

## Parent–Child Cultural Value Gaps and Depressive Symptoms Among Mexican American Youth

By: [Gabriela Livas Stein](#), Antonio J. Polo

Stein, G.L., & Polo, A. (2014). Parent-child cultural value gaps and depressive symptoms among Mexican American youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 23(2), 189-199. doi: 10.1007/s10826-013-9724-3

The final publication is available at Springer via <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9724-3>

**\*\*\*© Springer. Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Springer. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document. \*\*\***

### **Abstract:**

Cultural value gaps between Mexican American parents and their children are hypothesized to place youth at risk for poor mental health outcomes. While most studies examine these gaps on broad measures of acculturation, the present study examined value gaps in affiliative obedience, a cultural value that has at its core the belief that respect and deference must be shown to parents and adults. The present study hypothesized that adolescents would exhibit greater depressive symptoms when youth demonstrated lower levels of affiliative obedience than their mothers. Moreover, we examined whether gender, nativity status, and age predicted cultural value gaps and moderated the relationship between gaps and depressive symptoms. These questions were evaluated in a school-based sample of 159 Mexican American families whose children were either US born ( $n = 82$ ) or foreign-born ( $n = 77$ ). Twenty-five percent of the sample demonstrated a cultural value gap where youth endorsed lower levels of affiliative obedience than their parents, and this group reported the greatest depressive symptoms. Age moderated this relationship, and the greatest association between cultural value gaps and depression was found among the older group of early adolescents.

**Keywords:** Latinos | Depressive symptoms | Cultural value gaps | Immigrant families

### **Article:**

#### **Introduction**

Theorists have long posited that conflicts associated with differences in the acculturation process of parents and adolescents in immigrant Latino families can result in maladaptive youth outcomes (Szapocznik and Kurtines 1993; Telzer 2010). Specifically, as these and other immigrant families are exposed to the United States, they are exposed to US mainstream values and experience pressure and incentives to conform to these values. Youth may be more able and

more easily influenced to incorporate these new values than their parents, who may have more established and entrenched values from their home countries. As youth enter adolescence, these value discrepancies within the family can result in less family cohesion, negative family climate, and adolescent misbehavior and maladjustment (Szapocznik and Kurtines 1993).

Latino adolescents, and Mexican American youth among them, demonstrate greater risk for depressive symptoms than other ethnic groups (Roberts et al. 1997; Twenge and Nolen-Hoeksema 2002). In particular, Mexican American middle school students reported the greatest rates of depression and impairment, relative to youth from nine other ethnic groups (Roberts et al. 1997). This risk extends to suicidality such that Latina high school students, in particular, have been found in national surveys to endorse higher depressive symptoms and suicide attempts compared to their African American and European American counterparts (Centers for Disease Control 2011; Wagstaff and Polo 2012). Given these disparities, researchers have been attempting to identify culturally unique variables that may protect or confer risk for Mexican American youth. A process that has received substantial theoretical attention is the differential incorporation of US values between parents and children. This process has been called an “acculturation gap” and has been hypothesized to place families at risk (Telzer 2010). To date, however, the evaluation of these acculturation gaps has not focused on cultural values that have been identified as playing a role in the emergence of depressive symptoms among Mexican American youth (e.g., Polo and Lopez 2009).

### **Empirical Evaluations of Acculturation and Cultural Value Gaps**

Empirical evaluations of the acculturation gap hypothesis (i.e., cultural value gap) have only recently begun, and studies focusing on Latino families have yielded mixed findings (see Telzer 2010 for a review). Three studies support the model, where acculturation gaps predicted higher youth substance use and externalizing problems (Martinez 2006; Schofield et al. 2008; Zayas et al. 2009). However, in two other studies, acculturation gaps were not associated with youth externalizing problems (Lau et al. 2005; Pasch et al. 2006). In terms of youth internalizing symptoms, two studies support the acculturation gap model and found that greater gaps were associated, more specifically, with greater internalizing symptoms and depression (Céspedes and Huey 2008; Schofield et al. 2008). However, three other studies did not find a relationship between acculturation gaps and anxiety or depression (Bauman et al. 2010; Pasch et al. 2006; Zayas et al. 2009).

A closer examination of these aforementioned studies reveals conceptualization and measurement limitations that may help explain, at least in part, the lack of consistent findings. The majority of these studies measure differences between youth and their parents on acculturation scales that assess a wide range of behavior, attitudes, and values (e.g., Lau et al. 2005; Martinez 2006; Schofield et al. 2008). Thus, acculturation gaps are defined across a host of behaviors and values, such as media exposure, language use, food consumption, and participation in cultural traditions. Moreover, some of these measures do not specify particular

values or customs (e.g., familism) but instead use a blanket and vaguely defined label of either “Mexican” or “American” values.

By conceptualizing acculturation gaps so broadly, no definite conclusions can be drawn regarding whether gaps in *cultural values* actually confer risk. A more direct evaluation of the specific values that are differentially endorsed is needed. Supporting the argument that specific values need to be measured, Céspedes and Huey (2008) found that cultural value gaps between parents and adolescents in the perceived endorsement of traditional gender roles predicted greater adolescent depressive symptoms, but in this same study, parent–child gaps on a broad measure of acculturation were not related to depression. Additionally, mother–daughter cultural value gaps in familism were associated with greater externalizing symptoms but not internalizing symptoms in a sample of suicide-attempters and non-attempters (Zayas et al. 2009). Thus, more research is needed examining specific cultural value gaps to understand how these gaps relate to adolescent functioning.

