PARENTAL BEHAVIORS, ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT, AND MENTAL HEALTH IN LATINO EMERGING ADULTS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology, Clinical Psychology

by

Diana Velez

August 2015
The thesis of Diana Velez is approved:

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Dee Shepherd-Look, Ph.D.  Date

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Andrew Ainsworth, Ph.D.  Date

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Scott Plunkett, Ph.D., Chair  Date

California State University, Northridge
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. My accomplishments would not be possible without their endless support and encouragement.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank my committee members who supported my efforts in writing this thesis.

To my chair, Dr. Scott Plunkett, thank you for being the greatest mentor and chair a student could ask for. You made the thesis-writing process incredibly easy and pleasant. I appreciate you taking the time to revise and edit my thesis and for meeting with me whenever I needed it. This thesis and several of my other academic achievements would not exist without you. Thank you for all of your support.

To Dr. Andrew Ainsworth, thank you for being a great professor and committee member. You are extremely knowledgeable, and I’m happy to have been taught by you. The majority of what I know about statistics I have learned from you. Thank you for making statistics interesting and enjoyable.

To Dr. Dee Shepherd-Look, thank you for being a wonderful professor, clinic supervisor, and committee member. I have learned a so much from you, both inside and outside of class. Your classes influenced my interest in attachment theory, so this thesis would not be possible without you. Thank you for all of your contributions and support.

I would also like to thank the members of the A-Lab for all of your help collecting, entering, and verifying the data for this thesis. Your contributions helped make this thesis possible.

Lastly, I would like to thank David Alpizar for assisting with the data analysis.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page ii
Dedication iii
Acknowledgment iv
List of Tables vi
List of Figures vii
Abstract viii

## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION
- Statement of the Problem 1
- Definitions 3
- Hypotheses 4
- Assumptions 6

## CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE
- Emerging Adulthood 8
- Romantic Attachment and Mental Health 11
- Parenting, Attachment, and Mental Health 16
- Attachment as a Potential Mediator 26

## CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY
- Procedures 29
- Sample Characteristics 30
- Measures 30

## CHAPTER IV – RESULTS
- Path Analyses 34
- Pearson Correlations 38

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION
- Summary of Findings 40
- Discussion 40
- Limitations and Research Implications 44
- Implications 47

REFERENCES 50
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 – Summary Statistics for the Full SEM 34
Table 2 – Indirect Effects for Generalized Anxiety 35
Table 3 – Indirect Effects for Quality of Life 37
Table 4 – Indirect Effects for Happiness 38
Table 5 – Bivariate Correlations for Total Sample 39
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Hypothetical model for generalized anxiety 5
Figure 2 – Hypothetical model for quality of life 5
Figure 3 – Hypothetical model for happiness 6
Figure 4 – Final path analysis to predict generalized anxiety 34
Figure 5 – Final path analysis to predict quality of life 35
Figure 6 – Final path analysis to predict happiness 36
ABSTRACT

PARENTAL BEHAVIORS, ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT, AND MENTAL HEALTH
IN LATINO EMERGING ADULTS

By

Diana Velez

Master of Arts in
Psychology, Clinical Psychology

The purposes were to examine: (a) the relationship between perceived parenting (support, psychological control), secure romantic attachment, and generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life in Latino emerging adults, and (b) whether perceived parental behaviors indirectly predicted generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life through secure romantic attachment. Self-report data were collected from 1,142 Latino emerging adults ($M = 19.27$ years) at a university in southern California. Findings from the current study showed that perceived support, and psychological control were significantly correlated to secure romantic attachment, generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life in the expected directions. Furthermore, secure romantic attachment was significantly and negatively correlated with generalized anxiety and significantly and positively correlated with happiness and quality of life. Path analyses showed partial support for secure romantic attachment mediating the relationship between parental behaviors and mental health. Specifically, secure romantic attachment mediated the relationships between (1) parental psychological control and all three indicators of mental health, and (2) parental support and happiness. These results may be beneficial to parents, family life educators, and mental health practitioners working with emerging adults.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is the distinct age period between adolescence and the mid-twenties, roughly between 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2006). It is a developmental period characterized by identity exploration and instability where individuals are focused on themselves and all the possibilities available to them. Individuals in this stage of life feel in-between because they are no longer children, but have yet to reach full adulthood. They postpone taking on adult responsibilities such as getting married and having children in order to focus on themselves (Arnett, 2006). Emerging adults are at high risk for psychiatric disorders; Viner and Tanner (2009) found that 40% of emerging adults in the United States meet the diagnostic criteria for a psychiatric disorder. The most common disorder that emerging adults met the criteria for was anxiety. Furthermore, Latinos in particular, have been identified as being at significantly high risk for psychiatric disorders such as depression and anxiety (Ayon, Marsiglia, & Bermudez-Parsai, 2010). Factors such as quality of life and happiness have also been important in the lives of emerging adults (Bayrami et al., 2012; Hawkins et al., 2011). Given this information, it is important to examine factors that affect generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life in Latino emerging adults.

During emerging adulthood, while some individuals may be living independently for the first time, some remain in the parental home (Arnett, 2007a, 2007b). Since many emerging adults pursue secondary education, those that do not live in the dormitory or rent an apartment off-campus, often continue living with their parents (Arnett, 2007a, 2007b). As such, emerging adults who stay in the parental home will continue to interact
with their parents regularly. Parenting behaviors still remain an issue for the emerging adult, because their parents are still present in their lives (Aquilino, 2006). These parenting behaviors have an effect on mental health outcomes (Peterson, 2005).

While parental behaviors contribute to mental health outcomes, they also play a role in the way emerging adults form attachments (Peterson, 2005; Riggs & Han, 2009). Before emerging adulthood, parents are the primary attachment figures that provide guidelines of how attachment occurs (Riggs & Han, 2009). Since emerging adulthood is a period where romantic relationships become more common, the romantic partner is likely to become the primary attachment figure (Arnett, 2007a). As such, examining the influence of romantic attachment on generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life in emerging adults, may be valuable. Additionally, because parenting behaviors influence attachment between the parent and offspring and subsequently provide models for romantic attachment (Riggs & Han, 2009), secure romantic attachment between the emerging adult and their partner may mediate the relationship between perceived parental behaviors and generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life. Therefore, examining the relationship between perceived parental behaviors, secure romantic attachment and generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life, may also be valuable.

**Purpose**

This study’s purposes were to find: (a) whether Latino emerging adults’ perceptions of their fathers’ and mothers’ parenting behaviors (i.e., support and psychological control) and secure romantic attachment were related to their generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life, and (b) whether secure romantic attachment mediated the relationship between Latino emerging adults’ perceptions of
paternal/maternal behaviors and their generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life. This study contributes to the existing body of literature on emerging adults’ mental health, and additionally, mental health practitioners and college counselors working with emerging adults may utilize the findings.

**Definitions**

1. Emerging adulthood is a developmental age period spanning the late teens through the mid twenties, comprised of individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2007a).

2. Secure attachment is characterized by the way individuals give and receive care from and intimately relate to other people (Levy, Ellison, Scott, & Bernecker, 2011). When they are separated from their attachment figure, they are confident that their relationship will not suffer.

3. Parental support is characterized by positive parental behaviors directed toward offspring, which convey affection and warmth (Aquilino, 2006; Surjadi, Lorenz, Wickrama, & Conger, 2011).

4. Parental psychological control is characterized by manipulative parental behaviors such as guilt induction, love withdrawal, and shame, which intrude into the offspring’s life (Barber, 1996).

5. Generalized anxiety refers to extreme apprehension or worry about several events; avoidance, vigilance, and restlessness are typically associated features (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

6. Happiness refers to the sum of all pleasurable things in an individual’s life (Ryan & Deci, 2001), and is a component of subjective well-being (Kim-Prieto, Diener, Tamir,
Scollon, & Diener, 2005).

