


School experiences among African-American young adolescents

Implications for ethnic identity development and school adjustment

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Early Adolescence (ages 10-14)

- Transition to junior high/middle school
- Changes in social, cognitive and physical development
- The beginning of identity exploration and achievement
- Decrements in motivation, engagement and achievement (Eccles & Midgley, 1989)
- Increases in behavioral and psychological problems (Achenbach, Howell, Quay, & Conners, 1991; Kazdin, 1993)


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African-American Youth

- Increased risk of lower achievement and educational attainment (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).
- Higher odds of dropping out of school than youth from other ethnic groups (Rumberger, 1995).
- School adjustment may be compromised by:
 - Cultural conflicts with teachers and peers (Gonzales & Kim, 1997).
 - Lack of access to supports and resources (Spencer, 1999).
 - Overt and indirect forms of discrimination (Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1991).


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The relevance of school climate

- Particularly important for the school functioning of African-American and low-income youth (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Kuperminc et al. 1997).
- Effective schools for African-American youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds have documented that the caring, accountable environments, and supportive student-teacher relationships were critical to their success (Sizemore, 1988).
- Fairness and clarity of rules and discipline appear to be areas where schools are falling short.

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The role of perceived discrimination


Students of color report that they perceive prejudice and have experienced discrimination and stereotyping at school, with peers, and within the larger community

Experiences with discrimination and racial mistrust have been linked to:

- Lower academic achievement;
- Lower occupational expectations;
- Lower school engagement;
- More negative beliefs about the value of schooling;
- Increased aggression; and
- Delinquent behavior

(Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000; Gonzales et al., 1995; Vega, Gil, Warheit, Zimmerman, 1993)
 (Biafora, Taylor, Warheit, Zimmerman, & Vega, 1993; Gonzales & Caucé, 1995; Samaniego & Gonzales, 1999; Spencer, 1990; Taylor et al., 1994; Vega et al., 1993).

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Ethnic identity: The missing link

The Identity-focused Cultural-Ecological (ICE) perspective on school adjustment asserts:

- Processes of self-organization are particularly acute during adolescence (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartman, 1997; Lewis, 1995).
- Input regarding the self-system involves "self-other evaluative" processes, defined as the individual's perceptions of how others view him/her (Spencer et al., 1997).
- The phenomenological experience of ethnicity becomes one of the many important aspects of context-linked self-organization, and resulting behaviors for visible minority adolescents (Spencer, 1999).

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Ethnic identity: The missing link

Operational definitions of ethnic identity:

Private regard: How do I feel about being a member of my group? How connected am I to my group?

Public regard: How do others feel about my group?

Centrality: How central is my ethnic group membership to my self-concept and how I define myself?

(Sellers, Smith, Shelton Rowley & Chavous, 1998)

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School experiences and ethnic identity

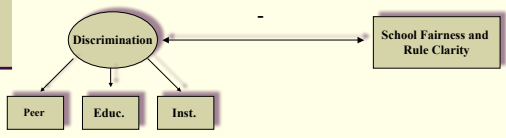
Research and theory suggest that the following school factors may be influential in shaping ethnic identity:

- **Continuity between home and school cultures** (Tharp, 1989)
- **Integration of students' cultural knowledge** (Hollins, 1996; Sheets, 1999, p.160)
- **Ethnic composition of and status within the school** (Bernal, Saenz, & Knight, 1995; McGuire, McGuire, Child & Fujioka, 1978; Saenz, 1990; Sanders, 1997).
- **Affiliation with in-group peers** (Phinney et al., 2001)
- **Teachers' attitudes regarding pluralism,** (Branch, 1999)

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Goals of the Current Study

Investigate the relationship between perceptions of school fairness and specific experiences with peer, educational, and institutional discrimination for African American and Latino middle school students.



