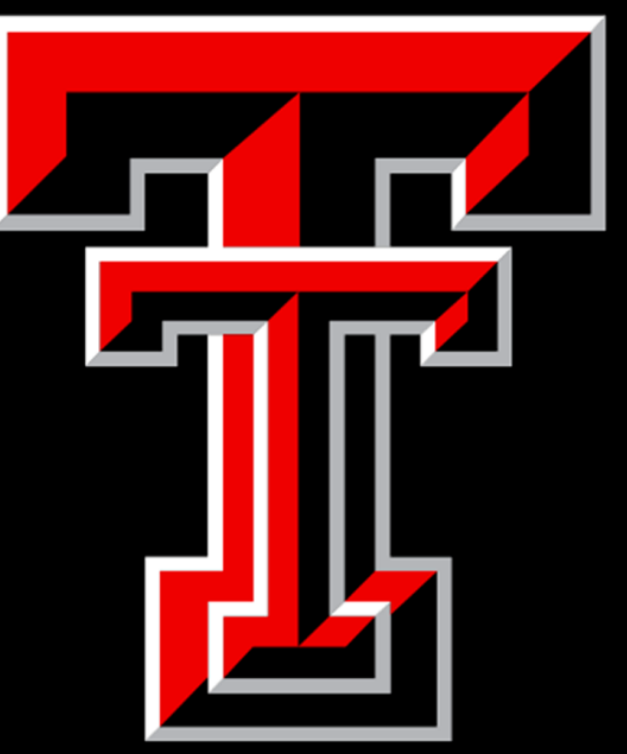




# Examining the Association between Guilt and Suicide Risk for Latinx Emerging Adults: Resilience through Self-Compassion

Gabriela Manzo, Iliana M. Gonzalez, & Brandy Piña-Watson, Ph.D.  
Texas Tech University



## Introduction

### VALUE-BEHAVIOR DISCREPANT GUILT

- VBDG (Value-behavior discrepant guilt) occurs when one does not behave in ways that are consistent with their values; however, trying on new ways of behaving during college/emerging adulthood is a normative process (Arnett, 2016), especially for ethnic minority youth who are often leaving their homes and family of origin for the first time into university settings which may promote values and behaviors much different from those they grew up with (Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005).
- VBDG can lead to cognitive dissonance when new behaviors are contradictory to their currently held values (Stice, 1992).
- Cognitive dissonance has been associated with negative mental health outcomes such as increased feelings of negative affect, state anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Harmon-Jones, 2000; Menasco & Hawkins, 1978; Prinstein & Aikins, 2004).
- When experienced, guilt and cognitive dissonance have been discussed as operating fundamentally in the same manner on mental health and therefore, we conceptualize VBDG is a specific form of guilt, and like general guilt, we expect that it will be similarly related to negative mental health outcomes.

### GUILT & PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING

- Frequent feelings of guilt are associated with depression in a number of studies (O'Connor, Berry, Weiss, & Gilbert, 2002; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Covarrubias et al., 2015).
- Guilt has also been associated with suicidal outcomes. One study found that guilt was associated with suicidal ideation among an East Coast community sample of male adolescents and young adults (Conner et al., 2004).
- While guilt has been positively associated with increased negative mental health outcomes, namely suicidal outcomes, its direct relationship with poor psychological functioning may not be deterministic in the presence of a potential protective factor such as self-compassion.

### SELF-COMPASSION AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR

- Self-compassion (SC) is defined as an emotionally positive self-attitude that emphasizes kindness and acceptance towards oneself and has been inversely related to suicidal behavior in college students (Kelliher et al., 2018; Neff, 2003).
- While there is little research about SC among the Latinx population the existing research suggests that SC may:
  - a) serve as potential resilience factor against negative mental health outcomes, and
  - b) support improved psychological functioning (Rivera, 2017; Edwards et al., 2014; Lopez-Asaah, 2016).



## Purpose & Hypotheses

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to:

- determine if VBDG was significantly related to both suicide risk, and
- if SC is protective in the relationship between VBDG and the suicide risk.

