

Abstract

Previous research suggests ethnic identity, a sense of belonging to a particular cultural group, may be protective against symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, the role of ethnic identity, in-group preference (i.e., an individual's preference for interactions with members of their own ethnic group) and acculturation (i.e., the level of comfort with the mainstream culture) have not been investigated as protective factors for Latinas with a history of interpersonal and sexual trauma. In this study, ethnic identity, in-group preference and acculturation were assessed via self-report on the Scale of Ethnic Experience in two samples of undergraduate Latina and non-Latina women with a history of interpersonal trauma ($N = 272$), and Latina and non-Latina women with a history of sexual trauma ($N = 222$). PTSD was assessed using the PTSD Symptom Scale.

In the first sample, a moderated mediation examined whether these factors of interest mediated the relationship between interpersonal trauma and PTSD and whether ethnicity (Latina versus non-Latina) moderated the mediate. In study 2, ethnicity was assessed as a moderator of the relationships between ethnic identity, in-group preference, and acculturation with PTSD in women who have been sexually victimized. In study 1, data were analyzed with Hayes Macro bootstrapping moderated mediation analyses. In study 2, data were analyzed using a hierarchical linear ordinary least squares regression with controls for age, race, city of origin, socioeconomic status, and immigration status.

In study 1, greater ethnic identity was significantly associated with lower rates of PTSD, further, ethnic identity mediated the relationship between interpersonal trauma and PTSD in all women, with no observed differences between Latina and non-Latina ethnic groups. In study 2, a significant interaction was found between in-group preference and ethnicity, such that non-

Latinas with greater in-group preference had lower PTSD symptoms. In comparison, this protective relationship was absent in Latinas within this sample.

These findings shed light on the protective role of ethnic identity for all women who have experienced interpersonal trauma. Further, relationships within one's ethnic group seem to exacerbate PTSD symptoms in Latinas with sexual trauma. Clinical implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: ethnic identity, interpersonal trauma, acculturation, sexual trauma, PTSD, Latinas