7. Quality of life is an individual’s perception that his/her needs are being satisfied at different levels, and is influenced by their value systems, expectations, and goals (World Health Organization [WHO], 1998); it is a component of subjective well-being (Kim-Prieto et al., 2005).

**Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were developed, based on the review of literature in Chapter 2 (see Figures 1, 2 and 3).

1. Emerging adults’ perceptions of supportive behaviors by parents will be significantly and negatively related to their generalized anxiety and significantly and positively related to their happiness and quality of life.

2. Emerging adults’ perceptions of psychological control by parents will be significantly and positively related to their generalized anxiety and significantly and negatively related to their happiness and quality of life.

3. Emerging adults’ perceptions of supportive behaviors by parents will be significantly and positively related to their secure romantic attachment.

4. Emerging adults’ perceptions of psychological control by parents will be significantly and negatively related to their secure romantic attachment.

5. Secure romantic attachment will be significantly and negatively related to emerging adults’ generalized anxiety and significantly and positively related to their happiness and quality of life.
6. Emerging adults’ perceptions of parental behaviors (i.e., support and psychological control) will also be indirectly related to their generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life through secure romantic attachment.

**Figure 1.** Hypothetical model showing perceived parenting behaviors directly and indirectly predicting generalized anxiety of emerging adults through secure romantic attachment.

**Figure 2.** Hypothetical model showing perceived parenting behaviors directly and indirectly predicting quality of life of emerging adults through secure romantic attachment.
Figure 3. Hypothetical model showing perceived parenting behaviors directly and indirectly predicting happiness of emerging adults through secure romantic attachment.

Assumptions

This research study was created based on a number of specific assumptions. First, it was assumed that the participants in this study did not receive pressure from the researchers in order to participate in the study and/or to complete the items in the questionnaire. This assumption was made because participants had several options for studies they could take part in when they elected to participate in the current study. Furthermore, they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. And, they had an alternative assignment they could have chosen to do in place of participating in research.

It was also assumed that participants were able to understand and read the English-written questionnaire because the study was conducted in the United States of America. Participants were also students enrolled in a university, where English is the primary language spoken. Furthermore, it was assumed that participants took the necessary time to read and understand all the questionnaire items completely. Some questions were phrased in ways that required specific responses to ensure that participants were reading and responding carefully.
It was also assumed that participants provided honest responses. Since the survey was anonymous, there was little incentive to provide dishonest answers. Given that there was no way of verifying the identification of participants that submitted surveys online, it was assumed that all of the online surveys were submitted by the actual participant.

Another assumption was that the measures utilized in the study were appropriate for use with a sample of Latino emerging adults. The scales utilized in the study have been used with several ethnic populations, including Latinos, as well as adolescents.

It was also assumed that no errors were made in the data entry, given that a team of trained research assistants coded, entered, and double-checked data for accuracy. Additionally, given that a trained statistician helped run the statistics and verified the results for accuracy, it was assumed that no errors were made in the data analyses.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emerging Adulthood

According to Arnett (2007a), emerging adulthood is a unique phase in an individual’s life course. More specifically, emerging adulthood refers to the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood and is comprised of individuals between 18 and 25 years of age (Arnett, 2007a). This period is generally characterized by instability because individuals are attempting to find their place in the world (Arnett, 2007a). The focus of emerging adults is on the self, so they generally experience a period of intense identity exploration (Arnett, 2007a). Individuals in this stage of life use this time to explore all the possibilities available to them, and postpone marriage, parenthood, and other adult responsibilities in order to do so (Jamison & Proux, 2013). However, they are entering serious romantic relationships, some even cohabiting with their romantic partners (Arnett, 2007a). During this time, emerging adults are often pursuing higher education and or career opportunities and are trying out several roles, rather than settling into a long-term adult role (Aquilino, 2006; Arnett, 2007a). They have yet to settle down, and while some individuals may be living independently, others remain financially dependent on their parents and continue residing in the parental home (Aquilino, 2006; Jamison & Proux, 2013).

While emerging adulthood is a time for identity exploration and becoming independent, it is also the time when individuals engage in high-risk behaviors (Sussman & Arnett, 2014). Drug use is prevalent, as well as heavy alcohol consumption and risky sexual behaviors (Lam & Lefkowitz, 2011; Sussman & Arnett, 2014). Furthermore,
emerging adults’ mental health is of great importance because different antecedents can lead to either positive or negative mental health outcomes, which affect their lives (O’Connor et al., 2012). Specifically, the rates for psychiatric disorders increase during emerging adulthood (Tanner & Arnett, 2009).

**Mental Health During Emerging Adulthood**

There are numerous mental health concerns and/or ways to assess mental health. This study will focus on three indicators of mental health: generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life. In the current study, generalized anxiety is defined as feelings of excessive worry and apprehension about a number of activities or events (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The American Psychiatric Association (2013) reported that the prevalence of generalized anxiety in the United States is 2.9% among adults, and the lifetime morbidity risk is 9%. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2015) found that 6.8 million adults in the United States had been diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder, and generalized anxiety occurs twice as often in women. Furthermore, the onset of generalized anxiety occurs gradually between childhood and middle age (NIMH, 2015).

One longitudinal study examined generalized anxiety symptoms in a subsample of 591 emerging adults through interview data (Angst, Gamma, Baldwin, Ajdacic-Gros, & Rossler, 2009). Specifically, the study conducted six interviews assessing generalized anxiety symptoms with the participants over a 22-year period and found that between the ages of 20 and 21 years, the incidence of generalized anxiety was 0.8%. The next interview found the incidence rate had increased to 3.4% for the ages of 23-24 years. Thus, the incidence rates increased in generalized anxiety during emerging adulthood.
In a review of literature, another study found that in particular, generalized anxiety commonly occurs among Latinos (Carter, Mitchell, & Sbrocco, 2012). Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States, making up about 16% of the population, and they have higher prevalence rates of anxiety disorders than the general population. The prevalence rate of anxiety disorders in Latinos is 22.5%, and the lifetime prevalence rate of generalized anxiety is 5.8%.

Another important factor in the mental health of emerging adults is happiness, which in the current study is defined as, the sum of all pleasurable things in a person’s life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Because emerging adulthood is a time of uncertainty and life changes, research has become interested in happiness because higher happiness levels lead to more life satisfaction, important for emerging adults’ well-being (Martin, Perles, & Canto, 2010). A study conducted with a sample of 320 university students between the ages of 17 and 29 examined different factors that affect happiness and what leads to the highest levels of happiness (Martin et al., 2010). The factors assessed were pleasure, meaning, and engagement, because previous literature finds that the three collectively predicted happiness. Results showed that emerging adults sought out pleasurable life experiences in order to feel happiness above meaning and engagement, and that experiencing pleasure led to the highest levels of happiness.

Along with happiness, quality of life is another indicator of positive mental health in emerging adulthood. Good quality of life in emerging adulthood promotes healthy psychosocial functioning throughout the individual’s life course (Hawkins et al., 2011). Considering that emerging adults positive and negative mental health outcomes have an effect on their development, it is important to evaluate factors that affect generalized
anxiety, happiness and quality of life.

