

An Examination of Suicide Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide Behavior in Latina Youth from the Rio Grande Valley

Symposium given at the National Latinx Psychological Association Conference, 10/17/25

Behavioral Health Lab
Joseph D. Hovey, Ph.D.
Isabella A. Cruz, B.S.
Nadeen Salhadar, M.A.
Finley Sims, B.S.
Monica Ochoa, B.S.
Amanda Peralez, B.S.

The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley[™]

Case Narrative

I feel so lonely and unheard. I love my family, but we are so different in our values and goals. My parents expect me to stay here, start a family, and help take care of my siblings. However, I don't want to spend the rest of my life here stuck in a career I don't want and resenting my family. I argue with my parents about going away to college. This would be my ticket out. I want to study engineering because it makes me happy, but my parents don't care about my happiness. They only care about what I bring to the table and how I can help them. Nobody understands me. Things would be better if I were just gone.... (17-year-old Mexican-American female)

Suicide Statistics

- According to national survey findings, Latina adolescents have consistently reported elevated suicide behavior.
- For example, according to Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance (CDC), Latina adolescents have consistently reported greater suicide ideation and attempts compared to adolescents in other racial/ethnic groups.

Year		Seriously Considered	Suicide Plan	Suicide Attempt	Medically Serious Attempt
1995 YRBS					
	Latina	34.1%	25.5%	21.0%	6.6%
	White	31.6%	21.9%	10.4%	2.9%
2005 YRBS					
	Latina	24.2%	18.5%	14.9%	3.7%
	White	21.5%	15.4%	9.3%	2.7%
2013 YRBS					
	Latina	26.0%	20.1%	15.6%	5.4%
	White	21.1%	15.6%	8.5%	2.8%

Suicide Statistics

- During past decade, suicide rates have increased in Latino/a individuals by 39%.
- From 2018-2021, suicide rates in Latino/a youth (aged 10-24 years) increased by 8.2%.
- Recent YRBS findings (CDC, 2023) indicate that 29% of Latina adolescents seriously considered suicide, 25% made suicide plan, 14% attempted suicide, and 5% made medically serious suicide attempt.

The Influences of Traditional Values and Family Conflict on Suicide Behavior in Latina Adolescents Living in Immigrant Families

Presentation given at the National Latinx Psychological Association Conference, 10/17/25

Joseph D. Hovey, Ph.D.
Psychological Science Department
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
www.jhoveyphd.com; joseph.hovey@utrgv.edu

Isabella A. Cruz, B.S.
Psychology Department
University of Texas at San Antonio
isabella.cruz@utsa.edu

The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley™

Cultural Values & Suicide Behavior

- How does lack of adherence to traditional cultural values and expectations impact mental health in Latina adolescents?
- Intergenerational conflict and consequent stressors may be especially acute in *immigrant families* (Cervantes et al., 2014; Nolle et al., 2012; Zayas et al., 2010), defined as having at least one parent who was born outside of the country of residence (Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012).

Cultural Values & Suicide Behavior

- Zayas et al. (2005) posited that in Latino/a families that support cultural beliefs emphasizing deference to parents, restrictions on adolescent female autonomy, and family unity – family conflict may arise when Latina adolescents exert autonomy and adapt non-traditional values, with conflict surrounding dating being especially conflictual.
- Consequent intense, overwhelming emotional distress may then contribute to increased suicide thoughts and behavior in Latina adolescents.

Cultural Values & Suicide Behavior

- Although Zayas et al. proposed conceptual model two decades ago, research has yet to thoroughly examine its applicability. Previous studies have examined components of the model (e.g., De Luca et al., 2012; Gulbas & Zayas, 2015; Hall et al., 2021; Kuhlberg et al., 2010; Peña et al., 2011; Szlyk et al., 2019; Zayas et al., 2010)
- These mixed methods findings suggest that intergenerational differences in values and role expectations may lead to family conflict; family conflict may be associated with emotional distress and suicide behavior; emotional distress may be associated with suicide behavior; and direct family conflict may precipitate suicide events when experiencing overwhelming distress.
- Previous studies of Latina adolescent suicide risk have included participants from a broad range of Latin cultural groups, limiting the external validity of findings.

Research Questions / Aims

- Does non-adherence to traditional gender expectations predict family conflict and suicide behavior in female adolescents of Mexican heritage living in immigrant families?
- Does family conflict and emotion dysregulation interact to predict suicide behavior?
- To examine moderated mediation model of suicide behavior. Model included marianismo, conflict with family and parents, emotion dysregulation, and suicide behavior.

Methods

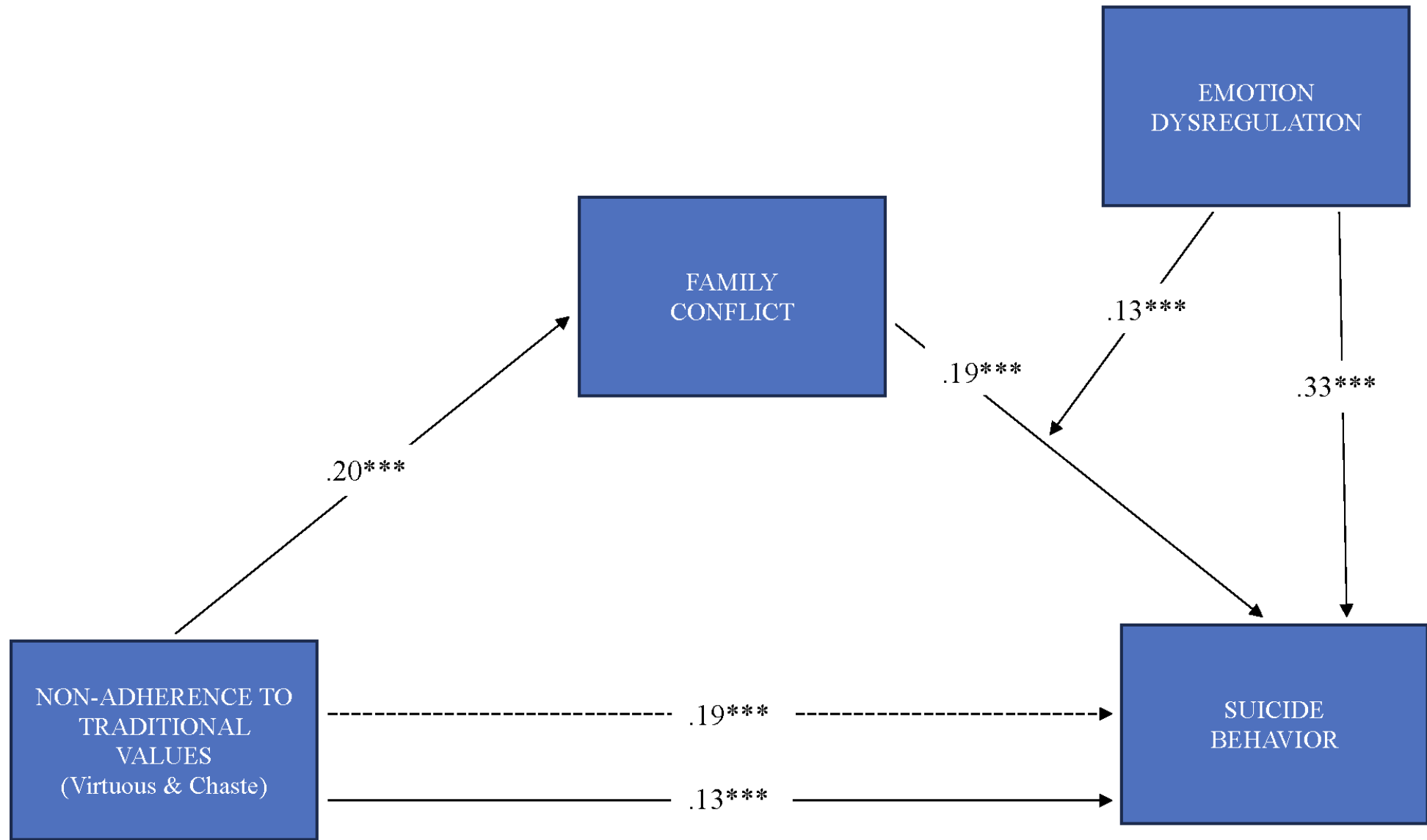
- Participants & Procedure: 574 females of Mexican heritage, with at least one parent born in Mexico, aged 18 & 19, from university in Rio Grande Valley, TX. Recruited through SONA Systems & data collected through Qualtrics.
- Measures:
 - *Virtuous/Chaste* subscale from *Marianismo Beliefs Scale* (Castillo et al., 2010), which assesses the extent to which a Latina believes that she should practice cultural values related to the female gender in Hispanic cultures.
 - *Conflict* subscale of *Family Environment Scale* (Moos & Moos, 1994).
 - *Conflict Behavior Questionnaire* (Schroder, 2004) to measure conflict with mother & father.
 - *Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale* (Gratz & Roemer, 2004).
 - *Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised* (Osman et al., 2001).

