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# “Tú No Eres de Aquí”: Latino Children’s Experiences of Institutional and Interpersonal Discrimination and Microaggressions

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Informed by critical race theory and Latino critical perspective, this study examined Latino children’s experiences with institutional and interpersonal forms of discrimination in the state of Arizona. Interviews conducted with 54 Latino immigrant parents revealed that Latino children encounter institutional and interpersonal forms of discrimination, including microaggressions. Interpersonal discrimination manifested through verbal abuse in the form of microinsults, microassaults, and physical attacks. Institutional discrimination occurred in schools as teachers minimized children’s connection to the Spanish language or culture (microinvalidation), enforced informal “no Spanish in the classroom” policies, and practiced differential treatment toward Latino children. Consequently, parents reported that their children are hyperaware of discrimination, experience emotional distress and social isolation, and demonstrate indicators of internalized oppression. The article ends with a discussion of the implications for social work practice and recommendations for social work intervention.

KEY WORDS: *discrimination; Latino children; Latino immigrant families; microaggressions*

In the last decade a number of restrictive immigration policies have been passed or put forward at the state level. The state of Arizona has been at the forefront of this legislation, for example the controversial Senate Bill 1070, which granted law enforcement officers the right to check an individual’s immigration status if “reasonable suspicion” of the person being undocumented was present (Supreme Court of the United States, 2012). The restrictive political environment has left immigrant families vulnerable to experiences with discrimination (Ayón, 2015). In 2009, the Pew Research Center surveyed Hispanic youths age 16 and older; one-third (32%) of the sample reported that they, a family member, or close friend had experienced discrimination within the past five years due to their race or ethnicity (see updated report, Pew Research Center, 2013). In a survey of all Americans, one in four (23%) reported that Hispanic people were discriminated “a lot” and more than any other ethnic group (Pew Research Center, 2010). Given the restrictive immigration political environment and heightened level of perceived discrimination, Latino parents worry about the well-being of their children (Romero, Gonzalez, & Smith, 2015). Their concern is substantiated by strong evidence linking

discrimination to poor health outcomes among Latino youths (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Umaña-Taylor, Tynes, Toomey, Williams, & Mitchell, 2015). This issue warrants national attention as Latino families represent 17% of the U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2014) and four in 10 Latino children have at least one foreign-born parent (Fry & Passel, 2009).

There is growing evidence that Latino immigrants and their children encounter discrimination across the United States (Ayón, 2015; Brown, 2015). Yet less is known about the forms of discrimination that children experience and the circumstances surrounding discrimination. Informed by critical race theory (CRT) and Latino critical perspective (LatCrit), this study aimed to examine Latino children’s experiences with institutional and interpersonal forms of discrimination in the state of Arizona. Close attention was placed on microaggressions as this phenomenon has been understudied among Latino youths. *Microaggressions* are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271).

Microaggressions may appear to be harmless, but their cumulative burden may have significant negative effects on youths. Our goal in completing this study was to increase awareness on the forms of discrimination, including microaggressions, experienced by the Latino youths and explore how practitioners can aid the healthy development of Latino youths.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Latino Youth Experiences with Discrimination

Discrimination can occur on an individual or institutional level (Ayón, 2015; Brown, 2015). Institutional discrimination involves formal or informal structural mechanisms, such as policies or processes that systematically marginalize or exclude nondominant groups (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2014). Youths experience discrimination at the individual level through microaggressions such as verbal insults from peers and adults, social exclusion, or physical assault (Brown, 2015). Latino children experience institutional discrimination and barriers in schools when placed in “English as a second language” programs (Brown, 2015) and when they encounter low access to staff resources (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004) and limited parental engagement (Adair, 2015).

Evidence suggests that U.S. and foreign-born Latino youths experience discrimination differently. According to the *Pew Research Center* survey (2013), perceived discrimination was more prevalent among native-born (41%) than foreign-born (32%) Latino youths. Moreover, being native born and speaking English does not protect Latino youths from discrimination (Ebert & Ovink, 2014). Other differences include the way in which youths experience discrimination. U.S. citizen Latino youths report being stereotyped as gang members, whereas foreign-born Latino youths report discrimination attributed to low acculturation indicators such as use of Spanish, limited English proficiency, and wearing traditional attire (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010). Latino youths also report within-group discrimination based on immigration or generation status, country of origin, and skin tone. For example, immigrant youths say that their U.S.-born counterparts look down at them for not speaking English well (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010).

