

# “They Will Post a Law About Playing Soccer” and Other Ethnic/Racial Microaggressions in Organized Activities Experienced by Mexican-Origin Families

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## Abstract

Organized activities have been found to provide positive experiences for Latino adolescents to develop confidence and learn critical life skills; however, these programs are sometimes a context where youth encounter negative experiences related to ethnic/racial microaggressions (ERMs). This qualitative study explores the types of ERMs that Mexican-origin parents and adolescents encountered in their organized activities experience. Parents were mainly concerned about SB-1070 and the associated law enforcement practices that posed a threat to transporting their children to and from the organized activity site. Adolescents reported that they encountered overt (e.g., ethnic teasing) as well as covert forms of discriminatory behavior

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(e.g., implicit ethnic stereotypes) from peers and adult leaders. Attention to the processes of ERM is critical to helping practitioners promote positive intergroup relations so that more Latinos will participate and stay active in organized activities.

**Keywords**

discrimination/stereotypes, organized activities (after-school), Latinos (U.S.), adolescence

Organized after-school activities refer to a broad array of adult-supervised activities, such as sports, clubs, and performing arts, that occur in school and community settings (e.g., YMCA; Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012). These activities are touted as contexts for positive youth development and, as such, viewed as a beneficial use of youth's time after school (Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003). But, are youth's experiences in activities always positive? It is possible that the experiences of Latino adolescents living in the United States are different given that they have been historically marginalized in various settings, including schools and neighborhoods (Ko & Perreira, 2010). Latino adolescents who participate in organized activities experience positive developmental outcomes related to increased self-esteem and critical life skills (Riggs, 2006); however, this group also has the lowest participation rate nationwide compared with all ethnic groups (for a review, see Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012). Although researchers have identified logistic and cultural barriers to Latino youth's participation (e.g., cost requirements, transportation issues, parents' understanding of organized activities; Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013; Simpkins, O'Donnell, Delgado, & Becnel, 2011), few have examined the prevalence of ethnic/racial discriminatory acts, which can inhibit participation and the benefits that youth garner from such activities.

Ethnic/racial microaggressions (ERMs) refer to overt and covert ways of communicating insensitivities toward ethnic minorities that have been found to be detrimental to overall well-being (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). Studies on Latino adolescents indicate that elevated perceptions of school-based ERMs can affect critical areas of school engagement, such as academic achievement, attendance, and relationships with school personnel (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Because many adolescents participate in organized activities that are located within their schools (Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009), it is possible that adolescents also experience ERMs at their school-based activities. Adolescents who encounter ERMs in organized activities might suffer from a double negative effect such that, activity-based ERMs

will likely have the same negative consequences as school-based ERMs. In addition, ERMs may also limit potential benefits typically garnered from organized activities and in fact negatively influence adolescents' feelings and achievements in school, more broadly.

The overarching goal of the current study is to highlight parents' and adolescents' perspectives on ERMs through their personal experiences with organized activities for Mexican-origin families, the largest Latino ethnic group in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). Another goal is to examine the context of Arizona's changing immigration policy and prejudicial attitudes that may serve as a hostile environment for the Mexican community. Strong awareness of ERMs is critical to helping policymakers and practitioners promote positive intergroup relations so that more ethnic minorities will participate and thrive in organized activities.

## **Positive and Negative Experiences of Organized Activities for Latino Adolescents**

High-quality organized activities are quite effective at promoting positive development because they provide adolescents with adult mentors, skill-building activities, and opportunities for leadership (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). More specifically, school-based activities may be particularly appealing to Latino adolescents who experienced growth in social mobility by connecting with peers and teachers who often supervised these groups (Flores-González, 2000). These activities may also be perceived as mechanisms of acquiring mainstream U.S. culture as suggested by research showing that Latino foreign-born adolescents were more likely to participate in school-based activities than native-born Latino adolescents (Simpkins, O'Donnell et al., 2011).

Organized activities can promote cross-ethnic/racial friendships among diverse youth (Moody, 2001), though it is important to note that bringing together youth from various ethnic backgrounds also presents challenges. Ethnically diverse activities provide a context where discrimination can occur and interfere with the process of developing meaningful relationships with peers. For example, Southeast Asian Canadian adolescents reported being the targets of ethnic slurs, name-calling, and taunting from peers in after-school sports (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). However, recent attention has also been devoted to covert forms of discriminatory behaviors, based on the experiences of African American adolescents who attributed ethnic stereotypes as influencing their coaches to have higher expectations than those from other ethnic/racial groups, on their sports performance (Henfield, 2011). A comprehensive framework is needed to identify certain experiences with

ethnic/racial discrimination that include both overt and covert behaviors that are perceived as demeaning to Mexican-origin adolescents. We first draw attention to understanding how ethnic/racial discrimination can function at the proximal (e.g., families, organized activities) and more distal levels (e.g., local and state policies) that combine to influence individual development.

