

Chicana/o Students' Engagement with Arizona's "Anti-Ethnic Studies" Bill 1108: Civic Engagement, Ethnic Identity and Well-being

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ABSTRACT

As an amendment to a Homeland Security Bill in 2008, Arizona Senate Bill 1108, the "Anti-Ethnic Studies" bill, sought to establish that "a primary purpose of public education is to inculcate values of American citizenship" by proposing to eliminate the state's ethnic-studies programs and ethnic-based organizations characterized as "un-American." We investigated undergraduate student responses to the proposed amendment to the SB 1108 bill and associations with civic engagement, stress, ethnic identity, and mental well-being (depressive symptoms and self-esteem). Ninety-nine undergraduate students who self-identified as Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicana/o completed an online survey. Their responses indicated that more stress due to SB 1108 was significantly associated with more discrimination stress, lower self-esteem, and more depressive symptoms. We found that students that were more civically engaged in general were more engaged with SB 1108. Students with less positive or examined ethnic identity were more likely to be disengaged with SB 1108. Moreover, even if students felt high levels of stress from SB 1108, their engaged responses buffered them from the potentially negative effect of this proposed measure on self-esteem. In contrast, those who felt stress but were not engaged had significantly lower self-esteem. These findings have important implications for understanding the effect of nativist policy on Chicana/o youth and validate the benefits of civic engagement for the well-being of ethnic minority students.

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“This summer, around 50 young people – including myself – ran from Tucson to Phoenix because legislators were threatening to eliminate the teaching of ethnic studies here in the state of Arizona. We were joined by the Yoeme and Otham nations. When we reached the state capitol, the legislators were amazed that we had run through the merciless desert in 115 degree heat. The bill was dropped, but they vowed to make another attempt next year. Afterwards, one of the runners commented: “We came to fight this bill, but in the end, we came to know ourselves...”

– Dr. Roberto Rodríguez, 2009

The Contemporary Context: Ethnic Studies in Arizona

In Arizona, as in most other states across the US, the 2008 presidential election year was arguably one of the most remarkable in the nation’s history and a direct result of the Civil Rights Movement’s progress towards equality. On center stage of local and national political campaigns was the very real possibility of electing the first US President that was African American, a significant visible indicator of the breaking down of the most fundamental of social inequalities. During this same time, contentious debates about race, ethnicity, and immigration in America had been brewing. Indeed, since the events of September 11, 2001, there has been an increase in state policies and laws to regulate immigration and increase border militarization in response to the anxiety about the presence and influence of foreigners in the US. These policies and legislation have had a significant impact on Latino immigrants.¹ Moreover, this generalized anxiety about any and all peoples and activities characterized as non-“American” mediated perceptions about immigrants resulting in policies with broader negative “spillover effects” affecting native-born US Latino and Chicana/o youth (Cammarota 2009; Fix and Zimmerman 2001). Fix and Zimmerman (2001) find that one in ten US families is of mixed immigration status, that is, a family that contains citizens as well as non citizens. Seventy-five percent of such households have children who are US citizens. Not surprisingly, inherent challenges to the well-being of such families are policy-driven, affecting areas of social welfare, education, and employment.

The public debate over Arizona SB 1108 can be understood within the state’s anti-immigrant discourse (see Cammarota 2009). Arizona Senate Bill 1108 came on the heels of an onslaught of nativist legislative initiatives that had been put forth since 2004 (O’Leary 2009). In 2005, close to 30 bills were introduced in Arizona’s 46th legislative session and by the spring of 2006 nearly 37 immigration-related bills were proposed during the second regular session, making clear a dominant nativist agenda, regardless of what effect discriminatory measures would have on families, (and in particular the children of immigrants), work and education environments, and civic and political life (O’Leary 2009). Nativism has assumed new meaning with the debate on immigration policy reform, border enforcement, and a focus on immigrants from Latin America. Since 2004, nearly 70 legislative bills targeting immigrants have been introduced in the Arizona State Legislature, paralleling a surge in similar actions in other parts of the nation (Harnet 2008, Winders 2007).

A nativist perspective distinguishes between those who consider themselves native to a country and those considered immigrants. In the United States, nativism has a long history, emerging from 19th century politics against immigrants perceived to represent cultures (most notably nonwestern European and Chinese) that were markedly different from the American white Anglo Saxon protestant image (Ngai 2004, Zolberg 2006). Since 9/11, nativism has resurfaced with heated debates on immigration policy reform and a particular focus on immigrants from Latin America. The rhetoric of these debates contend that “white culture” is being challenged by the shift in demographics of black or brown cultures, which are viewed as inferior both intellectually and morally.² On the other side of the immigration debate, Latinos, immigrants, and their supporters gathered in hundreds of cities across the country, in what has been characterized as the largest civic mobilization since the civil rights era (Fraga et al. 2010). The highly visible civic and political participation by immigrants and their allies in 2006 has been followed by repressive political and social backlash by way of negative perceptions

of immigrants (Cohen-Marks, Nuño, and Sanchez 2009), which threaten to further exclude Latinos from the social fabric of the United States (Fix and Zimmerman 2009; Kilty and Vidal de Haymes 2000; O’Leary 2009). The proposed SB 1108, with its focus on what is “American” and what is not can be understood as having developed from this highly charged political context.

It was within this socio-political climate in April of 2008, that Arizona senator Russell Pearce (R-Mesa) proposed an amendment to a Homeland Security Bill that would effectively eliminate ethnic studies and ethnic-related student groups in public schools in Arizona. In the post-9/11 sociopolitical context, the Republican-dominated Arizona legislature entered an amendment to Senate Bill 1108, which originally would have made only minor changes to the state’s Homeland Security advisory councils. The amendment sought to un-do the struggle for ethnic studies courses and programs at publicly funded schools by eliminating them, based on the perception that these programs espoused “anti-Western values.” (See Appendix B for full statement.) The AZ SB 1108 amendment stated in part:

A primary purpose of public education is to inculcate values of American citizenship. Public tax dollars used in public schools should not be used to denigrate American values and the teachings of Western civilization.