Romero and colleagues (2015) explored youths’ experiences with discrimination in focus groups

with Mexican parents and adolescents. Adolescents reported negative stereotypes in the media, in school, and from peers. Youths reported derogatory comments and anti-immigration slurs, such as “border hopper,” and were concerned that defending themselves from discrimination would lead to fighting. Parents reported that their children were unfairly treated by teachers and staff and received lower grades because of negative perceptions about their children’s academic ability.

### Discrimination and Latino Youth Health

Racial discrimination is detrimental to children’s well-being. In a systematic review of 121 studies, it was found that 76% presented significant associations between racial discrimination and negative mental health outcomes (Priest et al., 2013). For instance, native-born Latino adolescents who perceived discrimination by adults and peers at school had heightened levels of depression (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Similarly, perceived peer and societal discrimination were found to be associated with depressive symptoms among Latino youths (Behnke, Plunkett, Sands, & Bámaca-Colbert, 2011; Gonzalez, Stein, Kiang, & Cupito, 2014; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010).

Studies have also explored the role of perpetrator and social context. Discrimination by adults in the communities of Latino youths was a significant risk factor for developing self-esteem and externalizing problems; perceived peer discrimination in schools was associated with greater externalizing problems (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015). High levels of discrimination indirectly diminish Latino youths’ sense of school belonging (Brown & Chu, 2012) as well as their academic achievement, grades, and attendance (Benner & Graham, 2011). In a study on school perceptions, discrimination, and academic outcomes, Mexican American students’ perceptions of poor school quality were associated with increased odds of perceived discrimination by teachers. Moreover, perceptions of teacher discrimination, future discrimination, and perceptions of poor school environments were associated with lower grades, motivation, and graduation rates and with being off-track academically (Stone & Han, 2005).

### CRT, LatCrit, and Racial Microaggressions

CRT unfolded in the late 1970s post-civil rights movement when law professors and students began to work toward racial justice to combat racial

discrimination (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). CRT is a valuable framework in the field of social work. For instance, the application of CRT in social work education promotes diversity (Ortiz & Jani, 2010), critical thinking, informed practice, action around racism and oppression, and advances in antiracist pedagogy (Abrams & Moio, 2009). The principles of CRT are strongly compatible with social work; both social work and CRT recognize racial oppression and work toward promoting social justice for populations oppressed because of their race (Constance-Huggins, 2012). As social workers serve diverse oppressed populations, it is vital that they comprehend the roles of race, racism, and power in their commitment toward social justice and racial equality (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014). CRT guides social workers to recognize the manifestation of racism in practice and policies, with the intention to fight policies and power dynamics that promote racial biases despite race-neutral appearances (Constance-Huggins, 2012). LatCrit, a branch of CRT, builds on CRT by taking into account intersecting identities that marginalize Latino people such as nativity, generation status, language, socioeconomic class, gender, and sexual orientation (Kiehne, 2016; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Because CRT focuses on the lived experiences of people of color, it is constructive to examine racial microaggressions to understand how individuals are affected by everyday racism and oppression, and how this impact shapes their outcomes (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2014). Chester Pierce first introduced the concept of microaggressions in 1969 to describe subtle forms of racism experienced by African Americans (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2014). Sue and colleagues (2007) expanded on Pierce's work by developing a taxonomy of racial microaggressions, identifying three types: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. *Microassaults* are conscious racial derogatory verbal or nonverbal attacks intended to hurt the recipient in the form of discriminatory acts, name calling, or avoidant behavior. *Microinsults* are subtle forms of communications, often unconscious, that express disrespect or insensitivity and degrade an individual's racial heritage or ethnic identity. Examples include being treated as a lesser person (second-class citizen) or presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race. *Microinvalidations* are forms of communications that minimize, deny, or invalidate

people of color's thoughts, feelings, experiential realities, or ethnic histories.

Informed by CRT and LatCrit, this qualitative study examined the institutional and personal discrimination and microaggressions experienced by Latino children. This study is grounded on Latino parents' observations and interactions with their children following the passage of anti-immigration policies in the state of Arizona. The purpose of this study is to bring to light Latino children's (ages seven through 12 years) experiences with discrimination and microaggressions to inform social work practice and policy.

