



Ethnic Identity as a Catalyst for Mexican Descent Adolescents' Mental Health and Academics



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Introduction

LATINA/O ADOLESCENT ACADEMIC AND MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES

Academic Outcomes

- Although Latina/os comprise 17.4% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2014), only 13% of Latina/os over the age of 25 have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. This is far lower than their African American (17.7%) and non-Latina/o White counterparts (29.3%) (NCES, 2011; U.S. Census, 2012).
- At the rate in which the Latina/o population is expected to increase, it is important for this group to receive and pursue higher education for greater opportunities in the future regarding job stability and security.
- 23.5% of Latina/os have attended 2 years of college and then proceeded to drop out (Pew Research Center, 2015)
- Enrollment rates at the college level include 16.5% for Latina/o students, 58.2% for non-Hispanic white students and 14.7% for black students (U.S. Census, 2014)
- Researchers have begun looking at racial/ethnic schemas as a predictor for academic motivation and engagement (Gonzalez, 2009; Oyserman, Kemmeelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003).

Depressive Symptoms

- **Depressive symptoms** include, but are not limited to, feelings of persistent sadness, pessimism, hopelessness, and or helplessness as well as loss of interest in activities that once brought joy to an individual (NIMH, 2015).
- Within the U.S. Latina/o individuals age 12 and older comprised 6.3% of the population that experienced depression as opposed to 6% of African Americans, and 4.8% of non-Latina/o White individuals (CDC, 2013).
- Latina/o youth report higher levels of depression in comparison to other ethnic groups (Blazer, Kessler, McGonagle, & Swartz, 1994)
- Depressive symptoms are an indicator for the trajectory of one's academic endeavors (De Roma, Leach, & Leverett, 2009).

Life Satisfaction

- **Life Satisfaction** - The contentment an individual has with their life, especially regarding the fulfillment of their needs and expectations (Educational Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC, 2015).
- Latina/o students had lower levels of life satisfaction than their non-Latina/o White peers (Brown, Wallace, & Williams, 2001).
- Life satisfaction has been related to academic domains such as school performance (Suldo, Thalji, & Ferron, 2011).

ETHNIC IDENTITY AFFIRMATION AS A POTENTIAL CATALYST FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES

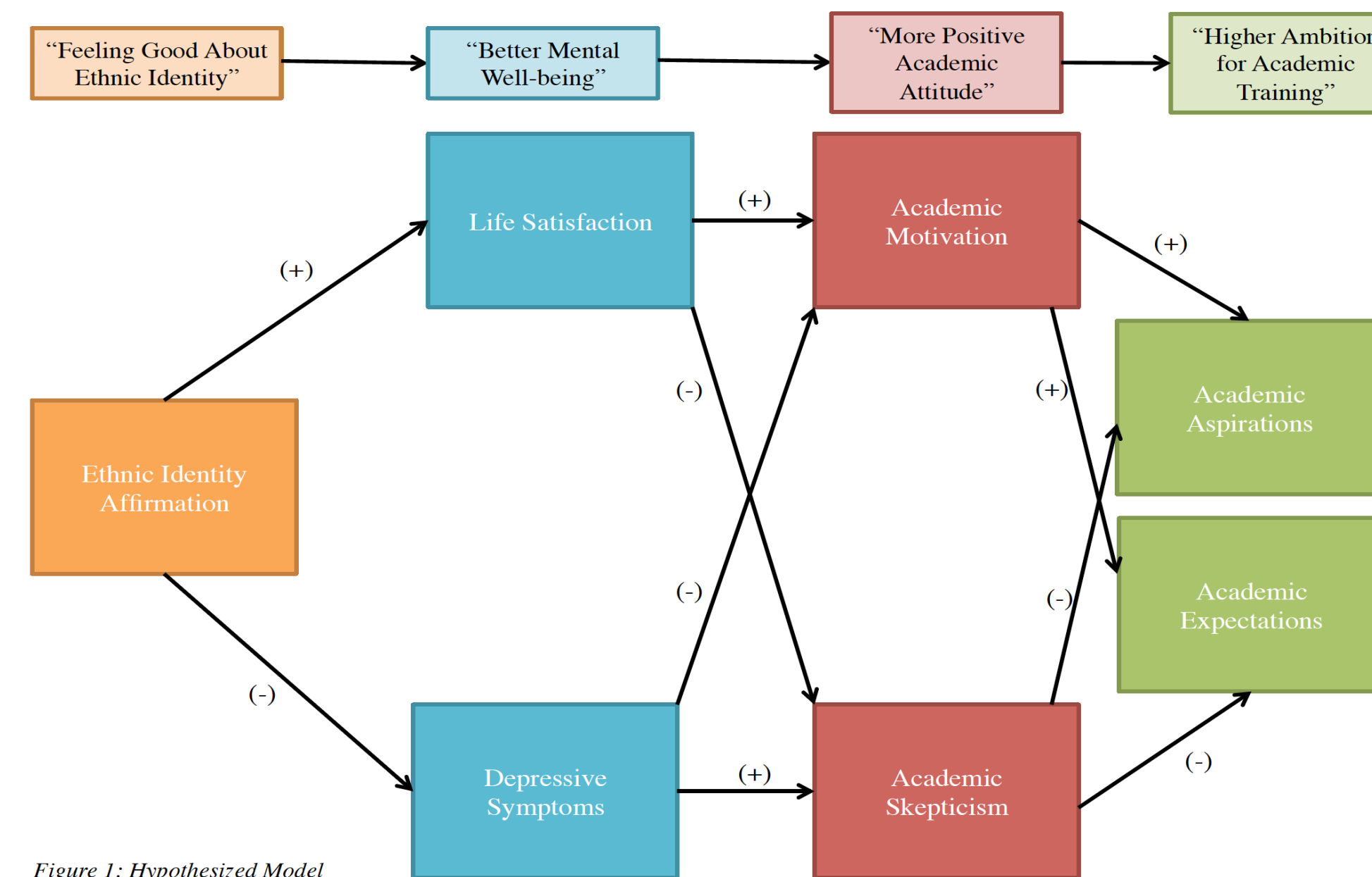
- **Ethnic Identity Affirmation** - Based on one's understanding of what it means to be part of their particular ethnic group, they are able to place positive or negative emotional value into their involvement with its members as well as their membership within the group (Phinney, 2007).
- Ethnic identity affirmation has been found to have implications on mental health and well-being (Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bámaca-Gomez, 2004).
- Ethnic pride and self esteem contribute to feelings of belongingness and affirmation, which yield greater performance in the world of academia (Cavazos-Rehg & DeLucia-Waack, 2009).
- Ethnic identity affirmation was positively related to a lack of social withdrawal and depressive symptoms among Latina/o youth (Rogers-Sirin & Gupta, 2012).
- A positive correlation exists between ethnic identity affirmation and academic performance. Furthermore, it was found that Latina/o adolescents that had greater positive feelings about their ethnicity were rated higher by their teachers regarding grades, cooperation and work (Supple & Plunkett, 2006).

