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## Ethnic and Racial Identity in Adolescence: Implications for Psychosocial, Academic, and Health Outcomes

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**Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group**

### Abstract

The construction of an ethnic or racial identity is considered an important developmental milestone for youth of color. This review summarizes research on links between ethnic and racial identity (ERI) with psychosocial, academic, and health risk outcomes among ethnic minority adolescents. With notable exceptions, aspects of ERI are generally associated with adaptive outcomes. ERI are generally beneficial for African American adolescents' adjustment across all three domains, whereas the evidence is somewhat mixed for Latino and American Indian youth. There is a dearth of research for academic and health risk outcomes among Asian American and

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Pacific Islander adolescents. The review concludes with suggestions for future research on ERI among minority youth.

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The U.S. youth population is in the midst of a remarkable transformation. Currently, ethnic minorities constitute the majority of all U.S. births and more than 40% of American youth under age 18 (U.S. Census, 2012). As the nation's populace continues to diversify, it is becoming increasingly necessary to fully explicate the role of ethnicity and race in normative developmental processes among young people. The construction of an ethnic or racial identity is thought to be one important means by which ethnicity and race influence normative development and promote positive youth adjustment (e.g., Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012; Williams, Tolan, Durkee, Francois, & Anderson, 2012). For example, a recent meta-analysis suggests that an achieved, positive ethnic identity is favorably associated with self-esteem and negatively associated with depressive symptoms among ethnic minority individuals (Smith & Silva, 2011). Empirical research also suggests that some components of ethnic and racial identity (ERI) can buffer the deleterious consequences of adverse life events, such as racial and ethnic discrimination on internalizing symptoms and other negative outcomes (Galliher, Jones, & Dahl, 2011; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2008; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006).

The purpose of this article is to provide a narrative review of the existing literature on how racial and ethnic identity are associated with psychological, academic, and health outcomes among ethnic minority adolescents. Although there is broad consensus that identity processes are generally pertinent to adolescence, diverse theoretical traditions posit the particular importance of adolescence in the construction of ethnic and racial identities, concomitant with increased experiences of discrimination (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006) and advances in social perspective-taking ability (Quintana, 1994, 1999) during this period of life vis-à-vis childhood (cf. Umaña-Taylor et al., in press). For instance, Quintana (1994) argued that whereas children form concepts of ethnicity and race, understand their (presumed) literal meanings, and observe their concrete significance in everyday life, adolescents' notions of ethnicity and race are more abstract and complex. Quintana's model posits that adolescence is marked by an increased *group consciousness perspective* of ERI that underlies implications for adjustment, as youth make meaning of their ethnic or racial experiences relative to those of other individuals. In this review, we sought to unpack the degree to which the presumed importance of ERI for adjustment in adolescence is borne out in the empirical literature. As will be discussed, the plethora of studies examining ERI in adolescence supports the notion that it is a period of increased meaning-making around the complexities of ethnic and racial group membership and, consequently, potentially increased significance for adjustment.

## Race and Ethnicity, Racial Identity, and Ethnic Identity

Identities linked to ethnicity or race can be developed based on cultural background (e.g., values, traditions) or specific experiences (e.g., racial discrimination) resulting from self-perceived ethnic or racial group membership, or both (Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005). To help clarify our terminology, we acknowledge the long-standing controversy regarding

the use of *ethnicity* and *race* in the empirical literature (e.g., Cokley, 2007; Helms, 2007). Phinney (1996) suggested referring to ethnic and racial groups collectively as ethnic groups due to concerns that using the term *race* often implies a biological foundation. However, Helms and Talleyrand (1997) suggested that race be retained and limit the term *ethnicity* to refer to cultural components. With increasing research on Latinos, who are typically defined as an ethnic rather than a racial group, using the term *race* alone to refer to samples that include Hispanics or Latinos may be problematic. In those mixed samples including Latinos, researchers have noted the use of either *ethnic* or a combination of *ethnic* and *racial* to refer to their samples and their identity formation (Byrd, 2012; Cross & Cross, 2008). Many scholars tend to use some combination of *ethnicity* and *race* when describing multiple ethnic and racial groups, except when there is a narrow focus on a few groups that have been historically considered racial groups (e.g., Black vs. White).

