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Effects of Familism and Family Cohesion on Problem Behaviors among Adolescents in Mexican Immigrant Families in the Southwest U.S

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Abstract

This study used baseline data from the Southwest sample of the Latino Acculturation and Health project to examine whether familism and cohesion are related to problem behaviors in a sample of Mexican and Mexican American adolescents in the Southwest U.S. This study is important to practitioners, and prevention and intervention researchers because it examines buffers to problem behaviors among an increasingly at-risk population. The results confirm that familism is a powerful protective factor against aggressive behavior, conduct problems and rule breaking in this sample. The results draw attention to the importance of family among Mexican and Mexican American families. Family cohesion, however, was found to be protective against conduct problems and rule breaking but not aggressive behavior. Possible explanations for this result are discussed. Additional findings suggest that adolescents who have the ability to navigate between culture of origin and mainstream culture are also protected against some problem behaviors.

Keywords

Mexican adolescents; familism; resiliency; externalizing problems

INTRODUCTION

During adolescence many problem behaviors emerge and increase in frequency and severity. While some patterns of deviance during adolescence may be a form of testing adult authority, others may be indicative of future deviance and more complex problems. This study examines the relation between family protective factors (familism and family cohesion) and adolescent aggression, conduct problems, and rule breaking behaviors among a group of Mexican heritage youth. The study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it examines problem behaviors at an age (12 to 18) when some problems are at their peak (Arnett, 1999). When problem behaviors occur during this developmental stage they are often predictive of a variety of other important outcomes, such as poor academic performance, conflicts between parents and children, peer rejection, and delinquency (Hofstra, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2002). In addition, adolescent problem behaviors may result in adverse health outcomes and functional impairment (e.g., following rules, getting along with people) (Chassin, Ritter, Trim, & King,

2003). Second, the study focuses on immigrant youth and the children of immigrants, who represent a fast growing segment of the U.S. population (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Third, it concentrates on Mexican heritage youth, a population identified as increasingly at risk for externalizing problems, especially among the more acculturated youth (Gonzalez et al., 2002). By focusing on this population the study avoids potential confusion due to inter-group differences that occur when Latinos of different national origins are examined together. Fourth, it examines family variables that, although previously identified as protective factors against youth problem behaviors (Bray, Adams, Getz & Baer, 2001; Villar, Luengo, Gomez-Fraguela, & Romero, 2006), may be eroded by the stresses of immigration and adjustment to a new land and culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Family Resilience Approach

Ecological theories served as the foundation for the study, with an emphasis on family resiliency approaches. Resilience is a concept related to an individual's positive adaptation in spite of adversity (Luthar, 2006). Family resiliency advances the idea that families vary in their levels of resiliency and in their strengths or protective factors against negative outcomes (Orthoner, JonesSanpei & Williamson, 2004; Patterson, 2002). In other words resiliency in families—as with individuals—is a process through which family systems and their individual members retain their balance as they confront crises and challenges. In immigrant families acculturation and adjustments to a new society have been identified as a source of important normative stress (Marsiglia, Miles, Dustman, & Sills, 2002). However, the assumption from a resiliency perspective is that immigrant families possess certain protective factors or environmental assets or safeguards which increase or boost the families' ability to cope with acculturation stress or family conflicts associated with acculturation. Family resiliency makes it possible to cope with risky situations and help family members to adapt and be competent in resisting those risks (Marsiglia, Nieri, & Stiffman, 2006).

Although family factors in general have been previously identified to be protective against adolescent problem behavior (Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006); this study aims at advancing knowledge about specific family factors (familism, cohesion) in acculturating youth from Mexican immigrant families in the Southwest border region. The overarching hypothesis leading this investigation is that familism and cohesiveness would have protective effects against problem behaviors among acculturating Mexican and Mexican American adolescents.

Problem Behaviors among Latino Youth

Adolescent problem behavior may be classified into internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Internalizing behaviors reflect the adolescent's internal distress while externalizing behaviors refer to the adolescent's conflict with others (Oldehinkel, Hartman, Winter, Veenstra & Ormel, 2004). This study focuses on three types of externalizing behaviors: aggressiveness, conduct problem, and rule breaking.

