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FAMILY SEPARATION AND CHANGES IN PEER RELATIONSHIPS AMONG EARLY ADOLESCENT LATINO YOUTH: EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

by

L. DUANE HOUSE

Under the Direction of Gabriel Kuperminc

ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study examines whether family processes (family cohesion and family conflict) mediate the relationship between family separation experiences and the development of peer relationships (quality and conflict). The study includes a sample of 199 early adolescent Latinos from immigrant families. Family conflict mediated the relationship between separation experiences from fathers and peer conflict at year 1 but not year 2 such that more separation from father was associated with higher family conflict and higher peer conflict at year 1. Family cohesion did not mediate associations between mother or father separation and peer relationship outcomes. Family cohesion predicted more positive peer relationship quality at year 1 and family conflict predicted more peer conflict at year 1 indicating some distinction between these characteristics of relationships for families and peers. Mother separation predicted more peer conflict at year 1. This is consistent with qualitative studies of immigration experiences and separation (e.g., Baccallo & Smokowski, 2007; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). This study has

added empirical quantitative support to show high levels of family conflict associated with family separation. Further, this study has demonstrated that youth who experience greater separation from fathers are likely to experience higher family conflict that is associated with greater peer conflict. In contrast, mother separation has a more direct association with peer conflict. Although family separations are associated with more peer conflict, they do not appear to influence change over time in peer conflict. The different paths of influence for mother separation and father separation warrant further research to explicate the unique associations between each parent's separation and family dynamics.

INDEX WORDS: Latino, Immigration, Family separation, Family Cohesion, Family conflict, Peer relationships, Peer conflict, Youth, Adolescence

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L. DUANE HOUSE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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2010

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Family Separation and Changes in Peer Relationships among Early Adolescent Latino Youth: Examining the Mediating Role of Family Relationships

In the past decade, immigrant children and US-born children of immigrants have become the fastest growing segment of the child population (Hernandez, Denton, & McCartney, 2008). Although immigration may offer the prospect of a better life for immigrants and their children, the experience presents some challenges for families. One challenge often experienced by youth in immigrant families is separation from one or more parents. Such separations can last for several years, and reunifications with different family members may be staggered over a similarly long period (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Parent-child separation can have a negative impact on family relationships (Mitrani, Santisteban, & Muir, 2004) and may have similar consequences for the development of youth's relationships with peers. The development of peer relationships has been considered important to other future developmental outcomes (Buhrmester, 1996; Newcomb, Bagwell, Bukowski, & Hartup, 1996). Therefore, it is important to understand the association between family separation experiences and changes in family relationships in order to better understand the potential mechanisms operating on the development of peer relations. The current study examined prospectively the association between family separations and peer relationships for early adolescent Latinos from immigrant families and the mediating role of family processes.

Attachment theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the processes through which family separation experiences may affect peer relationships for early adolescents. Attachment theory suggests that youth build working models of relationships based on early experiences with their primary caregiver that in turn, influence non-familial relationships, including those youth have with peers (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1979). Further,

studies have shown that youth whose parents provide security, warmth, and trust are more likely than others to experience the same qualities in peer relationships (Kerns & Stevens, 1996). Youth's working models of relationships are also changed and influenced by later experiences throughout childhood (Bowlby, 1979). According to developmental theorists, disruption of secure attachment to adults, particularly parents, affects how individuals approach future developmental tasks and relationships (Ainsworth, 1989) and such disruption is related to increases in problem behaviors (Allen, Moore, Kuperminc, & Bell, 1998) and decreases in social skills (Allen, Marsh, McFarland, McElhaney, & Land, 2002). However, Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2002) argue that attachment theory overemphasizes the significance of the mother-child dyad and note Ainsworth's (1989) recognition of the importance of parent surrogates, including other family members and peers who may serve as attachment figures. Further, the authors argue that many immigrants come from cultures in which extended family members play an important support role and thus there are other family members, besides parents, who can attend to the emotional needs of a child (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). In addition, Bowlby (1982) points to changes during adolescence in attachment patterns such that other adults and age-mates can become attachment figures in the youths' lives. He notes the variations that occur including youth who "detach" from parents altogether or cut themselves off from parents to those who remain very closely attached and unwilling to direct that behavior toward others. This perspective suggests that youth who experience separations from individual parents may be more likely than others to either have insecure attachment styles with parents or to form attachments to other caregivers. Suarez-Orozco and colleagues noted that youth often become attached to other caregivers during separation and suggests that these potentially multiple attachment patterns can be complicated if parents are unable to co-parent effectively with caregivers during separations.

These patterns are likely associated with greater disruptions to the family environment after reunions.

To date, there is limited research examining the impact of family separation on the development of peer relationships, particularly where such separation is likely due to the immigration experience. Much of the work on attachment theory and the impact of separations or disruptions to attachment have focused on separations in very different contexts. For example, the strange situation was based on separations of very short duration (Ainsworth, 1989) and some of the earlier work of John Bowlby was based on children who were either hospitalized or in residential facilities for treatment (1982). These earlier studies on separations are very different from the types of separation that occur during immigration in which youth are likely to maintain prolonged "psychological connections" to primary attachment figures in their absence (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). This dissertation research will contribute to the literature by examining this issue among early adolescent Latino youth using a prospective design.

Family Separation

The immigration experience often involves separations from parents and other family members. Such separations whether shorter or longer in duration can potentially impact the social development of affected youth. Although the immigration experience varies for different families, often families who migrate include some combination of children and adult couples (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). However, many families do not migrate as a single unit (Waters, 2001). Throughout the process, youth often experience separation from one or both parents and other family members and these separations can occur over several years. Similarly, reunifications with different family members may be staggered over a similarly long period or in a "stepwise" fashion (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2002) examined the context and impact of family separations on immigrant youth from China, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico. The authors found that whereas Chinese youth typically immigrated as a unit, the majority of Latin American youth immigrated with some family disruption. Of those Latinos in the study, more than half experienced separation from both parents and the majority had experienced separation from their fathers while fewer Latino youth were separated from mothers only (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Regarding duration of separation, many families planned separations and expected them to last a set amount of time; however, the duration of separation was often extended due to legal barriers and other unexpected issues (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Darnell and Roque (2004) conducted a mixed method study of early adolescent Latino immigrant youth (drawn from the same sample included in this study) and found similar patterns of separation to those reported by Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2002).

Given that Latino youth are likely to experience separation from parents and family members during the immigration process, it is important to understand the effects of such separations on youth's psychological and developmental outcomes. One study of immigrant families reported that youth who were separated from parents reported greater depressive symptoms than youth who did not experience separation from parents (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). However, the authors did not observe any differences between separated and non-separated youth on any other psychological outcomes. In a different cross sectional study of early adolescent Latino immigrant youth, researchers found separated youth reported lower family cohesion and higher family conflict than youth who did not report experiencing a separation (Darnell & Roque, 2004).

A more recent study by Bacallao and Smokowski (2007) provides further insight into family separation and family processes after migration. The authors conducted a qualitative study with a

sample of 12 adolescents and 14 parents from 10 undocumented Mexican families who had immigrated within 7 years prior to the study. The study used a grounded theory approach to understand family system dynamics in undocumented Mexican families and the changes that parents and adolescents experience after immigration. Specifically, the study asked (a) how undocumented Mexican families change after immigration, (b) how these changes affect family members and their interactions, and (c) what factors explain post immigration family system adjustment in undocumented families. The authors developed a conceptual model based on findings that described "the context of getting ahead", "the costs of getting ahead," and "coping with the costs of getting ahead." Results indicated that family separation may be an important "cost of getting ahead." Some of the major family separation issues included: Losing the boss (most often fathers), readjusting to new roles (role shifts), and boundary changes (especially after reunification). As part of adapting to these changes, the cultural value of familism, which is associated with high levels of family cohesion and mutual support within the family, still remained important (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007).

Reunification after separation can also present difficulties. For example, Suarez-Orozco and colleagues described reunification as a stressful experience for immigrant youth (2002). However, it is important to recognize the dynamic interplay of the strengths and challenges within family units such that negative experiences may be buffered by supportive factors at the same time. Suarez-Orozco and colleagues reinforce this view by noting that separations from family members may not be harmful if the child has healthy relationships with both their parents and family members providing care and if the separation experience is considered a normal and widely accepted cultural practice. Other researchers have also described the common cultural practice of "child fostering" present among Caribbean families where youth stay with extended

family members while parents travel to the US first and send for children and family later (Waters, 1999). Similar practices are common in other Latino cultures where youth may stay behind with grandparents, a single parent, or other extended family members as noted in earlier research (Darnell & Roque, 2004).

Taken together, the literature suggests that Latino youth from immigrant families are likely to experience short or long-term family separations and these separations can negatively effect the emotional and social development of these youth. This study will add to research on family separation by examining the effect of separations on peer relationship development. An important perspective on family separation in this context is that it is a complex event and youth who experience these challenges may have other resources to aid in adaptive functioning despite adversity such as other caring adults and extended family networks. This notion is most closely associated with the concept of resilience and it is this perspective that guides the proposed dissertation research.

Ecological Transactional Framework

Resilience is generally associated with having positive outcomes in the face of adversity or threats to adaptation or development (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001, 2007). Recent research on resilience suggests that resilience is the result of "ordinary" human adaptive processes (Masten, 2001, 2007); this view stands in contrast to earlier perspectives that described resilient youth as being invincible or invulnerable because they developed normally despite adversity. Resilience researchers have begun to take a multilevel approach to understanding resilient processes that spans biological, social, and cognitive processes in transaction with factors in the family, neighborhood, school, societal, and cultural levels of analysis (Kuperminc & Brookmeyer, 2006; Masten, 2007). To understand the influence of family separation on family

processes and the consequent impact on developmental processes among Latino youth, an ecological-transactional framework may be helpful. The ecological-transactional framework asserts that there are multiple levels within adolescents' environments that influence their development, ranging from proximal factors such as individual or family characteristics that may have more direct influence to distal factors such as socio-political beliefs and public policy that may have an indirect effect (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cicchetti & Toth, 1997). The transactional perspective suggests that the environment provides opportunities and constraints on development and that the child's task is to coordinate and integrate information from the environment to negotiate the tasks of each developmental phase (Cicchetti & Toth, 1997). Essentially, to understand youth development, it is important to understand how different contexts influence development. A large body of work points to the importance of parents in shaping a child's development (Collins et al., 2000; Maccoby, 2000). Similarly, researchers have emphasized the importance of peer groups for shaping future development and outcomes (c.f., Bukowski, 2003). The present study will use this perspective as a guide to understand how youth develop peer relationships in the context of family separation and potentially identify key mediators for intervention to foster resilience.