**Romantic Attachment and Mental Health**

Attachment refers to the ways individuals intimately relate to other people as well as how they give and receive care from their attachment figures, such as parents, children, and romantic partners (Levy et al., 2011). In the “Strange Situation” experiment, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) examined parent-infant attachment and identified three types of attachment, secure, anxious-avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent. Infants who were securely attached appeared open to and confident about exploring the environment and were easily comforted by their parent. Infants who were anxious-avoidant appeared withdrawn and unresponsive to their parent. Finally, infants who were anxious-ambivalent appeared distressed and were not easily comforted by their parent (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Bowlby (1973) proposed the idea that when children are young, they create “working models” of their relationships with their parents, which become prototypes for future friendships and romantic relationships. Phillips et al. (2013) found that the parent-child relationship extends into adulthood and the style and quality of the relationship affects the style and quality of the offspring’s romantic relationships. Furthermore, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) identified four attachment styles for adult romantic attachment based on an individual’s model of the self and model of the other. The model of the self was dependence, the model of the other was avoidance, and the four attachment styles are based on a combination of an individual’s levels of the models (e.g., high dependence-low avoidance, and so forth). The four styles identified were: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful. Individuals in the secure style were described as
being comfortable with intimacy and autonomy in their relationships. Preoccupied individuals were preoccupied with their relationship. Dismissing individuals were dismissing of intimacy and counter-dependent in their relationships, and fearful individuals were fearful of intimacy and socially avoidant (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

The adult attachment styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) are the equivalent of the attachment styles of children that Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified. Specifically, the secure attachment style for adults is the equivalent of secure attachment for children. The preoccupied attachment style for adults is the equivalent of anxious-ambivalent attachment for children. Finally, both the dismissing and fearful attachment styles for adults are the equivalent of anxious-avoidant attachment for children. The preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachment styles all make up insecure attachment (Ainsworth et al. 1978; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Romantic attachment involves availability; partners want their attachment figure to be available to them and this typically takes the form of exclusivity (Marazziti et al., 2010). Partners in secure romantic relationships describe their partners as trusting and supportive. These relationships tended to be characterized by happiness (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Romantic attachment commonly occurs in emerging adults’ development and has important implications for their mental health (Raque-Bogdan, Ericson, Jackson, Martin, & Bryan, 2011).

**Romantic Attachment and Mental Health**

Attachment is important for individual’s development, it is specifically related to emotion regulation and mental health (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Secure attachment
has been positively linked to several positive outcomes, such as psychological well-being, prosocial tendencies, and positive mood (Gillath, Gregerson, Canterberry, & Schmitt, 2014; Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011). When individuals don’t form secure attachments and instead form attachments with figures that are unreliable or inconsistent, this interferes with their development of stable mental foundations. Therefore, anxious and avoidant attachment make individuals vulnerable to mental health disorders (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012).

Levy et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 14 studies examining attachment security, anxiety, and psychotherapy outcomes in adults. In total, the 14 studies created an N of 1,467 adults. One finding of the meta-analysis showed that securely attached adults had been securely attached as children. Additionally, these securely attached adults felt confident that their attachment figures would always be available to them to offer comfort, support, affection, and help during times of distress. These individuals were comfortable leaving the attachment figure or being separated from them because they knew that when they returned, the relationship would still be the same (Levy et al., 2011). Conversely, Phillips et al. (2013) examined the effects that insecure attachment during childhood had on individuals’ intimacy when they reached adulthood. The study included 299 emerging adults and found that individuals with insecure attachment as children, reported poor intimacy in their romantic attachments. The romantic attachment of adults who had avoidant or ambivalent attachment as children, were characterized by obsessive behaviors, emotional extremes, and jealousy. They also concluded that adults’ descriptions of their current romantic attachments were similar to their descriptions of their attachment to their parents (Phillips et al., 2013).
Other studies have also found support for these ideas. For example, the Minnesota Study of Risk and Adaptation was conducted longitudinally for 30 years, beginning in the mid-1970s and assessed caregiver relationships beginning in infancy (Sroufe, 2005). They collected data from over 200 middle-class mothers and their infants and began by testing the “Strange Situation” experiment at two time points, 12 months and 18 months. This provided information about the infants’ attachment to their mothers, which would be the basis for comparison to their attachment style later in life. Assessments were made periodically throughout childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. Sroufe (2005) concluded that infants who had been categorized as securely attached in their “Strange Situation” experiment had a history of higher sensitivity to people throughout their lives and were more likely to be independent (i.e., secure attachment). This secure attachment translated into their romantic relationships, and these individuals felt confident leaving the attachment figure because they knew they’d be reunited. Infants who had been categorized as avoidant or ambivalent were less sensitive towards people throughout their lives. These individuals became highly dependent and needy and less self-reliant as adults (Sroufe, 2005).

Cassidy, Lichtenstein-Phelps, Sibrava, Thomas, and Borkovec (2009) conducted a study with 138 adults between the ages of 19 and 66 to assess how attachment was related to generalized anxiety. They found that individuals who had not formed secure attachments had not developed emotion regulation, and as such would resort to worrying (common in generalized anxiety) when faced with difficulties or stress. These individuals developed generalized anxiety as a result of not having a secure base, or a reliable attachment figure that they could seek help from during times of need. Therefore,
because individuals with generalized anxiety are unable to deal with negative emotions, they instead shift their attention to conceptual thoughts (e.g., worrying; Cassidy et al., 2009).

Riggs and Han (2009) found links between insecure attachment (i.e., anxious-avoidant, anxious-ambivalent) and generalized anxiety. They conducted a study with 330 college students (ages 17-44) using self-report questionnaires. The purpose of the study was to examine factors that affected generalized anxiety and depression in emerging adults. One factor examined was romantic attachment because the types of relationships individuals develop with romantic partners affect their mental health. Results showed that romantic attachment was significantly and negatively related to generalized anxiety. Specifically they found that insecure attachment/attachment anxiety was predictive of chronic generalized anxiety (Riggs & Han, 2009). Given this information, it was hypothesized in the current study that secure romantic attachment would be significantly and negatively related to generalized anxiety in Latino emerging adults.

Other studies have examined the role that romantic attachment plays in emerging adults’ happiness. Demir (2010) conducted a study with 314 young adults between the ages of 18 and 29. The sample was divided into two groups, one included 159 individuals involved in a relationship at the time ($M = 22.8$) and the other included 152 individuals who were not involved in a relationship at the time ($M = 20.5$). The focus of the study was to identify which types of relationships predicted happiness. Results showed that romantic relationships were significantly predictive of happiness for the group of emerging adults involved in a romantic relationship (Demir, 2010).

In a self-report study of 400 non-native college students at a university in Tabriz,
Iran, Bayrami et al. (2012) assessed the relationship between three types of attachment style and happiness. They found significant differences between attachment styles on happiness. Results showed that those with secure attachment were significantly more happy than those who were characterized as anxious attachment or avoidant attachment (Bayrami et al., 2012). Given this information, it was hypothesized in the current study that secure romantic attachment would be significantly and positively related to happiness in Latino emerging adults.

Studies have also examined how romantic attachment affects quality of life in emerging adults. Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani (2015) attempted to find out how romantic attachment and peer attachment in emerging adulthood mediated the relationship between parent-offspring attachment and quality of life / life satisfaction. They also studied the direct relation between romantic attachment and quality of life. The study was conducted with 385 emerging adults from high schools and colleges in Italy. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 ($M = 20.4$). Results showed that secure romantic attachment was significantly and positively related to quality of life. Furthermore, insecure romantic attachment was significantly and negatively related to quality of life (Guarnieri et al., 2015). Given this information, it was hypothesized in the current study that secure romantic attachment would be significantly and positively related to quality of life in Latino emerging adults.

**Parenting, Attachment, and Mental Health**

Bowlby (1980) proposed that the attachment style a child learned during infancy and childhood with their parents was the foundation for future attachments with other attachment figures. Phillips et al. (2013) found that beginning at infancy, individuals
learned whether or not others were trustworthy and dependable through their interactions with their parents. Therefore, the way they saw themselves and the way they expected to be treated by others, began to develop in their interactions with parents. When a child is raised in a supportive and responsive environment, they developed more secure attachment (Phillips et al., 2013). Furthermore, Nosko, Tieu, Lawford and Pratt (2011) found evidence that the bond a child formed with their parents had a lasting effect on the child’s adult relationships.