### **Affiliative Obedience**

Latino families, including Mexican Americans, have been characterized as having particularly strong familism, a traditional cultural value that emphasizes family obligation, unity, and connectedness (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003). Familism is a multi-faceted construct that includes affective bonds between family members, family loyalty, family obligation, and respect for elders (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003). A critical function of familism is its dictating of expectations for parent–child interactions. Specifically, youth are expected to obey and respect their elders. Indeed, research has established that respect for parental authority is paramount for Mexican American families (Calzada et al. 2010; Guilamo-Ramos et al. 2007; Livas-Dlott et al. 2010; Zucker and Howes 2009). Diaz-Guerrero (1994) termed this defining core value as affiliative obedience. In a series of cross-national studies, these investigators found that, relative to youth in the United States, youth in Mexico endorsed higher affiliative obedience (Diaz-Guerrero 1994; Holtzman et al. 1975). It is important to note the affiliative obedience has been termed *respeto* (respect) in other research (e.g., Calzada et al. 2010; Guilamo-Ramos et al. 2007).

Several lines of research point to the importance of family obedience and respect for authority in Mexican American families. For example, Mexican American adolescents report greater levels of family obligation than European American adolescents (Fuligni et al. 1999; Phinney et al. 2000). Similarly, Mexican, Central, and South American youth were less likely to report openly disagreeing with parents and demonstrated greater levels of respect for parents than European American youth (Fuligni et al. 1999). Parents of Latino youth also strongly endorse these cultural values. For example, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Mexican American parents emphasize the importance of the children demonstrating *respeto* and adherence to authority as crucial to successful parenting (Guilamo-Ramos et al. 2007; Zucker and Howes 2009). Taken together, these studies support the fact that Mexican American adolescents and their families

place a high value on the importance of family, and specifically on the adolescent's need to show deference towards adults (Phinney et al. 2000).

Although affiliative obedience is a central value in Mexican American families, very limited research has actually examined the relationship of this value to outcomes, particularly in adolescence. The majority of research on *respeto* has focused on describing parental expectations of pre-school aged youth (e.g., Calzada et al. 2010; Livas-Dlott et al. 2010), but has not linked this expectation to youth outcomes. Two past studies have examined the role of affiliative obedience and outcomes in adolescence using the problem suppression-facilitation model. This model posits that cultures that emphasize subjugation of the self in favor of the family may socialize children and adolescents to avoid expressing their distress openly, which could result in comparatively greater vulnerability for internalizing problems but also reduced vulnerability for externalizing problems (Weisz 1989). Polo (2002) and Polo and Lopez (2009) specifically tested whether, among Mexican American youth, affiliative obedience was responsible for the suppression of certain problem types (i.e., externalizing problems), while potentially promoting or facilitating others (i.e., internalizing problems). Evaluation of this hypothesis yielded only partial support, however. Higher youth affiliative obedience was found to be associated with lower externalizing problems (Polo 2002) as well as lower depressive symptoms (Polo and Lopez 2009). Most recently, using a latent construct called "cultural orientation" that included family obligation, familism, and affiliative obedience, Martinez et al. (2012) found that youth reports of cultural orientation were associated with higher anxiety, including harm avoidance and panic and separation anxiety symptoms.

Although there has been limited work examining affiliative obedience and respect in predicting outcomes in youth, a larger literature has examined the protective role of familism in Mexican American families. However, the findings have been inconsistent with regard to internalizing symptoms. Consistent with the findings from Polo and Lopez (2009), some studies document that familism is associated with fewer internalizing or depressive symptoms in samples with majority Mexican American youth (e.g., Smokowski and Bacallao 2007). Yet, other studies find that familism predicts greater externalizing or internalizing symptoms (e.g., Delgado et al. 2011; Kuhlberg et al. 2010). This inconsistency in the literature may have resulted from the fact that most of these studies only examine adolescent-reported familism and do not take into account parent report. In fact, parent and adolescent reports of familism tend not to be correlated (e.g., German et al. 2009). The lack of correlation implies that some families will in fact be more aligned on these values, while in other families their reports of familism may differ significantly. In order to understand how family values like affiliative obedience impact outcomes in youth, it may be necessary to examine how youth and parents align on these values.

## **Gender, Age, and Nativity and Cultural Value Gaps**

### ***Gender***

Past theorists have argued that Latino (including Mexican American) girls and boys may experience gendered expectations of familial cultural values, especially in terms of obligations for caring for others (e.g., Raffaelli and Ontai 2004; Zayas et al. 2009). In support for this idea, Céspedes and Huey (2008) found the risk for depressive symptoms only for girls who differed from their parents on gender role values. Similarly, poorer parent–child relationship factors have been shown to place Mexican American girls at risk for greater depressive symptoms when compared to boys (Updegraff et al. 2009). Thus, there is some initial evidence suggesting that cultural value gaps may be more prevalent and detrimental for girls. However, many studies that have demonstrated that risk of cultural value gaps for girls do so in single sex samples (e.g., Bámaca-Colbert et al. 2012; Bauman et al. 2010), thus limiting the ability to conclude that the risk is greater for either gender. At the same time, other studies find that there are no significant differences in the endorsement of familial cultural values by girls and boys (e.g., Fuligni et al. 1999) or that girls report higher levels of familial cultural values (e.g., Lac et al. 2011). Thus, how gender impacts the likelihood of experiencing a cultural value gap has not been fully elucidated. Moreover, Latina girls are more likely to report depressive symptoms than boys (Lorenzo-Blanco et al. 2011). Therefore, their greater risk may be in part associated with greater cultural gaps or greater impact associated with the gap.

### *Age*

Cultural groups vary in their expectations about adolescent behavior. In the US, youth are expected to spend more time outside the home, to establish a more independent identity, and to establish their own set of values (Granic et al. 2003). As a result, it is possible that family cultural values may diverge during adolescence, particularly if parents are from a cultural group that does not represent the mainstream values of the society in which youth are being raised. Supporting this notion, a recent study found that when compared with early adolescence, acculturation value gaps led to more familial conflict for Mexican American families when girls were in middle adolescence (Bámaca-Colbert et al. 2012). It is therefore reasonable to expect that older adolescents may demonstrate greater gaps than their younger counterparts. Studies have not established whether age interacts with value gaps to predict negative outcomes. In addition, older youth are at a greater risk for depressive symptoms (Hammen and Rudolph 2003), and it is possible that this risk is partly due to an increase in cultural value gaps as youth enter mid-adolescence.