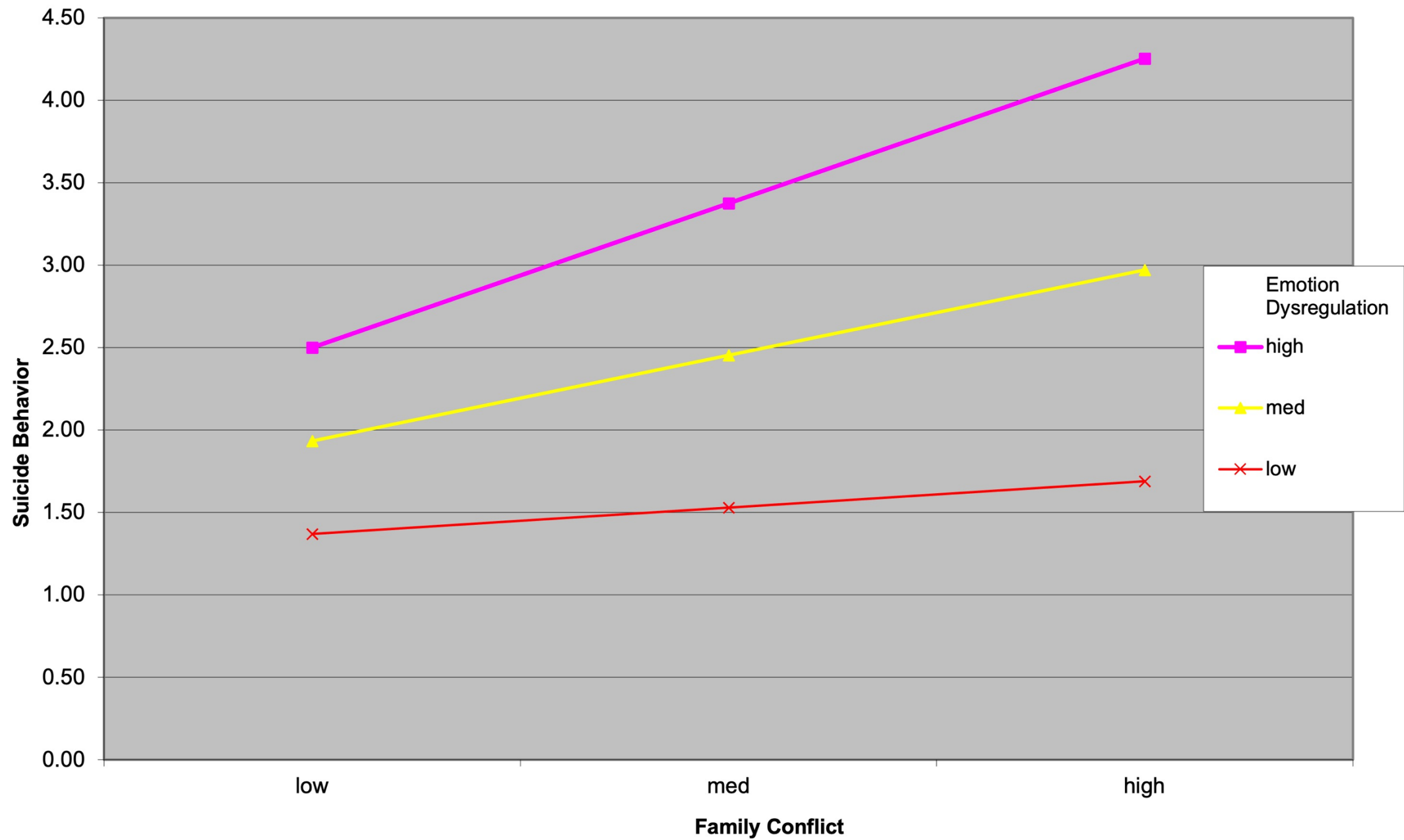
Correlations Between Variables

	Virtuous & Chaste	Family Conflict	Mother Conflict	Father Conflict	Emotion Dysregulation	Hopelessness	Depression
Virtuous & Chaste	--	.18***	.12**	.19***	.08*	.15***	.14***
Family Conflict	.18***	--	.50***	.43***	.30***	.31***	.34***
Mother Conflict	.12**	.50***	--	.31***	.28***	.30***	.36***
Father Conflict	.19***	.43***	.31***	--	.25***	.31***	.31***
Emotion Dysregul.	.08*	.30***	.28***	.25***	--	.55***	.65***
Hopelessness	.15***	.31***	.30***	.31***	.55***	--	.64***
Depression	.14***	.34***	.36***	.31***	.65***	.64***	--
Suicide Behavior	.19***	.30***	.27***	.26***	.42***	.44***	.59***

Notes: $N = 574$ 18- & 19-year adolescents of Mexican heritage. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Virtuous & Chaste = non-adherence to traditional virtuous and chaste cultural values.





Summary & Future Directions

- Findings provide support for Cultural Values model for female Mexican American adolescents.
- Model points to important variables to target when providing prevention & clinical interventions.
- Need to generalize findings.
- Prospective research can verify directionality of variables.

Thank You

- Questions?