Aggressive behavior is considered an important social problem due to its resistance to change (Pulkkinen & Pikanen, 1993) and because of its consequences later in life. During youth, aggressive behavior is a predictor of negative social and mental consequences for adults as well as substance use (Wagner, 1996). The way aggression is expressed varies considerably between cultures. In some cultures hitting and fighting are considered aggression, in others a raised eyebrow may be considered as aggressive as physically assaulting a person (Rummel, 1977). A comparative study of aggression among students from four countries illustrates ethnic/cultural differences in levels of aggression: Japanese students were significantly more prone to aggression compared to European ones, and students from Spain were the least prone

to aggression. (Ramirez, Andreu, & Fujihara, 2001). In a review of the literature on Latino youth mental health and acculturation, researchers found a link between acculturation and aggression (Gonzalez et al., 2002). In other studies familism (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006) and cohesiveness (Smith, Myron-Wilson & Sutton, 2001) were associated with less aggressiveness and conflict management. In addition, males traditionally have been considered more aggressive than females (Bjorkquist, 1994) but there is evidence that females may be as aggressive as males and may differ only in the ways aggression is expressed (Loukas, Paulos & Robinson, 2005).

The second problem behavior to be studied is conduct problems. Conduct problems include a complex set of symptoms that have a negative effect in various areas of the adolescent's development (Sanders, Gooley & Nicholson, 2000). An individual with conduct problems is characterized by a reduced concern for others (Hughes, White, Sharpen & Dunn, 2000). Conduct problems encompass a variety of behaviors including running away from home, stealing, threatening someone, vandalizing, skipping school, lying, arguing back, and having a negative attitude (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 1999). Early onset of conduct problems has been identified as an important predictor of delinquency, substance abuse and violent behavior (Snyder, 2001; Patterson, 2002). Adolescent onset of conduct disorder is related to ethnic minority status and exposure to deviant peers, with African Americans being more likely than any other group to have early onset and Latinos being not significantly different from Caucasians in regard to age of onset (McCabe, Hough, Wood, & Yeh, 2000). It appears that a higher level of acculturation among Latino youth is also related to behaviors that characterize conduct disorder (Rodriguez & Zayas, 1990).

The third problem behavior, rule-breaking, refers to swearing, truancy, using drugs, lying, and lacking guilt (Achenbach, 1991). The co-occurrence of rule-breaking behavior and aggressive behavior is well established. The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL, Achenbach 1991) presents items that point to the same direction of problem behavior for aggressive and rule-breaking adolescents. However, the two syndromes follow different developmental paths. While aggressive behavior tends to be transitory, starting in childhood and often decreasing during adolescence and resolving by the onset of adulthood, rule breaking tends to increase with age (Eley, Lichtenstein & Moffitt, 2003).

The emergence of adolescent behavior problems has been linked to a number of family factors including conflict, support, and communication (Loeber, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loeber & Van Kammen, 1998). Among Latino families, factors such as familism and cohesion are especially important (Santisteban et al., 2003; Vega, Gil, Warheit, Zimmerman, & Apospori, 1993). The next section discusses the importance of these family factors on adolescents' life.

Familism and Family Cohesion

Previous studies have already determined that different aspects of family functioning are related to Latino adolescents' problem behaviors, including aggressive behavior and conduct problems (Schwartz, Pantin, Prado, Sullivan & Szapocznik, 2005). In general, among Latino families living in the U.S., familism, respect and family cohesion have been identified as family attributes that function as protective factors against a number of problem behaviors (Marsiglia, et al, 2002; Resnick, 2000) and that provide important protection from the stresses related to both adolescent development and acculturation (Dinh, Roosa, Tein, & Lopez, 2002). However, Latinos are a heterogeneous group, and each subgroup has its own characteristics. Furthermore, the experience of Latino immigrants may differ greatly based on the geographic area in which they settle. Smokowski and Bacallao (2006) stressed the importance of understanding Latino adjustment in diverse geographic areas, for example, settlement in areas with and without a history of a significant Latino presence.