## **Orienting Frameworks: Ecological Systems Theory and ERMs**

Ecological systems theory suggests that adolescents are nested within a series of interlocking and reciprocally related systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). At the innermost level, microsystems are contexts in which adolescents interact directly with their proximal surroundings. Adolescents are embedded in several microsystems, such as organized activities and families. The mesosystem is defined as the relationship existing between a “system of two or more microsystems” and influences adolescents’ development through the transactions among these multiple settings (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 817). Moving outward to the broadest level, the macrosystem is the set of overarching policies and ideologies that can create a context within which microaggressions flourish and influence development in the lower ecological systems. Simpkins and colleagues’ research on Mexican-origin individuals shed light on how examining these various systems can unpack within-variability of families’ experiences with organized activities (Simpkins et al., 2013; Simpkins, Vest, & Price, 2011). Parents’ work schedules and adolescents’ expected household obligations complicated families’ decisions to support organized activities (Simpkins, Vest et al., 2011). Also, adolescents attributed societal discrimination of Mexicans as a barrier that limited their participation in organized activities (Simpkins et al., 2013).

Adolescents’ direct interactions with peers and leaders in organized activities can lead to potential encounters with ERMs. Sue (2010) argued that discriminatory behaviors have also evolved into more covert or subtle behaviors; thus, previous studies that mainly focus on overt forms of ERMs or “old-fashioned racism” (e.g., hate crimes, blatant discrimination) have not adequately addressed the full range of ERMs that can occur in activities (Doherty & Taylor, 2007). Microaggressions may also go undetected by the perpetrator because of unconscious bias, lack of awareness regarding racial issues, or both. Sue developed the ERMs framework to examine overt and covert forms of discrimination occurring in everyday interactions. In the ERMs framework (Sue, 2010), discriminatory behaviors are conceptualized as encompassing these three general forms: (a) microassaults, (b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations. First, microassaults consist

of discriminatory behavior intended to offend the victim, such as ethnic teasing and name-calling. Next, microinsults are reflective of covert ERMs in that the person is unaware of being insensitive toward the person's ethnic/racial background. For example, an ethnic minority may be the target of negative stereotypes or may be stigmatized because they are perceived as different from the dominant mainstream (e.g., assumption of the perpetual foreigner). Last, microinvalidations also represent unintended discriminatory behavior but differ from microinsults in that the perpetrator is unconsciously acting to deny sensitivity. One example is a store cashier who gives preferential treatment to Caucasian over ethnic minority customers.

Latino adolescents often encounter various forms of ERMs at school. For example, Latino adolescents reported being the targets of various ethnic slurs (e.g., "wetbacks," "beaners") and discriminatory remarks, such as "to go back to Mexico," from their peers at school (i.e., microassaults; Balagna, Young, & Smith, 2013). Adolescents also perceived implicit racist behavior (i.e., microinsults) from their teachers who seemed to hold negative stereotypes about Latinos having low academic skills and deviant attitudes (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Although these incidents were not specifically reported in organized activities, school-based ERMs experiences are likely to spill into the after-school context given that schools serve as a place where many adolescents participate in organized activities while also encountering the same peers and teachers from school (Mahoney et al., 2009). In fact, perceived discrimination was the most frequently reported barrier to Latino adolescents' school involvement in comparison with all other barriers (e.g., language problems; Valencia & Johnson, 2006) and this finding is especially salient considering that this population also reported more school-based discrimination than any other racial/ethnic group (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). At the same time, ERMs experienced in school-based activities could also cycle back to the school experience, as supported by research showing that Latino adolescents' elevated discrimination of peers contributed to lower school engagement (Benner & Graham, 2013). In sum, ERMs can occur in a range of overt to more covert behaviors that are perceived as offensive to ethnic minorities.

## **Arizona's Anti-Immigration Policies as a Context of Macroaggressions**

At the broad macro level, policies, laws, and societal views can create a context in which discriminatory interpersonal ERMs may flourish at the school and community levels. Quiroga, Medina, and Glick (2014) conceptualized a certain hostile environment characterized by anti-immigration

policies against Latino residents in Arizona as *macroaggressions*, which was found to have detrimental effects on the families' well-being. In the last decade, Arizona has been impacted by various state-level laws and policies (e.g., Propositions 100, 102, 200, and 203) designed to decrease undocumented immigration to the state, which culminated with the passage of SB-1070 also known as the "Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act" (Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013; Menjívar, 2014). The legislative act contains the provision that requires law enforcement officers to make a reasonable attempt to determine the person's immigration status during contact with law enforcement (Menjívar, 2014). These laws have created a hostile sociopolitical climate that makes all individuals in the Latino community vulnerable given that undocumented individuals cannot be easily classifiable and isolated from documented persons or U.S. citizens (Ayón & Becerra, 2013; Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013). As such, these laws create a context of macroaggressions in which anti-immigrant attitudes can flourish and has been argued to shape Mexican-origin adolescents' trust of adults and teachers (Gurrola, Ayón, & Salas, 2013).

## Present Study

The ERMs theoretical framework developed by Sue (2010) has been instrumental to understanding ethnic minorities' experiences with overt and covert forms of discriminatory behavior across various social settings, including college campuses and classrooms (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). This study sheds light on an unexplored context related to organized activities. Also, we draw attention to the perspectives of Mexican-origin parents and adolescents during a distinctive time and place where strong anti-immigration policies have created a hostile environment for Latinos living in the Phoenix metro area.

