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## Systems of Oppression: The Impact of Discrimination on Latinx Immigrant Adolescents' Well-Being and Development

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*Truth is on the Side of the Oppressed: Systems of Oppression Affecting BIPOC Youth*

*Special Series: Dismantling Systems of Racism and Oppression during Adolescence*

**Systems of Oppression: The Impact of Discrimination on Latinx Immigrant Adolescents' Well-Being and Development**

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With over 400 harmful immigration policy changes in the past 4 years, Latinx adolescents and families nationwide are developing within a context of extreme anti-immigrant sentiment (*Dismantling and reconstructing the U.S. immigration system: A catalog of changes under the Trump presidency*, Migration Policy Institute, 2020). This paper introduces the Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD), a conceptual model for understanding the impacts of multiple levels of discrimination on the well-being and development of Latinx immigrant adolescents. Interpersonal discrimination (*Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 2010, 32, 259), community-held stereotypes (*Social Psychology of Education*, 2001, 5, 201), institutional policies (*Children and Youth Services Review*, 2018, 87, 192), and structural practices (*Journal of Criminal Justice*, 2020, 66, 1) can negatively impact well-being and development among these adolescents. Culturally sustaining interventions, civic engagement and mobilization, and policies targeting inequitable policies and practices will provide healing and an avenue for liberation.

**INTRODUCTION**

According to recent estimates, Mexican immigrants made up 25% of the immigrant population in the United States, with Central Americans comprising 8% of the overall U.S. foreign-born population (Babich & Batalova, 2021; Batalova et al., 2021; Rosenblum & Ball, 2016). Additionally, South American Latinx immigrants comprise 7%, and Caribbean Latinx immigrants comprise another 6% of the U.S. foreign-born population (Zong & Batalova, 2018, 2019). Thus, Latinx immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean make up over 40% of the immigrant population in the United States (Budiman et al., 2020). Latinx immigrant youth may experience adolescence differently than youth who are U.S.-born or from other racial or ethnic backgrounds due to the stressful experiences that come from immigration, along with experiences of discrimination and resulting oppression (Cano et al., 2015). These stressors, in turn, are exacerbated by the current

sociopolitical climate which is characterized by anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric toward Latinx immigrants (Finley & Esposito, 2020; Torres et al., 2018). A majority of Latinx youth and families experience cultural stressors in the United States, including language barriers, experiences of discrimination, racism, violence, and criminalization (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2019).

In addition to individual stressors, the current sociopolitical climate and changes in immigration policy demonstrate how structural and institutional stressors negatively impact the lived experiences of Latinx immigrant youth and subsequently, their well-being and development. Furthermore, it is imperative to consider how discrimination intersects across individual, community, and societal levels, ultimately serving as a risk factor for increased psychological distress (Comas-Diaz, 2007; Lorenzo-Blanco & Unger, 2015). This paper introduces a conceptual model, the Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD), to

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demonstrate the intersecting levels of discrimination among Latinx immigrant adolescents and to delineate discrimination's insidious impact on well-being and development. This model is applied to Latinx immigrant adolescents who identify as Mexican and Central American origin given they constitute the majority of the Latinx immigrant population in the United States, although this model could certainly be applicable to Latinx youth of other backgrounds.

### THEORIES OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Before introducing the Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD), it is critical to discuss the adolescent developmental theories and frameworks used to inform the model. Broadly, adolescent development and outcomes are influenced by several systems, including biological, psychological, and societal systems (Newman & Newman, 2020). During adolescence, rapid biological and psychological changes are accompanied by changes in the environment as expectations and autonomy expand (Furstenberg, 2010). This period has been connected to an emergence and increased rates of, and sex differences for, depression and other mental health problems (Negri & Susman, 2011). This sensitive developmental period comes with new cognitive abilities and insights, including new understandings about oneself, society, and one's role in the community (Newman & Newman, 2020). Depending on factors such as family, cultural context, religious environment, and community, becoming a teenager can be viewed as a transition to a new, elevated status (Newman & Newman, 2020). Although broad theories of adolescent development are informative, other factors of development such as family and cultural theories may also contribute to adolescent development for Latinx immigrant youth.

### Importance of Development in Latinx Immigrant Adolescents

Despite their presence, Latinx adolescents have been inadequately, and sometimes inaccurately, represented in the developmental research (Raffaelli et al., 2005). Research on normative adolescent development is often conducted with non-Hispanic White populations, and the experiences of normative adolescent development for Latinx immigrant adolescents may be distinct (Raffaelli et al., 2005). Therefore, much work is still needed for developmental models to meaningfully

incorporate culturally relevant factors to capture some of the developmental changes associated with Latinx immigrant adolescence.

One facet of the diverse Latinx experience that is important to highlight is how families help youth learn about their ethnic and racial identity, and their membership to a Latinx ethnic identity group. Latinx adolescents learn about their Latinx identity through family ethnic racial socialization or the strategies and messages families promote that instill ethnic and racial pride through exposure to their culture (Ayón et al., 2018). Family ethnic racial socialization encourages youth to begin to construct an understanding of their family in the context of their cultural group. Research has demonstrated that this has many positive outcomes, such as strengthened ethnic identity affirmation in adolescence, academic engagement, and lower internalizing problems (Rivas-Drake et al., 2009). Ethnic racial socialization is key in helping children form a sense of self that centralizes all aspects of their identity, an often overlooked finding in previous adolescent development literature (García Coll et al., 1996).

