



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 47 | Issue 4

Article 6

2020

Political Climate, Discrimination, and Mental Health: Understanding Latino Youth Experience During the 2016 Presidential Election

Jaime Booth

University of Pittsburgh, jmbooth@pitt.edu

Christina Huerta

University of Pittsburgh, ceh110@pitt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Booth, Jaime and Huerta, Christina (2020) "Political Climate, Discrimination, and Mental Health: Understanding Latino Youth Experience During the 2016 Presidential Election," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 47: Iss. 4, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.4408>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol47/iss4/6>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

Political Climate, Discrimination, and Mental Health: Understanding Latino Youth Experience During the 2016 Presidential Election

Jaime Booth
University of Pittsburgh

Christina Huerta
University of Pittsburgh

In the last presidential election, Latino populations were the target of prejudicial language and discriminatory rhetoric. Experiences of discrimination may impact adolescent mental health, but little is known about the impact of the election cycle on Latino youth perceptions of discrimination and related emotional outcomes. The aim of this study was to understand Latino youths' experiences, emotional reactions, and coping responses to discrimination surrounding the 2016 Presidential election. To do this, this study employed a qualitative approach that engaged 30 Latino youth ages 8 to 16 years old from Latino-serving social services agencies in the creation of art based on prompts, dialogue based on that art, and the completion of a demographic survey at the beginning of the study period. Qualitative analysis of the dialogues revealed that youth experienced direct peer discrimination that they attributed to anti-immigrant and anti-Latino political rhetoric and their emotional responses included anger, sadness, and powerlessness. Youth utilized coping responses to discrimination that included direct confrontation to discrimination and utilizing their imagination to respond to discrimination. The results of this study suggest that youth perceived and were impacted by discrimination resulting from anti-immigrant rhetoric that was present during the 2016 presidential election.

Keywords: Latino youth, discrimination, political rhetoric

One quarter of all youth in the United States are Latino and will make up nearly one third of all youth in 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Despite their growing numbers, Latino youth frequently experience prejudice and discrimination associated with their ethnic “minority” status (Garcia-Coll et al., 1996), experiences that are linked to substance use, depression, anxiety, and conduct disorders that can persist over time (Ayón et al., 2010; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Experiences of prejudice, defined as rejection or unfair treatment based on an individual’s group membership (Branscombe et al., 1999), can be perceived and understood by youth as young as 6 years old (Pauker et al., 2010). By adolescence, youth are capable of identifying both implicit and explicit forms of discrimination (Wong et al., 2003). Prejudice can be experienced in interpersonal interactions but also may come from larger societal forces, such as political rhetoric. These two sources of prejudice are often related and mutually reinforcing (Carter, 2007). Therefore, it is likely that the prejudicial and discriminatory statements made by influential politicians could result in increased interpersonal discrimination and could, in turn, impact the level of stress that Latino youth experience. Despite this logical conclusion, very few empirical studies have investigated the role of anti-Latino political rhetoric on Latino youths’ experiences of discrimination and mental health and even fewer have sought to understand their coping responses to these experiences. To address this gap, this study used qualitative analysis to examine Latino youths’ perceptions of discrimination during the 2016 presidential election, their emotional responses, and strategies that may have helped them cope with discrimination-related stress.

Anti-Immigrant Political Rhetoric

Throughout American history, policies designed to restrict immigration have been accompanied by the criminalization of immigrants by politicians and the media (Chavez, 2013). Immigration reform policies influence the public perception of immigrant populations and have been focused on Latin American immigrants since the 1950s (Chavez, 2013). The importance of politicians’ influence over American citizens’ perceptions of immigration is highlighted by the fact that most Americans

are inadequately educated on the topic and gain most of their information from mass media (Scheve & Slaughter, 2001). The construction of the terms “illegal” and “alien” have been utilized to associate immigrants with criminality and serve as a mechanism to create public uneasiness and alarm (Chavez, 2013). Anti-immigrant discourse is rooted in threats posed to the economic stability and wellbeing of citizens and provokes fear and anxiety regarding the future of the country and individual welfare (Cervantes et al., 1995). Emotional reactions are a key component of political judgment and can influence behavior (Marcus et al., 2000). Previous policies aiming to restrict access to services to immigrant populations—like Proposition 187 in California, which utilized an anti-immigrant platform specifically citing Latinos as an issue—resulted in intensified discrimination toward Latinos regardless of documentation status, background, or generational status (Cervantes et al., 1995). The heightened hostility toward Latinos was reflected in a variety of settings and resulted in increased hate speech, crime, and reported victimizations of Latinos by law enforcement, as well as housing, employment, and business discrimination (Cervantes et al., 1995).

