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epaa@alperin.ca

Arizona State University  
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Orozco, Richard; López, Francesca  
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## Impacts of Arizona's SB 1070 on Mexican American Students' Stress, School Attachment, and Grades

*Richard Orozco*



*Francesca López*

University of Arizona  
United States

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**Abstract:** Understanding the impacts of immigration legislation on Mexican ethnic students who are citizens of the United States is needed. This study investigates how passage of Arizona's anti-immigration law, SB 1070, in 2010 bears upon the schooling experiences of Mexican American high school students. Applying Meyer's Minority Stress Model as the theoretical foundation for this work, the authors ultimately explore, 1) whether perceived discrimination along with acculturation, racial phenotype, familiarity and stress associated with SB 1070 influence school grades, and 2) the effects of SB 1070 stress on the school attachment of Mexican American high school students. The authors find that perceived discrimination and skin color are both negatively related to grades, whereas maintaining Spanish is positively related to grades, and SB 1070 stress and its effects are dependent upon levels of perceived discrimination. Likewise, while the authors find no relation of SB 1070 stress to school attachment, they do find that this relationship is moderated by perceived discrimination such that school attachment decreases as stress associated with SB 1070 increases for individuals with lower perceived discrimination. For individuals with high levels of perceived discrimination, there is a positive association between school attachment and SB 1070 stress. By impacting their acculturative stress, Arizona's SB 1070 has further upset an already precarious schooling experience for Mexican American students.

**Keywords:** Arizona's SB 1070; Mexican American students; discrimination; acculturative stress; grades; school attachment

### **Impactos de la SB 1070 de Arizona sobre el Estrés, el Apego y las Notas Escolares de Estudiantes Mexicoamericanos**

**Resumen:** Son necesarios estudios que comprendan los impactos de las leyes de inmigración sobre los estudiantes mexicanos que son ciudadanos de los Estados Unidos. Este estudio investiga cómo la ley anti-inmigrante de Arizona, SB 1070, en 2010 influye sobre las experiencias escolares de los estudiantes mexicanos de secundaria en los EEUU. Utilizando el Modelo de Estrés de Minorías de Meyer como el fundamento teórico de este trabajo, los autores exploran, 1) si la percepción de discriminación junto con la aculturación, fenotipo racial, familiaridad y el estrés asociado con la SB 1070 afectan las notas escolares y 2) los efectos de la ley SB 1070 en el apego hacia la escuela de los estudiantes mexicanos de secundaria estadounidenses. Los autores encuentran que la discriminación percibida y color de la piel se relacionan negativamente con las notas, mientras que el mantenimiento de Español está positivamente relacionada con los notas, y el estrés y los efectos de la SB 1070 dependen de los niveles de discriminación percibida. Del mismo modo, mientras que los autores no encuentran relación entre estrés de la SB 1070 y el apego a la escuela, encuentran que esta relación es moderada por la discriminación percibida y que el apego escolar disminuye a medida que el estrés asociado con la SB 1070 aumenta para los individuos con menor percepción de discriminación. Para las personas con altos niveles de discriminación, hay una asociación positiva entre el apego escolar y SB 1070 estrés. Impactando el estrés por aculturación, SB 1070 de Arizona genera una experiencia escolar aún más incomoda a la ya precaria experiencia de los estudiantes mexicoamericanos.

**Palabras clave:** SB 1070 de Arizona; Estudiantes mexicoamericanos; discriminación; estrés de aculturación; grados; apego escolar

### **Impactos Arizona SB 1070 sobre o Stress, de Fixação e de Escola Graus de Estudantes Americanos Mexicanos**

**Resumo:** São necessários estudos para entender os impactos das leis de imigração sobre os estudantes mexicanos que são cidadãos dos Estados Unidos. Este estudo investiga como a lei anti-imigrante Arizona SB 1070 de 2010 influenciou as experiências escolares dos alunos do ensino médio mexicanos dos EUA. Usando o Modelo Estresse de Minorias do Meyer como fundamentação teórica, os autores exploram 1) se a percepção de discriminação, aculturação, fenótipo racial, familiaridade e estresse associado com a SB 1070 afeta as notas escolares e 2) os efeitos da SB 1070 sobre o apego à escola de estudantes mexicanos do ensino médio americano. Os autores descobriram que a discriminação percebida e cor da pele se relacionam negativamente com as notas, manter o espanhol se relaciona positivamente com as notas, e estresse e os efeitos da SB 1070 dependerá dos níveis de discriminação percebida. Da mesma forma, enquanto os autores não encontraram nenhuma relação entre o estresse do SB 1070 e apego à escola, eles acham que essa relação é moderada por a percepção de discriminação e o apego escolar diminui à medida que o estresse associado com a SB 1070 aumenta para os indivíduos com menor percepção de discriminação. Para as pessoas com altos níveis de discriminação, há uma associação positiva entre o apego escolar e o stress da SB 1070. Impactando os níveis de estresse e aculturação, a lei Arizona SB 1070 cria uma experiência escolar ainda mais desconfortável para a já precária experiência dos estudantes americanos mexicanos.

**Palavras-chave:** Arizona SB 1070; Estudantes mexicano-americanos; discriminação; aculturação stress; graus; apego escola

## Introduction

Arizona's *Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act*, introduced as Senate Bill 1070 (hereafter, SB 1070) and its amendment, House Bill 2162 (hereafter, HB 2162)<sup>1</sup>, were passed in 2010. In its final draft, the bill, among its many provisions, requires in part that law enforcement officials in the state, upon any legal stop, detention, or arrest, shall, "where reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien ... determine the immigration status of the person" (Arizona HB 2162, 2010). Shortly after passage, legal challenges emerged that resulted in the Supreme Court striking down several of the bill's provisions. Nevertheless, the Court upheld section 2(B) of HB 2162 (*Arizona v. United States*, 2012), the provision described above. This *show me your papers* provision racially profiles citizens and non-citizens of the U.S. alike whether documented or undocumented (Provine, 2010). Because all Mexican heritage people in the state are subject to this profiling, Mexican American students in Arizona's schools may suffer the consequences of SB 1070's directives. These consequences may be physical insofar as any Mexican American could be stopped by law enforcement and subsequently interrogated (Castro, 2011; Romero, 2006); however, Mexican American students may also experience psychological consequences that influence schooling experiences through stressors related to racial indignities including those that occur to them personally or to their environment (Sue, 2010).