Peer Relationships

Early adolescence has been suggested as a period when youth begin to depend more on peer relationships rather than parent-child relationships and authors argue that there are developmental changes in both the nature and significance of friendship during early adolescence (Berndt, 1982; Buhrmester, 1990; Buhrmester & Furman, 1986). Understanding the factors that support and inhibit healthy peer relationship development is critical to efforts to promote development. Researchers have documented some of the barriers to forming healthy peer

relationships that include: Poor parent child relationships, family and school environments, and lack of neighborhood support (Buhrmester, 1990). However, much remains to be investigated in what processes operate as risk or protective factors among Latino youth facing familial separation as part of the immigration process. This study investigated these processes for early adolescent Latino immigrant youth with a particular focus on the influence of family functioning on peer relationship development.

This study's focus on the development of quality peer relationships has several implications for positive youth development. Supportive peer relationships can serve as a buffer to environmental stressors such as community violence, resource poor schools, and intermittent family poverty (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005). However, youth in such resource poor and high risk environments have limited access to potentially supportive friendships (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005). Still, peer relationships can enable the adolescent to develop relationship-based coping strategies that foster resiliency rather than reinforce patterns of distress and emotional defense that reflect a potentially isolated individual (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Further, peer relationships provide an important context for learning about mature symmetrical relationships that include mutual caring and mutual respect (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Burhmester (1990) found the development of positive peer relationships to be important to socio-emotional adjustment during early adolescence and others have found that adolescents' relationships with peers fulfill personal needs for social support and provide a context for the development of intimacy, social competence, and well-being (Buhrmester, 1996; Newcomb, Bagwell, Bukowski, & Hartup, 1996).

One pathway in which positive outcomes are influenced is through the direct effect that positive peer relationships have on interpersonal competence. Some researchers have shown that

positive peer relationships developed in adolescence predict interpersonal competence in young adults (Armistead, Forehand, Beach, & Brodyk, 1995; Parker & Asher, 1987; Patterson et al., 1998) with further support from early developmental theorists Piaget (1965) and Sullivan (1953). Positive peer relationships are also associated positively with self-esteem and negatively with depression (Barrera & Garrison-Jones, 1992). The bulk of research on peer relationships has focused on positive supportive dimension of relationships such as companionship, intimacy, and support while conflict has been considered the negative side of relationships and excluded from analyses (Way & Pahl, 2001). However, Berndt and Perry (Berndt, 2004; 1986) noted that conflict is an equally important dimension of peer relationships that is understudied. Berndt (1986) found that conflict and support were distinct dimensions of peer relationships. Specifically, Berndt found that conflict and support were "fused" in youths thinking of relationships during middle childhood such that youth believed friendships should be supportive and without conflict. However, among adolescents, Berndt (1986) found support and conflict to be distinct and that youth understand that you can argue with someone whom you also share mutual support.

Peer conflict has received less attention from research than supportive aspects of peer relationships (Laursen, Pursell, Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2009). Researchers have noted that conflict with peer decreases from middle childhood to adolescence (Clark-Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991) and that youth may report less conflict in a relationship that they perceive as being supportive given the benefits of the relationship (Laursen & Pursell, 2009). Youth who experience excessive conflict with their peers are likely toexperience reduced support in their close peer relationships, thus, decreasing a key stress support and thereby increasing risk for stress induced illnesses (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Some other negative outcomes associated with

peer conflict include poor academic performance (Adams & Laursen, 2007) and externalizing problems (Dunn, 2004). However, other researchers have noted positive benefits of experiencing conflict in peer relationships including learning to work through interpersonal difficulties (Kelley et al., 1983) and establishing an independent identity and a sense of autonomy (Cooper, Gunnar, & Collins, 1988).

In sum, peer relationships play a significant role in adolescents' normative development. It is important to understand both positive and negative dimensions of peer relationships as they have different implications. Understanding how the experience of family separation influences family functioning and how family functioning relates to changes in peer relationships can illuminate new or innovative approaches to promoting the healthy development of Latino youth from immigrant families.

Latino/a Peer Relationships. Few studies have examined peer relationship processes among ethnic minority adolescents (Way & Greene, 2006). However, research on quality of friendships among minority youth has focused primarily on gender and ethnic differences and has found differences in levels of support in friendships among European American adolescent but not among African American youth (Dubois & Hirsch, 1990). Way and colleagues (Way, 2004; 2001) have examined peer relationships and observed difference by gender and ethnicity suggesting cultural influences are important. Amongst Latinos, females may be more likely than their male peers to perceive ideal relationships due to a cultural script called *simpatia* and its meshing with American cultural values for women suggesting gender difference in perceived relationship quality among Latinos (Way et al., 2001). Way (2004) argues that ethnic minority boys from low-income urban communities desire intimacy in relationships and experience intimacy through protection from harm and sharing of emotions and resources. These findings

differ from research on White middle class adolescents. These differences may be explained by cultural differences such as emphasis on interdependence (familism) as opposed to independence and resistance from mainstream cultural influences of masculinity (Way et al., 2001).

Way and Greene (2006) conducted a longitudinal study with a sample of adolescent African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos over the course of three years in order to understand the trajectory of peer relationship quality for youth. The authors found that peer relationship quality improved over time and that Latino youth reported the highest level of relationship quality. The authors examined one plausible explanation for the findings in post hoc analysis. The authors posited that peer relationship quality increases for the sample might be explained by longevity of the peer relationship. However, post hoc analyses revealed no differences between youth with stable friendships (i.e., same friend for 3 years or more) and those with less stable friendships (Way & Greene, 2006).

Family Relationships.

Family Cohesion. Olson (2000) defines family cohesion as "the emotional bonding that family members have towards one another" (p.70). Specific aspects of family cohesion include emotional bonding, boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making, interests, and recreation (Olson, 2000). It has been theorized that families with more moderate or balanced levels of cohesion – considered separated and connected – will be more functional than families with extreme levels (low or high) which tend to be problematic for individual family members (Olson, 2000). Families at the low extreme are considered disengaged and are characterized by emotional separateness, limited involvement among family members, and limited support from other family members for personal problems. At the other extreme, families are considered enmeshed which is characterized by extreme emotional closeness, a high demand for loyalty,

high levels of dependence and emotional reactivity to each other, and energy focused on the family rather than outsiders. It is expected that families will shift between extremes given the presence of a variety of stressors (e.g., family member has a heart attack and family shifts from being separated to being enmeshed emotionally). Although family cohesion has been understood to have a curvilinear relationship with problems, scholars have typically reported a linear relation between family cohesion and other indicators of family functioning and youth outcomes (Baer, 2002; Farrell & Barnes, 1993).

Baer (2002) conducted an exploratory study to determine the trajectory of family cohesion for development among adolescents as they transition from early to middle adolescence. Baer found that family cohesion did decrease over time, yet noted that given the large sample size and minimal effect, family cohesion was fairly static among a large sample of African Americans, European Americans, and Mexican Americans. In addition, Baer and Schmitz (2007) later found that remaining close to family members is important particularly for Latino's who have high familistic values. Further, the authors examined the role status plays in predicting changes in family cohesion among white and Hispanic youth and found that for white youth, trajectories were such that family cohesion decreased slightly over time whereas Mexican American youth who spoke more Spanish at home experienced slight increases even though levels at baseline were similar to white non-hispanic youth at baseline (Baer & Schmitz, 2007). Although few researchers have examined the construct of family cohesion among Latinos, research suggests that family cohesion is a central construct in this population. In a study of 452 Mexican, Central, and Cuban-Americans, family cohesion was the most salient dimension of Latino familism (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, & Marin, 1987).

Numerous researchers and theorists have described the importance of family among Latinos as indicated by familistic behaviors and attitudes. Sabogal and colleagues (1987) defined familism as "a strong identification and attachment of individuals with their families (nuclear and extended), and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family" (p. 397-398). The cultural value is believed to influence the interactions and expectations within the family unit; among youth embracement of familism may be reflected in deference to parental and familial beliefs and values such that the attitudes and behaviors of the individual are affected by those of the collective family unit (Marin & Marin, 1991). Therefore, although family cohesion has been studied more broadly with other populations, family cohesion is considered an important characteristic for Latino culture and a key behavioral dimension of familism.

Family Conflict. Adolescence has been considered a time when conflict increases between parents and adolescents. However, conflict has been seen as a natural component of close relationships (Collins & Laursen, 1992). For this study, family conflict was defined as general arguments in the family that do not necessarily involve violence. Family conflict can involve siblings, parents, or extended family members. Conflicts can exist between the adolescent and other family members or between other members. Some research on parent-adolescent conflict illuminates trajectories of conflict during adolescence. Laursen, Coy, and Collins (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of adolescent-parent conflict and found that conflict between parents and youth actually decline across adolescence and noted that youth typically maintain positive relationships with their parents. However, the authors note that they did not include studies of middle childhood in their review and it is not clear whether family conflict increases from middle childhood to early adolescence. Smetana (1989) found that youth experience an increase

in conflict with parents from middle childhood to early adolescence whereas Galambos and Almeida (1992) found that overall conflict between adolescents and parents did not increase. Fuligni (1998) posited that as youth enter adolescence, they become more willing to disagree with their parents and this may explain any increases in conflict. These disagreements may be exacerbated by family separation experiences. For Latino youth, Baer (1999) found that family conflict increased during early adolescence. These findings suggest that youth in this study may be likely to report high levels of family conflict and that separation experiences may be associated with greater conflict. However, others have noted the importance of cultural values such as the values of respect and family harmony that are common in Latino families may be associated with reports of less conflict (Chung, Flook, & Fuligni, 2009).

Family Relationships and Peer Relationships.

There is limited research on connections between indicators of family functioning and peer relationships during adolescence (Brown & Mounts, 2007) yet studies have demonstrated a positive association between the perceived quality of relationships with parents and the perceived quality of relationships with peers or friends (Way & Chen, 2000; Youngblade, Park, & Belsky, 1993); as well as between perceived family support and perceived friend support (Procidano, 1992; Procidano & Smith, 1997). However, in a study of ethnic minority youth, Way and Pahl (2001) found that perceived relationship quality with mothers contributed to changes in peer relationship quality such that those with lower mother support reported greater increases in peer relationship quality over time. Overall, the sample reported increases associated with greater mother support. The authors suggest, that such a relationship may exist for two reasons: 1) youth with poor quality parent or familial relationships are more likely to seek out positive relationships with peers and 2) youth with high quality parent or familial relationships may either

be less interested or have less time to devote to building supportive friendships (Way & Pahl, 2001). Other studies have found that family and peer relationships often complement one another, yet sometimes they can compete for the youth's attention (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990).