In addition to family, other factors impact the development of identity among adolescents. In adolescence, youth are starting to understand their sense of self in comparison to those around them, such as their peers. The school environment can heighten these potential positive and negative influences, not only through peers, but through the degree a school provides a supportive and welcoming environment for Latinx youth, accepting teachers, and the inclusion of relevant cultural academic activities (Richards et al., 2007; Rivas-Drake et al., 2009). Additionally, the context of adolescents' neighborhoods and communities can impact a sense of identity. Welcoming and supportive environments that celebrate Latinx culture can be a positive force for youth, and potentially provide a protective effect.

Although there are many positive forces, such as family, that influence identity, adverse experiences, such as discrimination, have harmful effects on identity and well-being during adolescence. Among Latinx immigrant and U.S.-born Latinx adolescents, discrimination was identified as a salient stressor (Bennett et al., 2020). Intersectionality of identities may exacerbate experiences of discrimination. For example, Latinx immigrant youth who primarily spoke Spanish endorsed the use of discrimination based on their English language proficiency, migration history, and documentation status (Cervantes & Córdova, 2011). It is important

to note that U.S.-born Latinx youth also experience discrimination related to immigration vis-a-vis their immigrant parents (Cervantes & Córdova, 2011) along with harmful stereotype and harassment due to their Latinx identity. These experiences of discrimination are detrimental in adolescence as youth are starting to understand their sense of self in comparison to those around them and impact key developmental milestones, including emotional, social, and cognitive competencies. Overall, these unique sociocultural factors impact Latinx adolescent development.

### Foundational Theoretical Frameworks

A foundational theoretical framework of development is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems of Human Development which provides a framework of analysis of the interrelated nested environments that influence development, such as school, neighborhood, and peer networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). These influences of development are split up into "systems" representing a different layer of the environment during development: *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem*, and *chronosystem* development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The ecological system's theory focuses on "systems," which emphasizes how children also interact with their multiple environments during development. Influenced by Bronfenbrenner's framework, discrimination can be further expanded and explained through levels of discrimination that are embedded within a larger context.

García Coll's Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in minority children combines several existing developmental theoretical frameworks and culturally diverse models. A critical contribution of García Coll's Integrative Model is the integration of social position and stratification as interactive factors in development, rather than as additive factors in developmental models (García Coll et al., 1996). The Integrative Model proposes that the effect of social position is at the core of development and mediated through several other developmental factors (García Coll et al., 1996). Therefore, the Integrative Model provides key insights into how adolescent development can be impacted by experiences and contexts related to social position, such as discrimination, segregation, and access to quality education (García Coll et al., 1996).

Overall, these models have informed development of youth and have highlighted some of the complex developmental influences that youth

experience. However, unique sociocultural factors continue to impact Latinx adolescent development, such as racism and discrimination. By expanding on discrimination and oppression as pervading systems that Latinx adolescents experience, we attempt to create a model that further describes the unique experiences of Latinx adolescents. Given the pervasive nature of discrimination for immigrant populations, there is a continuous need to examine the impacts of discrimination among Latinx immigrant youth (García Coll et al., 1996).

### TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF DISCRIMINATION

Using past literature on developmental theoretical frameworks (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; García Coll et al., 1996) and theories of discrimination (Pincus, 1996; Thompson, 2003), this paper proposes an integrated conceptual model, the Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD), for understanding levels of discrimination among Latinx immigrant adolescents. Foundational theories of discrimination will be briefly described below to create context for the development of the model.

#### Theories of Discrimination

In order to determine the impacts of discrimination on development and well-being, it is critical to examine discrimination at multiple levels of influence. Discrimination involves differential or harmful treatment based on a minoritized identity and subsequently leads to these individuals to receive less power, resources, and opportunities (Thompson, 2003). Discrimination is multisystemic and can interact across multiple levels to maintain the status quo of oppression. Discrimination occurs through various interrelated mechanisms, including stereotyping, marginalization, and dehumanization (Thompson, 2003). This results in discrimination against particular social categories such as class, race, ethnicity, and sex/gender (Thompson, 2003) and ultimately, the "isms" of oppression (e.g., classism or racism; Thompson, 2003). In sum, discrimination leads to oppression as an outcome (Thompson, 2003). Pincus (1996) posited that there are three types of discrimination: individual, institutional, and structural discrimination, with institutional and structural discrimination embedded in institutions, policies, and practices. Thompson (2003) later proposed the Personal, Cultural, and Structural (PCS) Model, which focuses on how discrimination and resulting

oppression are embedded in individuals, community culture, and societal laws and policies. When discussing discrimination and oppression, it is important to consider intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991); Latinx immigrant adolescents have intersecting identities which may confer risk or resilience, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, nationality, and ability status.

### Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD)

The proposed model in this paper, the Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD), builds on the above frameworks by expanding on how discrimination interacts to create systems of oppression for Latinx immigrant adolescents during development. As previously mentioned, adolescence is a critical developmental period and discrimination can disrupt identity development and well-being, especially given adolescents' reliance on interpersonal interactions and support (Svetaz et al., 2000). Moreover, research has elucidated the pervasive impact of discrimination experienced in adolescence across the lifespan. In one study, racial discrimination during adolescence predicted greater psychological symptoms in adulthood (Assari et al., 2018). Although the MMOD can be applied to other developmental stages or adolescents of color, this model was created with the experiences of Latinx immigrant adolescents in mind, given their intersecting identities of developmental stage (adolescence), ethnicity (Latinx), and nationality (immigrant-born).

As illustrated in Figure 1, this model conceptualizes each level as hierarchically embedded in the next; individual-level discrimination is embedded in community contexts, community-level discrimination is embedded in institutional contexts, and institutional discrimination is embedded in structural systems. However, the model also recognizes that each level of discrimination is not mutually exclusive as demonstrated by the levels intersecting at the bottom of the figure. For example, as demonstrated in Figure 1, individual discrimination, such as derogatory jokes based on ethnicity, may stem from collective assumptions and beliefs heard in the greater community context (e.g., stereotypes in media about criminality). In turn, these forms of community discrimination are embedded within institutional and structural tiers of discrimination. For example, stereotypes commonly held in media may be a result of increased criminalization at the

border (institutional discrimination) and disproportionate policing in schools (structural discrimination). In other words, when an individual delivers an insult or a derogatory comment to a Latinx immigrant adolescent, that comment stems from assumptions and beliefs that an individual has heard in the community which is, in turn, maintained by the policies and structures that differentiate and cause harm among Latinx communities. The MMOD demonstrates that these tiers of discrimination create intersecting systems of oppression for Latinx communities. Understanding discrimination's embedded and intersectional nature can provide implications for multitiered discrimination interventions.

### APPLYING THE MULTITIERED MODEL OF OPPRESSION AND DISCRIMINATION (MMOD) TO LATINX IMMIGRANT ADOLESCENTS

Given the unique developmental trajectories of Latinx immigrant adolescents, it is important to consider how each level of discrimination can impact well-being and development. Using the MMOD as a guiding framework, each level of discrimination (individual, community, institutional, and structural) and associated impacts on well-being and development will be discussed below. Although reviewed separately, it is important to note that these levels do not exist in isolation.

#### Individual Discrimination and Development

Individual discrimination involves individual behavior that is intended to cause differential treatment or harm based on a minoritized identity (Pincus, 1996). Individual or interpersonal discrimination can be explicit and intentional, although subtle forms of discrimination can be equally as harmful (NRC, 2004). For example, individual or interpersonal discrimination can be perpetrated through microaggressions, which are defined as intentional or unintentional negative comments, insults, or derogatory statements toward minoritized individuals (Sue et al., 2007). As illustrated by the MMOD (Figure 1), individual-level discrimination is embedded within a cultural or community context as it may be based on community-wide beliefs, norms, or stereotypes (Thompson, 2003). Therefore, it is also important to conceptualize discrimination as an interactive process between individuals and the contexts in which they reside.

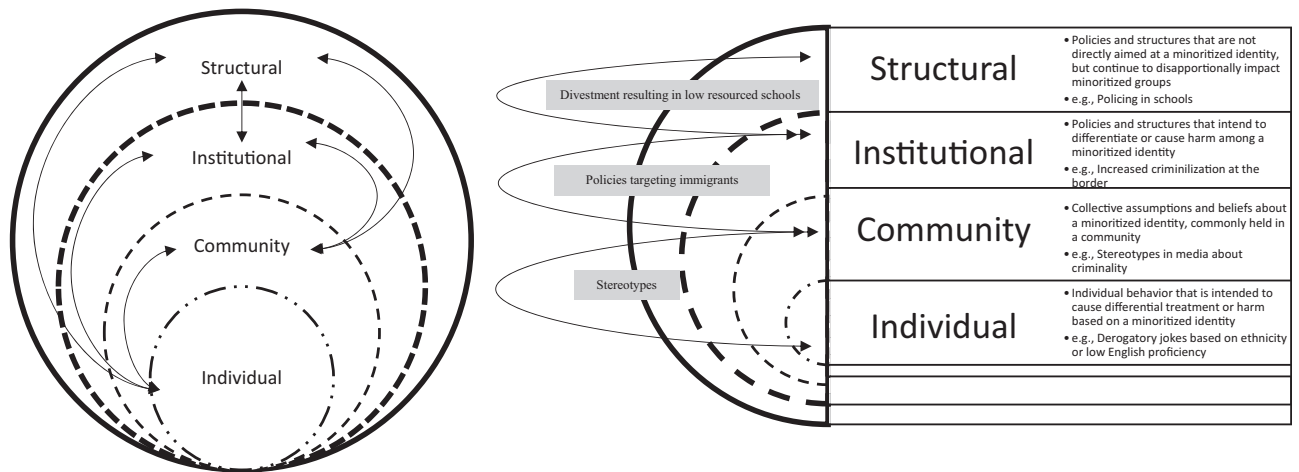


FIGURE 1 The Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD) among Latinx Immigrant Adolescents. *Note.* As demonstrated by the figure, each level of discrimination is embedded in a larger context while simultaneously intersecting across multiple levels. The second model provides a magnified look at each level of discrimination and a salient example of each. Each arrow demonstrates how each level of discrimination influences the next.

