

Under what circumstances does discrimination fuel civic behavior among middle and high school Latinx students?

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Background

- Latinx represent a large, rapidly increasing proportion of U.S. youth and will significantly impact civic life. Yet, little is known about Latinx adolescents' unique civic developmental experiences.
- Latinx youth experience discrimination in their daily lives. Sociopolitical development theory argues that experiences of injustice shape the civic development of ethnic minority youth.
- Some find that discrimination diminishes civic beliefs and behaviors (Ballard, 2015; Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, & Flanagan, 2008), while others show that discrimination motivates civic engagement (Hope & Jagers, 2014; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).
- The current study tests whether discrimination motivates Latinx youth civic engagement under certain conditions. We argue that internal psychological resources and ecological supports across contexts should allow Latinx youth to use experiences of discrimination to fuel greater informal helping and/or political behaviors. Findings for middle and high school Latinx youth are compared.

Method

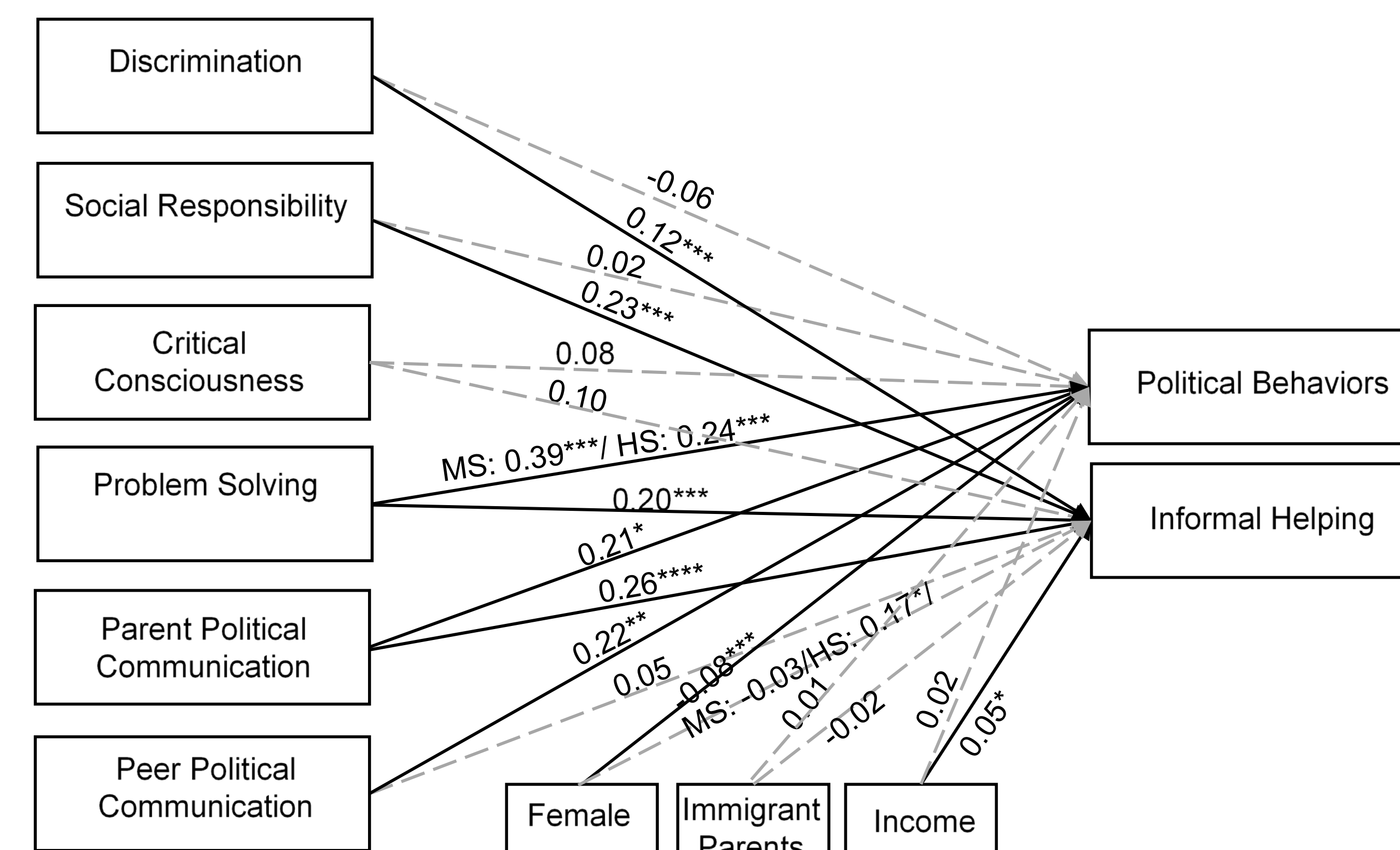
The sample includes middle ($n=256$, $M_{age}=12.2$, 55% female) and high school ($n=383$, $M_{age}=15.6$, 55% female) Latinx youth residing in California. Measures are shown in Table 1.

