

Revolutionary acts of collective-preservation: A longitudinal investigation of ethnic fit,
friendships, and civic engagement among Latinx undergraduates

by

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Abstract

Although Latinx undergraduates' access to college is steadily improving in the United States, those who enroll in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) tend to have a poor sense of belonging due to interpersonal discrimination and peer rejection. In response, some Latinx undergraduates participate in civic engagement to confront racial discrimination and foster a sense of belonging. Yet, few scholars have examined how the racial composition of Latinx undergraduates' friendship groups relates to the nature of their civic engagement on campus. The following study sought to address this gap by examining how Latinx undergraduates' ethnic racial identity (ERI) at the beginning of college, as well as the friendships and perceived ethnic fit/threat they develop on campus related to their participation in civic engagement at the end of their first year ($N = 313$). A one-way ANOVA demonstrated no significant differences in either acts of service or activism based on the racial composition of students' friendship groups. Yet, hierarchical linear regression analyses demonstrated that Latinx undergraduates' acts of service and activism varied based on indicators of their ERI (T1), perceived ethnic threat (T2), and proportion of intraracial friendships (T2). Similarly, Latinx undergraduates' activism at the end of their first year varied based on indicators of ERI and proportions of intraracial friendships. These findings suggest the importance of university support for Latinx undergraduate students, and cultural affinity spaces to promote better sense of belonging during the transition to college.

Keywords: *Latinx undergraduates, civic engagement, PWI, sense of belonging, friendships, ethnic fit*

Revolutionary acts of collective-preservation: A longitudinal investigation of ethnic fit, friendships, and civic engagement among Latinx undergraduates

Many Latinx families migrate to the United States (U.S.) in hopes of safety, financial security, and opportunity for themselves and their children (American Psychological Association, 2012; Montgomery & O'Brien, 2017; Shobe et al., 2009). In order to accomplish these goals, Latinx parents often encourage their children to strive for success by pursuing "los estudios" ("the studies"; Auerbach, 2006), to achieve societal acceptance and social mobility (Gándara, 2009; Fuster, 2011; Torres & Magolda, 2004). Hence, it is unsurprising most Latinx students have high college going aspirations (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Durand & Perez, 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2012). However, many Latinx students enroll in predominantly white institutions (PWIs), and face institutional and interpersonal barriers, like peer rejection and lack of ethnic fit on campus (Baldwin-White et al., 2017).

As Latinx students process societal expectations, stereotypes, and biases about their ethnic group in college, they may integrate these narratives into their assessment of their self-worth (Hope & Spencer, 2017; Spencer et al., 1997). Studies suggest Latinx students at PWIs may not feel a cultural fit with their campus because of stereotypes about their ethnic-racial identity (ERI), or other students' ignorance about their culture (Gloria et al., 2005). Discrimination from their peers related to their ERI may influence their academic self-efficacy, persistence, and achievement (Hope & Spencer, 2017). A lack of belonging, or perceived campus cultural fit may re-evaluate their ERI beliefs and become more civically engaged on campus (Hope & Spencer, 2017). Yet, less is known about how the racial composition of Latinx undergraduates' friendships on campus relate to the different types of civic engagement they participate in, during their transition to college.

The present study will address the gap in extant literature by examining how Latinx undergraduates' ERI beliefs at the start of college, as well as their campus cultural fit, and friendships on campus at the end of their first year relate to their civic engagement participation during the transition to college. Specifically, we will consider the importance of both ERI, and intraracial friendships on campus in fostering sense of belonging, overall wellbeing, and academic persistence during the transition to college (Chavous et al., 2017; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Katsiaficas et al., 2019). Hence, we examined how the racial composition of Latinx undergraduates' friendships – as a component of sense of belonging – contributed to different types of civic engagement. We draw on the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST; Spencer et al., 1997) and Intragroup Marginalization Theory (Castillo, 2009; Ferenczi et al., 2015) to investigate how Latinx undergraduates' ERI beliefs, intraracial friendships, and perceived ethnic fit on campus contribute to civic engagement.

PVEST highlights the role of identity, stress management, and coping when considering how individuals and communities interact with each other (Spencer et al., 1997). According to this theory, individuals' experiences contribute to their assessment of their own value within a certain context based on their social identities. These self-assessments also relate to how individuals may respond in oppressive situations. Recently, Hope and Spencer (2017) expanded this model to include critical civic engagement as a natural response to systemic inequality faced by ethnic minority individuals. We apply this theory to the interconnected nature of Latinx undergraduates' assessments of their ERI, their ethnic fit on campus, and their ability to take action through civic engagement during their transition to college.

Latinx Students' Perceptions of Campus Racial Climate

Although college access is steadily improving for Latinx emerging adults in the U.S., evidence indicates that Latinx undergraduates continue to face barriers (Ma & Baum, 2016; Murphy & Murphy, 2018). Most Latinx undergraduates enroll at PWIs (Robertson et al., 2014), and find that the campus environment promotes values that are misaligned with their own culturally derived values (Gloria et al., 2005). Moreover, they often face institutional and interpersonal discrimination, including: intraracial peer rejection (i.e., rejection from other Latinx students for their decisions around acculturating to the campus culture; Castillo, 2009), lack of perceived campus cultural fit (i.e., undergraduates cultural fit to the college environment; Ethier & Deaux, 1990), and a less sense of belonging compared to their white peers (Garcia, 2017). This discrimination on campus may contribute to prolonged graduation, such that 40% of Latinx undergraduates' graduate college within six years (Robertson et al., 2014). These factors may threaten some Latinx students' academic motivation, persistence and achievement (Baldwin-White et al., 2017; Gloria et al., 2005).

As Latinx undergraduates reflect on these challenges, they may also consider the role of their identities, access to power, and resources to persist in their college journey (Murphy & Murphy, 2018). Racial and social norms at PWIs promote uniqueness, independence, and self-reliance among students (Castillo, 2009) which is in direct contrast to cultural norms within some Latinx communities which encourage interdependence and group success (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Nagayama Hall, 2017). Often, members of the campus community actively devalue or criticize aspects of Latinx culture like communalism (i.e., a cultural continuity which promotes commitment to social connectedness) or familismo (i.e., strong identification and attachment to those considered family) (Gray et al., 2020). Instead, the culture at PWIs tend to

promote individualistic notions of personal and academic success (Gerlach et al., 2018).