While rhetoric that demonizes others and places White Americans in the role of moral superiority is not new to American politics, the rhetoric used in the 2016 presidential election showed a pointed increase in discriminatory rhetoric against Latinos, particularly against individuals who have migrated across the Mexican border. In June of 2015, Donald Trump announced his presidential campaign; during his nationally aired speech, he stated that Mexico was “sending people” who were bringing drugs and crime into the country and made a blanket statement about Mexican immigrants being rapists (C-SPAN, 2015). Throughout the election, Trump’s platform included plans to build a wall on the southern border between Mexico and the United States, and he frequently made statements highlighting the need to deport immigrants for the betterment of Americans. While this rhetoric consistently aimed at Mexicans and other nationalities who were crossing the U.S.–Mexico border without documentation, the messages impacted Latinos of various backgrounds and documentation statuses (Pew Hispanic Center, 2017).

Fear of Deportation

Trump's policies regarding the deportation of Latino immigrants should be considered particularly harmful to Latino youth and their families due to the influence the rhetoric can have on the self-isolation of Latinos. Political contexts and significant events may have an impact on adolescents' development because they are increasingly becoming aware of their surroundings and are actively forming their identities (Davis, 2004; Schuman & Corning, 2011). The 2016 presidential election was an important event in history, particularly for Latino youth and adolescents, as the anti-immigrant and anti-Latino political rhetoric included in Donald Trump's proposed policies related to potential deportations that could result in familial separation. The fear of deportation of oneself or a family member has been shown to increase anxiety and stress (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). Consequently, the increased stress and anxiety resulting from fear of deportation can influence Latino families to become more isolated and prevent them from attaining medical and mental health services, which can lead to an increase in disparities for this population (Berk & Schur, 2001). Additionally, decreases in daily activities, such as grocery shopping, have been associated with the fear of deportation and immigration raids among Latinos (Capps et al., 2007). Political rhetoric, therefore, not only impacts prejudicial beliefs about Latinos, but also may serve to isolate them from important resources and social services.

Outcomes of Discrimination

There are many types of racial and ethnic discrimination, including social exclusion, stigmatization, and threats of harm (Brondolo et al., 2005). Minority group membership is associated with an increase in exposure to discrimination and social exclusion (Garcia-Coll et al., 1996). Racial and ethnic discrimination is considered a distinct stressor, as it requires an individual to manage both emotional and practical demands (Brondolo et al., 2008). Experiences of discrimination impact youths' developmental outcomes and can result in low self-esteem, depression, emotional disturbances, sleep disturbances, and academic achievement (Levy et al., 2016). Latino youth who reported

experiencing discrimination were eight times more likely to experience symptoms of depression than Latino youth who reported no past experiences of discrimination (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). Among Mexican American youth, discrimination was associated with an increase in daily life stress (Zeiders et al., 2012). Exposure to discrimination can have effects on educational outcomes, with youth who reported more community discrimination also reporting a low sense of belonging in academic environments (Brown & Chu, 2012).

Reactions to Discrimination

Due to the prevalence of experiences of discrimination amongst Latino youth and the reported increase in bullying behaviors directed toward Latino youth since the 2016 election, it is important to identify and acknowledge coping strategies utilized in response to race- and ethnicity-related stressors (Rogers et al., 2017). Experiences of discrimination have been linked to distinct patterns of emotional responses such as anger, fear, powerlessness, disappointment, sadness, and anxiety (Broudy et al., 2007; Carter, 2007). Mellor's (2004) proposed framework for understanding coping resulting from racial/ethnic discrimination focuses on the emotional responses resulting from these experiences and the unique purposes they serve for the individual. Mellor asserted that there are three general types of responses. The first approach is defensive (protecting the self) and can be expressed through accepting the existence of racism and discrimination. Responses using this approach include avoidance of situations in which one could be exposed to these stressors, reinterpreting the experience to make coping easier, utilizing social supports to aid with coping, denial of one's ethnic or racial identity, and attempting to disprove the perceived inferiority of their group through high achievement. Per Mellor, emotions such as denial and acceptance are utilized as protection from distress (2004).

The second approach is controlled (self-control) and is expressed through ignoring the presence of racism or discrimination or using one's imagination to explore responses, rather than verbally or physically responding. The controlled approach is considered to be an adaptive response as it protects

the individual experiencing discrimination. The third approach is confrontational (confronting the racism) and can be expressed through providing education to the perpetrator in hopes of changing their behavior, disputing the racism, asserting one's racial/ethnic identity, utilizing authorities as supports to address the situation, or seeking revenge on the perpetrator (Mellor et al., 2009). In this coping response, anger and assertiveness are utilized to mediate and combat discriminatory acts (Mellor, 2004). Anger and confrontational coping are seen as serving two purposes for the individual experiencing discrimination. First, it can serve as motivation for the perpetrator to change their discriminatory behavior (Swim et al., 2003). Additionally, it provides an emotional outlet for the individual's anger. While patterns of emotional responses and the functions these emotions serve have been noted in research, no research has examined the emotional responses of Latino youth to experiences of discrimination related to the political climate before, during, and following the 2016 presidential election.

Current Study

Little research has explored the experience of discrimination among Latino youth in relation to anti-Latino political rhetoric. Additionally, while associations between discrimination and mental health concerns have been fairly consistent, less research has focused on the emotional responses of the perception of discrimination as it relates to political rhetoric and policies targeting specific ethnic groups. To address this research gap, this study utilized a qualitative approach to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How did youth understand and experience discrimination related to anti-immigrant political rhetoric during the 2016 presidential election?
- 2) What were Latino youths' emotional reactions to the messages that they perceived?
- 3) How did Latino youth cope with perceptions of discrimination during the 2016 presidential election?