To adequately address the full range of experiences found in organized activities, we argue the importance of examining parents and adolescents' individual perspectives, as well as considering adolescents who have varying levels of experiences with organized activities. First, adolescents are directly participating in activities whereas parents' role is largely relegated outside of the activity in terms of providing support. Thus, parents and adolescents provide complementary perspectives that are important to gaining a full picture of families' experiences in organized activities. Next, the perspectives of adolescents who attend organized activities and those who do not attend are equally important. Unlike schools and other settings, organized activities are generally voluntary. It is possible that ERMs or the anticipation of ERMs will prompt adolescents to quit or avoid participating in organized activities.

Focusing only on youth who are currently active in an organized activity could result in an incomplete understanding of the role of ERMs in activity participation. Thus, we include both, the perspectives of those who were involved and not involved in organized activities.

## Method

### *Research Setting and Design*

Data for the current study were drawn from a broader study examining Mexican-origin adolescents' and parents' thoughts and experiences regarding organized activities. Adolescents went to schools located in three distinct neighborhoods that varied in terms of ethnic/racial composition and socioeconomic status (see Table 1). These schools were selected to recruit participants who capture variability within Mexican-origin families living in the Phoenix metro area. The student population in Applereed School tended to reflect a predominately Caucasian middle-class community, whereas the student populations in Duffie Oak and Mapleleaf schools were predominately Latino. According to the percentage of students eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch program, social class differences were also noticeable as Duffie Oak (78%) and Mapleleaf (93%) tended to have students from poor and working-class families in comparison with Applereed (21%). A few additional characteristics are worth noting in regard to the mostly Latino student population in Duffie Oak and Mapleleaf schools. The neighborhood surrounding Duffie Oak School featured a history of ethnic/racial tensions between Latinos and African Americans. Maple Leaf School featured a history of within-ethnic tensions among Mexican-origin adolescents in particular to recent immigrants and those born in the United States.

In the recruiting phase, our research team used purposive sampling techniques to select Mexican-origin seventh-grade adolescents at their schools. These adolescents were given English and Spanish letters at school describing the study for them to share with their families. We contacted families and asked them for general information used for participant selection. The sample was stratified based on adolescents' (a) school (i.e., 30% of participants from each school), (b) gender, and (c) fall participation in an organized activity (i.e., 50% currently participated). Adolescents who did and did not participate in an organized activity within each school were matched on four key characteristics that predicted participation in organized activities—grade point average (GPA), language preference, proximity to the school, and nativity (when possible)—in order to control for selection effects. For example, within Applereed School we selected an adolescent who was active and

**Table 1.** Participant and School Demographic Features.

Participants	Aplereed		Duffie Oak		Mapleleaf		Total	
	Parent	Teen	Parent	Teen	Parent	Teen	Parent	Teen
Median family income <sup>a</sup>	US\$83,000		US\$46,000		US\$32,000		—	
Student ethnic composition <sup>b</sup>	16% Hispanic, 60% White		88% Hispanic, 6% White		91% Hispanic, 4% White		—	
% students qualified for the Free and Reduced Lunch program <sup>b</sup>	21%		78%		93%		—	
Gender (n female, n male)	10, 0	6, 4	12, 0	6, 6	11, 1	6, 6	33, 1	18, 16
Age in years	39.5	12.4	38.7	12.4	40.1	12.3	39.4	12.4
Language preference								
English only	8	10	2	5	0	2	10	17
Spanish only	2	0	7	5	9	1	18	6
Both	0	0	3	2	3	9	6	11
Birthplace								
Born in Mexico and immigrated to United States after 12 years	2	0	7	0	9	0	18	0
Born in Mexico and immigrated to United States before 12 years	1	1	3	3	0	0	4	4
Born in United States	7	9	2	9	1	12	10	30
Education								
Below high school	0	—	1	—	3	—	4	—
Graduated high school	4	—	7	—	4	—	15	—
Attended college	5	—	2	—	1	—	8	—
Postsecondary education	1	—	0	—	0	—	1	—
Working status								
Both non-working parent	0	—	1	—	1	—	2	—
One parent part-time	0	—	1	—	0	—	1	—
Both parents part-time	0	—	1	—	0	—	1	—
One parent full-time	3	—	4	—	3	—	10	—
One full-time and one part-time	1	—	2	—	6	—	9	—
Both parents full-time	6	—	3	—	1	—	10	—
Median family income	US\$50,000-US\$59,000		US\$20,000-US\$29,999		US\$10,000-US\$19,999		—	

<sup>a</sup>Data from the 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for the 2010 U.S. Census.<sup>b</sup>Data from the 2010-2011 Common Core Data at the National Center for Education Statistics.



another adolescent who was not active in an organized activity but were most similar according to the four adolescent characteristics listed. For each adolescent who was selected we requested the adolescent's and his or her mother's participation in the study because mothers are often the primary caregiver (Parra-Cardona, Córdova, Holtrop, Villarruel, & Wieling, 2008), but some fathers also participated. Overall, the study included 34 adolescents ( $M$  age = 12.4 years) and their parents ( $M$  age = 39.4 years). There were slightly more female ( $n = 18, 52.9\%$ ) than male ( $n = 16, 47.1\%$ ) adolescents (see Table 1 for all demographic information). Many adolescents' activity participation changed over the course of the 2009-2010 school year and resulted in a diverse set of participation experiences.<sup>1</sup> Most of the adolescents participated in sports (48.9%), followed by creative arts (e.g., music, drama, 20.9%), clubs (e.g., newspaper, 16.3%), and faith-based activities (4.6%).