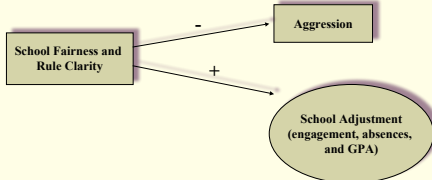
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    graph LR
      subgraph Discrimination
        Peer[Peer]
        Educ[Educ.]
        Inst[Inst.]
      end
      SF[School Fairness and Rule Clarity]
      Discrimination -- "-" --> SF
  
```

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Goals of the Current Study

Examine how perceived discrimination, school fairness and ethnic identity relate to school adjustment variables (engagement, absences, GPA and aggression).



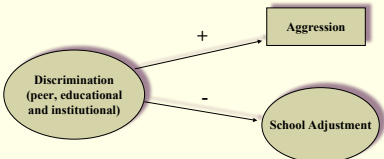
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    graph LR
      SFC[School Fairness and Rule Clarity] -- "-" --> Agg[Aggression]
      SFC -- "+" --> SA((School Adjustment  
engagement, absences,  
and GPA))
  
```

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Goals of the Current Study

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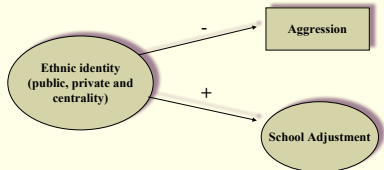
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    graph LR
      D((Discrimination  
peer, educational  
and institutional)) -- "+" --> Agg[Aggression]
      D -- "-" --> SA((School Adjustment))
  
```

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Goals of the Current Study

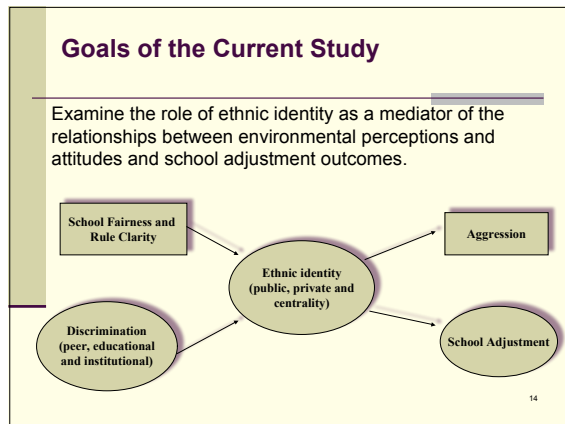
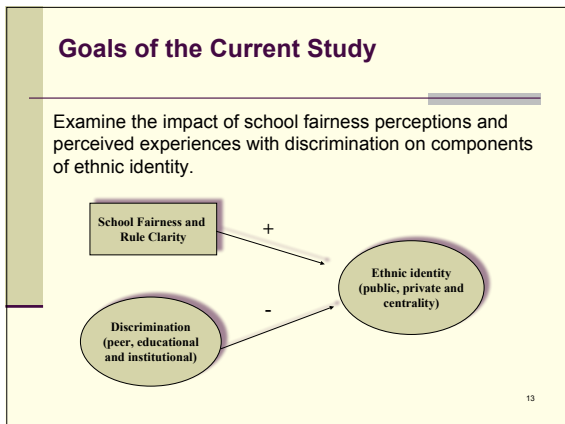

Examine how perceived discrimination, school fairness and ethnic identity relate to school adjustment variables (engagement, absences, GPA and aggression).



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    graph LR
      EI((Ethnic identity  
public, private and  
centrality)) -- "-" --> Agg[Aggression]
      EI -- "+" --> SA((School Adjustment))
  
```

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Participants

Sample characteristics:

- African-American or "Black Other" (N= 273) (Belize, Guyana, the Caribbean, or West Indies)
- Mexican or "Latino Other" (N=387) (Guatemala, El Salvador, Argentina, or other Latin American countries)
- 300 males and 360 females
- Average age of participants was 12.07 years (ranging from 11 to 14 years of age)
- Data from a total of 8 public middle schools.