### *Nativity*

The relationship between nativity or generation status and cultural gaps remains largely unexplored. In a large sample of Latina girls, nativity was not associated with a gap in familial cultural values defined as familism (Bauman et al. 2010), but this sample was a high-risk sample of girls who had attempted suicide compared to controls. Few studies have tested whether gaps differed by generation status (e.g., Lau et al. 2005; Martinez 2006) or whether nativity interacts with cultural value gaps to predict negative youth outcomes. It is possible US born children of

immigrant parents, relative to children who are foreign-born, would report greater cultural value gaps than their parents given that they have more exposure to US culture.

## **Present Study**

The present study extends previous research by exploring how cultural value gaps in affiliative obedience relate to adolescent depressive symptoms. The study uses a novel conceptualization of the cultural value gaps by examining differences in a specific cultural value instead of a broad-based measure of acculturation. To address previous limitations in the study of cultural value gaps, we also examine the roles that gender, age, and nativity play in the relationship between cultural value gaps and youth maladjustment. More specifically, we evaluate the following hypotheses: (1) Cultural value gaps in affiliative obedience will be associated with higher youth depressive symptoms but only among youth who report lower affiliative obedience than their parents. (2) We examine the potential moderational role of gender, age, and nativity in the relationship between cultural value gaps and youth depressive symptoms. Girls, older adolescents, and US-born Mexican Americans are expected to be at particularly higher risk for depressive symptoms as a result of having greater cultural value gaps than boys, younger adolescents, or foreign-born Mexican American youth.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The sample for the present study was drawn from three public middle schools in Los Angeles County. School records were used to recruit Latino students enrolled in 6th–8th grades across the three middle schools. In order to select foreign-born and US born youth of Mexican American backgrounds, parents were called and asked to complete a brief survey over the phone. Families were eligible to participate if at least one parent was of Mexican background and if the child was either (a) born in Mexico; or (b) born in the United States and had at least one parent who had lived in the United States for 20 years. These groups were selected because one of the study's original goals was to recruit approximately equal number of foreign and US born youth and to compare families who had different levels of exposure to living in the United States (see Polo and Lopez 2009).

A total of 362 families were contacted by phone. Of these, 12 (3.7 %) declined participation in the screening and 23 (6.4 %) were excluded. Reasons for exclusion included: (a) the targeted child was in special education ( $n = 13$ ) and consultation with the parent suggested that the interview would be too taxing or stressful for the child; (b) the targeted child had a sibling already enrolled in the study ( $n = 6$ ); and (c) no female legal guardian was living in the home ( $n = 4$ ). Then, of the 327 who were screened, 93 (28.4 %) were ineligible because neither parent was of Mexican American background ( $n = 70$ ) or because the parents did not meet the US length of stay criteria ( $n = 23$ ).

Eligibility to participate in the in-person interviews was met by 234 families. One parent (the biological mother or other female legal guardian in caretaker roles) and the selected child for each of these families were then invited to participate. Of these 234 eligible families, 163 (70.0 %) completed the in-person interviews. The remaining either (a) declined participation ( $n = 34$ ; 14.5 %), or missed the scheduled appointments ( $n = 37$ ; 15.8 %). Bias analyses were conducted to determine if those who participated were significantly different from those who actively or passively refused participation. No significant differences were found between these groups in terms of the target child's nativity,  $\chi^2(1, N = 234) = .67, p = .414$ , sex,  $\chi^2(1, N = 234) = .12, p = .734$ , or age,  $F(1,233) = 1.14, p = .287$ .

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the selected child's biological mothers ( $n = 158$ ), or with a female legal guardian in instances when the biological mother was not living with the target child (two grandmothers, one aunt, one sister, and one sister-in-law). Mothers (or female caretakers) were selected because of limited resources to interview more than one adult in the household. The majority of youth lived with two parents, including both biological parents (65.0 %) or with one biological parent and one step-parent (11.0 %). Parent interviews were predominately conducted in Spanish (81.0 %). In contrast, most of the children were interviewed in English (78.5 %).

Approximately equal numbers of youth US born ( $n = 82$ ) and foreign-born ( $n = 77$ ) were sampled. The foreign-born youth had spent, on average, 58.7 % of their lives in the US ( $M = 7.69$  years,  $SD = 3.59$ ). The majority of the sample included families in which both parents were of Mexican backgrounds ( $n = 149$ ), followed by those in which one parent was Mexican American and the other was either Central/South American ( $n = 12$ ) or Caucasian ( $n = 2$ ). Most parents were of low socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, 76.7 % reported having less than a high school degree or equivalent, and only 20.2 % reported family income  $> \$30,000$ . Four families were excluded from the present study due to missing parent data. This occurred because parents experienced difficulties with the items on the affiliative obedience scales due to, for example, low literacy levels and their responses were considered as invalid by the interviewer. Therefore, all analyses were conducted with the remaining 159 parent-child dyads (80 girls and 79 males;  $M$  age = 13.1,  $SD = .73$ ).

## **Measures**

### ***Youth and Parent Affiliative Obedience***

The Affiliative Obedience versus Active Self-Affirmation measure (Diaz-Guerrero 1994) is a subscale that is drawn from a socio-cultural premises inventory originally evaluated with youth in Mexico and Puerto Rico (Fernandez-Marina et al. 1958). Each of the 17 items, including "All adults should be respected" and "A person must always obey his/her parents" was rated from strongly agree (0) to strongly disagree (4). Item scores were recoded so that higher scores reflect a tendency towards affiliative obedience and away from active self-affirmation. The measure has

demonstrated sound psychometric properties (Holtzman et al. 1975). Both parents and youth completed identical versions of this measure, and the internal consistency of the scale was adequate for both youth reports ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and parent report ( $\alpha = .85$ ) as well as for Spanish ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and English ( $\alpha = .83$ ) versions.