Methods

To answer these research questions, we analyzed group discussion data that were collected as part of a larger study designed to understand Latino youths' ethnic identity and experience of acculturation stress. Once IRB approval was obtained, youth were recruited from two Latino-serving social service organizations in a city in Western Pennsylvania to participate in six sessions of Visual Voices, a method of data collection that utilizes paintings and discussions to elicit youths' lived experiences (Yonas et al., 2013). Data were collected in two separate sets of sessions; one took place from October to December in 2016 ($n = 14$) and the other took place in April of 2017 ($n = 16$). In both sets of sessions, participants were divided into two groups of 5 to 8 youth based on age and developmental stage, with a younger group derived of ages 7 to 11 ($n = 14$) and the older group of ages 12 to 16 ($n = 16$). There were no significant differences among groups regarding age, socioeconomic status, or length of time living in the United States.

In all sessions, youth were allotted 45 minutes to paint and then participated in a 45 minute discussion about their paintings. Prompts were developed in collaboration with our community partners, in consultation with the designers of the Visual Voices data collection method, and were based on a review of the literature of ethnic identity formation. Prompts were designed to be broad in order to encourage youth-directed subject matter. Eight bilingual facilitators were trained to allow the discussion to flow and to probe for data on identity, stressors, perceived discrimination, and mental health.

The first session of Visual Voices (1) consisted of facilitators introducing youth to the program. Youth were asked to paint in response to the first prompt: (2) "What are your hopes and dreams for the future?" In the subsequent sessions, the youth painted in response to the following prompts: (3) "What makes you who you are?"; (4) "What does it mean to be Latino?"; (5) "What are some of the challenges that you face?"; and (6) "What changes would you like to see in the world?" During the discussion, youth were asked to explain their artwork and the rest of the youth in the group were encouraged to engage in

discussion around the paintings. The facilitators asked probing questions and followed up for clarification. While the prompts in this study were designed to engage youth in a reflection on their ethnic identity, discussion of politics and political issues surfaced frequently, despite being unsolicited by facilitators. During the first session, youth were asked to vote and discuss language preference for the discussions. The younger group in the first round of data collection decided that the sessions would be conducted primarily in Spanish. All other groups chose to conduct discussions primarily in English, but all facilitators were bilingual, allowing youth the flexibility to use both languages in all groups.

Analysis Strategy

Youth dialogues were tape recorded and transcribed, and all transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo for qualitative data management. Three research team members, including one bilingual team member, transcribed the discussions. Thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was conducted to explore the conceptualization of discrimination and the resulting emotions and coping strategies related to experiences of discrimination. Two research team members discussed codes and analyzed the data independently. Team members met at the conclusion of coding and discussed and resolved any conflicting codes.

Results

Participants

The mean age of participants in this study was 11.43 years old. The majority of youth identified as male (68.97%) and 31.03% of participants reported being female. A little over one quarter (28.57%) of the participants reported that they were immigrants and had lived in the United States for under 5 years, and 57.14% stated that they had lived in the U.S. their whole lives. One third of participants reported that their mothers had been born in Mexico, 26.67% of participants reported that their mothers were born in Guatemala, 10% reported that their mothers were born

in Puerto Rico, and the remaining reported that their mothers were born in Ecuador, Columbia, Brazil, or the contiguous United States. It should be noted that pseudonyms were used in the following sections to protect the youths' identities.

Experiences of Discrimination

Youth were not prompted to discuss experiences of discrimination. However, youth frequently described these experiences during sessions. This discussion topic surfaced more often in groups held before and just following the election, although they were present in both sessions, and they were discussed in both the older and younger groups. Youth specifically related many of these experiences to the presidential election and ongoing political rhetoric about Latino Americans and immigrants. Youth seemed to be particularly concerned with the division between Latinos and other Americans, both physical (through discussions of building walls and deporting individuals) and through the anti-immigrant and anti-Latino political ideology spread during the election. This is seen in Figure 1 when a 13-year-old male (from the group held prior to the election results, born in the United States, both parents born in Mexico) discussed his feelings about the lack of perceived equality among Latinos and other "Americans." In response to the prompt, "What does it mean to be Latino?", he stated,

VICTOR: So, I wrote, "We are better, stronger, and smarter together"...I wrote that we should be treated equally, and that Americans and Latinos should be together.

FACILITATOR: So, do you think that's happening, though?

VICTOR: Kind of not.

FACILITATOR: How not?

VICTOR: Trump...I guess he's kicking out illegal immigrants and building a wall. It's basically separating us, in a way...