It was proposed in the amendment that institutions found in violation of the bill provisions, would have a portion of their state funding withheld. Although the original amendment did not pass in 2008, nor when it was introduced a year later as SB 1069 (See Appendix C), a prevailing hostile political climate in Arizona increases the likelihood that attacks on ethnic-based groups and ethnically diverse curricula will resurface.³

Pearce, a Mesa, Arizona, Republican and architect of many anti-immigrant proposals since 2004,⁴ was reported as saying that he did not oppose diversity instruction, but rather schools that used taxpayer dollars to indoctrinate students in what he characterized as anti-American, seditious thinking

(Benson, *The Arizona Republic*, April 17, 2008). If passed, the measure would have prohibited students of the state’s universities and community colleges from forming groups based in whole or part on the race of their members. The one exception was Native American groups.⁵ Thus, this bill would primarily target individuals of Mexican descent, by far the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority in Arizona. According to the Latino Educational Equity Index (see <http://latinostudies.nd.edu/equityindex/>), the Latino percentage of Arizona’s school-age population increased dramatically, from 26.5 percent in 1990 to 34.5 percent in 2000 and to 40.0 percent in 2006. The state now ranks fourth among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the percentage of all school-age children who are Latino. Moreover, the underlying assumptions of this bill are discriminatory in that its sponsors implicitly assume that Mexican American studies and Mexican American students and their student organizations are anti-American.

While many scholars have argued that national and state policies aimed at minority populations may increase their anxiety and fear of discrimination (Michelson 2001; Pew 2007) very few studies have actually investigated the relationship between individual perceptions of policy, subjective stress, engagement and mental well being. There are no existing studies that investigate the effect of broad policy-based discrimination on young people’s self-esteem, stress, and depressive symptoms or their forms of resilience to stand up to prejudice and discrimination emanating from state policy. Furthermore, while it is likely that SB 1108/1069 may have a negative effect on student’s self-esteem and increase depressive symptoms, we are interested in how students use positive ethnic identity and civic engagement in constructive ways. Based on the historical context of the civil rights movement and contemporary work on youth activism, we are interested in how students may use ethnic identity and civic engagement to buffer their mental well-being against the negative effect of hate rhetoric and negative stereotypes of their ethnic group that are associated with policies that target them.

Ethnic Studies: Historical Context

It is ironic that in 2008, the same year that the 40th anniversary of the Chicano Movement was celebrated, amendments to the Arizona Senate Bill 1108 "Homeland Security Advisory Council" (see Appendix A-C) threatened to eliminate race/ethnic-based groups from operating on college, university and high school campuses. During the 1960s the Chicano Movement was one of several new social action interest groups that through a new form of citizen politics addressed issues of power, authority, democracy, inequality, social discrimination, and cultural freedoms (Handler, 1992, Muñoz, 1989, Navarro, 2005, Weiviorika, 2005). Within the Chicano Movement, the student group, *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlán (MEChA)*, was founded in 1969 and played a central role in advocating for meaningful public education curricula that integrated Chicana/o culture, history and politics (Muñoz 1989). The cornerstones of the Chicano Movement that led to greater empowerment were ethnic identity, civic engagement, knowledge of cultural history, and access to meaningful education. The dramatic increase in the percentage of 25- to 29-year-old Hispanics who attended college and attained bachelor's degrees between 1971 and 2008 lends some evidence that important gains have been made (National Center for Educational Statistics 2010a). In 1971, for example, 14 percent Hispanics had attempted some college, compared with 35.9 in 2008. In 1971, 5.1 percent of Hispanics had completed 4 years of college or a bachelor's degree, compared with 12.4 percent in 2008. The steady increases in percentage of post-secondary attainment for Hispanics must be viewed with caution, however, considering that for all minority groups in the 18- to 24-year-old age range, education participation rates increased from 1974 to 2003, more so for Hispanic females than for their male counterparts who have suffered a decline in participation over this period. (National Center for Educational Statistics 2010b). No doubt, it is difficult not to associate the role of the 1960s activism and advocacy of MEChA with the growth of Hispanic post-secondary education participa-

tion, and the growth of ethnic studies programs in US schools, colleges, and universities. In US colleges and universities alone, these programs have grown to approximately 400 according to the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies website (www.naccs.org).⁶

The context for understanding the creation of ethnic studies programs in the US is in this way rooted in the mid-1960s during the struggle for civil rights, student protests, anti-war demonstrations, and other social actions and causes such as the feminist movement, environmentalism, and the American Indian Movement's struggle for cultural self-determination (Wieviorka 2005). Differing substantively from preceding movements dominated by class struggle and the struggle for economic justice (see, for example, Gómez-Quíñonez 1994), civil rights movements were driven to a great degree by disillusionment and cynicism toward government with its unfulfilled promises of equality for all (Muñoz 1989). A result of these struggles was the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that addressed the systematic exclusion of ethnic and racial minorities from the political process. Subsequently, the Civil Rights Movement also fought for the inclusion of diverse cultural views that would, according to many scholars of the time, lead to meaningful educational curricula that would ensure the educational success of minority populations (Sanchez 1966). These social movements for cultural self-determination have been referred by some scholars as New Social Movements (NSMs) (Handler 1992), or "new social action interest groups" (Navarro 2005), from which a new form of citizen politics emerged that addressed more abstract issues of power, authority, democracy, inequality, social discrimination and individual and cultural freedoms (Muñoz 1989; O'Leary 2007). The Chicano Movement was one of these new social action interest groups (Handler 1992).