In their study of ethnic minority youth friendship trajectories, Way and Greene (Way & Greene, 2006) also examined contextual influences and found family relationship quality to be an important predictor of increases in friendship quality. The authors noted two patterns of association between family relationships and friendship quality: an attachment pattern and a compensatory pattern. The positive association between family relationships and friendship quality suggest an attachment like pattern. However, similar to findings from their earlier study as reported earlier, the authors found the largest increases in friendship quality for those youth with the poorest quality family relationships (Way & Greene, 2006).

The Present Study

The negative impact of family separation on family functioning and youth well-being has been documented, yet there is a lack of longitudinal research on the association. Further, although studies have examined the association between family separation and family functioning, there has not been a longitudinal quantitative examination of the impact of separation experiences on the development of peer relationships through family processes, including family cohesion and family conflict. The research documenting the association between family relationships and peer relationships suggest family separation is likely to influence peer relationships through its effect on family functioning. The evidence suggests that there is need to understand processes that promote positive relationship development as the

development of peer relationships has been considered important to normal adolescent development.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relations between youth experiences of family separation and changes in peer relationships among early adolescent Latino youth from immigrant families. Specifically, the study tested the indirect effects of family relationships (family cohesion and family conflict) on the association between family separations and the development of peer relationships (peer relationship quality and peer conflict). To date, there have been limited studies on peer relationship development among early adolescent Latino youth who have immigrated or are from immigrant families and even fewer studies examining the effect of family separation and family relationships among adolescents in the context of immigration. In addition, there are few studies that have examined different patterns of both the supportive aspects of relationships and conflict. This study contributes to the literature in that it will aid in understanding the influence of family separation on family relationships and how that contributes to developmental outcomes, specifically the development of peer relationships. Specific research questions and associated hypotheses are described below.

Research Questions:

1. Do family separation experiences predict characteristics of family relationships (family cohesion and conflict) among early adolescent Latino youth?
    a. It is hypothesized that early adolescent Latino youth who report experiencing longer separations from mothers or fathers (independently) will report lower family cohesion.

   b. It is hypothesized that early adolescent Latino youth who report experiencing longer separations from mothers or fathers (independently) will report greater family conflict.

2. Do characteristics of family relationships (family cohesion and family conflict) predict changes in peer relationships (peer relationship quality and peer conflict) among early adolescent Latino youth?
   a. It is hypothesized youth who report higher family cohesion will report increases in peer relationship quality and decreases in family conflict.
   b. It is hypothesized that youth who report lower family conflict will report increases in peer relationship quality and decreases in family conflict.

3. Do family separation experiences have an indirect effect on changes in peer relationships (peer relationship quality and peer conflict) through family cohesion and family conflict?
   a. Family cohesion will mediate the relationship between family separation and changes in peer relationship quality and changes in peer conflict.
   b. Family conflict will mediate the relationship between family separation and changes in peer relationship quality and changes in peer conflict.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from a public urban middle school in the southeastern U.S. The school is ethnically and racially diverse with students representing many different countries. During the 2002-2003 school year, the school reported that 1073 students were enrolled (50.8% male and 49.2% female). The racial/ethnic composition of students in the school included a high percentage of Latino (58%) and Black or African-American (20%) students along with lower

percentages of Asian (13%), White or Caucasian (11%), and multiracial students (2%). The sample for this study included all Latino youth in the school.

The study sample included Latino youth from diverse Latin American countries (e.g., Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and Puerto Rico) although the majority of the sample was of Mexican descent. Immigrants made up 80% of the sample, while the other 20% were born in the US. Of those who immigrated 73% did so before age 11. Participants were 57% female, the average age was 13.8 years (SD= .80), and participants were nearly evenly split between the seventh (53%) and eighth (47%) grades. The sample was comprised of 199 participants at baseline and 143 participants at one-year follow up. All except 1 of the 144 study participants who were attending the school at follow-up completed both waves of the study. The majority of participants who did not participate at follow-up were no longer enrolled at the middle school or did not transition to the feeder high school.

Procedure

All students in the middle school who identified as Latino or Hispanic were eligible to participate. Researchers recruited participants by going to classes, explaining the study to those students who identified as Latinos, and signing up those who were interested in participating. Approximately half of the researchers were bilingual in English and Spanish, and introductions were made in both languages. Another recruitment strategy was to set up an information table at the entrance to the school cafeteria for a week. At the time of recruitment, all students were given parental consent forms, in both English and Spanish, for parents to sign. Each student was required to bring a signed parental consent form, and to sign an assent form documenting personal consent before participating. All participants were told that they would receive a free movie pass for completing the survey.

Participants completed questionnaires during recruitment and at one-year follow up. The questionnaire included measures assessing filial responsibility, acculturation, psychological adjustment, social adjustment, school adjustment, problem behaviors, school capital, demographics, and immigration history. Questionnaire items were printed in both English and Spanish on each page of the questionnaire. Questionnaires were administered in groups of approximately 20 students. One researcher read the questionnaire aloud to aid in reading comprehension (in either English or Spanish, depending on the preference of students in each group), while a second researcher was available to monitor the questionnaire administration and answer questions.

Measures

Demographic and Immigration Information. Students completed a self-report questionnaire indicating their sex, grade level in school, household composition, and whether or not they were born in the US. If youth were not born in the US they were asked to report their age of immigration by answering how old they were when they came to the US and were able to choose from the following options: 1) birth to 5 years old, 2) 6 to 11 years old, or 3) over 12 years old. For this study, immigration age was recoded into "US-reared" (US-born to younger than 5 years old; *N*= 77) and "Recent immigrants" (5 to 12 years or older; *N*= 122). It was reasoned that US-reared youth differed from recent immigrants in that all of their formal education was likely received in the US.

Family Separation. Youth were asked to indicate whether they had experienced any separation from their mother or father and the duration and timing of separations with questions taken from the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation study (LISA; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Tordova). Two separate variables were created for mother and father

separation that included duration of separation ranging from no separation to the maximum number of years separation for mother or father. Therefore, mother separation ranged from 0 – no separation to 10 years of separation and father separation ranged from 0 – no separation to 15 years of separation.

Family Cohesion. This variable was assessed using a 7-item Family Cohesion Scale. Items in the FCS were taken from the Family Adaptation and Cohesion Scale (Olson, 1986), the Family Climate Scale (Moos, 1994), and a measure developed by Carlson, Uppal, and Prosser (2000). This scale assessed adolescents' perceptions of closeness to the family (e.g., "My family members feel very close to each other"), enjoying time together, and mutual support (e.g., "I'm available when someone in my family wants to talk with me"). Participants responded using a 4-point scale that indicates how often they experience a particular attribute (1 = never, 4= always) (alpha = .76). The Family Cohesion Scale has adequate reliability in this sample (Cronbach's alpha = .76).

Family Conflict. This variable was assessed using the 7-item Family Conflict Scale also adapted from existing measures including the Family Climate Scale (Moos, 1994) and the Family Adaptation and Cohesion Scale (Olson, 1986) and is similar to a measure developed by Carlson and colleagues (2000). This measure assesses adolescents' perceptions of conflict in the family (e.g., "In my family, we often insult and yell at each other"). Participants responded using a 4-point scale that indicates how often they experience a particular attribute (1 = never, 4 = always). All items were reverse scored so that higher scores indicate less conflict (Cronbach's alpha = .76).

Peer Relationship Quality. Subscales from the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) were used to assess the quality of relationships with close friends and

conflict with close friends. Quality of relationships with close friends was assessed in 3 domains, including companionship (e.g., “How much free time do you spend with this person”), intimacy (e.g., “How much do you talk to this person about important things?”), and nurturance (e.g., “How much do you help this person with things they can’t do by themselves?”). Peer conflict was also assessed in the same measure as a separate domain (e.g., “How much do you and this person get upset with or mad at each other”). Participants responded to the same set of questions in reference to his or her closest friends. Participants responded using a 4-point scale that indicates how often they experience a particular attribute (0 = none, 3 = a lot). Each subscale domain consists of three items which are averaged for a domain score. Each three-item subscale has been shown to evidence adequate reliability and validity in research with ethnic minority samples (e.g., Way & Chen, 2000). In the present sample, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .70 to .84 for each scale including Year 1 and Year 2.

Plan of Analysis

An analysis of frequencies and descriptive statistics was conducted to check for errors in the data set, such as minimum and maximum values, an excessive number of missing cases, and outliers (Pallant, 2001). Data were checked for multicollinearity, univariate normality, and multivariate normality. Some variables violated the assumption of normality (mother and father separation were positively skewed); thus, maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors was used for model parameter estimates. Correlations and t-tests were conducted to examine relationships between the study variables and to detect differences in peer relationship quality, peer conflict, family cohesion, and family conflict by grade level, immigration status, and gender. The attrition rate for this study sample was 29% from Year 1 to Year 2. Little’s (1998) missing completely at random (MCAR) test was conducted to assess the distribution of

missing values and showed that all missing values were missing completely at random. Therefore, it was concluded that attrition was not a problem for the variables measured in this study.

For the major analyses, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to estimate the mediating effects of family conflict and family cohesion on the associations of mother and father separation with peer relationship quality and peer conflict. Specifically, 4 mediation path models were tested using AMOS 17.0 statistical software package. One model tested family cohesion as a mediator of the association between mother and father separation and peer relationship quality. A second model tested family cohesion as a mediator of the association between mother and father separation and peer conflict. The same 2 models were tested with family conflict as a mediator instead of family cohesion (see Figures 1 to 4). These models tested the role of the family mediator in explaining 1-year changes in peer relationship quality or peer conflict. In respective models, Year 2 peer relationship quality or Year 2 peer conflict were examined controlling for Year 1 peer relationship quality or Year 1 peer conflict. Thus, associations of relational variables with Year 2 peer relationship quality could be interpreted as prediction of change in peer relationship quality over time. Research supports the use of this method to measure change, and suggests that residualized change techniques are as robust as other techniques for measuring change, such as growth modeling (Roberts & Chapman, 2000).