Mediating Influences in the Relationship Between Obesity and Suicide Behavior in Young Latina Adults of Mexican Heritage

Authors: Nadeen Salhadar, M.A., Monica E. Ochoa, B.S., Liza Talavera-Garza, Ph.D.,
& Joseph D. Hovey, Ph.D.

Literature – Suicide Behavior & Obesity

- Hispanic adults maintained the second highest prevalence of obesity, at 45.6%, preceded by Black adults at 49.9% (Stierman et al., 2021)
- Few studies have examined obesity and suicidal ideation and behavior (Stunkard, 2003; Flegal, 2005; Zuromski et al. 2017; Graham & Frisco 2022)
- Obesity and Suicidal behavior have been found to be correlated (Dutton et al., 2013). An association exists between higher expressive symptoms of suicidality and individuals with higher body fat percentages (Dong et al., 2006; Mukamal et al., 2009; Klinitze et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2013; Branco et al., 2017;)
- A call for the examination of mediators that may contribute to or explain the association between obesity and suicidal behavior (Bronco et al., 2017; Klinitze et al., 2013; Swahn et al., 2009; Mukamal et al., 2009).
- Hovey et al. (2024): Found that depression, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts were significantly associated with obesity. Mediators (explanatory factors) include sleep problems, health problems, and personal appearance dissatisfaction.

Variables Associated with Obesity & Suicidal Behavior

Physical Health

- Obesity impacts one's physical and mental health (Dixon, 2010)
- 20% of all suicides from a 2019 report were associated with a physical health condition (Philips & Hempstead, 2022). In addition, suicide related to physical health was more common among women under 60 years of age.

Insomnia

- Stress, which affects both sleep and obesity, increases cortisol levels, a stress hormone linked to fat accumulation (Jackson, 2017)
- The severity of suicidal ideation has been attributed to the severity of insomnia among young adults (Bradford et al., 2022).

Body Dissatisfaction

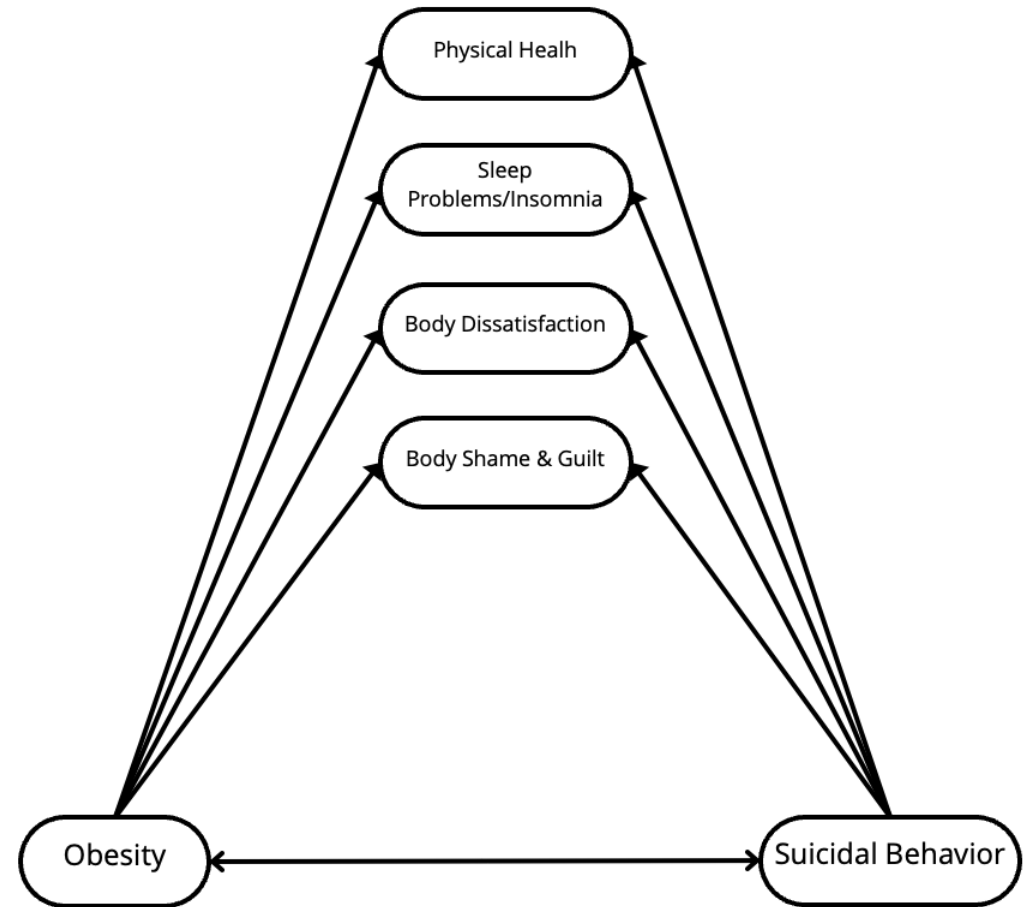
- Hispanic American women classified as obese reported higher rates of body dissatisfaction than normal and overweight participants (Cachelin et al., 2005)
- Body dissatisfaction contributes to suicidal ideation (Lamis et al., 2010).

Body Shame and Guilt

- Individuals classified as overweight or obese encounter body-related shame and guilt more than their average-weight peers (Conradt et al., 2007; Pila et al., 2013)
- Oexle et al. (2017) found that self-stigma increased the results of suicidality among adults.

Purpose

To expand the research on the association between obesity and suicidal behavior by examining the role of mediating factors (physical health, insomnia, body dissatisfaction, and body shame & guilt) on the relationship.



Hypotheses

1. The relationship between obesity and suicide behavior will be significant among Hispanic females.
2. Obesity will be significantly associated with body dissatisfaction, body shame, insomnia, physical health, and suicidal behavior.
3. Suicidal behavior will be significantly associated with body dissatisfaction, body shame, insomnia, physical health, and obesity.
4. Body dissatisfaction, body shame, insomnia, and physical health will significantly mediate the relationship between obesity and suicidal behavior.

Methods

- Participants were **204 Hispanic** Females (M age = 19.9; 100% females) ages 18 through 35
- Recruited via SONA used at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Individuals received course credit as compensation for their participation in the study.