A number of scholars have also discussed the problem of conflating ethnicity and race with little regard for the social structures in which diverse ethnic and racial group members live (Markus, 2008). Briefly, race indicates power and connotes the ongoing hierarchy in which one group considers other groups as different and inferior (Markus, 2008). Racial differences may indicate differences in societal worth that dominant group members impose on subordinate groups, which are accompanied by stereotypes and prejudicial notions that minority group members often resist (Markus, 2008; Omi & Winant, 1994). Yet, ethnicity emphasizes differences in meanings, values, and cultural practices generalized to specific groups (Markus, 2008; Omi & Winant, 1994). Ethnic differences may refer to differences in ways of living that derive from association with specific subordinate groups and are often claimed, appreciated and embraced by subordinate group members. We concur with Markus (2008) who argued:

The social distinction of race and ethnicity are inventions—race and ethnicity are alike in many respects. Both race and ethnicity are dynamic sets of ideas (e.g., meanings, values, goals, images, associations) and practices (e.g., meaningful actions, both formal and routine) that people create to distinguish groups and organize their own communities. (p. 654)

Thus, scholars have described the challenges of demarcating ethnic identity from racial identity, given considerable overlap—and conversely, the difficulty in distinguishing what is ethnic versus *racial*—in individuals' experiences with ethnicity and race (Cross & Cross, 2008). Moreover, although presumably easy to differentiate ethnicity and race based on demographic factors, such as ethnic or racial heritage, the psychological meaning of membership in a racial or ethnic group cannot be reduced to such demographic markers. Our focus, therefore, is on the *social* and *psychological experiences* associated with identifying with an ethnic or racial group, which may not necessarily be separated into orthogonal categories. To reflect this approach, we employ the term *ERI* throughout this review.

## Review Objectives

Although prior research suggests that ERI is linked to positive psychological outcomes, less is known about its links to outcomes in other, related domains, including social and academic functioning and health risk behavior among adolescents. Accordingly, we sought

to explore whether prior empirical research supports the notion that ERI is similarly positively associated with various adjustment indicators among minority group adolescents. Our exploration of this question began with a review of extant literature to address the following question: *In what ways has ERI been associated with psychosocial, academic, and health risk-related outcomes among American minority adolescents?* Our review includes adolescents in four categories: African American, Latino, Asian American, and Pacific Islander, and Native American. We reviewed the literature in this order to acknowledge both the historical progression of the field and the volume of the literature on ERI development for each of the groups. In addition, although the psychological study of ERI in youth is rooted in the doll studies of African American children in the mid-20th century (e.g., Clark & Clark, 1940), there has been a proliferation of research on ERI among diverse ethnic and racial groups in the past 20 years since the introduction of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). Our review focused on this contemporary body of work as it directly addresses youth's constructions of ERI against the backdrop of the rapidly changing demographics of the U.S. population that have occurred due to immigration from Latin America and Asia.

We reviewed the linkages of ERI with psychosocial, academic, and health risk outcomes in studies of community-based (i.e., nonclinical or adjudicated) U.S. samples. Psychosocial outcomes include mental health indicators such as depressive symptoms, anxiety, and externalizing behaviors as well as self-esteem and psychological well-being. Academic outcomes include academic achievement, attainment, engagement, and attitudes. Health risk outcomes include attitudes toward risky behavior or engagement in risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, sexual activity, and so forth. We chose psychosocial, academic, and health risk outcomes because theory suggests that whether ethnic minority youth cultivate positive or negative outcomes has implications for their life-span development (García Coll et al., 1996).

Our discussion is bound by several parameters. We focused on young people's beliefs (cognitions) and feelings (affect) about their ethnicity or race— and their explorations of these beliefs and feelings. The empirical research on ERI since 1990 relies on various constructs (e.g., affirmation, private regard, pride, exploration, search, centrality, importance, public regard; see Table 1 for all operational definitions). Consequently, all of these constructs were examined so that the review would accurately reflect the breadth of contemporary work (see also Phinney & Ong, 2007; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bamaca-Gomez, 2004). Furthermore, the review is not exhaustive but rather illustrative of what is known about these aspects of ERI. The developmental focus of adolescence was selected to conduct an in-depth analysis of an important formative period of ERI development, and should not be taken to indicate that it is the only time in which ERI is relevant. Indeed, studies have demonstrated emergent aspects of ERI in late childhood (e.g., Brown, Alabi, Huynh, & Masten, 2011) and the continued development of ERI during the young adult years (e.g., Syed & Azmitia, 2009). It is also important to note that studies of multiple ethnic and racial groups were included only if they disaggregated findings by specific groups or explained whether findings varied significantly across groups. This criterion was included to explicate the role of ERI both within and across ethnic and racial groups. Finally, given the use of disparate terms used to study ERI,

we discuss a given ERI construct as it was described by the authors of the study. For example, some researchers have examined composite ethnic identity scores, whereas others have referred to specific dimensions (e.g., affirmation and belonging, commitment). Table 1 includes operational definitions of all disaggregated constructs considered in this review.