Despite attempts by some school districts to provide improved experiences for Mexican American students by offering programs such as mariachi music and folklorico dancing, these programs may not include critical social analyses and Mexican American student academic progress has continued to be elusive. In this work we acknowledge the extant research suggesting that people of color may experience an increased fear of discrimination as the result of public policies at both the federal and state levels (Michelson, 2001; Pew Hispanic Center, 2007) and recognize the persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate miseducation of Mexican Americans nationally (Valencia, 2011), as well as Arizona's mainstream Eurocentric view of people of Mexican origin as deficient (Orozco, 2012). Thus, understanding the effects of larger socio-political arrangements is imperative to creating more equitable schools for Mexican American students. This work is intended to address this imperative by focusing on the effects of Arizona legislation and its pertinence to race/ethnicity and is grounded in the struggle to provide fair educational opportunities for Mexican American students, and others similarly situated, who have been historically underserved by U.S. schools. As such, this study is aimed at contributing to an understanding of the effects of immigration legislation upon students of Mexican heritage who are U.S. citizens and who are either English-Spanish bilingual or monolingual English speakers.

In the quantitative study presented here, we assess the dynamics of stress as it relates to SB 1070, acculturation, and perceived discrimination and how these in turn are associated with Mexican American high school students' attachment to school and grades. The specific research questions we address are:

1. Are perceived discrimination, acculturation, racial phenotype, familiarity with SB 1070 and its associated stress related to acculturative stress?
2. Does perceived discrimination moderate the effects of acculturative stress on stress associated with SB 1070?
3. In consideration of the saliency of perceived discrimination in acculturative stress, what is the relationship between perceived discrimination, along with acculturation, ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> While much of the current work engages the amendment offered in HB 2162, we will refer to the bill mostly as SB 1070. We do so to avoid confusion and because the discourse regarding the bill has used SB 1070 as its referent.

identity, and racial phenotype (skin color and facial features) and self-reported school grades?

4. Is stress from SB 1070 associated with attachment to school? Does perceived discrimination moderate the effects of stress from SB 1070 on attachment to school?

In the sections that follow, we present the theoretical model within which this project was conducted. We then discuss Arizona legislation as it has pertained to race/ethnicity and immigration and SB 1070 within a historical context. Next, we review extant literature regarding Mexican heritage youth perceptions of discrimination, acculturative stress, and stress as it relates to school attachment and grades. After discussing our methods, we describe the results of this study and discuss its implications.

## Theoretical Model

Originally conceived for studies of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) populations, Meyer's Minority Stress Model (MMSM) is used as the theoretical foundation for this study. The model posits that larger social conditions may produce increases in minority stress with subsequent negative effects on mental well-being (Meyer, 2003). In this model, *minority* stress is conceived as "the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position" (Meyer, 2003, p. 675). Outlining specific social conditions and their consequences, Meyer explains mental health problems are the product of social experiences that are antagonistic and stressful as the result of prejudicial and discriminatory activities.

The role of macro-level arrangements is included in the model's propositions insofar as the norms of the dominant culture, as well as its social structures, are liable to create tensions for minorities since there is typically a lack of coherence to the norms of the minority group. Ultimately, Meyer (2003) describes three assumptions regarding minority stress: (a) It is unique in that the stress experienced by minorities is added to stressors endured by everyone; (b) It is *chronic* in that it is connected to established and maintained "social and cultural structures" (p. 676); (c) It is social in terms of its institutional and structural origins. In consideration of these assumptions, stress related to SB 1070, perceived discrimination, and acculturative stress are all likely to contribute to minority stress.

## Race/Ethnicity, Immigration, and SB 1070 in Arizona

Legislation pertaining to race/ethnicity and immigration in Arizona did not begin with the passage of SB 1070. While some legislative history was clearly racial, the line between race/ethnicity and immigration has been quite blurred in other Arizona laws. Racially involved legislation in Arizona has included miscegenation law. The first such law passed in 1864, referred to as *The Howell Code* (Goff, 1967), prohibited the marriage of Whites to Blacks. One year later, the state's second territorial legislature added Native American and Chinese to the list of those prohibited from marrying Whites (Hardaway, 1986). Racial discrimination was further extended by the Arizona Alien Land Law of 1921. The Court's 1936 decision in *Takiguchi v. State* applied the law to Asians and effectively prevented them from owning land (Chin, Byrne Hessick, & Miller, 2012). Native Americans have also been subjected to disenfranchisement by the state. The Arizona State Constitution of 1912 held that, "No person under *guardianship* [emphasis added] ... shall be qualified to vote at any election" (Az. Const., art. VII, § 2[c]). Native Americans in Arizona were disenfranchised by the Court's 1928 decision in *Porter v. Hall* that held Native Americans to be *wards* of the government and thus under its *guardianship* (Watkins, 2007). Although this decision was

overturned in 1948, the language of the Arizona State Constitution striking the term *guardianship* did not occur until the year 2000 (Watkins, 2007).

Demarcation of race/ethnicity and immigration issues has been vague in Arizona legislation. Although ostensibly intended to control immigration, the racial/ethnic implications of Arizona laws conflate the issues. Because the majority of immigrants in Arizona have been of Mexican descent, legislative rhetoric of immigration has been largely directed at this group (Provine, 2010). In the early 1970s, the U.S. Supreme Court found that an Arizona law attempting to deny public benefits to noncitizens legally in the state to be “violative of the Equal Protection Clause” (*Graham v. Richardson*, 1971) of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. However, the issue of proving citizenship before receiving public benefits (and registering to vote) resurfaced after Arizona voters approved Proposition 200 in 2004. Moreover, in the mid-1990s, a voter approved amendment to the Arizona Constitution that declared, “all political subdivisions of this State shall act in English and no other language” (*Yniguez v. Arizonans for Official English*, 1995), was declared in violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In the Court’s opinion, the amendment’s impact fell “almost entirely upon Hispanics ... Since language is a close and meaningful proxy for national origin, restrictions on the use of language may mask discrimination against specific national origin groups” (*Yniguez v. Arizonans for Official English*, 1995).

While the Federal Court was able to identify language-restrictive legislation as discriminatory and temporarily sidetrack the efforts of *English Only* proponents in Arizona, the state would hedge the Court’s decision by passing Proposition 203 in 2000. The initiative required public schools to implement Structured English Immersion (SEI) programs for English language learners (ELL), most of whom in Arizona are of Mexican heritage, where they would learn English for one year after which most students would be expected to transition to “mainstream classrooms” (AZ Rev Stat §15-752, 2013). Furthermore, in 2007, the Arizona State Board of Education adopted the 4-hour block SEI model with the goal of teaching English language fluency to ELLs in one year despite little support in education and language research that suggests that such a goal is attainable (Rios-Aguilar, González-Canche, & Moll, 2010). In effect, the 4-hour block segregates ELLs, mostly Mexican heritage students, from their peers for 4 hours daily.

