

The Role of Peers and Friends on Mexican-Origin Female Adolescents' Psychological Adjustment

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Abstract

Despite the importance of peers and friends in adolescence, little work has been done that explores the contributions that peers and friends have in Latino adolescents' lives, specifically on their psychological adjustment. To fill in this gap, the current study examined the contribution that peer stressors had on Mexican-origin female adolescents' ($n = 153$) self-esteem and depressive symptomatology and explored the moderating role that the quality of the relationship with friends and best friends played in shaping this association. Results from hierarchical regressions indicated that more peer stress was significantly associated with lower levels of self-esteem and greater levels of depressive symptoms. Further, friendship support moderated the association between peer stressors and self-esteem such that this association was only significant among adolescents reporting low friendship support. Finally, contrary to expectations, relationship quality with best friend was neither a direct predictor of adjustment or moderated any associations. This study stresses the importance of supportive friendships in adolescent psychological adjustment against peer stressors.

Introduction

Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), with a large percentage of this population being children and youth (U.S. Census Bureau). Latino adolescents, along with other ethnic minority youth, report psychological adjustment issues such as depressed mood more so than White adolescents (Gore & Aseltine, 2003), and Latina adolescents show significantly higher levels of depression than their White, Black, and Asian counterparts (Siegel, Aneshensel, Taub, Cantwell, & Driscoll, 1998). As a result, understanding the psychological adjustment of Latino adolescent girls is extremely relevant considering the scarcity of knowledge and needs on this population.

Depressive symptoms and self-esteem are two important components of psychological adjustment (Feldman, Rubenstein, & Rubin, 1988; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2009) that appear to be affected by adolescents' stressful experiences with peers. For instance, adolescents

have been shown to exhibit more negative adjustment outcomes (i.e., depressive symptoms) when faced with hassles from peers such as victimization (Storch, Nock, Masia-Warner, & Barlas, 2003). Further, less acceptance by peers has been linked to lower feelings of self-worth in girls (Klima & Repetti, 2008). Peer stressors may affect female adolescents more so than males because they appear to be more affected by stress than males (Washburn-Ormachea, Hillman, & Sawilowsky, 2004). For instance, female adolescents who experienced stress in a peer context showed more negative emotional responses in the form of depression (Rudolph, 2002).

Relationships with friends, however, may serve a protective function from stress and adjustment problems (Parker & Asher, 1993). Specifically, having a close friendship in adolescence has been shown to contribute to adolescent psychological adjustment (Townsend, McCracken, Wilton, 1988). Laible et al. (2000) found that adolescents who reported better quality relationships with friends were least likely to report maladjusted symptoms (i.e., depression, aggression) compared to those who reported lower quality relationships. Further, the quality of a relationship with a best friend has been shown to reduce the effects of peer stressors (Bagwell, Newcomb & Bukowski, 1998). Bagwell et al. found that the negative effects of peer rejection were not significant when friendship status was included as a predictor. These findings point to the importance of friends during adolescence. Thus, given the little understanding we have on the role of friends and peers in Latino youth's adjustment (Bámaca-Colbert, Plunkett, & Espinosa-Hernández, in press), in this study, we wanted to explore the role that support from friends and relationship quality with a best friend had in shaping the link between peer stressors and depressive symptoms and self-esteem.

In summary, the purpose of this study was twofold: To examine the contribution that peer stressors may have on Mexican-origin females' self-esteem and depressive symptomatology and explore the moderating role that the quality of the relationship with friends and best friends may play in shaping this association.

Review of the Literature

Although parents continue to be an important influence during adolescence, the world of friends and peers (as a context for activity, socialization, and emotional experience) becomes increasingly more important (Larson & Asmussen, 1991; Laursen, 1996; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Examining the role that peers and friends have in regards to Latina adolescents' adjustment is necessary because all too often the family is at the forefront of research focusing on this population. Further, having knowledge of the intimate relations among Latina adolescents and friends can be useful in gaining knowledge about the multiple interpersonal factors that can contribute to Latino youth development and adaptation.