In the following sections, we present our review for each domain—psychosocial functioning, academic, and health risk outcomes. In addition, the literature is presented separately for four major pan-ethnic minority groups in the United States: African American, Latino, Asian American, and Pacific Islander, and Native American. Separating the empirical research in this way affords the opportunity to examine if ERI is expressed differently among minority adolescents. Whenever possible given the amount of extant research for each pan-ethnic group, we further divide the discussion by the following: type of outcome, findings that indicate protective processes, and cases where null or negative findings present caveats to conclusions that can be drawn. We conclude by discussing the implications of the extant work for future directions in the field.

## Psychosocial Functioning and Mental Health

### African American Youth

**Self-Beliefs**—Among seventh and eighth graders, Mandara, Gaylord-Harden, Richards, and Ragsdale (2009) found that ethnic affirmation was positively correlated with self-esteem for boys (but not for girls). Other empirical research has found that high-school-aged girls who reported internalization (more positive Black racial identity) also reported more positive physical, emotional, and social self-concepts (Buckley & Carter, 2005). Ethnic identity achievement (e.g., high levels of exploration and commitment) has also been positively correlated with global self-esteem among high-school-aged African American adolescent girls (Turnage, 2004).

**Depressive and Somatic Symptoms**—Findings from a study with 10- to 14-year-olds demonstrated that a composite of affirmation and achievement was associated with lower depressive symptoms (Street, Harris-Britt, & Walker-Barnes, 2009). Among sixth graders, more positive public regard (i.e., one's perceptions of others' views of the group) was associated with fewer somatic symptoms (Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009). Mandara et al. (2009) found that affirmation and belonging was associated with fewer depressive symptoms concurrently and longitudinally among early adolescent youth. In addition, a higher composite MEIM score (affirmation and achievement) was indirectly linked with fewer depressive symptoms among 13- to 19-year-olds through perceived ability to cope with problems (Swenson & Prelow, 2005).

**Coping, Mastery, and Psychological Well-Being**—In their study of seventh graders, Zaff, Blount, Philips, and Cohen (2002) found that a more positive ERI was associated with engagement in positive coping strategies. Blash and Unger (1995) found that a sense of personal mastery and community with others was positively correlated with adolescent boys' ethnic affirmation and achievement (as assessed with a composite MEIM score). The highest levels of psychological well-being were reported by 11- to 17-year-olds characterized as

“Achieved” (have explored and feel positively about the group) (Seaton, Scottham, & Sellers, 2006).

**Other Psychosocial Correlates**—Consistent with findings for other psychosocial outcomes thus far, youth’s positive private regard beliefs were negatively related to perceived stress among middle and late adolescents (Caldwell, Zimmerman, Bernat, Sellers, & Notaro, 2002). In addition, links between ERI and prosocial competencies have also been identified among African American adolescents. For example, early adolescent girls (aged 11–13) who participated in an intervention designed to promote positive racial identity attitudes exhibited a decrease in relationally aggressive behaviors (Belgrave et al., 2004). Similarly, in a study of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, Hughes, Wither-spoon, Rivas-Drake, and West-Bey (2009) found that higher affirmation was associated with less antisocial behavior. Finally, Rock, Cole, Houshyar, Lythcott, and Prinstein (2011) found that higher levels of peer acceptance and popularity, as rated by African American peers, were associated with the importance of race to self-definition (centrality) among 11th and 12th graders.

