whereas no generation effects were found for adolescents of Mexican-origin (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). Cultural differences in the value attributed to education have been linked to educational motivation and aspirations in different cultural groups (Asakawa, 2001; Phalet & Schonpflug, 2001).

#### *English Language Proficiency and Educational Aspirations*

One of the major obstacles in attaining professional success and upward social mobility within a new culture is dominant culture language proficiency. For many adult Hispanic immigrants, competency in the English language is perceived as the vehicle for postsecondary educational attainment and, eventually, as the primary avenue to increase employability within the dominant culture (Buttaro, 2004). Immigrant students whose primary language is not English must learn the language in order to be successful both academically and socially. Thus, it is not surprising that students who have low English proficiency also have low educational expectations (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998).

Interestingly, adolescent immigrants asked about their ideal educational aspirations and their "realistic" educational expectations perceived their level of proficient bilingualism (English & Spanish) as related to their "realistic" educational expectations as opposed to their ideal aspirations (St. Hilaire, 2002). Language spoken at home is also related to

Hispanic immigrant students' academic aspirations, such that those who speak English at home have higher aspirations (Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003) due to decreased academic frustration and increased motivation as opposed to those who spoke less English at home.

Not being proficient in the language of the host culture can have a variety of socioemotional implications for the immigrant student, and acquisition of the new language has been reported to be one of the major concerns of newly arrived immigrant students (Williams & Butler, 2003). Low English proficiency has been identified as a major source of anxiety for immigrant students and mediates the relationship between generational status and reported stress, such that first-generation students' high levels of stress (versus second-generation students' low levels) are related to their low proficiency (Gil & Vega, 1996). In addition, low English proficiency may play a major role in teachers' perceptions of immigrant students as being more anxious and shy than their non-immigrant peers (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999; Spomer & Cowen, 2001) though anxiety is one of the sequelae of the immigration process (McLatchie, 1997).

Immigrant students' distress and its relationship to lower levels of English proficiency have many explanations. First, the ability to communicate is integral to the socialization process, which is, thereby, hindered in immigrant students. Thus, language difficulties not only lead these children to withdraw socially but to be excluded or even teased by peers (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999; Spomer & Cowen, 2001). In effect, some immigrant children react by exhibiting behavioral problems (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999; McLatchie, 1997), which have been demonstrated to be directly related to their level of language proficiency (Vega et al., 1995). In contrast to second-generation

immigrant students, the behavioral problems of first-generation students generalize to the home (in addition to the school setting), purportedly because language difficulties are a more salient issue for the latter group (Vega et al., 1995). It seems that newly arrived immigrant students' concerns about social acceptance and language acquisition (Williams & Butler, 2003) are well-founded.

Language proficiency is also a source of stress due to the actual learning of a new language. In a sample of college students enrolled in a French-as-a-second-language course, students who were anxious tended to underestimate their language competence whereas those who were not anxious about learning the new language overestimated their competence (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997). In the same study, there was a positive relationship between perceived competence and actual competence, suggesting that anxiety about learning a new language can seriously affect actual performance (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997). The relationship between language anxiety and actual competence has been demonstrated across different second-language courses (i.e., French, Spanish, German) (Sparks, Ganschow, Artzer, Siebenhar, & Plageman, 1997). MacIntyre, Noels and Clement proposed that this creates a cycle whereby the anxiety leads to reluctance to speak, which leads to low language proficiency, which, in turn, leads to high anxiety about speaking the new language. This has several important implications for immigrant students in the process of learning English.

### *The Proposed Study*

#### *Rationale*

Given the projected growth of the Hispanic population in the United States and Hispanics' relative academic and socioeconomic underachievement, it is important to

examine the factors that predict this negative outcome. Because of the comprehensive impact of English proficiency on the socioemotional adjustment of this minority group, the role of language proficiency in predicting academic aspirations warrants further inquiry. In addition to replicating previous findings among other Hispanic cultural groups (Mexicans have been the predominantly studied sample), the purpose of the proposed study was twofold: 1) To examine the language proficiency-academic aspirations relationship in more heterogeneous Hispanic samples (i.e., people from different Central American countries and the Caribbean islands as well as South Americans) and 2) To investigate the roles of social-evaluative anxiety and acculturation in the relationship between language and academic aspirations.