Familism and cohesion are separate constructs. Familism refers to the sense of duty and responsibility towards one's family (Updegraff, McHale & Whiteman, 2005) while cohesion has been described as "the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another" (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1979, p. 70). Families that share a higher degree of familism are distinguished by high family unity, interdependence among family members, and high social support (Gaines, Marelich & Bledsoe, 1997). In comparison to Whites, Mexicans tend to be more family-oriented (Ramirez et al., 2004) and, familism has been identified as an important value among them (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). Familistic values have been shown to have a protective effect against marijuana and inhalant use among adolescents (Ramirez et al., 2004). There is no agreement among researchers concerning familism and acculturation; some studies have shown that familism diminishes with increased acculturation (Marin, 1993) while others shown familism increases with acculturation (Rodriguez & Kosloski, 1998). Others reported that this sense of family obligation and responsibility is inversely associated with acculturative stress (Gil et al., 2000). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) reported that Mexican American children and Asian refugees display the strongest attachment to family obligations, with the most recent arrivals reporting stronger cohesion and familism. These researchers also argued that acculturation weakens these traditional family values and leads to more individualistic orientation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Cohesion reflects the emotional bond that family members have with other members of the family and is an expression of belonging and acceptance within the family (McKeown et al., 1997). Low family cohesion has been associated with aggression, depression, and poor social adjustment (Cummings et al., 1994). Among Latinos, high levels of cohesion were identified as protective of substance use and delinquency (Coohey, 2001; Gil et al., 2000). Acculturation seems to have an effect on family cohesion. Some studies have suggested that low acculturated families tend to be very connected and they maintain a rigid hierarchical power structure in which the power is held by the adults in the family, while high acculturated and bicultural families are more similar in cohesion and more egalitarian than less acculturated families (Miranda, Estrada & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000). Bicultural families appear to practice more negotiation between parents and children, and may undergo role changes according to the needs of the family (Miranda et al., 2000).

In addition to family factors, Mexican heritage adolescents are influenced by the experience of living in two cultures: the culture of origin and the dominant culture. Immigrant families undergo a process of acculturation to the new environment that is often stressful. Immigrant families must battle the stress of acculturation while seeking to fulfill the hopes and desires of both parents and children (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). During this process, some individuals become competent in two cultures. This dual competency is called biculturalism and it has been associated with more positive youth outcomes (LaFrombiose, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Bicultural adolescents demonstrate a higher level of competence and a lower incidence of mental health problems, conduct problems, delinquency (Szapocznik et al., 1980), and stronger anti-drug norms (Kulis, Napoli & Marsiglia, 2002).

The present study aims at adding to the body of literature on family factors that may be protective of Mexican heritage youth against the development of problem behaviors. The general hypothesis guiding the study was that both familism and cohesiveness would be strong factors in predicting fewer problem behaviors among this sample of Mexican heritage adolescents. We also anticipated finding differences by acculturation level and generation status.

METHODS

Data

The Latino Acculturation and Health Project is a study of how acculturation and health outcomes change over time among Latino families living in Arizona and North Carolina. The present study utilizes baseline adolescent's data collected during the spring of 2005 in Arizona. A full board IRB review of the project was conducted by the Arizona State University Behavioral Institutional Review Board in the fall of 2004.

Participants

Participants were recruited from ESL adult classes, community centers, local churches, and community fairs. Criteria for participation was being a Latino/a, and agreeing that at least one adult and one adolescent (14 to 18 years of age) from each participating family would be interviewed. Individuals who showed interest were invited to participate in a study looking at the experiences of Latino youth and their parents in this country. In compliance with requirements by the Centers of Disease Control participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that participants were free to leave the study at any time. The confidential nature of the participation was also explained and those who agreed to participate received \$20 each as a token of appreciation for their time and for opening their homes to the interviewers. Parents/guardians gave written consent for their adolescents to participate. The adolescents gave written assent for their participation. All written materials were available in Spanish and English. Participants were given the choice to answer the questions on their own or to have interviewers read the questions to them. Most adolescents chose to work on the questionnaires on their own. However, interviewers reviewed each questionnaire before leaving the homes and were available to answer questions at the end of each interview and/or give community referrals to participants as needed.