## METHOD

### Recruitment and Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from three community-based agencies that primarily serve Latino immigrants in the state of Arizona. During a short presentation, potential participants were informed about the study's purpose, rights as participants, and eligibility criteria. The sample consisted of 54 participants; mothers (80%,  $n = 43$ ) and fathers (20%,  $n = 11$ ). Participants' mean age was 35.6 years ( $SD = 6.47$ ). A majority of the participants were married or in a committed relationship (81%,  $n = 44$ ) and on average had three children ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ). Most of the participants were immigrants from Mexico (96%,  $n = 52$ ) and had lived in the United States for an average of 14 years ( $M = 14.44$ ,  $SD = 5.86$ ). Approximately 60% ( $n = 33$ ) of participants had an annual family income below \$19,000, and 70% ( $n = 37$ ) of participants had less than a high school degree.

### Interview Guide and Procedures

A series of open-ended questions were used to learn about the Latino immigrant families' experiences of discrimination. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on parents' responses to question about their children's experiences with discrimination. Concrete examples were solicited and probing questions were used to gather detailed information about the participants' experiences. Interviews were scheduled in participants' homes, in a community-based agency, or in another mutually agreed-on location. Interviews ranged between 45 minutes to two hours in length. All interviews were completed in Spanish by the lead author. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Passages were translated by

the two authors who are bilingual and bicultural. Participants received a \$30 remuneration.

Analysis

The analysis was guided by constructivist grounded theory methods including initial line-by-line coding, focused coding, and axial coding. A constant comparison approach was used between and within transcripts throughout the coding process (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding in the form of line-by-line coding involved breaking up the data into component parts and naming each line in the data (Charmaz, 2006). During focused coding, analytical decisions were made about most significant codes (Charmaz, 2006). These codes were then applied to all the data. Axial coding was used to derive dimensions and properties of themes (for example, the different ways in which youths experience microassaults.) In addition, relationships between themes were identified. Figure 1 illustrates the various components of children’s experiences with discrimination.

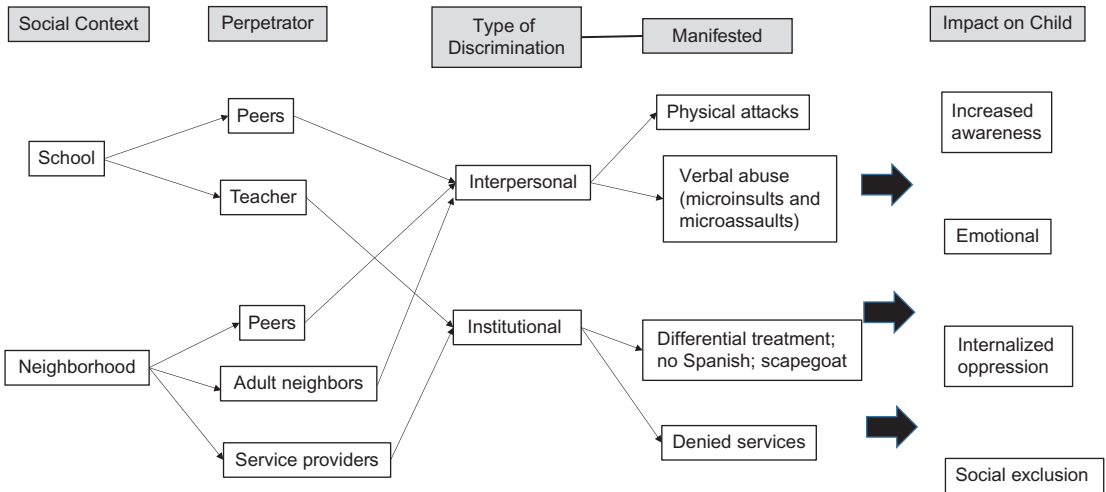
The following strategies were applied to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. To address the confirmability of the study, we met regularly to discuss initial, focused, and axial coding (Shenton, 2004). In a collaborative process we discussed themes and made analytical decisions. This process facilitated identifying inclusive and comprehensive themes. When differences in interpretations emerged, we referred back to the data to ground themes on participants’ experiences. Throughout this process we

aimed to minimize researcher bias. To support the credibility of the study, strategies were used to help participants feel safe within the interview process. For instance, the interview was structured in a way that facilitated first building rapport by learning more about participants’ migration process before moving into questions about discrimination (Ayón, 2016). Detailed descriptions and substantial quotes follow to support the themes and to ensure the credibility of the findings (Charmaz, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The narratives of Latino parents indicate that their children have experienced discrimination in multiple forms. The discrimination was most frequently based on perceived ethnicity (that is, skin tone and other features) and language abilities (for example, speaking Spanish or atypical English pronunciation). Perpetrators of discrimination in schools included peers and teachers (Brown, 2015). In neighborhoods, children were discriminated against by adults, peers, and service providers. Interpersonal discrimination manifested through verbal abuse in the form of microinsults, microassaults, and physical attacks. Institutional discrimination occurred in schools as teachers dismissed children’s connection to the Spanish language (microinvalidation), enforced informal “no Spanish in classrooms” policies, and showed differential treatment toward Latino children. Further institutional discrimination arose when immigrant families were