When discussing parenting practices, two parenting constructs have been identified that are of great importance: support and control. Parental support refers to nurturing behaviors towards the offspring, such as physical affection, encouragement, and praise (Peterson, 2005). Supportive parenting leads to warmer home climate and creates a better balance between separateness and connectedness between the parent and offspring (Henry, Robinson, Niel, & Huey, 2006).

Although there are multiple types of parental control (e.g., monitoring, punitiveness, psychological control), the focus of this study will be on just one type of control, psychological control. Parental psychological control refers to coercive behaviors where positive interactions with parents are contingent on the offspring’s compliance with parent demands (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Luyten, 2010). These behaviors strain the relationship between parent and offspring and lead to adjustment problems for the offspring, such as low self-esteem (Soenens, et al., 2010). Perceived parental support and psychological control affect attachment and mental health in emerging adulthood (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Christensen, Evans, & Carroll, 2011).
Parental Support

**Perceived parental support and mental health.** Parental support is defined as warmth, affection, and nurturing behaviors that individually and jointly support the offspring’s psychological development (Barber, Maughan, & Olsen, 2005). Supportive behaviors also include acceptance, responsiveness, and attachment and are related to overall positive development in the offspring (Baumrind, 2005). Parental support is also related to identity formation in the parents’ offspring, specifically adaptive identity processes, because the supportive behaviors promote identity exploration (Pesigan, Luyckx, & Alampay, 2014). Furthermore, parental support and caregiving influences offspring’s mental health by shaping the offspring’s adaptation. Generally, positive parenting practices are related to positive mental health outcomes for the offspring (Bornstein, 2013; Peterson, 2005).

Studies have found that supportive behaviors can be protective for the offspring’s mental health (Morgan, Brugha, Fryers, & Stewart-Brown, 2012). Through self-report data, Morgan et al. (2012) examined how the quality of the parent-child relationship was related to mental health in 11,271 adults born in England, Wales, and Scotland. Participants were asked to assess the quality of their relationships with their parents throughout their childhood and about their mental health outcomes throughout life. They found that the quality of the parent-offspring relationship was related to mental health, and specifically, supportive parenting protects the offspring from developing poor mental health (Morgan et al., 2012).

Studies have examined the relationship between parental support and generalized anxiety and found that the parenting behaviors contribute to the development of anxiety
(Wei & Kendall, 2014). In a meta-analysis, Wei and Kendall (2014) assessed how parental support (called parental acceptance in their paper) related to generalized anxiety in adolescents. They found that “shared” environment is an influential factor in adolescents’ development of generalized anxiety, and that parenting behaviors make up much of the “shared” environment. When examining specific parenting behaviors, they found that supportive and warm parental behaviors were related to lower anxiety symptoms and greater overall well-being. Based on this meta-analysis, it was hypothesized that perceived parental support would be significantly and negatively related to generalized anxiety in Latino emerging adults.

Assessments of the relationship between parental support and positive mental health have found that supportive behaviors contribute to life satisfaction and happiness. For example, Lim, You, and Ha (2014) conducted a study with 278 adolescents from one high school in Seoul, Korea in grades 10 through 12. Through self-report measures they assessed the relationship between parenting behaviors, including emotional support, and outcome measures such as emotion knowledge, self-esteem, and happiness. The results showed that the scores on parental support were highly related to the scores on happiness; therefore, the greater parental support an adolescent experienced, the greater their happiness would be. Thus, it was hypothesized in the current study that perceived parental support would be significantly and positively related to happiness in Latino emerging adults.

Studies have also examined how parental support is related to quality of life. Piko and Hamvai (2010) examined how parents, peers, and school affect quality of life / life satisfaction in adolescents. Self-report data were collected from 881 high school students
from five schools in Szeged, Hungary between the ages of 14 and 20 ($M = 16.6$). Results of the study showed that parental support positively contributed to quality of life for adolescents. Although they found that parental support played a positive role for quality of life for both girls and boys, they found that it benefitted boys slightly more than girls (Piko & Hamvi, 2010). Thus, it was hypothesized in the current study that perceived parental support would be significantly and positively related to quality of life in Latino emerging adults.

**Perceived parental support and attachment.** Supportive parents are warm and affectionate, as well as emotionally responsive to their offspring, and encourage open communication (Aquilino, 2006; Surjadi et al., 2011). By being emotionally responsive, parents teach their offspring that their needs will be met and the parent will be available to them (Surjadi et al., 2011). Furthermore, open communication and affection serve to enhance the offspring’s psychosocial development (Aquilino, 2006). Supportive parents also foster their offspring’s autonomy and independent expression, and acknowledge the offspring’s separateness from the parent, by accepting their adult status. Specifically, supportive parents help their offspring form career goals and teach them the practical knowledge and life skills that assist them in becoming independent (Aquilino, 2006). Parental support also helps to nurture the offspring’s sense of security, which leads to healthy social-emotional development (Surjadi et al., 2011).

Driscoll, Russell, and Crockett (2008) found that some supportive parental behaviors are similar in Latino families, such as warmth and emotional availability. Halgunseth, Ispa, and Rudy (2006) found that Latinos value *familismo*, which aims to keep the family close-knit; this is achieved through family support. However, Driscoll et
al. (2008) reported that differences in supportive behaviors are seen throughout generations because parents learn to engage in different types of supportive behaviors as a result of acculturation. Latino parents gradually begin to change their supportive behaviors, offering less support to their offspring and discouraging interdependence, while emphasizing independence. They found that some immigrant mothers become stricter and developed higher expectations of their offspring as they acculturated.

The relationship between supportive parents and their offspring is characterized by mutual respect and respect of boundaries (Aquilino, 2006). Mutual respect and good boundaries become particularly important for the parent-offspring relationship when the emerging adult offspring still lives in the parental household because the dynamic includes both dependency and independency. The offspring are dependent on their parents for shelter, but also independent because they are in emerging adulthood. Therefore, the parents and offspring need to be respectful of the boundaries that arise as a result of the situation. Ideally, parents and offspring create a balance where the parents provide care for the offspring, but are respectful of their offspring’s autonomy needs, and the offspring are respectful of the parents and parents’ household (Aquilino, 2006).

Studies that have examined the relationship between parental support and attachment have found that parental support is important for the development of attachment (Barber, Stolz, Olsen, 2005). Barber and colleagues collected data from 9,000 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17. Data were collected in nine countries: Bangladesh, Bosnia, China, Colombia, Germany, India, Palestine, South Africa, and the United States of America, and the surveys were translated appropriately. In their study, they proposed that parental support would significantly contribute to attachment in the
adolescents. Their results supported the proposal, and they also found that parental support was also connected to the offspring’s need for relatedness. Therefore they found that supportive parenting led to the development of both relatedness and attachment. Thus, in the current study, it was hypothesized that perceived parental support would be significantly and positively related to romantic attachment for Latino emerging adults.

**Parental Psychological Control**

Parental psychological control is a set of manipulative and intrusive actions intended to control offspring’s thoughts and behavior (Peterson, 2005). These actions include dismissing or invalidating the offspring’s feelings, threatening to withdraw love, and expressing disappointment or shame in the offspring (Barber, 1996; Soenens et al., 2008). Parents utilize the actions to punish any expression of feelings, behaviors, and thoughts that they believe are unacceptable (Peterson, 2005). Ultimately, psychological control undermines the offspring’s growth and autonomy, and negatively affects their psychosocial development (Kunz & Grych, 2013).

In a review of literature, Halgunseth et al. (2006) found that psychological control is different in Latino families. One finding showed that Latino fathers focused on their offspring’s emotions, such as hiding anger and not crying. They also reported that Mexican-American mothers were more likely to engage in guilt-induction. Another finding was about the concept of “consejos,” which are pieces of advice that Latino parents give their offspring in order to educated them. They are a form of psychological control because through their use, parents attempt to model and shape the way their offspring thinks and behaves. Other psychologically controlling behaviors identified in Latino families included interrogating, correcting, and pressuring (Halgunseth et al.,
Perceived parental psychological control and mental health. Generally, parental psychological control is associated with offspring maladjustment and negatively impacts their well-being (Baumrind, 2005; Soenens et al., 2008). Additionally, Pesigan et al. (2014) found that parental psychological control significantly predicted mental health outcomes of the offspring.