Construct (# items)	α	Sample Item	Response Scale
Discrimination (5)	.77	You are treated with less respect than other people.	1 = Never to 6 = Almost every day
Internal Resources			
Informal Helping (6)	.70	I have helped out around the house by doing chores such as cleaning, cooking, or yard work.	1 = Never to 5 = Very often
Political Behaviors (8)	.82	Volunteer to campaign for a political candidate.	1 = I wouldn't do this to 5 = I will do this or already have done this
Social Responsibility (4)	.79	It is important to me to make sure that all people are treated fairly.	1 = Not at all important to 5 = Very important
Critical Consciousness (3)	.78	In America, certain groups have fewer chances to get ahead.	1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree
Problem Solving (4)	.85	Create a plan to address a problem.	1 = I definitely can't to 5 = I definitely can
External Resources			
Parent Sociopolitical Communication (3)	.81	In my family, we talk about times when people are treated unfairly.	1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree
Peer Sociopolitical Communication (3)	.74	My friends and I talk about times when people are treated unfairly.	1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

Results

- Path analyses were conducted in *Mplus* with missing data estimated using FIML. The model was tested using the full sample, and multigroup analyses examined – using the adjusted chi-square test - differences across middle and high school youth (see Figure 1).
- Discrimination was positively associated with informal helping for both middle and high school youth.** Discrimination was not related to political behaviors.
- Political Behavior:** Parent communication, friend communication, and problem-solving predicted higher political behaviors. Females had lower political behaviors than males. Problem solving predicted political more strongly in middle school than high school.
- Informal Helping:** Social responsibility, parent communication, problem-solving, and critical consciousness predicted more informal helping. In high school, females had higher informal helping.