Qualtrics Survey - Measures:

- *Demographics Questionnaire*
- *Body Mass Index (BMI)*
- *Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R2)*
- *The Insomnia Severity Index (ISI)*
- *The Body Influence Assessment Inventory (BIAI) → Body Dissatisfaction*
- *Weight and Body-Related Shame and Guilt Scale (WEB-SG) → Body Shame and Guilt*
- *General Health Question from The Short Form Health Survey (SF-36)*

Qualtrics Survey - Measures:

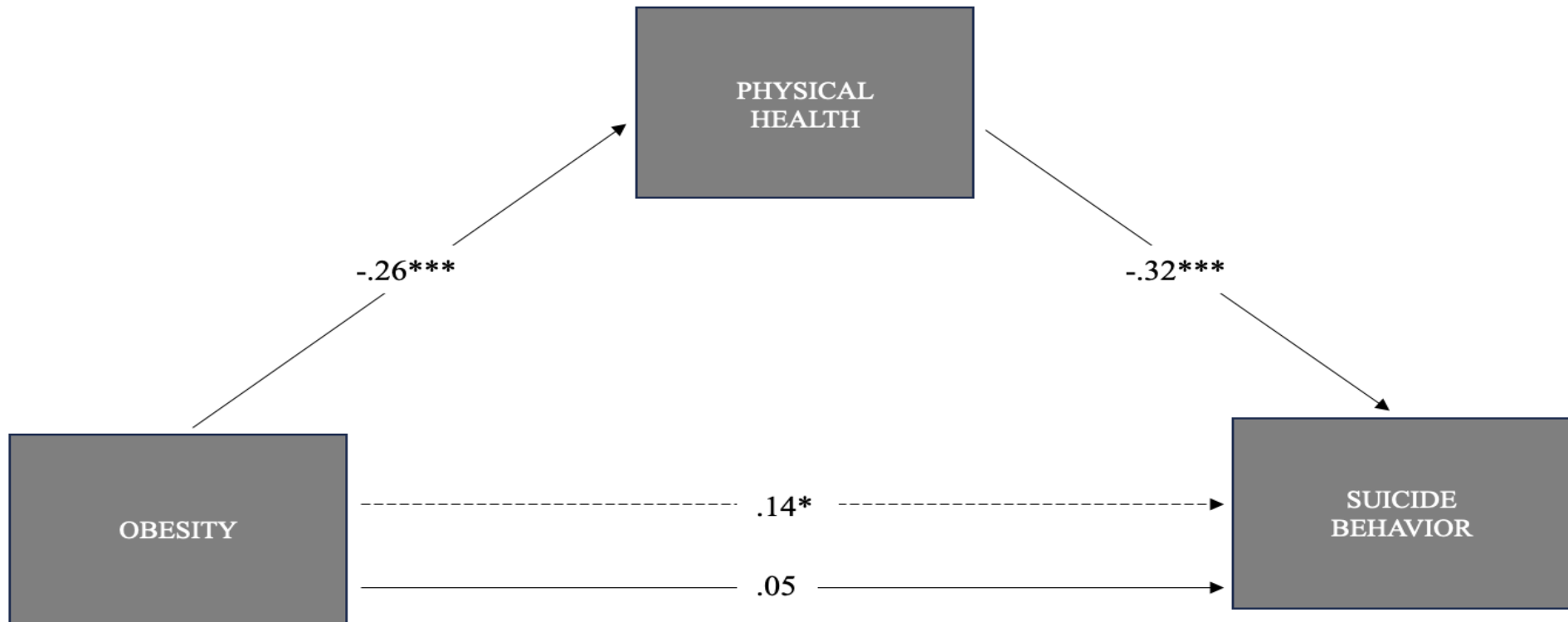
- **44%** Healthy Weight
- **26%** Obese
- **24%** Overweight
- **6%** Underweight

Analysis

	1	3	4	5	6
1. Obesity					
3. Body Dissatisfaction	.324**				
4. Body Shame & Guilt	.407**	.832**			
5. Physical Health	-.296**	-.508**	-.485**		
6. Insomnia	.148*	.414**	.388**	-.316**	
8. Suicide Behavior	.135*	.404**	.320**	-.338**	.337**

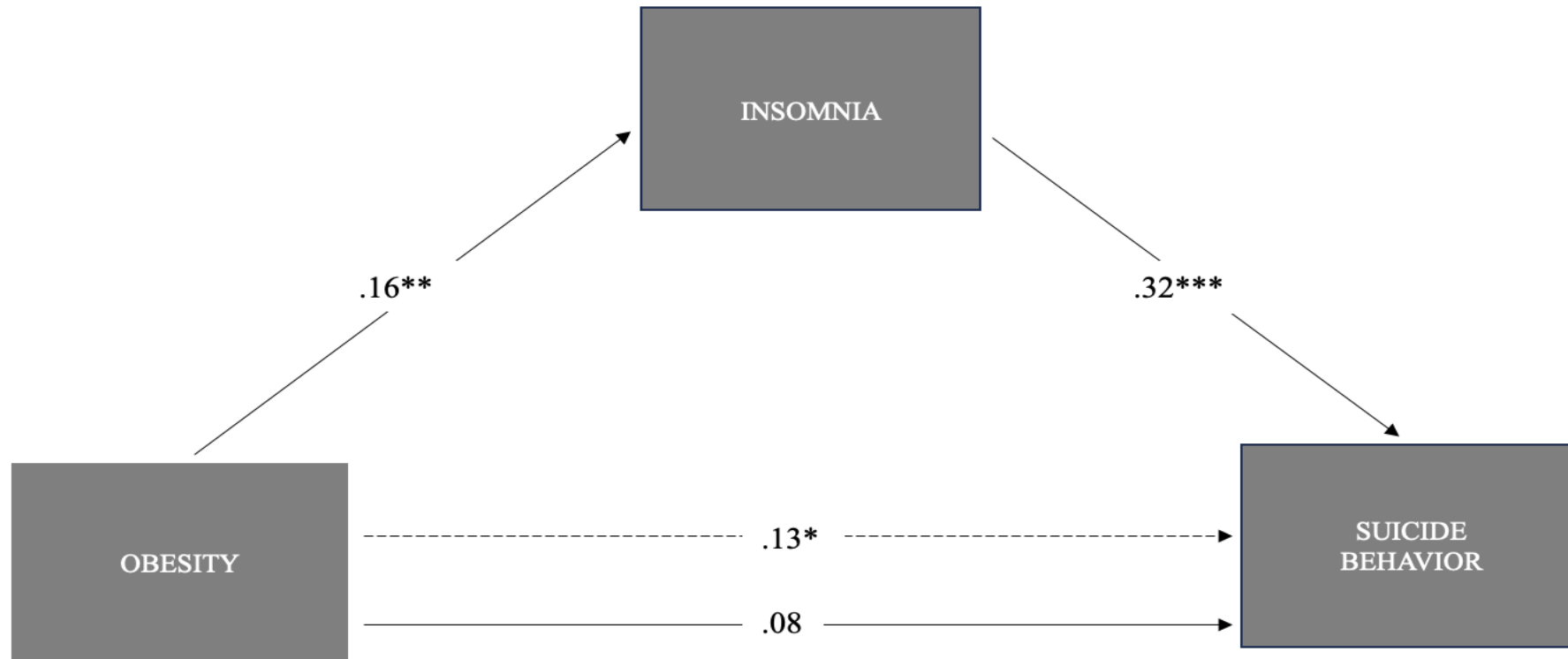
Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Analysis