There is a breadth of literature documenting the experiences of perceived interpersonal discrimination on well-being and development among Latinx youth. Experiences of interpersonal discrimination can impact key developmental trajectories and impact psychological and physiological outcomes (Pachter & García Coll, 2009). Specifically, among Latinx adolescents, instances of interpersonal discrimination are associated with lower self-esteem, depressive symptoms, lower academic performance, decreased prosocial behaviors, and physical symptoms (Davis et al., 2016; Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007; Zeiders et al., 2013). Research has suggested that interpersonal discrimination may have a greater impact on development among U.S.-born Latinx adolescents compared to Latinx immigrant adolescents (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). Exposure to stress in the United States over time may explain worse psychological outcomes in later generations of Latinx communities, particularly Latinx adolescents (Teruya & Bazargan-Hejazi, 2013). However, immigrant adolescents may face more acculturative stress compared to later generations and these experiences have been linked to poor mental health outcomes (Sirin et al., 2013). Hence, as Latinx immigrant adolescents begin to acculturate to U.S. society, they may become especially vulnerable to the impacts of individual-level discrimination (Davis et al., 2016). It has also been argued that Latinx immigrant populations may not be aware of their racial hierarchy within the United States (Tummala-Narra & Cladius, 2013) and immigrants become more aware of what constitutes

discrimination the longer they live in the country (Tuppat & Gerhards, 2020).

Research has demonstrated that Latinx immigrant youth experience discrimination primarily in the school context, with peers and teachers as the common perpetrators of discriminatory language and actions (Ayón, 2016; Córdova & Cervantes, 2010; Rodriguez, 2021). Although peer and adult discrimination was not linked to internalizing outcomes in one specific study (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013), Latinx immigrant adolescents still experience the insidious impact of interpersonal discrimination, including derogatory jokes due to their ethnicity, low English proficiency, or immigration status (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010; Garza Ayala, 2022) and racially charged language from teachers (Rodriguez, 2021). Discrimination perpetuated by peers may be particularly insidious, as peer discrimination has been found to impact emotional well-being over time, risky behaviors, and academic achievement (Delgado et al., 2019; Greene et al., 2006). Given the importance of peers in adolescent development, discrimination perpetuated by peers may cause feelings of marginalization and changes in physiological responses to stress (Cavanaugh et al., 2018). Peers can also engage in within-group discrimination, and studies have shown that U.S.-born Latinx adolescents discriminate against Latinx immigrant adolescents due to English-speaking ability, documentation status, and generational status (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010). Related to the peer setting, Latinx adolescents also experience interpersonal discrimination or vicarious discrimination in online settings (e.g., reading

an offensive post), including text messages and social media (Tynes et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015). Similar to other forms of individual discrimination, online racial discrimination was related to a host of negative psychological outcomes in Latinx adolescents (Tynes et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015).

Discrimination by teachers can also impact Latinx immigrant adolescents' well-being. Discrimination in school contexts is linked to lower cognitive, academic, and emotional competencies, including lower academic outcomes for Latinx adolescents and decreased sense of school belonging among school-age Latinx children (Brown & Tam, 2019; Delgado et al., 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2014). Latinx immigrant adolescents reported that teachers have certain negative expectations toward success for Latinx immigrant students and joke about students being in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010). Recent studies have demonstrated that discrimination by teachers and school staff can heighten student-teacher conflict and is associated with both internalizing and externalizing symptoms among Latinx adolescents (Bennett et al., 2020). These different types of individual discrimination can be particularly harmful for Latinx immigrant adolescents as they form their sense of ethnic identity, as it may make them question or alter their budding understanding of their identities (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). If youth are exposed to damaging discriminatory messages about their Latinx immigrant identity, then it will, over time, inform their self-concept and how they perceive themselves and their value in society (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Discrimination can be especially harmful in middle adolescence as it coincides with key transitions (e.g., high school) and may have a detrimental impact on school belonging and academic achievement, engagement, and motivation (Benner & Graham, 2011; Benner et al., 2018). As young adults, experiences of discrimination may contribute to relationship distress (Killoren et al., 2020) and other social difficulties.

Finally, it is important consider the impact of colorism as a form of interpersonal discrimination. Colorism refers to the discrimination and unfair treatment individuals face due to their skin tone, in which individuals with lighter skin tones tend to receive preferential treatment and acceptance that individuals with darker skin tones do not (Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019). The roots of Latinx colorism can be traced back to Spanish conquest, colonization, and slavery, which resulted in racial stratification that favored White individuals and

discriminated against Black and Indigenous individuals (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014). The research on colorism is scant within adolescent populations (Delgado et al., 2019); however, a recent meta-analysis documented the damaging impact of colorism on students of color, including Latinx youth (Crutchfield et al., 2022). It is particularly important to consider colorism as an oppressive "ism" of discrimination (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014).