The emergence of the Chicano Movement (*El Movimiento*) with its call for unity under the banner of Cultural Nationalism, thus, was in step with the youthful student politics of the 1960s in both the US as well as in the rest of the world.⁷ It began with affirming ethnic/cultural identity

and its power to unify communities of Mexican heritage and frame criticisms of structured inequality, especially in terms of educational and employment opportunities (Rosen 1973). Like most other minority student groups, Chicanas/os⁸ saw themselves as a people stripped of their land, history, and culture as a result of the loss of the Mexican American War (Navarro 2005). Like other minority groups, Chicanos and Chicanas began a struggle to redefine themselves in ways that were culturally meaningful and organic, adopting labels of their own choosing. For example, activist Mexican-Americans thus opted for “Chicano,” or “Chicana,” and Afro-Americans activists opted for “black.”⁹ Ultimately, political organization—invigorated by cultural pride and group identity (Muñoz 1989)—helped restore a measure of social respect for language, ritual, and religious traditions of ethnic groups in the US (Navarro 2005). In this way these movements also helped sensitize political arenas to the exclusionary, discriminatory politics of the past. Thus, important cornerstones of the Chicana/o Movement, positive ethnic identity and civic engagement, emerged in response to historical discrimination. Indeed, the legacy of the mobilization by student groups who were able to influence national, state, and local policies around the education of Chicanas and Chicanos were a source of empowerment for generations to come (Muñoz 1989; Pizarro 1998; Rhoads and Martínez 1998).¹⁰

The appropriation of ethnic/national identities (Chicano Nationalism, Black Nationalism) also averted the eradication of some of the languages and cultures by Americanization programs and were instrumental to the consolidation of efforts to establish various “ethnic studies” programs in universities throughout the US, such as Chicano, Raza, or Mexican American studies, Black (or African-American studies), Women’s studies, and American Indian studies (Reuben 1998). Positive ethnic identity—based on knowledge of history, ethnic pride, and consciousness of culture and social injustice—was thus reconstructed and became a central element of the Chicana/o Movement and a source of youth empowerment. Because of an

increase in general self-esteem due to a sense of pride in one’s ethnic group and decrease in negative stereotypes about one’s ethnic group, many youth were able to constructively engage in activities to address the social inequalities and discrimination that were prevalent within their communities. MEChA, which had its beginnings in the period of civil rights struggle (Muñoz 1989), was founded in March of 1969 in Denver, Colorado, during the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference and was instrumental in outlining the basic premises for the Chicana/Chicano Movement. The Denver conference planted the seeds for the implementation of Chicano studies programs in which MEChA and its allies would play an important leadership role for advocating for meaningful curricula within US colleges and universities by integrating Chicana/o culture, history, and politics (Muñoz 1989; Rhoads and Martínez 1998; Rosen 1973). Today many Chicana/o studies and ethnic studies programs throughout the nation credit their existence to the dedication and political advocacy of “Mechistas.” Clearly, ethnic based groups and ethnic studies academic programs are a result of the civil rights movement and were considered critical in addressing social inequalities of the time in the United States. The success of student advocacy certainly contributed to the resilience of Chicana/o students against discrimination and further invested them in the US civic and educational systems.

Student Engagement and SB 1108

As Gauthier (2003) has noted, modern young adults, in general, are often mischaracterized as less concerned with politics compared to previous generations. Ethnic minorities have especially been portrayed as apathetic in terms of civic knowledge and civic engagement around ethnic-based policies (Baldi et al. 2001; Hahn 2001; Niemi and Junn 1998; Jennings 2002). In a study by Michelson (2003) for example, Latino youth were found to be least likely (compared to Anglo and African-American youth) to view voting as an important activity. However, other studies of youthful political and civic participation sug-

gest otherwise. The edited volume by Ginwright, Noguera, and Cammarota (2009) for example contributes to how we can expand our views to understand and make more visible minority youth activism by providing a variety of examples and contexts in which young people become engaged in an array of issues that concern their schools, neighborhoods and communities. This volume also demonstrates how a range of methodologies might help to overcome some of the challenges to accurately portraying youth civic engagement. Moreover, we now know that there was widespread involvement and organizing among Latino youth in the immigration marches of 2006-2007 (Bloemraad and Trost 2008), suggesting that youth are knowledgeable about current legislative debates on immigration and related issues and are not complacent (See also Cammarota 2009 and Cammarota and Romero 2009b). For the 2008 presidential election, Kirby and Kawashima-Ginsberg (2008) also report that the voter turnout rate among young people (ages 18 to 30) was one of highest recorded. Using data from the US Census Current Population Survey from November 2008, the authors report that in 2008 two million more voters went to the polls than in 2004, which was an increase of two percentage points from 2004 and an 11 percentage points increase compared to 2000. Among young people, African-American youth had the highest turnout rate on November 4, 2008, (58 percent) and a new racial category introduced by the Census Bureau in 2003, "mixed race," had the second highest turnout rate (55 percent). Turnout among white youth was 52 percent and, unlike most other racial/ethnic groups, showed no gain between the 2004 and 2008 elections. By comparison, Latino youth voter rates increased five percentage points.