Figure 1: Latino Children’s Experiences with Discrimination



denied access to services. Participants' narratives show how discrimination negatively affected their children: Youths became aware of discrimination at an early age, experienced emotional distress and social isolation, and showed indicators of internalized oppression.

### **Institutional Discrimination**

Arizona's anti-immigration policies have exacerbated institutional discrimination. Those policies have led to an increase in intimidation, detention, and deportation of Latino people (Valdez, Padilla, & Valentine, 2012). The same policies have restricted access to public benefits, education, and employment and have criminalized undocumented immigrants. Children experience institutional discrimination when they are not allowed to speak Spanish, encounter differential treatment by teachers, and are denied access to services.

**Not Allowed to Speak Spanish.** In schools, children experienced institutional discrimination from teachers who disallowed them to speak Spanish, a microinvalidation that denies the children's culture. In 2000, Proposition 203 ended bilingual education (Arizona Secretary of State, 2000). In response teachers implemented "no Spanish in the classroom" policies. Many parents reported that teachers prohibit any Spanish in the classrooms and pressure children to speak only English. This form of discrimination may foster a learning environment that shames students for their use of Spanish and invalidates their cultural heritage. One parent stated, "*Mi niña como en su salón dice que . . . nunca los permiten hablar español, siempre inglés.*" [My daughter tells me that in her classroom they are never permitted to speak Spanish, always English.] Another parent described how Spanish was deemed unimportant by her child's teacher:

It got to the point where my daughter didn't want to go to school, well, because at home, we speak Spanish all the time . . . Her teacher was forcing her . . . to speak . . . English . . . He told her that here you have to speak English . . . You do not speak Spanish. My daughter answered, "But my mom and dad are Mexican," and he replied, "I do not care."

**Differential Treatment.** Parents reported that Latino children experienced differential treatment

by teachers due to their Latino or Mexican descent. Latino children did not receive the same recognition as white children, and their privileges were limited. Teachers were reported to enforce inappropriate disciplinary strategies in the classroom. A father shared, "*[El maestro] la castigaba mucho. . . . Una vez [mi hija] pidió permiso para ir al baño, no la quiso dejar ir al baño [y] se orinó los calzones.*" [The teacher punished her a lot. . . . One time my daughter asked for permission to go to the bathroom and he would not let her go, and she peed herself.] Another parent shared a teacher's strategy for enforcing the "no Spanish in the classroom" policy:

[There is] a teacher who said that every time they speak Spanish inside the classroom they needed to bring a candy . . . to give candy to the teacher. . . . So [the kids] . . . said that two teachers were doing this. . . . It was very, very . . . racist towards children.

Scapegoating emerged as a subtheme of differential treatment. Parents retold occurrences in which teachers only blamed Latino youths among other involved students for any wrongdoing. Latino students were singled out, faulted, or accused of misbehavior. One parent related that her child was the only one faulted among her group of friends, all of whom were involved in a situation. "*Deberían tener el mismo trato todos alumnos quienes hayan participado en lo que [pasó], nada más agarrar al quien creen que es culpable. Eso no es un trato justo.*" [They should have the same treatment for all students who were involved in what happened, not just blame one they believe is at fault. It is not fair treatment.] In other cases Latino children were instantly singled out for committing more serious offenses. One parent described that her child was constantly scapegoated and then faulted for a serious offense without being questioned:

At school . . . someone found some gun bullets and blamed [my son]. . . . So I talked to [my son and] he replied it wasn't me, it was another kid who brought them, but they want to blame me. . . . Then he was angry and started to tell the teacher, the principal, he said, "How can I be blamed for something I did not do? Just because another kid said it was me, you just based it on what he said." . . . Every little



thing it was . . . Marcos this, Marcos that . . . they punished and punished him . . . and only him. If he did something wrong with another peer it was only Marcos who was punished, and I got tired. . . . I enrolled him in another school and now, thank God, he is doing much better. I have had no complaints.

