

Ethnic Identity, Life Satisfaction, and Depression for Mexican Descent Adolescents: Self-Esteem as a Mediating Mechanism

Mandrita Das, B.S., Estephania Yanez, & Brandy Piña-Watson, Ph.D.
Texas Tech University

Lourdes Modella, MPH
University of Miami

Carla Camacho, B.S.
California

Introduction

MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES

- Among adolescents living in the United States (U.S.), Latina/os account for approximately 35% of the total population (Passel & Cohn 2008).
- Latina/o youth report higher levels of feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors when compared to youth from White, African American and non-Latina/o ethnic backgrounds (CDC YRBSS, 2013).
- Psychosocial and cultural factors associated with being an ethnic minority may increase or decrease vulnerability to developing mental health problems (Gonzales et al., 2012).

ETHNIC IDENTITY & MENTAL HEALTH

- Ethnic identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the feelings and attitudes associated with the group membership (Phinney, 1990). This includes three distinct components: exploration, resolution, and affirmation.
- Higher levels of ethnic identity affirmation are associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms among Latina/o youth (Gaylord et al., 2007).
- Higher levels of ethnic identity, measured as a single construct, are related to improvements in well-being and life satisfaction (Romero & Roberts, 2003).

ETHNIC IDENTITY & SELF-ESTEEM

- Self-esteem is an overall manifestation of an individual's self-worth, encompassing beliefs about oneself and the emotional response to those beliefs (Rosenberg, 1965).
- Ethnic identity is associated with higher levels of self-esteem among individuals of Mexican descent (Roberts et al., 1997).

SELF-ESTEEM & MENTAL HEALTH

- Self-esteem positively impacts the lifetime course of depression, relationship satisfaction, job satisfaction, and physical health (Orth et al., 2012).
- Adolescents with higher levels of self-esteem experience less depressive symptoms and greater life satisfaction (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

SELF-ESTEEM AS A MEDIATOR

- Given that self-esteem can have a significant impact on adolescent mental health and that ethnic identity formation is central during adolescence, self-esteem may explain the relationships that have been found between ethnic identity components and mental health outcomes.

GENDER AS A MODERATOR

- Past studies that examine ethnic identity have seldom looked at gender differences. The few studies that explore these relationships yield mixed results (Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Plummer, 1995).

Purpose of Study

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between components of ethnic identity (i.e., exploration, resolution, affirmation), self-esteem, depression, and life satisfaction for Mexican descent adolescents. Additionally, this study seeks to determine if there are gender differences present in these relationships.

Hypothesized Model

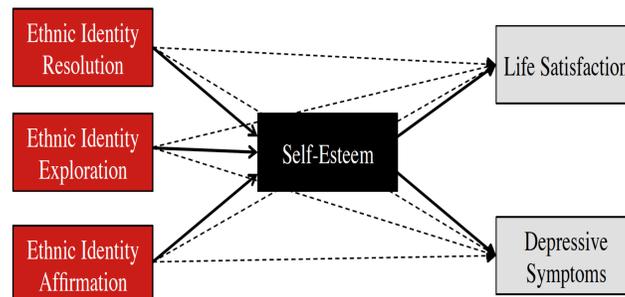


FIGURE 1.

Note: Model is hypothesized to be moderated by gender

Methods

PARTICIPANTS

- **n**: 294 Mexican descent adolescents
- **Ages**: 14-18 years (M = 15.27 years, SD = 1.00 years)
- **Gender**: 44.6% boys, 55.4% girls
- **Nativity**: Majority born in U.S. (97.6%)
- **SES**: Majority indicated that their family income was "same as most others" in their school (46.9%) and community (53.1%)

INSTRUMENTS

- **Ethnic Identity Scale** (Ethnic Identity Scale; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004)
- **Depressive Symptoms** (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale-Revised-10; Eaton et al., 2004)
- **Life Satisfaction** (Satisfaction with Life Scale; Diener et al., 1985)
- **Self-Esteem Scale** (Rosenberg, 1965)

PROCEDURE

- Return signed consent forms
- Adolescents gave assent
- Self-report questionnaire
- Collected in school computer lab using Qualtrics
- 45 minutes to complete
- Drawing for ten \$25 gift cards to local cinema

Results

CORRELATIONS, MEANS, SDs, & ALPHAS

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	----						
2. EI-Exploration	.14 [*]	----					
3. EI-Resolution	.01	.56 ^{***}	----				
4. EI-Affirmation	-.08	.13 [*]	.11	----			
5. Self-Esteem	-.25 ^{***}	.09	.18 ^{**}	.17 ^{**}	----		
6. Depressive Symptoms	.20 ^{***}	-.01	.00	-.19 ^{***}	-.53 ^{***}	----	
7. Life Satisfaction	-.12 [*]	.10	.18 ^{**}	.16 ^{**}	.54 ^{***}	-.41 ^{***}	----
α	----	.80	.85	.77	.86	.78	.90
<i>M</i>	----	2.54	2.82	3.68	2.87	2.03	4.79
<i>SD</i>	----	.65	.78	.45	.56	.60	1.46