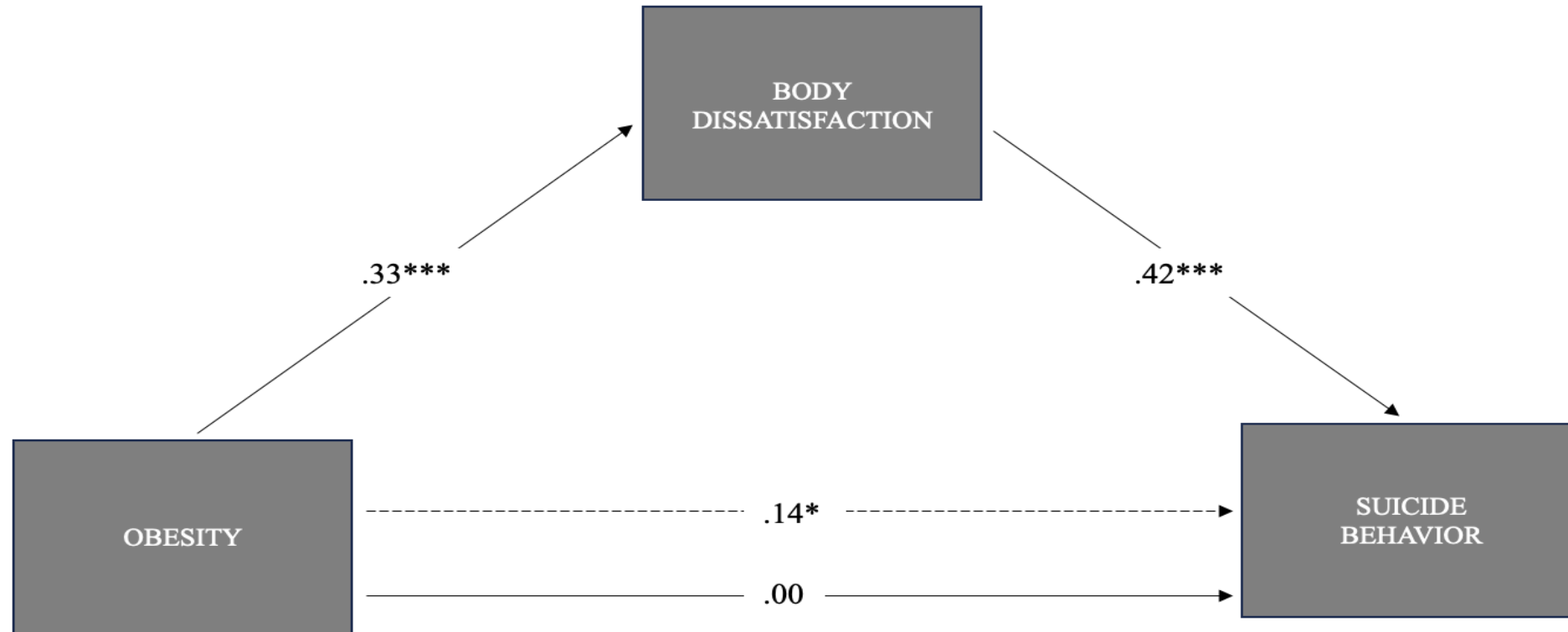
Notes: $N = 198$. Above values are standardized beta coefficients. $* p \leq .05$, $*** p \leq .0001$. Obesity had a significant indirect effect on suicide behavior through physical health (standardized indirect coefficient = $.0815$; standardized 95% CI = $.0284$, $.1451$). The dotted arrow represents the direct effect of obesity on suicide behavior prior to bootstrapping.

Analysis



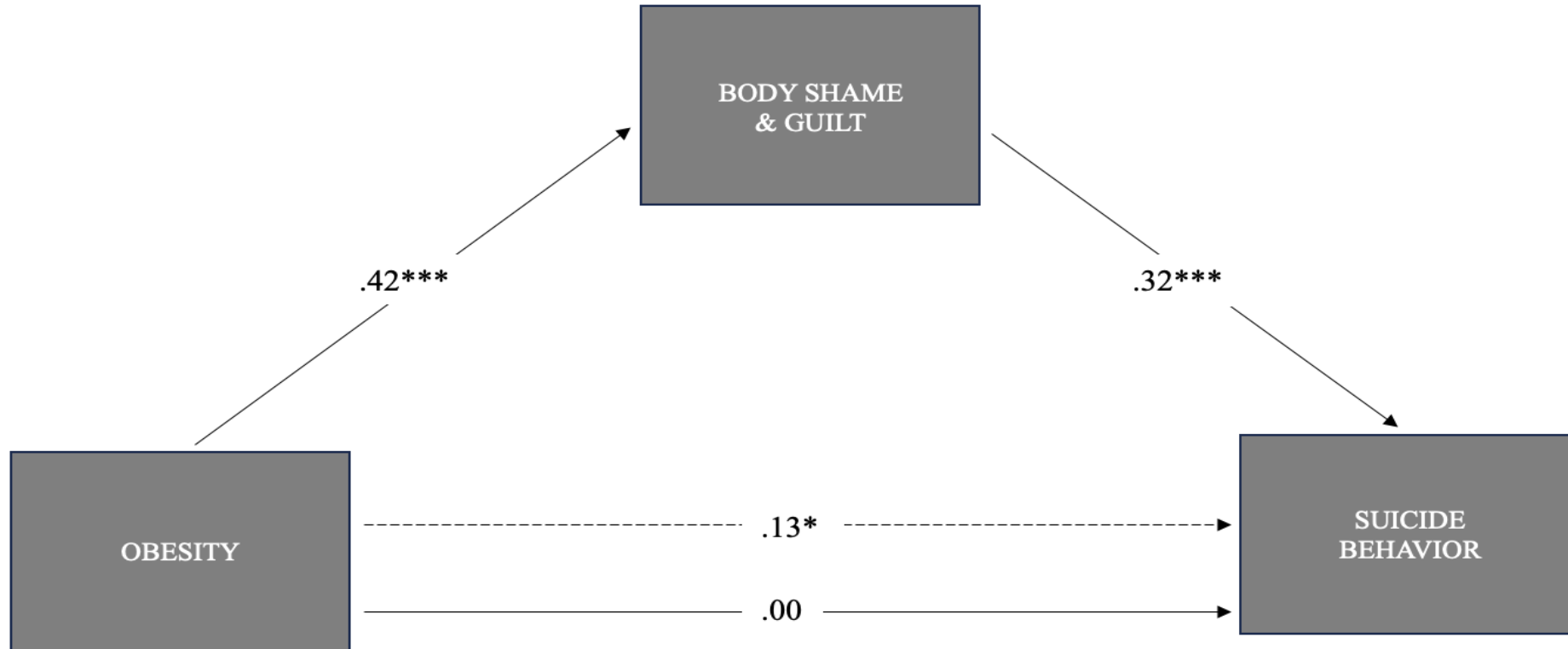
Notes: $N = 196$. Above values are standardized beta coefficients. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .0001$. Obesity had a significant indirect effect on suicide behavior through insomnia (standardized indirect coefficient = .0504; standardized 95% CI = .0071, .1089). The dotted arrow represents the direct effect of obesity on suicide behavior prior to bootstrapping.

Analysis



Notes: $N = 190$. Above values are standardized beta coefficients. * $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .0001$. Obesity had a significant indirect effect on suicide behavior through body dissatisfaction (standardized indirect coefficient = .14; standardized 95% CI = .0663, .2223). The dotted arrow represents the direct effect of obesity on suicide behavior prior to bootstrapping.