Furthermore, qualitative research suggests that urban ethnic minority youth understand civic engagement in a manner different from middle-class Anglo students because of their personal experiences with social injustice in the United States (Rubin 2007). Bedolla's qualitative research (2000) also shows that respondents' political par-

ticipation may be nuanced, at times, often reflecting disenchantment with the political system while maintaining a strong ethnic affiliation. However, it is exactly the sense of being engaged with the political systems that may be an important factor for youths' mental well-being. For this reason, in the current study we take a broader view of civic and political participation to understand the engagement and civic behaviors of Latino students, which includes actions that can be taken regardless of citizenship status or voting ability (Marcelo, Lopez, and Kirby 2007; Montoya 2002; Pew Research Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2004). Following the trends in recent studies to expand the concept of politics, we too extend the scope of political and civic participation beyond voting and running for office (Gauthier 2003). These include wearing buttons with political messages, taking part in demonstrations, voicing concerns to or trying to persuade registered voters, and volunteering to help mobilize communities (Marcelo, Lopez, and Kirby 2007; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). As such, we consider being engaged as including all activities that are fundamental to all types of political actions such as talking about them, learning about them, being positive about them, and participating in them. Gauthier (2003) also finds that today's youth are motivated to express their political views through means such as protest activism, volunteer work, membership in student associations, and targeted purchasing. Membership in organizations based on ethnic, racial, ideological identity (McIlwain 2007), or values such as responsibility or obligation to community can also advance the development of civic and political voice through coalition-building, collaboration, and outreach (Fox 2005). Political consciousness-raising through video journals and poetic expression and other activities that cultivate critical intellectualism have been used in ethnic studies classes in K-12 in public schools (Cammarota and Romero 2009a). These have been linked to youth activism that is fundamental to exercising civil rights and learning about issues facing neighborhoods and communities such as racism and discrimination (Romero, Arce, and Cammarota 2009). However, research has yet to

link civic engagement or engaged responses to legislation to mental well-being of minority adolescents.

Relatedly, an ethnic identity that is based on knowledge of cultural history and a positive view of one's ethnic group may increase resilience of students to negative messages they may receive about their ethnic group via legislation and related rhetoric (Romero et al. 2003a). Students who have a more positive sense of their ethnic group may be more resilient to hearing hate rhetoric and negative messages about their own ethnic group, which may thus insulate their self-esteem and minimize depressive symptoms. Furthermore, an ethnic identity based on knowledge of cultural history and traditions, may elicit a more engaged response, both politically and socially, because of Chicana/o role models of the 1960s. On the other hand, youth who have less understanding of their own ethnic group culture, history, and traditions may be more vulnerable to negative stereotypes and hate rhetoric and may then become more disengaged with their schools, politics, and US society. There is a significant amount of empirical research that has demonstrated that ethnic identity is associated with higher self-esteem, more optimism, and fewer depressive symptoms (Phinney 1992). However, we do not know how ethnic identity may buffer effects of political legislation. In the current study we were interested in the responses of Chicano/a undergraduate students to the amendments to SB 1108/1069, anti-Ethnic studies legislation. Based on the existing literature review, the following questions were generated:

- (1)(a) Will students who report more stress due to SB 1108 also report more stress from discrimination in general?
- (1)(b) Is more stress from SB 1108 associated with more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem?
- (2) Will students who are more civically engaged and have a stronger ethnic identity report more engaged responses to SB 1108?
- (3) Will students who are more disengaged about SB 1108 be more likely to report depressive symptoms?
- (4) Do engaged responses buffer the nega-

tive effect of stress from SB 1108 on self-esteem?

Research Design and Participants

The study, conducted in the fall of 2008, used a cross-sectional self-report study design. Undergraduate students completed an online survey at one time point. Students were recruited from undergraduate courses at a four-year institution in Arizona. Undergraduate research assistants read a five-minute recruitment script in each of these classes at the beginning of class and students were asked to write down their email address on a list if they were interested in being contacted for the study. The recruitment script contained information not only about the survey details; but also let the students know that it was confidential, anonymous, and that they would be contacted only twice via email. In most of their courses, students were offered extra credit as an incentive for participating in the study. Students were also able to enter a raffle for an MP3 player for their participation. Students who provided email addresses were sent individualized links to the web-based survey; if they did not respond to the first email contact they also received one follow up email 24 hours before the end of data collection. Initially, 513 email addresses were collected, 51 emails returned as undeliverable, and 7 students opted out of the study. Of those initial emails, 326 completed the survey online, which was 71 percent of the valid email addresses that were sent an invitation.

Procedure

Undergraduate students completed an online survey on a wide range of student issues using the online program, Survey Monkey. First, they were sent individualized email links for the survey to ensure that they completed the survey at only one time point. Once students completed the survey they were not able to go back to it to make changes or to forward the link to others. The survey was completed at the student's own convenience at the computers of their own choice. Prior to beginning the survey, participants read and agreed

to an informed assent. At this point students were also able to opt out of the survey. The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete. All surveys were completed in English. After completing the questionnaire, participants were able to print out a confirmation page to give to their professors in order to receive extra credit. One MP3 player was raffled off to one student upon the completion of the study. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board Committee for the protection of human subjects at the University of Arizona.

Demographics

Participants self-reported their age, gender, and generation level. Ninety-nine (30.3 percent of the total sample) respondents self-identified as either Mexican National or Mexican American/Chicano, which were included in the analyses for the current study. The sample was predominantly female ($n=72$, 73 percent) with 27 percent males (27). The average age was $M=20.22$, $SD=1.77$ with a range from 18-23 years old. Nine (9.1 percent) were born in another country, and 42.4 percent (42) had at least one parent who was an immigrant, 48.5 percent (48) were of a later generation.

Engagement/Disengagement to SB-1108 Anti-Ethnic Studies Amendment

The following vignette explaining SB 1108 was provided for the questionnaire: "In the spring of 2008, some Arizona senators proposed a law (SB 1108) that would ban curricula that conflict with Western values (such as Raza studies) and "race-based" organizations (such as MEChA) from public school campuses, including colleges and universities." Participants read the vignette and were asked: "to what degree do the following describe your response to the proposed law/these events?" Engagement strategies involve directly coping with the stressor or one's emotions and include problem solving, emotional expression, and emotional modulation; engagement is generally associated with fewer emotional problems for youth (Compas et al., 2001). Conversely, dis-

engagement strategies distance one's thoughts, emotions and physical presence from the stressor, such as denial and wishful thinking. A Likert scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree was provided for each of the following responses: (a) Realize I have to live with how things are, (b) Try not to think about it, (c) Talk to friends and family about it, (d) Learn all I can about it, (e) Concentrate on positive things, (f) Pray or meditate to calm myself, (g) Participate in activism (e.g. petitions, marches, rallies, etc.) with people who share similar views, (h) I don't know what I feel. The responses a, b, and h were grouped to create a "disengage" variable and the responses c, d, e, f, and g were grouped to create an "engage" variable (See Table 1). Another response, "Feel stressed out," became a separate item for "stress due to SB 1108."