### *Hypotheses*

- I. Level of English language proficiency will be associated with level of evaluative anxiety. Specifically, students with low English proficiency will score higher on the anxiety measure than students with high proficiency.
  
- II. Level of social evaluative anxiety will be associated with academic aspirations. Specifically, higher scorers on the anxiety measure will report lower academic aspirations.
  
- III. Level of English proficiency will be associated with academic aspirations, such that students who demonstrate high English proficiency will have high academic aspirations.



IV. Level of acculturation will be associated with social-evaluative anxiety, such that highly acculturated students will report lower social-evaluative anxiety.

V. Level of acculturation will be associated with student academic aspirations, such that highly acculturated students will report high academic aspirations.

VI. Parental education will be associated with student academic aspirations, such that higher parental level of education will predict higher student academic aspirations.

VII. Annual household income will be associated with student academic aspirations, such that higher income will predict higher academic aspirations.

VIII. The combination of anxiety, English language proficiency and acculturation will have the greatest predictive influence on academic aspirations, followed by income and parental education.

## Method

### *Participants*

Seventy-four student and parent participants were recruited from middle schools in Miami-Dade county. This age group was selected in order to examine students' educational aspirations before they entered high school, where they are formally exposed to postsecondary education and career options. The student sample consisted of 35 male and 37 female participants between the ages of 11 and 16 years ( $M$  age = 12.6 years). Student participants were enrolled in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes, which range from Levels I through V. Students' ESL level is based on their level of English proficiency as determined by their performance on English proficiency tests. Students with the lowest level of English proficiency are placed in ESL Level I and those with the highest level of proficiency (as determined by their ability to read, speak, write, and understand spoken English) are placed in ESL Level V and subsequently exit the program. In the sample for the present study, the majority of student participants were enrolled in ESL Level I ( $N = 28$ ) and ESL Level II ( $N = 24$ ). The majority ( $N = 58$ ) were of Cuban origin (see Table 1 for student demographics).

Table 1

## Student Participants' Countries of Birth and ESL Levels

Variable	<i>N</i>
Country of Birth	
Cuba	58
Colombia	4
United States	2
Puerto Rico	2
Dominican Republic	1
Mexico	1
Honduras	1
Bolivia	1
Ecuador	1
ESL Level	
I	28
II	24
III	12
IV	4
V	0

Parent participants were between the ages of 25 and 53 years ( $M = 37.8$  years).

Most were married ( $N = 50$ ) and had attained some postsecondary education (see Table 2 for parent demographics).

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Parent Participants

<u>Variable</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	
Grade 6	1.4
Grade 9	6.8
Some high school	10.8
High school diploma	12.2
Associate/Vocational degree	29.7
Bachelor's	23.0
Master's	4.1
Doctoral	1.4
<b>Income</b>	
< 10,000	14.9
10-20,000	29.7
20-30,000	18.9
30-40,000	5.4
40-50,000	8.1
50-60,000	1.4
>60,000	1.4

*Materials*

- Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix A). Each student's parent/guardian was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. The demographic

questionnaire consisted of items regarding 1) number of children, 2) parental age, 3) marital status, 4) their child's gender, 2) their and their child's country of birth (if they are different), 3) length of time they and their children have lived in the United States, 4) parental highest level of education, 5) annual income, and 6) the language spoken at home. The questionnaire was provided in Spanish on one side and in English on the other side.

- Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA). Student participants' scores on the CELLA, the English proficiency test given routinely in the Miami-Dade county school district, were obtained from their school records following the principal's approval and written consent by parents and students. The CELLA is a test developed by the Educational Testing Service that measures English language proficiency in three domains: listening/speaking, reading, and writing. Scores for each of these domains as well as a total score are available. However, the availability of these scores depends on students' level of proficiency. Specifically, students with low English proficiency typically only receive a score on the listening/speaking domain. Because of the composition of the sample of the present study, reading, writing, and total scores were not available for the majority of student participants.

Student participants were asked to complete the following self-report measures (Note: All measures were translated and back translated to Spanish):

- Social Evaluative Anxiety Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969) (See Appendices B and C). This questionnaire contains items that cluster into two subscales, a 28-item Social Avoidance and Distress (SAD) subscale and a 30-item Fear of Negative

Evaluation (FNE) subscale. Respondents indicate whether each item is True or False for them. For the purposes of the present study, scores on SAD and FNE were analyzed as two factors (rather than one social-evaluative anxiety factor) as they appeared to measure two different constructs (i.e., there was no correlation between students' scores on these two measures). Scores range from 0 to 28 for the SAD scale and from 0 to 30 for the FNE scale, with higher scores being indicative of greater social avoidance and distress and fear of negative evaluation, respectively.