Analysis




Notes: $N = 189$. Above values are standardized beta coefficients. $* p \leq .05$, $*** p \leq .0001$. Obesity had a significant indirect effect on suicide behavior through body shame and guilt (standardized indirect coefficient = $.13$; standardized 95% CI = $.0621, .2200$). The dotted arrow represents the direct effect of obesity on suicide behavior prior to bootstrapping.

RESOURCES

- Our study attempted to understand the connection between obesity and suicide through mediators such as body dissatisfaction, body shame and guilt, physical health, and insomnia.
- Therefore, this study aims to expand on the available research by utilizing variable measures that are standardized and more accurate.
- This study adds to the scant research on suicide risk among Latina college students. In addition, research has shown that Mexican-American women are more inclined to identify as fullers and as a result body dissatisfaction does not affect Latinas (Lindberg & Stevens, 2011). Yet, our findings suggest otherwise
- The findings suggest pathways for interventions to address factors involved in leading health problems such as suicidal behavior. (i.e., examine thoughts and feelings, psychoeducation, exercise)
- Future research should generalize these findings to other ethnic groups (community and clinical sample) and consider including a wider age range among females and males.


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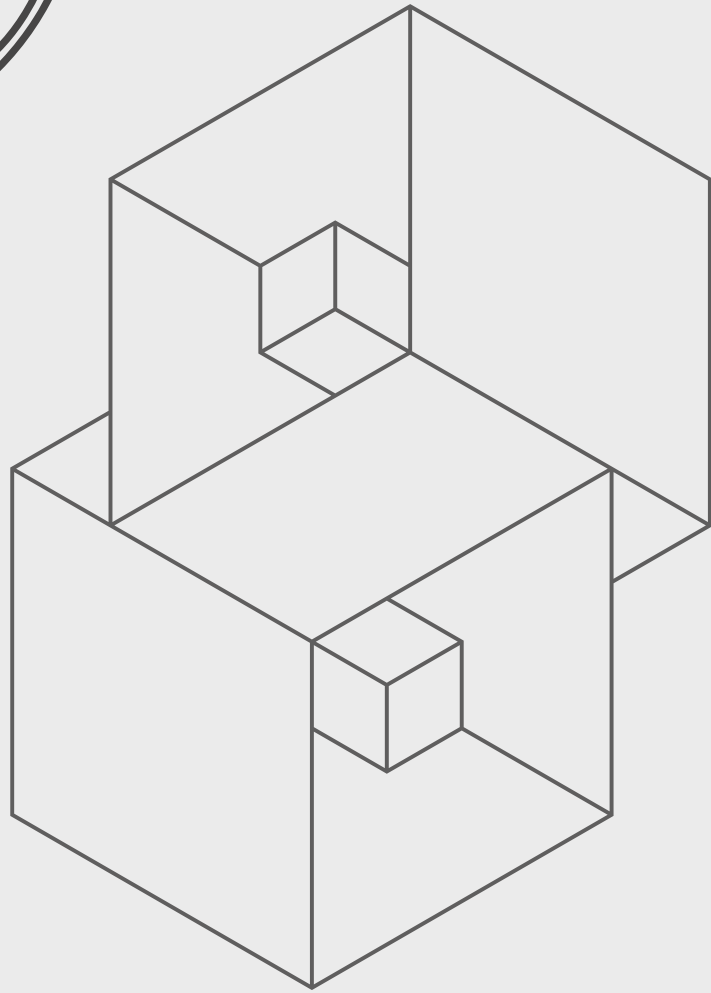
Email: nadeen.salhadar01@utrgv.edu

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EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF BODY IMAGE AND CYBERBULLYING VICTIMIZATION ON SUICIDE IDEATION IN YOUNG LATINA WOMEN

Finley Sims, B.S., Lorena Houghton, M.A., Joseph Hovey, Ph.D., Liza
Talavera-Garza, Ph.D., and Michiyo Hirai, Ph.D.

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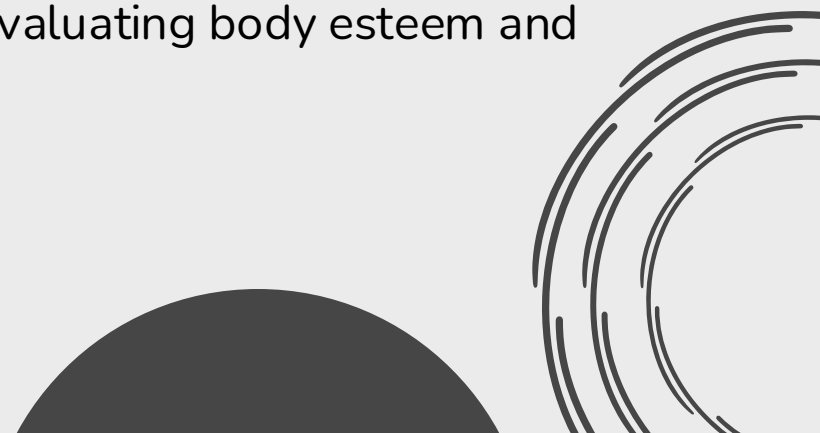
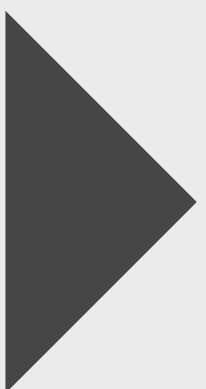


PURPOSE

The purpose of the current study is to look at the relationships between body esteem, cyberbullying victimization, social anxiety, and suicide ideation.



BACKGROUND

- 
- Researchers have found that adolescent and young adult women who are dissatisfied with their bodies are more likely to report high levels of depression and suicide ideation (Fan et al., 2023; Richard et al. 2016).
 - Recent studies indicate having low body esteem is predictive of becoming a cyber victim (Olenik-Shemesh & Heiman, 2016).
 - Victims of cyberbullying are 2-3 times more likely to commit suicide and meet the criteria for major depression than non-victims (Cénat et al., 2019; Selkie et al., 2015).
 - Victims of cyberbullying are also likely to report high levels of social anxiety (Lam et al., 2022).
 - To the best of our knowledge, there are no published studies evaluating body esteem and cyberbullying victimization through social media in Latinas.
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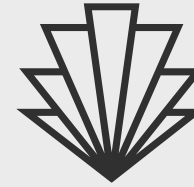
HYPOTHESES



Body esteem will be negatively correlated with cyberbullying victimization, social anxiety, and suicide ideation