In addition to Proposition 203, efforts to make English the official language of Arizona were furthered by the passage of Proposition 103 in 2006. Specifically, this proposition, which passed by a 3 to 1 margin, calls for English to be the official language of state business with the exception of communications in emergency events. The proposition had the effect of repealing the amendment to Arizona’s constitution that was found to be unconstitutional in the *Yniguez v. Arizonans for Official English* case of 1995 (Cashman, 2009) described above. Ultimately, although some of the legislation presented here was blocked by the courts, SB 1070 garnered enough votes to pass through Arizona’s legislature in 2010.

Impacts of SB 1070 have undoubtedly been mediated by the U.S. Supreme Court’s decisions in 2012 to strike down three of the bill’s provisions. However, the section of the bill popularly known as the *show me your papers* provision was allowed to go into effect and will be, therefore, the provision upon which we concentrate this section. As we note in the introduction to this essay, Section 2(B) of SB 1070 (as amended by section 3(B) of HB 2162) declares that law enforcement officials in the state, upon any legal stop, detention, or arrest, shall, “where reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien ... determine the immigration status of the person” (Arizona HB 2162, 2010). The bill goes on to read, “(a) law enforcement official ... may not consider race, color or national origin in implementing the requirements of this subsection *except to the extent permitted by the United States or Arizona Constitution*” (our italics, Arizona HB 2162, 2010). While this section represents only a small part of the entire bill, it is highly controversial as a consequence of its

potential for racial profiling (Chin et al., 2012). While the provision at first prohibits the consideration of race in its implementation, it immediately diminishes its own restriction by making exception to that which is *permitted by the United States or Arizona Constitution*. In other words, the consideration of race may be allowable so long as it is permitted by either the U.S. or Arizona Constitution. Chin, Byrne Hessick, and Miller (2012) describe case law at both levels that give direction to the use of race in immigration enforcement. In the 1975 case of *U.S. v. Brignoni-Ponce*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, “[t]he likelihood that any given person of Mexican ancestry is an alien is high enough to make Mexican appearance a relevant factor” (as cited in Chin et al., 2012, p. 67). However, this dictum was rejected in 2000 by the case of *U.S. v. Montero-Camargo* where the court opined that appearance is not a relevant factor in determining reasonable suspicion of a Latino when the area under consideration is highly populated by Latinos. At the state level, in the 1982 case of *State v. Graciano*, the Arizona Supreme Court found that “enforcement of immigration laws often involves a relevant consideration of ethnic factors” (as cited in Chin et al., 2012, p. 67). Thus, at both federal and state levels, lawful use of race (racial profiling) has been permitted, although not without argument at the federal level as described above in *U.S. v. Montero-Camargo*, as *relevant* in the enforcement of immigration policies. The courts’ decisions that Mexican ethnic appearance is relevant in the determination of reasonable suspicion for stops and questioning allows enforcement of SB 1070 based in part on racial profiling (Chin et al., 2012). This brings to question whether or not such profiling creates stress for Mexican American students. However, before addressing this question, we discuss works that address perceived discrimination by Mexican heritage students in the United States, acculturative stress, school attachment, and grades. Such works are significant, for as noted above, public policies may result in the fear of discrimination for people of color (Michelson, 2001; Pew Hispanic Center, 2007).

### **Mexican Heritage Youth and Perceived Discrimination**

Dion and Kawakami’s (1996) work investigating discrimination against both immigrants and people of color reveals that both perceived and real discrimination are significant insofar as they are markers of real discriminatory experiences that have a “psychological reality” (p. 204) for its victims. This reality occurs on a daily basis and includes not just prejudicial rhetoric based on hostile stereotypes, but also deleterious activities directed at people based on their race or ethnicity (Edwards & Romero, 2008). The studies highlighted below describe Mexican heritage youth perceptions of such discrimination, its effect on their schooling aspirations and achievement, and the stress associated with discrimination.

An early study by Rumbaut (1994) that includes eighth and ninth grade children of Mexican immigrants living in San Diego, California, assesses, among several social characteristics, perceived discrimination and ethnic identity. Of the 757 Mexican ethnic students under study, both U.S. and Mexican born, 65% describe being discriminated against. Furthermore, the investigation focuses, in part, on those students who refer to themselves as *Chicano* ( $n=123$ ). When defining this group, the author reveals citizenship by noting that almost all of the Chicanos are U.S. born. Among these Chicanas/os, 71.5% believe they have been discriminated against. Similarly, López and Stanton-Salazar (2001), utilizing data gathered by Portes and Rumbaut (2001), describe that no less than 78% of second generation Mexican American youth studied agree that there is racial discrimination and conflict in the United States. However, Stone and Han (2005), also using the data of Portes and Rumbaut, find that with a larger social context that is non-racist, students of Mexican-born parents are less likely to perceive discrimination from their teachers in school.

Schooling aspirations and schooling achievement of Mexican ethnic youth are assessed in the works of both Rumbaut (1994) and López and Stanton-Salazar (2001). Rumbaut (1994) finds that children of Mexican immigrants have “lower aspirations” (p. 770) than children of immigrant parents from Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia, Haiti, Jamaica, the Philippines, or Vietnam. However, López and Stanton-Salazar (2001) report that 67% of the second generation Mexican American youth they studied have aspirations of completing college. Unfortunately, the authors also note that a much lower percentage of these youth actually realize their aspirations. In both of these investigations, there is agreement regarding the schooling achievement of the children in their studies. In each, the math scores of children of Mexican immigrants, as assessed by the Stanford Math test in Rumbaut’s study and by the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in the López and Stanton-Salazar work, were below both national norms and their white peers. López and Stanton-Salazar (2001) also find that second generation Mexican Americans scored below their white peers in the verbal section of the SAT and were much less eligible for admission to University of California system schools.

Finally, concentrating on a bicultural context, Romero and Roberts (2003) assess the stressors of Mexican ethnic youth. While this study did not assess schooling outcomes, to develop a measure of stress, these researchers consider both linguistic and cultural experiences. This work calls for evaluations that address “intergenerational stress, peer group racism, school discrimination, worry about immigration, gang influence on ethnicity, and monolingualism” (p. 173). Findings are shared for both U.S. born and immigrant Mexican ethnic youth and includes that no less than 50% of the students sampled reported discrimination stressors. For example, 79% of immigrant and 64% of U.S. born students felt discrimination stress as the result of discomfort with other cultures, and 76% of both immigrant and U.S. born Mexican ethnic youth felt stress as the result of *uncomfortable ethnic jokes*.