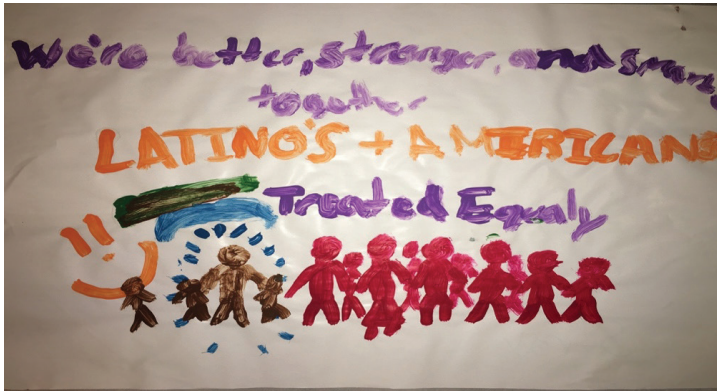


Figure 1. Participant's painting response to the question, "What does it mean to be Latino?"

Youth frequently expressed concerns regarding the potential backlash of anti-immigrant sentiment related to the immigration platform presented by Donald Trump during the election. In response to the prompt, "What does it mean to be Latino?", a 14-year-old female (from the group that occurred during the election, born in the contiguous United States, both parents born in Ecuador) stated that she feared that American citizens would be persuaded by Trump to separate themselves from Latinos:

I think the fact that President Trump has said all about sending immigrants back...since he's a really influential person in the U.S., more people will be influenced by his way of thinking, and more people will think like that, and kind of, like, separate themselves. I feel that the fact that Trump was elected really made a change in people. Like, in school they felt the need to say that it was an open place, that everyone was accepted, right after he was elected. So, I think that the fact that they felt the need to say that really says a lot...I was a bit worried because they really shouldn't really feel the need to say it with something that wouldn't be said but it would be known.

Youth in the younger group seemed to be well informed of the political climate related to immigrant and Latino issues. Youth often described complex issues related to discrimination in developmentally appropriate ways. Such understanding is seen in the following excerpt, when a 9-year-old male from the

session after the election (born in the contiguous United States, both parents born in Colombia) described Donald Trump's feelings about undocumented immigrants in response to the prompt, "What are your hopes and dreams?"

MIGUEL: I think Donald Trump is going to sue us... 'Cause you know his problem with us. Let's just say he doesn't like us.

FACILITATOR: What doesn't he like about us?

MIGUEL: He doesn't like us living without documentation to go to the United States. And people just need a better life, and they think the United States is gonna be a good place to live, but they don't have enough money to travel, so they just sneak in.

Younger youth also frequently expressed knowledge and fear regarding Donald Trump's statements about Latinos and building a wall. In response to the prompt, "What makes you who you are?", multiple youth from the younger group session that occurred during the election began discussing qualities that they admired in other people. From this discussion, these youth transitioned to the following a conversation about the election:

FACILITATOR: What do you admire in other people?

IVAN: Donald Trump is rich, but he does bad things.

SAMUEL: He's a very ugly and very stupid person.

IVAN: He does wrong with the Latinos. He bullies; I heard that.

FACILITATOR: He bullies Latinos?

SAMUEL AND IVAN: Yeah.

FELIPE: He does.

FACILITATOR: So, you don't like him because he's disrespectful of Latinos?

SAMUEL, IVAN, AND FELIPE: Yep, yes, yep.

IVAN: And he's also racist!

LUCAS: He is racist!!

FELIPE: We have to deal with Donald Trump for eight years...if he wins again.

IVAN: Donald Trump is going to get us killed.

Youth frequently discussed their feelings regarding discrimination that they felt was either prompted by political rhetoric or directly stated by Donald Trump. In the following excerpt from the same session as above, youth continued to

discuss their discontent with the statements made by Donald Trump regarding Latinos. Then youth related Trump's rhetoric to a situation in which a youth they knew from school was told they were going to have to "go back to Mexico." Most youth stated that they had experienced discrimination through hearing individuals speaking negatively about Latinos, while one youth stated that they had only heard discriminatory speech from Donald Trump. This indicates that, for some youth, their first experience of perceived ethnic/racial discrimination occurred during this election. The youth from the younger group in the session that occurred during the election shared in response to the prompt, "What makes you who you are?",

FACILITATOR: Is that the main reason you don't like him (Trump), because of the stuff he says about Latinos?

SAMUEL, IVAN, FELIPE, AND LUCAS: Yeah.

FACILITATOR: Do other people say stuff like that or just him?

SAMUEL: Just him.

IVAN, FELIPE, AND LUCAS: Other people.

LUCAS: Didn't you hear? A Latino was greeted, umm...at a first class of school by, "Are you ready to go back to Mexico?"

SAMUEL: That's just rude...mean.

FACILITATOR: You said that you never heard anybody except for Donald Trump talk like that?

SAMUEL: Just Donald Trump.

FACILITATOR #2: So, Donald Trump was the first time you guys have heard someone say something bad about Latinos?

LOLA: Yes.

FACILITATOR: And what do you guys think?

LOLA: That it's not good...that he doesn't like people who aren't American.

While youth frequently discussed pride related to their ethnic and racial identities throughout the prompts, youth also discussed difficulties related to perceived discrimination. In the following excerpt, youth from the younger group discussed difficulties related to deportation and familial separation. Youth in the younger group that occurred after the election began the discussion by stating their feelings related to being Latino in response to the prompt, "What does it mean to be Latino?"