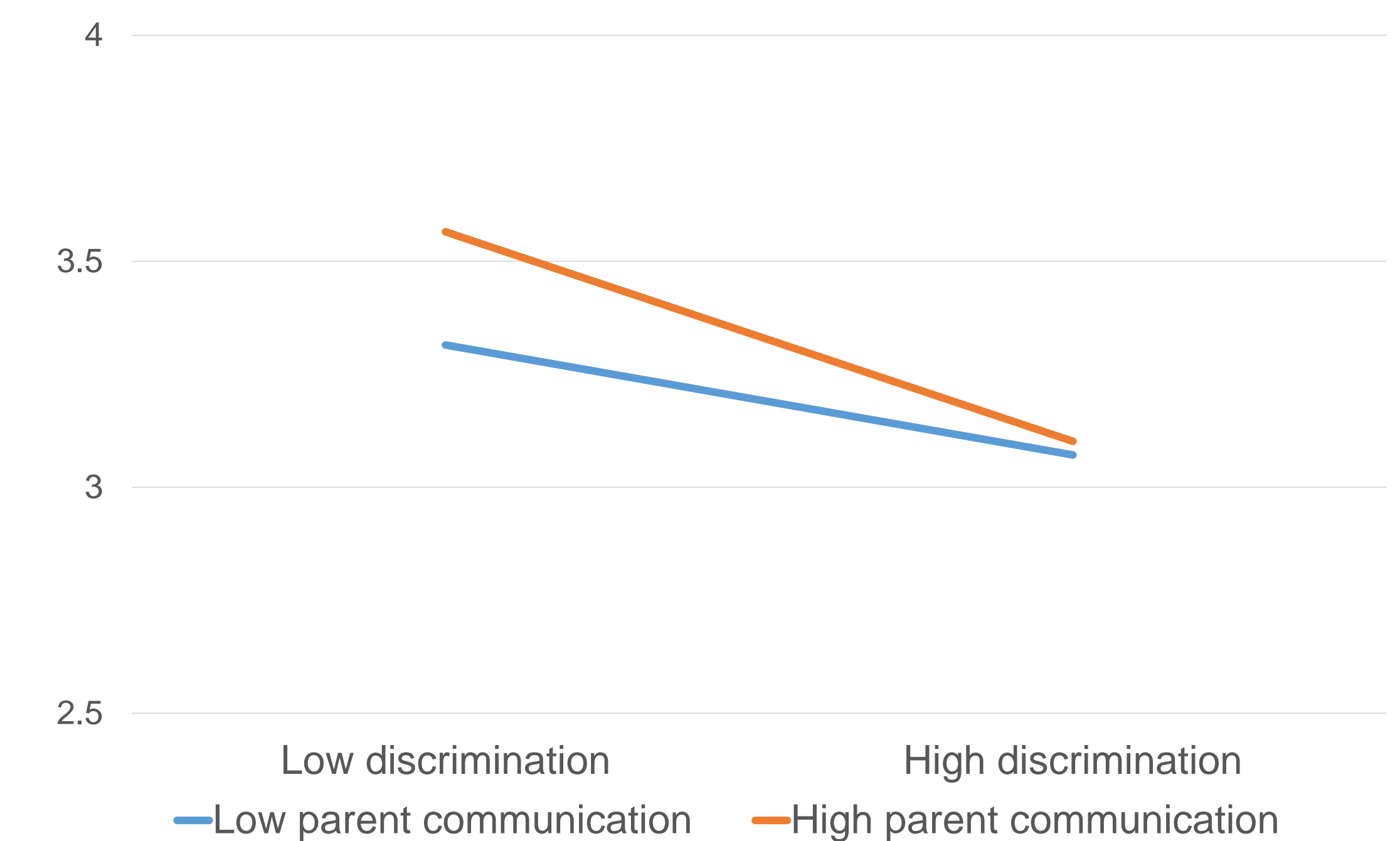
Figure 1. Path diagram of model of discrimination, internal and ecological resources predicting civic behaviors, middle and high school



Model fit: $\chi^2 (df=56)=200.652$, $p=0.00$; CFI = 0.84; RMSEA = 0.09, (90% C.I. = 0.08, 0.10); SRMR = 0.03. Note. Interactions between discrimination and each of social responsibility, critical consciousness, problem solving, parent communication, and peer communication were also included in the model, and are described in the text. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<.001$

- A significant discrimination by parent communication interaction predicted political behaviors, but only for high school youth.** As shown in Figure 2, there is a more negative association between discrimination and political behaviors for youth who experience high levels of parental political communication.

Figure 2. Interaction between Discrimination X Parent Political Communication on Political Behaviors, High School



Conclusions

- Results indicate a main effect of discrimination on informal helping that holds across ages. This aligns with previous findings (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015) and extends the finding to a younger age group. The lack of a significant association between discrimination and political behaviors may indicate that Latinx youth experiencing discrimination choose to channel their energy into more local forms of civic behavior like informal helping, compared to more formal political participation.
- Findings suggest that individual resources like problem solving, as well as ecological resources like parent and peer sociopolitical conversations, may spur Latinx youth civic engagement. These findings highlight ecological strengths and resources that promote civic engagement for Latinx youth.
- Gender differences in civic behaviors across ages suggest the importance of examining the how gender and ethnicity intersect to impact civic development.

Acknowledgements

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