Discrimination Stress

Sixteen items were used to measure stress resulting from discrimination. This scale was modified from the discrimination subscale of the Bicultural Stress Scale (Edwards and Romero 2008; Romero and Roberts 2003a; 2003b). These 16 items represent discrimination due to language, immigration concerns, derogatory ethnic jokes, being followed at stores, and solo status. They refer to discrimination at school, in stores, with police/border patrol and with peers. The responses ranged from 0=this has never happened to me; 1=not at all stressful, 2=a little bit stressful, 3=quite a bit stressful, 4=very stressful. The items were averaged for a mean stress score with a higher score indicating more stress. Internal reliability of this scale was $\alpha=.82$ for Mexican Americans.

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement items were modified from scales by Flanagan and colleagues (2007). A total of 19 questions were asked including items such as "write an opinion letter to a local newspaper, contact an elected official, get other people to care about the problem, participate in a boycott, vote on a regular basis, or wear a campaign button." Participants were asked "How often have

you used the following strategies when you feel there is problem in your community?" A Likert scale ranged from 1=never, 2=a few times, 3=sometimes, 4=a lot. The alpha for all items was $\alpha = .93$. All items were combined to create an overall average score of civic engagement with a higher score indicating more frequent use of civic engagement behaviors. The internal reliability for Engaged was $\alpha = .71$ for Mexican Americans. The internal reliability for Disengaged was $\alpha = .66$ for Mexican Americans.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity was assessed with 12 items of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) which represent the degree to which individuals have explored their ethnic history and traditions and have committed and resolved their feelings about their ethnic group as well as seven affirmation items (Marsiglia et al. 2004) that represent the positive-negative emotional valence of ethnic identity. Response items ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. The 12 identity items were averaged for a mean score, with a higher score indicating more agreement. A mean value of the affirmation items were taken and standardized from -1 to 1 in order to create a valence for the positive-negative effect of the affirmation of identity. Thus, in order to represent ethnic identity, a variable was created by multiplying the identity mean with the standardized affirmation mean. The internal reliability was $\alpha = .90$.

Depressive Symptoms

Depressive symptoms were measured with 10 items from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff 1977). Participants rated how frequently they experienced each symptom during the past week, on a scale from 1 (rarely) to 4 (most of the time). Items included: I felt that I could not shake off the blues, even with help from my family or friends; I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing; I felt lonely; and I felt hopeful about the future (reversed-scored). Higher mean scores denoted

higher depressive symptoms. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .76$).

Self-esteem

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) was used to measure self-esteem as a global sense of self-worth. The seven-item scale (1 = never, 5 = almost always true) was reliable in previous studies with adolescents (Rosenberg 1965; 1979) and particularly with Mexican Americans, Cronbach's alpha ranged from .73 to .87 (Cervantes et al. 1990-91; Joiner and Kashubeck 1996). A sample item is "I feel that I have a number of good qualities." For this sample the internal reliability was $= .86$. An average self-esteem score was computed.

Results

Descriptive results for variables of interest are provided in Table 1. Pearson Product Moment Correlations were used to analyze correlations between two variables (see Table 2). Multiple linear hierarchical regression analyses were undertaken to investigate the associations between multiple variables on one continuous outcome variable (see Table 3). The results from the current study are presented for the following questions.

1 (a) Is more stress from SB1108 associated with more discrimination stress? (b) Is more stress from SB1108 associated with more depressive symptoms and less self-esteem?

Based on Pearson Product Moment correlations there were significant correlations between SB 1108 stress and discrimination stress, ($r = .25$, $p < .05$). Students who reported more stress from SB 1108 were significantly more likely to report more stress from discrimination in general (See Table 3).

Based on Pearson Product Moment correlations there were significant correlations between SB 1108 stress and self-esteem and depressive symptoms. More SB 1108 stress was associated with lower self-esteem ($r = -.25$, $p < .05$) and more depressive symptoms ($r = .32$, $p < .01$) (See Table 3).

(2) Are more civic engagement and positive ethnic identity associated with more engaged responses to SB1108 and less disengaged responses?

Based on Pearson Product Moment correlations, being engaged with SB 1108 was significantly associated with civic engagement in general ($r=.27$, $p<.01$) but was not significantly associated with ethnic identity. A disengaged response to SB 1108 was significantly associated with lower ethnic identity ($r=-.38$, $p<.001$) but was not significantly associated with civic engagement in general.

In a multiple linear regression model to predict engagement with SB 1108 from both civic engagement and ethnic identity the overall model was significant (see Table 4). Civic engagement was significantly associated with SB 1108 engagement but ethnic identity was not. The overall regression model was significant at the $p<.01$ level and accounted for seven percent of the variance of SB 1108 engagement. More civic engagement in general was associated with more engagement with SB 1108 ($\beta=.27$, $t=2.71$).

The overall multiple linear regression model to predict disengagement from both civic engagement and ethnic identity was significant at the $p=.001$ level, accounting for 16 percent of the variance (see Table 4). The only significant variable was ethnic identity ($\beta=-.38$, $t=-4.07$, $p<.01$). Students who were more disengaged were significantly more likely to report a more negative and less examined ethnic identity.