Missing data were addressed by using a full information maximum likelihood (FIML). This method is recommended as a robust strategy in data sets with moderate to large amounts of missing data (Widaman, 2006). To assess model fit, 3 goodness of fit indices were used: the Bentler Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the chi-square (χ^2) statistic. The Bentler Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is an incremental fit index

that compares the fit of the researcher's model relative to a null model (the model that assumes none of the observed variables are correlated). A CFI of greater than .90 is an indicator of a good fit (Kline, 2005). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation index (RMSEA) assesses the amount of error based on model degrees of freedom and values less than .08 are indicative of good fit (Kline, 2005). The model chi-square statistic estimates the probability that the model differs by chance from the fully saturated model, in which every path is estimated and fits the data perfectly. This statistic is a measure of change from the saturated model; therefore, a large, significant chi-square statistic is an indicator that the model is significantly worse than the saturated model. It is suggested that a non-significant model chi-square statistic is indicative of adequate fit. Direct and indirect effects were examined after modifications[1] and achieving model fit. Indirect effects were examined to determine whether family conflict or family cohesion mediated associations between family separation and peer relationship variables. The indirect effect is measured as the product of the magnitude of the direct effects of which it is comprised (A x B). Evidence for a mediation effect was implied by a statistically significant Sobel test of the indirect effect (Kline, 2005).

Results

The results are organized in four sections: preliminary analyses, description of family separation, path models, and gender and immigration status effects. Descriptive statistics, attrition analyses, correlation, and covariates are reported in the preliminary analyses section followed by a detailed description of family separation experiences for study participants. The path model section reports the results of the 4 path analyses conducted to test the hypotheses that

[1] Modifications were made to each model based on modification indices reported in AMOS 17.0 statistical software. These modification indices are only provided for data without missing values. Therefore, to obtain modification indices, an imputed data set using expectation maximization was used. In addition to using modification indices, other paths were tested for significance and contribution to the model and were deleted if nonsignificant. Hypothesized paths were included regardless of significance to test the theoretical model.

family conflict and family cohesion mediate the associations between mother and father separation and changes in peer relationship quality and peer conflict. A final section describes the contributions of covariates that were included in the 4 models.

Preliminary Analyses

Sample demographics and descriptive statistics are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Attrition analyses showed no significant differences between youth who participated in Year 2 and youth lost to follow up on any study variables at baseline. Intercorrelations between all variables are provided in Table 4. Gender was positively correlated with father separation, peer conflict, and peer relationship quality at Year 1 and Year 2 (girls reported higher quality relationships, more conflict, and more separation). Immigration status was positively correlated with father separation (recent immigrants reported more separation). Grade level was negatively correlated with peer conflict at year 2, but was uncorrelated with other study variables. Immigration status had a significant effect on family conflict and significant covariances with mother and father separation. Given these associations, immigration status was included as a covariate in family conflict mediational analyses only. Gender was included as a covariate in all analyses.

Most correlations between the variables tended to be weak, but in expected directions. Year 1 scores for peer conflict and peer relationship quality were significantly correlated with their Year 2 counterparts (*r*'s were .29 and .47 respectively), indicating modest stability over time. Mother separation and father separation were positively correlated indicating that youth who were separated from one parent were likely to be separated from the other parent at some time. Youth who reported more separation from their mother reported greater peer conflict at Year 1. Youth who reported more separation from their father reported greater family conflict. Higher family conflict was associated with higher peer conflict and higher family cohesion was associated with

higher peer relationship quality. Family cohesion, family conflict, mother separation, and father separation were not correlated with peer conflict or peer relationship quality at Year 2. Although not a focus for major analyses in this study, family cohesion and family conflict were significantly correlated such that youth with higher levels of family cohesion reported lower levels of family conflict.

Family Separation Experiences

Descriptive statistics of qualitative and quantitative measures were conducted to understand better the heterogeneity of family separation experiences among Latino immigrant youth in this study. Given the small sample size and the variability across youth who reported separations, this study focused on duration of separation from mother and father. A large number of youth reported experiencing separation from their mother or father with longer time periods reported for separation from fathers (see Table 3). Twenty four percent of the sample reported experiencing separation from both parents at some time. Youth reported experiencing separations at varying time points in their development and some separations were permanent. For example, a few youth were separated from fathers during infancy whereas others reported separations from fathers at an early age that were permanent due to marital separation or divorce. Of youth who reported separations from mother, 60% reported separation and reunions occurring between the ages of 6 and 11. In contrast to mother separations, most youth who reported experiencing separations from fathers experienced separations before age 5 (60%) and reunions between ages 6 and 11 (41%) or age 12 or older (44%). Participants reported some common reasons for separations from mothers and fathers, such as leaving for the US to find work (n = 39 for mothers and n = 29 for fathers), traveling to take care of a family member (n = 6 for mothers and n = 3 for fathers), or divorce and marital separation (n = 19 for fathers). Some reasons that

were more common for father separations included traveling to the US to find work (n=39), divorce or marital separation (n=19). Some reasons that were reported by only a few youth included death, family violence, and traveling for business. The most common reasons for mother separation were to leave for the US to find work or to go to the US while the child stayed behind (n=29). A few youth reported being separated from their mother because the youth stayed with grandparents or that the mother had to stay behind to take care of younger siblings (n=6)). There were insufficient numbers to group youth by age of separation and reunion or with common reasons for separation to conduct analyses to explore differences in reasons for separation.

Path Models

Family Cohesion as Mediator. Figure 1 shows the path model used to test whether family cohesion mediated the association between mother and father separation and change in peer relationship quality. The model fit the data well [χ^2 (4, N = 199) = 2.998, p = .558, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000 (90% CI=.000; .094]. There were both direct and indirect effects of family cohesion on peer relationship quality (see Tables 5 & 6). Family cohesion significantly predicted Year 1 peer relationship quality such that greater family cohesion was associated with greater peer relationship quality. Family cohesion had a significant indirect effect on Year 2 peer relationship quality through Year 1 peer relationship quality. Although there was a significant indirect effect from family cohesion to peer relationship quality at Year 2, the direct effect was not significant, indicating that family cohesion did not predict changes in peer relationship quality over time. The indirect effects of mother and father separation on peer relationship quality through family cohesion did not reach significance.

Figure 2 shows the path model to test whether family cohesion mediated the association between mother and father separation and change in peer conflict. Modification indices and previously observed correlations indicated a direct path between mother separation and Year 1 peer conflict; therefore, this path was added to the model. This model demonstrated good fit to the data [χ^2 (4, N = 199) = 3.457, p = .484, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000 (90% CI=.000; .101]. There was a significant direct effect of mother separation on Year 1 peer conflict (see Table 4 for standardized coefficients). Specifically, youth with greater separation from their mother reported experiencing more peer conflict than youth with less or no separation from their mothers. There was a significant indirect effect of mother separation on Year 2 peer conflict through Year 1 peer conflict. Indirect effects of mother and father separation on changes in peer relationship quality through family conflict were not significant.

Family Conflict as Mediator. The path model to test family conflict as a mediator of the association between mother and father separation and peer relationship quality is shown in Figure 3 (see Table 5 for standardized coefficients). This model achieved good fit to the data [χ^2 (5, N = 199) = 1.998, p = .849, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000 (90% CI=.000; .055]. Only one significant direct effect was observed. Greater separation from father was associated with greater family conflict. There were no significant indirect effects; thus, no evidence of mediation.

Figure 4 shows the path model to test family conflict as a mediator of the association between mother and father separation and peer conflict. Similar to the model testing family cohesion as a mediator of this association, modification indices recommended adding a path between mother separation and Year 1 peer conflict. Therefore this path was also included in the final model. This model fit to the data well and analyses showed significant direct and indirect effects [χ^2 (5, N = 199) = 5.447, p = .364, CFI = .992, RMSEA = .021 (90% CI=.000; .103)].

There was a significant direct effect between mother separation and peer conflict at year 1. Specifically, greater separation from mother was associated with greater Year 1 peer conflict. There was a significant direct effect between father separation and family conflict, but no direct effect between mother separation and family conflict. Specifically, youth who reported greater separation from father reported greater family conflict than youth who reported less separation. Youth who reported greater family conflict also reported greater Year 1 peer conflict. Family conflict did not predict changes in peer conflict over time. An analysis of indirect effects revealed 3 significant indirect associations. Father separation had an indirect effect on Year 1 peer conflict through family conflict. Mother separation and family conflict had an indirect effect on Year 2 peer conflict through Year 1 peer conflict.

Gender and Immigration Status

Analyses indicated significant associations between gender and both peer relationship quality and peer conflict at Year 1 and 2 (see Table 7). Gender was significantly and positively associated with peer relationship quality at both year 1 and year 2. These findings indicate that females reported more positive relationship quality than males and that females reported greater increases in peer relationship quality over time than males. There was also a significant direct effect of gender on peer conflict at year 1 and a significant indirect effect of gender on peer conflict at year 2 through peer conflict at year 1. These direct and indirect associations indicate that females report greater peer conflict than males.

Immigration status was not significantly associated with peer relationship quality at year 1 or year 2. Immigration status was associated with peer conflict at year 1 at a trend level ($p<.10$) such that more recent immigrants reported lower quality relationships than youth who immigrated at an earlier age. Immigration status was significantly associated with family conflict

such that more recent immigrants reported greater family conflict than youth who immigrated at an earlier age.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

	N	%
Gender		
Male	86	43
Female	113	57
Grade		
7th	103	52
8th	96	48
Immigration Age		
US Reared	76	38
Recent Immigrant	122	62
Separated		
Mother	59	30
Father	121	61

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for All Study Variables

	Year 1		Year 2	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Peer Relationship Quality	2.80	.68	2.93	.59
Peer Conflict	2.23	.64	2.02	.68
Family Cohesion	2.92	.63	-	-
Family Conflict	1.76	.58	-	-

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for youth who experienced separation from mother or father.

	M	Med.	Range
Mother Separation	2.38	1.0	.5-10
From age	8.2	8	1-14
To age	10.6	11	5-15
Father Separation	5.32	4.0	.5-15
From age	5.10	5	0-15
To age	10.0	11	0-15

Table 4. Correlations between Year 1 and Year 2 Variables.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Peer Relationship Quality Y1	-									
2	Peer Conflict Y1	.23**	-								
3	Peer Relationship Quality Y2	.47**	.14	-							
4	Peer Conflict Y2	.13	.29**	.16	-						
5	Family Cohesion Y1	.28**	-.02	.09	.10	-					
6	Family Conflict Y1	.09	.19**	.06	-.01	-.26**	-				
7	Mother Separation	.04	.23**	.01	.08	-.09	.13	-			
8	Father Separation	.12	.02	.11	-.03	-.11	.23**	.29**	-		
9	Gender	.42**	.20**	.57**	-.01	.03	.03	-.05	.15*	-	
10	Grade Level	.12	.04	.02	-.24**	-.09	.04	.02	.05	-.01	-
11	Immigration Status	-.08	-.03	-.07	-.06	.10	-.13	.09	.23**	-.02	-.10

*p<.05 **p<.01

Table 5. Direct Effects for Final Path Models of Family Cohesion as Mediator of the Relationship between Mother and Father Separation and Peer Relationship Quality and Conflict.