In a study examining the effects of parental psychological control on hopelessness, well-being, and mental health, Shek (2007) determined that psychological control was related to mental health. Longitudinal data were conducted with 3,017 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 19 from 16 schools in Hong Kong. Time 2 was a follow-up assessment conducted one-year later and included 2,758 adolescents from the Time 1 sample. Through self-report data, Shek assessed the levels of parental psychological control experienced by the adolescents, as well as mental health factors. Results showed that at Time 2, higher levels of parental psychological control were related to lower levels of positive mental health. Shek (2007) concluded that parental psychological control inhibited the adolescents’ ability to develop positive mental health.

The relationship between parental psychological control and mental health outcomes has led researchers to look at the relationship between psychological control and generalized anxiety (Wijsbroek, Hale, Raaijmakers, & Meeus, 2011). Wijsbroek et al.’s (2011) study focused on 1,313 Dutch adolescents (early to late) from the general population. Data were collected at three different time periods over a two years, and the samples were as follows: Time 1 – 1,313 participants, Time 2 – 1,293 participants, and Time 3 – 1,275 participants. Using self-report data, they measured the adolescents’
reports about perceived parental psychological control as well as their separation and
generalized anxiety symptoms. Results showed that at Time 1, parental psychological
control and generalized anxiety were positively and significantly correlated. Through
structural equation modeling they also found a moderate fit between perceived parental
psychological control and adolescent generalized anxiety symptoms for the total
adolescent sample (Wijsbroek et al., 2011). Based on these studies, it was hypothesized
in the current study that perceived parental psychological control would be significantly
and positively related to generalized anxiety in Latino emerging adults.

Studies have also examined how parental psychological control is related to
positive mental health. Yang, Wang, Li, Teng, and Ren (2008) conducted a study to
examine how parental rearing styles related to subjective well-being (i.e., happiness,
quality of life). They collected data from 448 high school seniors from several cities in
China. The mean age of boys in the study was 17.9, and the mean age of girls in the study
was 17.4. Participants completed self-report questionnaires measuring subjective well-
being and their perceptions of their parents’ rearing style. Results demonstrated that
dysfunctional rearing style characterized by emotional unresponsiveness and punishment
(i.e., psychological control) was significantly and negatively related to happiness and life
satisfaction. That is, adolescents with higher reports of parental psychological control
reported lower levels of happiness.

Özdemir (2012) examined how parental psychological control affected self-
esteem, quality of life/life satisfaction, depressive symptoms, and antisocial behaviors in
adolescents. The sample for the study consisted of 333 students from three schools in a
western city in Turkey. Participants were between the ages of 13 and 15 (M = 13.9). Self-
report data measured the adolescents’ perceptions of psychological control and their quality of life. Özdemir found that adolescents who reported more psychologically controlling behaviors from their parents had lower quality of life. Based on these studies, it was hypothesized in the current study that perceived parental psychological control would be significantly and negatively related to happiness and quality of life in Latino emerging adults.

**Perceived parental psychological control and attachment.** Parental psychological control is characterized by emotional unresponsiveness as well as behaviors that intrude into the offspring’s thoughts and feelings (Barber, 1996; Peterson, 2005). Instead of being responsive to their offspring’s emotional needs, parents engage in intrusive and manipulative behaviors such as love withdrawal, guilt induction, and shaming (Barber, 1996). Psychologically controlling parents are also overprotective and possessive of their offspring (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Through psychological control, the parent offers warmth and love to the child on a conditional basis, dependent on whether the child behaves according to standards set by the parent (Soenens et al., 2010). If the child does not behave according to the parent’s standards, the parent engages in love withdrawal and guilt induction (Barber, 1996; Soenens et al., 2010). These behaviors serve to make the offspring psychologically and emotionally dependent on the parent (Soenens et al., 2010).

When the offspring perceives their parent as being psychologically controlling, they feel like they are losing their autonomy, which in turn limits their ability to explore their identity and impedes them from developing their own sense of self, leaving the offspring unable to see themselves as a person separate from their parent (Barber, 1996;
Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). These behaviors also inhibit the offspring’s psychological development and strain the parent-child relationship further because of disagreement between the parent and child (Barber, 1996). This strain in the parent-child relationship leads to insecure attachment within their relationship and negatively influences the way the offspring relates to others. Offspring will be insecurely attached to other individuals because they are insecurely attached to their parent (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010).

Studies examining the relationship between parental psychological control and secure attachment have found that the two are negatively correlated (Leondari & Kiosseoglou 2002). Specifically, Leondari and Kiosseoglou (2002) examined a sample of 319 predominantly Caucasian adolescents and young adults and measured, through self-report, accounts of perceived parental psychological control and attachment to parents. The parental psychological control scale contained items related to love withdrawal and invalidation of feelings, while the attachment scale contained items related to emotional responsiveness and unresponsiveness (Barber, 1996; Leondari & Kiosseoglou 2002). With these measures, they found that parental psychological control and attachment were significantly and negatively related, meaning that when greater parental psychological control was present, the overall quality of the parent-child relationship was lower (Leondari & Kiosseoglou 2002). Thus, in the current study, it was hypothesized that perceived parental psychological control would be significantly and negatively related to romantic attachment in Latino emerging adults.

**Attachment as a Potential Mediator**

Given that perceived parenting behaviors plays such an important role in
emerging adults’ mental health, and that secure attachment contributes to these factors, studies have examined the possible mediation of secure attachment on the relationship between perceived parenting behaviors on mental health. Reid (2014) collected data from a sample of 709 ethnically diverse emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 25 in one university in southern California. The study looked at the relationships between parental behaviors (i.e., support and psychological control) and romantic attachment and depressive symptoms. Perceived parental support and parental psychological control, secure romantic attachment, and depressive symptoms were measured using self-report data. Reid (2014) used structural equation modeling to examine the relationships. The results indicated that the relationship between perceived parental psychological control and depressive symptoms was mediated by secure romantic attachment. However, the relationship between perceived parental support and depressive symptoms was not mediated by secure romantic attachment; instead, parental support was directly related to depressive symptoms.

Guarnieri et al. (2015), who collected data from 385 emerging adults in Italy, aimed to find out if romantic attachment and peer attachment in emerging adulthood mediated the relationship between parent-offspring attachment (mother and father separately) and quality of life/life satisfaction. Using structural equation modeling, Guarnieri et al. (2015) found that romantic attachment mediated the relationship between parent-offspring attachment and quality of life for mothers, but not for fathers (Guarnieri et al., 2015). Based on these two studies, it was hypothesized that perceived parental behaviors would be indirectly related to mental health of Latino emerging adults through secure romantic attachment.
Summary

Research studies have found that perceived parental support is positively related to secure romantic attachment, happiness, and quality of life, and negatively related to generalized anxiety across a variety of ethnic groups and age groups. Research has also demonstrated that parental psychological control is negatively related to secure romantic attachment, happiness, and quality of life, and positively related to generalized anxiety. Furthermore, studies have found that secure romantic attachment is positively related to happiness and quality of life, and negatively related to generalized anxiety. Finally, research has examined how parental behaviors are indirectly related to mental health through romantic attachment, and found significant results for depression and quality of life. However, studies have not looked at whether parenting behaviors are indirectly related to happiness and generalized anxiety through romantic attachment, and these studies have not used Latino samples. As such, the presented literature sets the framework for testing the hypothesized models in Figures 1, 2, and 3.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Procedures

The data for this study were collected from students in one university in southern California. Participants were recruited using two methods: (1) a research subject pool for lower-division psychology classes, and (2) upper-division, general education courses. Inclusion in the study required participants to sign consent forms.