(3) Are individuals who are more disengaged about SB1108 likely to report more depressive symptoms?

Based on Pearson Product Moment Correlations there was not a significant relationship between being disengaged and depressive symptoms (see Table 3).

(4) Do engaged responses buffer the negative effect of stress from SB1108 on self-esteem and depressive symptoms?

Separate multiple linear regression models were conducted to predict self-esteem and depressive symptoms from responses to SB 1108

(engaged, disengaged, stress) and the interaction between engaged and stress (see Table 4).

Self-esteem: The overall model to predict self-esteem accounted for 15 percent of the variance and was significant at the $p=.001$ level. Stress, engagement and the interaction between the two were significant (see Table 4). Figure 1 depicts the direction of the interaction between stress and engagement on self-esteem. At high levels of SB1108 stress, engagement did significantly buffer the negative effect on self-esteem. A higher level of engagement protected students' self-esteem from the negative effect of stress due to SB1108 compared to students who were less engaged. **Depressive Symptoms:** The overall model to predict depressive symptoms was significant at the $p=.04$ level accounting for 6 percent of the variance. Stress was the only significant variable ($\beta=.33$, $t=3.15$, $p<.01$), such that more stress from SB1108 was associated with more depressive symptoms. Being engaged did not buffer the negative effect of stress on depressive symptoms. Interaction terms were not significant for depressive symptoms.

Discussion

The current study investigated students' engaged and disengaged responses to the AZ SB 1108, "anti-ethnic studies" proposal and the relation between responses and civic engagement, ethnic identity and discrimination experiences. More SB 1108 stress was linked with more stress from personal experiences of discrimination, lower self-esteem, and more depressive symptoms. Students that were more civically engaged in general were more engaged with SB 1108. Being disengaged about SB 1108 was associated with a less positive ethnic identity. Students who felt high levels of stress from SB 1108, but were also engaged had the least negative effect on their self-esteem; where those who felt stress but were not engaged had significantly lower self-esteem. Engagement did not buffer the negative effects of stress on depressive symptoms.

Nationally, Latino teens have the highest rates of feeling sad and hopeless for more than

two weeks, making plans for suicide, and suicide attempts (Eaton et al. 2007). Mental health and related issues of self-esteem are critical to understanding this understudied population. Although many scholars suggest that political environments impact the daily life and mental well-being of Latinos, there is very little empirical work that provides evidence for this relationship between macro factors and individual well-being. Our results indicate that proposed legislative policy aimed at Latino youth via their schools and school-based organizations is associated with more stress, lower self-esteem and more depressive symptoms. Given the national rates of health disparities of depressive symptoms and suicide, these findings shed light on the effect of the broader environment that uniquely impacts Latino adolescents in the United States. While some young people remain disengaged, which does negatively impact their self-esteem, it is also the case that when youth are engaged in discussion and change of proposed legislation they are more likely to report higher self-esteem. Thus, the take-home message of the results of this study is that Latino/a youth are finding collective strategies to remain engaged in US civic processes and to remain resilient at individual levels, despite the continued negative messages and obstacles that are presented by individuals in positions of power in society.

It is now widely acknowledged that Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority in the US (US Census Bureau 2009). The demographic analysis of US youths, ages 18-25, by Lopez and Marcelo (2006) demonstrates that this segment of the population has become increasingly diverse in the last 35 years, and will continue to diversify as a growing Latino and African-American youth population matures and the number of whites decline (Lopez and Marcelo 2006). The number of Hispanic children who are now second generation (those who are US-born but have a least one parent who is an immigrant) is rapidly increasing and will surely be a potential force in determining future electoral outcomes. It is estimated that one in every five young Latinos has at least one immigrant parent and that political behaviors will

likely be particularly sensitive to immigration issues in political debates (Marcelo and Lopez 2006). Predictably, these youthful populations will also be subjected to stress from discrimination and pressures to reconcile competing cultural loyalties (Kelley et al. 2009).

As such, discrimination in this context and its consequences for well-being necessarily moves us in the direction of examining how group identities are politicized and the positive role that ethnic identity or ethnic pride plays in framing civic and political engagement when an attack on those ethnicities or identities is perceived (Schildkraut 2005). Thinking about and acting to counter the oppressive social economic forces that impede the development of a healthy identity and environment is fundamental to Chicano studies curricula and where such principles have been applied, gains in educational attainment have been made (Camarota and Romero 2009b; Romero 2008).

However, as the case in Arizona proves, the growth and success of such ethnic studies programs may increase the negative backlash from critics who accuse such programs of ethnic chauvinism, racism, and self-segregation (Camarota 2009), despite evidence that shows that such programs improve students' life chances with academic success and educational attainment (Romero 2008). This begs the question as to why these programs are being targeted by state legislators. In this regard, the role of having examined their ethnic identity may help youth so that they do not become disengaged from US society and civic involvement. The findings clearly indicate that it was the youth who knew more about their cultural history that were more likely to be engaged and aware of state politics and government systems. The systematic exploration of ethnicity in the US is rooted not only within families, but also in the multicultural curricula that emerged in US classrooms since the 1970s and continues today in many ethnic studies programs. The findings of the present study provide yet another reason to maintain these programs. These programs do not isolate and decrease tolerance among youth; in fact they appear to increase cultural knowledge and understanding

of ethnic minority group roles within US society (Romero and Roberts 1998) and may thus increase youth engagement in US political life.