**Denied Service.** Institutional discrimination was also experienced by Latino children when they were denied services because of their documentation status. In 2004, Proposition 200 limited access to public benefits by mandating verification of identity and immigration status for all applicants (Arizona Secretary of State, 2004). Employees were obligated to report undocumented applicants to immigration officials. Those who failed to report could be charged with a misdemeanor (Arizona Secretary of State, 2004). One parent reported denial of service in her neighborhood when her child was denied entry into a soccer club due to his legal status.

[My son] . . . wanted to join a soccer team and they didn't want to take him because he didn't . . . have a state identification. . . . He has always wanted to be in that soccer team. . . . I was told that the child needed an ID from here and his birth certificate. And yes, he was sad because he couldn't . . . enter the soccer team.

## Interpersonal Discrimination

**Verbal Discrimination.** Parents reported that Latino youths predominantly experienced verbal discrimination in their schools and neighborhoods. Verbal discrimination manifested in two types of microaggressions, microassaults (derogatory comments, stereotyping, teasing, name calling, and threatening) and microinsults (questioning parents' legal status and nativity).

Consistent with the findings of Córdova and Cervantes (2010) and Romero et al. (2015), parents noted that their children were recipients of derogatory ethnicity-based comments from adults and peers in their communities. For instance, youths were told to return to Mexico and were told that Mexicans are not welcome in the United States. One parent reported, "*Vino mi hijo y me dijo, 'Mamá, la abuelita de [un] niño nos dijo que los mexicanos somos unos estúpidos.'*" [My son came and told me, "Mom, the grandma of a boy told us that

we Mexicans are stupid." ] Another parent relayed a comment a teacher made to her daughter: "*La maestro . . . le dijo a la niña que todos los mexicanos eran apuestos.*" [The teacher . . . told my daughter that all Mexicans reek.] Microassaults may lead Latino youths to believe that being Mexican is not something one should be proud of or that they are not valuable (Sue et al., 2007). In extreme cases derogatory comments conveyed white supremacy. A mother shared,

When my daughter was in third grade there was a white boy . . . that would tell her, "I'm better than you because I'm white." Then my daughter would answer, "What do you have that I don't?" And he would reply, "Because I am white and you are Mexican." . . . And she began to tell him that "I am not Mexican, my roots are from Guatemala and Cuba," and he would reply, "I am still better than you."

Parents believed that their children were stereotyped because of their Latino or Mexican characteristics. One parent reported that her daughter experienced the following microassault by a school peer: "*Un [niño] . . . en el bus le dijo, '¿Hey, como te llamas?' Y luego le dijo se llama Katherine. [El niño dijo] por qué se llama Katherine, se debe llamar María . . . porque viene de México y luego después, 'Hey María, hey María.'*" [A boy on the bus asked her, "Hey, what's your name?" And she answered her name was Katherine. He replied, why are you named Katherine, you should be named Maria because you come from Mexico, and afterwards he called at her, "hey Maria, hey Maria." ]

Parents reported that Latino children were teased based on their Mexican characteristics and accents. One parent described how her child was teased by classmates because he didn't speak English well: "*Él me ha dicho que en veces se rien de él cómo pronuncia palabras . . . . Va a una escuela donde hay muchos niños güeritos.*" [He has told me that at times they laugh at how he pronounces words. . . . He goes to a school where there are many white children.] The following quote demonstrates how one child was teased based on her skin tone and accent:

My daughter . . . was teased a lot because . . . she is *morena* [darkened skinned]. . . . Her classmates didn't believe she was my daughter because I'm light skinned. . . . They would tell

her I was not her mother. Yes, they discriminated her in that way . . . and if she made mistakes they would tease her because she . . . didn't pronounce words well.

Latino youths were often called names by peers and adults in their communities. One parent stated that her children were called names by adult neighbors: "*Con los niños, por ejemplo en el departamento donde yo vivo, a mis muchachitos les han gritado, 'Mexicano apestoso.'*" [With my children, for example in the apartment where I live, to my boys they have shouted at them, "Smelly Mexican."] Children were also called names by peers in school. A parent described how another student got upset at her child after he won a game: "*Le dijo a mi hijo, 'Mira mojado . . . tú no me ganaste, yo fui la que gané, y no me estás dando lata y lo que deberías hacer es regresar a México.'*" [She told my son, "Look, wetback . . . you did not beat me, I was the one who won, and do not bother me and what you should do is return to Mexico."]