## Procedures

Throughout the academic school year, participants were interviewed during January, May, and June to examine activity participation in fall 2009, spring 2010, and summer 2010. Interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language (English or Spanish) and mainly took place at their home, though some were conducted at libraries. The multi-ethnic team of interviewers (mostly Mexican or Caucasian with one African American individual) included native Spanish speakers who lived in participants' local communities. Our research team took several steps to ensure that interview protocols were consistently followed as a way of establishing trustworthiness of the data. Prior to meeting with participants, interviewers attended 2 days of training that covered interview ethics, practice sessions, and effective communication techniques used to elicit responses. Interviews with adolescents were primarily conducted in English (except one was in Spanish). For parents, 17 interviews were conducted in English, while the remaining half of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Translation of Spanish interviews followed a six-step process to ensure accuracy in translation and cultural meaning (Simpkins, Vest et al., 2011).

The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to assess multiple aspects of participants' experiences with organized activities (e.g., reasons for joining, supports to participation, positive experiences); however, we provide only the central questions that informed the current findings. Participants discussed experiences in multiple activities across the three interview sessions. At any one interview session, participants were encouraged to focus on one activity, though they had more time to discuss other activities, such as activities they thought about joining or quitting. All questions were open-ended and follow-up

questions were prepared to elicit further details about participants' possible encounters with ERMs. In every interview, conversations with participants always began with a definition of organized activities: (a) adult leader, (b) meets at a regularly scheduled time, and (c) generally takes place at school or community centers (e.g., YMCA, boys and girls club). First, our interview team asked general questions about whether negative experiences were encountered in organized activities to adolescents (e.g., "Have you gotten mad, sad, or frustrated at [activity]?") and parents (e.g., "What are some of the challenges or struggles you or your child have faced concerning [activity]?"). The interview transcript for adolescents also included a question that asked them to relate their ethnic identity with activity experience (e.g., "Do you think that being Mexican changed how people treated you there?"). Participants who mentioned having ERMs experiences were sometimes probed to elaborate on their experiences (e.g., "Did you come across stereotypes?" "Did the incident have anything to do with being Mexican?"). As participants provided their responses, our interview team made every effort to be active listeners and probe for additional clarification. The Institutional Review Board at the authors' host institution (at the time that data collection took place) approved the study.

### *Data Analysis*

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (QCA) that focuses on the content or contextual meaning of the text (Krippendorff, 2012). This analysis was combined with a hybrid inductive-deductive approach of using the data to identify certain themes and use prior research to test theory (Braun & Clark, 2006). As proscribed in QCA, several aspects of grounded theory techniques were used to analyze the data: (a) open and focused coding to categorize data, (b) memo writing, and (c) constant comparison to make systematic comparisons within participants across interviews (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, a multi-ethnic research team led by the first author and three other authors followed a systematic process of discussing each potential code until the team agreed on the use and definition of codes before applying each code in the transcripts (i.e., consensus coding). In the first stage of developing the coding manual, we conducted open coding to "break" the data into manageable segments for interpretive purposes. The four authors independently coded hundreds of pages of interview data to identify instances where participants described encounters with general ethnic/racial discrimination, which resulted in a collection of coded "chunks." Next, the four authors met several times throughout the constant comparative phase to analyze coded materials and discussed the interpretive meanings of these chunks through an iterative process of inductive and deductive thinking that involved relating codes (categories

and properties) to the coding categories informed by prior ERMs research (Sue, 2010). Theoretical memos were presented for interpretive analysis and resulted in an agreed upon coding manual that specified coding categories grouped by ERMs constructs (e.g., microinsult) and subcodes (e.g., teasing).

The next phase was to reassign participants' words and statements to specific constructs conceptualized in the coding manual (i.e., focused coding). In the process of coding transcripts, our research team used a web-based software tool called *Dedoose* that helps manage, code, and analyze qualitative data (SocioCultural Research Consultants, 2014). The first and last author relied on the coding manual to independently code a quarter of the transcripts and then discussed differences in the attribution of codes until >0.75 agreement was achieved (Fleiss, 1971). The remaining interviews were independently coded using the agreed upon coding scheme (i.e., consensus coding).