### **Acculturative Stress**

Acculturation can be described as the socio-psychological process individuals from minority cultures (most usually individuals from the non-dominant group irrespective of their numerical representation in a given setting) undergo as they come into contact with the dominant culture (Born, 1970; Padilla, 1980; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovitz, 1936; Williams & Berry, 1991). Born (1970) was the first to refer to *acculturative stress* as the stress associated with the process of navigating the conflicts that arise in the acculturative process. The conceptualization of acculturative stress has since evolved to consider the nuances associated with acculturation, which may include the number of stressors individuals face as well as the very context of the setting within which individuals find themselves (Padilla, Wagatsuma, & Lindholm, 1985). To reflect these nuances, Padilla, Wagatsuma, and Lindholm (1985) develop and validate a measure to assess the degree of acculturative stress in individuals, called the Societal, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Acculturative Stress Scale (SAFE). Validations of the instrument incorporate views of acculturative stress that reflect not only the conflict between dominant and non-dominant cultures, but also individuals’ perceptions of the need to conform to dominant societal norms (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). More recently, scholars have argued for the need to evaluate acculturative stressors that are unique to certain contexts. Namely, as described above, Romero and Roberts (2003) developed a measure of acculturative stress reflecting the unique experiences of adolescents in a bicultural context.

### **School Attachment**

Attachment for the present study adheres to Dworkin’s (1987) conceptualization of attachment as a perception of the value of school learning as it is related to the lives of students. Hirschi’s (1969) seminal work in social bonding theory attempts to describe such relations to social



institutions. In this work, Hirschi finds that weak relations or *bonds* to society and social institutions result in oppositional behavior to that which is socially and institutionally endorsed. This negative relationship between adolescent social and institutional attachment and oppositional behavior is not generalizable since, for example, strong attachment to some peers could escalate unacceptable behavior. Still, attachment is that upon which this study builds since we examine the conflicts Mexican American students experience from SB 1070 and their perceived attachment to school.

The role of sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of school attachment and performance by Mexican American students is crucial. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) describe the importance of this context when they posit a rejection of schools by many Mexican American youth resulting from racial discrimination and stratification in society. While programmatic effects on school attachment have been investigated (Conchas, 2001; Erkut & Tracy, 2002), the current study researches school attachment concentrating on “nonacademic school issues” (Young, Lakin, Courtney, & Martiniello, 2012, p. 20).

Parental mediation of school attachment for Latina/o youths is the focus of LeCroy and Krysik’s (2008) work. This study of 170 seventh- and eighth-grade “Hispanic” students in the southwest finds that the adolescent-parent relationship strongly predicts school attachment. Specifically, this investigation notes that the emotional support of parents is crucial to predicting school attachment for the students. Furthermore, these researchers report similar results for white and Hispanic adolescent-parent relationships and no significant association of either socio-economic status or “linguistic acculturation” (p. 206) to school attachment.

Tendencies to engage in relationships, such as those described by LeCroy and Krysik (2008), is identified by Griner Hill and Werner (2006) as *affiliative orientation*. In their study that includes high school students in the Pacific Northwest, these researchers compare associations between affiliative orientations and school attachment for white and Latino students. While none of the items measuring affiliative orientations includes relationships with parents directly, results do indicate that Latino students have a lower mean affiliative orientation, or need to engage in relationships, and a higher mean school attachment than their white peers. Still, like LeCroy and Krysik’s (2008) work, this study reports that the differences between Latino and white students’ associations of affiliative orientation and school attachment are not significant. Díaz’s (2005) work expands the study of affiliation to include affiliation of students to their school. Referring to this as attachment to students’ own school this researcher differentiates this from the way students are committed to schooling in general. This investigation of 159 students, overwhelmingly Mexican Americans with an average age of fewer than 16 years, finds lower levels of attachment to a student’s school, and thus an increased desire to change schools, when a student believes that schools are more inviting and responsive to the academic success of white students. Of particular note, this study finds, “students born outside of the United States had a greater level of attachment to the school than students born in the United States” (p. 315).

By giving attention to race/ethnicity and nativity, this final work by Díaz (2005) begins to focus on Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco’s (1995) call for the sociocultural contextualization described at the outset of this section. However, none of the studies attempt to measure Mexican American student attachment to school as a result of perceived discrimination and stress.

## Grades

Scant research investigates the role of stress on individual lesson grades and the overall grade point average (GPA) of Mexican heritage students in K-12 schools. Benner and Graham (2011) find that discrimination stress has indirect influence on grades of Latino students through their perceptions on school climate. Similarly, Espinoza, Gonzales, and Fuligni (2013) report an indirect

influence on the grades of Mexican American students as a result of the stress they experience from daily racial victimization. Referring to grades via academic achievement in their analyses, Alva and de los Reyes (1999) report that academic achievement was negatively correlated to acculturative stress and that the effects of the stress were not attenuated by a student's perceived self-competence. Likewise, Huynh, and Fuligni (2010) find that when compared to their white and Asian peers, Latino high school students showed lower levels of school achievement as the result of higher levels of stress.

As a whole, the works cited here highlight the impact of larger social contexts of perceived racism within the United States on the perceptions of discrimination and its influence on stress and school performance of Mexican American youth. However, none of these studies attempt to identify stress within any particular social context perceived as racist. Neither do any of them focus on the effects on Mexican American student attachment to school and achievement. The present investigation attempts to fill this void by analyzing the perceptions of Arizona's SB 1070, vis-à-vis racist discrimination, resultant stress for Mexican American youth, and its effect on school attachment and grades.

## **Methods**

### **Context**

The work presented here was derived from a larger one-year study of Mexican American high school students enrolled in two schools in Southern Arizona who completed a one-time survey. The schools are located in an urban community approximately 80 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border. Both schools are located in the same school district, separated by just over 3 miles and were selected as research sites due to their large Mexican heritage student populations. According to the district, in the 2011-2012 school year, the district's total "Hispanic"<sup>2</sup> student population was 88% and its "White" student population was 4.9%. Eighty-five percent of its students were identified by the district as "Low SocioEconomic Status," while 22% were labeled as "English Language Learners" (ELL).