	Family Cohesion	Family Conflict	Peer Relationship Quality		Peer Conflict	
			Y1	Y2	Y1	Y2
Mother Separation	.02 (.04)	.08 (.06)	--------	--------	.10 (.04)**	--------
Father Separation	-.11 (.01)	.11 (.04)**	--------	--------	---------	--------
Family Cohesion	--------	--------	.29 (.07)***	-.01 (.07)	-.02 (.07)	.12 (.09)
Family Conflict	--------	--------	.06 (.08)	.18 (.08)**	.18 (.08)**	-.07 (.10)
Peer Conflict Y1	--------	--------	--------	--------	---------	.29 (.08)***
Peer Relationship Quality Y1	--------	--------	--------	.26 (.07)***	---------	--------

Note. Unstandardized estimates of regression weights are provided.
p<.05*, *p*<.01**, *p*<.001***

Table 6. Decomposition of Effects for 4 Path Models.

Models 1 & 2– *Family Cohesion as Mediator*		Total	Direct	Indirect
Mother Separation	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y1	.005	-	.005
	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y2	.001	-	.001
Father Separation	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y1	-.005	-	-.005
	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y2	-.001	-	-.001
Family Cohesion	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y2	.071	-.006	.077
Mother Separation	→ Peer Conflict Y1	.096	.097	.000
	→ Peer Conflict Y2	.032	-	.031
Father Separation	→ Peer Conflict Y1	.000	-	.000
	→ Peer Conflict Y2	-.002	-	-.002
Family Cohesion	→ Peer Conflict Y2	.108	.115	-.007
Models 3 & 4 – *Family Conflict as Mediator*				
Mother Separation	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y1	.005	-	.005
	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y2	.006	-	.006
Father Separation	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y1	.007	-	.007
	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y2	.008	-	.008
Family Conflict	→ Peer Relationship Quality Y2	.070	.055	.016
Mother Separation	→ Peer Conflict Y1	.096	.093	.004
	→ Peer Conflict Y2	.029	-	.029
Father Separation	→ Peer Conflict Y1	.007	-	.007*
	→ Peer Conflict Y2	.000	-	.000
Family Conflict	→ Peer Conflict Y2	-.010	-.066	.048

Table 7. Covariate Regression Coefficients for Final Path Models of Family Cohesion and Family Conflict as Mediator of the Relationship between Mother and Father Separation and Peer Relationship Quality and Conflict.

	Family Cohesion	Family Conflict	Peer Relationship Quality Y1	Peer Relationship Quality Y2	Peer Conflict Y1	Peer Conflict Y2
Direct Effects						
Gender →	.04 (.09)	-.01 (.03)	.55 (.09)***	.51 (.09)***	.26 (.08)**	--------
Immigration Status →	-------	-.23 (.08)**	-.08 (.04)	--------	-.05 (.09)	--------
Indirect Effects						
Gender → (Family Cohesion models)	-------	-------	.013	.151***	-.001	.087**
Gender → (Family Conflict models)	-------	-------	.000	.140	.002	.082
Immigration Status →	-------	-------	-.007	.028	-.041	-.012

Note. Unstandardized estimates of regression weights are provided for direct and indirect effects.
$p<.05^{*}$, $p<.01^{**}$, $p<.001^{***}$

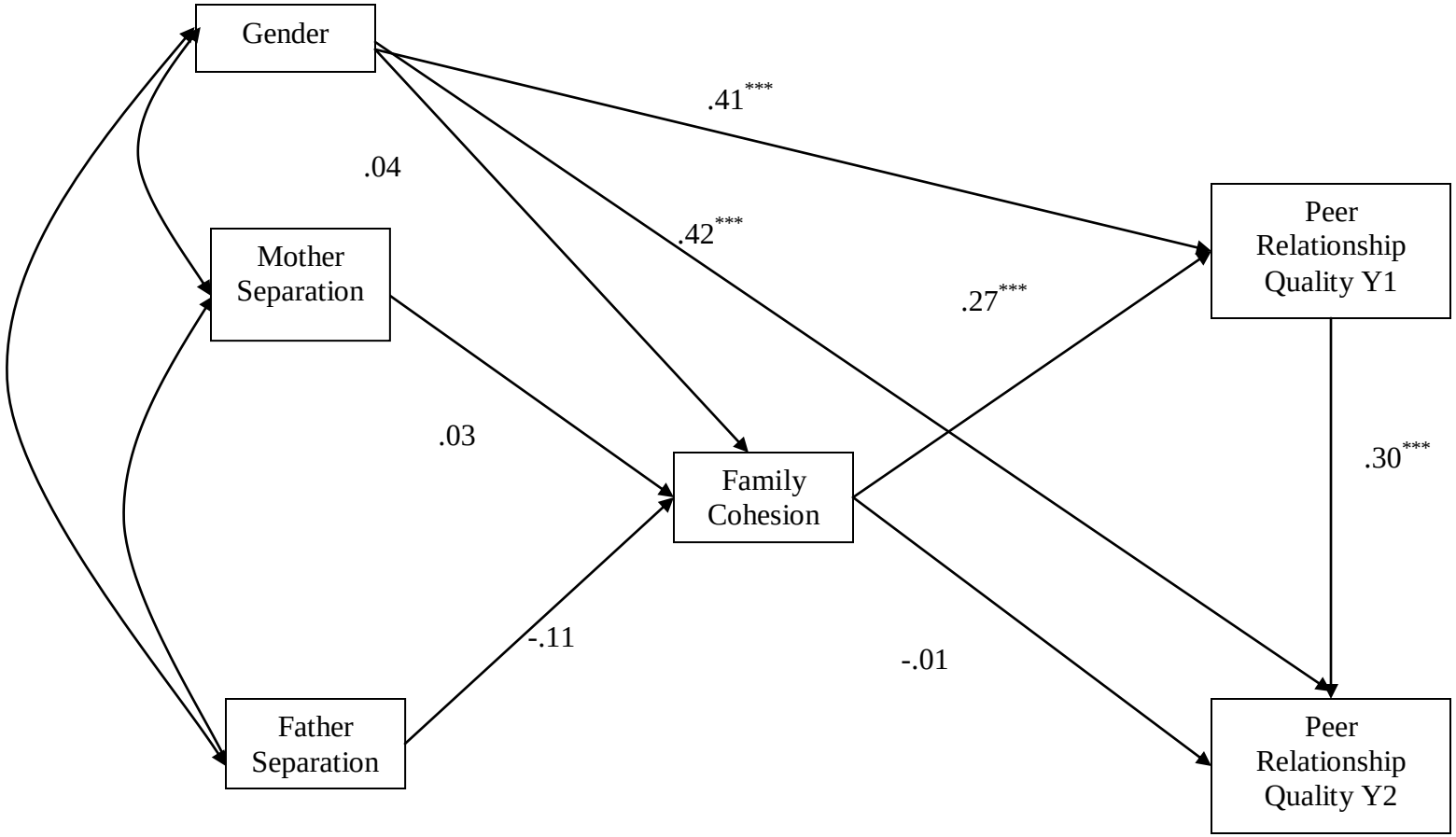

Figure 1. Path model of the associations of mother separation and father separation with family cohesion and changes in peer relationship quality showing standardized path coefficients.

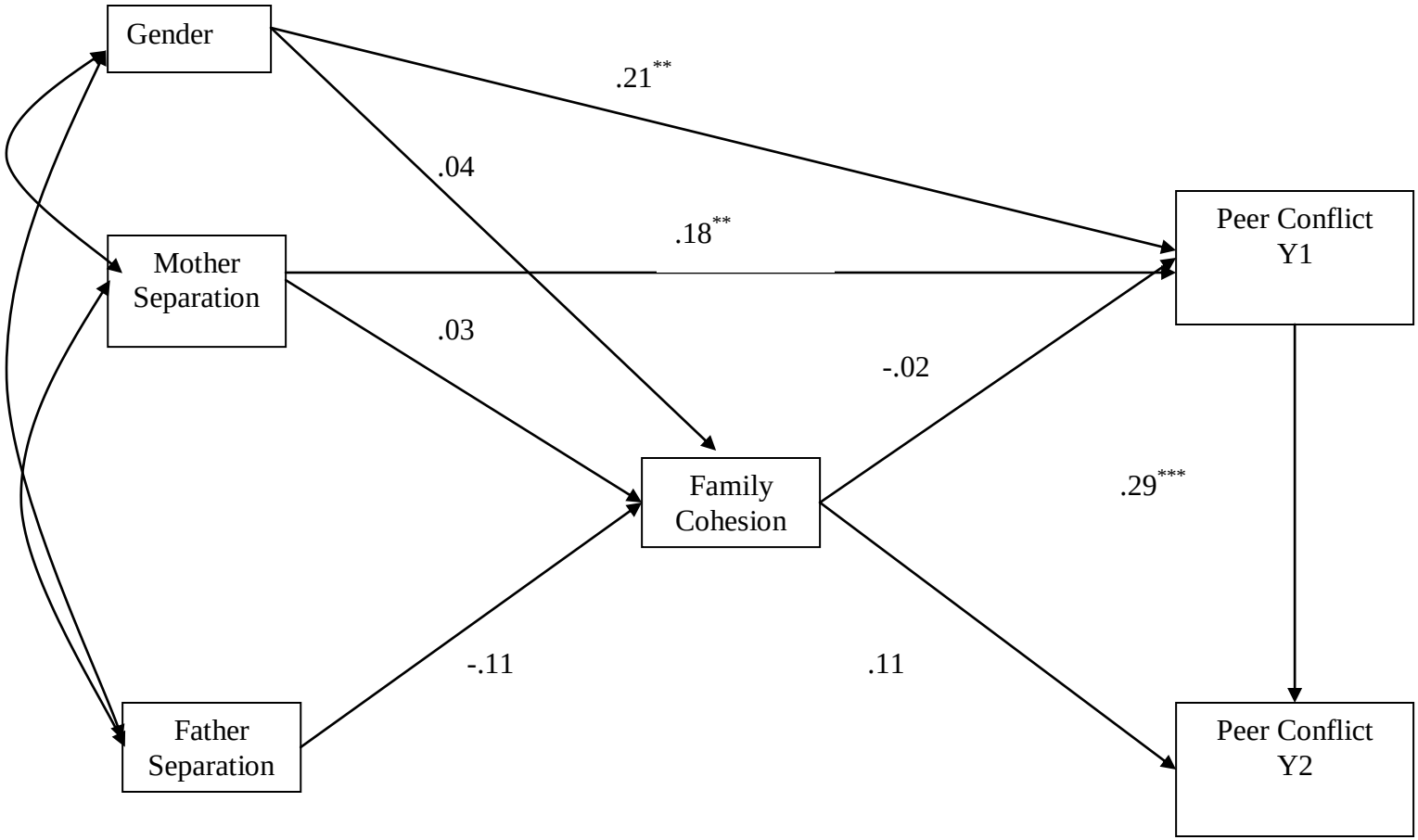

Figure 2. Path model of the associations of mother separation and father separation with family cohesion and changes in peer conflict showing standardized path coefficients.