## Results

This section sheds light on the experiences of Mexican-origin families living in the Phoenix metro area and how a time of increasingly punitive immigration policies has fostered a context where ERMs occur in adolescents' on-site experiences of organized activities. The interviews were not specifically designed to prompt or probe into these categories, and thus the themes emerged organically from participants' responses, which is an indication of how important these experiences were for the study participants. The article refers to participants using their assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

### *Macroaggressions Limiting Engagement in Organized Activities*

Among the 34 parents who were asked about the challenges of supporting their adolescents' experiences in organized activities, seven parents were particularly concerned about anti-immigration policies, including SB-1070 and law enforcement related to this legislation. More specifically, discussions regarding these matters were more salient among parents who resided around the predominately Mexican-origin neighborhood areas (Duffie Oak,  $n = 3$ ; Maple Leaf,  $n = 4$ ) whereas there were no mentions among parents who lived in the largely Caucasian and more middle-class neighborhood surrounding Applereed School. All the parents who shared these anti-immigration concerns were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States as adults (20 years old and above) with the exception of one mother (i.e., immigrated when 8 years old).

Parents reported that their children mainly learned about SB-1070 at school. A mother at Duffie Oak said, "my daughter told me that law, SB-1070 was just passed on Tuesday and the whole class talked about that.

She [daughter] was really mad because of this.” Furthermore, parents were concerned about the law enforcement aspects of SB-1070 or “the law” as many participants were accustomed to calling it, a term that encompasses the different immigrant-hostile laws that the state has passed within the past 10 years. As parents were concerned about law enforcement in their neighborhoods, they were also distressed about the safety aspects of arranging transportation to school and recreational areas. One mother at Maple Leaf said,

Something that we, all of the Hispanics are going through right now is the law the governor signed. We are already thinking that the police will stop us and we don't know what they will ask us. The kids come to school and we have a cop in front of us.

Another Maple Leaf parent compared her experiences of supporting her child's participation before and after approval of SB-1070:

Before, I even took them [children] by myself to the park, or the library, or wherever. And now I stop myself because I do not want to be driving. With the laws, that is what is affecting me a lot.

The following excerpt from a mother and her child demonstrates the sense of fear that was instilled in how SB-1070 was carried out by law enforcement. This mother at Duffie Oak said,

We don't get out much. We fear the police that's why we don't go out. Right now, many parents worry about the police and how things are, that they will get us or put us in jail and deport us. She [daughter] said that some days immigration [immigration enforcement agents] can come to her school.

The mother's daughter, Camila, was interested in joining the school soccer team because there were many girls who could speak Spanish, as opposed to basketball where “they [girls] do not talk Spanish.” However, she decided *against* this opportunity because she was concerned about discriminatory laws. In our discussion with Camila:

- Camila: Sometimes because of the *laws* it is going to be like no more Mexicans here, but more like American people.
- Interviewer: Do you think that people are not going to want to be out there [playing soccer]?
- Camila: Yes, kind of scared of about getting [into soccer]. I am not really a white person and I was born in Mexico. They [government] will post a law about playing soccer.

Camila discussed how being of Mexican descent could possibly jeopardize her participation in the soccer team because of “the laws” or anti-immigration initiatives related to SB-1070. From her perspective, the law had authority to limit people “born in Mexico” from being allowed to play soccer. The stories revealed that SB-1070 instilled a sense of vulnerability to law enforcement surveillance of neighborhood areas—school and community locales—which are two of the central venues for organized after-school activities. These concerns played a role in shaping parents’ ability to coordinate transportation for their adolescents to and from the organized activity site, ultimately affecting the likelihood of adolescents’ participation in organized activities and limiting their opportunities for positive development.

### *ERMs Experienced in Organized Activities*

A total of five of 34 adolescents reported experiencing ERMs, and all incidents were reported in the context of sports. Table 2 displays their profiles with information on their activity history, forms of ERMs encountered (e.g., microinsult, microassault), and level of involvement in the activity. These adolescents were either enrolled in Applereed or Duffie Oak schools, but not Mapleleaf, the school located in a predominantly Latino and poorer or working-class neighborhood. This section is organized to present overviews of Applereed and Duffie Oak schools followed by adolescent profiles within each of these schools.

*Applereed school.* The adolescent sample that attended Applereed School represented the numeric ethnic minorities in the predominately Caucasian student body. We present cases of the three adolescents who talked specifically about their ERMs encounters in organized activities.

*Adrianna.* Adrianna was a 12-year-old girl who played softball since she was 8 years old. We observed that the softball team was mainly comprised of Caucasian peers, including the coach. Although Adrianna had many friends in the school softball team, she revealed that she encountered negative ethnic stereotypes about Mexicans from her teammates. Adrianna explained,

Like yesterday we were talking about one of the coaches that got a better job offer and one of the girls goes to my friend and she goes he [coach] only quit because of you. And I said, “what about me?” And they said, “Coach quit because me and you are Mexican.”