Based on research that connects other forms of guilt with poorer mental health outcomes (e.g., Reynolds & Salkovskis, 1991; Bryan, Morrow, Etienne, & Ray-Sannerud, 2013) and research that demonstrates the relationships of SC with better psychological functioning (e.g., Neff, 2003a; Rivera, 2017; Lopez-Asaah, 2016), we hypothesize the following:

### HYPOTHESES

- H<sub>1</sub>:** Higher levels of VBDG will be positively related with increases in suicide risk.
- H<sub>2</sub>:** SC will moderate the relationships between VBDG and suicide risk. Specifically, we hypothesized that higher levels of VBDG will be protective in that it will decrease the strength of the relationship between VBDG and suicide risk. Contrarily, lower levels of SC will serve as a risk factor for suicide risk in the presence of VBDG.

## Methods

### PARTICIPANTS

- 810 emerging adults of Mexican descent from two large public universities located in South and West Texas
- Ages:** 18-25 years, ( $M = 19.7$  years;  $SD = 1.76$  years)
- Gender:** 65.7% women; 34% men

### INSTRUMENTS

- The Value-Behavior Discrepancy Guilt Scale** ( $\alpha = .93$ ; self-developed scale)
- The Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form** ( $\alpha = .72$ ; Raes et al., 2011)
- The Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised** (SBQ-R;  $\alpha = n/a$ ; Osman et al., 2001).

### PROCEDURE

- Students were recruited through their introductory psychology courses.
- Participation was anonymous and voluntary.
- Provided a link to complete the study online via Qualtrics.
- Study took approximately an half an hour to complete.
- Participants were automatically granted course credit for their participation in the study.

## Results

### REGRESSION ANALYSIS

- H<sub>1</sub>: Supported**
  - Higher levels of VBDG will be positively related with increases in suicide risk.

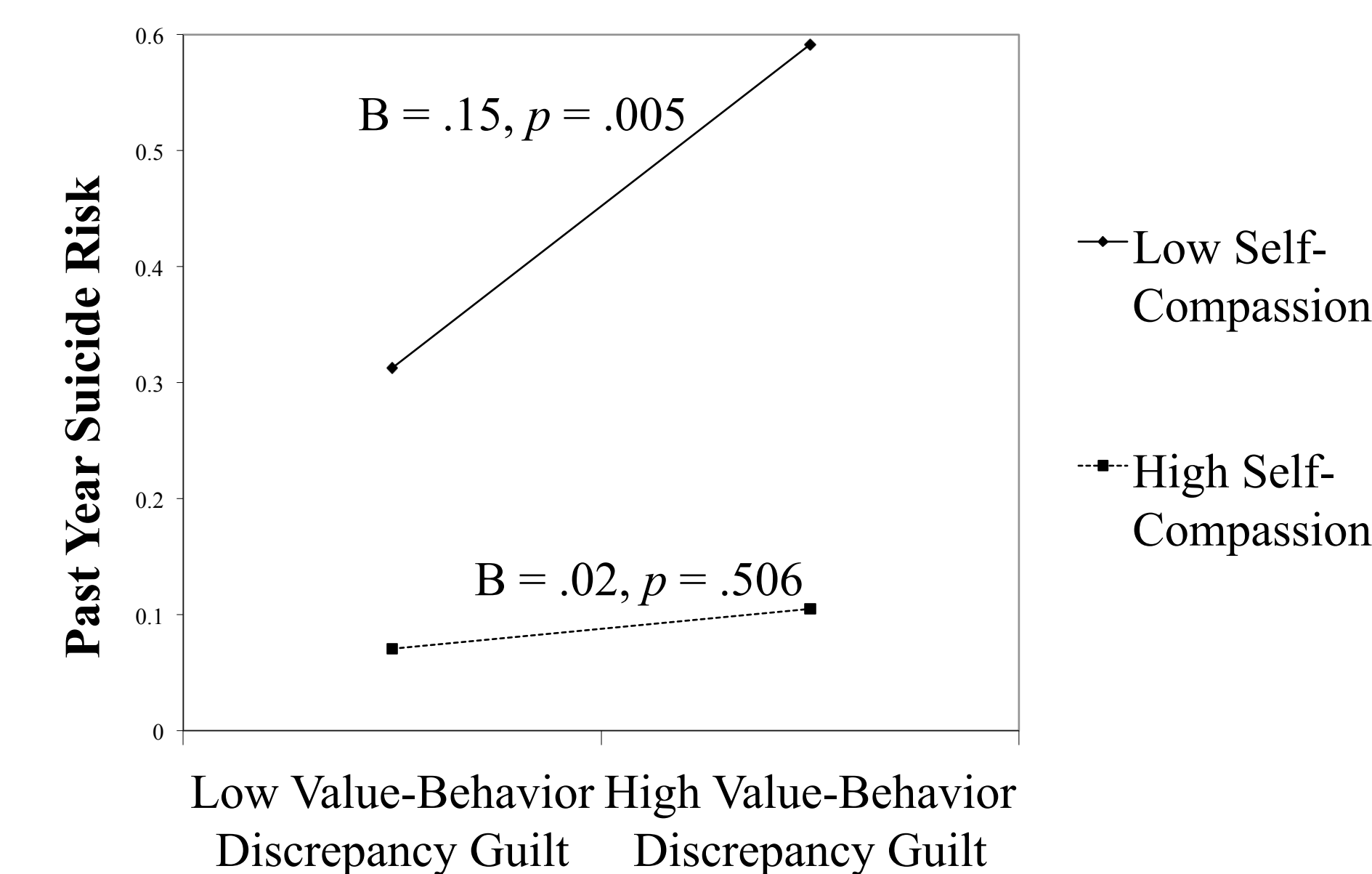
Table 1. Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses

	B	95% CI		B	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>
		SE	Lower			
Step 1					.00	.00
Gender	0.50	0.09	-0.05	0.15	0.04	
Step 2					.01	.01**
Gender	0.50	0.05	-0.05	0.15	0.03	
Guilt	0.10**	0.03	0.04	0.15	0.11	
Step 3					.07	.06***
Gender	0.04	0.05	-0.50	0.16	0.03	
Guilt	0.08*	0.03	0.02	0.14	0.09	
SC	-0.37***	0.05	-0.47	-0.27	-0.25	
Step 4					.08	.01*
Gender	0.05	0.05	-0.05	0.14	0.03	
Guilt	0.09*	0.03	0.03	0.14	0.10	
SC	-0.34***	0.05	-0.44	-0.24	-0.23	
Guilt x SC	-0.12*	0.05	0.22	-0.02	-0.08	

Note: Gender coding "1" = man, "2" = woman; SC = Self-compassion; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### MODERATION EFFECTS

- H<sub>1</sub>: Supported**
  - The relationship between guilt and past year suicide risk was not significant for those who were high in SC.
  - However, the relationship between guilt and past year suicide risk was significant for those low in SC.



Notes:  
Simple slope analysis was conducted and the slope and p-values for each self-compassion group are reported in the above figure; Low Self-compassion is set at -1 SD; High Self-compassion is set at +1 SD; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Conclusions

- As we anticipated based on prior guilt research, the relationship between VBDG and suicide risk was significant and positive.
- SC moderated this relationship such that:
  - the higher one's guilt about engaging in behaviors discrepant from their values, the more at risk they are for reporting increased suicide risk when they have low SC.
- It is clear that low SC is a serious risk factor to one's mental health during this developmental period where psychological issues are already an existing concern for Latinx college students (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010)
- It is important to examine relevant processes such bicultural stress that may contribute to the occurrence of VBDG for this population.
- Clinical implications of this study apply to mental health providers in college counseling centers who work with Latinx descent students.
  - Psychologists can help these students foster a higher sense self-compassion is by complementing their extant therapeutic approaches with compassion focused techniques.
  - The benefits of an improved and more compassionate relationship with oneself may extend above and beyond college years setting students with improved coping and resiliency skills.

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