Rejection of Latinx values may contribute to lower sense of belonging as well as feelings that they cannot share their true selves and culture with their peers on campus (Passano, 2021; Robertson et al., 2014). To navigate the campus setting, Latinx undergraduates may seek intraracial friendships, or spaces on campus where they feel accepted to reflect on their cultural heritage and race-based experiences on campus (Robertson et al., 2014).

Latinx Students' Ethnic-Racial Identity and Sense of Belonging

In the U.S., ERI refers to shared cultural characteristics such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs (American Psychological Association Style, 2019). Scholars have identified domains that contribute to ERI among Black/African Americans, like how salient or central their race is to them (centrality), the ideologies around what it means to belong to their racial group (ideology), and the affective beliefs that they and others have about individuals in their racial group (regard) (Rivas-Drake & Umana-Taylor, 2019; Sellers et al., 1997). While these domains apply to Latinx undergraduates, these emerging adults may also lean more on Latin American conceptualizations of ERI like ethnicity and nationality (Chavez-Duenas et al., 2019). Latinx undergraduates' ERI, and pride in their Latinidad (i.e., the experience of developing and expressing a Latinx identity; Arana-Chicas et al., 2019) can serve as a protective factor in the face of interpersonal and institutional discrimination (Forrest-Bank & Cueller, 2018). Scholars have demonstrated that many Latinx undergraduates consider their ERI or ancestral nationality, a major source of pride (e.g., Corona et al., 2017; Rivas-Drake, 2011).

Yet, when Latinx undergraduates realize that their peers are uninformed about their culture, and hold racist biases against them, their ERI may become more salient or even threatened (Gloria et al., 2005; Torres & Magolda, 2004). Various studies have demonstrated the

crucial role of Latinx undergraduates' ERI and their feelings about their college. Specifically, studies have shown that higher racial centrality (how important their race is to their identity; Sellers et al., 1997) tend to feel more motivated, confident, and connected to their school compared to their intraracial peers with lower centrality (Rivas-Drake & Umana-Taylor, 2019; Torres & Magdolas, 2004). Another study found that Latinx undergraduates with greater racial centrality and public regard (perception of others' beliefs about their ethnic group; Sellers et al., 1997) tend to be more trusting of and engaged with their academic institutions (Rivas-Drake, 2011). Similarly, studies have highlighted the importance of both public regard (individuals' beliefs about how others perceive their ethnic-racial group; Sellers et al, 1997) and private regard (individuals' perceptions of their own ethnic-racial group; Sellers et al, 1997) in undergraduates' reflections on and persistence in the college setting. One study found that Latinx students with higher private regard and lower public regard are more likely to identify racially unjust settings, and may feel a greater sense of rejection on campus (Green, 2019). Relatedly, Latinx undergraduates with higher public regard tend to identify the dissonance between their values and those at the PWI more readily (Cerezo & Chang, 2014). Lastly, Latinx undergraduates' private regard was associated with college-going efficacy and academic persistence on campus (Green, 2019; Stein et al., 2019). These findings demonstrate the importance of examining the college transition and highlighting the deleterious effects of stigmatizing campus experiences on Latinx students' ERI. Yet, more work is needed which examines how Latinx undergraduates' ERI and the racial composition of their friendships relate to sense of belonging on campus.

Intraracial Peer Relationships and Latinx Students' Sense of Belonging

As Latinx undergraduates compare their experiences on campus to that of their inter-and-intra racial peers, they notice differences in the privilege or marginalization they face on campus

compared to their friends based on their ERI. In line with the PVEST model, PWIs are a unique space to consider Latinx undergraduates' net vulnerability, or the composite of both the protective and risk factors affecting their identity development (Spencer et al., 1997). Factors, like Latinx undergraduates' physical characteristics, family migration history, and citizenship status, contribute to their overall net vulnerability and varying proximity to PWIs Eurocentric-individualistic campus culture (Murphy & Murphy, 2018). Often, Latinx undergraduates compare their experiences to their peers and realize that the campus culture caters to the White, male, middle-class students (Castillo, 2009; Gloria et al., 2005). Campus based racism can manifest as perceived ethnic threat, pressure to adopt campus culture, and difficulty establishing meaningful intraracial friendships. This contributes to Latinx undergraduates' perceived racialized inferiority and poses a potential risk to their academic motivation, persistence, and achievement (Baldwin-White et al., 2017; Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Torres et al., 2012).

However, it can also be hard to find other Latinx peers on campus at PWIs since they are fewer compared to White students (Gonzales, 2020). According to Intragroup Marginalization Theory, ethnic-racial minorities may face rejection from their own racial/ethnic group when they adopt characteristics of the dominant racial/ethnic group (Castillo, 2009; Ferenczi et al., 2015). In fact, this theory argues that those within a group who do not conform to the norms within the group tend to face harsher criticism than those who do not belong to the group. Within the context of PWIs, Latinx undergraduates may have a hard time connecting to other Latinx peers because of different cultural experiences, acculturation, and ERI beliefs (Castillo, 2009; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). While some students may believe the best technique to navigate a PWi is to acculturate to the campus culture, others may feel the need to further isolate among those with whom they share identities. In both cases, Latinx undergraduates may feel judged by their

intra-racial peers based on their choices about how to adapt to the new campus. This may relate to a belief that their choices about how to navigate the campus communicate a sense of either honoring or betraying their ERI related beliefs.

Cultural values which encourage pride in ethnicity and shared Latinidad makes intra-racial peer rejection uniquely painful (Gloria, 2000; Rivas-Drake, 2011). Intra-racial peer rejection can contribute to poorer mental health and academic outcomes, reduced sense of belonging and attrition among Latinx students (Gloria, 2005; Baldwin-White et al., 2017). Contrarily, Latinx undergraduates' intra-racial relationships can be protective and essential to the development of healing counter-spaces where marginalized students can meet and engage in extracurricular activities rooted in ERI, community building and fostering solidarity on campus (Cerezo et al., 2013; Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Solorzano, 2000). In these cultural healing spaces, Latinx undergraduates celebrate accomplishments and share resources to navigate college (Luedke, 2019). These cultural affinity spaces also promote the civic engagement, and sociopolitical development needed to disrupt the oppressive culture at the PWI (Hope et al., 2018).