Prior to knowing that the softball coach left the team for a better job offer, Adrianna and her teammates discussed why the softball coach was not with

**Table 2.** Profile of the Five Adolescents Who Mentioned Encountering ERMs During On-Site Experiences.

Pseudonym	Profile	Fall activity	Spring activity	Summer activity	Level of involvement in activity <sup>a</sup>	ERMs encountered in activity <sup>a</sup>
Adrianna	Female Age 12 Born in the United States Applereed School	Softball	Softball	Softball <sup>b</sup>	Softball: Plays 5 days per week (3 hr)	Microinsult: Encountered statement from teammates that reflect implicit negative ethnic stereotype
Christian	Male Age 13 Born in the United States Duffie Oak School	Non-active	Non-active	Volleyball <sup>b</sup>	Volleyball: Plays 4 days per week (4 hr)	Microinvalidation: Perceived that he was judged based on his ethnic heritage
Paul	Male Age 13 Born in the United States Applereed School	Wrestling	Wrestling Softball	Wrestling <sup>a</sup>	Wrestling: Plays 5 days per week (2 hr)	Microassault: Encountered situation where teammates gave him an ethnic nickname
Luis	Male Age 12 Born in the United States Duffie Oak School	Basketball <sup>b</sup>	Basketball	Basketball Judo	Basketball: Plays 4 days per week (3 hr)	Microinvalidation: Perceived that coach used race as a criteria to determining who got to play in the school games
Victor	Male Age 13 Born in the United States Applereed School	Running <sup>a</sup> Wrestling Soccer club	Running <sup>a</sup> Wrestling Soccer club	Running Wrestling Soccer club	Track: Plays 2 days per week (3 hr) Soccer club: Plays 15 hr a week	Microassault: Target of ethnic teasing to infer a negative attribute about his ethnic heritage Microinsult: Encountered statement from teammates that reflects implicit positive ethnic stereotype

Note. Of the overall sample of 34 adolescents, five adolescents mentioned ERMs in their on-site experiences. ERM = ethnic/racial microaggression.

<sup>a</sup>Activity and interview period that the participant mentioned some encounter with ERMs.

the team. Some of her teammates told Adrianna that he quit because of her Mexican-origin background. This comment suggests that there was something undesirable about Adrianna's Mexican-origin background that would drive her coach to quit. In reflecting on this experience, Adrianna seemed to be unoffended by the verbal exchange because she said that it was "not a problem" and "it is just like one big joke." Adrianna also indicated that these offensive comments about ethnic stereotypes were commonplace among her softball teammates because they "like to joke about everything like about our races and our background." Adrianna also felt that her softball experiences already taught her how to "respect everybody" and "not get upset and just like let everything be." The experiences of being part of the softball team helped her to understand the importance of respecting people's differences as a possible way of managing conflicts.

*Paul.* With no prior wrestling experience, Paul (13 years old) joined the wrestling team in the fall and continued to participate throughout the school year. He was mainly attracted to the wrestling team because he had many friends who were in the team and they frequently "hung out after practice." Paul was coached by a Caucasian male, but acknowledged the wrestling team's ethnic/racial diversity that was primarily composed of "white people and Mexicans and then one black kid." Paul recalled a time when his teammates were engaging in ethnic name-calling (microassault) by giving "everybody the most Mexican nickname." They called him, "Paco" or "taco with a 'P'"—a nickname derived from a combination of his name and the word "taco." Paul reported that, "he didn't know how that happened but that is what they started calling me." He indicated that his teammates gave him that nickname without his approval. He also clarified the ethnic nature of the nickname by indicating that, "if I was not Mexican, there is no way they would have called me 'Paco'." Paul was quite committed to wrestling and did not want to quit despite these negative experiences.

*Victor.* Victor was mainly attracted to joining the cross-country team because he excelled at running in his physical education (P.E.) class. In addition, Victor enjoyed playing for a soccer club that was held at a nearby community center. In an experience reflecting microinsults, Victor described a time when his community center teammates implied negative "stereotypes about Mexicans." Victor's teammates also played in the school soccer team and told him, "We need you. We are the only ones that know you are really good at soccer." He reported that his teammates pressured him to also join the school soccer team because there were "no Mexicans" in the school soccer team. In response, Victor told them that, "I do not do soccer. I am

cross-country.” However, his teammates told Victor that he should “join soccer with all your people [Mexicans].” Victor questioned their comments by challenging them to recruit Aztec Indians into the school soccer team because they “used to hunt and run every time.” In this instance, Victor responded back by deploying stereotypes about Aztec Indians.

Victor also described a separate incident that reflected a more overt form of ERMs (microassault) related to ethnic teasing. We observed that Victor’s cross-country team had mostly Caucasian peers and was coached by a Caucasian male. His school cross-country teammates told him that he is “fast because you are Mexican. You just jump the border wall.” This presumed teasing reflects the negative stereotype that Mexicans are prone to being fast because they are accustomed to crossing the “border wall” that separates the United States and Mexico. In reflecting on this experience, Victor felt discouraged as demonstrated by his response that his “teammates were pretty mean” and that “a lot of people think that soccer is just for Mexican people.” In our follow-up interview, Victor indicated that he wanted to change “from cross-country to soccer instead,” though he did not specifically cite peer pressure as his reason for doing so.

*Duffie Oak School.* The adolescent sample that attended Duffie Oak School were part of the numerical ethnic majority of the student population. Two incidences of ERMs in organized activities are presented in this section.