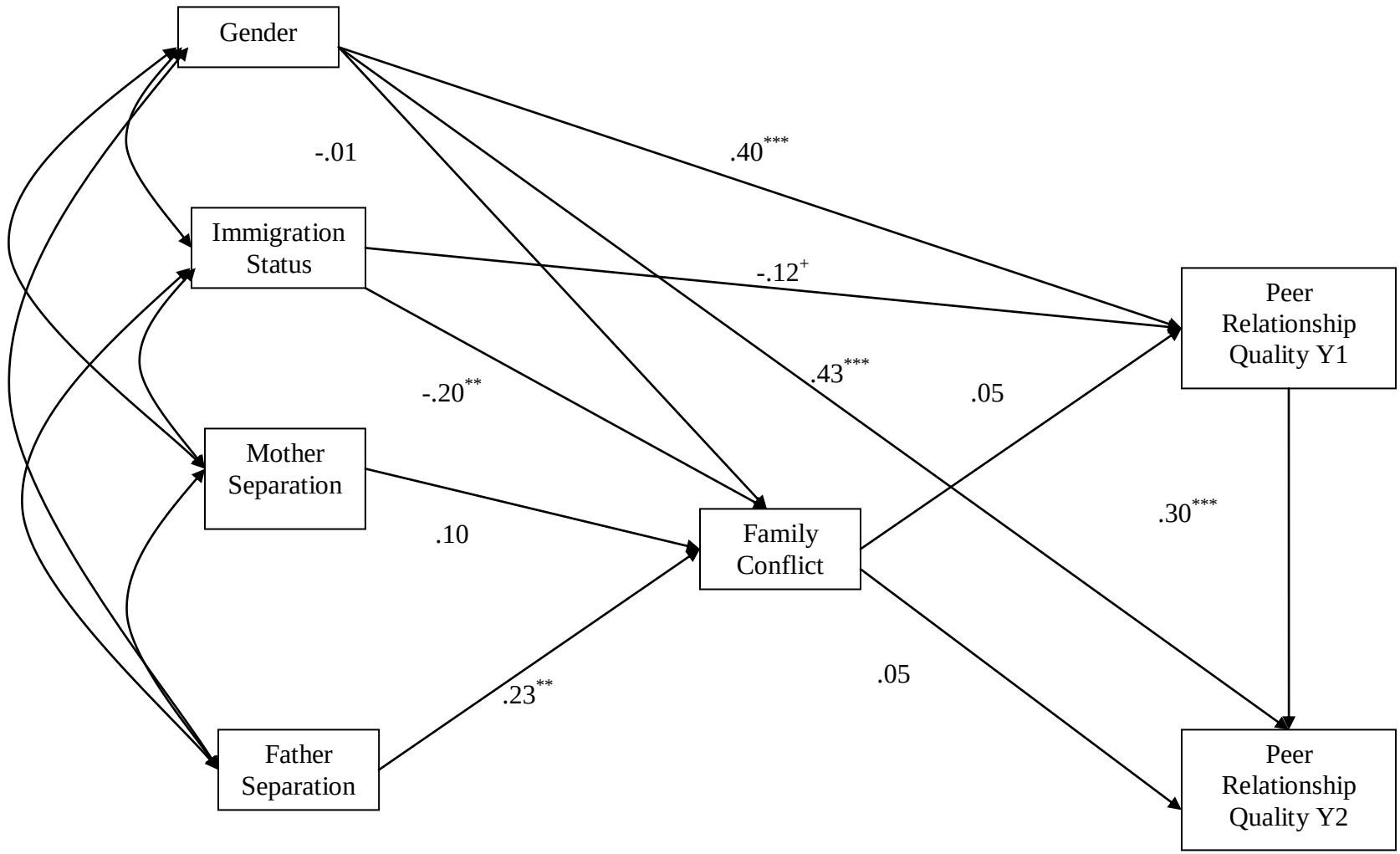

Figure 3. Path model of the associations of mother separation and father separation with family conflict and changes in peer relationship quality showing standardized path coefficients.

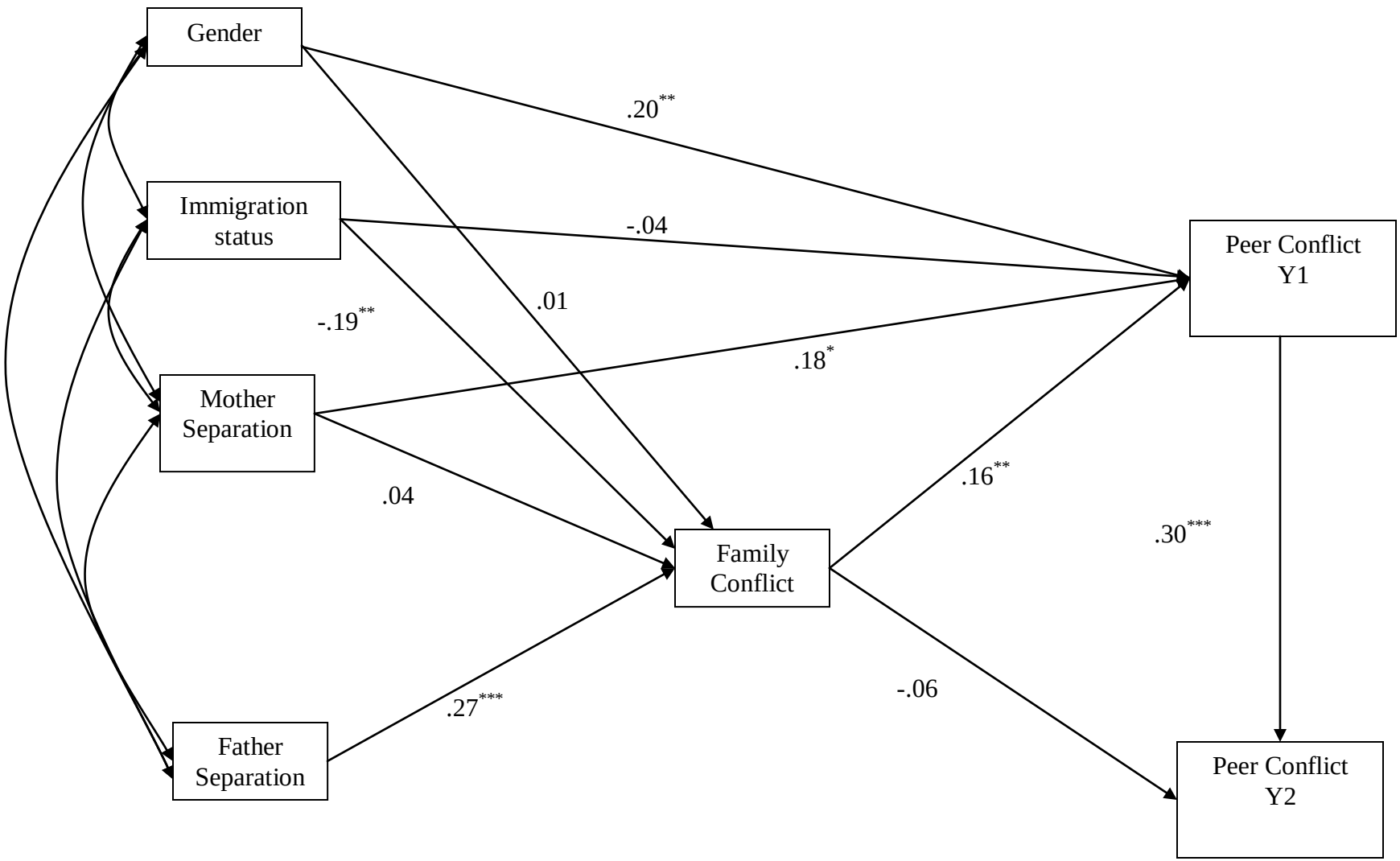

Figure 4. Path model of the associations of mother separation and father separation with family conflict and changes in peer conflict showing standardized path coefficients.

Discussion

This study used a prospective approach to understanding the influence of family separations on the development in peer relationships and the potential mediating role of family cohesion and conflict. There are a limited number of studies that have explored the impacts of family separation on Latino adolescent development and specifically, the development of peer relationships. This study adds to the extant literature by examining the mediating roles of family cohesion and family conflict for the relationship between family separation and changes in peer relationships. Specifically, this study tested path models to determine whether or not family cohesion or family conflict mediated the association between mother and father separation and changes in both peer relationship quality and peer conflict among a sample of Latino immigrant youth. It appears that family conflict is a mediator for the relationship between father separation and peer conflict at year 1 but not for changes in peer conflict over time. Family cohesion and family conflict did not mediate other tested associations, yet other direct and indirect effects suggest that family conflict and family cohesion remain important predictors of peer relationships for early adolescent Latinos. Further, it appears that family separation experiences do have some influence on peer conflict.

Mediation Analyses

Family conflict. It was hypothesized that family conflict would mediate the association between mother and father separation and changes in both peer conflict and peer relationship quality. These hypotheses were not supported as family conflict did not predict changes in peer relationship quality. However, an indirect effect was observed between father separation and peer conflict at year 1 through family conflict. Although these findings are cross sectional and directionality cannot be determined, it appears that youth who experience more time apart from

their fathers are experiencing greater family conflict than other youth and that this family conflict is associated with higher levels of peer conflict. This is consistent with previous qualitative and quantitative studies of Latinos that have found youth to report greater family conflict after a prolonged separation (Baccallao & Smokowski, 2007; Darnell & Roque, 2004; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). However, this study adds a new finding that family separation-specifically father separation-has an indirect effect on peer conflict through increased family conflict while mother separation operates more directly on peer conflict processes.