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Analyses: Four Stages

- (1) 2 x 2 Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to explore differences by ethnicity and gender.
- (2) Correlational Analyses
- (3) Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Multiple Group Modeling to examine the factor structure of the measurement models, and to explore differences in these models by ethnicity.
- (4) Structural Equation Modeling to test proposed hypotheses.

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Main Effects: Group Differences

African-Americans had significantly lower scores on: school fairness, public regard, GPA and school engagement,

and higher ratings on: institutional discrimination, private regard, centrality, absences and aggression, relative to Latino students.

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Correlational analyses between school context and ethnic identity variables

- Perceived experiences with discrimination were significantly associated with more negative personal feelings about being a member of one's ethnic group
- More frequent experiences with discrimination were more consistently and strongly associated with higher ratings on teacher-reported aggression for African-American students.
- Perceptions of school fairness/rule clarity were not associated with school adjustment outcomes for African-American students.

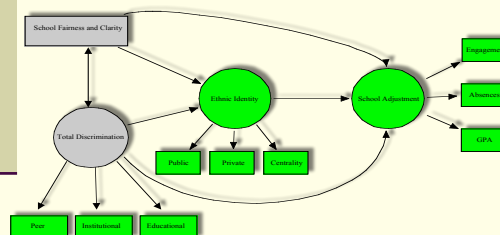
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Correlational analyses between school context and ethnic identity variables

- Higher ratings on private regard were significantly associated with positive school adjustment outcomes for African-American students (i.e. positive associations with school engagement and Spring GPA, and negative associations with aggression).
- Neither public regard nor centrality were associated with any school adjustment outcomes within the African-American sample.

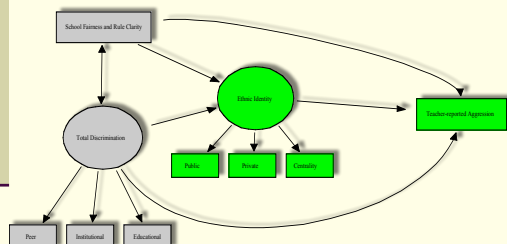
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SEM: School Adjustment Model



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SEM: Aggression Model



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Model testing for African-American girls

- More positive perceptions of school fairness and rule clarity were associated with fewer experiences with discrimination and more positive ratings of ethnic identity.
- Experiences with discrimination significantly predicted teacher-reported aggression, but school fairness/rule clarity did not predict aggression.
- Ethnic identity did not predict school adjustment or aggression or serve as a mediator.

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Model Results for African-American boys

- More positive ratings of ethnic identity predicted lower ratings on teacher-reported aggression. No other paths were significant.
- Experiences with institutional discrimination appear to be strongly connected to their self-perceptions as ethnic group members.
- Results may provide some evidence of oppositional social identities in African-American males.
- Limitations in sample size may have precluded the detection of effects within the model.

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Ethnic identity as a mediator

The current study did not support the hypothesis that ethnic identity would mediate the relationship between experiences/perceptions and school adjustment outcomes.

- The public regard and centrality subscales demonstrated questionable reliability.
- The relationships between ethnic identity development processes and ethnicity-related experiences and perceptions are reciprocal.
- Ethnic identity may serve as a moderator of experiences and school adjustment outcomes.

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Implications for Best Practice in Schools

- Schools must conceive positive school adjustment for African-American youth within a developmental framework that considers the processes that promote or undermine ethnic identity.
- Student-teacher relations: what are the influences of stereotypes and discrimination?
- Person-focused interventions should emphasize the development of skills in social information-processing, problem solving skills, understanding and coping with discrimination to protect individuals from the deleterious psychological consequences of stereotypes and discrimination.

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Implications for Best Practice in Schools

- Positive community and civic engagement may be particularly important for African-American males, with schools serving as liaison.
- Family and peer values must be considered in the development of school-based interventions.

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