- Educational Expectations and Aspirations (see Appendix D). Students were asked to indicate the highest level of schooling that they expected to complete on a Likert scale. The question was stated as follows: "What is the highest level of education that you expect to complete? Please indicate by circling one of the options below." The available options included: 1) Less than high school, 2) High school diploma, 3) Two years of college or vocational/technical school degree, 4) Bachelor's degree, 5) Master's degree, and 6) Doctoral degree.
- Bicultural Involvement Questionnaire (revised 24-item version) (Szapocznik, J., Kurtines, W., & Fernandez, T., 1980) (See Appendix E). The BIQ is a 24-item scale that asks respondents to indicate their level of comfort speaking Spanish and English in different contexts and the degree to which they enjoy Hispanic versus American activities. Items are on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all comfortable* and 5 = *Very comfortable*). Because the sample of the present study consisted of adolescents, two items inquiring about respondents' level of comfort speaking Spanish and English "at work" were removed from the questionnaire,

for a total of 22 items. Scores could be obtained for each of four domains: two domains related to preference for speaking Spanish versus English (4 items for each domain) and two domains related to preference for engaging in American versus Hispanic activities (7 items for each domain). Scores range from 4 to 20 for each “language preference” domain and from 7 to 35 for each “activity preference” domain.

### *Procedures*

Following approval from both the Barry University and the Miami-Dade school district Institutional Review Boards, a letter was sent to middle school principals summarizing the study’s purpose and procedures and asking for permission to recruit students from their respective schools and to contact the ESL teachers. Letters were sent to 11 middle schools with high Hispanic student populations. One of the 11 schools replied to the request. Following a meeting with the principal and assistant principal, a meeting was held with all ESL teachers. At the meeting, the study was explained in detail and ESL teachers were given packets containing a cover letter, parent consent form, student assent, demographic questionnaire, and permission for the release of records form (as required by the school district) for the parent to complete. Teachers were asked to give a packet to every ESL student and were told that the investigator would follow-up on the return rate one week later. Two-hundred twenty-three packets (i.e., the number of ESL students enrolled at that school) were distributed to teachers. One week after distributing the packets, an inquiry was made to the assistant principal regarding the return rate, and teachers were asked to remind students who had not returned packets to

return them along with parental consent if they were interested in participating in the study.

Once a majority of the students had returned the packets with signed consent, assent, permission for the release of records form and completed demographics, a time and date were scheduled with teachers to administer the set of questionnaires to student participants. Teachers were informed that the procedure would take about half an hour and were asked to give an alternative activity (e.g., quiet reading activity) to students who did not participate. About one week before administering the questionnaires, all the packets with consent forms were collected to ensure that all consents and assents had been signed. Labels with students' names were placed on each page of the questionnaire packets. Prior to administering questionnaires, participants were given brief instructions on how to complete the measures, and the investigator made herself available to answer questions related to completion of the forms. Students were asked to indicate whether they preferred to complete the measures in Spanish or in English. Questionnaire packets were then distributed to students. The presentation of the questionnaires in each packet was counterbalanced to control for order effects. After all students completed and handed in their questionnaire packets, the investigator gave an overview of the purpose of the study and answered general questions about the study.

### Results

In order to evaluate the relationship among variables, a correlation matrix was created. Of all the variables investigated, only social avoidance and distress was significantly correlated to academic aspirations,  $r = -.25, p = .04$ . Significant correlations also were found between participants' level of social avoidance and distress and (1) a



preference for speaking Spanish ( $r = -.32, p = .008$ ), (2) a preference to engage in Hispanic activities ( $r = -.47, p = .000$ ), and (3) a preference for speaking Spanish and engaging in Hispanic activities as one variable ( $r = -.46, p = .000$ ), as well as between a preference for speaking English and engaging in American activities (i.e., acculturation) and fear of negative evaluation,  $r = -.28, p = .03$  (see Table 3).