**Protective Functions**—ERI also serves a protective function in some cases. Prior research indicates that a composite of ethnic importance and pride attenuated the associations between perceptions of racial discrimination and problem behaviors among African American adolescents (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Similarly, higher composite MEIM scores (measuring exploration and affirmation) significantly offset the negative impact of online racial discrimination on anxiety (Tynes, Umaña-Taylor, Rose, Lin, & Anderson, 2012). In addition, lower public regard beliefs mitigated the impact of racial discrimination on psychological functioning among African American adolescents (Sellers et al., 2006). Seaton (2009) reported that no association was found between interpersonal discrimination and self-esteem or depressive symptoms for Buffering–Defensive (i.e., high racial centrality, high private regard and low public regard) and Idealized (high centrality, high private and high public regard) profiles, whereas discrimination was positively linked to depressive symptoms among Alienated (i.e., low centrality and private and public regard) youth.

**Null Findings**—Although a great deal of research has identified links between ERI and psychosocial functioning among African American adolescents, other empirical research has not found such links with variables such as teacher-reported aggression, internalizing, and externalizing behaviors (Smith, Levine, Smith, Dumas, & Prinz, 2009); depressive symptoms (Simons et al., 2002; Wong et al., 2003); self-esteem (Rivas-Drake et al., 2009; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Wong et al., 2003); anxiety (Mandara et al., 2009); perceived stress (Caldwell et al., 2002); and aggression (Belgrave, Nguyen, Johnson, & Hood, 2011; Holmes & Lochman, 2009). Seaton, Neblett, Upton, Hammond, and Sellers (2011) also reported that neither racial centrality nor regard moderated the negative relation between adolescents’ perceived discrimination and psychological well-being over time. Finally, ethnic affirmation and achievement neither predicted depressive symptoms nor moderated the link between online racial discrimination and depressive symptoms among 14- to 19-year-olds (Tynes et al., 2012).



## Latino Youth

**Self-Beliefs**—Among Mexican American middle school youth, higher ethnic affirmation was associated with higher self-esteem (Romero & Roberts, 2003). Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, and Guimond (2009) further found that longitudinal changes in ethnic identity exploration predicted longitudinal growth in self-esteem among Latino (primarily Mexican American) high school students. Researchers have also identified a positive association of a composite measure of ethnic exploration, affirmation, and behaviors with Latino adolescents' self-esteem (Bracey, Bámaca, & Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Roberts et al., 1999). In addition, Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff (2007) found that ethnic identity exploration and resolution were positively associated with self-esteem, which was in turn negatively associated with depressive symptoms among Latino adolescents.

**Other Psychosocial Outcomes**—ERI associations paralleling those for self-esteem include linkages with depression, facets of psychological well-being, and prosocial behaviors. More positive public regard (i.e., perceptions of others' views of the group) was linked to fewer somatic symptoms among Dominican youth (Rivas-Drake et al., 2009). Roberts et al. (1999) reported positive correlations between (a) a composite of exploration, affirmation, and ethnic behaviors with (b) coping, mastery, and optimism among Mexican American early adolescents. In addition, ethnic affirmation was positively associated with prosocial tendencies, such as the desire to help others in various kinds of situations, among Mexican American fifth and sixth graders (Armenta, Knight, Carlo, & Jacobson, 2011). Among middle school Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Central and South American youth, having a stronger and more positive ethnic identity was indirectly associated with fewer externalizing behaviors through its association with self-esteem (Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007). Berkel et al. (2010) reported a favorable thought indirect path between youth's ethnic pride and internalizing and externalizing via endorsement of Mexican American cultural values.

**Null Findings**—We note that ERI is not universally promotive in the face of adjustment difficulties for Latino adolescents. For example, some studies have not found associations between various ERI dimensions and happiness, prosocial behaviors, self-esteem, anxiety, depressive symptoms, or suicidal ideation (Kiang, Gonzales-Backen, Yip, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006; Le, Lai, & Wallen, 2009; O'Donnell, O'Donnell, Wardlaw, & Stueve, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009).

## Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth

Research on ERI and psychosocial outcomes among Asian American and Pacific Islander youth is very limited. Le et al. (2009) found that greater ethnic search and commitment was positively related to subjective happiness among diverse Asian American 11- to 15-year-olds. Bracey et al. (2004) found that higher levels of exploration and commitment, affirmation, and ethnic behaviors (composite) were associated with higher self-esteem among a diverse Asian American high school students. In addition, a composite of affirmation and belonging, achievement, and behaviors has been positively associated with self-esteem among Asian American adolescents (Worrell, 2007; Yip & Fuligni, 2002).