An extreme form of microassault involved threatening comments regarding the deportation of family members. One participant described a neighbor who directly threatened her child with deporting her parents:

On one occasion those that lived beneath us . . . the man . . . told my little girl . . . my girl was playing outside and they said, "I will take your parents away." . . . My girl came up crying, crying with fear, very frightened. "Mom," she asked me, "Why are they going to take you?" . . . The man . . . threatened to call the sheriff.

Latino children also experienced similar threats from their peers. Such threats demonstrate that young children make assumptions that people are undocumented based on not speaking English and Mexican characteristics. Similarly, [Dreby \(2012\)](#) found that often children assume all immigrants are "illegal."

The [neighborhood] children also shout at [my kids], because they know that their parents are Mexican or my parents. . . . My children always visit [their grandparents, who] do not speak English. So [the neighborhood children] tell them things, "You are not from here"; "Tell your grandparents to go to Mexico and that we are going to call immigration"; "I am

going to send immigration to take away your mom and your grandfather."

Parents reported that Latino children were questioned by school classmates about their parent's legal status or national origin. Such comments imply to Latino children that they are different for having Mexican parents. Asking about parents' legal status also highlights assumptions that having Mexican parents equates to having undocumented parents. One parent shared how classmates asked her daughter about their nativity: "*Unas niñas le preguntan . . . ¿De dónde son tus papás? . . . Pues ella contestó que éramos mexicanos los dos . . . La niña le dijo, 'Entonces tú no eres de aquí, eres mexicana.'*" [Some girls asked her, "Where are your parents from?" Well, she answered that we were both Mexican. . . . The girl replied, "Then you're not from here, you're Mexican."] Other parents described viewpoints held about Latino children, such as assuming they are troublemakers or aggressive. This finding speaks to the impact of policies that aim to criminalize immigrants; children may also bear the burden of such policies.

One time my daughter argued with a white girl. . . . The white girl told her, "My mom doesn't let me hang out with you anymore. . . . She says all Mexicans are troublemakers." [My] daughter told me, "Mom, it's the same when we are cheerleading, when other cheerleaders came from another school [and] they are all white and . . . it's as if they were afraid of us." And I asked her why and she replied she didn't know why. . . . She said, "We were acting normal, but I think they were afraid of us because they saw no other white girls [on our team]."

**Physical Attacks.** Latino children were physically attacked because of their Latino appearance. One parent reported that his daughter was often beaten by peers because of not being born in the United States: "*Sí, maltratos, golpes. Peleas en la escuela, sí que le han echado montón. De que la niña le dice que tú no eres de aquí, que tú eres da allá [México]. O sea problemas siempre, siempre en la escuela.*" [Yes, mistreatment, beatings. Fights at school, yes, she has been jumped a lot. The girl tells her, you're not from here, you're from there (Mexico). There are always problems, always at school.]

## Impact on Children

**Increased Awareness.** From a young age Latino children are aware of biases in their social interactions through their direct and indirect experiences with discrimination. Latino children understand that not everyone will treat them the same or kindly. Parents reported that children may grow up faster as they learn about the realities of ethnic and language discrimination in their surroundings. Parents indicated that many children would arrive home confused about the negative treatment they received and would inquire about the discrimination. One parent described how her child realized and questioned why white students were given better and more valuable rewards at school compared with what was given to Mexican children:

She says, “Mommy, why are they different, why do they treat people differently?” . . . She noticed that to Americans they give almost everything and to the others they don’t. . . . In school, in the ceremony, when they give prizes to the students who are doing well . . . my daughter said that the white students get computers and iPods. And she was given a bear, and she wanted an iPod too, but no, instead a bear . . . . In the pictures . . . you can see that she and her friend, who is also Mexican, were given small prizes and you can see white students were given bigger prizes.

Other parents reported that their children’s new immigrant classmates were teased for not speaking English. Children’s awareness also increased as they witnessed their parents being discriminated against by others. Children became aware that not everyone will treat them or their parents equally. For instance, one parent stated, “*Mi hijo, el mayor, sí se ha dado cuenta de que luego no me quieren tratar bien y me dijo una vez, ‘Mami, esa señora no fue amable.’*” [My child, the oldest, has noticed when others do not want to treat me well, and he once told me, “Mommy, that lady was not nice.”] Another participant described discrimination that she faced with her son during a meeting with the child’s teacher and interpreter, which led to both the parent and child crying. This participant stated that her son began to keep her better informed about school updates after this shared experience and upon learning that his mother was discriminated for not speaking English well.

