

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

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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

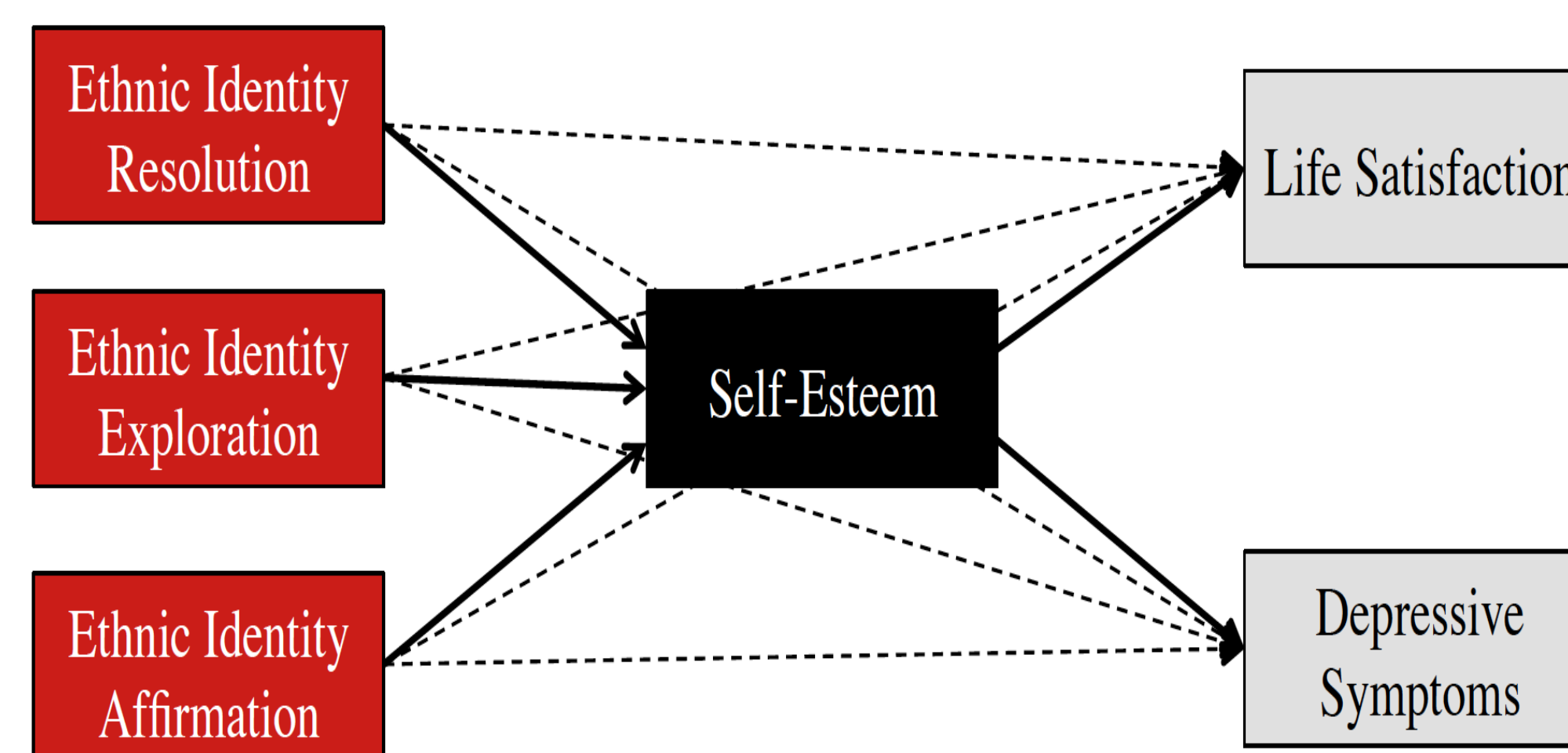


FIGURE 1.