Civic Engagement as a Response to Institutional and Interpersonal Discrimination

Civic engagement is defined as “the revolutionary act of self-preservation in direct response to broadly under acknowledged conditions of social inequity” (Hope & Spencer, 2017, p. 455). Traditionally, civic engagement has been described as behaviors that promote justice and equity through acts of service, activism, tutoring, and functionary work (Perez et al., 2010). For the purpose of this paper, we focus specifically on acts of service, and activism. Acts of service centers immediate care of people in need; within the school setting, this can include tutoring friends, sharing meal passes, or helping another student seek services on campus. Activism focuses on a particular social issue or cause as opposed to individual people; on campus, this

may include protesting racist policies, or encouraging other students to vote (Perez et al., 2010).

In their recent adaptation of the PVEST framework, Hope and Spencer (2017) suggested that some undergraduates who experience marginalization choose to cope with oppression through civic engagement. This aligns well with the original tenet of reactive coping in the PVEST model, which refers to the adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies that emerging adults leverage to navigate oppressive systemic factors. In relation to the current study, as Latinx undergraduates perceive less sense of belonging due to interpersonal discrimination and institutional harm they may participate in different types of civic engagement in order to gain resources, build community, and leave their campus better positioned for the next generation of Latinx students. Hence, civic engagement may serve as a means of survival in order to cope with the racism they experience on campus.

While many Latinx undergraduates engage in civic participation long before they arrive on campus (e.g. Katsiaficas et al., 2019), college may have provided a space for some Latinx students to practice new forms of civic engagement (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Cuellar (2019) found cultural assets (e.g. aspirational and spiritual) shaped Latinx undergraduates' college experiences and commitment to social change. Additionally, they noted that these assets, as well as both communal experiences of marginalization and empowerment resulted in a collective commitment to social agency. Although it is common for Latinx undergraduates to perform acts of service, they may not as readily participate in other forms of civic engagement, like protesting, due to mistrust of the criminal legal system, and criminalization of immigrant communities in the U.S (Sierra, 2018). This is important to note because critical action serves as a protective factor against the negative effect of racial-ethnic discrimination on stress and depressive symptoms for Latinx undergraduates (Hope et al., 2018). Yet, gaps in the literature persist in understanding the

contextual factors that contribute to Latinx students' civic engagement at PWIs, such as their ERI beliefs and the friendships they develop on campus.

Racial Composition of Friendships and Civic Engagement

Previous literature highlighted the role of undergraduates' friendships on their critical reflection and action (Carter et al., 2018; Pinedo et al., 2021). Academic spaces are identified as crucial sites for emerging adults to collaboratively challenge campus discrimination they face (Serrano, 2020). Recent work has examined the role of race as it relates to undergraduates' friendships and their civic engagement participations. For example, Carter et al (2018) found that White students with more under-represented minority friends are more likely to engage in critical analysis of systemic injustice, and reported being more likely to take critical action. Conversely, underrepresented minority students with more White friends were more likely to report less reflection on injustice, or critical action to rectify oppression (Carter et al., 2018). These findings suggested a relationship between the composition of undergraduates' friendships and their sociopolitical development.

Another study examined the role of Black and Latinx undergraduates' intraracial peers in moderating the relationship between discrimination and critical action longitudinally (Pinedo et al., 2021). According to Pinedo et al., (2021) Black and Latinx undergraduates who experienced more racism on campus, engaged in more critical action. Although critical action tended to decline within the first two years of college, Black and Latinx students who participated in more ethnic-racial clubs were more likely to maintain their action efforts on campus compared to those who did not attend the clubs. The findings suggest that the racial composition of Latinx students' friendship groups may influence their civic participation on campus (Pinedo et al., 2021). However, more work is needed to examine how Latinx undergraduates' friendship racial

composition may contribute to fostering civic engagement behaviors – and more specifically acts of service, and activism respectively.

The Current Study

The following study aims to expand the current literature (e.g., Carter et al., 2019; Cueller, 2019; Pinedo et al., 2021) on Latinx undergraduates' civic engagement at PWIs. More specifically, we seek to understand the role ERI, perceived ethnic threat, and intraracial friendships on campus on Latinx students' civic engagement during their first year in college. Using moderation analysis, we aim to explore how ERI at the beginning of college, as well as the racial composition of Latinx students' friendships at the end of the first year of college strengthen or weaken the relationship between perceived ethnic fit and civic engagement during the transition to college. We address gaps in the literature which neglect to examine factors contributing to different types of civic engagement. Hence, we explore how these relationships contribute to acts of service and activism respectively. This study has three primary aims:

1. Examine how ethnic-racial identity (e.g., centrality, public regard, and private regard) at T1 (fall of their first year of college) relates to acts of service and activism at T2 (spring after their first year of college);
2. Investigate how perceived ethnic threat at T2 (end of their first year) relates to their participation in acts service and activism at T2;
3. Explore how racial compositions of Latinx students' friendships at T2 relates to acts of service and activism at T2.

Building on extant literature regarding Latinx students' civic engagement as an act of resistance against discrimination (Hope & Spencer, 2017; Spencer, 1997), perceived ethnic fit (Bernard,

2017; Passano, 2021; Robertson et al., 2014) and intraracial peers on campus, (Gonzales, 2020; Levin et al., 2006), we advanced the following hypotheses:

H1: Latinx undergraduates with higher ERI at the beginning of college and both less perceived threat (T2) and more intraracial peers at the end of their first year will have engaged in more acts of service.

H2: We also hypothesized that Latinx undergraduates with higher ERI at the beginning of college as well as both more perceived ethnic threat on campus, and less intraracial friendships at the end of their first year will engage in more activism.