MIA: It's fun.

GABRIELA: It's easy to be Latino. It makes me a star.

NATALIA: It means a lot to my parents. I love it.

LUNA: We get to be special and get to show people how to talk Spanish.

FACILITATOR: Do you think being Latino is fun? Do you think it's easy?

LUNA: No. I mean I think it's hard because Trump is president.

FACILITATOR: Do you think it was easier before Trump was elected?

ALL PARTICIPANTS: YES!!

FACILITATOR: So, what is he doing that makes it hard?

GABRIELA: He's making the wall even stronger, and he's sending the immigrants back. And if you were someone who was born here like me and my brothers...My mom and dad weren't born here, so they would take them over there and leave us alone here, or we would have to go over there.

Emotional Reactions to Discrimination

Youth not only described experiences of discrimination but also discussed emotional reactions related to these experiences. Youth expressed feelings of fear, anger, and powerlessness related to perceived discrimination. In the response to the prompt, "What does it mean to be Latino?", a 14-year-old female (born in the contiguous United States, both parents born in Ecuador) described her feelings related to the perception that she spoke only Spanish based on her appearance alone: "I kind of feel annoyed, but then I understand them, because there are people that don't speak fluent English."

Younger youth discussed expressions of anger related to Donald Trump winning the presidential election. In response to the prompt, "What makes you who you are?", a younger youth from the session that occurred during the election discussed defacing a photo of Donald Trump. Samuel stated, "I had a *Time* magazine of Donald Trump winning the election, and I scribbled...and I scribbled it, and then I ripped it. I literally ripped it in a million pieces." This behavior can be seen as a coping strategy for dealing with feelings of powerlessness.

Youth also expressed feelings of fear related to deportation prior to the outcome of the election. In the following excerpt, youth discussed Trump's potential win. The group collectively

believed the outcome of Trump's presidential win would mean that all Latinos would be deported. While one youth stated that they would voluntarily move to Mexico if Trump were elected, another stated that they would attempt to stay in the United States if they were threatened with deportation. This was illustrated when, in response to the prompt, "What makes you who you are?", a younger youth from the session that occurred during the election stated,

ALMA: I'm scared.

FACILITATOR: You're scared? Why?

ALMA: ...We're gonna have to leave if Donald Trump wins.

VIOLETA: I'm going to Mexico; I don't even care if I have a passport.

ALMA: I'm gonna try and sneak and see if I can stay in America.

Many youth discussed a range of emotions related to potential familial separation. This is seen in the following excerpt, when the younger youth in the second session discuss fear, stress, anger, powerlessness, and hesitation to even leave the house due to the perceived threat of separation. One youth discussed that she felt a sense of powerlessness related to Donald Trump's perception of Latinos. She stated that she felt his perception was inaccurate, but also noted that he represented America and she had no control over how she is perceived. This is illustrated in the following excerpt, when younger youth in the session after the election were discussing their feelings surrounding deportation in response to, "What are some changes you want to see in the world?" (See Figure 2)

MAURO (referencing his painting): I said no more Trump.

LINDA: He's sending Latin families away for no reason, just because he doesn't like Latin families.

FACILITATOR: How does that make you guys feel?

SANDY: I get scared. Very scary actually!

MAURO: Angry.

LINDA: Stressed

JOSEPH: More caution to go outside.

FACILITATOR: Do you worry about it a lot or a little?

SANDY: A lot.

LINDA: It causes me a lot of stress and anxiety, not knowing what he's going to do next.

JOSEPH: We should send him back to his own country.

PAULINE: I don't like that he represents America. He represents all of us...like what he says is how we all feel, but that is not the case in a large part of the country. Just the fact that that is how the world sees us, and how we're labeled like we support the bad stuff that's going on, and we don't really have a say over it.

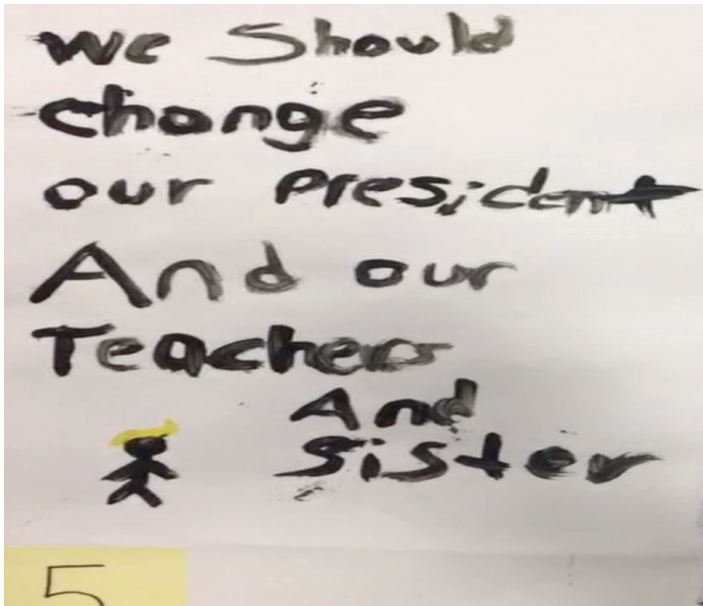


Figure 2. Participant's painting response to the question, "What are some changes you want to see in the world?"