The majority of the participants in the study were recruited through the research subject pool. These participants completed an online survey through Qualtrics. Given that the research subject pool is primarily made up of freshman level students in a general education course, the subject pool was comprised of students from a variety of majors. Students from the subject pool received course credit for their participation in the study. The remaining participants were recruited through upper-division, general education courses. These participants completed a paper-pencil survey at the beginning of their class. Students from the upper-division courses were not given credit for participation, but were asked to assist with the research. The survey was voluntary and anonymous for all participants. Students also reserved the right to leave questions unanswered or to stop taking the survey altogether, without penalty.

Data for this study were coded and verified by trained research assistants before being entered into an Excel file. Next, trained research assistants verified the entered data for accuracy. Finally, the data were transferred into SPSS, and frequencies were computed for each variable to further verify accuracy. Any potential errors were compared with the surveys and fixed when needed.
Sample Characteristics

Latino participants between the ages of 18 and 25 years were included in the sample for this study; participants outside of this age range were excluded from the analyses. The sample consisted of 831 female Latino participants (72.8%), 307 male Latino participants (26.9%), and 3 missing (.3%). Participants were all between the ages of 18 and 25 ($M = 19.27$). Fifty percent of the participants in the study identified as freshmen, 26.4% as sophomores, 16.5% juniors, 6.0% as seniors, and .2% as graduate students. Most of the sample (i.e., 71.4%) reported living with their parent, while 27.2% of the sample reported living independently; 1.4% did not specify. Sixty-five percent of the sample reported having both a biological mother and father present in their life, 20.7% only had a biological mother, 12.6% had a biological mother and stepfather, 1.2% only had a biological father, .4% had a biological father and stepmother, and .2% were adopted. Approximately 8.8% of the sample reported being born outside of the United States, and 90.7% were born in the United States; .5% did not specify. The sample was also comprised of 75% second-generation participants (at least one of their parents was born outside of the United States in one of 17 different countries). Fifty-nine percent of the participants’ mothers were born in Mexico, 14% in the United States, 12.5% in El Salvador, 8.8% in Guatemala, and the remaining 5.3% were from 14 other countries. Sixty percent of the participants’ fathers were born in Mexico, 12.5% in the United States, 10% in El Salvador, 9.8% in Guatemala, and the remaining 7.6% were born in 14 other countries.

Measurement

Standard fact sheet items were used to assess the demographic characteristics
(e.g., gender, age, classification, birth country) of the participants. Previously validated scales were used to measure parental support, parental psychological control, secure romantic attachment, quality of life, happiness, and generalized anxiety.

**Perceived Parental Support**

The study used a 4-item scale to evaluate perceived parental support in emerging adults (Bush, Peterson, Cobas, & Supple, 2002). Sample items included: (a) “Tells me how much he/she loves me”, and (b) “Says nice things about me.” The following were the response choices: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Participants responded separately about the perceived parental support of mothers and fathers. Composite scores were created for the scale by averaging the 8 items (4 about mothers, 4 about fathers). Higher scores signified that emerging adults perceived their parents displayed higher levels of supportive behaviors. Using the current sample, a Cronbach’s alpha of .85 was found for perceived parental support.

**Perceived Parental Psychological Control**

A 9-item scale was used to assess perceived parental psychological control (Frank, Plunkett, & Otten, 2010). Sample items included: (a) “Is always finding fault with me”, and (b) “ Tells me that someday I will be punished for my behavior.” The following were the response choices: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Participants responded separately about the perceived psychological control of mothers and fathers. The 18 items in the scale were averaged together to create a composite score; higher scores suggested that emerging adults perceived that their parents displayed higher levels of psychologically controlling behaviors. Using the current sample, a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 was found for perceived parental psychological
control.

**Secure Romantic Attachment**

The study used a 12-item scale to measure secure romantic attachment (Wei, Russell, Malinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). Sample items included: (a) “I get frustrated if partners are not available” (reverse coded), and (b) “I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.” The response choices follow: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *somewhat disagree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 5 = *agree*, and 6 = *strongly agree*. A composite score was created for the scale by averaging the 12 items. Higher scores indicated that emerging adults exhibited greater secure romantic attachment. Using the current sample, a Cronbach’s alpha of .70 was found for secure romantic attachment.

**Generalized Anxiety**

The 7-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7) was used to measure generalized anxiety symptoms (Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Löwe, 2006). Participants responded to items asking how often they had been bothered by certain problems in the past fourteen days. Sample items included: (a) “Not being able to stop and control worrying”, and (b) “Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen.” The response choices were as follows: 0 = *not at all*, 1 = *several days*, 2 = *more than half the days*, and 3 = *nearly every day*. All 7 items in the scale were averaged together to create a composite score; higher scores indicated that emerging adults exhibited greater generalized anxiety symptoms. Using the current sample, a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 was found for the scale.

**Happiness**
A 5-item scale was used to evaluate perceived happiness (Ferber, 2011). Participants were asked about their agreement with how well certain statements describe them. Sample items included: (a) “I enjoy life regardless of what is going on”, and (b) “I tend to view things positively.” The response choices were on a VAS scale which ranged from: 1 = does not describe me at all to 10 = describes me perfectly. The 5 items in the scale were averaged together to create a composite score; higher scores indicated the emerging adults exhibited greater happiness. Using the current sample, a Cronbach’s alpha of .92 was found for the scale.

**Quality of Life**

A single item was used to assess happiness (Zimmerman et al., 2010). Participants were asked to rate their overall quality of life during the past six months. The following were response choices: 0 = very bad, my life could hardly be worse, 1 = pretty bad, most things are going poorly, 2 = the good and bad parts are about equal, 3 = pretty good, most things are going well, and 4 = very good, my life could hardly be better.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presented in Table 1 are the summary statistics (i.e., ranges, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s alphas) for each of the six variables included in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Summary Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalized anxiety</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>0-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life (single item)</td>
<td>0-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure romantic attachment</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental support</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental psychological control</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Path Analyses

Path analyses using EQS were run to examine the relationships between perceived parental behaviors (i.e., support, psychological control), secure romantic attachment, and mental health (i.e., generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life). An assessment of the data set for multicollinearity found that perceived parental support and perceived psychological control, the independent variables, were not highly correlated, suggesting they were sufficiently different for comparison.

Path Analyses for Generalized Anxiety

Path analyses using EQS were run to assess the relationship between perceived parental behaviors (i.e., support, psychological control), secure romantic attachment, and generalized anxiety for emerging adults. The chi-square ($\chi^2$) test of fit for the path analysis was acceptable, $\chi^2 (0, 1134) = 0$ and $NFI = 1$, suggesting the model fit was good. Figure 4 shows the structural portion of the path analysis (i.e., the relationships between...
the variables), and Table 2 shows the indirect effects. As shown in the figure and table, secure romantic attachment was significantly and negatively related to generalized anxiety. Also, parental psychological control and parental support were both directly related to secure romantic attachment and generalized anxiety. In addition, parental psychological control was indirectly related to generalized anxiety through secure romantic attachment.

![Final path analysis to predict generalized anxiety. *p < .05.](image)

**Figure 4.** Final path analysis to predict generalized anxiety. *p < .05.

**Table 2**  
*Indirect Effects for Generalized Anxiety*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psych Cntrl → Rom Att → Anx</td>
<td>.035*</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support → Rom Att → Anx</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *p < .05.