In the first school, Southwest High School<sup>3</sup>, 93% of its 2,296 students were "Hispanic" and 2% were "White," while 31% of its teachers were "Hispanic" and 65% of the teachers were "White." Seventy percent of all students were eligible for free or reduced lunch and 16% were ELL. The second school, Villa High School, had a student population of 2,099. Eighty-three percent of its students were "Hispanic" and 7% were "White." Meanwhile, 37% of Villa's teachers were "Hispanic," and 60% were "White." Sixty-eight percent of its students were eligible for free or reduced lunch with 11% labeled as ELL. Statewide in Arizona, during the 2011-2012 school year, 40% of public high school students were identified as "Hispanic" (Arizona Department of Education, 2013) with 57% of all students in the state eligible to receive free or reduced lunch (Arizona Department of Education, 2012) and 7.5% participating in ELL programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

### **Participants**

Participant selection was initiated by first discussing the project with Social Studies teachers in both schools. The first author selected Social Studies content teachers because of the potential for students in the classes to have had the opportunity to discuss social and legislative issues. However,

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Hispanic" is used here to reflect its usage in the district's website.

<sup>3</sup> All school names are pseudonyms.

none of the teachers were surveyed for their perceived discrimination nor evaluated for the extent to which they planned discussions regarding SB 1070, racism against Mexicans, and acculturation. Five teachers (3 from Southwest High School, 2 from Villa High School), all of whom were Mexican American, agreed to participate in the study and allowed recruitment of student participants from the 6 classes they taught. One teacher from Southwest High School had over 20 years teaching and taught 12<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. Government, while the other two were in their eighteenth year of teaching and taught 11<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History. One teacher from Villa High School had 15 years of experience as a teacher and taught 10<sup>th</sup> grade World History, while the second was in her second year and taught World History to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. Four of the participating teachers were born and raised in the same city where they taught with the other born and raised in northern California. Student volunteers were recruited after presenting the study in their classrooms. Parental consent and student assent were obtained from those students that volunteered to participate. Four students volunteered for whom parental consent was not obtained and as a result were excluded from the study. A total of 90 students completed the survey (10 freshmen, 16 sophomores, 42 juniors, 22 seniors) during the fall term. All students self-identified as either “Mexican” ( $n = 34$ ), “Mexican American” ( $n = 48$ ), or “Chicana/Chicano” ( $n = 8$ ). Additionally, all students were U.S. born with generations ranging from second (children of Mexican citizen parents) to fourth.

### Procedures

All surveys were completed either during home-base periods or after school. The surveys were conducted in English and took approximately 45 minutes to complete. While most of the freshmen respondents were female (80%), less than half of the total student respondents were female (46%) with the average age of all students being 15.9 years. All students were U.S. born with the majority of the respondents (71%) being 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> generation.

### Measures

**SB 1070 stress.** To investigate stress related to SB 1070, a modification of MMSM (Ochoa O’Leary & Romero, 2011) was further modified to reflect SB 1070. In the earlier modification, Ochoa O’Leary and Romero created a survey that concentrates on stress related to Arizona’s first iteration of its anti-ethnic studies bill, SB 1108. In their work, stress-related effects of SB 1108 were examined and “include both positive and negative mental health outcomes that are commonly used to study adolescent populations, specifically depressive symptoms and self-esteem” (p. 16). For the present study, the following statement regarding SB 1070 was provided in the survey: “Over the last several years, Arizona lawmakers have proposed and/or passed bills concerning immigration, immigrants, and ethnic studies. For example, SB 1070 allows police, with probable cause, to ask people for identification to verify legal status in the U.S.” Participants were subsequently asked: “To what degree do the following describe your response to SB 1070?” The survey included ten items with Likert-type responses that ranged from 1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree. Sample items include: “I realize I have to live with how things are,” “I can’t stop thinking about it,” and “I feel stressed out.” Coefficient alpha for the ten items was  $\alpha = .71$ .

**Acculturative stress.** Acculturative stress was examined using 27 items from the conceptualization of bicultural contexts presented by Romero and Roberts (2003). The questions were framed by asking, “To what degree were the following events stressful for you?” Subsequent items with Likert-type responses that ranged from 1 = Not Stressful at all to 4 = Very Stressful included: “Being treated badly because of my accent,” “When others make jokes about people of my ethnic background,” “Needing to speak Spanish better,” and “When my friends think I’m acting ‘White.’” Coefficient alpha for all items was  $\alpha = .80$ .

**Perceived discrimination.** A modification of Clark, Coleman, and Novak's (2004) Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS) was used to measure perceived discrimination by asking, "How often in your day-to-day life have you experienced ..." Participants rated the frequency of discriminatory experiences using the 12-item EDS on a scale of 1 = Never to 5 = Often daily. Sample items are, "Being treated as if you are not smart," "Being treated as if you are a threat," and "Being called names or insulted." Internal reliability for the twelve items was  $\alpha = .91$  ( $M = 2.39$ ,  $SD = .85$ ).

**Grades.** Participants self-reported grades ("mostly A's", "mostly B's", "mostly C's", "mostly D's", "mostly F's") and school attachment data via three items by O'Leary and Romero (2011) are detailed in Table 1. Internal reliability for the three attachment items was  $\alpha = .82$ .

**Attachment.** Modifying LeCroy & Krysik's (2008) school attachment scale that focused on assessing "Hispanic" student attachment via importance and interest of school work with a reported alpha coefficient = .83, school attachment was measured in the current study by asking participants the following: (1) "How often do you feel that the school work you are assigned is meaningful and important?" Responses ranged from 1 = Never to 5 = Almost Always. (2) "How interesting are most of your classes to you?" Responses ranged from 1 = Very Dull to 5 = Very Interesting and Stimulating. (3) "How important do you think things you are learning in school are going to be for you in later life?" Responses ranged from 1 = Not At All Important to 5 = Very Important. For the three items, coefficient alpha was  $\alpha = .56$ .