The impacts of individual discrimination on adolescent development are well-documented and far-reaching (Pachter & García Coll, 2009). The individual level of discrimination is considered the crux of the MMOD; it is the tier which is ultimately impacted by the intersecting forces of community, institutional, and structural discrimination. Individual discriminatory behavior does not develop in isolation, and it is critical to consider the context in which it developed.

### Community Discrimination and Development

Community discrimination includes collective assumptions and beliefs about a minoritized identity, commonly held by a community (Thompson, 2003). For Latinx communities, this could be community-held stereotypes about Latinx individuals being "lazy," "poor," "criminals," "docile," and "lacking ambition" (Padilla, 2001). This creates an "Us versus Them" paradigm, fueling xenophobia and anti-Latinx rhetoric. Identifying as both Latinx and an immigrant may further deepen the impact of community-based stereotypes and can permeate community spaces such as schools and the media (Erba et al., 2019; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). A final form of community-level discrimination includes statistical discrimination and profiling, which is when individuals or communities use beliefs about a certain group to make decisions about individuals from that minoritized group (NRC, 2004). The MMOD (Figure 1) illustrates that individual-level discrimination is embedded in norms and assumptions held in the cultural fabric of communities; therefore, it is crucial to understand that interpersonal discrimination may be a direct result of commonly held community biases or stereotypes about Latinx immigrants.

Decades of research has suggested that communities hold certain stereotypes about Latinx communities, including that Latinx individuals take jobs away from American citizens, are undereducated, cannot or do not speak English, and are on welfare (NHMC, 2012; Padilla, 2001). Stereotypes and generalizations about Latinx adolescents are

also prevalent in community spaces. Latinx adolescents report being followed around by employees and targeted by police officers because of the stereotypical belief that Black and Brown adolescents are violent (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Latinx immigrant first- and second-generation youth may face comments based on immigration status. For example, Latinx youth have been questioned about their parent's immigration status, called "María," or harassed by adults calling these youth, "smelly Mexicans" (Ayón & Philbin, 2017). Community discrimination can lead to internalized racism or colonized mentalities (e.g., internalized attitudes that uphold colonialism and perceived inferiority of minoritized individuals) among BIPOC communities (David & Okazaki, 2006). Internalized racism pressures BIPOC individuals to accept and believe community-held stereotypes, leading to hopelessness and resignation, thereby strengthening the insidious cycle of discrimination (Jones, 2000).

Stereotypes about Latinx students are perpetuated in the school environment. Researchers found that Latinx adolescents are more likely to be perceived as low achievers and disengaged in school (Hudley & Graham, 2001). This is further exacerbated by teachers' perceptions that Latinx adolescents are "bad kids" (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004) and stereotypes that Latinx parents are uninvolved in their child's education (Ho & Cherng, 2018). These stereotypes can lead to biased school practices toward Latinx students such as automatic placement in remedial classes, assigning grades that are discrepant to actual performance, and avoiding contact with parents (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010; Guyll et al., 2010). Research demonstrates teacher stereotypes and differential treatment is related to lower academic outcomes, behavioral symptoms, and poor emotional well-being (Delgado et al., 2019; Guyll et al., 2010). Discrimination in schools can also impact adolescents' beliefs about attainment of future goals, such as college, based on negative stereotypes of Latinx individuals as low achievers and misbehaved (Carey, 2019).

The media plays a critical role in disseminating stereotypes about the Latinx immigrant community. Media tends to portray Latinx individuals as gardeners, maids, or criminals (NHMC, 2012), which can lead to negative self-attitudes about their Latinx identity (Tukachinsky et al., 2017). Moreover, Latinx individuals are more likely gain media coverage when focusing on topics such as immigration or criminality (Sui & Paul, 2017), which was exacerbated by the Trump administration's depiction of immigrants (Silber Mohamed &

Farris, 2020). Media perceptions of Latinx individuals may impact development among Latinx adolescents by impacting self-esteem, identity development, and standards of beauty and sexuality among Latina adolescents (Sousa & Ramasubramanian, 2017). Stereotypes do not only influence unfair practices in school and community spaces, but may eventually lead students to internalize negative views of themselves and eventually engage in self-fulfilling prophecies (Guyl et al., 2010).

Colorism is also embedded within community discrimination and can be particularly damaging in the classroom space. Research has demonstrated that darker-skinned individuals are more likely to be disciplined by school personnel (Hunter, 2016) and receive lower grades (Thompson & McDonald, 2016) than their lighter-skinned counterparts. Moreover, internalized racism may lead Latinx communities to hold stereotypes about their own communities, for example, through colorism. Comments about preferences for lighter skin ("hay que mejorar la raza" / "we need to better the race") or using seemingly innocuous language to describe darker skinner Latinxs ("prietita" / "dark little one") can reinforce colonial hierarchies and lead to negative psychological outcomes within Latinx communities (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014).

