

The Association between Ambiguous Loss of Family Relationships and Depressive Symptoms among Latino Youth

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Abstract

Guided by Pauline Boss's Theory of Ambiguous Loss, this study examined how youth perceived potential change in family relationships and how it was associated with depressive symptoms and academic satisfaction. Latino youth participants ($N = 122$; age 14-18 years) were recruited in a predominantly low income community in the Southwestern United States. Pearson Product Moment Correlations and linear regression models demonstrate that depressive symptoms were positively associated with ambiguous loss of family relationships and negatively associated with familism behaviors. However, only family behaviors were significantly associated with academic satisfaction. These findings illuminate how familism behaviors are a positive and protective factor for Latino adolescent depressive symptoms and academic satisfaction. Further research and implications for individuals experiencing ambiguous loss of family relationships among Latino youth is warranted.

Background

- During the past few decades, educational attainment has increased among the Latino population. Latinos value education as a form of upward social mobility and potential escape from poverty (Zambrana, 2014).
- Latinos value *familism*, which is the process of creating a bond of support and understanding within the family over personal responsibility and interests (Valenzuela & Dournbush, 1994).
- There have been few research studies on Latino adolescents in relation to family relationships, education, and depression (Zambrana, 2014).

Methods

Participants and Procedures

Latino youth participants ($N = 122$) were recruited in a predominantly low income community in the Southwestern United States. Age ranged between 13-18 years old. In regard to sex, 55.2% were female.

Measures

Measures included: *depressive symptoms* using the CES-D Depressive Symptoms Scale (Radloff, 1997; $\alpha = .88$), *academic satisfaction* using two questions to evaluate academic achievement and academic performance, ($\alpha = .87$) *familism* using the Familism Scale (Colon, R. M., 1998; Romero & Ruiz, 2007; $\alpha = .94$) and *Ambiguous Loss of Family Relationships* (ALFR) which is a new scale to evaluate the sense of loss or confusion surrounding family relationships in the context of child's educational success ($\alpha = .76$). Demographics assessed gender, age, immigration status, GPA, and qualification of free or reduced lunch.

Results

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlations

Variable	ALFR	Familism	Depression	GPA	Academic Satisfaction	Age
ALFR	--	--	--	--	--	--
Familism	-0.20*	--	--	--	--	--
Depression	0.34**	-0.32**	--	--	--	--
GPA	-0.08	0.13	-0.09	--	--	--
Acad. Sat.	-0.07	0.31**	-0.08	0.39**	--	--
Age	0.01	-0.18*	0.11	-0.05	-0.05	--
<i>M</i>	2.35	3.43	1.80	3.24	3.01	16.26
<i>SD</i>	0.48	0.88	0.51	1.13	0.73	1.36
Actual	1-4	1-5	1-4	1-5	1-4	14-19
Range						

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; ALFR indicate Ambiguous Loss of Family Relationships; GPA indicates Grade Point Average; Acad. Sat. indicates Academic Satisfaction

Results

Table 2: Regression Models

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	95% CI	β	R^2	<i>F</i>	
Model 1: Depression						0.19	13.24**
ALFR	0.31	0.09	0.13 0.49	0.29**	--	--	
Familism	-0.16	0.05	-0.26 -0.06	-0.27**	--	--	
Model 2: GPA						0.02	1.12
ALFR	-0.12	0.22	-0.56 0.32	-0.04	--	--	
Familism	0.15	0.12	-0.09 0.40	0.12	--	--	
Model 3: Academic Satisfaction						0.10	6.27**
ALFR	-0.01	0.13	-0.27 0.26	-0.01	--	--	
Familism	0.25	0.07	0.11 0.40	0.31**	--	--	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ ALFR = Ambiguous Loss of Family Relationships; GPA = Grade Point Average.

Conclusions and Implications

- As shown in Table 2 (Model 1), higher ALFR and lower familism behaviors was associated with higher depressive symptoms.
- In Table 2 (Model 3), higher familism behaviors was significantly associated with higher academic satisfaction. However, there was no significant association between ALFR and academic satisfaction.
- These findings shed light on challenges and resilience of family relationships that set the context for understanding Latino youth mental health.
- Familism behaviors may help overcome such obstacles and provide a supportive environment for youth as they continue on their educational journey. Future longitudinal research is warranted.

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