Table 3

Correlations Between Students' Language and Activity Preferences, Measures of Social-Evaluative Anxiety, and Academic Aspirations

Students' Language and Activity Preference	Social Avoidance and Distress	Fear of Negative Evaluation	Academic Aspirations
Speaking Spanish	-.32**	.11	.11
Engaging in Hispanic activities	-.47**	.12	.23
Speaking Spanish and engaging in Hispanic activities	-.46**	.15	.21
Speaking English	.11	-.23	-.08
Engaging in American activities	.04	-.23	-.11
Speaking English and engaging in American activities	.07	-.28*	.12

\* Indicates correlations significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

\*\* Indicates correlations significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

No significant correlations were found between academic aspirations and any of the following variables (see Tables 3 and 4): (1) students' English proficiency (listening/speaking, reading, writing), (2) fear of negative evaluation, (3) preference for speaking English, (4) preference for engaging in American activities, (5) preference for

speaking Spanish, (6) preference for engaging in Hispanic activities, (7) parental level of education, and (8) income. Students' reported social avoidance and distress was not related to either their level of English proficiency or to their preference for speaking English or engaging in American activities.

Table 4

Correlations Between Students' English Proficiency, Academic Aspirations, Demographic Variables and Measures of Social-Evaluative Anxiety

Variable	Social Avoidance and Distress	Fear of Negative Evaluation	Academic Aspirations
CELLA Listening/Speaking Score	-.24	-.21	.21
CELLA Reading Proficiency Score	-.23	-.03	.24
CELLA Writing Proficiency Score	-.00	-.14	.21
ESL Level	.19	-.19	.19
Parental Education	--	--	.15
Income	--	--	.08
Academic Aspirations	-.25*	.03	--

Hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted as planned to assess the variance attributable to academic aspirations. Specifically, measures of anxiety (i.e., scores on social avoidance and distress and fear of negative evaluation scales), English language proficiency (i.e., listening/speaking, reading, writing), and acculturation (i.e., preference for speaking English and engaging in American activities) were entered first

and parental income and highest level of education (i.e., indicators of socioeconomic status) were entered second.

Table 5 summarizes the findings of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses. None of the variables entered were significant predictors of academic aspirations. The analyses indicated that those variables entered first accounted for 37% of the variance in academic aspirations,  $F(6, 11) = .51, p = .78$ . Income and level of education, when entered second, accounted for 49% of the variance,  $F_{change}(8, 11) = 5.91, p = .09$ . The total variance explained by the variables entered in both blocks was 54%,  $F(8, 11) = 2.62, p = .23$ . The variable that had the greatest contribution to this was level of parental education,  $t = 3.25, p = .05$ .

In order to examine the predictive value of parental income and level of education, a regression analysis was conducted with those variables entered as the predictors in one block and educational aspirations entered as the criterion. This analysis revealed that parental income and education accounted for only 0.7% of the variance,  $F(2, 52) = .82, p = .45$ . Therefore, it appears that parental education and income alone do not predict Hispanic students' level of academic aspirations. Rather, a host of variables, namely social-evaluative anxiety, proficiency in the English language, and level of acculturation, must be controlled for in order for socioeconomic status to have some predictive value.

Table 5

Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Social-evaluative Anxiety, English Language Proficiency, Acculturation, and Parental Variables as Predictors of Academic Aspirations ( $N = 12$ )

Variable Entered	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Step 1	.37		.51			
Social Avoidance and Distress				.25	.51	.63
Fear of Negative Evaluation				.22	.52	.63
CELLA listening/speaking				.48	.80	.46
CELLA reading				-.14	-.30	.77
CELLA writing				.25	.42	.69
Preference for speaking English plus engaging in American activities				-.29	-.77	.48
Step 2	.54	.49	2.62			
Social Avoidance and Distress				-.63	-1.64	.20
Fear of Negative Evaluation				.02	.08	.94
CELLA listening/speaking				.49	1.39	.26
CELLA reading				.66	1.82	.17
CELLA writing				-.68	-1.55	.22
Preference for speaking English plus engaging in American activities				.85	2.06	.13
Parental income				-.21	-.78	.50
Highest level of parental education				1.72	3.25	.05

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the factors that predict the academic aspirations of Hispanic adolescents. Specifically, it was hypothesized that proficiency in the English language, level of social-evaluative anxiety, acculturation, and factors related to socioeconomic status (i.e., parental income and education) would be related to academic aspirations. Additionally, it was hypothesized that the combination of English language proficiency, social-evaluative anxiety, and acculturation would have the greatest predictive influence on students' academic aspirations.