Method

Participants

This study included a subsample of Latinx undergraduates ($n = 313$) from a larger, longitudinal study – the College Academic and Social Identities Study- which focused on risk and resilience in multi-ethnic college students' pathways to science, technology, and math (STEM) fields (PI: Tabbye Chavous). Undergraduates were included in the study if they selected Latinx as their race and/or ethnicity. All students attended one of five PWIs in the Midwestern U.S. Two of the universities were large public institutions ($n = 95$; 3.5% Latinx undergraduates enrolled; $n = 181$, 6.3% Latinx undergraduates enrolled), while the other three were mid-sized private universities ($n = 7$, 1.7% Latinx undergraduates enrolled; $n = 5$, 3.5% Latinx undergraduates enrolled; $n = 25$, 2.2% Latinx undergraduates enrolled). Participants were eligible in this study if they identified as either ethnically, and/or racially as Latinx/Hispanic. Ethnically, most students identified as Hispanic/Latinx (86%), European/European American (4%), or bi/multiracial (10%). On average, participants were 18 years old (range, $SD = 1.97$) and the majority of students identified as female (65%). In terms of sexual orientation identification, the majority of participants were heterosexual (94%). The median annual family income was

approximately \$55,000 (range below \$4,999 – above 205,000). Additionally, the majority of Latinx undergraduates matriculated to college from neighborhoods (51%) or high schools (58%) which were composed of less than 20% Latinx community members.

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval, students were emailed an invitation that explained the purpose and nature of the study through their respective registrar's office at the researchers' request. After providing informed consent, students were asked to complete a web-based survey within 6 weeks of the academic school year for Time 1. Those who completed the survey were contacted again to complete another web-based survey during the spring/summer of their freshman year for Time 2. Surveys included questions about students' ethnic-racial identity, peer interactions, campus experiences, and their academic beliefs. The survey took approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Students were compensated incrementally such that participants were compensated \$10.00 for their first survey and \$15.00 for their second survey.

Measures

Demographic Items. Participants were asked to provide information regarding their university, year in college, and college major. Additionally, they were asked items regarding their ethnic identity, racial identity, gender, and sexual orientation. Students were also asked about their household income, the racial composition of their neighborhood prior to college, and the high school they attended.

Ethnic Regard and Racial Centrality. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1997) was used to measure racial centrality, as well as public and private regard at prior to their first year of college (Time 1). For each subscale, undergraduates rated their responses on a seven-point scale which included the options, from 1- "Strongly

Disagree”, to 7 - “Strongly Agree.” Racial centrality, or the extent to which being Latinx was important to these undergraduates was measured using three items (i.e., “being a member of my racial group is an important reflection of who I am”). Private regard, undergraduates’ feelings about being Latinx was measured using four items (i.e., “I am happy that I am a member of my racial/ethnic group”). Similarly, private regard, undergraduates’ views of how others in society view Latinx people, was measured using four items from the MIBI (i.e., “In general, others respect people from my racial group”). All subscales demonstrated high internal consistency at Time 1: centrality ($\alpha = .86$), private regard ($\alpha = .90$), and public regard ($\alpha = .85$).

Perceived Ethnic Threat. The Perceived Ethnic Fit Scale was used to assess perceived ethnic fit on campus at the end of their first year of college (Time 2) (Ethier & Deaux, 1990). This scale measured the degree to which Latinx undergraduates’ ethnic identity may be threatened for first-year Latinx students at a PWI, (i.e., “I feel that I have to change myself to fit in at school”). Undergraduates rated their responses on a scale from 1- “Not True of Me at All,” to 7- “Very True of Me.” The scale demonstrated high internal consistency at Time 2, ($\alpha = .89$). These items were asked on and after Time 2, in order to allow Latinx undergraduates to develop experiences on campus which would inform their answers.

Friendships on Campus. We used two items to assess Latinx undergraduates’ friendships on campus at the end of the first year of college (Time 2). Undergraduates were asked to think about the closest friends they hang out with socially. The first item asked students how many friends they had in their own racial background. The second item asked how many of their friends from different racial backgrounds than their own. Both items were reported using a 5-point scale with item responses indicating “0,” “1-2,” “3-4,” “5-6,” and “6 or more.” These items were asked on and after Time 2 to allow students to answer based on their time on campus.

Civic Engagement. Civic engagement at the end of their first year (Time 2), was measured using a 12- item adapted measure of the Adolescence-Youth Involvement Inventory (Pancer et al., 2007). This measure included a subscale for acts of service, and activism on campus. Both subscales used a five-point scale that included options from 1- “Strongly Disagree” to 5 - “Strongly Agree.” Acts of service was measured using seven items (i.e., “Since entering college how often have you – “Given money to or volunteered for a social or political action group”). Activism was measured using five items (i.e., “Since entering college how often have you – signed a petition”). Both subscales demonstrated good internal consistency at Time 2: acts of service ($\alpha = .72$) and activism ($\alpha = .71$).

Reflexivity

Understanding authors' social positions and theoretical underpinnings is important to understanding their approach to data analysis – hence we present brief reflexivity statements. The first author is a second-generation Latina, woman, lesbian, and graduate student scholar. Her work focuses on understanding how Black and Latinx adolescents and emerging adults leverage ethnic racial identity, critical consciousness, and civic engagement to navigate inequities in the education system. The second author is a Black female scholar from a working-class background. She is an assistant professor with over seven years of research on the identity development processes of Black girls and women. The final author is a Black, cisgender woman who has been studying racial and gender identity processes among Black students for 23 years.

Data Analysis

In order to assess the role of the intraracial friendships on the relationship between perceived ethnic fit and civic engagement, we used moderation analysis. More specifically, we used Hierarchical Linear Regression in SPSS (IBM Corp, 2020). Using hierarchical linear

regression is a common and effective way to examine how the variables of interest, in this case ERI, perceived ethnic fit, and proportion of intraracial friendships, statistically contribute to the amount of variance in the dependent variable - civic engagement - after accounting for all other variables (Bommae, 2016). This framework allows the researcher to build several regression models by adding new variables to the previous model by each step; this allows for an understanding in how the newly added variables show a significant improvement in the R^2 change (Bommae, 2016).