Youth in both age groups frequently discussed feelings of powerlessness and a lack of control regarding politics due to their age and inability to vote. A 12-year-old female youth (born in the contiguous United States, both parents born in Brazil) discussed feelings of powerlessness the day after the election in response to the prompt, "What does it mean to be Latino?" She discussed the amount of power over her future that the President might have:

My dad said at school the next day everybody came in so sad...Our teacher really makes us think about it since he's [Trump's] going to be our President for four years. At least for me, he's going to be the president for most of my teenage

years, and he might even get reelected. So, he is going to be like a big thing in our future and might decide some things in our future and we might not have that much control.

Coping With Discrimination

Many youth expressed that they felt strongly that if they had the ability to vote, the outcome of the election would have been different. Youth frequently discussed a desire to participate in the voting process, both at their current age and in the future. These expressions indicate that youth feel that voting and political participation are effective manners of creating change. This feeling was demonstrated when youth in the younger, predominately Spanish-speaking session that occurred during and after the election responded to the prompt, “What makes you who you are?”, with a discussion involving characteristics of people they admire. The youth guided the conversation to include qualities that they do not value in individuals, and they began talking about Donald Trump. The following excerpt from the conversation illustrates how the outcome of the election might influence a desire for youth to participate in civic engagement:

IVAN: I wish kids could vote because 75% of kids would not vote for Donald Trump.

FACILITATOR: You wish kids could vote?

IVAN, FELIPE, AND LUCAS: Yes.

FACILITATOR: Why do you want to vote?

IVAN: Because Hillary Clinton would win.

In addition to voting and political participation, youth discussed other ways to express their feelings related to powerlessness. In the following excerpt from the younger group session after the election, in response to the prompt, “What does it mean to be Latino?”, two youth discuss fighting back against perceived discrimination. One participant stated that she felt helpless and could not fight against people who discriminated against her. Another participant recommended she utilize a controlled response by relying on religious teachings to justify not defending oneself against discrimination:

ABRIL: You hate that people really love Trump and they make fun of you. You want to fight back, but you can't.

FACILITATOR: Why do you think you can't?

SOFIA: First of all, if you love God...God says even though they are mean to you, you don't have to fight back.

Confrontational means of coping were utilized frequently among youth to combat discrimination. Youth discussed directly confronting discrimination without involving adults or authority figures. In one example among the group that occurred before the election, in response to the prompt, "What makes you who you are?", one of the younger youth described standing up for another student who was told to "go back to Mexico." The youth calmly confronted the individual and explained the inaccuracies in his statement: "He said (name) has to go back to Mexico. I told him, no, because I'm a US citizen and he is as well, so..."

While youth expressed feelings of powerlessness related to the inability to vote, they discussed ways in which they felt empowered to share their feelings about the political climate. They hoped that doing so could make effective change. During the session that occurred after the election and in response to the prompt, "What change do you want to see in the world?", one youth in the younger group stated that the use of social media was a way to express her feelings about the President:

ALICE: My mom shows me these videos on Facebook...these kids say strong words on Facebook and make a video and upload it up there, like strong words about Trump and all that stuff.

FACILITATOR: You do YouTube. Would you want to do something like that? Make a video of what you think about Trump?

ALICE: I would! And say, please stop doing this stuff; I had it enough of you doing this. If I was, like, on real camera and the whole place and the whole place and the whole United States, the whole world was watching me say this, I would say this to Trump's face...

Some youth seemed to internalize discrimination as a way of coping with exposure to ethnic discrimination. This manner of coping is sometimes used as a way of managing feelings of social exclusion by assigning fault related to political rhetoric

to a certain population of that group: in this case, drug-dealing Mexicans. This was illustrated when one of the younger youth in the session that occurred after the election stated, in response to the prompt, "What change do you want to see in the world?",

There are some Mexicans that make Trump do this. It's the Mexicans' fault. But some of them some aren't innocent because they were hiding drugs...and Trump had enough of this. So, some of those Mexicans made the country worse.

Discussion

The current political climate has included widespread anti-immigrant and discriminatory rhetoric regarding the Latino population in the United States. Donald Trump's presidential campaign frequently focused on anti-immigrant sentiment targeting Latinos. Although this study was not designed to measure the impact of the political rhetoric used in the presidential election on Latino youth, the timing of data collection allowed us to understand the relationship between the political climate and Latino youths' perceptions of discrimination and coping. The pertinence of the issue in the lives of the youth at the time of data collection was reflected in the discussion of discrimination and political rhetoric that was initiated by the youth unprompted. In both sessions, youth not only painted and discussed political topics, but they also appeared to have a firm knowledge and awareness of anti-Latino and anti-immigrant political rhetoric that occurred during the election. This knowledge was consistent in both the younger groups and the older groups. Youth were particularly concerned with deportation and the potential that they might be separated from their families, and they related the need to isolate from the outside world to this fear—an isolation which could further harm the Latino community. While youth reported experiences of discrimination in the painting sessions, less discrimination was reported by the group of youth who completed the study 6 months after the presidential election. This decline in reported experiences of discrimination may be because the rhetoric was more pronounced in the months leading up to the election. This decline also might reflect a normalizing of policy environments

and the youths' abilities to cope with the persistent anti-Latino sentiment in the political arena.