In contrast to father separation, mother separation directly predicted peer conflict at year 1. Youth who experienced longer periods of separation from mothers were more likely to report greater conflict than youth with little or no separation and mother separation was not directly associated with family conflict. The differing nature of the association between mother and father separation and peer conflict suggests a complex pattern. Baccallao and Smokowski's (2007) qualitative study of separation experiences among Latino youth may offer some insight. The authors found that separation and reunion with fathers was associated with increase strain on family relationship and called for role redefinition in the family. This may support the association of father separation experiences and family conflict. In addition, placed in context with earlier studies of trajectories of peer relationship quality, it may be that peer conflict is more directly influenced by mother separation because youth are more likely to seek out peer relationships for additional supports and thus increasing frequency of interaction and likelihood of experiencing conflict. This would be consistent with attachment theory that suggests mothers are often primary attachment figures; yet, during adolescence, youth are more likely to seek out peers as sources of support and are likely to form attachments to peers. Way and Greene (2006) point to this possibility as they found an attachment like pattern between adolescents and their

parents, but also noted a compensatory pattern. Specifically, youth who report the largest increases in friendship quality are for those youth who report the poorest quality family relationships (Way & Greene, 2006).

There were also indirect associations between mother separations and peer conflict at year 2 through peer conflict at year 1. Youth who reported longer separations from mothers also reported higher levels of peer conflict at year 1, which was associated with higher levels of peer conflict at Year 2. Mother separation did not have a direct effect on family conflict. Family conflict did predict peer conflict at year 1 and had an indirect association with peer conflict at year 2 through peer conflict at year 1. In context with the finding of an indirect effect of father separation on peer conflict at year 1, these findings suggest long-term consequences. It may be that the disadvantage experienced in peer relationships in the short term due to family separation continues to affect youth for a longer period of time. That is, the effect of separation continues even though the separation itself does not predict changes in the developmental trajectory. However, because peer conflict is only moderately stable, even kids who have this disadvantage may be able to recover and eventually form positive peer relationships with lower levels of conflict. This explanation is consistent with Masten's (2000) model of resilience which emphasizes the ability of youth to bounce back after experiencing negative outcomes after adverse experiences.

Family cohesion. It was hypothesized that family cohesion would mediate the relationship between mother and father separation and changes in peer relationship quality and peer conflict. Although family cohesion did predict peer relationship quality at year 1, this variable did not predict changes in either peer relationship quality or peer conflict. In addition, mother and father separation do not predict family cohesion. While inconsistent with earlier qualitative studies of

family separation experiences (Baccallao & Smokowski, 2007; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002), these findings suggest that family separations are not necessarily detrimental to Latino youths' feelings of closeness in the family. Although other studies reported decreases in cohesion associated with separation, the findings in this study show that closeness isn't directly impacted by past experiences of separation. One possible explanation for this lack of an association is that individuals may define family in different ways. Specifically, some youth responding to questions about their family may have been thinking of only immediate family members (e.g., mother, father, siblings) whereas others may have included extended family members (e.g., uncles, aunts, grandparents). Further, youth who live in blended families may have responded for immediate family referring to a step-parent and step-siblings as well as a parent and biological siblings. Other theorists have noted the importance of familism for Latinos and have identified family cohesion as a highly salient dimension (e.g., Sabogal et al., 1987). This behavioral dimension of familism is less affected by family separation as measured in this study. It may be that the embracing of familism among Latino youth makes family separations less troublesome for these youth because they may perceive the separation as necessary or driven by desire to maintain the family unit ultimately.

The lack of longitudinal findings for all 4 path models suggests that family separations have some short term impacts on peer relationships but that these separations do not continue to directly affect peer relationship development one year later. Although this study could not examine peer relationships beyond one year, it is possible that effects of earlier parental separations on peer relationship development emerge only after a longer period. This possibility needs further research and this study cannot address it directly. Attachment theory suggests that significant separations from primary attachment figures would predict negative outcomes

(Bowlby, 1973); however, the findings in this study suggest that youth who experience separations are somewhat resilient because separation including duration did not predict changes in peer relationships. Specifically, youth reported increases in peer relationship quality and decreases in peer conflict over time despite experiencing separations from mother or father. This is consistent with Suarez-Orozco's study of the influence of family separations on psychological outcomes. Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2002) did find more reports of depression among separated versus nonseparated youth, yet noted that duration of separation did not predict other psychological symptoms. The authors suggested that similar to studies of behavioral disturbances among youth who have experienced the stress of war, effects are "less intense than anticipated" (Jensen & Shaw, 1993: cited in Suarez-Orozco et al. 2002).

It was expected that family separation experiences would predict family cohesion and family conflict such that longer separations would be associated with higher family conflict and lower family cohesion. Baccallao and Smokowski (2007) noted disruptions to the family environment after prolonged separations and one would expect temporary disruptions to the family environment after such separations. However, family cohesion was not predicted by family separations. It appears that there are short-term disruptions to the family environment after a prolonged separation from fathers on family conflict but not from mothers. It is possible that attachment patterns may have an underlying role that warrants future examination. Specifically, youth are likely to attach to more than one individual as they grow older and it may be that youth are maintaining stronger attachments to mothers despite separations. This is consistent with Suarez-Orozco's idea of youth and parents maintaining a "psychological connection" during separations. This is an important inquiry for future research on the impact of separations. In addition, it may be that father separations are planned for and that mother separations are less so.

Interestingly, family cohesion and family conflict were associated with related peer relationship dimensions in cross sectional findings. Family cohesion predicted peer relationship quality whereas family conflict predicted peer conflict. Consistent with Berndt's earlier work on peer relationships (1986), this suggests that conflict and cohesion are unique dimensions that have unique implications for peer relationships; thus, youth can experience high levels of conflict and supportive aspects of relationships. Further, although this study did not include the association between family conflict and family cohesion in the same path models, a significant negative correlation was observed in preliminary analyses. Baer (1999) examined this association and found cohesion to predict family conflict such that higher levels of cohesion were associated with lower levels of conflict. This further suggests that these constructs, although related, may contribute uniquely to the development of peer relationships.

Gender and Immigration Status

Although not a focus of this study, gender differences were observed for overall relationship quality. Girls reported higher quality relationships than boys, but also reported experiencing more conflict than boys. Girls also reported more separation than boys. These findings are consistent with earlier research on relationship trajectories (Way & Greene, 2006) that noted that girls are report higher levels of intimacy in relationships than boys in early adolescence. However, Way and Greene (2006) also found that from early adolescence to late adolescence, boys experience greater increases in relationship quality than girls. These findings suggest that changes in relationship quality over 1-year during early adolescence may not be sensitive enough to capture meaningful change. Immigration status significantly predicted family conflict such that more recent immigrants reported greater family conflict than earlier immigrants. Studies have found that family conflict typically increases among Latino youth who experience increases

in acculturative stress (Gonzalez et al., 2006). Therefore, a possible explanation is that this finding may be due to high levels of acculturative stress that are experienced by more recent immigrants.

Family Separation.

The separations reported by study participants are similar to those reported in the study by Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2002); specifically, most participants reported separation from fathers whereas fewer reported separation from mothers. In contrast to the study by Suarez-Orozco and colleagues, this study did not measure other variables that describe the context of separation. However, there were some notable differences among youth who experienced separations in this study. Youth reports of their age of separation and reunion differed for fathers versus mothers. More youth reported experiencing separations and reunions from mothers between the ages of 6 and 11 whereas most youth reported separations from fathers before age 5. Fairly equal numbers of youth reported reunions with fathers between the ages of 6 and 11 and after age 12. Therefore, there are some clear differences in patterns of separation by parent. These have implications for the application of attachment theory. Attachment theorists argue that primary attachments are established in the first few years of life (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982) and most often the primary attachment figure is the mother. It appears there are more father separations and fewer mother separations in earlier years. This is likely a consequence of planning to attend to the needs of the child with the primary caregiver during the early years. Therefore, this study suggests future research on family separation should address more specific characteristics of immigration that are associated with separation including patterns of immigration and timing of reunions and separations. For example, the measures used in this

study were not sensitive to whether or not the mother left for the US before the child and whether or not the father stayed behind with the youth or with whom the child stayed.

Family separation experiences are also diverse in other ways and difficult to measure. This study measured whether or not youth had experienced separation from one or both parents, yet some youth reported that the separations were still ongoing. In addition, there are likely differences between youth who experienced separation from both parents and youth who experienced separations from only one parent. Nineteen youth reported separations from fathers due to divorce or marital separation. These differences in separation experiences are likely to have diverse influences. For example, youth who reported separations from fathers due to divorce or marital separation might be more likely to report greater conflict cross-sectionally, as was found in this study. That is, youth in divorced families may be more likely to experience higher levels of conflict already. However, in the context of immigration, one may argue that divorce and separation are common to family separation experiences as part of the immigration process. Future studies with larger samples should explore these nuances through the use of mixed method approaches to understand better how immigration separations influence relations.

Strengths and Limitations

To date, only one peer reviewed quantitative study of this nature was found in the literature (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002) that examined the association between separations and psychological outcomes. This study examined both support and conflict aspects of relationship development among Latino youth. Most studies have focused only on the supportive aspects of relationships and their role in development. This study included duration of separation in measures of separation to and a description of the context of separation (i.e., timing of separation and reunion). This was also a heterogeneous sample with diverse immigration experiences

among Latino youth. In addition, it has been argued that family cohesion represents a highly salient behavioral dimension of familism, which is a strong cultural value for Latinos. This study focused on this important construct to understand separation as a predictor and its consequences for peer relationship development. Finally, this study tested a path model using a robust analytical procedure to assess causality.