### ***Cultural Value Gap***

Cultural value gaps were examined in two ways as these may lead to different results (Bámaca-Colbert and Gayles 2010). First, a gap variable was created by subtracting youth affiliative obedience from parent affiliative obedience. Thus, positive values indicate parents having higher perceptions of affiliative obedience than children, values near zero indicate an agreement among children and parents, and negative values indicate parents having lower perceptions of affiliative obedience than children. Second, youth were grouped into three categories based on their cultural value gap with their parents on affiliative obedience. A .5 SD of the acculturation gap (.72) was used as a cut-off to group youth into three groups: (1) greater youth obedience, (2) equal, and (3) greater parent obedience. These two measurements of the gap were used in order to assess the prevalence of cultural value gaps and whether there was a difference between those who demonstrated a greater parent gap compared to the other groups.

### ***Youth Depressive Symptoms***

The Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Inventory for Children (CES-DC; Weissman et al. 1980) was used to assess youth depressive symptoms over the course of the week prior to the interview. Youth rated the 20 items from this measure, including “I felt down and unhappy” and “I was more quiet than usual” from Not at all (0) to a lot (3). The psychometric properties of the CES-D, a parallel form of this instrument, have been found to be similar across Mexican American and European American samples of youth (Roberts 1992). Adequate internal consistency was found for this measure in this sample ( $\alpha = .82$ ) and for both the English ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and Spanish ( $\alpha = .79$ ) versions. A score of 16 is considered to be a cut-off for moderate to severe depression risk in adolescent samples (Swanson et al. 1992).

### ***Age***

Age was calculated based on birthday at the time of the assessment. In order to examine the context of culture value gaps in terms of age, a median split was performed to categorize youth as younger (range 11.7–13.2;  $M = 12.6$ ;  $n = 84$ ) or older (range 13.3–15.1;  $M = 13.8$ ,  $n = 75$ ).

### ***Procedure***

Informed consent forms were signed by parents and assent forms were signed by children indicating their agreement to participate. Interviews lasted 2.5 h and were conducted on school grounds, and parents and youth were interviewed at the same time but in separate classrooms. Parents (\$25.00) and children (\$15.00) were paid for their study participation. The interviews



were conducted by 15 bilingual undergraduate, BA-, and doctoral-level research assistants. Interviewers read the items aloud and asked participants to respond with the aid of a response scale booklet. The questionnaires were available in Spanish and English for both child and adult versions. Translation and back-translation procedures were used on all measures using an adaptation from Brislin's (1986) guidelines (see Polo and Lopez 2009, for more details).

## Results

Although parents and youth reported similar overall levels of affiliative obedience (see Table 1), scores in this measure across these two reporters were not significantly correlated ( $r = .12, p = ns$ ). A MANOVA was conducted to examine whether gender, age, or nativity were associated with parent or youth reported affiliative obedience. There were no significant differences for gender [Wilks's  $\lambda F(2,154) = .27, p = .77$ ] or age [Wilks's  $\lambda F(2,154) = 1.93, p = .15$ ] (see Table 1 for means). However, there was a significant effect for nativity [Wilks's  $\lambda F(2,154) = 5.65, p = .004$ ]. Foreign-born youth and their parents reported higher levels of affiliative obedience than US born youth ( $p = .03$ ) and their parents ( $p = .01$ ) (see Table 1). In terms of the cultural value gap, the mean level of the discrepancy between youth and parents was  $-.17$ , indicating that, overall, youth reported higher affiliative obedience scores than their parents.

**Table 1** Sample means and standard deviations by nativity status

	<b>Girls</b> M (SD)	<b>Boys</b> M (SD)	<b>Younger</b> M (SD)	<b>Older</b> M (SD)	<b>US born</b> M (SD)	<b>Foreign- born</b> M (SD)	<b>Total sample</b> M (SD)
Parent affiliative obedience	2.59 (.57)	2.59 (.58)	2.52 (.55)	2.67 (.59)	2.47 (.60) <sub>A</sub>	2.71 (.51) <sub>A</sub>	2.59 (.57)
Youth affiliative obedience	2.72 (.54)	2.79 (.50)	2.70 (.50)	2.81 (.54)	2.67 (.55) <sub>B</sub>	2.85 (.48) <sub>B</sub>	2.76 (.52)
Cultural value gap	-.14 (.69)	-.20 (.75)	-.18 (.66)	-.15 (.79)	-.20 (.69)	-.14 (.75)	-.17 (.72)
Youth depressive symptoms	15.01 (9.20)	13.90 (8.25)	14.10 (7.67)	14.87 (9.83)	13.78 (8.56)	15.18 (8.91)	14.45 (8.73)

Cultural value gap is the difference between parent and youth reports of affiliative obedience. Same letter subscript denotes a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the two groups

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine the extent to which difference scores in parent and youth perceptions of affiliative obedience predicted youth depressive symptoms, controlling for nativity, gender, and age (see Table 2). Results indicated a significant effect of cultural gaps on depressive symptoms. Higher affiliative obedience gaps scores were associated with higher youth depressive symptoms. The model accounted for 8 % of the variance in depressive symptoms.

