

Barriers to Education Among Mexican-origin Adolescents: The Roles of Familism and Educational Values

Priscila Gámez Hernández¹, Norma J. Perez-Brena¹, Kimberly A. Updegraff², Russ B. Toomey¹, & Ada M. Wilkinson-Lee¹

Introduction

Late adolescence brings changes in identity, cognition, and transitioning to young adulthood^{1,2}, including decisions about workforce entry or further education.

Educational aspirations and expectations guide goal-setting, postsecondary plans^{3,4}, and educational attainment.

Educational attainment is crucial for future economic well-being⁵.

Mexican-origin adolescents have high aspirations and expectations⁶, but structural barriers contribute to educational disparities^{7,8}.

PVEST (Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory)¹ highlights how stress engagement strategies help students cope with risk factors.

Familism and educational values are two strategies that can promote psychological well-being, and academic success^{9,10}.

- Yet little is known about how these protective factors promote educational outcomes for Mexican-origin adolescents during the transition to adulthood.

Study Questions

1. How barriers to education in late adolescence relates to educational attainment, aspirations and expectations in young adulthood for Mexican-origin adolescents.
 - H1: More barriers to education will be linked to less educational attainment, aspirations and expectations.
2. Whether familism and educational values in late adolescence moderate these links.
 - H2: Familism and educational values will buffer or weaken the examined relationship.



Methods

Data used for this study are from a more extensive study of 246 Mexican-origin families¹¹ followed for 8 years across 4 waves of data collection.

Variables of interest will focus on younger siblings at T3 ($N = 174$) and T4 ($N = 160$). See Table 1 for demographics.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics for all Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age (T3)	-										
2. Gender (T1)	.03	-									
3. Nativity (T1)	-.08	.04	-								
4. Family SES (T1)	-.17	.09	.39	-							
5. GPA (T1)	-.09	.22	.11 [†]	.23	-						
6. Barriers to Education (T3)	.00	.07	-.42	-.27	-.17	-					
7. Familism (T3)	-.08	.11 [†]	.15	.07	.07	-.15	-				
8. Educational Values (T3)	-.01	.14	.13	.01	.14	-.09	.29	-			
9. Educational Attainment (T4)	-.14	.08	.28	.39	.32	-.34	.10	-.00	-		
10. Educational Aspirations (T4)	-.10 [†]	.05	.20	.33	.28	-.13	-.09	-.05	.51	-	
11. Educational Expectations (T4)	-.11 [†]	.06	.22	.32	.34	-.23	.08	.07	.54	.78	-
Means	18.18	.51	.62	-.01	2.73	2.06	4.12	4.28	2.72	3.68	3.42
(SD)	(.47)	(.50)	(.48)	(.83)	(.92)	(.80)	(.48)	(.58)	(1.13)	(1.30)	(1.41)

Note. Bolded estimates were significant at $p < .05$. [†] $p = .10$. Gender coded as (0 = male, 1 = female). Nativity coded as (0 = immigrant, 1 = U.S.-born). T1 = Time 1, T3 = Time 3, T4 = Time 4. SES = socioeconomic status. GPA = grade point average.

MEASURES

Barriers to Education (Holland et al., 1980): 4-items, 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), $\alpha = .75$.

Familism Values (Knight et al., 2010): 16-items, 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), $\alpha = .86$.

Educational Values (Fuligni et al., 2005): 5-items, 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all true to 5 = almost always true), $\alpha = .81$.

Educational Attainment: 0 = completed less than HS diploma/GED, 1 = completed HS diploma/GED, 2 = attending or completing community college or vocational/ technical school, 3 = attending or completing a 4-year degree.

Educational Aspirations and Expectations: 2-items, 0 = less than HS/GED, 1 = complete HS/GED, 2 = attend or complete some college or vocational/ technical school, 3 = attend college or vocational/ technical school but not complete 4-year degree, 4 = complete a 4-year degree, 5 = attend or complete graduate, law or medical school.

Demographic variables: Adolescents were asked to report their age, gender, nativity, and GPA. Parents were asked to report family SES.

Results

Path analyses were conducted in Mplus to assess if familism and educational values moderate the link between barriers to education at T3 and educational attainment, aspirations and expectations at T4.

Main effects model:

- Barriers to education at T3 were negatively linked to education at T4, but not educational aspirations or expectations at T4.
- Familism and educational values at T3 were not significant.

Moderating effects model (Table 3):

- Familism and educational values were not significant moderators.

Table 3.
Summary of Longitudinal Path Analyses Examining Familism and Educational Values as Moderators Among Mexican-origin Adolescents in the Transition to Adulthood ($N = 246$).

	Educational Attainment (T4)			Educational Aspirations (T4)			Educational Expectations (T4)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Intercept	2.57***	.15	-	3.52***	.20	-	3.34***	.21	-
Age (T3)	-.18	.18	-.07	-.13	.19	-.05	-.13	.23	-.04
Gender (T1)	.08	.18	.03	-.00	.20	-.00	-.03	.22	-.01
Nativity (T1)	.18	.18	.08	.26	.23	.10	.17	.24	.06
Family SES (T1)	.32**	.13	.24	.37**	.13	.24	.34**	.14	.20
GPA (T1)	.27**	.09	.22	.32**	.11	.23	.40***	.11	.26
Barriers to Education (T3)	-.29*	.13	-.21	-.02	.15	-.01	-.19	.15	-.11
Familism Values (T3; FV)	.09	.23	.04	-.34	.25	-.13	.04	.29	.01
Educational Values (T3; EV)	-.15	.18	-.08	-.14	.20	-.06	.05	.20	.02
Barriers to Education X FV	.03	.21	.01	.01	.25	.00	.11	.27	.03
Barriers to Education X EV	-.09	.17	-.04	.03	.22	.01	.08	.22	.03

R-Squared .29*** .20*** .22***
Note. Age, GPA, barriers to education, and familism and educational values were grand-mean centered. Interaction terms were created using grand-mean centered variables. Gender coded as (0 = male, 1 = female). Nativity coded as (0 = immigrant, 1 = U.S.-born). T1 = Time 1, T3 = Time 3, T4 = Time 4. SES = socioeconomic status. GPA = grade point average.
^{*} $p < .05$, ^{**} $p < .01$, ^{***} $p < .001$

Discussion

Barriers to education

- Barriers to education may have more direct impact on educational actions, but not one's hopes and dreams.

Familism and educational values

- Both values were endorsed highly and showed small variance, suggesting that there was little difference between youth.
- Familism behaviors may be more protective than values and should be studied in the future.

Measurement differences and sample characteristics may explain discrepancies with past findings.

Implications for practice: Support Mexican-origin adolescents through parent-school partnerships and by identifying salient barriers.

Strengths: Longitudinal design and a balanced sample across gender and generation status.

Limitations: Regional sample and limited data on younger siblings' educational expectations.

References:

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NORTON SCHOOL OF HUMAN ECOLOGY ¹

Frances McClelland
Institute for Children,
Youth & Families



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