Other variables in the present study included racial phenotype (skin color and facial features), language use in Spanish and/or English as a proxy for acculturation, and measures of in-group and other-group ethnic identity using the Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992). Descriptive statistics for these measures is presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Perceived Discrimination	1.00	4.92	2.39	.85
Acculturative Stress	.30	2.56	1.31	.52
SB 1070 Stress	1.00	3.86	2.43	.58
Skin color	1.00	4.00	2.86	.65
Facial features	2.00	5.00	3.11	.53
MEIM In-Group	2.00	3.93	3.25	.53
MEIM Other-Group	2.17	4.00	3.38	.41
Spanish Acculturation	1.00	4.00	2.44	.80
English Acculturation	2.25	4.00	3.58	.53
Familiar with SB 1070	2.00	5.00	3.99	.98
Attachment	1.33	5.00	3.20	.72
Grades	1.00	5.00	3.60	.96

### Statistical Analyses

SPSS version 21.0 was used to manage and clean the data. Four separate multiple regression analyses were conducted to address each of the research questions. In both the first and third analysis, multiple variables related to acculturation, perceived discrimination, and SB 1070 were entered simultaneously as predictors with the measure of acculturative stress and grades as the

outcome variables, respectively; the final model included only those variables that contributed significantly to the model (see Table 2 and Table 4). To address the second and fourth research questions, predictors were centered prior to being entered in subsequent blocks with the interaction term entered in the final model (see Tables 3 and Table 5).

## Results

### Acculturative Stress

Little research has looked at policies as influencing acculturative stress. Nevertheless, there is evidence that SB 1070 has influenced the ways Mexican American students internalize their context. Our first research question asks, “Are perceived discrimination, acculturation, racial phenotype, familiarity with SB 1070 and its associated stress related to acculturative stress?” To address this question, we examined the extent to which perceived discrimination, acculturation, racial phenotype, familiarity with SB 1070, and stress associated with SB 1070 are related to acculturative stress (see Table 2).

Of the variables entered, only perceived discrimination, familiarity with SB 1070 and stress associated with SB 1070 are related to acculturative stress. Together, the three variables accounted for 41% (Adjusted  $R^2$ ,  $SEE = .40$ ) of the variability in acculturative stress. For each 1  $SD$  increase in perceived discrimination, there is a  $\frac{1}{2}$   $SD$  increase in acculturative stress. For each 1  $SD$  increase in stress associated with SB 1070, there is more than a  $\frac{1}{4}$   $SD$  increase in acculturative stress. Finally, for each 1  $SD$  increase in familiarity with SB 1070, there is a  $\frac{1}{5}$   $SD$  increase in acculturative stress.

Table 2  
*OLS Regression Model Predicting Acculturative Stress*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Initial Model	B	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Intercept	-0.03	0.54		-0.06	0.95
Perceived discrimination	0.30	0.05	0.50	6.00	<0.01
Acculturation Spanish	0.08	0.06	0.12	1.34	0.18
Acculturation English	-0.08	0.09	-0.08	-0.88	0.38
Skin color	0.05	0.07	0.06	0.64	0.53
Facial features	-0.10	0.09	-0.10	-1.16	0.25
SB1070 stress	0.19	0.08	0.21	2.32	0.02
Familiar with SB 1070	0.11	0.05	0.20	2.37	0.02
Final Model	B	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Intercept	-0.41	.25		-1.64	.11
Perceived discrimination	0.32	0.05	0.52	6.30	<0.01
SB1070 stress	0.24	0.08	0.27	3.21	<0.01
Familiar with SB 1070	0.10	0.04	0.20	2.12	0.04

### Perceived Discrimination as a Moderator for Acculturative Stress

Although we found that stress associated with SB 1070 was related to acculturative stress, there is evidence that low levels of perceived discrimination can serve as a *buffer* to negative

experiences (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). To examine this phenomenon, we asked, “Does perceived discrimination moderate the effects of acculturative stress on stress associated with SB 1070?”

To address the second research question, we examined whether perceived discrimination moderates the effects of acculturative stress on stress associated with SB 1070. In this analysis (see Table 3), we found that for each 1 *SD* increase in acculturative stress there is an increase in stress associated with SB 1070 of almost .40 *SD* ( $p < .01$ ). In the next step of the analyses, perceived discrimination is entered but is not significant. Nevertheless, in the final block, an interaction term was entered with acculturative stress and perceived discrimination, which is significant and positive ( $p = .02$ ), accounting for almost 20% of the variability in stress associated with SB 1070 (Adjusted  $R^2$ ,  $SEE = .53$ ). Namely, as acculturative stress increases for individuals with low levels of perceived discrimination, stress associated with SB 1070 increases. As seen in the analysis for the first research question (Are perceived discrimination, acculturation, racial phenotype, familiarity with SB 1070 and its associated stress related to acculturative stress?), it is expected that perceived discrimination is positively related to acculturative stress. However, after parceling out the relationship between acculturative stress and perceived discrimination, those with higher levels of perceived discrimination see a *decrease* in stress associated with SB 1070 as acculturative stress increases (see Figure 1). In other words, for those who perceive high levels of discrimination, the saliency of SB 1070 stress diminishes as the saliency of acculturative stress is strengthened; for those who perceive low levels of discrimination, the saliency of SB 1070 stress increases as acculturative stress is strengthened.

Table 3  
*OLS Regression Model Predicting SB 1070 Stress*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
	B	SE	Beta		
Model 1					
Intercept	2.43	0.06		42.90	0.00
Acculturative Stress	0.42	0.11	0.38	3.83	0.00
Model 2					
Intercept	2.43	0.06		42.85	0.00
Acculturative Stress	0.49	0.13	0.44	3.67	0.00
Perceived discrimination	-0.07	0.08	-0.11	-0.89	0.38
Model 3					
Intercept	2.37	0.06		37.73	<0.01
Acculturative Stress	0.48	0.13	0.43	3.74	<0.01
Perceived discrimination	-0.12	0.08	-0.17	-1.42	0.16
Interaction term (Acculturative Stress X Perceived Discrimination)	0.28	0.12	0.23	2.31	0.02