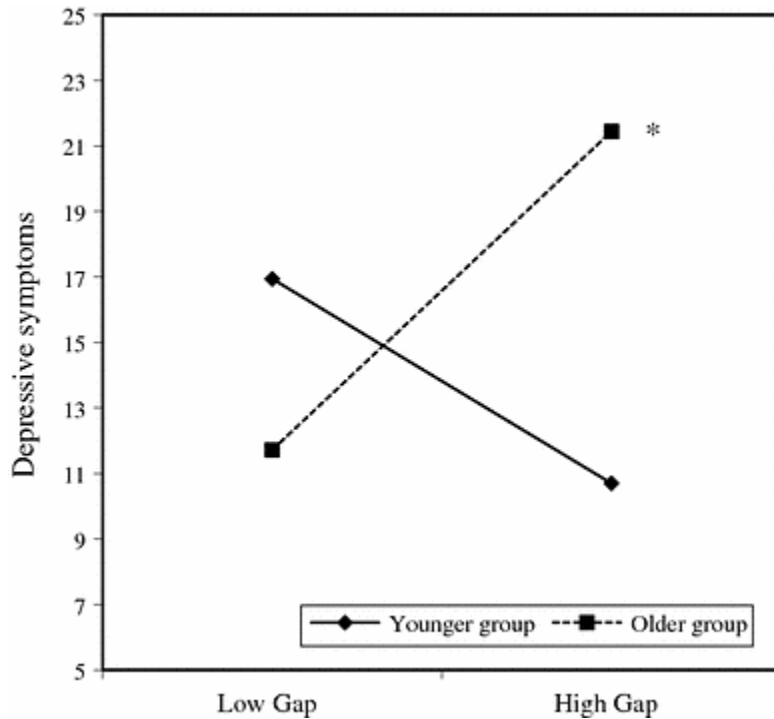
**Table 2** Multiple regression models predicting youth depressive symptoms

Predictor	Main effects		Interaction model 1		Interaction model 2		Interaction model 3	
	$\beta$	<i>p</i> value	$\beta$	<i>p</i> value	$\beta$	<i>p</i> value	$\beta$	<i>p</i> value
Nativity status	-.07	.38	-.07	.39	-.07	.38	-.07	.37
Gender	-.06	.47	-.04	.64	-.04	.59	-.06	.48
Age	.04	.59	.05	.54	.08	.32	.04	.59
Cultural value gaps	.26	.001	.18	.09	.07	.53	.24	.04
Gender $\times$ gap	–	–	.11	.32	–	–	–	–
Age $\times$ gap	–	–	–	–	.25	.03	–	–
Nativity $\times$ gap	–	–	–	–			.03	.81
$R^2$	.08		.08		.10		.08	

Cultural value gap is the difference between youth and parent reports of affiliative obedience. Age is a categorical variable (median split with 1 = older youth)

In terms of predictors of the gaps, contrary to the hypothesis, there were no significant differences in the difference scores due to gender, age, or nativity (see Table 1). Three additional hierarchical regression models were evaluated to determine whether gender, age, or nativity significantly interacted with the affiliative obedience gaps scores to predict depressive symptoms. The first model tested gender as a moderator. Contrary to our predictions, the interaction term was not statistically significant, suggesting that affiliative obedience gaps predict youth depression similarly across both genders (see Table 2). The second model tested age (entered categorically) as a moderator. As predicted, the age  $\times$  affiliative obedience gap scores interaction term was statistically significant and the new model accounted for an additional 2 % of the variance (see Table 2). To further probe this interaction effect we used the online calculation utility created by Preacher et al. (2006). The simple slope for the older group

was significant ( $B = 4.86, p < .001$ ), while the simple slope for the younger group was not ( $B = -.87, p = .46$ ) (see Fig. 1). This interaction suggests that cultural value gaps predict greater depressive symptoms, but only among the older group of adolescents. The final model tested nativity as a moderator. Contrary to our predictions, the nativity by affiliative obedience gaps score interaction term was not found to be statistically significant, which suggests that the relationship between the affiliative obedience gaps and youth depression scores do not vary depending on whether youth are foreign or US born (see Table 2).



**Fig. 1** The moderational role of age in the relationship between parent–child cultural values gap and youth depressive symptoms. \*Statistically significant slope

Next, the cultural value gap was examined by grouping families based on the type of discrepancy found between youth and parent reports of affiliative obedience (see Table 3). Forty youth (25.1 %) endorsed lower affiliative obedience than their parents ( $>.5$  SD). Fifty-six youth (35.2 %) reported equal endorsement of affiliative obedience (within  $.5$  SD of each other). Finally, 63 youth (39.6 %) endorsed greater affiliative obedience than their parents ( $>.5$  SD).

**Table 3** Cultural value gap group means and percent in group classifications

	Youth greater affiliative obedience than parent		Youth and parent equal on affiliative obedience		Youth lower affiliative obedience than parent	
	M or %	SE	M or %	SE	M or %	SE

Parent obedience	2.21 <sub>A</sub>	.05	2.65 <sub>B</sub>	.06	3.10 <sub>C</sub>	.07
Youth obedience	3.10 <sub>A</sub>	.05	2.69 <sub>C</sub>	.06	2.32 <sub>C</sub>	.07
Percent in group foreign-born	46 %		45 %		58 %	
Percent in group girls	49 %		48 %		55 %	
Percent in group older	44 %		45 %		55 %	
Mean age	13.1	.09	13.1	.10	13.2	.12
Depressive symptoms	13.03 <sub>A</sub>	1.07	13.43 <sub>A</sub>	1.14	18.14 <sub>B</sub>	1.36
Percent above clinical cut-off	35 %		35 %		55 %	

Means that have different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$ . Depressive symptoms adjusted for nativity, gender, and age

An ANCOVA was estimated with depressive symptoms as an outcome and nativity, gender, and age as a covariate. An examination of the adjusted means demonstrated the parent greater group had significantly greater depressive symptoms ( $M = 18.1$ ) than youth in the equal group ( $M = 13.4$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and youth greater group ( $M = 13.0$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Using the established 16-point cut-off to classify kids at risk for depression on the CES-DC measure, 55.0 % of the youth in the parent greater group were classified at risk compared to 35.0 % of youth in each of the other groups. Consistent with the regression results, the groups did not differ significantly by nativity, age, or gender.

## Discussion

The results of the present study provide further evidence of the potentially detrimental effects of parent-child cultural value gaps on the well-being of Mexican American youth. More specifically, when parents endorse greater levels of affiliative obedience than their children, youth are more likely to report greater levels of depressive symptoms. In addition, age (but not gender or nativity) differentially relate to parent-child cultural gap discrepancies in affiliative obedience.