Interviewers

Master level students in social work and allied fields were trained to conduct the interviews at the participants' homes. Spanish was the first language for all interviewers who were also fluent in English. Participants were given the opportunity to choose to speak in either language during the interview. Eighty-seven (58%) adolescents chose to complete the questionnaires in English and 64 (42%) completed them in Spanish. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour (1.5 to 2 hours per family).

Dependent Variables

Adolescents' aggressive behavior, conduct problems and rule-breaking behavior were measured using the Youth Self-Report (Achenbach, 1991). In clinical samples t-scores are used to calculate normal, borderline, and clinical ranges for each behavior problem. However, Achenbach (1991a) suggested that the raw scale scores be used when the interest of the investigator is to make distinctions among children with mild symptoms. The three problem-behaviors are measured by asking adolescents to describe their behavior in the last 6 months. The Likert scale answers are 0=Not true, 1=somewhat true, and 2=Very true.

The aggressive behavior subscale consists of 18 questions, and includes items such as "I am mean to others" and "I destroy my own things." Reliability for the aggressive behavior subscale was α : .83. The subscale ranges from 0 to 28, and the overall sample mean was 9.25(s.d. 5.28).

The conduct problem subscale is composed of 12 questions. Examples are "I don't feel guilty after doing something I shouldn't" and "I swear or use dirty language." Conduct problems ranged from 0 to 13 and the overall sample mean was 3.60 (s.d. 2.90). Reliability for the conduct problem subscale was α : .70.

Rule-breaking behavior includes 15 questions like “I drink alcohol without my parent’s approval” and “I cut classes or skip school.” The overall sample mean was 4.46 (s.d. 3.50) with a range of 0 to 15. Reliability for the rule-breaking subscale was α : .66.

Independent Variables

The FACES-II (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1982) is a twenty item self-report instrument. Cohesion, which is conceptualized by Olson and McCubbin (1982) as to the emotional bonding of family members, is a FACES-II subscale composed of a series of statements like “our family does things together” and “family members go along with what the family decides to do.” Answers range from 1=Not at all to 5=All the time. High scores are considered to represent healthy family functioning. This scale ranges from 14 to 50, and the overall samples mean is 37.22 (sd 8.03). Internal consistency reliability for cohesion was α : .89.

The Familism Scale was used to measure the level of familism (Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000). Familism has been conceptualized by Gil et al., (2000) as the propensity of living close to family members and using this network as a source of emotional and instrumental support, and as having pride in the family. This is a 6-item scale that includes statements such as “family members respect one another” and “you really do trust and confide in each other.” The Likert type answers range from 1= Strongly disagree to 4=Strongly agree. The range of the scale is 6 to 24, and the sample mean is 20.14 (sd 3.18). The scale’s internal consistency reliability was α : .86.

Control Variables

Age was measured in years and adolescents identified their gender as male or female. Parents’ education was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Educational levels of mothers and fathers ranged from 0=no schooling to 5=college graduate. A variable “generation status” was created to reflect whether the participant was born in Mexico (coded 1) or in the U.S. (coded 0).