Among Korean American adolescents, Shrake and Rhee (2004) found that those with higher levels of ethnic belongingness, achievement, and ethnic behaviors (composite) reported fewer internalizing and externalizing symptoms. We found only one study reporting a pertinent null result: Farver, Xu, Bhadha, Narang, and Lieber (2002) found no association between ethnic affirmation or achievement and anxiety among South Asian adolescents. Finally, one study reported on a significant protective role of ERI for depressive symptoms. At higher levels of discrimination, Chinese American sixth graders reporting more favorable public regard reported fewer depressive symptoms compared to youth with less positive public regard (Rivas-Drake et al., 2008).

### Native American Youth

There is evidence, though limited, that ERI is linked to positive psychosocial outcomes among Native American adolescents. In a study of Navajo high school students, ethnic affirmation and belonging and exploration were associated with psychosocial adjustment (with some gender distinctions), including greater self-esteem, fewer depressive symptoms, and greater social and adaptive functioning (Jones & Galliher, 2007). In addition, affirmation was related to indices of positive functioning among Navajo high school students (Galliher et al., 2011). Ethnic affirmation was also associated with more positive general affect among Lumbee adolescents (Newman, 2005). Kenyon and Carter (2010) used MEIM exploration and commitment scores to create profiles reflecting ethnic identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement among high school students from a Northern Plains Native American community. Sense of community and positive general affect were related to those identity statuses characterized by greater degrees of exploration (moratorium and achievement), and Achieved adolescents reported the highest levels of sense of community and positive affect (Kenyon & Carter, 2010).

**Null Findings**—Some of the aforementioned studies reported null results for ERI and other psychosocial out-comes. For example, in their study of Native American youth, Kenyon and Carter (2010) did not find significant associations between ERI and depressive and psychosomatic symptoms. Furthermore, Newman (2005) found that a composite of ethnic identity exploration and resolution was not associated with prosocial experiences, social problems, aggression, or physical and relational victimization among Lumbee adolescents. In addition, Jones and Galliher (2007) found no relation between ethnic identity exploration and psychosocial or behavioral outcomes among Navajo adolescents. As with Asian American and Pacific Islander youth, it is difficult to identify a clear trend between ERI and mental health for Native American youth given the few studies meeting our inclusion criteria.

### Summary

Among adolescents, diverse facets of ERI are more often than not positively associated with psychosocial functioning—directly or indirectly—in adolescence among ethnic minority youth. Although sparse, burgeoning research has also illustrated that ERI moderates perceptions of racial discrimination on mental health indicators for African American adolescents, and that it carries indirect associations with mental health for Latino adolescents. A few empirical studies with African American, Latino, and Native American



youth suggest that ERI has no association with mental health indicators. The overall trend for Asian American and Pacific Islander youth appears to reflect a positive link between ERI and psychosocial functioning, with one study reporting a lack of association with such outcomes.

Certainly, potential moderators that may account for discrepant findings both within and between groups include differences in historical migration, immigration status, national origin in cases of Asian American and Latino groups, tribal and reservation versus nonreservation status among Native Americans, school or neighborhood composition and geographic location, socioeconomic status (SES), family structures, and peer group configuration (e.g., crowd, popularity status). Although a detailed exploration of how these factors potentially explain the discrepant findings is beyond the scope of the present article, we encourage the field to consider these potential moderators when examining the relation between ERI and psychosocial functioning among minority adolescents.

## Academic Outcomes

### African American Youth

**Academic Achievement**—Ethnic affirmation and belonging was positively associated with academic performance among adolescents (Adelabu, 2008). Similarly, less positive and secure racial identities were negatively associated with scores on the California Achievement Test, whereas more secure and positive views of one's racial group were positively related with cumulative grade point average (GPA) for adolescents (Sandoval, Gutkin, & Naumann, 1997). Among early adolescents, feelings of connection to the African American community and sensitivity to racism predicted a higher GPA (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006). Additional research suggests that the associations of a given dimension of ERI and academic outcomes in adolescence may depend on contextual features or other ethnic and racial beliefs and experiences. For example, Byrd and Chavous (2009) found that high levels of racial pride among adolescents were associated with higher GPA in lower SES neighborhoods, but with lower GPA in higher SES neighborhoods.