As hypothesized, students' level of social avoidance and distress was negatively related to their academic aspirations. Thus, it can be inferred that students who reported higher levels of social avoidance and distress reported lower academic aspirations. Feeling comfortable in social situations is related to higher expectations of achievement; perhaps this finding is a reflection of the underlying relationship between the personality factor of extraversion and a sense of optimism (see Marshall, Wortman, Kusulas, & Hervig, 1992). It is also possible that perceived competence in social situations and success within the academic arena are components of the broader factor of self-efficacy. Because of the importance of the social environment for adolescents' identity development and well-being, comfort within the social setting would be expected to have a positive effect on many aspects of their lives. In addition, most of adolescents' socialization occurs within the school setting. For students, the perception that they are competent socially may generalize into a desire to attain academic success. As opposed to social avoidance, fear of being criticized or negatively evaluated by others was not

related to students' academic aspirations, perhaps because this construct is not as specific to the school setting as is social avoidance.

The relationship between social avoidance and adolescents' academic aspirations has not been addressed in the literature. However, one study (see St. Hilaire, 2002) investigating Mexican-American adolescents' academic aspirations found a positive relationship between these students' aspirations and perceived or actual discrimination by peers. Specifically, those students who had high aspirations experienced discrimination from their peers of the same culture, purportedly because of pressure to conform to lower aspirations. Although social avoidance and distress was not investigated in that study, it is similar to discrimination by peers in that both variables share the element of social withdrawal or discomfort. However, it is difficult to compare the results of these two studies and draw conclusions because the constructs measured in each may not be analogous. The role of socialization in the academic aspirations of minority students deserves further inquiry.

Because previous studies examining the stressors of Hispanic students found a relationship between low English proficiency and higher levels of anxiety (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999; Gil & Vega, 1996; Spomer & Cowen, 2001), and because proficiency in a language (e.g., English) is one of the factors that make up the construct of acculturation, it was hypothesized that student participants who were more acculturated would report lower levels of social distress. Contrary to the hypothesis that acculturated students (i.e., those with a preference for speaking English and engaging in American activities) would experience less social distress, it was those adolescents with a greater preference for speaking the Spanish language and for engaging in Hispanic

activities who reported lower levels of social avoidance and distress. When examining the environment of the student participants, this finding makes much sense. Specifically, the adolescents who took part in the present study were enrolled in a school and lived in a community that is linguistically and culturally homogeneous. In essence, many of the students in this sample are of Cuban descent, as are the majority of the other students enrolled at their school (i.e., their peers) and the members of their community. For these adolescents, acculturation would be expected to lead to greater social distress (i.e., isolation, exclusion) within the peer group and family environment. In the acculturation literature, stress related to the acculturative process, as it pertains to Mexican-American adults, has been linked to a greater incidence of anxiety disorders (Hovey & Magaña, 2002). In the present study, however, there was no relationship between acculturation and social avoidance, perhaps because so few students were engaged in the process of acculturation. Because of the large population of Cubans living in South Florida, there is no need for these students to acculturate to traditional American society. Nevertheless, those students who acculturated did report being less apprehensive of being negatively evaluated by others. Despite little need for acculturation given the cultural homogeneity of their environment, it appears that students understand the value of conforming to American society for their being perceived favorably by others outside of their immediate setting.

Actual proficiency in the English language, contrary to hypotheses, was not related to students' academic aspirations, which makes sense within their context. Much of the school curriculum is either completely taught in Spanish or their teachers provide supplemental support and instruction in Spanish. Therefore, these students do not need to

be proficient in English in order to feel confident about their ability to be academically successful.

Also contrary to hypotheses, acculturation was not related to academic aspirations. As previously explained, because these students are immersed in their native culture, they feel no need to acculturate in order to be successful. However, a preference for Spanish and for being engaged in Hispanic activities was not related to academic aspirations either. It appears that cultural preferences are not related to aspirations. Nonetheless, cultural preference does affect students' social avoidance, which, in turn, affects their aspirations. While preference for their native culture does not directly affect their aspirations, it may have an indirect effect in that such preference may lower their avoidance of others in their social setting. It is important to keep in mind that this finding may be specific to the Cuban community, which makes up the majority of the sample.