Despite the limitations of the current study, sample size and non-random sample, it does provide a timely insight into the impact of nativist legislation designed to marginalize specific ethnic groups on the mental well-being of Latino adolescents. Given national disparities of depressive symptoms and suicide among Latinos there is a need to understand the impact of hate rhetoric against immigrants and negative stereotypes of Latinos on youth. Despite claims that that Latino youth are not engaged in current events, it is clear from the results of our study that they are not only engaged on multiple dimensions, but these activities may protect their self-esteem against the negative effects of proposed legislation against them and their schools. A sense of how the civic arena is potentially reformulated to be more inclusive and tolerant of minorities is one of many lessons learned from increased engagement, and clearly, Latino youth voicing and acting upon policies that affect them also can expect to benefit from positive effects on their mental health. Thus, perhaps it is time to take stock and consider strategies that can further increase civic participation of the nation's largest ethnic minority group in ways that promote civil democratic discourse.

Postscript

On May 11, 2010, Governor Janet Brewer signed into law an "anti ethnic studies" bill known as Arizona Senate Bill 2281. Similar to its 2008 predecessor, SB 2281 prohibits curricula that promotes the overthrow of the United States government; promotes resentment toward a race or class of people; is designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group; and, advocates ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals. Like the previous version, SB 2281 targets the Tucson Unified School District's ethnic studies program an interdisciplinary curriculum that focuses on contributions made by Mexican Americans, African Americans and Native Americans in literature, history, and science, which serves approximately 1,500 primarily Mexican students.

SB 2281 comes on the heels of Arizona SB 1070, entitled the "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act," signed into law on April 23, 2010, which as one of the harshest measures on record aimed at controlling unauthorized immigration, received national and international attention and stirred controversy. Both bills spurred mass demonstrations, including by many youths who also carried out acts of civil disobedience in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona's largest metropolitan areas.

Notes

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- 1 In the spring of 2004, Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington's controversial essay in Foreign Policy, "The Hispanic Challenge," (Huntington 2004) produced unprecedented media coverage and sparked a national debate on the impact of Latino immigrants in the United States. In this excerpt from a forthcoming book, Huntington asserts that Mexican immigrants in particular pose the "single most immediate and most serious challenge to American's traditional identity," and that a plausible reaction to the notable demographic shift due to immigration could be the rise of anti-Hispanic and anti-immigrant movement that would become increasingly vocal in protesting job losses to immigrants, the displacement of English, and "the perversion of their culture."
- 2 This description is found in Huntington (2004), referencing a description provided by Carol Swain from her 2002 book titled, *The New White Nationalism in America*.
- 3 An anti-ethnic studies measure had been previously introduced (in 2007), following a similar pattern

in Arizona's anti-immigrant legislative activity in which failed bills are re-tooled and reintroduced in later legislative sessions (See O'Leary 2009).

- 4 See the Arizona State Legislature website where Pearce boasts, "I am Arizona's, and the nation's, most outspoken advocate for stopping the illegal invasion, securing our borders and enforcing our laws.... In 2004 I was the architect of The Citizen's Initiative known as Proposition 200,... I authored: Arizona's Fair and Legal Employment Act; Arizona's Employer Sanctions legislation, the toughest worksite enforcement bill in the nation to stop illegal employers and to protect jobs for Arizonans. Proposition 100 in 2006, a Constitutional Amendment to refuse bond to any illegal alien who commits a serious crime in Arizona... Proposition 102 to require that an illegal alien who sues an American citizen cannot receive ANY punitive damages. ... Prop. 103 making English the Official Language of Arizona..." Available at: http://www.azleg.gov/MembersPage.asp?Member_ID=109&Legislature=49&Session_ID=93#bills.
- 5 In June of 2009, a version of the 2008 bill was introduced again, as Senate Bill 1069 (Kossan 2009). Its re-introduction follows what is now readily recognized as a familiar pattern established since 2004 in which revised versions of failed bills are revised and reconsidered in subsequent legislative sessions and through the use of public resources, work to wheedle away opposition (O'Leary 2009).
- 6 The National Association of Chicano/Chicana Studies was established in 1972 to promote communication and exchange of ideas among Chicana and Chicano scholars across all geographical and disciplinary boundaries (See www.naccs.org).
- 7 For a thorough treatment of student unrest around the world during this time, see Reuben 1998.
- 8 Unless a referenced author specifies "Chicano", we will use "Chicana/o" as an alternative to the Spanish language convention that erases the feminine subject form when both masculine and feminine subject forms are present.
- 9 Likewise, Native Americans, became increasingly political in articulating opposition to labels imposed on them by conquering western peoples (Anglos and Spaniards), which were derogatory and dehu-

manizing. The long process of re-educating US populations about the imposed labels resulted in their replacement with the traditional names of their choosing (e.g. replacing "Papago" (the name given to the largest Amerindian nation in the state of Arizona, with "Tohono O'odham").

- 10 See for example the edited volume by Gerard J. DeGroot (1998) *Student Protest: the Sixties and After*. London and New York: Longman.

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Tables and Figure

Table 1

Variables used to determine “engaged” and “disengaged” with SB 1108

Responses used to determine “engaged”	Responses used to determine “disengaged”
(c) I talk to friends and family about it (d) I learn all I can about it (e) I concentrate on positive things (f) Pray or meditate to calm myself (g) Participate in activism (e.g. petitions, marches, rallies, etc.)	(a) I realize I have to live with how things are (b) I try not to think about it (h) I don’t know what I feel

Table 2

Descriptive Values for Variables of Interest

	M(SD)	Range
Disengaged Response to 1108	1.94(.65)	1-3.33
Engaged Response to SB 1108	2.67(.51)	1.33-4.00
Stress Response to SB 1108	2.27(.94)	1-4
Discrimination Stress	1.28(.63)	.11-3.44
Ethnic Identity	1.19(2.72)	-5.6-4.75
Civic Engagement	1.50(.50)	1-4
Self-esteem	4.20(.60)	2.12-5.00
Depressive Symptoms	1.96(.51)	1-3.20

Note: p value less than .05 is considered a significant difference between groups. A higher score indicates more agreement.

