



Associations Between Ethnic Discrimination, Self-Mastery/Control and Communicative Processes in U.S. Latino/a Young Adults: Implications for Adjustment



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Abstract

Using data from 283 U.S. Latino/a young adults, we examined self-mastery/control and perceived negative communication with a romantic partner as potential intervening mechanisms for the associations between ethnic discrimination and anxiety and depressive symptoms. We also examined if these associations varied based on gender. Findings revealed that for men, but not women, ethnic discrimination was associated with increased anxiety and depressive symptoms. Further, for men and women, self-mastery/control was negatively associated with perceived negative communication with a romantic partner. Finally, for women, but not men, negative communication with a romantic partner was associated with increased anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Introduction

- U.S. Latino/a young adults are at a higher risk for anxiety, depression, and suicide compared to other ethnic-minority groups (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Holliday et al., 2016).
- As discriminatory experiences are uncontrollable, identifying intervening mechanisms may provide researchers with the ability to create targets for intervention.
- Research has identified that self-mastery/control and communication with a romantic partner are two domains that are particularly sensitive to stress.
- Self-mastery/control refers to the extent to which individuals believe they have control over their circumstances and environment (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).
- Perceived negative communication with a romantic partner includes experiences such as withdrawing from arguments, experienced criticism, or holding opposing views regarding a problem (Owen et al., 2011; Stanley et al., 2005).
- Additionally, research has also largely ignored how men's and women's experiences and outcomes may be different due to variations in gender socialization (Block, 1983).
- We explored perceived negative communication with a romantic partner as potential intervening mechanisms for the associations between ethnic discrimination and anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- In addition, we examined how these associations may vary by gender.

Method

Participants included 283 Latino/a young adults living in the U.S. (57.6% male) between the ages of 18 and 29 ($M_{age} = 25.37$, $SD = 6.19$). Data came from a larger study exploring U.S. Latino/as' romantic relationships. Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk and completed online surveys rating their experiences of perceived ethnic discrimination (Whitbeck et al., 2001), self-mastery/control (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), perceived negative communication with a romantic partner (Owen et al., 2011; Stanley et al., 2005), anxiety (Spitzer et al., 2006; Löwe et al., 2008), and depressive symptoms (Radloff, 1977). Cronbach's alphas were all above .80. Descriptive statistics can be provided upon request.

Findings

Table 1. Model Fit Indices for Model Comparisons

Model	χ^2 /MLR	df	Scaling	Model comparison	$\Delta\chi^2$ /S-B	CFI	RMSR
M1. Unconstrained	16.29 [*]	8	1.33			.95	.08
M2. Fully constrained	42.18 ^{**}	22	1.11	M2 vs. M1	25.56 [*]	.97	.08
M3. Partially constrained	20.31	17	1.19	M3 vs. M2	26.97 ^{**}	.99	.03
M4. Anxiety on ethnic discrimination	28.72 [*]	18	1.17	M4 vs. M3	12.68 ^{**}	.98	.06
M5. Depressive symptoms on ethnic discrimination	29.33 [*]	18	1.16	M5 vs. M3	14.89 ^{**}	.98	.06
M6. Anxiety on self-mastery/control	21.46 [*]	18	1.18	M6 vs. M3	1.13	.99	.03
M7. Anxiety on negative communication with a romantic partner	29.12 [*]	18	1.16	M7 vs. M3	15.25 ^{**}	.98	.06
M8. Depressive symptoms on negative communication with a romantic partner	35.93 [*]	18	1.15	M8 vs. M3	36.34 ^{**}	.97	.08