*Christian.* Christian talked about his experiences of being one of the few Latinos who played in a predominately Caucasian (peers and coaches) volleyball camp, “I felt I was the only one, I felt like people were looking at me weird and talking behind my back.” From his perspective, Christian was concerned about the pressure of people evaluating him because of his Mexican-origin background. He added, “It did not get to me. This camp is not for judging people, it is for volleyball only.” Christian expressed hope that he was evaluated based on the merits of his volleyball performance rather than his ethnic/racial background. The example reflected a microinvalidation encounter where the individual perceives being judged based on his or her ethnicity.

*Luis.* Luis joined the Duffie Oak basketball team at the beginning of the school year. His reasons for joining basketball were to be more involved at school. Although he enjoyed making new friends in the team, Luis was particularly concerned about the head basketball coach who seemed to favor the African American players. The basketball team had a “Black [head] coach and quite a few team players who were Black,” though surrounding the head



coach were also Latino adults in the coaching staff. Luis perceived that his head coach was prejudiced because he mainly let the African Americans play in the school games, while leaving “the majority, the Latinos, aside.” This comment reflected Luis’ perceptions that being Latino limited his opportunities to play in the school games. The example reflected a microinvalidation encounter where the individual perceives the lack of equal opportunities because he or she belongs to a different ethnic/racial group. Luis discussed that he was frustrated and was tempted to quit on numerous occasions, but his mother encouraged him to stay. Luis said that he managed to “stick” with basketball through the end of the school year because he “had to learn to control it (his anger).” After the school year ended, he quit playing for the school basketball team.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe ERMs in the context of organized activities from the perspectives of Mexican-origin families. The ERM framework developed by Sue (2010) was instrumental to understanding how macroaggressions (e.g., laws, policies) may foster a context where ERMs can shape interactions within organized activity settings (Quiroga et al., 2014). Adolescents not only experienced blatant and overt ERMs (e.g., ethnic/racial name-calling and teasing) but also were the victims of covert ERMs. Because ERMs often occur at the subconscious level, it is critical to unpack and interpret the hidden meanings behind these subtle manifestations of discrimination. We discuss the implications of our findings with attention to how the study of ERMs can build and modify previous research on organized activities.

### *Macroaggressions—SB-1070 Legislation and Immigration Enforcement*

Parents were mainly concerned about SB-1070, an all-encompassing term that refers to law enforcement practices in the Phoenix area, which instilled in parents a fear of traveling to neighborhood areas to support their children’s activities participation. Although these concerns were not shared by a majority of the parents, we note that these apprehensions tended to be salient among parents residing in the predominately Latino neighborhoods as opposed to those living in the more middle-class neighborhoods. A major controversy of the Arizona bill is that it gave officers considerable latitude to arrest individuals who appeared “suspicious,” meaning, that they could be undocumented, and as such encouraged racial profiling of Latinos and other ethnic minorities

(Nier, Gaertner, Nier, & Dovidio, 2012). In fact, Quiroga and colleagues (2014) examined Latino adults' experiences during the time that SB-1070 was nearly passed and found that foreign-born adults, regardless of citizenship or legal status, were more likely to express negative perspectives of anti-immigration policies in comparison with U.S. born Latino adults.

We provide caution that the sample's concerns regarding anti-immigration initiatives and its associated law enforcement should be contextualized according to this specific time period (January 2009 to June 2010) when SB-1070 was debated and at the height of its passage. It will be difficult to put into context of how families' experiences (or lack of) with organized activities have changed over time after the law took full effect. However, most of these laws are still in effect today, which creates a singularly and continued hostile context for immigrants, especially Latinos (Menjívar, 2014). Thus, future studies should consider using longitudinal data to investigate the extent that ERMs have been encountered in organized activities throughout various implementation stages of SB-1070's passing.

### *On-Site Experiences: Encounters With Microassaults, Microinsults, and Microinvalidations*

Our findings indicate that a number of adolescents reported encounters with ERMs in their organized activities, though it is important to acknowledge that they did not represent the majority of our sample. Adolescents brought up their concerns during the interviews even when unprompted, which reflects deep concerns and, therefore, compelling evidence that ERMs are present, and hindered their experiences. First, there were adolescents who experienced microassaults in the form of ethnic name-calling and teasing. Although participants did not report being called the more common pejoratives for Mexicans or Latinos (e.g., wetbacks) as reported in past research (Balagna et al., 2013), one adolescent provided unique perspective on how a term ("taco") evolved into a personalized pejorative nickname ("Paco"). This finding provides nuanced understandings of how ethnic name-calling can also appear in hybrid forms that obscure its ethnic-based judgments. Thus, more attention is needed to understand how seemingly benign labeling that conveys discrimination to minority participants may go unnoticed among peers and leaders. Adolescents also recalled encountering ethnic teasing from peers who implied negative ethnic stereotypes, such as Mexicans who can jump the border wall. The implications of encountering these ERMs represents potential harm to the recipient who may feel marginalized, according to past research on Latino college students who encountered ethnic teasing (e.g., "Taco Bell joke, Chihuahua jokes") from their

college peers (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 670). These types of ERMs are generally considered to operate outside the conscious awareness of the perpetrator; however, the recipient may interpret the interaction as offensive (Sue, 2010).