Youth openly expressed feelings of fear and anger through artwork and discussion with their peers. Younger youth often identified discrimination as a form of bullying; they discussed handling discrimination by fighting back in ways similar to those one would use to defend against a bully, which is developmentally appropriate for this age group and in line with Mellor's confrontational response (2004). Youth also utilized the self-control approach to discrimination by using their imaginations to respond to discrimination or to express their anger in response to the political climate, which is beyond their control (Mellor, 2004).

Youth discussed two main types of experiences of discrimination—discriminatory statements made by Donald Trump and direct peer discrimination. Youth frequently reported using direct confrontation as a response to peer discrimination, and typically attempted to provide education to other youth regarding documentation statuses rather than becoming aggressive or treating their peers disrespectfully. The use of direct confrontation as a response to discrimination indicates that youth are displaying elements of psychological empowerment, as youth believe they are knowledgeable with regard to the political climate and feel a sense of obligation to defend themselves and other youth from discriminatory speech (Zimmerman, 1995).

Responses to indirect discrimination tended to vary. Patterns in the younger group included using their imagination to respond to statements and contemplating using social media as a platform to share their views. Youth also indicated a desire to become politically active when they reach voting age. Many youth reported feeling frustrated because they were not able to vote.

While both controlled and confrontational approaches to discrimination were utilized among the group, almost no instances of the defensive approach were noted among participants. One youth did specify that she felt such a fear of deportation due to the discriminatory political rhetoric that she felt that she needed to be cautious about leaving her home. Reasons for the lack of defensive responses could be because the defensive strategies utilize a more internal process that might not come up in discussions, particularly with other peers present.

Additionally, youth may be hesitant to disclose defensive responses to peers and facilitators as they are protective in nature.

Limitations

Despite the fact that this study contributes to the understanding of Latino youths' responses to discrimination resulting from anti-immigrant and anti-Latino political rhetoric surrounding the 2016 presidential election, the results need to be interpreted in light of the limitations of the study. Although the timing of data collection allowed us to gain insight into the Latino youths' responses to the 2016 presidential election, this study was not designed to assess these responses. For this reason, the timing of the two assessments are not evenly spaced around the election and contain two different groups of youth. The use of separate groups of youth to understand varying attitudes at distinct points of time potentially neglects the unique characteristics that may account for any differences observed over time. While the two groups do not appear to be dissimilar on key demographic characteristics, it is always a possibility that unique characteristics may account for differences observed when comparing two samples that were not randomly assigned. Lastly, group facilitators did not specifically prompt youth regarding political topics during discussions. Therefore, all discussions regarding the election and current political rhetoric were directed by the youth; the study could have produced richer content had discussion of the political climate been emphasized by the prompts.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

This study provided timely insight into the manner in which Latino youth perceive discriminatory political rhetoric and how it may impact their mental health. The results suggest that youth are keenly aware of messages conveyed in the political arena, display strong emotional reactions, and are able to relate the larger macro discussion to interpersonal experiences of discrimination. Preventative interventions are needed to help Latino youth cope when discrimination is persistent. Although thoroughly testing these dynamics is beyond the scope

of this study, more research is needed to understand the role of political and cultural rhetoric on Latino youth experiences of discrimination, mental health, and their ability to maintain the resources they need to cope.

The results of this study suggest that discriminatory political rhetoric can affect peer interactions of Latino youth, particularly in educational settings. Latino youth can benefit from the support and acknowledgment of perceived discrimination and the effects that it can have on youth, as well as the resulting behavioral effects of feeling targeted by others. Exploration of culturally relevant programs that can buffer some of the effects of discriminatory language might be helpful for this population.

References

- Ayón, C., Marsiglia, F. F., & Bermudez-Parsai, M. (2010). Latino family mental health: Exploring the role of discrimination and familismo. *Journal of Community Psychology, 38*(6), 742–756.
- Berk, M. L., & Schur, C. L. (2001). The effect of fear on access to care among undocumented Latino immigrants. *Journal of Immigrant Health, 3*(3), 151–156.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage.
- Branscombe, N. R., Schmitt, M. T., & Harvey, R. D. (1999). Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*(1), 135–149.
- Brondolo, E., Libby, D. J., Denton, E. G., Thompson, S., Beatty, D. L., Schwartz, J., Sweeney, M., Tobin, J. N., Cassells, A., Pickering, T. G., & Gerin, W. (2008). Racism and ambulatory blood pressure in a community sample. *Psychosomatic Medicine, 70*(1), 49–56.
- Brondolo, E., Thompson, S., Brady, N., Appel, R., Cassells, A., Tobin, J. N., & Sweeney, M. (2005). The relationship of racism to appraisals and coping in a community sample. *Ethnicity and Disease, 15*(4), 14–19.
- Broudy, R., Brondolo, E., Coakley, V., Brady, N., Cassells, A., Tobin, J. N., & Sweeney, M. (2007). Perceived ethnic discrimination in relation to daily moods and negative social interactions. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 30*(1), 31–43.