Overall, our findings suggest that parent–child gaps in affiliative obedience can be associated with youth maladjustment. Specifically, adolescents are at increased risk for depression when they endorse lower levels of affiliative obedience than their parents, but this was only true for older early adolescents. The fact that the gap was more problematic for older youth may be due to the fact that older adolescents may demonstrate more age-related defiance (e.g., by openly disagreeing with parents, or by not doing the chores in the home) that destabilizes the family unit. It is important to note that we found a moderating role of age even within a small age range, and as adolescents transition to high school, we would expect that the effects of age may be even greater as they begin to show more autonomy. Although the age range of this sample is limited, the youth were sampled during a critical early adolescence stage in which issues of autonomy and independence are emerging. Diaz-Guerrero (1994) has noted that a “passive” affiliative obedient stance is not as healthy by age 15 and that the transition from affiliative obedience to self-affirmation is critical between the ages of 12 and 15 years old (p. 18). This suggests that longitudinal research on the course of this cultural value is needed as well as on the normative and non-normative gap between youth and their parents before, during, and after this transitional age. These findings are in line with past research linking acculturation gaps and adolescent depression and externalizing symptoms in Latino youth (Céspedes and Huey 2008; Schofield et al. 2008).

Consistent with past research, only 25 % of families were classified as having the gap that has been hypothesized to be related to negative outcomes where parents endorse greater levels of the value than youth (Lau et al. 2005). This suggests that the majority of Mexican American families with children in this age group appear to be successful in aligning on parent–child cultural values, and thus cultural value gaps are not a ubiquitous experience. In fact, the largest proportion of families was those where the youth endorsed greater levels than their parents. While Diaz-Guerrero (1994) postulates that the majority of youth of Mexican backgrounds endorse this value, he argues that a developmental task of these youth is to shift gradually towards a more assertive and self-affirming stance at some point during adolescence. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of Mexican American parents in this sample endorsed lower affiliative obedience than their own children. It also appears that the parent greater group is not comprised of parents who endorse extreme levels of the value while youth report a value more aligned with their peers, as evidenced by the fact that the mean level of affiliative obedience endorsed by parents in this group is the same as the mean level of affiliative obedience endorsed by the youth in the youth greater group. Moreover, youth in the parent greater group report significantly less affiliative obedience than youth in the other two groups. It is also important to note that the mean level of endorsement by both youth and parents could be characterized as agreeing as opposed to strongly agreeing suggesting that both youth and parents do not endorse extremely high affiliative obedience. This is likely due to the wording of the measure, which rigidly states many of the values (e.g., “A person must always obey his/her parents”).

Although our grouping analyses revealed that only a small portion of youth actually demonstrated a problematic gap, this small group appeared to be at higher risk, as they endorsed the highest levels of depressive symptoms, and more than half of youth in this group were classified as “at-risk” using the clinical cut-off. Differences in affiliative obedience may lead to greater family conflict and decreased supportive parenting, both of which have been related to greater externalizing and depressive symptoms in Latino youth (Crean 2008; Gonzales et al. 2006). In contrast, families in which youth and parents are aligned in terms of core cultural values are likely to have common goals and decreased tension, which would lessen the risk for depressive symptoms. Moreover, when adolescents and their parents differ on an important cultural value, the ensuing family conflict may lead to negative cognitions on the part of the adolescent, which may lead to greater depressive symptoms. Future research should explore mechanisms explaining how cultural value gaps result in externalizing versus depressive symptoms as well as changes in family functioning.

A novel aspect of our study is the systematic investigation of how key demographic variables influence cultural value gaps. Contrary to our hypothesis, gender, age, and nativity status were not related to parent–child gaps in affiliative obedience. In terms of gender, both girls and boys reported similar levels of affiliative obedience, and neither was more likely to differ from their parent. Thus, it appears that boys and girls equally receive messages of obedience and respect and internalize these messages. Although past research has suggested that girls may be at particular risk of demonstrating a problematic gap in values (e.g., Céspedes and Huey 2008), this risk may be more likely in gender-role values where girls and boys are socialized differently and the cultural differences between US and Mexican roles for women may be more distinct.

It was unexpected that younger and older early adolescents were just as likely to demonstrate cultural value gaps. In our sample, there were no developmental differences in the endorsement of the value as youth became older. This highlights that cultural values of respect and obedience are not just expected of younger children (e.g., *respeto*, Calzada et al. 2010), but extend through early adolescence. However, the developmental differences may begin to emerge in later adolescence as youth enter high school and may begin to want to exert more of their own autonomy (Granic et al. 2003). Although foreign-born parents and youth reported greater affiliative obedience than US-born youth and their parents, contrary to our expectation, families with US-born youth were not more likely to have parents who endorsed more affiliative obedience than themselves. The fact that nativity status was not associated with cultural value gaps was unexpected, but this may be due to the fact that the length in time in the US varied among families who were foreign-born. Overall, it appears it is equally likely that US- and foreign-born youth align with their parents on this specific cultural value. However, it may also be that these gaps increase between foreign and US-born youth as they enter mid-to-late adolescence, which should be investigated in future research.

Our results provide support for examining acculturation gaps in specific cultural values instead of using broad measures of acculturation. Given our findings and past research, it appears that

differential acculturation on values that dictate early adolescent behavior within the family context can be problematic in terms of individual and family outcomes. Traditional gender roles (as measured in Céspedes and Huey 2008) and affiliative obedience are both culturally specific values that provide norms and expectations for adolescent behavior within the family context. Within-family discrepancies on these familial values are perhaps more directly linked to family functioning than perhaps parent–child mismatches on media preference, food consumption, or reported participation in traditional cultural events. Although Céspedes and Huey (2008) only obtained reports of cultural values from the youth and gathered data on how children perceived their parents values, our study uses parent and child report of affiliative obedience to define the acculturation gap, thereby contributing significantly to this line of research. Future research should continue to examine this question in relation to the acculturation–gap hypothesis, instead of no longer testing the model as other researchers have suggested due to the lack of consistent empirical support (e.g., Smokowski et al. 2008). In addition, this research should examine the temporal sequencing in terms of whether adolescent adjustment predicts gaps or vice versa, as this was not established in this study.