**Path Analyses for Quality of Life**

Path analyses was also run to assess the relationship between perceived parental behaviors (i.e., support, psychological control), secure romantic attachment, and quality of life. The chi-square test of fit for the path analysis ($\chi^2$) test was rejected, suggesting the
model was not a good fit. A post hoc Wald test was used to assess if any paths could be dropped from the model without weakening the model fit. The Wald test recommended that the path between perceived parental support and secure romantic attachment be dropped from the final model. After dropping the path, the chi-square ($\chi^2$) test of fit for the path analysis was acceptable, $\chi^2 (1, 1135) = 3.811, p > .05$, suggesting the model was a good fit. Additional fit statistics supported this conclusion (CFI = .99; RMSEA = .05). Figure 5 shows the structural portion of the path analysis, and Table 3 shows the indirect effects. As shown in the figure and table, secure romantic attachment was significantly and positively related to generalized anxiety. Also, parental psychological control was directly related to secure romantic attachment and quality of life and indirectly related to quality of life through secure romantic attachment. Parental support was directly related to quality of life, but it was not significantly related to secure romantic attachment.

Figure 5. Final path analysis to predict quality of life, after post hoc adjustments (structural model only). *$p < .05$. 

---

36
Table 3  
*Indirect Effects for Quality of Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psych Cntrl à Rom Att à QOL</td>
<td>-.046*</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>-.033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.

**Path Analyses for Happiness**

Finally, path analyses were run to assess the relationship between perceived parental behaviors (i.e., support, psychological control), secure romantic attachment, and happiness. The chi-square test of fit for the path analysis \( (\chi^2) \) test was rejected, suggesting the model was not a good fit. A post hoc Wald test was used to assess if any paths could be dropped from the model without weakening the model fit. The Wald test recommended that the path between perceived parental psychological control and happiness be dropped from the final model. After dropping the path, the chi-square \( (\chi^2) \) test of fit for the path analysis was acceptable, \( \chi^2 (1, 533) = 2.799, p > .05 \), suggesting the model was a good fit. Additional fit statistics supported this conclusion (CFI = .99; RMSEA = .06). Figure 6 shows the structural portion of the SEM, and Table 4 shows the indirect effects. As shown in the figure and table, secure romantic attachment was significantly and positively related to happiness. Also, parental support was directly related to secure romantic attachment and happiness and indirectly related to happiness through secure romantic attachment. Parental psychological control was directly related to secure romantic attachment and indirectly related to happiness through secure romantic attachment.
Figure 6. Final path analysis to predict happiness, after post hoc adjustments (structural model only). *p < .05.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Effects for Happiness</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psych Cntrl → Rom Att → Happ</td>
<td>-.086*</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support → Rom Att → Happ</td>
<td>.030*</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.

**Pearson Correlations**

As a supplement to the path analyses, Pearson correlations were used to establish the direction and strength of the bivariate relationships between each variable included in the study (see Table 5). As hypothesized, perceived parental support was significantly and positively correlated with secure romantic attachment, happiness, and quality of life, and significantly and negatively correlated with perceived psychological control and generalized anxiety. Furthermore, perceived psychological control was significantly and positively correlated with generalized anxiety, and significantly and negatively correlated with secure romantic attachment, happiness, and quality of life. Finally, secure romantic attachment was significantly and positively correlated with happiness and quality of life,
and significantly and negatively correlated with generalized anxiety.

Table 5
Bivariate Correlations for Total Sample ($n = 1,142$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Parental support</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Parental psychological control</td>
<td>-.42*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Secure romantic attachment</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Generalized anxiety</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Happiness</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Quality of life</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>-.46*</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The purposes of this study were to determine: (a) whether Latino emerging adults’ perceptions of parenting behaviors (i.e., support and psychological control) and secure romantic attachment were related to their mental health (i.e., generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life), and (b) whether secure romantic attachment mediated the relationship between Latino emerging adults’ perceptions of parenting behaviors and their mental health. Findings from the current study showed that perceived support, and psychological control were significantly correlated to secure romantic attachment, generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life in the expected directions. Furthermore, secure romantic attachment was significantly and negatively correlated with generalized anxiety and significantly and positively correlated with happiness and quality of life. Path analyses showed partial support for secure romantic attachment mediating the relationship between parental behaviors and mental health. Specifically, secure romantic attachment mediated the relationships between (1) parental psychological control and all three indicators of mental health, and (2) parental support and happiness.

Discussion

The current study found that lower levels of secure romantic attachment were related to higher levels of generalized anxiety in Latino emerging adults. Individuals who have insecure attachment are often obsessive about their romantic partner and exhibit greater jealousy (Phillips et al., 2013). They may come to expect too much out of the relationship and become highly dependent on their partner (Sroufe, 2005). These
emotions begin to affect their romantic relationship(s), and they may begin to worry about their partner’s loyalty to them, which may lead them to become an avoidant partner. The excessive worry leads to greater feelings of anxiousness, which may manifest in other areas of their life as well (e.g., generalized anxiety). However, individuals with secure attachment may feel more comfortable about their romantic partner being loyal to them, and therefore they are more likely to be trusting of their partner (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These individuals will seek and provide support from and for their partner and reach a higher level of intimacy with them. These behaviors foster a secure romantic relationship and decrease the feelings of anxiousness in the individual. Therefore, individuals with secure romantic attachment are less likely to experience generalized anxiety.

Perceived parental support was negatively correlated with generalized anxiety; this is consistent with previous studies (Wei & Kendall, 2014). Perceptions of supportive behaviors promote greater well-being and protect the offspring from developing poor mental health, (e.g., generalized anxiety; Morgan et al., 2012; Wei & Kendall, 2014). When a parent is warm and affectionate towards their offspring, the offspring feels cared for, which makes them feel better and protects them against feelings of anxiousness. They don’t worry because the support from their parents makes them feel secure. Conversely, emerging adults who don’t receive support from their parent may develop poor mental health (Shek, 2007). These emerging adults may never receive encouragement or praise from their parents, and therefore may develop feelings of inadequacy, which can develop into anxiousness. They don’t feel secure, and instead feel constant worry because their parents haven’t fostered a sense of security in them.
Perceived parental psychological control was positively correlated to generalized anxiety and indirectly related to generalized anxiety through secure romantic attachment. That is, perceptions of psychologically controlling behaviors decreased secure romantic attachment, which subsequently predicted higher levels of generalized anxiety. A reason for this might be that when offspring perceive their parents engage in psychologically controlling behaviors (e.g., love withdrawal, guilt induction), they may not feel validated (Barber, 1996; Peterson, 2005). This puts a strain on the parent-offspring relationship and can lead to insecure attachment with parents and others. When they become involved in a romantic relationship, these feelings generalize to the romantic partner, and the couple may be emotionally unresponsive to one another and have issues with intimacy (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Phillips et al., 2013). This can increase insecure attachment within the relationship, which leads the individuals to feel invalidated and unloved. These feelings lead to rumination about the partner’s feelings and increases symptoms of generalized anxiety.

Consistent with previous studies (Demir, 2010; Guarnieri et al., 2015), this study found that secure romantic attachment significantly and positively predicted happiness and quality of life in Latino emerging adults. Individuals in insecure relationships often exhibit emotional extremes and may withdraw from or be dismissing of their partner (Phillips et al., 2013). They are fearful because they are unsure if they can trust their partner. These fears begin to affect their everyday life and diminish their quality of life and happiness. Conversely, an individual in a secure romantic relationship experiences mutual trust and love in their relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The partners feel secure with each other and know that they will be available for one another. This leads to
a more positive outlook for the individuals and enhances their quality of life and increases their happiness. Therefore, individuals with secure romantic attachment are more likely to experience greater happiness and have better quality of life.