In considering covariates within the model, a one-way ANOVA was used to assess significant differences based on gender or racial identity beliefs. Additionally, when considering the most effective way to measure when the proportion of intraracial friends, we conducted a one-way ANOVA to assess significant differences based on students' percentage of intraracial friendships. There were no significant differences. Hence, the proportion of intraracial friendships was examined as a continuous variable (from fewer to more intraracial friendships) by dividing the number of intraracial friends they had by the overall racial composition of their friendship group regardless of race.

The first hierarchical regression examined the role of ethnic racial identity (T1) and both perceived ethnic threat (T2), and the proportion of intraracial friendships (T2) on acts of service at the end of their first year of college. We included three indices of ethnic-racial identity (e.g., public regard, private regard, and centrality) due to prior literature demonstrating the relationship between racial ethnic identity and perceived ethnic fit on campus as well as civic engagement behaviors (Cerezo & Chang, 2014; Rivas-Drake, 2011). In the first step, we entered key study variables including private regard, public regard, racial centrality, perceived ethnic fit, and the proportion of intraracial friendships. In the second step, we included interactions between each

type of ethnic regard and perceived ethnic fit respectively. Next, in the third step, we included the interaction between the proportion of intraracial friendships and perceived ethnic fit. Lastly, our fourth step included three-way interactions between each type of ethnic regard and both perceived ethnic threat and the proportion of intraracial friendships. Similarly, a hierarchical linear regression with the same steps was used to examine the role of ethnic racial identity (T1) and both perceived ethnic threat (T2), and the proportion of intraracial friendships (T2) on activism at the end of their first year of college.

Results

Preliminary Descriptives

Table 1 summarizes means, standard deviations and correlations among ERI variables at Time 1, and intraracial friendships, perceived ethnic threat, and civic engagement at Time 2. Findings were consistent with prior literature suggesting a negative relationship between private regard at Time 1 and perceived ethnic fit at Time 2, $r(302) = -.13, p < .05$. Perceived ethnic threat was strongly and positively related to activism ($r(303) = .12, p < .00$), and moderately and positively related to acts of service ($r(303) = .38, p < .001$). Proportions of intraracial friends was positively related to private regard, $r(270) = -.12, p < .05$. Lastly, acts of service and activism were strongly and positively related, $r(270) = .543, p < .001$.

Ethnic Racial Identity, Perceived Ethnic Fit and Intraracial Friends as Predictors of Acts of Service

The regression results for ERI (T1), perceived ethnic threat (T2), and proportion of intraracial friends (T2) predicting acts of service (T2) are reported in Table 2. At the final step (Step 4), all variables explained 8.2% of the variance in Latinx undergraduates' acts of service at the end of their first time in college; only the interaction between racial centrality, and perceived

ethnic fit were significant. At step 1, we entered key study variables including three indicators for ERI, perceived ethnic threat, and proportion of intraracial friendships, as well as gender. There were no significant contributors to the model, $F(5, 259) = 1.47, p > .05$, and the variables accounted for 2.8% of Latinx undergraduates' acts of service at the end of their first year of college. At step 2, we introduced the interaction terms for each ERI indicator and perceived ethnic fit, an additional 2% of the variance was explained, $F(7, 257) = 1.82, p > .05$. There was a significant negative relationship between the interaction effect between racial centrality (T1) and ethnic fit (T2) and acts of service (T2), $t(263) = -2.25, p < .05$.

At step 3, we entered interaction terms for proportion of intraracial friends and each ERI indicator and interaction terms between perceived ethnic fit and each ERI indicator. The overall model was significant and contributed to an additional 1.9% of the variance explained, $F(8, 256) = 1.98, p < .05$. There was a significant negative relationship between the interaction of racial centrality (T1) and perceived ethnic threat (T2) and activism (T2), $t(263) = -2.44, p < .01$. Finally, at step 4, three-way interactions between each ERI indicator, perceived ethnic fit, and proportions of intraracial friendships were added and accounted for an additional .005% of the variance explained by the overall model, $F(10, 254) = 1.83, p < .06$. At this step, there was a significant relation between the interaction between racial centrality (T1) and perceived ethnic threat (T2) and acts of service (T2), $t(263) = -2.69, p < .01$. (See Figure 1.)

Ethnic Racial Identity, Perceived Ethnic Fit and Intraracial Friends as Predictors of Activism

The regression results for ERI (T1), perceived ethnic threat (T2), and proportion of intraracial friends (T2) predicting activism (T2) are reported in Table 2. At the final step (Step 4), all variables explained 18.7% of the variance in Latinx undergraduates' activism at the end of

their first time in college; only the interaction between racial centrality, and perceived ethnic fit were significant. At step 1 we entered key study variables including three indicators of ERI, perceived ethnic threat, and proportion of intraracial friends, as well as gender, $F(5, 259) = 9.80$, $p < .00$. There was a significant negative relationship between racial centrality, $t(263) = -1.96$, $p < .05$ and activism, as well as a significant positive relationship between perceived ethnic threat ethnic fit $t(263) = 6.62$, $p < .00$. At step two, interaction terms for each ERI indicator and perceived ethnic fit were entered into the model. The overall model was significant, $F(8, 256) = 6.62$, $p < .00$, and contributed to an additional 1.2% of the variance. The model demonstrated a trending negative relationship the interaction of racial centrality and perceived ethnic fit, $t(263) = -1.89$, $p < .06$ and activism.

At step 3, we entered interaction terms for proportion of intraracial friends and each ERI indicator, as well as interaction terms of perceived ethnic fit and each ERI indicator; these variables did not account for additional variance, $F(8, 256) = 5.81$, $p < .00$. There was a trending significant positive interaction between racial centrality (T1) and the proportion of intraracial friends, $t(263) = -1.89$, $p < .06$, and activism. (See Figure 2.) Finally, at step 4, three-way interactions between each ERI indicators, perceived ethnic fit, and proportions of intraracial friends were added, $F(10, 254) = 4.82$, $p < .00$, and explained an additional .1% of the variance was explained by the inclusion of these variables.