The Bicultural Involvement Questionnaire (BIQ-Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980) was used to measure the level of acculturation of the participants. The BIQ has 33 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= not at all to 5= all the time. The scale items ask participants how much they enjoy music, dances, places, recreation activities, TV programs, radio stations and books/magazines from their native country and from the U.S., as well as their preferred language (Spanish or English) at home, with friends, in school and in general. The items are summed to form two subscales: Hispanicism and Americanism. Following the approach used by Coatsworth and colleagues (2005), we transformed the sub-scales scores onto a 4-point scale ranging from very low to very high scores. Next, the new Hispanicism and Americanism scores were crosstabulated. The resulting cross-classification of the scores produced five groups: alienation (very low on both subscales), separation (low on Americanism but high on Hispanicism), assimilation (high on Americanism but low on Hispanicism), bicultural (or integrated; very high on both subscales) and moderates (moderately high on both subscales). Similarly to Coatsworth et al. (2005), we found that most of the participants could be classified as moderately or strongly bicultural. The moderately bicultural group (with moderately high scores on Hispanicism and Americanism) represented 44% of the cases, and the strongly bicultural group (very high scores on Hispanicism and Americanism) constituted another 37% of the cases. Small proportions of the cases fell in the remaining acculturation categories of separation (14%), assimilation (5%), and alienation (<1%). The moderately and strongly bicultural groups are characterized by relatively high involvement in both the culture of origin and American culture, and they are more similar to each other than to the other three groups. Given their large size, for the purpose of our analysis we clustered the two bicultural groups

together and created a dummy variable for “biculturalism” that contrasted them with all the remaining categories (coded 0=others 1=biculturals).

Two sets of interaction terms were created to test whether the effects of familism and family cohesion differed by gender and by acculturation level. Four interactions were created by multiplying mean centered versions of the two family variables by the dummy variable for gender and by the dummy variable for biculturals versus others.

Data Analytic Strategy

This study examines the extent to which familism and family cohesion influenced adolescent’s problem behaviors including aggression, conduct problems, and rule-breaking. Initially, bivariate correlations between the dependent and independent variables and control variables were explored. Relationships were further examined through OLS multiple regression analyses. A series of hierarchical regression models were run for each dependent variable—entering Familism and Family Cohesion, separately, and then in combination. There was little evidence that these two predictors mediated the effects of the others, so only the final model with all three included is presented here. In addition, interactions between gender and the independent variables were tested as well as between the family variables and the biculturalism variable. All regression models were inspected to ensure there was no instance of multicollinearity among the variables, and the colinearity diagnostics were all acceptable (variance inflation factors all below 5 and mostly close to 1.0).

FINDINGS

Table 1 provides a profile of the sample which was comprised of 90 (60%) female and 59 (40%) male adolescents ranging in age from 13 to 18, with a mean age of 15. Parents education range from 0 to 5 and the mean education was 2.22 for mothers and 2.21 for fathers, indicating that parents in general had some high school (figures reported by the adolescents). In this sample 56% of the adolescents were born in the United States and 44% were born in Mexico.

As Table 1 illustrates, 80% of the adolescents could be classified as bicultural on the Bicultural Involvement Questionnaire. The means of the two family variables indicate that adolescents, in general, scored high on cohesion and very high on familism. The distributions for the problem behavior measures indicated that approximately one third of these adolescents manifested at least one of these problems in the previous six months.

Initially correlations were computed between the dependent variables and the independent variables. Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients for these variables. Aggression, conduct problem, and rule breaking were all inversely and significantly correlated with familism and family cohesion.

Initial regression models entered familism and cohesion separately and then together, along with the control variables. The pattern of effects for these family related variables was essentially the same. Thus, Table 3 presents the last and most robust model, in which all control and family variables were entered simultaneously.

Table 3 displays the standardized coefficients, the standard errors in parentheses, the overall significance of the model and the adjusted r^2 . There was no evidence of collinearity in the models; variance inflation factors were within acceptable ranges (under 4.0). Among the demographic variables, a surprising finding was that females were at higher risk for aggressive behavior, controlling for other variables, but there were no gender differences in the remaining outcomes. Mothers with a high school or higher education were more likely to have a protective

effect on rule breaking behavior and conduct problems. Unexpectedly, more educated fathers were linked with more prevalent adolescent conduct problems and rule breaking behavior.¹

Bicultural adolescents were less likely to report engaging in aggressive behavior and conduct problems than others. However, generation status (whether the adolescent was born in the U.S. or in Mexico) was not a significant predictor. Turning to the family variables, familism functioned as a protective factor for all three problem behaviors. While family cohesion emerged as a protective factor for conduct problems and rule breaking, it was not a significant predictor of aggressive behavior.