**Academic Engagement**—Among early adolescents, higher academic efficacy and school engagement have been positively associated with higher ethnic affirmation (Hughes et al., 2009) and feelings of connection to the African American community and sensitivity to racism (Altschul et al., 2006; Bennett, 2006; Oyserman, Harrison & Bybee, 2001). Early adolescents identified as succeeding in school reported significantly higher ethnic identity, achievement, and affirmation and belonging than their counterparts who exhibited problem behaviors in school (Yasui, Dorham, & Dishion, 2004). Conversely, Perry (2008) found that confusion, ambivalence, and anxiety about racial identity dampened school engagement, whereas a more secure, internalized racial identity was associated with a higher level of school engagement.

**Academic Beliefs and Attitudes**—Research indicates that racial pride was linked to expectations and anticipation of academic success for adolescents (Murry, Berkel, Brody, Miller, & Chen, 2009). Similarly, higher composite MEIM scores (affirmation and exploration) were positively associated with future education orientation among adolescents

(Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008) and academic self-concept among adolescent girls (Buckley & Carter, 2005). Ethnic affirmation and belonging was favorably linked to boys' and girls' school self-esteem and boys' school belonging (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009). Greater racial identity exploration and resolution were positively associated with interest in learning among adolescents (Borrero & Yeh, 2011).

Empirical research has also examined profiles of racial identity beliefs with academic outcomes. Chavous et al. (2003) conducted a longitudinal examination of racial identity profiles and educational outcomes among adolescents. Three of the profiles previously identified in the Psychosocial Functioning section (e.g., Buffering–Defensive, Idealized, and Alienated) were examined, with an additional profile named Low Connectedness–High Affinity (i.e., low racial centrality, high private regard and low public regard). Buffering–Defensive, Idealized, and Low Connectedness–High Affinity youth had more positive school attitudes than Alienated youth, and Alienated youth were least likely to enroll in college (Chavous et al., 2003). Thus, African American youth with more positive racial identity beliefs were more likely to evidence positive educational outcomes, whereas youth with more negative racial identity beliefs were more likely to evidence negative educational outcomes, which converges with aforementioned studies indicating a positive relation between ERI and academic outcomes.

**Protective Functions**—Research has also indicated that ERI dimensions buffered the effects of perceived racial discrimination on various academic outcomes among adolescents. One study indicated that a strong, positive connection to one's racial group reduced the magnitude of the association of racial discrimination experiences with declines in academic self-concept and school achievement among adolescents (Wong et al., 2003). High racial centrality and low public regard levels also buffered the negative consequences of high levels of perceived teacher discrimination on academic achievement among Caribbean Black adolescents (Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009). Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, and Cogburn (2008) reported that among middle school boys, higher racial centrality buffered the relation between classroom discrimination and lower school importance attitudes and grades. Among middle school girls, higher racial centrality was protective against the negative impact of peer discrimination on school importance and academic self-concept (Chavous et al., 2008). Lastly, among African American girls (6th–12th graders) who experienced discrimination, lower levels of ethnic affirmation and belonging were associated with decreased school bonding (Dotterer et al., 2009).

**Null or Negative Findings**—Although the bulk of empirical research has indicated that ERI is positively associated with increased academic achievement, engagement, and success among African American adolescents, some empirical research has not reported a relation between racial identity dimensions and academic outcomes such as educational importance and the perceived value of education (Wong et al., 2003) and self-efficacy (Gushue & Whitson, 2006). Some counterintuitive findings have also emerged. One study indicated that a composite of affirmation and belonging, achievement, and behaviors negatively predicted school achievement for African American students (Worrell, 2007). Similarly, contrary to Chavous et al.'s (2003) findings, Harper and Tuckman (2006) found that among 9th and

12th graders, Alienated students achieved significantly higher GPAs than did Idealized students.

### Latino Youth

**Academic Achievement**—Having a stronger and more positive ethnic identity (a composite of exploration, validation, belongingness, and commitment and of affirmation and achievement, respectively) predicted higher grades in middle school both directly (Chang & Le, 2010) and indirectly through its association with self-esteem (Schwartz et al., 2007). Supple, Ghazarian, Frabutt, Plunkett, and Sands (2006) identified a positive association between ethnic affirmation and school performance (composite of grades and other positive school behaviors) among 14- to 15-year-olds of Mexican, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran heritages. Oyserman (2008) also reported that Latino eighth graders who emphasized a positive sense of being Latino in conjunction with their group's contributions to society exhibited better academic performance. Rivas-Drake (2011) found that more positive public regard was associated with higher grades in a diverse Latino high school sample. One caveat to the overall trend in results for academic achievement is that in a longitudinal study of Mexican-origin seventh graders, ethnic identity affirmation was associated with decreases in GPA for boys (Umaña-Taylor, Wong, Gonzales, & Dumka, 2012).