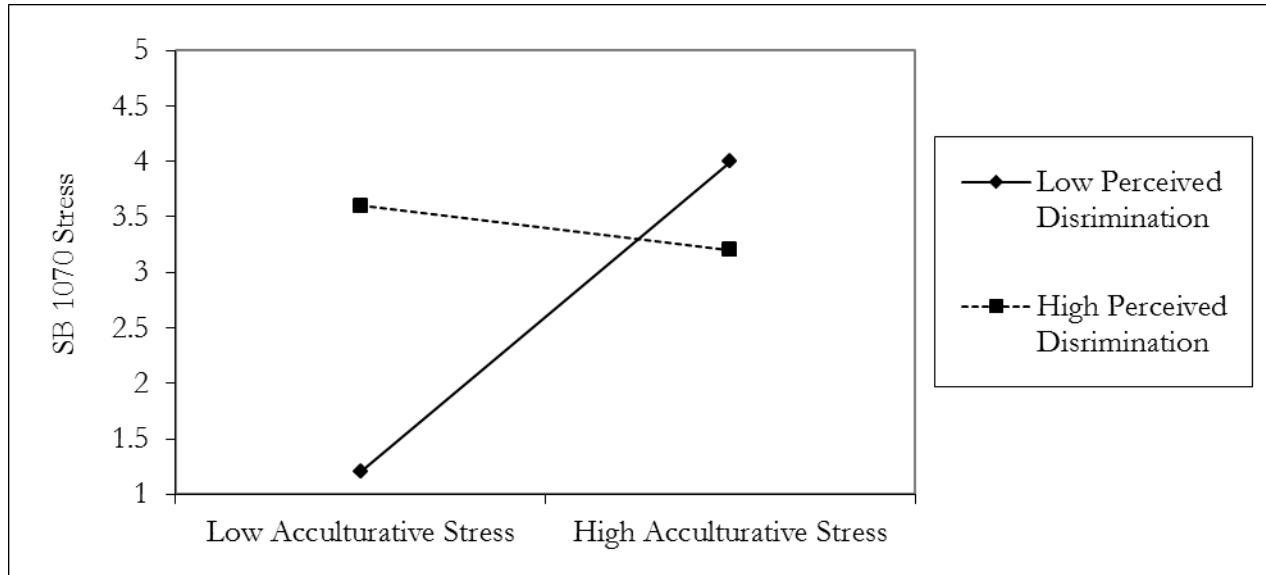


Figure 1. Perceived discrimination, SB 1070 stress, and acculturative stress.

### Grades

In consideration of the role of perceived discrimination in acculturative stress, we also examined the relationship between perceived discrimination, along with acculturation, ethnic identity, and racial phenotype (skin color and facial features) and school grades (see Table 4), thus addressing the third research question, “What is the relationship between perceived discrimination, along with acculturation, ethnic identity, and racial phenotype (skin color and facial features) and self-reported school grades?” Here, perceived discrimination and skin color are both negatively related to grades, whereas maintaining Spanish is positively related to grades, collectively accounting for almost 20% of the variability in grades (Adjusted  $R^2$ ,  $SEE = .86$ ). For each 1 *SD* increase in perceived discrimination, there is a .30 *SD* reduction in grades. For skin color, each 1 *SD* in skin darkness increase is associated with a decrease of .20 *SD* in grades. For maintaining Spanish, however, each 1 *SD* increase is associated with almost  $\frac{1}{4}$  *SD* increase in grades.

Table 4

OLS Regression Model Predicting Grades

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Initial model	B	SE	Beta		
Intercept	3.97	1.38		2.87	0.01
Perceived discrimination	-0.34	0.12	-0.30	-2.92	0.01
Acculturation English	0.09	0.20	0.05	0.47	0.64
Acculturation Spanish	0.32	0.14	0.27	2.23	0.03
In-group ethnic identity	0.01	0.20	0.01	0.07	0.94
Other-group ethnic identity	0.08	0.24	0.04	0.34	0.73
Skin color	-0.32	0.16	-0.21	-2.00	0.05
Facial features	-0.03	0.19	-0.02	-0.15	0.88

Table 4 (Cont'd.)

OLS Regression Model

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Final model	B	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Intercept	4.63	0.54		8.53	<0.01
Perceived discrimination	-0.35	0.11	-0.31	-3.24	<0.01
Acculturation Spanish	0.30	0.12	0.25	2.60	0.01
Skin color	-0.32	0.14	-0.22	-2.27	0.03

### Attachment

Our final analysis examined whether stress from SB 1070 is associated with attachment to school, and once again, whether perceived discrimination moderated this effect (see Table 5). In the first block, stress associated with SB 1070 was not related to attachment. However, there is a moderating effect of discrimination on attachment, accounting for approximately 13% of the variability in attachment scores (Adjusted  $R^2$ ,  $SEE = .67$ ). Whereas attachment decreases as stress associated with SB 1070 increases for individuals with lower perceived discrimination, attachment increases as stress associated with SB 1070 increases for individuals with high levels of perceived discrimination (see Figure 2).



Table 5  
*OLS Regression Model Predicting Attachment*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Model 1	B	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Intercept	3.20	0.08		41.91	<0.01
Stress SB 1070	-0.06	0.13	-0.05	-0.44	0.66
Model 2	B	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Intercept	3.20	0.07		44.61	<0.01
Stress SB 1070	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.03	0.97

Table 5 (Cont'd.)  
*OLS regression model*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Model 2	B	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Perceived discrimination	-0.31	0.09	-0.36	-3.58	0.00
Model 3	B	<i>SE</i>	Beta		
Intercept	3.18	0.07		44.54	<0.01
Stress SB 1070	-0.07	0.13	-0.06	-0.56	0.58
Perceived discrimination	-0.35	0.09	-0.41	-3.99	<0.01
Interaction term (Stress SB 1070 X Perceived discrimination)	0.26	0.14	0.20	1.83	0.07

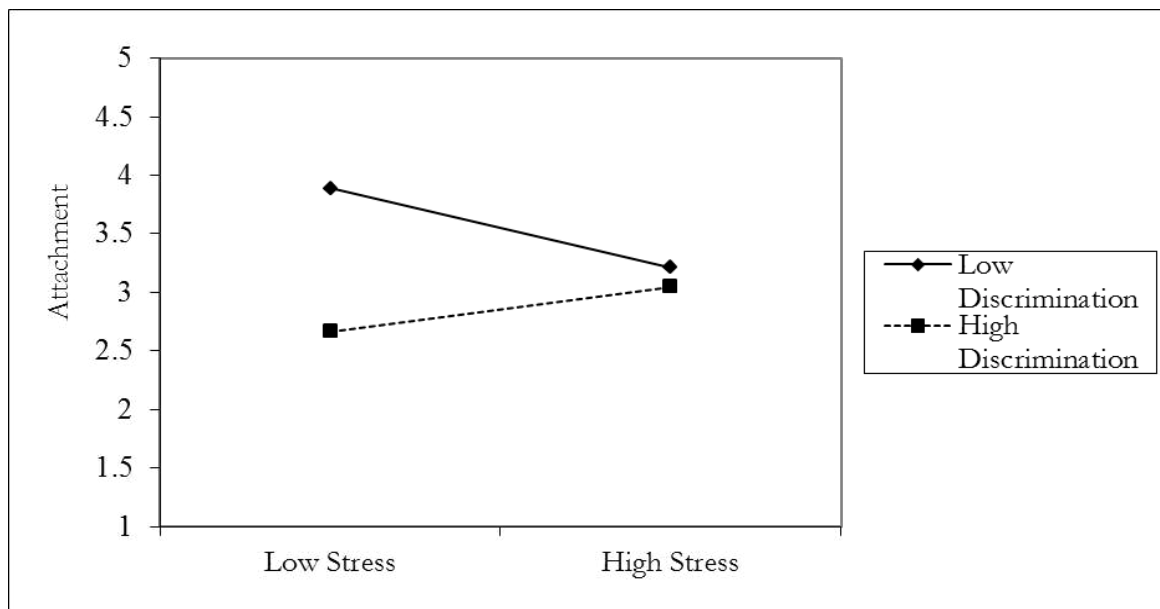


Figure 2. Discrimination, attachment, and SB 1070 stress.