Peer Stressors and Adjustment

Peer factors have been linked to positive and negative adolescent adjustment (Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983). In fact, peers can be a source of stress. Although there are different types of stress, the most common type of stress is normative (Grant et al. 2003). Peer stressors can be described as normative stressors because they occur as a daily part of adolescent's lives. That is, adolescents who report peer stressors report their occurrence frequently as part of the school setting (Seals & Young, 2003).

Researchers have usually assessed peer stressors in the form of rejection and victimization that occur within a peer group (Parker & Asher, 1983). The effects of peer stress,

in the case of rejection and victimization, can have a severe influence on the psychological adjustment of adolescents. For instance, peer stressors in the form of rejection are associated with more depressed mood (Brendgen, Wanner, Morin, & Vitaro, 2005). Specifically, adolescents who report low acceptance (rejection) from peers are also found to have more symptoms that resemble depressive states than those who report being more accepted. Moreover, adolescents who encounter peer victimization (a very common form of peer stress) experience negative psychological adjustments such as anxiety/depression, aggression, and delinquency (Bailey, 2009). In this current study, we examined forms of victimization *and* rejection, such as being teased, rumors being spread, or fights being started with the adolescent. Therefore, we hypothesized that more peer stressors would predict more depressive symptoms in Mexican-origin adolescents.

In addition to depressive symptoms, we examined whether peer stressors would be associated with self-esteem as self-esteem is also an important indicator of psychological adjustment. Further, we focused on self-esteem because the literature surrounding Latina adolescent self-esteem lacks depth. Whereas the literature on peer stressors and depressive symptoms is extensive, the study of self-esteem as an outcome resulting from peer stress is scarce (e.g., Way & Robinson, 2003). When self-esteem is studied in relation to interpersonal factors, it is usually seen as an outcome in regards to parent-child relationships (Bohanek, Marin, & Fivush, 2008; Lindsey, Colwel, Frabutt, Chambers & MacKinnon-Lewis, 2008). But for the most part, self-esteem is studied as an antecedent (Orth, Robins & Roberts, 2003; Stanford, Chambers, Biesanz, & Chen, 2008) that is usually viewed as predicting factors such as depression, anxiety, and other negative adjustment outcomes. This may be due to the fact that self-esteem is believed to be a stable factor that remains so throughout adolescence and into young adulthood (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Robins, 2003). In this study, we wanted to explore self-esteem as a dynamic construct, which is constantly evolving as a result of the situations an adolescent undergoes with peers. For instance, some researchers state examples in which adolescent self-esteem may be lowered by the presence of overall adolescent stressors (Youngs, Rathge, Mullis & Mullis, 1990).

Few researchers have studied stress from the peer context and its contribution to self-esteem (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995). Yet, when an adolescent is put under stress from the peer context, their self-esteem can decrease. Peer stress, therefore, can lead to lower self-worth during adulthood (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998). Therefore, we hypothesized that more peer stressors would be associated with lower levels of self-esteem in Mexican-origin female adolescents.

Although peer stressors can contribute negatively to adolescent adjustment, other types of peer interactions can protect against or foster psychological adjustment. For instance, adolescents who have supportive friendships or a positive relationship quality with a best friend may be more well adjusted and more able to cope with peer stressors than those adolescents who do not have supportive friendships or have poor relationship quality with a best friend.

Friendship Support and Adjustment

Friendships are important in all stages of life. But making friends becomes a critical part of navigating adolescence (Hartup, 1996). Friendships can be seen as a voluntary and reciprocal relationship between two individuals (George & Hartmann, 1996; Hartup, 1989). Further, friends “foster self-esteem and a sense of well-being...socialize one another... (Hartup & Stevens, 1997 p. 366). In sum, having friendships is seen as a normative, significant part of the

condition of being an adolescent (Hartup, 1996).