### **Limitations and Conclusions**

It is important to note some limitations to our study. First, we only examined this question with Mexican American youth and their families, and future work is needed to see whether acculturation gaps in affiliative obedience or other core cultural values serve as a risk factor in other cultural groups. Secondly, we only have mothers' reports of affiliative obedience, but past research has found possible parental gender differences in acculturation gaps (Schofield et al. 2008), so future research should examine these questions using both paternal and maternal reports. Third, our sample of Mexican American families was low SES, limiting the generalizability of our findings to Mexican Americans in other economic strata. Given that education level influences the rate of acculturation (Kranau et al. 1982), the limited variability on parental education may have also influenced our findings. Future research should examine these questions in sample with more diversity in terms of SES as higher SES families may show smaller acculturative value gaps. Finally, our data were collected concurrently, and thus we could not establish whether acculturation gaps in affiliative obedience predict depressive outcomes longitudinally. It may be that youth who exhibit high levels of depressive symptoms develop a large acculturation gap.

Nevertheless, the results of our study have important clinical implications. Clinicians should attend to acculturation differences when working with Latino families, especially differences in familial cultural values such as affiliative obedience. By framing family conflict through a cultural lens, parents and adolescents may begin to have different interpretations for each other's behavior, thereby easing the tension in the home. In addition, clinicians should be aware that the majority of Latino families underestimate the disparity in their acculturation levels (Merali 2002), so it may be important that the clinician go beyond asking them if they feel they

differ in their level of acculturation and ask instead specific questions regarding important cultural values, such as family obligation, respect for parents, or traditional gender roles.

In summary, this study found that cultural value gaps in affiliative obedience can serve as a risk factor for youth depressive symptoms. Thus, researchers should continue to explore how cultural value gaps affect Latino youth and their families, specifically whether these gaps lead to greater family dysfunction as hypothesized. Our study highlights the importance of examining the specific mechanisms through which culturally specific variables play a role in the development of adolescent maladjustment to increase our understanding of why Latino adolescents are at such high risk for depressive symptoms.

## References

Bámaca-Colbert, M. Y., & Gayles, J. G. (2010). Variable-centered and person-centered approaches to studying Mexican-origin mother–daughter cultural orientation dissonance. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *39*(11), 1274–1292.

Bámaca-Colbert, M. Y., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., & Gayles, J. G. (2012). A developmental–contextual model of depressive symptoms in Mexican-origin female adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, *48*, 406–421. doi:10.1037/a0025666.

Bauman, A. A., Kuhlberg, J. A., & Zayas, L. H. (2010). Familism, mother–daughter mutuality, and suicide attempts of adolescent Latinas. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *24*, 616–624.

Brislin, R. (1986). *The wording and translation of research instruments*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Calzada, E. J., Fernandez, Y., & Cortes, D. E. (2010). Incorporating the cultural value of *respeto* into a framework of Latino parenting. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *16*(1), 77–86. doi:10.1037/a0016071.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2011. *MMWR*, *61*, 1–162. Available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf>.

Céspedes, Y. M., & Huey, S. J. (2008). Depression in Latino adolescents: A cultural discrepancy perspective. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *14*(2), 168–172. doi:10.1037/1099-9809.14.2.168.

Crean, H. F. (2008). Conflict in the Latino parent–youth dyad: The role of emotional support from the opposite parent. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *22*(3), 484–493. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.22.3.484.



- Delgado, M. Y., Updegraff, K. A., Roosa, M. W., & Umaña-Taylor, A. J. (2011). Discrimination and Mexican-origin adolescents' adjustment: The moderating roles of adolescents', mothers', and fathers' cultural orientations and values. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *40*(2), 125–139.
- Diaz-Guerrero, R. (1994). *Psicología del Mexicano: Descubrimiento de la Etnopsicología* (6th ed.). México, DF: Trillas.
- Fernandez-Marina, R., Maldonado-Sierra, E., & Trent, R. (1958). Three basic themes in Mexican and Puerto Rican family values. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *48*, 167–181.
- Fuligni, A., Tseng, V., & Lam, M. (1999). Attitudes toward family obligations among American adolescents with Asian, Latin American, and European backgrounds. *Child Development*, *70*(4), 1030–1044.
- German, M., Gonzales, N. A., & Dumka, L. (2009). Familism values as a protective factor for Mexican-origin adolescents exposed to deviant peers. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *29*(1), 16–42.
- Gonzales, N. A., Deardorff, J., Formoso, D., Barr, A., & Barrera, M. (2006). Family mediators of the relation between acculturation and adolescent mental health. *Family Relations*, *55*(3), 318–330.
- Granic, I., Dishion, T. J., & Hollenstein, T. (2003). The family ecology of adolescence: A dynamic systems perspective on normative development. In G. R. Adams & M. D. Berzonsky (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of adolescence* (pp. 60–91).
- Guilamo-Ramos, V., Dittus, P., Jaccard, J., Johansson, M., Bouris, A., & Acosta, N. (2007). Parenting practices among Dominican and Puerto Rican mothers. *Social Work*, *52*(1), 17–30.
- Hammen, C., & Rudolph, K. D. (2003). Childhood mood disorders. In E. J. Mash & R. A. Barkley (Eds.), *Child psychopathology* (2nd ed., pp. 233–278). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Holtzman, W. H., Diaz-Guerrero, R., & Swartz, J. D. (1975). *Personality development in two cultures: A cross-cultural longitudinal study of school children in Mexico and the United States*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Kranau, E. J., Green, V., & Valencia-Weber, G. (1982). Acculturation and the Hispanic woman: Attitudes toward women, sex-role attribution, sex-role behavior, and demographics. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *4*(1), 21–40.
- Kuhlberg, J. A., Peña, J. B., & Zayas, L. H. (2010). Familism, parent–adolescent conflict, self-esteem, internalizing behaviors and suicide attempts among adolescent Latinas. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, *41*(4), 425–440.