The third step of the analysis tested for interactions between each of the two family orientation variables (familism and cohesiveness) and the dummy variables for gender and acculturation. Testing each of the four interactions (of familism and cohesion with gender and biculturalism) individually in additional models (not presented in tables), only one interaction was statistically significant, the effect of gender*cohesiveness on aggressive behavior (standardized $b = -.179$, prob. $< .026$), indicating that the protective effect of family cohesion was weaker for females than for males.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine whether familism and cohesion predicted recent problem behaviors among a group of Mexican heritage adolescents. The relevance of the study lies, in part, in the sample itself. As Latinos in general are increasing in numbers and proportions in the U.S. population, Mexican and Mexican Americans constitute the largest Latino group. In addition, previous studies have found that various family variables seem to buffer individuals from engaging in problem behaviors or deviance. Because familism has been identified as a value characteristic of Latino families, and especially salient among Mexican families, it is important to examine whether it functions as a protective factor against problem behaviors in an immigrant family sample that is also vulnerable to the effects of acculturation (Cummings et al., 1994; Coohey, 2001; Gil et al., 2000). In general, the literature on Latino families emphasizes their family values as a source of strength and protection (Marsiglia, et al, 2002; Resnick, 2000). Family cohesion has been identified as protective against a number of problems. Therefore we hypothesized that familism and cohesion would function as protective factors for externalizing problem behaviors in this sample. We were also interested in exploring if generation status and a bicultural orientation were associated with externalizing problems. This exploratory study advanced knowledge in the expected direction and at the same time produced some unexpected findings.

First, consistent with previous findings familism was identified as a powerful protective factor against adolescent's externalizing problems. Familism emerged as an expression of the centrality of members of the nuclear and extended family in the social life of adolescents (Marsiglia, et al, 2002). Adolescents like the ones participating in this study who live in families characterized by strong familism may be more inclined to respect and follow family rules. These adolescents appear to be receptive to their families' encouragement to behave well and to control aggressive behavior. These family expectations and the subsequent adolescents' behaviors seem to be consistent with the idea that the family name is important and it should be respected and honored. This may be another normative way in which familism is protective against problem behavior. Adolescents in these families may feel a strong sense of allegiance

¹Along with all other predictors, we investigated the possibility that the mother education and father education variables were collinear, but found the variance inflation factor was acceptable ($VIF = 1.3$). We also checked whether the effects for mother's education and father's education were the same when entered in equations without the education of the other parent; these results were the same, suggesting that both variables could be included simultaneously in the model.

and responsibility towards their families and their strong sense of duty appears to be helping them stay away from problem behaviors.

Second, family cohesion was found to be protective against conduct problems and rule breaking. These adolescents reported a very close connection to their families and by doing so they appear to adhere to traditional cultural norms (Hawkins & Weiss, 1985). This strong family bond and normative identification may be what protects them from problem behaviors. Interestingly, cohesion was not protective against aggressive behavior. This finding can be interpreted from a developmental perspective as adolescence is a period in which individuals are searching for an identity and are longing for independence from their parents. Perhaps the protective effects of cohesion may be counterbalanced by the experience of living in two different worlds, one that promotes independence and another in which family interdependence is valued and often necessary for survival. This search for differentiation may be particularly difficult for Mexican heritage adolescents who grow up in families in which teenage independence is not encouraged as strongly as in mainstream American culture because it is often perceived as a threat to family unity. Acculturating adolescents may resort to aggressive behaviors as way to break the strong bond and to achieve their desired levels of individuality and separation from their families and the related normative expectations. This possible explanation needs to be further investigated and in part may help elucidate the counterintuitive finding about females being at higher risk for aggressive behavior as some of them may be in greater need of independence and differentiation than their male counterparts.

Third, the bicultural adolescents seem to be more protected against at least some of the problem behaviors. Previous studies have pointed in the same direction, suggesting that individuals that are able to adapt to both cultures and can easily move from one culture to the other can benefit from both (Feliciano, 2001). From a family resiliency perspective, biculturalism (or the ability to move between two cultures) appears to enable youth to retain the protective factors that come from family and culture of origin as the same time that they incorporate aspects of the host culture that help them and their families better function in their new environment.