Most often, researchers examine the relationship between friended and friendless adolescents in regards to their psychological adjustment. Less is known about the link between the quality of the relationship with friends (e.g., support, intimacy) and adolescent psychological adjustment. Yet, some evidence exists that supportive friendships are important to one's overall psychological adjustment. For instance, support from friends (i.e., positive support) has been shown to help adolescents become more involved in the school setting (Berndt & Keefe, 1992). Further, whereas some work has only found limited support (i.e., approached significance) for the link between perceived support from friends and its association to depressive symptoms and self-esteem during adolescence (Way & Robinson, 2003); others have found that friendship support is linked to less depressive symptoms in both males and females (Hoffman, Ushpiz, & Levy-Shiff, 1988) and higher levels of self-esteem among females (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hoza 1987; Walker & Greene, 1986). The aforementioned study also found that friendship support (vs. peer support) was a better indicator of overall self-worth (Bukowski, Newcomb, Hoza). We therefore hypothesized that greater friendship support would be associated with higher self-esteem in Mexican-origin female adolescents. Furthermore, because support from close friends has been shown to serve as a buffer against peer stressors (i.e., victimization) on depressive symptoms, loneliness, self-esteem, and externalizing behaviors (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001), we also hypothesized that reporting more supportive friendships would be associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms in Mexican-origin youth.

Relationship Quality with Best Friend and Adjustment

Not only is support from friends necessary for overall well being, but the quality of the relationship can also prove to be of vital importance (Sullivan, 1953). Few researchers have explored relationship quality with friends and its contribution to adolescent outcomes (e.g., Bukowski and Hoza, 1989). Waldrup, Malcolm, and Jensen-Campbell (2008) found that friendship quality was associated with less internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety/depression, withdrawn/depression) such that greater relationship quality predicted better adjustment. In fact, when adolescents had fewer friends; their levels of internalization of symptoms did not increase because the friendships they had were perceived as high quality.

An important aspect of friendships is intimacy (Sullivan, 1953). Intimacy can be described as "emotional closeness" (Camarena, Sarigiani, & Petersen, 1990 p. 20). High quality friendships tend to be more intimate than low quality friendships. Friendships among best friends are more likely to be intimate than other friendships. That is, best friends serve adolescents in more intimate way than their peers can (Sullivan, 1953). These dyadic relationships serve to help the adolescent define him or herself in a more personal, concrete way (Sullivan).

Best friend relationship quality can impact feelings of self-esteem. In a high quality relationship, an adolescent should expect a positive and reciprocated approach to any issues that she may bring to a friend. That is, having a high relationship quality with a best friend would serve to strengthen the adolescent's self-worth (Sullivan, 1953). Most of the research exploring associations between friendship factors and adjustment has focused on the existence or absence of friends (Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand, & Amatya, 1999; Parker & Asher 1993). These studies suggest that friends are important as long as they are present. That is, friendless adolescents are thought to exhibit worse outcomes than adolescents with friends.

Moreover, the quality of the relationship with one or two best/good friends has been found to be a better predictor of loneliness and depression than popularity among peers (Nangle

et. al., 2003). Sterling (2004) examined several aspects of friendship quality and their association to adolescent adjustment outcomes (i.e., self-worth and depression) and results suggested that facets of friendship quality (i.e., trust/loyalty, caring/validation, closeness) were associated with depression, anxiety, and self-worth. Quality of the relationship with friends, therefore, may be a better predictor of psychological adjustment than overall friendship support. Therefore, we hypothesized that better relationship quality with a best friend would be associated with higher self-esteem and lower depressive symptoms among Mexican-origin adolescents.

Friendship Support and Relationship Quality with Best Friend as Moderators between Peer Stressors and Adjustment

In the aforementioned discussion, peers were described as contributing negatively to the adjustment of adolescents via peer stressors. But the positive aspect of friendships could serve as a protective role. That is, adolescents may be better able to cope with peer stressors with the benefit of supportive friends and intimate relationships with best friends. Having a friend in adolescence may inform the adolescent that he or she is valued by another individual, which may decrease the impact that hassles experienced from the peer group may have on the adolescent. Although not much is known about the protective role that peer support and relationship quality may have, previous work has found that the presence of one reciprocated friendship predicts less internalization and externalization of behaviors in adolescents who are victimized (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999), suggesting that friendships can buffer the negative impact that stressors such as victimization can have on adolescent adjustment. Therefore, we predicted that friendship support and intimacy with a best friend would serve a protective function against peer stressors. Specifically, we hypothesized that the association between peer stressors and adjustment (i.e., self-esteem and depressive symptoms) would be weaker for female adolescents reporting high levels of friendship support and best friend relationship quality and stronger for adolescents reporting lower levels of friendship support and best friend relationship quality.