Socioeconomic factors have been noted in the literature to have one of the strongest relationships to Hispanic adolescents' academic expectations (Kao & Tienda, 1998; St. Hilaire, 2002). Socioeconomic status (SES), as measured by parents' level of education and income, was not related to students' aspirations when this variable was examined by itself. However, it appears that SES predicts students' aspirations only when English proficiency, acculturation, and social-evaluative anxiety are controlled. The results of this study suggest that there is a high likelihood that such interpretation is due to chance. However, these results were based on 12 participants, so it is possible that the present results reflect a lack of statistical power. It is interesting that parents' level of education had the greatest predictive influence on students' own aspirations. It seems that adolescents' expectations of their educational attainment are founded on what they have



observed to be standard in their household. It is also possible that parents who have achieved a certain educational status have communicated the same expectations of achievement to their children. Perhaps parental educational achievement is one of many parental behaviors (e.g., warmth, support) that, as the literature has suggested (Izzo, Weiss, Shanahan & Rodriguez-Brown, 2002; Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003), greatly impacts students' aspirations for educational attainment.

#### Limitations

One important limitation of the present study is the sample size given the number of variables examined. As a result, it is possible that some of those correlations that were not significant would have been significant had 120 participants been recruited, as originally planned. Therefore, caution should be exercised in reaching conclusions on results that were not statistically significant, as that would increase the likelihood of making a Type I error.

The homogeneous composition of the sample also may have skewed the results. Specifically, the majority of students who participated in this study had relatively low levels of English proficiency. Perhaps a relationship between level of English proficiency and other variables would have emerged had there been more variability in participants' level of proficiency. Another problem inherent in this sample that directly affects the hypotheses is student participants' cultural environment. Had the same variables been examined with students who resided in a more culturally heterogeneous area or in a school and community mostly populated by individuals from the majority culture, certain hypotheses may have been supported. In that alternate setting, students would feel more

pressure to conform, and, therefore, acculturation possibly would have been linked to lower social anxiety and higher academic aspirations.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, certain problems are inherent in adolescent students' reports of their educational aspirations. First, there was not much variability in students' reports of aspirations. Surprisingly, the majority of students reported that they expected to obtain Bachelor's and Doctoral degrees. Almost none reported that they would obtain Master's degrees, which may have been due to lack of knowledge of what this degree is. Many of these students have spent very little time in the United States and may not be familiar with the meaning of certain types of degrees (e.g., the meaning of a "Master's" degree). In addition, at their ages, students probably have had very limited exposure to career options and the requirements that must be fulfilled to attain certain degrees. Also, as young adolescents, many students are idealistic and have not seriously thought about their academic futures. Thus, adolescents' report of their "educational expectations" must be interpreted taking into account the characteristics of this stage of development. Finally, it is possible that social desirability swayed students' reports of their academic aspirations.

Despite the limitations, the findings of the present study contributed to the understanding of those factors that have the most relevance to Hispanic adolescents' academic aspirations. Cultural factors, whether it is a preference for being immersed in the host culture or in the native culture, do not appear to greatly affect students' aspirations. Comfort within the social setting, which includes the school setting, does have a mild relationship to academic aspirations. Therefore, resources should be allocated to decreasing these students' anxiety in relating to peers and facilitating their involvement

in social activities, as that may increase their sense of effectiveness, which may generalize to their own educational expectations. Additionally, even though cultural factors were not directly related to aspirations, they were related to students' comfort within their social environment. For students who live in a community that is largely composed of individuals from their own culture, it seems that it is to their immediate benefit to foster involvement within that native culture and encourage appreciation for their culture. Nevertheless, the value of teaching these students English and assisting their attainment of some level of acculturation should not be discounted, as such may prove more valuable as students become older and compete with the rest of society for employment. Studies that examine academic aspirations across groups, namely Hispanic youth living in a Hispanic community versus Hispanic youth living within an American community, may help to isolate the factors that truly account for Hispanic adolescents' academic aspirations. Future studies should also place more emphasis on parental educational attainment as a predictor of aspirations. For example, do Hispanic students automatically internalize ideals for themselves based on the attainment of their parents, or do parents with high educational attainment make explicit the value of education to their children? Academic aspirations, as it relates to the Hispanic student population, seems to be a complex topic that warrants further inquiry.