Many research and practice implications can be derived from these findings as they further demonstrate the complexity and the multidimensional nature of Mexican/Mexican American family resiliency. They support the premise that prevention and treatment interventions among Mexican and Mexican American adolescents need to take into consideration the important role that families play in the lives of these youth and to make a concerted effort to actively involve parents.

The findings also highlight the complex interplay between allegiance to family and the need youth have to adapt and function in the outside world. Some youth need culturally competent support from outside the family to reconcile contradictions and mixed messages in order to prevent the emergence of problem behaviors. More research on bicultural individuals and families is needed in order to better understand how service providers can effectively support youth who are navigating two cultures. Research needs to further explore gender differences as more knowledge is critical for the development and evaluation of gender appropriate family prevention interventions that can help Latinas transition from more traditional (internalizing) forms of coping with environmental stress to other (externalizing) forms of coping while avoiding physical health and psychosocial negative consequences for them and others.

These findings cannot be generalized to all Latino youth or to Mexican and Mexican American youth because the study relied on volunteer participation and therefore the types of families entering the study may not be representative. The findings may under-estimate the extent of youth problem behaviors in this population. Highly dysfunctional families were probably less likely to volunteer to be interviewed. Because of the cross-sectional design of the analysis, the

implicit causal explanations offered above need to be confirmed with longitudinal data. It may be that youth problem behaviors of the type examined here have negative effects on the adolescent's perceptions of family cohesion and familism, as well as at the family system level. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the existing knowledge of family resiliency because it focuses on a non-clinical group of Mexican and Mexican American youth. The experiences and strategies of these resilient families can serve as the basis for the development of culturally grounded interventions which can effectively serve more vulnerable adolescents and their families.

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TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics (N=151)

	Mean (SD)	Percentage	Range
Gender			
Male=0		40%	
Female=1		60%	
Age	15.53 (1.25)		13–18
Generation			
born in US=0		56%	
born in Mexico=1		44%	
Mother Education	2.22 (1.13)		0–5
Father Education	2.21 (1.31)		0–5
Biculturalism			
Other=0		20%	
Bicultural=1		80%	
Familism	20.14 (3.18)		6–24
Cohesion	37.22 (8.03)		14–50
Aggressive Behavior	9.25 (5.28)		0–28
Conduct Problems	3.60 (2.90)		0–13
Rule Breaking	4.46 (3.50)		0–15

TABLE 2

Correlations between Dependent and Independent variables (N=146)

	Aggressive Behavior	Conduct Problem	Rule Breaking
Familism	-.330 **	-.417 **	-.357 **
Cohesion	-.221 **	-.442 **	-.417 **

**
p<.01 (2-tailed)

TABLE 3

OLS Regressions Predicting Problem Behaviors
 [Standardized Coefficients, and Standard Error in parentheses] (N= 146)

	Aggressive Behavior	Conduct Problems	Rule Breaking
Gender (F v. M)	.228 ** (.834)	.065 (.437)	.054 (.466)
Age	.024 (.334)	-.011 (.175)	.081 (.187)
Generation status	-.053 (.895)	.038 (.469)	-.078 (.500)
Mother's Education	-.138 (.394)	-.136 § (.206)	-.223 ** (.220)
Father's Education	.124 (.302)	.157 § (.158)	.186 * (.168)
Biculturalism	-.208 * (1.10)	-.167 * (.579)	-.142 (.618)
Familism	-.330 *** (.165)	-.285 *** (.086)	-.211 * (.092)
Cohesion	-.042 (.064)	-.285 ** (.033)	-.287 ** (.036)
Interaction	-.840 †		
F	4.52 ***	6.49 ***	6.17 ***
Adjusted R ²	.162	.231	.216

§ p<.10

* p<.05;

** p<.01;

*** p<.001

† Interaction: p<.10: gender * cohesion