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
M	----	2.54	2.82	3.68	2.87	2.03	4.79
SD	----	.65	.78	.45	.56	.60	1.46

ACCEPTED PATH MODEL

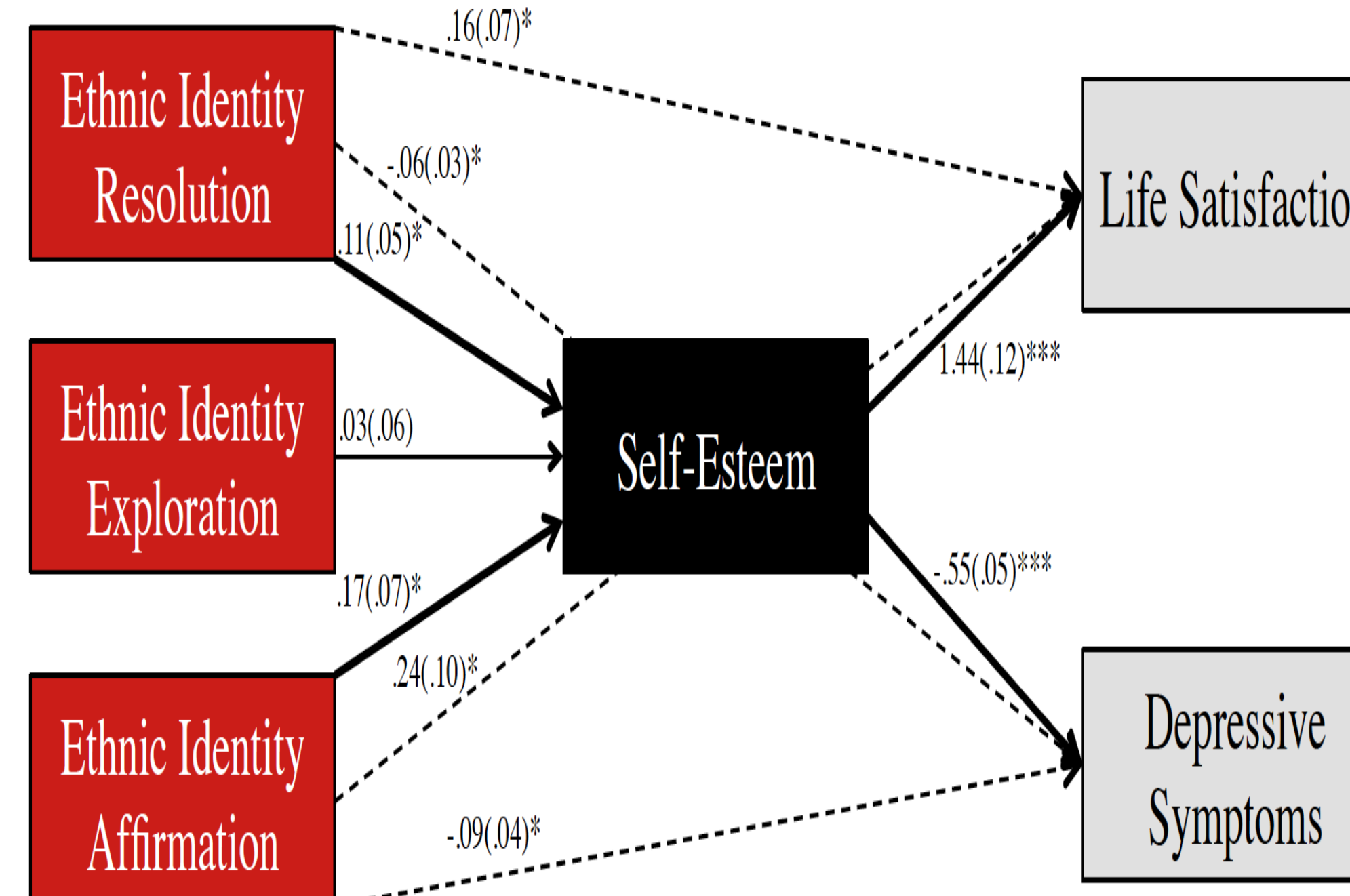


FIGURE 2.

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 \rightarrow SE \rightarrow LS	.16	.07	.02	.31	.034	
Resolution \rightarrow SE \rightarrow Dep	-.06	.10	-.11	-.01	.028	
Affirmation \rightarrow SE \rightarrow LS	.24 [*]	.10	.05	.46	.017	
Affirmation \rightarrow SE \rightarrow 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.

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