**Emotional Impact.** Parents reported that their children are emotionally affected by discrimination. Parents’ observations are supported by research, which found a strong relationship between discrimination and poor mental health outcomes (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015). When children were verbally discriminated by classmates and adults in their communities, parents reported that children often cried and grew sad, angry, intimidated, or uncomfortable (see Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016). A parent shared, “*Un niño le dijo, ‘Ustedes los mexicanos no sirven para nada,’ y mi hijo llegó llorando.*” [A boy told him, “You Mexicans are worthless,” and my son came back crying.] When children were discriminated in school they no longer wanted to return to class: “*[Mi hijo] estaba muy enojado. Ya ni quería ir a la escuela, decía que no, que no quería ir a la escuela.*” [My son was very angry. He didn’t even want to go to school, he said no, he did not want to go to school.] Another child told her mom that she was afraid of her teacher: “*Susto . . . decía que ya no quería ir a la escuela porque le daba miedo el profesor ese.*” [Fear . . . she would say that she no longer wanted to go to school because she was afraid of that teacher.]

**Social Exclusion.** “*Me ha dicho [mi hijo], ‘Este niño no quiere jugar conmigo porque . . . soy mexicano.’*” [My son told me, “This boy doesn’t want to play with me because . . . I’m Mexican.”] Many parents noted that Latino youths were isolated from groups and made to feel different from others. Social exclusion can be a form (Brown, 2015) as well as an outcome of discrimination. In schools or neighborhoods peers did not want to play or be friends with Latino children. The following quote illustrates social exclusion as a parent described her child being isolated by friends for resembling a Hispanic cartoon character, Dora the explorer.

One day my daughter came back crying. She told me her . . . friends didn’t want to be her friend anymore. . . . My daughter is very dark skinned, the other little girls are white, and she said that the other girl had told her that [it was] because she cut her hair short and now looked like Dora.

## Internalized Oppression

Another significant consequence of discrimination manifested in the form of internalized oppression. Through experiences with discrimination children



receive strong messages leading them to believe that who they are is not acceptable. Internalized oppression can reinforce negative stereotypes and result in self-destructive behaviors (Padilla, 2001). For example, evidence suggests a relationship between discrimination and lower self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, as well as hopelessness and increased delinquency and aggression. One parent observed that her children grew insecure and angry toward her for not being able to speak English at their school. Her children were embarrassed and ashamed that their mother could not speak English. Another parent described how her child grew upset and uncomfortable in having to translate for his mother during parent-teacher conferences when an interpreter was not provided. Both examples illustrate that children are adopting views that speaking Spanish is unacceptable and wrong in school institutions. Because of institutional discrimination such as English-only policies, children and their families are faced with institutions that do not provide a welcoming and supportive multilingual environment. Subsequently, children become ashamed of speaking Spanish and embracing their cultural values. Latino children may be rejecting important cultural values and characteristics to cope or prevent further discrimination.

One parent noted that her child displayed lower self-esteem as she wished she had lighter skin as a result of being teased for her accent and skin tone. This parent continued, “*Decía que . . . ¿por qué ella no era güera?, que ella hubiera querido mejor ser güera . . . por eso que ella tiene baja su autoestima de que siempre le han dicho cosas que la han molestado por su color y por sus ojos.*” [My daughter said . . . why isn’t she light skinned, that she would have wanted to be light skinned . . . that is why she has low self-esteem, because they have always said things, bothered her based on her color and eyes.] Another parent described how her child wished he was born in the United States after being unable to join a soccer team because of not having a state ID. The mother reported, “*Él siente que todos los que nacieron aquí tienen mas oportunidades que él que no nació aquí. . . . Dice que por qué y por qué él no nació aquí. . . . Y siempre dice que él quiere, que él quiere . . . ser nacido aquí.*” [He feels that all who were born here have more opportunities than him, who was not born here. . . . He asks why, why wasn’t he born here . . . and he always says he . . . wants to have been born here.] This

child grew sad and longed for the same opportunities as American children. In both circumstances, parents observed that their children wished to change aspects of themselves, such as country of origin and appearance. These examples portray how children may become ashamed of their heritage because of encounters with discrimination.

## LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study is informed by interviews with parents on their children’s encounters with discrimination; these children may have experienced other forms of discrimination that they did not share with or that were not observed by their parents. In addition, the impact of discrimination on children is also informed by parents’ perspective, therefore children may be affected in other ways not observed by parents. Yet this study makes a significant contribution to the knowledge base as few studies have examined Latino children’s experiences with discrimination (Brown, 2015). Consistent with an ecological framework (Parra-Cardona, Bullock, Imig, Villarruel, & Gold, 2006) and Latino cultural values such as *familismo* (Molina & Alcántara, 2013), Latino parents play a critical role in the lives of their children; thus, parents’ awareness and understanding of the impact of discrimination on their children can also inform social work practice and education in efforts to promote social justice.

This study builds on existing literature by providing concrete examples of interpersonal and institutional forms of discrimination experienced by Latino youths in their schools and neighborhoods. It expands existing literature by incorporating the microaggressions taxonomy in the analysis, which has been mostly absent in social work literature and in research with the Latino community. Findings also reveal several impacts on Latino youths beyond social isolation and emotional consequences such as hyperawareness and internalized oppression. Consistent with social work’s commitment to vulnerable and oppressed populations (National Association of Social Workers, 2015), we have a duty and responsibility to intervene in support of healthy development of Latino children and immigrant families. It is critical to increase awareness of this issue among school systems, service providers, and the community at large. Microaggressions are often committed unknowingly by the perpetrator (Sue et al., 2007). It is time to label the actions and make the unknown known. Latino

children's well-being is placed at risk every time they experience overt discrimination or microaggressions, as illustrated by parents' narratives of children's emotional distress, social isolation, and shame of their culture. Latino children are being robbed of their childhood as they constantly worry about the well-being of their families and experience differential treatment.

Social workers in educational settings and community-based agencies who work with youths and families can engage in macro- and micro-level interventions. To educate teachers, administrators, and other frontline workers on the mechanisms and consequences of discrimination, policy analyses must be completed by institutions. It is imperative to understand (a) the impact of the policy on the institution and service providers; (b) identify appropriate ways to implement and enforce the policy; (c) identify potential unintended consequences, such as discrimination; and, (d) assess training needs and establish consequences for inappropriate implementation of policies. The end of bilingual education should not mean that children are shamed for speaking a different language. Institutions that serve immigrant populations need to be proactive in understanding the impact of immigration legislation.

There is also a need to create more accepting school environments that address the diverse needs of immigrants, for example, by including bicultural and multilingual staff and interpreters. With the growing number of immigrants and refugees in the United States, institutions must be prepared to meet the needs of diverse communities and facilitate their integration into U.S. society. Increased parent engagement will play a critical role in helping children feel welcomed in schools. Immigrant parents often come to this country to provide their children with better opportunities, including access to education. Parents can participate in classroom activities to increase children's awareness of diversity issues. For example, sharing historical anecdotes (Demircioglu, 2008) and singing traditional songs from different cultures (Pascale, 2011) have been found to be effective ways to promote inclusiveness. A *promotoras* model can be used to foster parent leadership and involvement. The *promotoras* model has succeeded in efforts to empower Latino immigrant communities and create positive social change (Arizmendi & Ortiz, 2004).

In efforts to ameliorate the effects of discrimination on children, programs that engage children in

critical discussion about their social context and enhance their ethnic pride should be supported. Photovoice is a tool used to engage youths in action, increase critical consciousness, and promote community connection and awareness (Smith, Bratini, & Appio, 2012). *Realidad Latina*, a participatory action research project, found that Latino immigrant youths value their ethnic identity. Youths took pictures and discussed aspects of their culture and customs that they cherish (Streng et al., 2004). Such programs provide youths an opportunity to discuss their experiences in a safe environment, feel validated, and work toward change. In addition, programs that target immigrant parents are needed to help them identify the best ways to address issues of discrimination with their children and find support when needed.

Findings revealed institutional and interpersonal forms of discrimination that Latino youths face from adults and peers outside of their homes. Based on parent narratives, children were affected by discrimination and daily forms of microaggressions in significant ways, which affect children through awareness of discrimination, emotional distress, social exclusion, and internalized oppression. These findings are critical because Latino children are part of the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the country. Additional research is needed to explore children's perceptions on how they experience discrimination and how they combat discrimination within anti-immigration climates. Social workers have an opportunity to work with this community to advocate for legislative changes and support the empowerment of Latino youths as they endure the aftermath of the anti-immigration movement and the subsequent discrimination and oppression. **SWR**

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