Purpose of Study

PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study is to test a model in which ethnic identity affirmation is a precursor to mental health and academic outcomes whereby mental health mediates the relationship between ethnic identity affirmation and academic related outcomes. The present model could inform prevention and intervention programs aimed at improving the mental and academic well-being of Mexican descent adolescents.

Hypothesized Model



Methods

PARTICIPANTS

- 524 Mexican descent adolescents
- **Ages:** 14-20 years (M = 16.23, SD = 1.10)
- **Gender:** 46.9% boys, 53.1% girls
- **Generation:** Majority 2nd generation (40.7%)

INSTRUMENTS

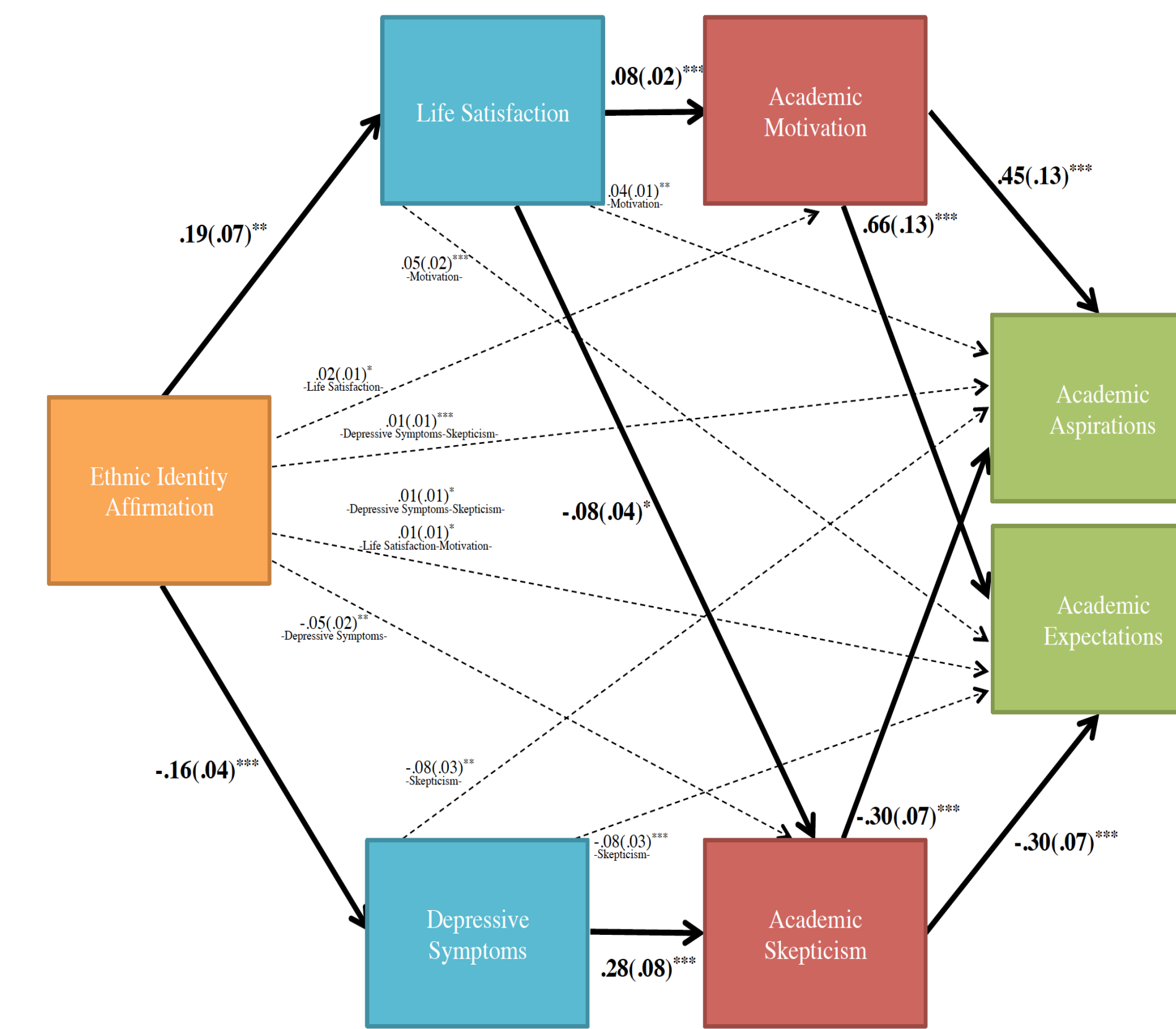
- **Ethnic Identity Affirmation** (Ethnic Identity Scale; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004)
- **Depressive Symptoms** (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale-20; Radloff, 1977)
- **Life Satisfaction** (Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale; Seligson et al., 2003)
- **Academic Motivation** (Academic Motivation Scale; Plunkett et al., 2003)
- **Academic Skepticism** (Skepticism About the Relevance of School for Future Success Scale; Midgley et al., 2000)
- **Academic Aspirations & Expectations** (Single items; Flores et al., 2006)