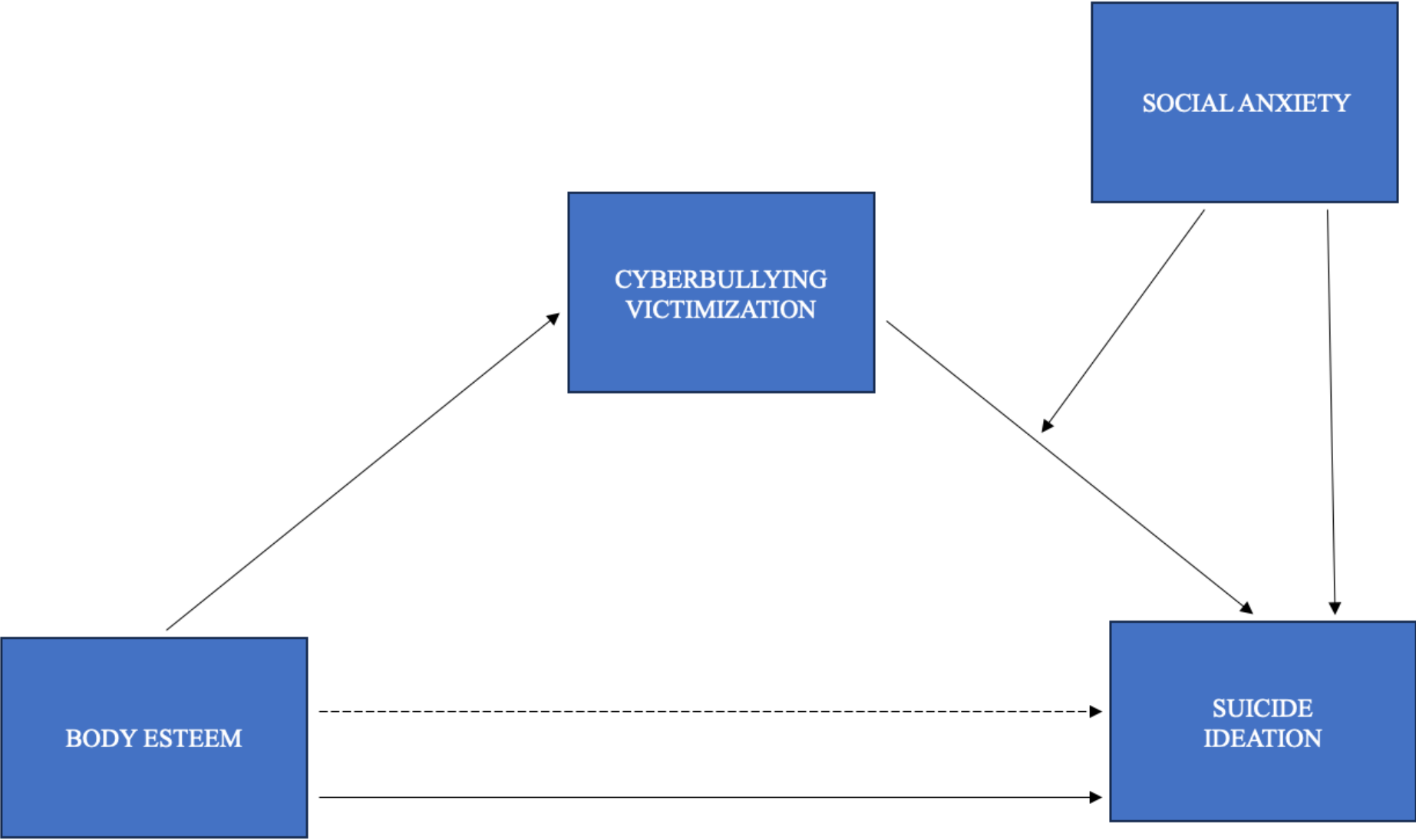
Cyberbullying victimization, social anxiety, and suicide ideation will be positively correlated with each other



Cyberbullying victimization will mediate the relationship between body esteem and suicide ideation



Social anxiety will moderate the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and suicide ideation



METHODS

Participants and Procedure

- $N = 1,021$ undergraduate women aged 18–25; $M = 19.35$, $SD = 1.43$
- 100% were of Mexican heritage
- Recruited through the UTRGV SONA program and data was collected on Qualtrics

Measures


- *Body Esteem Scale for Adults & Adolescents* (Mendelson et al., 2001)
- *Social Media Cyberbullying Inventory* (Hovey & Cruz, 2023)
- *Social Anxiety Interaction Scale* (Mattick & Clarke, 1998)
- *Depressive Symptom Index - Suicidality Subscale* (Joiner et al., 2002)
- *Beck Depressive Inventory* (Beck et al., 1996)



SOCIAL MEDIA CYBERBULLYING INVENTORY

Evaluated perceived cyberbullying victimization through email and text, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and online gaming. Below is the Instagram subscale.

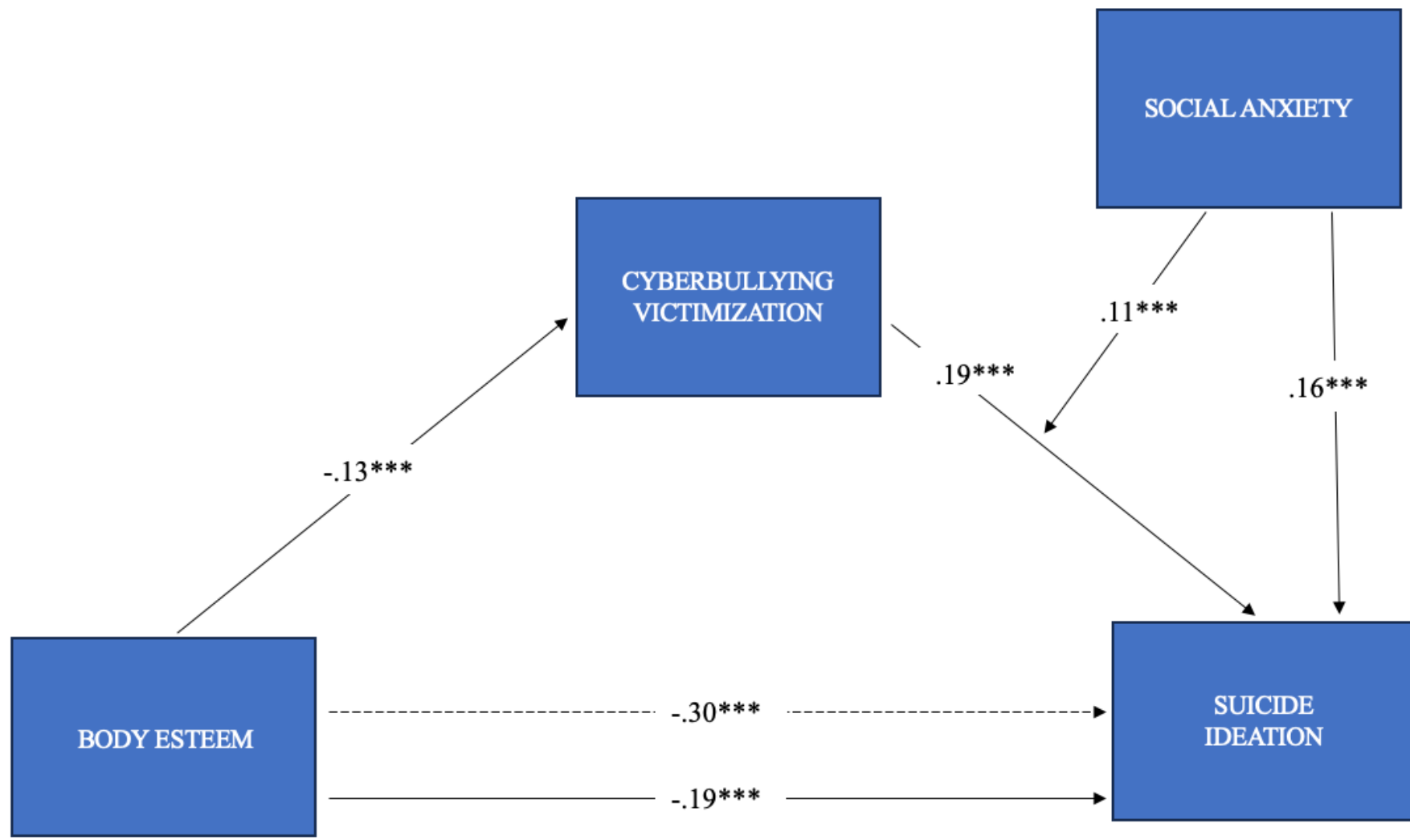
In the past six months, how often have you been a victim of the following behaviors? Respond using the scale:
0=never, 1= once or twice, 2= two or three times a month, 3= once a week, 4= several times a week