- Brown, C. S., & Chu, H. (2012). Discrimination, ethnic identity, and academic outcomes of Mexican immigrant children: The importance of school context. *Child Development, 83*(5), 1477–1485.
- Capps, R., Castaneda, R. M., Chaudry, A., & Santos, R. (2007). *Paying the price: The impact of immigration raids on America's children*. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/paying-price-impact-immigration-raids-americas-children>
- Carter, R. T. (2007). Racism and psychological and emotional injury: Recognizing and assessing race-based traumatic stress. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(1), 13–105.
- Cervantes, N., Khokha, S., & Murray, B. (1995). Hate unleashed: Los Angeles in the aftermath of Proposition 187. *Chicano-Latino L. Rev., 17*, 1–23.
- Chavez, L. (2013). *The Latino threat: Constructing immigrants, citizens, and the nation*. Stanford University Press.
- Colby, S. L., & Ortman, J. M. (2015). *Projections of the size and composition of the US population: 2014 to 2060: Population estimates and projections: Current population reports* (Report No. P25-1143). U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>
- C-SPAN. (2015). *Donald Trump Presidential Campaign Announcement Full Speech (C-SPAN)* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apjNfkysjBM>
- Davis, A. (2004). Co-authoring identity: Digital storytelling in an urban middle school. *THEN: Technology, Humanities, Education, & Narrative, 1*(1), 1–12.
- Garcia-Coll, C. G., Crnic, K., Lamberty, G., Wasik, B. H., Jenkins, R., Garcia, H. V., & McAdoo, H. P. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. *Child Development, 67*(5), 1891–1914.
- Levy, D. J., Heissel, J. A., Richeson, J. A., & Adam, E. K. (2016). Psychological and biological responses to race-based social stress as pathways to disparities in educational outcomes. *American Psychologist, 71*(6), 455–473.
- Marcus, G. E., Neuman, W. R., & MacKuen, M. (2000). *Affective intelligence and political judgment*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mellor, D. (2004). Responses to racism: A taxonomy of coping styles used by Aboriginal Australians. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 74*(1), 56–71.
- Mellor, D., Merino, M. E., Saiz, J. L., & Quilaqueo, D. (2009). Emotional reactions, coping and long-term consequences of perceived discrimination among the Mapuche people of Chile. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 19*(6), 473–491.

- Pauker, K., Ambady, N., & Apfelbaum, E. P. (2010). Race salience and essentialist thinking in racial stereotype development. *Child Development, 81*(6), 1799–1813.
- Pew Hispanic Center. (2017). *Latinos and the New Trump Administration*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2017/02/23/latinos-and-the-new-trump-administration/>
- Potochnick, S. R., & Perreira, K. M. (2010). Depression and anxiety among first-generation immigrant Latino youth: Key correlates and implications for future research. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 198*(7), 470–477.
- Rogers, J., Franke, M., Yun, J. E., Ishimoto, M., Diera, C., Geller, R. C., Berryman, A., & Brenes, T. (2017). *Teaching and learning in the age of Trump: Increasing stress and hostility in America's high schools*. UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access.
- Scheve, K. F., & Slaughter, M. J. (2001). Labor market competition and individual preferences over immigration policy. *Review of Economics and Statistics, 83*(1), 133–145.
- Schuman, H., & Corning, A. (2011). Generational memory and the critical period: Evidence for national and world events. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 76*(1), 1–31.
- Swim, J. K., Hyers, L. L., Cohen, L. L., Fitzgerald, D. C., & Bylsma, W. H. (2003). African American college students' experiences with everyday racism: Characteristics of and responses to these incidents. *Journal of Black Psychology, 29*(1), 38–67.
- Umaña-Taylor, A. J., & Updegraff, K. A. (2007). Latino adolescents' mental health: Exploring the interrelations among discrimination, ethnic identity, cultural orientation, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Adolescence, 30*(4), 549–567.
- Wong, C. A., Eccles, J. S., & Sameroff, A. (2003). The influence of ethnic discrimination and ethnic identification on African American adolescents' school and socioemotional adjustment. *Journal of Personality, 71*(6), 1197–1232.
- Yonas, M. A., Burke, J. G., & Miller, E. (2013). Visual voices: A participatory method for engaging adolescents in research and knowledge transfer. *Clinical and Translational Science, 6*(1), 72–77.
- Zeiders, K. H., Doane, L. D., & Roosa, M. W. (2012). Perceived discrimination and diurnal cortisol: examining relations among Mexican American adolescents. *Hormones and Behavior, 61*(4), 541–548.
- Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 23*(5), 581–599.