## Discussion

Among several inquiries, this study investigates the impacts of various factors on the acculturative stress of Mexican American high school students. Specifically, our first question is: Are perceived discrimination, acculturation, racial phenotype, familiarity with SB 1070, and stress associated with SB 1070 related to acculturative stress? Our findings that discrimination, acculturation, and familiarity with SB 1070 are, indeed, related to acculturative stress suggests that Mexican American students' awareness of public policies and the stress associated with said policies should be included in examinations of the acculturative process of students, particularly in contentious contexts. In the present case, such a context exists. Arizona's SB 1070 was only one of several legislative acts passed from 2004 to 2010 that were of concern to the state's Mexican heritage population (Campbell, 2011). Although SB 1070 did not, ostensibly, direct its focus on American citizens of Mexican ethnicity, the findings of this work support Provine's (2010) claim that SB 1070's effects are felt by Mexican Americans.

Given that previous work has identified perceptions of discrimination by Mexican American youth (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Rumbaut, 1994; Stone & Han, 2005), we highlight perceived discrimination and ask: Does perceived discrimination moderate the effects of acculturative stress on stress associated with SB 1070? We find that the greater the perceptions of discrimination, the greater the acculturative stress. However, these occur simultaneously with a lowering of the saliency of SB 1070 stress. This negative relationship may be the product of the political environment within which these students live. As noted above, SB 1070 did not appear in a legislative vacuum. Several other policies were enacted by the state that concerned people of Mexican heritage. Although in need of further investigation, we postulate that for those Mexican American students who are already aware of discrimination, SB 1070 acts as only one of several discriminatory state actions. Thus, even if SB 1070 had not been enacted, enough other discriminatory laws would still exist to impact the students' acculturative stress.

Our finding of the positive relationship between perceived discrimination and acculturative stress is further investigated in this study by asking: What is the relationship between perceived discrimination, along with acculturation, ethnic identity, and racial phenotype and school grades? Although school grades are self-reported in this study and there are indeed concerns with the validity of self-report data, there is evidence that self-reporting grades is a viable alternative when actual grades are not available (Crockett, Schulenberg, & Peterson, 1987). While it is unfortunate that Mexican American students' skin color would be negatively associated with their grades, there is a clear benefit to maintaining cultural ties via language—a factor that can at the very least mitigate the negative social effects of racial phenotype. Notably, ethnic identity was *not* associated with grades as has been the case in prior research; however, scholars have argued that the conceptualization of ethnic identity has “focused on cultural features” and “paid little attention to how ethnic identity is affected by racialization processes” (Quintana & Scull, 2009, p. 87). Quintana and Scull assert that Phinney's (1992) and Umaña-Taylor, Yazejian, and Bámaca-Gómez's (2004) ethnic identity measures exclude “items specific to discrimination and racism that Latino youth experience” (Quintana & Scull, 2009, p. 87). Indeed, in the present study, in-group ethnic identity was moderately correlated with Spanish language maintenance, ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ). Considered together with the findings related to skin color and perceived discrimination, the present study supports Quintana and Scull's assertion regarding the saliency of items related to both discrimination and racism that Latino youth experience in the conceptualization of ethnic identity.

Finally, we ask the two-part question: Is stress from SB 1070 associated with attachment to school? Does perceived discrimination moderate the effects of stress from SB 1070 on attachment to school? While we find no relation of SB1070 stress to school attachment, this relationship is moderated by perceived discrimination such that Mexican American students who have lower levels of perceived discrimination report lower attachment to school when SB 1070 stress increases. This suggests that students' attachment to school may be compromised by the effects of legislation. In other words, even when students may not perceive discrimination, attachment is vulnerable in the face of discriminatory policy.

## Conclusion

The failure of K-12 schools to work equitably for Mexican American students has been *persistent, pervasive* and *disproportionate* when compared to white students (Valencia, 2011). As Stone and Han (2005) remind, studies seeking to address such issues must include the impact of both proximate environments and larger socio-cultural contexts due to their associations to school performance. Added to these must be investigations of legislation that negatively influences the schooling of Mexican Americans within the context of their unequal educational outcomes. Gándara and Contreras (2009) describe this context as an *education crisis* that "is the result of circumstances encountered in this country" (p. 3). Findings here show that for Mexican American high school students in Arizona, SB 1070 is a circumstance that contributes to the crisis. By impacting their acculturative stress, legislation has further upset an already precarious schooling experience for Mexican American students.

While this work offers quantitative findings, further research needs to qualitatively investigate how legislation such as SB 1070 impacts students' day-to-day experiences in school. In addition, voices of teachers and counselors must be heard to offer a holistic understanding of these impacts. Studies that make transparent the often unconscious or dysconscious (King, 1997) discrimination found both within and outside of schools need to inform attempts to improve K-12 schooling for Mexican American students and others similarly situated. It is essential that this information, if it is to have impact, be accessible to all those who may engage in actions that influence outcomes. Outside of schools, legislators have a duty to be cognizant of the bearings of policies on schooling experiences. Within schools, teachers, counselors, school and district administrators must be mindful of how not just their actions but the actions of other social actors (i.e. politicians) influence their daily work.

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## About the Author

### Richard Orozco

University of Arizona

[raorozco@email.arizona.edu](mailto:raorozco@email.arizona.edu)

Richard Orozco is an Assistant Professor of Secondary Education. His research interests include the educational experiences of Mexican Americans; in particular, the analysis of discourses concerning Mexican American schooling.

### Francesca López

University of Arizona

[falopez@email.arizona.edu](mailto:falopez@email.arizona.edu)

Francesca López is an associate professor in the Educational Psychology department at the University of Arizona. Her research is focused on the ways educational settings inform Latino student identity and achievement.

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