Community-held beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes impact the well-being and development of Latinx adolescents, particularly Latinx immigrant adolescents. As illustrated by the MMOD, community-level discrimination leads to discrimination on an interpersonal level and these experiences are embedded in larger sociocultural contexts. Community-held discrimination can be subtle; it is so embedded in the cultural fabric that many do not notice how damaging it may be to individuals of color (Thompson, 2003). Community discrimination has a bidirectional relationship with the macro-level policies and structures, otherwise known as institutional and structural discrimination. Community beliefs are influenced by social, political, and economic contexts just as these contexts may be influenced and maintained by discriminatory institutional practices.

### **Institutional Discrimination**

Community-level discrimination is embedded in institutional and structural systems, which take into account interactions with social, political, and economic contexts (Thompson, 2003). It is evident that institutional and structural levels of



discrimination are intertwined, although there are important distinctions to take into consideration. Unlike previous models, the MMOD explicitly dedicates a tier of the model to institutional discrimination. Institutional discrimination is defined as policies and structures that intend to differentiate or cause harm among a specific minoritized identity (Pincus, 1996). Institutional discrimination is rooted in the historical legacies of colonialism, slavery, and segregation (Pincus, 1996). For Latinx individuals, decades of institutional discrimination included mob lynching from 1848 to 1928, forced deportation of Mexican-origin American citizens in 1920 to 1930, and segregated “Mexican schools” in the 1940s (Carrigan & Webb, 2003; Ramirez & Peterson, 2020). These experiences are forms of historical trauma that continue to perpetuate discrimination among Latinx communities (Estrada, 2009).

Immigration policies and practices are salient examples of institutional discrimination because they are intended to target immigrants, including immigrants of Latinx origin (Provine, 2013). This is not new and can be traced back to two seminal immigration policies in 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). The IIRIRA created 3- and 10-year re-entry bars which required undocumented immigrants to leave the country and re-enter lawfully after either 3 or 10 years (American Immigration Council, 2016). The IIRIRA also allowed for expedited removal and increased border enforcement (Torres et al., 2018). PRWORA limited access to federal public benefits for both undocumented immigrants and legal immigrants during the first 5 years of resettlement (Kaushal & Kaestner, 2005). Both policies had devastating impacts on immigrant communities (Fix & Passel, 2002; Torres et al., 2018) and set the stage for future restrictive immigration policies and procedures.

The former Trump administration (2017–2021) passed over 400 immigration policy changes, which brought harm, including irreparable harm, upon many Latinx adolescents and families (Pierce & Bolter, 2020). For example, this administration enacted changes to the public charge rule, which deems immigrants applying for admission into the United States or adjustment of status in the U.S. inadmissible if they are shown to be a “public charge” (USCIS, 2021). Under this rule, individuals who use Supplemental Security Income, cash benefit programs, or Section 8 housing could be denied admission (USCIS, 2021). This is a form of

institutional discrimination as it intends to target a specific minoritized identity; in this case, low-resourced, immigrant individuals. Similarly, the Migration Protection Protocols (MPP: Remain in Mexico) was announced in 2018 and forced individuals asking for asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border to “return” to Mexico and wait for a hearing date (American Immigration Council, 2021). This disproportionately impacted immigrants from Latin American countries, including families (American Immigration Council, 2021). As a final example, Temporary Protected Status, which grants foreign-born individuals temporary protected status if they are unable to return home due to civil war, natural disasters, or other extenuating circumstances (Svaljenka & Jawetz, 2020), was terminated under the Trump administration (USCIS, 2021). Given the majority of TPS recipients are from Central America (Wilson, 2020), this demonstrates an example of institutional discrimination in that they were disproportionately impacted.

To date, the Biden administration has signed several executive orders to restructure the immigration system, including the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, which provides undocumented individuals an 8-year pathway to citizenship (The White House, 2021). Moreover, President Biden has pledged to preserve the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, pause the construction of the border wall, and reverse the prior administration’s Muslim Ban (Chishti & Pierce, 2021). Although these are positive steps in preserving and upholding the U.S. immigration system, there are a considerable number of oppressive immigration policies remaining. Immigration policies, and countless other policies, perpetuate the systems of oppression that impact Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities. Colorism is also pervasive in immigration policies and practices. A report released in 2016 concluded that one out of five individuals facing deportation were Black immigrants and furthermore, Black immigrants are more likely to be detained for a criminal conviction (Morgan-Trostle et al., 2016). Therefore, when considering the impact of the current immigration system on Latinx immigrant individuals, it is crucial to consider intersectionality.