- Lac, A., Unger, J. B., Basáñez, T., Ritt-Olson, A., Soto, D. W., & Baezconde-Garbanati, L. (2011). Marijuana use among Latino adolescents: Gender differences in protective familial factors. *Substance Use and Misuse, 46*(5), 644–655.
- Lau, A. S., McCabe, K. M., Garland, A. F., Wood, P. A., & Hough, R. L. (2005). The acculturation gap–distress hypothesis among high-risk Mexican American families. *Journal of Family Psychology, 19*(3), 367–375. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.19.3.367.
- Livas-Dlott, A., Fuller, B., Stein, G. L., Bridges, M., Mangual Figueroa, A., & Mireles, L. (2010). Commands, competence, and Cariño: Maternal socialization practices in Mexican American families. *Developmental Psychology, 46*(3), 566.
- Lorenzo-Blanco, E. I., Unger, J. B., Ritt-Olson, A., Soto, D., & Baezconde-Garbanati, L. (2011). Acculturation, gender, depression, and cigarette smoking among us Hispanic youth: The mediating role of perceived discrimination. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 40*(11), 1519–1533.
- Lugo Steidel, A., & Contreras, J. (2003). A new familism scale for use with Latino populations. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 25*, 312–330.
- Martinez, C. R. (2006). Effects of differential family acculturation on Latino adolescent substance use. *Family Relations, 55*(3), 306–317. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00404.x.
- Martinez, W., Polo, A. J., & Carter, J. S. (2012). Family orientation, language, and anxiety among low-income Latino youth. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 26*(4), 517–525.
- Merali, N. (2002). Perceived versus actual parent–adolescent assimilation disparity among Hispanic refugee families. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 24*(1), 57–68. doi:10.1023/A:1015081309426.
- Pasch, L. A., Deardorff, J., Tschann, J. M., Flores, E., Penilla, C., & Pantoja, P. (2006). Acculturation, parent–adolescent conflict, and adolescent adjustment in Mexican American families. *Family Process, 45*(1), 75–86. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2006.00081.x.
- Phinney, J. S., Ong, A., & Madden, T. (2000). Cultural values and intergenerational value discrepancies in immigrant and non-immigrant families. *Child Development, 71*(2), 528–539. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00162.
- Polo. (2002). Mexican American youth: An examination of the role of cultural, social, and family correlates of their mental health. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B. Sciences and Engineering, 63*(5-B), 2599.
- Polo, A., & Lopez, S. (2009). Culture, context, and the internalizing distress of Mexican American youth. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 38*, 273–285.

- Preacher, K. J., Curran, P. J., & Bauer, D. J. (2006). Computational tools for probing interactions in multiple linear regression, multilevel modeling, and latent curve analysis. *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics, 31*(4), 437–448.
- Raffaelli, M., & Ontai, L. L. (2004). Gender socialization in Latino/a families: Results from two retrospective studies. *Sex Roles, 50*, 287–299.
- Roberts, R. (1992). Manifestation of depressive symptoms among adolescents: A comparison of Mexican Americans with the majority and other minority populations. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 180*, 627–633.
- 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.
- Schofield, T. J., Parke, R., Kim, Y., & Coltrane, S. (2008). Bridging the acculturation gap: Parent–child relationship quality as a moderator in Mexican American families. *Developmental Psychology, 44*(4), 1190–1194. doi:10.1037/a0012529.
- Smokowski, P. R., & Bacallao, M. L. (2007). Acculturation, internalizing mental health symptoms, and self-esteem: Cultural experiences of Latino adolescents in North Carolina. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development, 37*(3), 273–292.
- Smokowski, P. R., Rose, R., & Bacallao, M. L. (2008). Acculturation and Latino family processes: How cultural involvement, biculturalism, and acculturation gaps influence family dynamics? *Family Relations, 57*(3), 295–308. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00501.x.
- Swanson, J. W., Linskey, A. O., Quintero-Salinas, R., & Pumariega, A. J. (1992). A binational school survey of depressive symptoms, drug use, and suicidal ideation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 31*, 669–678.
- Szapocznik, J., & Kurtines, W. M. (1993). Family psychology and cultural diversity: Opportunities for theory, research, and application. *American Psychologist, 48*, 400–407.
- Telzer, E. H. (2010). Exploring the acculturation gap-distress model: An integrative review of research. *Human Development, 53*, 313–340.
- Twenge, J. M., & Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (2002). Age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and birth cohort differences on the children's depression inventory: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 111*(4), 578–588.
- Updegraff, K. A., Delgado, M. Y., & Wheeler, L. A. (2009). Exploring mothers' and fathers' relationships with sons versus daughters: Links to adolescent adjustment in Mexican immigrant families. *Sex Roles, 60*(7), 559–574.

Wagstaff, A. E., & Polo, A. J. (2012). Ethnicity and adolescent depression: Prevalence, access to services, and promising interventions. *The Prevention Researcher, 19*, 8–10.

Weissman, M. M., Orvaschel, H., & Padian, N. (1980). Children's symptoms and social functioning self-report scales: Comparisons of mothers' and children's reports. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 168*, 736–740.

Weisz, J. R. (1989). Culture and the development of child psychopathology: Lessons from Thailand. In D. Cicchetti (Ed.), *The emergence of a discipline: Rochester symposium on developmental psychopathology* (Vol. 1, pp. 89–117). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Zayas, L. H., Bright, C. L., Álvarez-Sánchez, T., & Cabassa, L. J. (2009). Acculturation, familism and mother–daughter relations among suicidal and non-suicidal adolescent Latinas. *The Journal of Primary Prevention, 30*(3–4), 351–369. doi:10.1007/s10935-009-0181-0.

Zucker, E., & Howes, C. (2009). Respectful relationships: Socialization goals and practices among Mexican mothers. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 30*(5), 501–522. doi:10.1002/imhj.20226.