**Academic Engagement, Beliefs, and Attitudes**—Overall, Latino youth who have positive beliefs about being Latino (e.g., affirmation) or favorable views of Latinos (e.g., public regard) tend to be engaged in and value school. Oyserman (2008) found that a positive sense of being Latino and of the group's contributions to society predicted stronger emotional engagement with school and better in-class behaviors among Latino adolescents. Greater ethnic affirmation and belonging predicted more positive educational values among diverse Latino ninth graders (Perreira, Fuligni, & Potochnick, 2010). Similarly, Latino high schoolers with more positive public ethnic regard reported greater academic competence (Rivas-Drake, 2011). Berkel et al. (2010) provide one possible explanatory mechanism; they found an indirect association of ethnic pride with academic self-efficacy via greater endorsement of cultural values for prioritizing family relationships and avoiding interpersonal conflict among Mexican American youth.

### Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth

Although comparatively sparse, empirical research indicates a positive association between ERI and academic achievement among adolescents of Asian descent. Worrell (2007) found a positive association between a composite of affirmation, exploration, and behaviors and academic performance among gifted Asian American adolescents. Shrake and Rhee (2004) reported that a composite of ethnic belongingness, achievement, and behaviors was positively associated with GPA among Korean American high school students. Kiang, Supple, Stein, and Gonzalez (2012) also found that affirmation and belonging was positively associated with value of school, school centrality, and school connectedness among adolescents. In addition, ethnic exploration was positively associated with academic goals, academic expectations, utility value, school centrality, and school connectedness (Kiang et al., 2012). One study reported a null result: Farver et al. (2002) reported no association between GPA and ethnic identity for South Asian middle to late adolescents. The trend,

however, appears to suggest that ethnic identity is positively associated with academic outcomes among adolescents of Asian descent.

### **Native American Youth**

There simply is not sufficient research to offer a conclusive statement on academic outcomes of Native Americans relative to affective and cognitive dimensions of ERI that are within the scope of this review. Jones and Galliher (2007) reported that ethnic identity exploration was negatively related to GPA among Navajo adolescent girls. However, Bryant and LaFromboise (2005) reported no associations between Lumbee high school students' secure and positive sense of connection to their ethnic group and their school perceptions.

### **Summary**

The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that ERI is positively associated with academic outcomes among African American, Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander youth. The fact that the empirical research is consistent despite the examination of distinct ERI and academic constructs suggests that when minority youth have positive identities linked to their ethnicity or race, this has positive implications for various academic outcomes. Yet, a small number of studies also suggest that ERI may carry a negative or null relation with academic outcomes, particularly for African American and Native American youth. One caveat for the discrepant findings among Native American youth concerns the fact that, with so few studies, no clear trend may be discerned in the research examining ERI and academic outcomes for these youth. For African American youth, the association between ERI and academic outcomes may depend on their access to positive learning opportunities within schools, experiences with teachers and other adults, and specific school policies, which may result in disparate outcomes. All of these factors should be examined as potential moderators in future work.

### **Health Risk Outcomes**

#### **African American Youth**

Prior work has shown that ERI is linked to decreased involvement in risky behaviors among African American adolescents. For example, middle schoolers with a strong sense of racial pride reported less drug use and exposure (Marsiglia, Kulis, & Hecht, 2001). Among 10- to 14-year-old girls, more positive attitudes about being African American were linked to more disapproval of drug use and lowered intentions to use drugs, as well as to greater self-efficacy for engaging in HIV-preventive behaviors such as refusal of unwanted sex and partner communication (Corneille & Belgrave, 2007). Similarly, among older adolescents (e.g., 17- to 18-year-olds) more positive private regard was associated with less self-reported alcohol use, and this was especially true for those who reported that race was a more central part of their identity (Caldwell, Sellers, Bernat, & Zimmerman, 2004). Nasim, Belgrave, Jagers, Wilson, and Owens (2007) found support for protective effects such that youth (aged 13–20) who reported higher ethnic affirmation and belonging and were exposed to increased risky behaviors from peers engaged in less alcohol consumption than their counterparts with lower levels of affirmation and belonging. Among adolescent girls who had not experienced menarche and who reported low levels of masculine gender role attitudes, high levels of