Discussion

Extant literature suggest ERI serves as a protective factor for Latinx undergraduates attending PWIs in that: (1) undergraduates with greater public regard reported stronger trust in their institution; (2) undergraduates with greater private regard demonstrated more academic motivation and persistence; (3) and undergraduates with greater racial centrality felt more

motivated, confident, and connected to their school compared to Latinx undergraduates with lower ERI (Green, 2019; Rivas-Drake, 2011; Stein et al., 2019). Undergraduates leveraged values related to their ERI like familismo and communalism to find intraracial friends with whom they could feel uncensored on campus (Sanford et al., 2019), and respond to discrimination by participating in civic engagement (Carter et al., 2018; Hope & Spencer, 2017). Our findings extend this work and demonstrate the importance of both intraracial friendships, and ERI – particularly racial centrality- in understanding Latinx undergraduates' participation in civic engagement. Moreover, we address gaps in the literature by examining how these relationships contribute to acts of service and activism respectively.

We hypothesized (Hypothesis 1) that Latinx undergraduates with higher ERI (T1), lower perceived ethnic threat (T2) and more intraracial friends (T2) would engage in more acts of service; similarly (Hypothesis 2), we believed that Latinx undergraduates with higher ERI (T1), more perceived ethnic threat (T2), and more intraracial friends (T2) would engage in more activism. Overall, our findings were consistent with previous literature which has documented a relationship between ERI, and perceived ethnic threat on PWIs and civic engagement (Hope et al., 2018; Pinedo et al., 2021). We found that Latinx undergraduates' participation in acts of service (T2) varied based on their ERI (T1)– specifically racial centrality - and their perceived ethnic fit on campus (T2). Additionally, we found that engagement in activism at the end of their first year varied based on Latinx undergraduates' ERI (T1)– specifically racial centrality - and their friendship racial composition (T2).

Role of ERI and Perceived Ethnic Threat on Acts of Service

Partially consistent with hypothesis 1, our findings suggested an association between Latinx undergraduates perceived ethnic fit and acts of service at the end of their first year varied

based their racial centrality at the start of college. Latinx undergraduates who entered college with less racial centrality generally participated in more acts of service, regardless of their perception of ethnic threat on campus. This may be related to the role of racial centrality and connectedness to their university. Relatedly, while our findings supported previous work which documented the relationship between perceived discrimination on campus and critical action (Pinedo et al., 2021), we found that Latinx undergraduates who perceived less ethnic threat participated in greater acts of service by the end of their first year than those who perceived less ethnic threat. Although previous literature has highlighted the role of racial pride and ERI as a protective factor against Latinx undergraduates' experiences of interpersonal and institutional discrimination (Corona et al., 2017; Forrest-Bank & Cueller, 2018; Rivas-Drake, 2011), it is possible that the cognitive load of perceived ethnic threat hinders engagement in acts of service. More specifically, Latinx undergraduates who perceive greater ethnic threat on campus may not want to serve within an institution they feel does not value their ERI. This may be especially true for Latinx undergraduates who had a more central ERI before starting college.

Role of ERI and Intra-racial Friends on Activism

Partially consistent with Hypothesis 2, we found that the association between the proportion of intra-racial friends and activism at the end of Latinx undergraduates' first year of college varied based on their perceived ethnic threat on campus. Overall, Latinx undergraduates with low racial centrality consistently participated in low activism, regardless of the number of intra-racial friendships they had by the end of their first year. However, Latinx undergraduates who began college with high racial centrality and made less intra-racial friend during their first year engaged in the least activism. Contrarily, those who made more intra-racial friends engaged in the most activism. These findings are consistent with previous work which highlights how

ERI relates to both friendship and sociopolitical development on campus (Carter et al., 2018; Pinedo et al., 2021).

Our findings did not align with those found in Pinedo et al. (2021) which suggested that having intraracial friendships did not moderate the relationship between racial discrimination and critical action among Black and Latinx undergraduates. Our findings suggested that intraracial friendships did moderate the relationship between perceived ethnic fit and civic engagement behaviors among Latinx undergraduates, in that having more intraracial peers was associated with more activism when students perceived greater ethnic threat. These dissimilar findings may reflect differences in how the two studies measured discrimination and civic engagement; for instance, the subscale used in the current study for activism may not reflect the measure of critical action used by Pinedo et al (2021). While there is a lot of overlap between both critical action and civic engagement, they may stem from different motivation, and may also encompass different behaviors. It is possible that our subscale for activism captured behaviors which were not included in the measure of critical action. Similarly, Pinedo et al. (2021) assessed racial discrimination by examining school based racial-ethnic micro-aggressions, while we focused on Latinx students' perceptions of ethnic fit within the broader institutional climate. Although related, these constructs may have tapped into unique aspects of discrimination on campus, which highlights the need to further explore the utility of current discrimination and civic engagement measure amongst Latinx undergraduates; further, more work is needed to examine the relationship between civic engagement and critical action among Latinx undergraduates. Still, findings from both studies add to scholarly understandings of Latinx undergraduates' action in the face of racism perpetuated at PWIs.

Previous literature has demonstrated that having more intraracial friendships can help create a safe space to practice their activism communally, and help promote more individual agency. As evidenced by Carter et al., (2018) the racial composition undergraduates' friendship groups affect their sociopolitical development, such that having more underrepresented minority (specifically students of color) friends was associated with more perceived injustice and collective action. Having more underrepresented minority friends is associated with greater shared responsibility, and hence informed advocacy for social justice. This may have been related to undergraduates' ability to reflect on their perceived injustice among each other. More specifically, Cuellar (2019) highlighted that Latinx undergraduates' cultural assets related to their ERI contribute to shaped their college experiences and commitment to social change. Specifically, these assets contributed to a sense of collective commitment to social agency. Our findings further this work by illuminating and clarifying the importance of intraracial peer friendships in Latinx undergraduates' participation in activism during their first year in college. It is possible that Latinx undergraduates' intraracial friendships fortify their resolution to engage in activism despite socialization, which would suggest these behaviors might attract dangerous attention from the immigration or criminal-legal systems (Sierra, 2018). Hence, ERI was leveraged to navigate feelings of perceived ethnic threat, or lack of belonging on campus.