Emerging research has documented the impacts of immigration policies on Latinx communities. In general, Latinx families who had personal experience with immigration enforcement were more likely to endorse a lower quality of life for themselves and their children and endorse higher symptoms of depression and anxiety (Becerra et al.,

2020). Anti-immigrant policies impact identity among Latinx individuals (Vargas et al., 2017) and emotional and physical health (Hardy et al., 2012; Lee & Zhou, 2020). A specific study expanded this area of research to explore reactions to immigration policies under the Trump administration (Wray-Lake et al., 2018). First- and second-generation Latinx immigrant adolescents reported anti-immigrant policies led them to feeling threatened, marginalized, afraid, and angry (Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Moreover, Latinx adolescents experienced emotional and physical disruptions in their development when a parent was deported or at-risk of being deported (Tellez Lieberman et al., 2020). Latinx adolescents who experienced a family member being deported in past year experienced an increased risk of suicidal ideation, alcohol use, and behavioral problems, likely due to heightened cognitive awareness of the current anti-immigrant climate (Roche et al., 2020). It was even found that anti-immigrant sentiment linked to the 2016 presidential election altered stress hormones and cortisol levels among Latinx adolescents (Zeiders et al., 2020).

The MMOD illustrates how institutional-level discrimination may promote stereotypes and assumptions in communities, which leads to discriminatory experiences at the individual level. Institutional and structural discrimination are often used interchangeably in the literature on discrimination; however, there are important distinction as will be demonstrated below (Bailey et al., 2017).

### Structural Discrimination and Development

Structural discrimination, like institutional discrimination, involves policies and structures, but unlike previous levels, may not be *directly* aimed at minoritized individuals or communities (Pincus, 1996). Structural forms of discrimination are created to be “race-neutral,” although they disproportionately impact BIPOC communities and aim to reinforce systemic inequities and oppression. By way of example, even though banks may have “race-neutral” practices to mortgage lending, there tends to be less mortgage approvals for communities of color (NRC, 2004). The MMOD distinguishes between institutional and structural discrimination as it has important policy consequences; it is much more difficult to target structural discrimination given these policies may not be illegal and are not *intentionally* targeted toward a racial/ethnic group.

Although not an exclusive list, structural discrimination is evident in housing, education,

employment, and the criminal justice system (Bailey et al., 2017). In the housing sector, exclusionary practices, such as zoning and building and occupancy codes, contribute to the segregation (Troche-Rodriguez, 2009) and gentrification (Hwang, 2020). For example, Latinx families are forced to purchase homes with needed repairs and later find out they are unable to rent out extra spaces (e.g., basement) because of restrictive occupancy codes (Troche-Rodriguez, 2009). Moreover, certain ordinances, such as the anti-illegal immigrant “AII” ordinances, restrict undocumented individuals from leasing or renting properties, which can lead to exclusive targeting of Latinx individuals, regardless of immigration status (Oliveri, 2009). Blatant misinformation about loans, mortgages, and housing inspections can further perpetuate this form of structural discrimination (Troche-Rodriguez, 2009). Experiences of housing discrimination have been associated with distress among Latinx immigrants (Woo et al., 2020), particularly higher depressive and anxious symptoms (Lee, 2009), and restricted access to health care services (Anderson, 2020).

For Latinx adolescents, structural discrimination is manifested in educational systems where Latinx students are overrepresented in certain neighborhood schools with less funding and less quality instruction (Bottia, 2019; Fuller et al., 2019). This is especially true for Latinx immigrant students, who are more likely to reside in areas where schools are under-resourced and may also have less access to academically rigorous classes (Bottia, 2019; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Moreover, studies have found undocumented status exacerbates the impact of structural discrimination as Latinx students who are undocumented may not be able to access higher education due to the inability to qualify for financial assistance or in-state tuition (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). This, in turn, is associated with lower school expectations among immigrant adolescents (Diaz, 2020). Deep-rooted systemic discrimination has also led to unfair disciplinary practices in school systems as well as the greater community. Students of color, including Latinx adolescents, are more likely to receive suspension or expulsion compared to their non-Hispanic White peers (Skiba et al., 2011) and Latinx adolescents’ experiences of policing within schools may funnel these students into a prison to deportation pipeline (Saun Jui et al., 2017). Within BIPOC communities, systemic discrimination has led to policing practices, such as stop-and-frisk and racial profiling (Garcia-Hallett et al., 2020; Rios et al., 2020). Moreover, certain policing practices, including arrest and brutality,

are common among BIPOC communities and research has shown that Latinx adolescents experience higher rates of ethnic-racial discrimination perpetuated by police officers in comparison to their non-Hispanic White counterparts (Zeiders et al., 2021). Among BIPOC adolescents, criminalization and policing are associated with legal cynicism, psychological distress, and stigma (Geller & Fagan, 2019; Jackson et al., 2020). This is particularly salient for Latinx individuals with darker skin tone (Lanuza et al., 2021), demonstrating the insidious impact of colorism in structural policies and practices.

The MMOD demonstrates how individual, community, and institutional discrimination are all embedded within structural discrimination. One cannot consider an act of individual discrimination without considering community stereotypes, policies directly targeting a minoritized identity, or practices embedded in the structural fabric of society. The embedded nature of the model also signifies that levels of discrimination are not mutually exclusive and are continuously interacting across different levels.