In summary, we examined the following hypotheses in this study:

- More peer stressors would be associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem.
- More friendship support would be associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and higher levels of self-esteem.
- Better relationship quality with best friend would be associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms and higher levels of self-esteem.
- More friendship support would serve as a protective factor between the association of peer stressors and depressive symptoms such that the association between peer stressors and depressive symptoms would be weaker for adolescents reporting more friendship support.
- More friendship support would serve as a protective factor between the association of peer stressors and self-esteem such that the association between peer stressors and self-esteem would be weaker for adolescents reporting more friendship support.
- Better relationship quality with best friend would serve as a protective factor between the association of peer stressors and depressive symptoms such that the association between peer stressors and depressive symptoms would be weaker for adolescents reporting better friendship quality.
- Better relationship quality with best friend would serve as a protective factor between the association of peer stressors and self-esteem such that the association between peer

stressors and self-esteem would be weaker for adolescents reporting better friendship quality.

Methods

Participants

Participants ($n = 153$) were female adolescents of Mexican origin, who completed a self-administered survey at home. We drew data from a longitudinal study that originated in an area of the United States with a large Latino population (44%; United States Census Bureau, 2000). Variables of interest were only available at Wave 2. Participant ages ranged from 14 to 19 ($M = 16.3$; $SD = 1.57$) years of age. Almost ninety percent of the girls were enrolled in high school or college at Wave 2. Seventy percent of the adolescents in this study were born in the United States and almost as many (69.3%) reported their SES (socioeconomic status) as middle class.

Measures

Depressive symptoms. We used the *Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale* (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) to measure the prevalence of depressive symptoms in the past week. The CES-D was developed for use in the general population (Golding & Aneshensel, 1989) and has shown excellent reliability ($\alpha = .93$) among Mexican-origin adolescents (Robert & Chen, 1995). Adolescents responded to 20 items rated on a Likert scale with points ranging from 0-3 (0 = *less than 1 day*, 1 = *1-2 days*, 2 = *3-4 days*, and 3 = *5-7 days*), with higher numbers signifying greater depressive symptoms. With the current sample, this measure obtained an excellent reliability value of .90.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979). This 10-item scale included global self-esteem items such as “I feel I do not have much to be proud of” and “I take a positive attitude toward myself”. Participants responded on a Likert scale ranging from 1-4, with endpoints of 1 = *Strongly Disagree* and 4 = *Strongly Agree*. Negative items were reverse scored so that the lower total score meant lower self-esteem. Studies have shown satisfactory reliability scores with Latino adolescents (Armenta & Hunt, 2009; Schwartz, Samboagna, & Jarvis, 2007.) With the current sample, this measure obtained a good reliability value of .87.

Peer stressors. We measured peer stress (in the past three months) with an 8-item subscale of the Multicultural Events Scale for Adolescents (MESA; Roosa, Den, Ryu, Burrell, Tein, Jones, Lopez, & Crowder, 2005). This subscale was developed specifically to measure experiences that are relevant to urban and culturally diverse adolescent samples. This measure assesses negative peer hassles and has shown adequate reliability (alpha of .73) in previous studies (Samaniego & Gonzales 1999). Peer stress statements included items such as “Other teens said mean or bad things to you” and “Other teens wanted to fight with you or tried to fight with you.” Items were answered with “yes” or “no” to indicate whether adolescents had experienced the event in the past three months. A sum was calculated to obtain a total peer stress score ranging from 0 = *no stressors* to 8 = *8 stressors*.

Friendship support. We measured friendship support (FS) using an adapted (9-item) version of the *Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment* (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). The original measure assesses support from peers, but in the current study we asked adolescents to report on support from friends with statements such as “I tell my friends about my problems and worries” and “My friends help me understand myself better”. Scores were calculated on a 4-

point Likert scale with endpoints (1 = *almost never or never true* to 4 = *almost always or always true*). With the current sample, this measure obtained an excellent reliability value of .93.