Role of Intraracial Friends and Perceived Ethnic Threat on Acts of Service

Partially consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found that Latinx undergraduates' friendship racial composition informed the association between perceived ethnic threat and acts of service at the end of their first year. Undergraduates with more perceived ethnic threat on campus, and had more intraracial friends participated in the most acts of service. However, intraracial friendships had no effect on acts of service among Latinx undergraduate students who perceived

less ethnic threat on campus. This may be because Latinx undergraduates who perceived more ethnic threat on campus may feel a greater sense of urgency to develop a network of other Latinx peers in order to mitigate the threat to their ERI. This is consistent with findings from Pinedo et al., (2021) which document that Latinx undergraduates who participated in more ethnic organizations continued to engage in critical actions more than Latinx students who were not part of these groups. This is important, as we consider the role of peer communities on campus in reflecting on, navigating, and challenging perceived ethnic threat on campus. These findings also support prior work which highlights the importance of Latinx affinity groups and counter-spaces in coping with discrimination and navigating inequities at PWIs (Cerezo et al., 2013; Dueñas & Gloria, 2020). Within these spaces, students learn skills which foster critical civic engagement and feel empowered to explore their identities, build meaningful community, and persist in their college studies.

Limitations

While this study adds to the extant literature on Latinx students in higher education, it has a few limitations worth noting. The Latinx undergraduates recruited in this study attended PWIs in the Midwest, a specific region within the U.S. Future studies should consider civic engagement among Latinx undergraduates nationally, as students' experiences of institutional and interpersonal discrimination may vary based on geographical location, diversity, and political leaning. Additionally, more ethnic-racial and gender diversity could have improved our understanding of this diverse population of students. The undergraduates in this study identified as: Hispanic/Latinx (86%), European/European American (4%), or bi/multiracial (10%). However, more intentional recruitment around Latinx students with different information like nationality, as well as generational status may contribute to a better understanding of the role of

acculturation in perceived ethnic threat, peer rejection, and civic engagement (Castillo, 2009). The addition of this information would allow for a more nuanced examination of the vast heterogeneity within the cultures and experiences of the overall pan-ethnic label of “Latinx” (Atroon et al., 2019; Cuellar et al., 2019).

Because of the diverse ancestral backgrounds among Latinx communities, Latinx individuals have a wide range of physical characteristics and skin tones which are associated with other races. These characteristics often relate to their access to power as others may perceive them as White passing, racially ambiguous, or Black. So, having a demographic question about skin tone may have further elucidated students' experiences of discrimination, racial friendship composition, and opportunities for civic engagement based on colorism (Atroon et al., 2019). Inquiring about Latinx undergraduates' ethnic background and skin tone would provide a more robust understanding of their proximity to privilege or marginalization within not only the U.S., but also among their Latinx peers at PWIs.

Lastly, more intentional recruitment of gender expansive Latinx undergraduates would allow for more nuanced, and intersectional understanding of marginalization and resistance experiences on campus. Although we included gender as a covariate within our models, because of the relatively low number of gender expansive people, it was not possible to conduct further analysis beyond differences within the gender binary of woman and men. Hence, we could not capture differences in students' campus experiences and civic engagement at the intersection of their ethnicity and gender; this limitation continues to neglect narratives from individuals with gender expansive backgrounds - an already overlooked population among the Latinx community.

Implications & Future Directions

Our findings have implications for promoting and evaluating positive undergraduate experiences and civic engagement development for Latinx students through development of emic measurement, reconstruction of student programming, and implementation of institutional policies. Firstly, future scholarship must continue to examine Latinx undergraduates' ERI, sense of belonging, and participation in civic engagement during their transition to a PWI. As more Latinx undergraduates, who are often immigrants or second-generation Americans, gain access to institutions of higher education, scholars must invest more time in understanding how to support their healthy development beyond their academic attainment. This might include validating more multidimensional and culturally emic measures of civic engagement that attend to Latinx students' sociocultural experiences with familial and communal support, generational status and messages around subverting xenophobic systems like the criminal legal and immigration systems. For instance, considering the communal orientation of Latinx communities, future scholars might integrate the role of acts of service in Latinx students' civic engagement as a revolutionary act of collective preservation.

Our findings also demonstrate that Latinx undergraduates perceived cultural incongruence on campus may relate to their ability to make meaningful connections with peers of both same and different races. However, intraracial friendships on campus can serve as a protective factor in this setting, and promote both acts of service and activism. Institutional leaders can support Latinx undergraduates by subsidizing access to affinity groups and cultural counter-spaces on campus (Solorzano, 2000). These spaces are essential to promoting meaningful friendships, communal support, and an opportunity for coping and healing from the discrimination they may face at the institutional level, and amongst their peers. Support for these

cultural counter-spaces also sets the precedent for the importance of cultural diversity of values on campus, and the inclusion of students of underrepresented students attending PWIs (Thomas & Brower, 2018).

Lastly, future work must consider how institutions can foster Latinx undergraduates' healthy ERI development and racial pride on PWIs. Developmentally, intraracial peer rejection and perceived ethnic threat related to their cultural values and ERI can be harmful to emerging adults as they solidify their sense of self and prepare for life beyond the PWI (Beeson et al., 2019; Jane, 2020). So, institutions must consider how to prepare students of different races to navigate relationships with peers of different social positions during college, in order to promote a more inclusive environment and overall ethnic fit on campus. Further, interventions are needed which encourage and foster healthy allyship among White students at PWIs in order to make more equitable spaces for their peers of different races (Gray, 2018).

Conclusion

The following study contributes to our understanding of Latinx undergraduates' civic engagement by exploring variations based on ERI at the start of their first year of college, as well as the perceived ethnic fit and proportion of intraracial friends they meet during their first year. It is pivotal to understand how Latinx undergraduates' acts of service and activism on campus may relate to long term institutional support and change. Since our findings suggest intraracial friendships can serve as a protective factor at PWIs, additional empirical evidence is needed which examines Latinx undergraduates' barriers to intraracial friendships on campus as well as their navigation of perceived ethnic threat, and participation in civic engagement.