There are some notable limitations to this study. The sample included in the study was relatively small and precluded using other indicators of separation, multi-group modeling for moderation, and testing models with multiple mediators. There is great diversity in separation and reunion experiences among youth in the study sample including age of separation and reunion and immigration age. There were also a variety of causes for separation that applied to very small numbers of participants such as the number of youth who experienced separation due to divorce or marital separation. A study with a much larger sample may be able to explore differences based on reasons for separation with sufficient power to detect effects in subgroup analyses. It is possible that the measures used in this study to assess peer relationship quality and conflict were not sensitive enough to detect changes over a 1-year time period or changes in peer relationships take more time to actualize. Other more sophisticated measures of relationships or networks may provide different results. To more adequately capture the impact of family separations, future studies should consider use of in-depth parent reports and/or peer reports of relationship qualities. In addition, multiple time points over a longer period of time provide stronger causal inference. The family measures used in this study also represent a weakness. ‘Family’ was not clearly defined for study participants and it is likely that youth reported on very different family contexts. Specifically, youth may have reported cohesion or conflict for a parent and step-parent and step-siblings whereas others may have reported conflict for both biological

parents and siblings. Given the diverse types of separations that Latino immigrant youth are likely to have experienced, it may be better to focus on individual family relationships such as relationship quality with individual parents, siblings, and extended family members rather than a global indicator of family relationships. This study focused on separations only between mother and father but as previous studies have indicated, youth are likely to experience separation from other family members as well including grandparents and aunts or uncles. Given Bowlby's (1982) assertion that youth can attach to other figures, this is a strong direction for future research on family separation in the context of immigration. Longitudinal studies are needed to further our understanding of developmental trajectories for immigrant youth experiencing early, later, and intermittent separations from one or both parents.

The measures used in this study included single item measures and all of the data were based on youths' self-reports. These limitations increase the likelihood for error in measurement. The use of multiple item measures and latent constructs can help to reduce error and are recommended for future research. In addition, multiple informants may be particularly important given the nature of family relationships and peer relationships. To understand better the dynamics of such relationships, the use of multiple informants may offer a more accurate picture of relationship quality and conflict experiences.

Future Directions and Implications

The findings in this study provide several directions for future research. Future studies of family separation should use more sensitive measures to capture the nuances of separation. It may be that the impact of separation is linked to specific developmental stages and there is cultural variation in norms around separation as discussed by Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2002). In addition, to understand the normative nature of separations in this context, studies

should assess planned versus unplanned separations and planned versus unplanned reunions. The diversity of reasons for separations and timing of separations warrants future research to test better the impact of separations. Specifically, youth who experience separation as a result of divorce or youth who experience separation due to death or violence are likely to differ from youth who experience separation specifically as a part of a migratory process. Mixed method approaches are suggested as a means of understanding the nuances of separation and being able to determine how separations predict later development among youth. The addition of qualitative interviews with open-ended questions administered to multiple family members who represent the diversity of separation experiences can help to triangulate information to increase the validity of findings. In addition, qualitative approaches such as focus groups and interviews can be used to develop better measures that capture the nuances of separation.

Some suggested future analyses include cluster analysis or latent class analysis to identify types of separation experiences. In addition, studies with larger samples will be able to draw statistical comparisons between youth separated from mother only, father only, or both parents and youth with no separation experiences. These analyses can include added categories to further understand separation experiences influence on relational development (e.g., household composition, duration of separation). Future studies should also examine potential interactions between separation and family conflict to determine whether or not a type of mediated moderation exists. It may be more fruitful to explore family separation by examining reunion experiences more closely and having some measure of "connection" during separation. Separation did not predict cohesion in this study sample and this may be due to the high rates of cohesion typically observed among Latinos that are also noted for this study sample. Future

studies should examine how active separation influences cohesion more directly and how cohesion changes over long periods of time for these youth.

Further research is needed to explore the dynamics of family influences on the development of peer relationships. For example, cluster analysis may be useful in discovering typologies of family environments for Latino immigrant youth. Although family conflict was negatively correlated with family cohesion, it may be that families can be high in cohesion and high in conflict or low in cohesion and low in conflict. This is not inconsistent with studies of cohesion as discussed by Olson (2002) in which he discusses enmeshed and disengaged families. An exploration of these dynamics is warranted to understand more wholly the association between these relationships that are important to early adolescent youth.

Future research should more directly examine attachments to parents and peers to understand the association between these important relationships. Freeman and Brown (Freeman & Brown, 2001) found that adolescents were just as likely to identify a peer or a parent as a primary attachment figure. In the study, differences depended on attachment style. Specifically, insecure adolescents were more likely to prefer boy/girl friends or best friends as primary attachment figures whereas secure adolescents showed a strong preference for mothers (Freeman & Brown, 2001). These findings suggest a more direct examination of attachment may illuminate better the impact of separations on the development of peer relations. Further, to understand better the impact of family separations on family conflict and cohesion, a study with a larger sample may be able to capture effects before and after a separation or reunion. For example, high conflict families may experience greater conflict after a separation or reduced conflict if the separation was helpful in reducing family tensions. Such studies would also be better to understand how cohesion is maintained or eroded as a result of separation. Finally, an important note in earlier

work on separation is that immigrant youth often stay with other family members during separations and may experience "secondary attachments" and relationships (e.g., older siblings, grandparents). In future studies it will be important to measure these separately to determine how they influence adolescent development. There are also implications of these findings for interventions. The apparent short-term impact of family separation on peer conflict and continued influence through peer conflict at year 1 suggests that there is a time to intervene to bolster conflict resolution skills. Interventions that seek to build social and emotional competencies geared towards fostering positive relationships have shown success at this age period for similar populations (Catalano, et al. 2002).

Conclusion

Family separation experiences do not appear to have strong long-lasting influence on the development of peer relationship quality through family conflict or family cohesion among early adolescent Latino youth. It appears that family separations are associated with more peer conflict, but that influence does not last over time. It may be that youths' develop adaptive processes to adjust to new living circumstances that include parental separation as a new aspect, but not one that permanently damages their ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships (contrary to attachment theorists' perspective). It may be that family conflict is a mediated moderator when it comes to family separation experiences. Specifically, it may be that the influence of father separations on peer conflict depends upon the length of separation from fathers. Family conflict may only mediate for high conflict families or low conflict families. An important direction for future research is to examine the association between both family and peer relationship processes among Latino youth and their contribution to other outcomes.

In summary, these findings suggest a complex relationship between separation and both family and peer conflict. This is consistent with qualitative studies of immigration experiences and separation (e.g., Baccallo & Smokowski, 2007; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). This study has added empirical quantitative support to show increases in family conflict associated with family separation. Further, this study has demonstrated that youth who experience greater separation from fathers are likely to experience higher family conflict that is associated with greater peer conflict in the short-term. In contrast, mother separation has a more direct association with peer conflict. Although family separations are associated with more peer conflict, that influence does not appear to last over time. The different paths of influence for mother separation and father separation warrant further research to explicate the unique associations between each parent's separation and family dynamics.

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Appendix

Study Measures

Demographics

Are you a... *Eres…*
Boy/*Niño* _____ or/ó Girl/*Niña*_____?

What is your date of birth?
¿En qué fecha naciste? Month/*Mes*_____ Day/*Día*_____ Year/*Año*_____

Immigration Information

Were you born in the United States?
¿Naciste en los Estados Unidos?
a. Yes/*Sí* ____
b. No/*No* ____

How old were you when you moved to the United States?
¿Cuántos años tenías cuando te mudaste a los Estados Unidos?
a. Younger than 5 years old
Menor de 5 años
b. 5-11 years old
5-11 años
c. 12 years old or older
12 años ó mayor

Have you ever lived apart from your mother?

¿Has vivido separado(a) de tu madre?

a. No
b. Yes From age until age
Sí Desde los _____años, hasta los _____años
Why?/*¿Por qué?*

Have you ever lived apart from your father?
¿Has vivido separado(a) de tu padre?
a. No
b. Yes From age until age

Sí Desde los _____años, hasta los_____años
Why?/*¿Por qué?*

Peer Relationship Quality - Network of Relationships Inventory

Items rated from 1 – None to 4 – A lot

How much free time do you spend with your friends?
¿Cuánto tiempo libre pasas con tus amigos(as)?

How much do you talk to your friends about important things?
¿Qué tanto platicas(hablas) de cosas importantes con tus amigos(as)?

How much do you help your friends with things they can't do by themselves?
¿Qué tanto les ayudas a tus amigos con cosas que ellos(as) no pueden hacer solos(as)?

How much do you share your secrets and private feelings with your friends?
¿Qué tanto les confias a tus amigos(as) tus secretos y sentimientos privados?

How much do you protect your friends?
¿Qué tanto protégés a tus amigos(as)?

How often do you go places and do enjoyable things with your friends?
¿Qué tan seguido vas a lugares y haces cosas agradables con tus amigos(as)?

How much do you talk to your friends about things that you don't want others to know?
¿Qué tanto hablas con tus amigos(as) acerca de cosas qué no quieres qué otros sepan?

How much do you take care of your friends?
¿Qué tanto cuidas a tus amigos(as)?

Peer Conflict – Network of Relationships Inventory

How much do you argue with your friends?
¿Qué tanto discutes con tus amigos(as)?

How much do you and your friends get upset with or mad at each other?
¿Que tanto te enojas con tus amigos(as) ó ellos(as) contigo ?

How much do you and your friends disagree and quarrel?
¿Qué tanto estás en desacuerdo con tus amigos(as) y se pelean?

Family Cohesion – Family Support Scale

Items rated from 1 – Never to 4 Always

I'm available when someone in my family wants to talk with me.
Estoy disponible cuando alguien en mi familia quiere hablar conmigo.

I listen to what other family members have to say, even when I disagree.
Yo escucho lo que mis familiares tienen que decir aunque no esté de acuerdo.

My family members ask each other for help.
Mis familiares se piden ayuda unos a otros.

Family members like to spend free time with each other.
A mis familiares les gusta estar juntos en sus tiempos libres.

My family members feel very close to each other.
Mis familiares se sienten muy unidos unos a otros

We can easily think of things to do together as a family.
Facilmente podemos pensar en cosas que podemos hacer juntos como familia.

My parent(s) or guardian(s) know my friends.
Mis padres ó mi guardian legal conocen a mis amigos.

Family Conflict – Family Support Scale

Scores ranged from 1 – Never to 4 – Always

In my family we avoid each other when we are upset and rarely have an argument even if we are mad at each other.
En mi familia nos alejamos unos(as) de otros(as) cuando estamos enojados, y raramente tenemos discusiones aunque estemos enojados.

In my family we often insult and yell at each other.
En mi familia con frecuencia nos insultamos y nos gritamos los unos a los otros.

I wish I had a different family.
Me gustaria tener una familia diferente.

In my family people hit each other when they are angry.
En mi familia se golpean unos a otros cuando están enojados.

My family has a lot of problems.
Mi familia tiene muchos problemas.

We argue about the same things in my family over and over.
En mi familia siempre discutimos sobre las mismas cosas.

People in my family have serious arguments.
La gente en mi familia discuten seriamente.