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APPENDIX A. Demographic Questionnaire

**Demographic Questionnaire**

*Please take a few minutes to answer all of the following questions.*

1. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your marital status? (Please circle one).

Single (No boyfriend)    Have boyfriend    Married    Divorced    Widowed

4. Please indicate the sex of the child in the study.

Male                  Female

5. In what country were you born? (Please circle one).

1) Cuba    2) Dominican Republic    3) Mexico    4) Nicaragua    5) Peru

6) Honduras    7) Panama    8) Guatemala    9) Costa Rica    10) El Salvador

11) Argentina    12) Bolivia    13) Chile    14) Colombia    15) Ecuador    16) Paraguay

17) Uruguay    18) Venezuela    19) United States    20) Puerto Rico

21) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. In what country was your child born? (Please circle one).

1) Cuba    2) Dominican Republic    3) Mexico    4) Nicaragua    5) Peru

6) Honduras    7) Panama    8) Guatemala    9) Costa Rica    10) El Salvador

11) Argentina    12) Bolivia    13) Chile    14) Colombia    15) Ecuador    16) Paraguay

17) Uruguay    18) Venezuela    19) United States    20) Puerto Rico

21) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. How long have you lived in the United States?

\_\_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_\_ months

8. How long has your child lived in the United States?

\_\_\_\_\_ years, \_\_\_\_\_ months

9. What is the highest level of school that you completed? (Please circle one)

- (a) Did not complete elementary school      (b) Completed up to grade 6  
 (c) Completed middle school (up to grade 9)      (d) *Some* high school but did not graduate  
 (e) Graduated from high school or obtained GED      (f) Obtained Associate or vocational degree  
 (g) *Some* college      (h) Obtained Bachelor's (4-year) degree      (i) Obtained Master's degree  
 (j) Obtained Doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D., M.D.)

10. What is your annual household income? (Please circle one)

- 1) Less than \$10,000    2) \$10,000-\$15,000    3) \$15,000-\$20,000    4) \$20,000-\$30,000  
 5) \$30,000-\$40,000    6) \$40,000-\$50,000    7) \$50,000-\$60,000    8) \$60,000-\$70,000  
 9) \$70,000-\$80,000    10) \$80,000-\$90,000    11) \$90,000-\$100,000    12) Over \$100,000

11. Please indicate the degree to which English and/or Spanish are spoken at home (Circle one):

- (1) Spanish only      (2) More Spanish than English      (3) Spanish and English about the same  
 (4) More English than Spanish      (5) English only

*Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please give it to your child so that he or she may return it to the investigator.*

## APPENDIX B. Social Avoidance and Distress Scale

	Please Circle	
1. I feel relaxed even in unfamiliar social situations.	True	False
2. I try to avoid situations which force me to be very sociable.	True	False
3. It's easy for me to relax when I am with strangers.	True	False
4. I have no particular desire to avoid people.	True	False
5. I often find social occasions upsetting.	True	False
6. I usually feel calm and comfortable in social situations.	True	False
7. I am usually at ease when talking to someone of the opposite sex.	True	False
8. I try to avoid talking to people unless I know them well.	True	False
9. If the chance comes to meet new people, I often take it.	True	False
10. I often feel nervous or tense in casual get-togethers in which both sexes are present.	True	False
11. I am usually nervous with people unless I know them well.	True	False
12. I usually feel relaxed when I am with a group of people.	True	False
13. I often want to get away from people.	True	False
14. I usually feel uncomfortable when I am in a group of people I don't know.	True	False
15. I usually feel relaxed when I meet someone for the first time.	True	False
16. Being introduced to people makes me tense and nervous.	True	False
17. Even though a room is full of strangers I may enter it anyway.	True	False
18. I would avoid walking up to and joining a large group of people.	True	False
19. When my superiors want to talk to me, I talk willingly.	True	False
20. I often feel on the edge when I talk to a group of people.	True	False