1. Having embarrassing photos or videos of yourself posted on Instagram
 2. Having your personal photo or video posted by somebody else on Instagram, with the intent of embarrassing you publicly
 3. Having your post forwarded with the intent of embarrassing or insulting you
 4. Having a photo or video of yourself, in a compromising situation, posted on Instagram, with the intent of embarrassing you publicly
 5. Having someone respond to your post in an aggressive, hurtful, or embarrassing manner
 6. Having someone post rude or insulting comments about your appearance on Instagram
- 

Correlations Between Variables

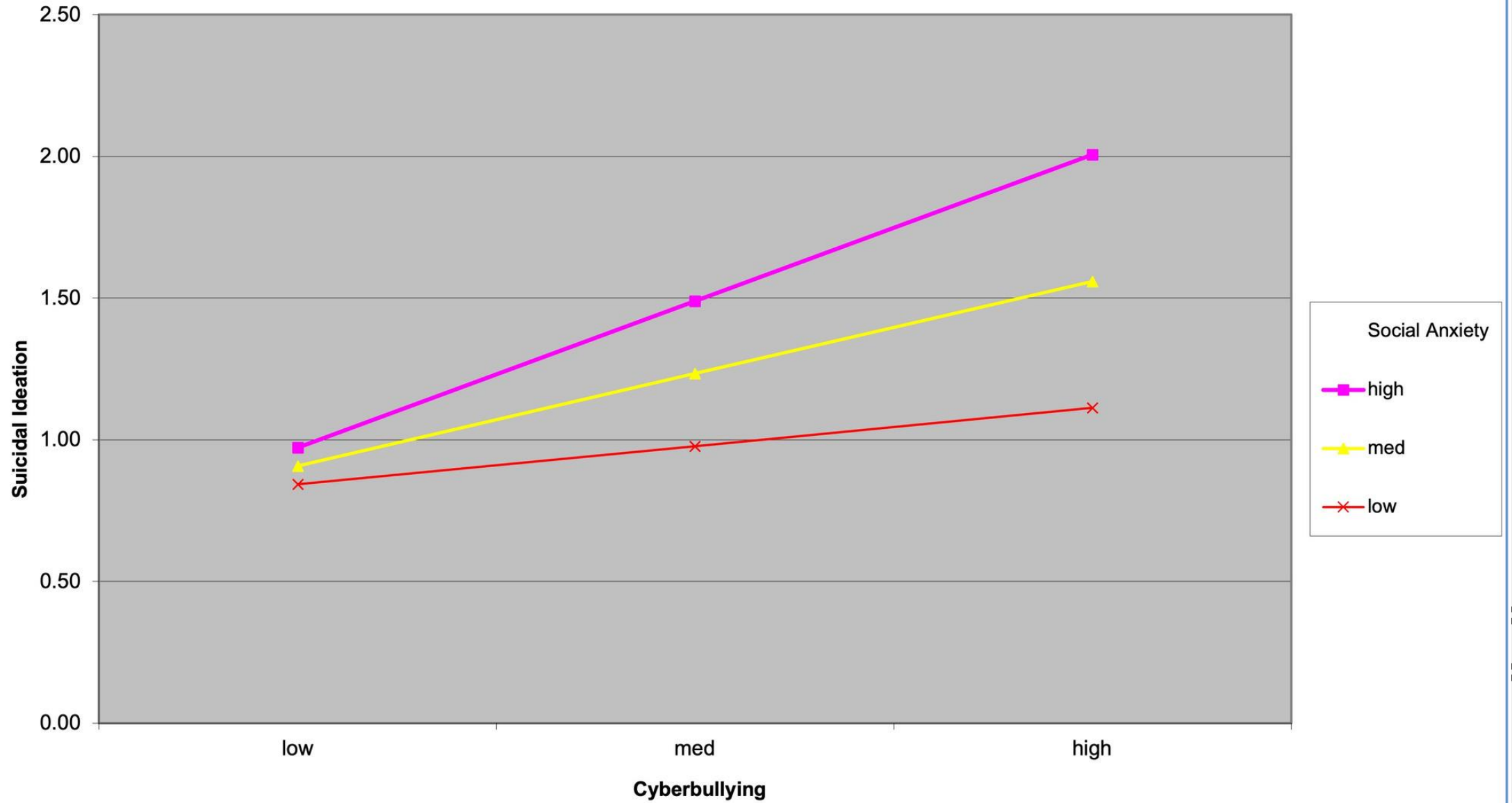
	Cyberbullying	Social Anxiety	Depression	Suicidal Ideation
Body Esteem	-.13*	-.50*	-.57*	-.30*
Cyberbullying	--	.14*	.34*	.33*
Social Anxiety	.14*	--	.55*	.29*
Depression	.34*	.55*	--	.57*
Suicidal Ideation	.33*	.29*	.57*	--

Notes: $N = 1,021$. $*p \leq .0001$.




Notes: $N = 998$. Above values are standardized beta coefficients. $*** p \leq .001$. Body esteem had a significant indirect effect on suicide ideation through the interaction of cyberbullying victimization and social anxiety (unstandardized 95% CI = $-.00015928, -.00001687$). The dotted arrow represents the direct effect of body esteem on suicide behavior prior to bootstrapping.

Cyberbullying X Social Anxiety





DISCUSSION

- Results of the moderated mediation analyses suggest that women who have lower body esteem are more susceptible to being cyberbullied which, in turn, is associated with increased suicide ideation, especially for those women who are socially anxious.
 - The study contributes to the growing body of research challenging the misconception that Latinas are less susceptible to body dissatisfaction and related mental health challenges.
 - The results highlight the importance of targeted intervention for body image resilience and online safety education among young adults.
 - Future research should:
 - Explore the relationships in the study longitudinally to verify the directionality of the variables.
 - Study these variables in other ethnic groups.
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THANK YOU