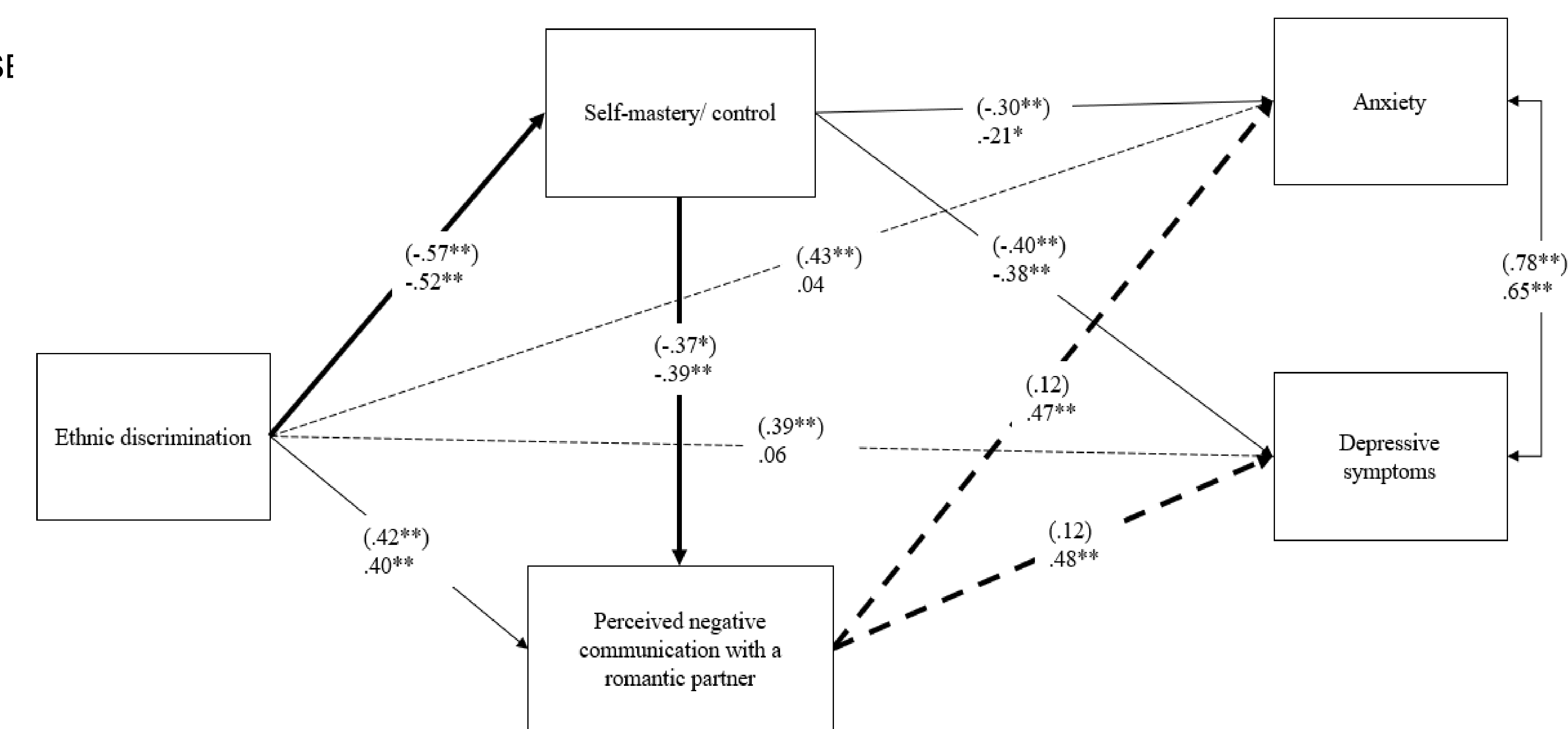


Figure 1. Finalized path model showing standardized direct and indirect associations between ethnic discrimination, self-mastery/control, perceived negative communication with a romantic partner, anxiety, and depressive symptoms for men and women. Estimates inside parentheses represent estimates for men. Estimates outside the parentheses represent estimates for women. Dashed lines represent paths that differed significantly for men and women. Bold lines indicate significant indirect effects. Gender and economic hardship were controlled for in analyses. Model fit indices: $\chi^2(17) = 20.31$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .05. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

- We conducted multigroup path analysis in *Mplus* (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors to examine the associations between ethnic discrimination and anxiety and depressive symptoms via negative communication with a romantic partner and self-mastery/control.
- We also examined if these direct and indirect associations varied between men and women.
- We tested an unconstrained model in which all paths were freely estimated. Then we tested a fully constrained model, in which all paths were constrained to be equal between both men and women. A significant Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-Square test indicated that the model should be considered separately for men and women. We utilized a partially constrained model as our final model.
- This model was an excellent fit to our data (see Figure 1). Ethnic discrimination was positively associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms for men, but not women (see Table 1). Self-mastery/control was negatively associated with anxiety for women and men. Negative communication with a romantic partner was positively associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms for women, but not men.
- Next, we tested the indirect effects between ethnic discrimination and anxiety and depressive symptoms via self-mastery/control and perceived negative communication with a romantic partner.
- Findings revealed that ethnic discrimination was associated with decreased self-mastery/control, which in turn predicted increased negative communication with a romantic partner and in turn predicted increased anxiety for women ($ab = .09$, $SE = .02$, $p < .01$; CI 95% = .04, .16), but not men ($ab = .02$, $SE = .02$, $p = .18$; CI 95% = -.01, .06).
- Further, the indirect path between ethnic discrimination and depressive symptoms via self-mastery/control and perceived negative communication with a romantic partner was significant for women ($ab = .09$, $SE = .02$, $p < .01$; CI 95% = .89, 2.52), but not men ($ab = .02$, $SE = .01$, $p = .10$; CI 95% = -.08, .90).

Discussion

The current study provides evidence that experiences of ethnic discrimination “spillover” into both individual (e.g., self-mastery/control) and relational (e.g., perceived negative communication with a romantic partner) factors. Further, spillover is associated with increased anxiety and depressive symptoms among U.S. Latino/a young adults. Clinicians working with individuals and couples can teach effective coping strategies in order to help individuals process experiences of discrimination. Clinicians can also provide individuals and couples with effective communication techniques that can be utilized during conflict. Findings from the current study highlight the continued need for research to explore why discrimination impacts U.S. Latino/as and to investigate potential buffers for these experiences.