Relationship quality with best friend. We assessed relationship quality with female best (RQBF) friends with an 8-item intimacy subscale taken from the Social Relations Questionnaire (Blyth, Foster-Clark, 1987). Statements tapped into adolescents' perceived emotional closeness with their female best friend with items such as "How much does your best friend understand what you are really like" and "How much does your best friend accept you no matter what you do?". Adolescents responded to items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1 = *not at all* through 5 = *very much*.) In multiple studies (Crockett, Losoff, & Petersen, 1985; Field & Lang, 1995; Petersen, Sarigiani, & Kennedy, 1991; Rice & Mulkeen, 1995), the measure has been reliable in assessing intimacy with family and friends. With the current sample, this measure obtained an adequate reliability value of .73.

Results

Plan of Analysis

We performed hierarchical linear regressions to test all hypotheses. We controlled for age because we wanted to test if different ages of adolescents were significant across the regressions. Age was not significant in any of the regressions. We centered all peer stressors and friendship support and relationship quality with best friend around their means. We computed interaction terms as the product of the centered peer stressors variable and centered friendship support and relationship quality of best friend variables to test moderation models (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

We performed one regression for each of the psychological adjustment variables (i.e., depressive symptoms and self-esteem) and each of the two moderating friendship variables (i.e., friendship support and relationship quality with best friend). That is, we performed 4 regressions. Depressive symptoms and self-esteem was always the outcome. In all regressions, we entered age as a control in Step 1. We entered the peer stressors variable in Step 2. Then, we entered either the friendship support or relationship quality with best friend variable in Step 3. Finally, we entered the two-way interaction between the peer stressors variable and friendship support and between peer stressors and relationship quality with best friend variable in Step 4. We describe the results separately Independent and moderating variables.

Associations Between Peer Stressors and Depressive Symptoms and Self-Esteem

We predicted that peer stressors would be associated with depressive symptoms. Step 2 of the regression models tested these associations. Step 2 accounted for 10% and 11% of the variance in both regressions with depressive symptoms as an outcome (see Table 1). The main effect of peer stressors was significant in these regressions. That is, female adolescents who reported more peer stressors were more likely to report more depressive symptoms than those adolescents who reported less peer stressors.

We also predicted that peer stressors would be associated with self-esteem. Step 2 in the regression models also tested this association. Step 2 accounted for 11% and 12% of the variance in both regressions with self-esteem as an outcome (see Table 1). The main effect of peer stressors was significant in these regressions. Specifically, Mexican-origin female adolescents who reported more peer stressors reported lower levels of self-esteem than those adolescents who reported lower peer stressors.

Associations Between Friendship Support and Depressive Symptoms and Self-esteem

We predicted that friendship support would be associated with depressive symptoms. We focus on Step 3 of the regression model, which tested this association. Step 3 accounted for 3% of the variance in the regression with depression as an outcome and friendship support as moderator (see Table 1). The main effect of friendship support was significant in this regression. Female adolescents who reported more friendship support were more likely to report lower depressive symptoms than adolescents who reported less friendship support.

In addition, we predicted that friendship support would be associated with self-esteem. We, therefore, focus our attention to Step 3 of the regression models, which tested this association. Step 3 accounted for 3% of the variance in the regression with self-esteem as an outcome and friendship support as moderator (see Table 1). The main effect of friendship support was significant in this regression. Adolescents who reported more friendship support were more likely to report higher self-esteem than adolescents who reported less friendship support, supporting our hypothesis.

Associations Between Relationship Quality with Best Friend and Depressive symptoms and Self-esteem

We predicted that relationship quality with a best friend would be associated with depressive symptoms. Step 3 in the regression model tested this association in the regression with depressive symptoms as an outcome and relationship quality with a best friend as the moderator (see Table 1). The main effect of relationship quality with a best friend was not significant, providing no support for this hypothesis.