PROCEDURE

- Incentives given to return consent forms and to participate
- Paper-and-pencil self-report questionnaire
- 30 minutes to complete

Results

ACCEPTED PATH MODEL



Model Fit

- Path from depressive symptoms to academic motivation removed based on modification indices.
- Acceptable Model Fit of model above (Kline, 2005)
- $\chi^2(13) = 44.42, p < .000, \chi^2/df = 3.41, CFI = .95, \& RMSEA = .07.$

Indirect Effects

- Ethnic Identity Affirmation & Academics
 1. EI-A → LS → Motivation
 2. EI-A → Dep Sx → Skepticism
 3. EI-A → Dep Sx → Skepticism → Aspire
 4. EI-A → Dep Sx → Skepticism → Expect
 5. EI-A → LS → Motivation → Expect
- Life Satisfaction & Academics
 1. LS → Motivation → Aspire
 2. LS → Motivation → Expect
- Depressive Symptoms & Academics
 1. Dep Sx → Skepticism → Aspire
 2. Dep Sx → Skepticism → Expect

Note: EI-A = Ethnic Identity Affirmation; LS = Life Satisfaction; Dep Sx = Depressive Symptoms; Motivation = Academic Motivation; Skepticism = Academic Skepticism; Aspire = Academic Aspirations; Expect = Academic Expectations. Solid lines denote statistically significant direct paths and dashed lines denote statistically significant indirect paths; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Conclusions

ETHNIC IDENTITY AFFIRMATION IMPROVES MENTAL HEALTH

- A higher level of ethnic identity affirmation is related to more positive mental health outcomes (i.e., higher life satisfaction and lower reporting of depressive symptoms).

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVES ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

- **Life Satisfaction:** Having higher levels of life satisfaction is related to better academic related outcomes, namely higher levels of academic motivation and lower levels of academic skepticism. Life satisfaction was also indirectly related to academic aspirations and expectation because of the impact it has on academic motivation.
- **Depressive Symptoms:** High levels of depressive symptoms is detrimental to academic outcomes. Namely, higher levels are directly related to higher levels of skepticism and indirectly related to lower academic aspirations and expectations. These indirect relationships are explained by increases in academic skepticism as depressive symptoms increase.

MENTAL HEALTH EXPLAINS THE LINKS BETWEEN ETHNIC IDENTITY AFFIRMATION AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

- **Life Satisfaction:** Life satisfaction explained the ethnic identity affirmation-academic motivation and ethnic identity affirmation-academic expectations links. This means that ethnic identity affirmation is related to academic outcomes because it promotes more positive mental health through life satisfaction.
- **Depressive Symptoms:** Depressive symptoms explained the ethnic identity affirmation-skepticism, 2) ethnic identity affirmation-academic motivation, and 3) ethnic identity affirmation-academic expectations links. This means that ethnic identity affirmation is related to academic outcomes because it promote more positive mental health decreasing the reporting of depressive symptoms.

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