Table 3
Pearson Product Moment Correlations between Variables of Interest

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5	6.	7.	8.
1. SB 1108 Engage	1.00							
2. SB 1108 Disengage	-.30**	1.00						
3. SB 1108 Stress	.36***	-.11	1.00					
4.Civic Engagement	.27**	-.19	.14	1.00				
5. Ethnic Identity	.14	-.38***	.04	.02	1.00			
6. Discrimination Stress	.19	-.03	.25*	.20	-.01	1.00		
7. Self-esteem	.04	-.07	-.25*	.07	.27**	-.17	1.00	
8. Depressive	.09	-.05	.32**	.06	-.22*	.20*	-.55***	1.00

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

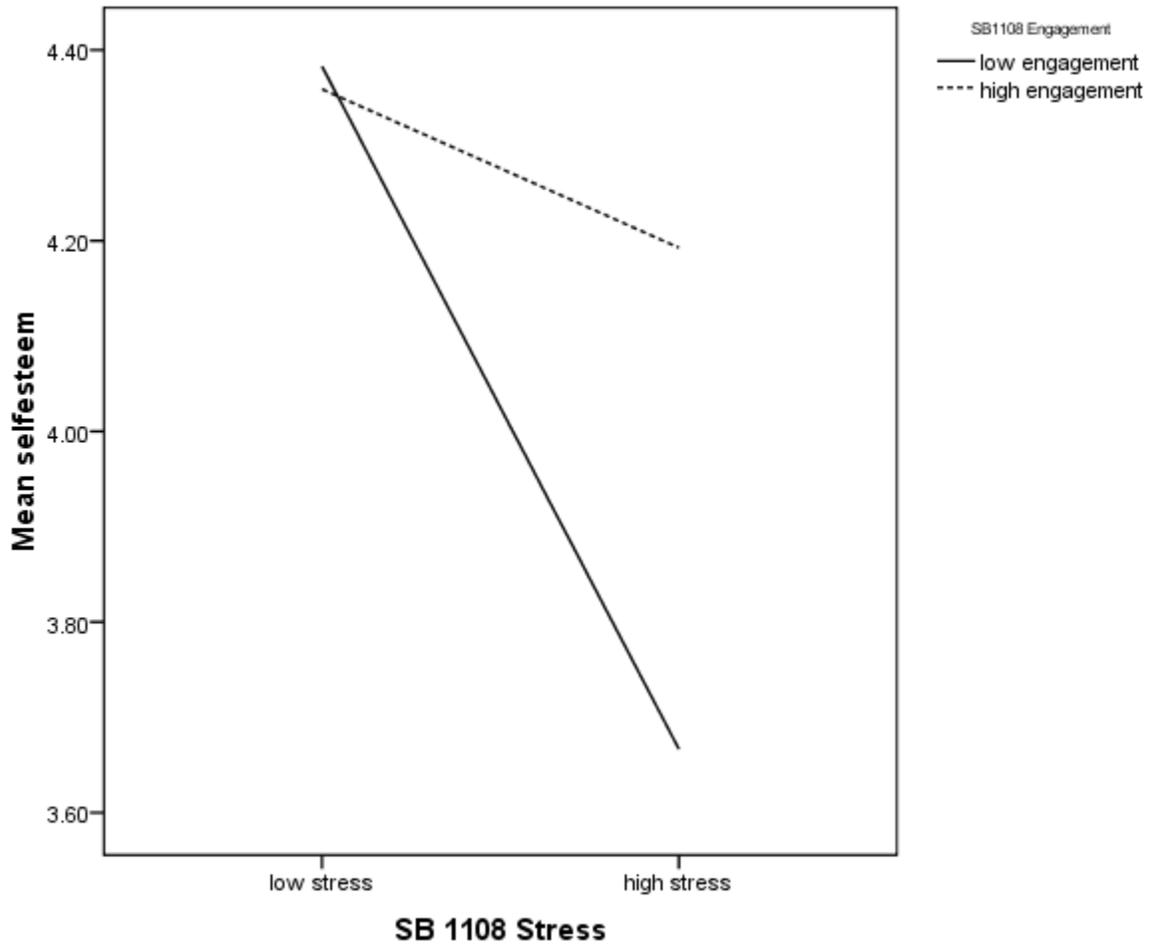
Table 4
Multiple Linear Regression Analyses

	Std.β	t value
1. SB 1108 Stress	F(3,94)=3.22, p=.03, R=.31, adj.R2=.06	
Discrimination	.27	2.72**
Civic Engagement	.09	.86
Ethnic Identity	.05	.50
2. SB 1108 Disengage	F(2, 95)=10.26, p=.001, R=.42, adj.R2=.16	
Civic Engagement	-.18	-1.91
Ethnic Identity	-.38	-4.07***
3. SB 1108 Engage	F(2, 95)=4.62, p=.01, R=.30, adj.R2=.07	
Civic Engagement	.27	2.71**
Ethnic Identity	.13	1.33
4. Self-esteem	F(4,94)=5.19, p=.001, R=.43, adj.R2=.15	
1.SB 1108 Stress	-1.8	-3.91***
2. SB 1108 Engage	-.49	-2.32*
3. SB 1108 Disengage	-.07	-.70
4. Interaction	1.8	3.34***
5. Depressive Symptoms	F(4,94)=3.59, p=.02, R=.32, adj.R2=.06	
1. SB 1108 Stress	.33	3.15**
2. SB 1108 Engage	-.04	-.36
3. SB 1108 Disengage	-.03	-.25

Note: * p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Figure 1

Significant Interaction between SB 1108 stress and engagement on self-esteem. At low stress there is minimal impact of engagement on self-esteem. At high levels of SB 1108 stress, individuals who are less engaged reported significantly lower self-esteem than those who were engaged.



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