We also predicted an association would exist between relationship quality with a best friend and self-esteem. Step 3 in the model tested this association in the regression with self-esteem as an outcome and relationship quality with a best friend as the moderator (see Table 1). The main effect of relationship quality with a best friend was not significant.

Friendship Support as a Moderator

We predicted that friendship support would moderate the association between peer stressors and depressive symptoms. Step 4 tested the interactions between peer stressors and friendship support. In the regression model with depressive symptoms as an outcome and friendship support as moderator (see Table 1), the interaction between peer stressors and friendship support was not significant.

We also predicted that friendship support would moderate the association between peer stressors and self-esteem. Step 4 tested the interactions between peers stressors and self-esteem. In the regression models the change in R^2 from step 3 to step 4 was significant (see Table 1), suggesting a significant moderating effect. The final model with self-esteem as a predictor and friendship support as a moderator explained 21% of the variance. Step 4 accounted for 6% of the variance. The interaction between peer stressors and self-esteem was significant. To interpret the interaction, we created two groups of low and high friendship support, by identifying the friendship support variable mean and splitting the sample into two groups: low support (scores below the mean) and high support (scores above the mean). We conducted follow up analyses (Aiken & West 1991) that revealed that the association between peer stressors and self-esteem was significant for the group who reported low friendship support ($\beta = -.54; p < .001$), but not for the group reporting high friendship support ($\beta = -.19; p > .05$). That is, for the low friendship support group, girls who reported more peer stressors reported lower self-esteem

Relationship Quality With Best Friend as a Moderator

We predicted that relationship quality with a best friend would moderate the association between peer stressors and depressive symptoms. Step 4 tested the interactions between peer stressors and depressive symptoms. In the regression models Step 4 was not significant (see Table 1). Finally, we predicted that relationship quality with a best friend would moderate the association between peer stressors and self-esteem. Step 4 tested the interaction between peer stressors and self-esteem. In the regression model Step 4 was not significant (see Table 1).

Discussion

We examined peer stressors, friendship support, and relationship quality with best friend as predictors of psychological adjustment in Mexican-origin adolescents. Further, we examined the possible protective role of friendship support and relationship quality with a best friend. We specifically looked at depressive symptoms and self-esteem as adjustment outcomes. Results from this study provided some evidence for the importance of peers and friends in predicting the psychological adjustment of Mexican-origin female adolescents.

As predicted, we found that peer stressors were associated with both depressive symptoms and self-esteem. Specifically, adolescents who reported more stressors were also more likely to report lower self-esteem and higher levels of depressive symptoms. These findings show the negative effects that peer stressors can have on Mexican-origin female adolescents and contribute to previous work that has found that peer stressors adolescents experience are linked as self-esteem and depression (Brendgen, Wanner, Morin, & Vitaro, 2005; Youngs, Rathge, Mullis & Mullis, 1990). Further, these findings add to our knowledge regarding the type of stressors that are associated with adjustment among Latina youth.

We also found that friendship support was a key indicator of adjustment in our study. Specifically, adolescents who reported higher levels of friendship support were also more likely to report higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depressive symptoms. Thus, whereas peer stressors predicted less positive outcomes, supportive friendships appeared to play a positive role in reducing negative psychological adjustment outcomes in our sample. These findings provide evidence that, in addition to parents, support from friends is also important to incorporate in models examining the role that interpersonal relationships may have on Latino adolescents' psychological adjustment.

Surprisingly, and contrary to the findings on friendship support, relationship quality with a best friend in terms of intimacy was not a significant predictor of adjustment in all regressions. It is possible that Latino adolescents may be more inclined to need collective support (which our measure of friendship support addressed) instead of intimate interactions with one person (which is what relationship quality measured). This potential explanation is based on literature that posits that central to Latinos is the value of collectivity and familism (Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2010). That is, the importance of a group dynamic is central to Latino culture; thus, support from just one individual (e.g., best friend) may not be as salient as feeling supported by many. So having friends that are supportive appears to be more significant to these Mexican-origin female adolescents than having a close intimate relationship with a best friend.