Next, we found that adolescents only encountered ERMs in two school sites (i.e., Applereed and Duffie Oak) and not at the third school site, Mapleleaf. Applereed School is located in a middle-class neighborhood and has a predominantly Caucasian student body, whereas Duffie Oak and Mapleleaf school are both located in working-class, poor neighborhoods with a largely Latino student body; thus, socioeconomic and ethnic composition of the student body does not seem to affect the occurrence of ERMs. However, it was interesting that an adolescent from Duffie Oak perceived that his Black coach was biased against Latinos playing in the school basketball games and this concern may be emblematic of the school's history of ethnic/racial tensions between Latinos and African Americans. These findings suggest that school-based ethnic tensions can possibly spill over into the activity settings given the potential for strong intersections in similar peer groups and geographic settings (e.g., gym and playgrounds) to occur. We recommend future work that examines the ethnic/racial climate at the school site where organized activities are sometimes embedded (Greene et al., 2006). Attention should also be devoted to possible within-group tensions among certain ethnic minority populations, particularly between native and foreign-born youth. In sum, these findings suggest that school-based organized activities present research challenges that may be distinct from activities that occur in other settings, such as church and community organizations.

An unexpected finding was that an adolescent felt offended when he encountered positive ethnic stereotypes that assumed Mexicans to be naturally good at soccer. This finding sheds light on the experiences of ethnic minorities who tend to encounter positive ethnic stereotypes (e.g., Asian Americans and the model minority myth) who may be vulnerable to experiencing high pressure to conform to unrealistic expectations, which can otherwise lead to embarrassment if these expectations are not met and can have detrimental consequences for those who cannot meet expectations (Gupta, Szymanski, & Leong, 2011). Positive ethnic stereotypes may also contribute to accentuate group boundaries by highlighting the perceived differences of the ethnic group from others. These findings call for extending the ERMs framework to consider seemingly positive stereotypes as containing hidden messages that marginalize or exclude ethnic minorities.

This study's finding that adolescents' encounters with ERMs occurred exclusively in the context of school-based sport should be treated with caution as many sport participants in our sample did not report ERMs. However, there is concern given that some of the adolescents who reported ERMs came

from immigrant family backgrounds, in which sports play a large role in the positive functioning of Mexican-origin families and communities, more broadly. Sports, especially in regard to soccer, can help structure public facilities access for Mexican American players and their families, which is also crucial to building permanent social lives for immigrants (Pescador, 2004). These findings suggest future examinations of how experiences with ERMs may potentially undermine the sense of belongingness for immigrant youth.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

This study provides important insights in the nuances of ERMs encounters that occur within organized activity settings, however, these findings must be considered in light of a few limitations that also provide a few important directions for future research. A small number of participants reported ERMs, and we highlight the possibility of underreporting given that they were asked to talk about negative experiences in organized activities and challenges more generally, and not ERMs specifically. Although the qualitative method used in this study was rich and informative, we recommend future studies that examine the antecedents and consequences of ERMs on a larger scale. The first step is to develop and test survey scales that specifically measure ERMs in the context of organized activities with the help of existing quantitative ERMs scales used in past research (Sue et al., 2007). Furthermore, the types of ethnic discrimination and stereotypes that Latinos as a group encounter may differ from what other ethnic and racial groups experience. Although Latinos represent the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, there is much variability within-Latino and between-Latino ethnic subgroups (e.g., Mexicans, Cubans, Central Americans). Mexican-origin individuals tend to have lower education levels and experience lower social status than other Latino subgroups, which is related to institutional exclusion that Mexicans have experienced over generations (Telles & Ortiz, 2008), and in turn may confound the everyday effects of discrimination on activity participation. This is an important theoretical contribution we make, which future research can explore in other geographic regions and other populations.

### **Conclusion**

The increasing diversity of the U.S. population introduces more possibilities for adolescents to encounter ERMs across various social settings. Although there is substantial research documenting the motivational and beneficial aspects of organized activities, this study argues that it is also important to

gain a deeper understanding of the relational aspects of how adolescents interact with peers, especially in this increasingly diverse environment. Recently, the Migration Policy Institute highlighted the lack of meaningful connections between immigrant communities and schools where the communities are not well established and school staff may struggle to understand the unique needs of children from diverse backgrounds and connect with their parents (Adair, 2015). Leaders, families, and youth must work together to establish mutual appreciation of linguistic and cultural differences. Respect, especially in ethnically diverse activities, fosters a welcoming atmosphere and promotes positive relationships between leaders and youth (Deutsch, 2008), as well as among youth (Vest Ettekal, Gaskin, Lin, & Simpkins, in press). Our study finds that organized activities bring together individuals from diverse communities, yet these experiences can be marred by discrimination and feelings of exclusion. Youth and adult leaders must be prepared to navigate and challenge these tensions so that organized activities can provide a more inclusive environment.

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### **Note**

1. Among the 34 adolescents in our sample, 18 were active in at least one organized activity when they were recruited in fall 2009. The remaining adolescents were not active in an organized activity at the time of recruitment. However, 13 of these non-active adolescents enrolled in an organized activity at a later point and then were interviewed about their experiences. Three adolescents did not participate in an activity at any point of the school year. The analytic sample includes all 34 families.

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