ACCEPTED PATH MODEL

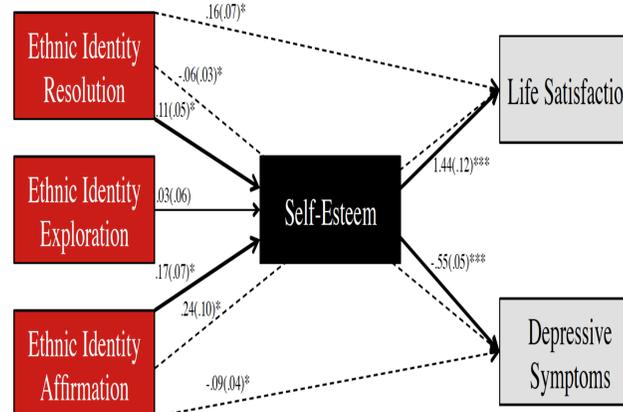


FIGURE 2.

Note: No gender differences were present in the model paths, therefore they were all constrained by gender; Solid lines denote significant direct effects; dashed lines denote significant indirect effects; Path coefficients presented with standard error of estimate in parentheses; Model produced adequate model fit (Kline, 2005): $\chi^2 = 24.70$, $df = 17$, $p = .10$, $\chi^2/df = 1.45$, $CFI = .96$, $TLI = .95$, $SRMR = .06$, & $RMSEA = .06$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

DIRECT & INDIRECT PATH COEFFICIENTS

Paths	B	SE	95% CI		p	R ²
			Lower	Upper		
Direct Effects						
Self-Esteem						.06
EI-Resolution	.11 [*]	.05	.01	.20	.029	
EI-Exploration	.03	.06	-.09	.16	.636	
EI-Affirmation	.17 [*]	.07	.03	.31	.014	
Life Satisfaction						.26
Self-Esteem	1.44 ^{***}	.12	1.21	1.68	.000	
Depressive Symptoms						.28
Self-Esteem	-.55	.05	-.65	-.45	.000	
Indirect Effects						
Resolution → SE → LS	.16	.07	.02	.31	.034	
Resolution → SE → Dep	-.06	.10	-.11	-.01	.028	
Affirmation → SE → LS	.24 [*]	.10	.05	.46	.017	
Affirmation → SE → Dep	-.09 [*]	.04	-.18	-.02	.019	

Note: EI = Ethnic Identity; LS = Life Satisfaction; Dep = Depressive Symptoms; SE = Self Esteem; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Conclusions

- Our findings suggest that the three components of ethnic identity may relate to self-esteem in different ways.
- Ethnic identity exploration (i.e., learning of one's ethnic background) did not significantly relate to self-esteem.
- Ethnic identity affirmation and resolution were significantly related to self-esteem, which in turn was related to higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of depressive symptoms.
- Given the significant mediation effect of self-esteem, Mexican descent youth may benefit from programming that works to increase ethnic identity. Specifically resolution and affirmation due to the positive association with self-esteem and thus mental health outcomes of life satisfaction and depressive symptoms.
- Findings from this study may help counseling psychologists and public health researchers develop and adapt interventions for Mexican descent youth that target the improvement of self-esteem to prevent negative mental health outcomes.
- Future research should investigate what other health outcomes self-esteem mediates for Mexican youth, and how to encourage ethnic development while incorporating self-esteem as a core component of prevention interventions, family-based programs, and other counseling sessions.

References

- Crocker, J., & Wolfe, C. T. (2001). Contingencies of self-worth. *Psychological review*, 108, 593.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S., (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75.
- Eaton, W. W., Muntaner, C., Smith, C., Tien, A., & Ybarra, M. (2004). Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale: Review and revision (CESD and CESD-R). *The Use of Psychological Testing for Treatment Planning and Outcomes Assessment* (3rd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; 363-377.
- Gonzales, N. A., Germán, M., & Fabrett, F. C. (2012). US Latino youth. In *Handbook of Race and Development in Mental Health* (pp. 259-278). Springer New York.
- Martinez, R. O. & Dukes, R. L. (1997). The effects of ethnic identity, ethnicity, and gender on adolescent well-being. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 26, 503-516.
- Orth, U., Robins, R. W., & Widaman, K. F. (2012). Life-span development of self-esteem and its effects on important life outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102, 1271.
- Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. V. U. S. (2008). US population projections: 2005-2050.
- Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 499.
- Gaylord-Harden, N. K., Ragsdale, B. L., Mandara, J., Richards, M. H., & Petersen, A. C. (2007). Perceived support and internalizing symptoms in African American adolescents: Self-esteem and ethnic identity as mediators. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36, 77-88.
- Roberts, R. E., Roberts, C. R., & Chen, Y. R. (1997). Ethnocultural differences in prevalence of adolescent depression. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 25, 95-110.
- Romero, A. J., & Roberts, R. E. (2003). The impact of multiple dimensions of ethnic identity on discrimination and adolescents' self-esteem. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 33, 2288-2305.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Yazedjian, A., & Bamaca-Gomez, M. (2004). Developing the ethnic identity scale using Eriksonian and social identity perspectives. *An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 4, 9-38.