- |   |      |       |
|---|------|-------|
| 21. I tend to withdraw from people.   | True | False |
| 22. I don't mind talking to people at parties or social gatherings.           | True | False |
| 23. I am seldom at ease in a large group of people.                           | True | False |
| 24. I often think up excuses in order to avoid social engagements.            | True | False |
| 25. I sometimes take the responsibility for introducing people to each other. | True | False |
| 26. I try to avoid formal social occasions.                                   | True | False |
| 27. I usually go to whatever social engagements I have.                       | True | False |
| 28. I find it easy to relax with other people.                                | True | False |

Reference:

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## APPENDIX C. Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale

	Please Circle	
1. I rarely worry about seeming foolish to others.	True	False
2. I worry about what people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference.	True	False
3. I become tense and jittery if I know that someone is sizing me up.	True	False
4. I am unconcerned even if I know that people are forming an unfavourable impression of me.	True	False
5. I feel very upset when I commit some social error.	True	False
6. The opinions that important people have of me cause me little concern.	True	False
7. I am often afraid that I may look ridiculous or make a fool of myself.	True	False
8. I react very little when other people disapprove of me.	True	False
9. I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings.	True	False
10. The disapproval of others would have little effect on me.	True	False
11. If someone is evaluating me I tend to expect the worst.	True	False
12. I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone.	True	False
13. I am afraid that others will not approve of me.	True	False
14. I am afraid that others will find fault with me.	True	False
15. Other people's opinions of me do not bother me.	True	False
16. I am not necessarily upset if I do not please someone.	True	False
17. When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking of me.	True	False
18. I feel that you can't help making social errors sometimes, so why worry about it.	True	False

- |  |      |       |
|--|------|-------|
| 19. I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make.                     | True | False |
| 20. I worry a lot about what my superiors think of me.                             | True | False |
| 21. If I know someone is judging me, it has little effect on me.                   | True | False |
| 22. I worry that others will think I am not worthwhile                             | True | False |
| 23. I worry very little about what others may think of me.                         | True | False |
| 24. Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me.       | True | False |
| 25. I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things.                          | True | False |
| 26. I am often indifferent to the opinions others of have me.                      | True | False |
| 27. I am usually confident that others will have a favourable impression of me.    | True | False |
| 28. I often worry that people who are important to me won't think very much of me. | True | False |
| 29. I brood about the opinions my friends have about me.                           | True | False |
| 30. I become tense and jittery if I know I am being judged by my superiors.        | True | False |

Reference:

Watson, D., & Friend, R. (1969). Measurement of social-evaluative anxiety. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 33*, 448-457.

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APPENDIX D. Educational Aspirations Questionnaire

**Educational Expectations**

What is the highest level of education that you expect to complete? Please indicate by circling one of the options below.

1. I am not planning on completing high school

2. I will receive a high school diploma

3. Two years of college or vocational/technical school degree

4. Bachelor's degree

5. Master's degree

6. Doctoral degree

APPENDIX E. Bicultural Involvement Questionnaire

**Bicultural Involvement Questionnaire—revised version**

Instructions: In the following questions, please circle the number that best describes your feelings.

A. How comfortable do you feel speaking SPANISH...?

	Not at all comfortable				Very comfortable
1. at HOME	1	2	3	4	5
2. in SCHOOL	1	2	3	4	5
3. with FRIENDS	1	2	3	4	5
4. in GENERAL	1	2	3	4	5

B. How comfortable do you feel speaking ENGLISH...?

	Not at all comfortable				Very comfortable
5. at HOME	1	2	3	4	5
6. in SCHOOL	1	2	3	4	5
7. with FRIENDS	1	2	3	4	5
8. in GENERAL	1	2	3	4	5

C. How much do you enjoy...

	Not at all				Very much
9. Hispanic Music	1	2	3	4	5
10. Hispanic Dances	1	2	3	4	5
11. Hispanic-oriented places	1	2	3	4	5



12. Hispanic-type recreation	1	2	3	4	5
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How much do you enjoy...

	Not at all				Very much
13. Hispanic TV programs	1	2	3	4	5
14. Hispanic radio stations	1	2	3	4	5
15. Hispanic books and magazines	1	2	3	4	5
16. American music	1	2	3	4	5
17. American dances	1	2	3	4	5
18. American-oriented places	1	2	3	4	5
19. American-type recreation	1	2	3	4	5
20. American TV programs	1	2	3	4	5
21. American radio stations	1	2	3	4	5
22. American books and magazines	1	2	3	4	5

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