This is not to say that relationship quality with a best friend is disregarded, however. It may just not be considered as vital to feelings of self-worth or depression or buffer against the negativity peers can bring in the form of stressors, as support from friends appeared to be. In fact, friendship support not only predicted self-esteem and depressive symptoms directly, but

also interacted with peer stressors to predict adjustment. Specifically, friendship support served a protective function for girls who reported high levels of support from friends. That is, the association between peer stressors and self-esteem was only significant for female adolescents who reported low levels of friendship support, not for those who reported high levels of friendship support, meaning that only those who reported low levels of friendship support appeared to be affected when experiencing more peer stressors. This is an important finding as it points to the protective nature of friendships when adolescents experience stress. Future studies should examine whether friendship support buffers against stressors other than that from peers.

Limitations and Future Directions

The interpretation of results would not be complete without taking into consideration limitations of the study. First, findings from this study may be relevant only to Mexican-origin females. It is possible that different results would emerge if the sample were from other Latino-origin countries or from other ethnic groups. For instance, if we had studied adolescents from Argentina we may have found the sample to be more influenced by the relationships they have with a best friend, since people from Argentina appear to be more individualistic (based on their Hofstede scores) when compared to other Latinos, specifically people from Mexico, which is where our study sample originates (Clearly Cultural, 2009).

Another limitation may be that friendship support and intimacy items addressed two different ideas. Therefore, although quality of the relationship with best friend in terms of intimacy was not significant, assessing other aspects of relationship quality with a best friend such as support from best friend might have resulted in different findings.

A third limitation of this study is its sole focus on females, not males. Although stressors seem to affect females more (Washburn-Ormachea, Hillman, & Sawilowsky, 2004), that is not to say they do not affect males. Thus, it is important to include males in other studies, especially because males appear to be affected by other stressors such as discrimination more so than females (Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, Bámaca, & Zeiders, 2009).

Conclusion

The findings from this study are a step toward the goal of having a better understanding of the factors associated with Latino youth development and adjustment, as it provides evidence that relationship aspects with peers and friends are linked to adjustment outcomes and serve a protective function against stressors faced by Latino youth. Although friendships are important and usually associated with positive benefits for adolescents, not much is known about their role among Latino youth. For the most part our knowledge on peers comes from the academic literature that has found peers can have an influence, either positive or negative on academic outcomes in adolescence (Bouchey, 2001), but less is known about their role in contributing to the psychological well-being of Latino youth. Further, peers and friends need to be assessed as two separate entities; they may exist in the same contexts (e.g., schools), but they clearly do not garner the same roles to the adolescent. More work is needed to better understand whether friends and peers serve the same roles for Latino adolescents as they do for other youth. Further, future studies should focus on the differences that may exist among Latino adolescents and the role of peers and friends in their lives.

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Table 1.
Standardized betas for regressions predicting depression and self-esteem with peer stressors as a predictor and friendship support (FS) and relationship quality of best friend (RQBF) as moderators

Outcome	Depressive symptoms		Self-esteem	
	<i>FS</i> ($R^2 = .15^{***}$) $n = 151$	<i>RQBF</i> ($R^2 = .13^{***}$) $n = 148$	<i>FS</i> ($R^2 = .21^{***}$) $n = 151$	<i>RQBF</i> ($R^2 = .14^{***}$) $n = 148$
Step 1				
Age	.08	.06	.05	.05
ΔR^2	.01	.00	.00	.00
Step 2				
Age	.09	.07	.03	.04
Peer stressors	.32***	.33***	-.35***	-.34***
$\Delta R^2 (1 - 2)$	.10***	.11***	.12***	.11***
Step 3				
Age	.09	.08	.04	.05
Peer stressors	.32***	.32***	-.34***	-.34***
Peer moderator	-.18**	.12	.16*	.09
$\Delta R^2 (2 - 3)$	.03**	.01	.03*	.01
Step 4				
Age	.08	.08	.04	.05
Peer stressors	.32***	.33***	-.36***	-.36***
Peer moderator	-.18**	.12	.17*	.08
Outcome X peer moderator	-.08	-.03	.25***	.13
$\Delta R^2 (3 - 4)$	.01	.00	.06***	.02

† $p < .06$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.