### DISMANTLING OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS OF DISCRIMINATION

To dismantle oppressive systems for Latinx immigrant adolescents directly, interventions must consider the complex layers of discrimination and resulting oppression. Individual, community, institutional, and structural levels of discrimination are interrelated; thus, the use of interventions for individuals that encompass these levels should be considered. Careful attention must be directed toward understanding the normative development and protective factors that are often present in Latinx immigrant adolescents and other minoritized groups. The Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD) sets the foundation for critically evaluating how to use this model in tandem with supports, interventions, and social justice initiatives meant to empower youth in the midst of discrimination. This allows for a strength-based approach in dismantling systems of oppression that ultimately empowers youth.

Interventions that address discrimination and racial trauma among Latinx adolescents should incorporate strength-based approaches. One example of such an approach is the use of the Healing Ethno-Racial Trauma (HEART) framework, which is an intervention for Latinx immigrant communities that uses intersectionality to focus on the

individual symptoms of ethno-racial trauma, as well as the multiple interlocking systems of oppression that affect the individual, families, and the community (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019). This perspective then allows for intervention across systems (individual, family, and community) that move from providing immediate relief to collective action and liberation (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019). Through an intervention that involves individualized care to Latinx youth and strength-based approaches, youth are given the psychological tools needed to continue working toward dismantling the several oppressive systems of discrimination. For example, at the family and community level, individuals using the HEART framework guide Latinx immigrant individuals to identify individual and family strengths, as well as develop a social-justice orientation (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019).

In order to move forward with the implementation of strength-based approaches to support groups who are oppressed, it is important to understand the policies and community-level shifts that are necessary to help dismantle discrimination and to empower communities to action. The theory of Critical Consciousness (CC) poses that the process of understanding dehumanizing social conditions in a critical way is crucial considering such oppression makes these communities feel unheard, irrelevant, and powerless. Hence, education and unfiltered conversations with, within, and about oppressed communities is an essential step for change. When injustice is brought to awareness, communities receive more agency to address inequities with justice, even if just through reflection, but in a way that encourages collective action (Diemer et al., 2016). It has been proposed that engagement in CC can alter not only the developmental trajectories of youth, but it can also provoke changes in the marginalized communities in which youth live by decreasing the pervasive negative effects of health and educational barriers (Diemer et al., 2016).

Despite being perceived as less likely to participate in civic engagement than their peers, Latinx youth report a variety of ways they can make a difference in their communities, including engagement with communities, advocacy, maintaining cultural pride, and educational persistence (McWhirter et al., 2019). Experiences of discrimination have predicted critical action (Tyler et al., 2020), suggesting youth are motivated to dismantle oppression. However, they must be supported in these efforts. Society can support Latinx youth in these efforts by engaging in specific action such as

mass mobilization around issues pertaining to Latinx communities, such as immigration, access, and equity, through educated voting, participation in protests and rallies, and solidarity. Such mobilization is necessary to promote policy change, which at a systemic level, is necessary to relieve the burden of the oppressed.

It is important to note that interventions should not place the burden on BIPOC youth to change the current societal content. Interventions should target inequitable policies and practices at the institutional and structural levels contribute to continued oppression of BIPOC communities. Two areas of focus are changes to the educational system and comprehensive immigration reform. Gulbas et al. (2015) found that for children, schools represent a safe and trustworthy space, and a place to access networks and resources in coping with stressors and hardship, especially following immigration-related stress. When these supportive school networks become disrupted by processes of systemic oppression, such as racism and discrimination, this group of youth will experience additional negative outcomes. (Paccione-Dyszlewski, 2016). Policies should strive toward a fair, inclusive, and equitable education for under-resourced neighborhoods to enhance social cohesion and trust. In addition, they must address equitable approaches to provide education to immigrants (foregoing placement into special education classrooms and academic selection; Simon et al., 2007). Policies that support nation-wide implementation of intentional restorative justice practices in schools are a step in the direction of reducing current systems of oppression such as “the school-to-prison pipeline” (Schiff, 2018). Lastly, policies must ensure school staff are bilingual and culturally sensitive, with continuous trainings addressing multiculturalism, anti-racism, and implementing trauma-informed approaches (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Paccione-Dyszlewski, 2016; Simon et al., 2007).

The current sociopolitical climate, particularly forced family separations and deportations, places Latinx adolescents’ psychosocial and academic well-being at risk (Lovato et al., 2018). Research demonstrating the significant impacts of harsh immigration policies on mental health should provide the impetus for humane and family-focused immigration reform, including legalization pathways for families. The Biden administration has proposed an immigration reform bill that aims to grant citizenship to DACA recipients, those with TPS, and farmworkers (Chishti & Pierce, 2021). In addition to legalization pathways, other policy recommendations include

eliminating the 3- and 10-year bars under IIRIRA and granting relief to certain groups of immigrants while the current immigration reform bill is in Congress (Bolter et al., 2021).

The Multitiered Model of Oppression and Discrimination (MMOD) is an innovative framework for contextualizing development among Latinx immigrant adolescents by considering the impacts of individual, community, institutional, and structural discrimination. In order to dismantle the oppressive systems perpetuated by discrimination, multitiered interventions are needed. Culturally sustaining interventions, civic engagement and mobilization, and policies targeting inequitable policies and practices will provide healing and an avenue for liberation and Latinx immigrants adolescents and the greater Latinx community.

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