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Table 1
Correlation of Key Variables

	M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Private Regard T1	5.62(1.22)						
2. Public Regard T1	4.72(1.48)	.66**					
3. Racial Centrality T1	4.72(1.48)	.66**	.21**				
4. Perceived Ethnic Threat T2	2.51(1.42)	-.13*	-.11	.07			
5. Acts of Service T2	2.80(.84)	-.04	.11	.03	.12*		
6. Activism T2	2.30(.90)	-.08	-.02	-.06	.38**	.54**	
7. Proportion of Intra-racial Friends T2	.37(.16)	.12*	.01	.01	-.07	-.11	-.10

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2.
Hierarchical Linear Analysis for Acts of Service and Activism at Step 4

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Acts of Service			Activism		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Step 1: Key Study Variables						
Private Regard T1	-.04	.06	-.05	.07	.06	.09
Racial Centrality T1	.02	.05	.03	-.10	.05	-.15*
Perceived Ethnic Threat T2	.07	.04	.11†	.25	.04	.40**
Proportion of Intra-racial Friends T2	-.50	.34	-.09	-.52	.33	-.09†
Women	.03	.11	.02	-.02	.11	-.01
R ²			.028			.159
F			1.469			9.799**
Step 2: Interactions with Perceived Ethnic Threat T2						
Private Regard T1 X Ethnic Threat T2	.04	.03	.383	.05	.03	.45
Centrality T1 X Ethnic Threat T2	-.07	.03	-.71*	-.05	.03	-.51†
R ²			.058			.171
ΔR^2			.030			.012
F			1.824*			6.617**
Step 3: Interactions with Proportion of Intra-racial Friends T2						
Private Regard T1 X Friends T2	-.42	.44	-.52	-.64	.43	-7.5
Centrality T1 X Friends T2	.71	.03	-.61	.71	.33	.756†
Ethnic Threat T2 X Friends T2	-.55	.34	.793	-.24	.26	-.17
R ²			.077			.186
ΔR^2			.019			.015
F			1.983*			5.814**
Step 4: Three Way Interactions Among Key Study Variables						
Priv Regard T1 X Threat T2 X Friends T2	-.23	.29	1.00	.05	.22	-.64
Centrality T1 X Threat T2 X Friends T2	-.24	.22	-1.02	-.07	-.28	.71†
R ²			.082			.187
ΔR^2			.005			.001
F			1.826*			4.818**

^a All standardized regression coefficients for Acts of Service are from the third step in analysis – n = 264

† p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01

Figure 1.
Racial Centrality (T1) and Perceived Ethnic Threat (T2) Predicting Acts of Service (T2)

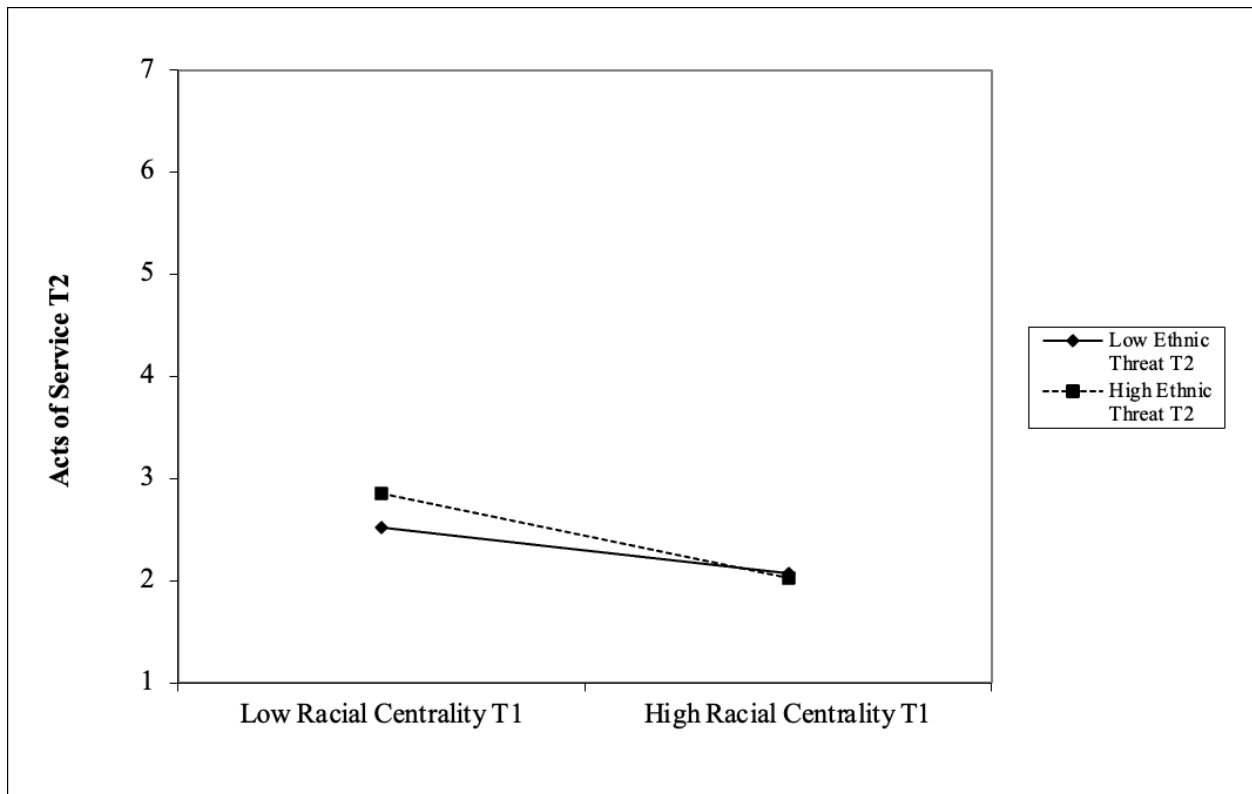


Figure 2.
Racial Centrality (T1) and Proportion of Intra-racial Friends (T2) Predicting Activism(T2)