Furthermore, perceived parental support was positively correlated with happiness and indirectly related to happiness and through secure romantic attachment. That is, perceptions of supportive behaviors increased secure romantic attachment, which subsequently predicted higher levels of happiness. A reason for this may be that when offspring perceive their parents are being more supportive (e.g., emotionally responsive, encouraging), they feel like the parent cares for them (Peterson, 2005). This creates a sense of security and trust for them, and they feel like their parent will be available to them (Peterson, 2005). When they grow up and enter a romantic relationship, they may transfer these feelings to their romantic partner (Phillips et al., 2013). They use this as a model for how relationships work, and they are more trusting of their partner and they feel better. The fulfillment they receive from their romantic relationship leads to greater happiness for the individual.

Consistent with previous literature (Piko & Hamvi, 2010), perceived parental support was positively correlated with quality of life. However, the relationship between perceived parental support was not mediated by secure romantic attachment, contradicting the proposed hypothesis. Although parental support was significantly and positively related to secure romantic attachment in the bivariate correlations, it seems like other aspects of support predict quality of life. Studies have found that when parents engage in supportive behaviors (e.g., warmth, nurturing, praise, acceptance), it promotes identity formation and autonomy (Peterson, 2005), which positively affects their mental
health. Therefore, when the emerging adult feels like their parents are supportive, they feel valued and loved, which makes them feel better about themselves. These things all improve the emerging adults’ quality of life. On the other hand, emerging adults who do not receive warmth, affection, and encouragement from their parents may feel invalidated and undervalued. The emerging adult may not feel loved, and as such may develop lower self-esteem and efficacy, subsequently diminishing their quality of life.

Perceived parental psychological control was negatively correlated to happiness and quality of life and indirectly related to happiness and quality of life through secure romantic attachment. That is, perceptions of psychologically controlling behaviors decreased secure romantic attachment, which subsequently predicted lower levels of happiness and quality of life. A reason for this may be that when offspring perceive their parents are engaging in psychologically controlling behaviors (e.g., shame, manipulation), they feel uncared for and unworthy (Barber, 1996; Peterson, 2005). These feelings of being unlovable and unworthy are transferred over to their romantic partner when they enter a romantic relationship. Once in the romantic relationship, the emerging adult may be dismissing, which may lead their partner to behave the same way. This subsequently makes the emerging adult question whether they can trust their partner and leads to insecure attachment. Insecure attachment leads to further distress and unhappiness in the emerging adult’s life, and diminishes their quality of life.

**Limitations and Research Implications**

While the current study found a significant relationship between perceived parental behaviors, secure romantic attachment, and emerging adults’ mental health, this study has some limitations that should be noted. One limitation of the study is that data
were only collected from students in one university in southern California. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to emerging adults in geographic regions outside of southern California, who are not in college, and who are not Latino. In order to account for greater external validity of the results, future studies examining the effects of perceived parental behaviors on Latino emerging adult’s mental health should attempt to collect data from several geographic regions, from emerging adults not currently enrolled in college, and from other ethnic groups.

Another limitation of the study is that it did not examine mother/father and son/daughter differences. Each group may have different experiences that were not accounted for in the current study. In order to account for these differences, it would be beneficial to examine results separately for mothers/fathers and male/female offspring. Therefore, future studies should look into examining results separately, for each group, to account for differences.

The sample included in the study was made up of university students, who are different form individuals who are not in a university. This is a limitation, because findings from the study cannot be applied to individuals not attending university. It would be useful to include a community sample of non-university students in order to see the differences between the two groups. As such, future studies should look into including a community sample along with a university student sample.

Another limitation of the study is that data were collected through self-report surveys. Although participants were asked to provide truthful responses, they may have responded in a socially desirable manner to demonstrate that they are not anxious, they are happier, they have better quality of life, and that they have more secure romantic
attachment. Furthermore, because all the variables are measured from the same respondent, this may increase the strength of the relationships between the variables (i.e., shared method variance). Therefore, future studies could examine actual parenting behaviors, in addition to perceived parenting behaviors. Future studies could also use clinical diagnoses of generalized anxiety instead of self-report measures, and they could use multiple measures to assess happiness and quality of life.

Slightly less than half of the participants were involved in a romantic relationship at the time they completed the survey. As a result, the participants who were not currently involved in a romantic relationship had to retrospectively respond to the items that asked about romantic attachment. This is a limitation because it is possible that participants who were not in a relationship at the time and responded to those items may not have fully remembered how they felt about certain items when they were in a relationship, and yet they still provided a response. It is also possible that some participants may have never been involved in a romantic relationship; in which case, the secure romantic attachment scale may not apply as well to them. In order to control for this, future studies may want to only include participants who are currently involved in a monogamous relationship in their sample.

Another limitation of the study is that there are several other factors that could influence emerging adults’ anxiety, happiness, and quality of life, which were not taken into account in this study. Health, finances, academics, family system characteristics (e.g., cohesion), and other personal matters could all potentially affect the emerging adults’ mental health. As such, future studies may want to examine other contextual factors that may influence mental health of Latino emerging adults.
The fact that there is minimal variability in the level of anxious symptoms in the current study is another limitation. Because one of the outcome variables in the study was generalized anxiety, it would be useful to include a clinical sample in addition to the community sample. This would increase the range of responses on the generalized anxiety scale. Therefore, future studies should look to include a clinical sample along with a community sample.

Finally, because the design of the study was cross-sectional, the survey only assessed how the respondents felt at one point in time. This is a limitation because the study cannot identify the exact direction of the relationships between the variables. It is possible that the endogenous variables may actually predict the exogenous variables in the path analyses. That is, generalized anxiety, happiness, and quality of life may predict the level of attachment and/or perceptions of parental behaviors. For example, if the emerging adults appear restless or worried, their parents may attempt to get involved and help with the problem. Emerging adults may interpret these supportive behaviors as intrusiveness from their parents, which in turn may foster anxiousness. On the other hand, if the emerging adults appear happy and upbeat, their parents are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors, which the emerging adult views positively. The emerging adults may interpret these behaviors as love and affection, which foster happiness and quality of life, and diminish anxiety. Therefore, future studies should conduct a study using a longitudinal design in order to measure the variables across time and to more precisely determine the direction of the relationships.

**Implications**
Despite the aforementioned limitations, the findings of the current study pose practical implications that could be beneficial to family life educators, parents of emerging adults, and mental health practitioners. Supportive behaviors are correlated to secure romantic attachment, happiness, and quality of life, and reduce the risk of developing generalized anxiety. Thus, family life educators (e.g., parent educators) should advocate affectionate and encouraging behaviors from parents. Because psychologically controlling behaviors are correlated with higher generalized anxiety and diminished romantic attachment, happiness, and quality of life, parent educators should also encourage and teach parents to engage in alternative behaviors that are positive and foster security.

Some emerging adults have difficulties identifying when behaviors are meant to be supportive or psychologically controlling (e.g., intrusiveness). Parents may be intrusive because they are involved parents and want to know about their offspring’s life. The emerging adults may view this as a controlling behavior and not want the parent to be as involved in their life. Emerging adults could be taught to better understand and perceive their parents’ attempts to be supportive, even in situations where the supportive behaviors are not coming across as such. This is important because some parents engage in psychologically controlling behaviors to protect their offspring, and it is beneficial for emerging adults to be able to identify when these behaviors are being used for their benefit.

Mental health practitioners working with emerging adults can assist them with cognitive restructuring for their ideas about attachment. Emerging adults who have insecure attachment with their parents can be taught to restructure negative thoughts
about attachment. By restructuring these thoughts, these individuals may be able to achieve secure attachments with others because they are able to stop generalizing their experiences with their parents to their experiences with other people. Practitioners can also incorporate other cognitive behavioral techniques to help emerging adults cope with generalized anxiety affected by their parents’ psychologically controlling behaviors. Finally, CBT can also help them improve their happiness and increase their quality of life.


O’Connor, M., Sanson, A., Hawkins, M., Olsson, C., Frydenberg, E., Toumbourou, J. W., & Letcher, P. (2012). The relationship between positive development and


Reid, A. (2014). *Parental behaviors, secure romantic attachment, and depression in...*