racial identity were associated with attitudes that were less tolerant of sexual behavior (Townsend, 2002). Finally, one study reported that a higher level of ethnic affirmation and search predicted disapproving attitudes and beliefs about fighting among early and middle adolescent African Americans (Arbona, Jackson, McCoy, & Blakely, 1999). Thus, the trend of findings for ERI and risk-related outcomes among African American youth suggests that more positive ERI attitudes are linked to less exposure to health risks, in particular, to substance use.

### Latino Youth

There is some evidence to support the notion that a positive ERI decreases Latino youth's engagement with health risks. For instance, Kulis, Marsiglia, Kopak, Olmsted, and Crossman (2012) reported that ethnic identity strength and affirmation was associated with decreases in substance use intentions among 9- to 13-year-old Mexican American youth. Other research has shown that higher levels of ethnic pride were linked to less alcohol and tobacco use (Marsiglia et al., 2001). Morgan-Lopez, Gonzalez Castro, Chassin, and MacKinnon (2003) reported that youth's connection and positive regard for their ethnic group was related to higher self-efficacy, which was then associated with a lower likelihood of smoking among Mexican American early adolescents. Guilamo-Ramos (2009) reported that higher levels of ethnic pride were linked to higher self-esteem, which in turn predicted lower intention to engage in sexual behavior among sixth and eighth graders of Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Mexican descent. In addition, higher levels of ethnic pride directly (and indirectly via self-esteem) predicted decreased intention to smoke among these youth.

**Null or Negative Findings**—It should be noted that some studies have reported no association between Latino youth's ERI and outcomes such as violent or delinquent behavior (French, Kim, & Pillado, 2006), and others have indicated a positive association between ERI and risky behaviors, particularly substance use. For example, Marsiglia, Kulis, Hecht, and Sills (2004) reported that seventh-grade Mexican American youth who had a stronger sense of ethnic affiliation and pride indicated more lifetime drug use and higher alcohol and cigarette use. Similarly, Zamboanga, Schwartz, Jarvis, and Van Tyne (2009) reported that a composite score of exploration and affirmation was positively predictive of cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use among sixth to eighth graders of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central and South American heritages. In another study, Schwartz et al. (2012) indicated that Latino youth (including Cubans, Dominicans, Hondurans, and Colombians, and Nicaraguans) aged 14–17 who reported ethnic identity levels similar to those of their parents demonstrated better communication with their parents, but such communication positively predicted number of binge drinking days, occasions of drunkenness, number of sexual partners, and number of oral sex partners. Thus, the research suggests that, among community samples of Latino youth, ERI may directly and indirectly facilitate negative health-related behaviors.

### Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth

Two studies reported group-specific results for the association between health risk outcomes and ethnic identity among Asian American and Pacific Islander youth. Le and Stockdale (2008) did not find a significant association between ethnic identity (composite of search

and commitment) and youth violence among diverse Asian American youth in a community study of 10- to 18-year-olds. In addition, Go and Le (2005) found that ethnic identity search was positively associated with self-reported delinquency among Cambodian adolescent boys (but not girls) aged 11–18. Given the dearth of research that met inclusion parameters, it is not possible to draw meaningful conclusions about ERI and risk outcomes among Asian American and Pacific Islander youth at this point.

### **Native American Youth**

Evidence regarding a protective function of ERI against health risk outcomes among Native American youth is scant and somewhat mixed. Yu and Stiffman (2007) reported that ethnic cultural pride was associated with fewer problematic alcohol symptoms among reservation and urban Native American adolescents. Similarly, in a study of ethnic identity among seventh-grade Native American students from a large Southwestern city, ethnic cultural pride was related to personal antialcohol norms as well as to parents' and friends' anticipated reactions to the respondent's potential use of alcohol or drugs (Kulis, Napoli, & Marsiglia, 2002). Consistent with that finding, ethnic negativity or embarrassment about one's ethnic group was also related to lessened antidrug norms (Kulis et al., 2002). However, Marsiglia et al. (2004) found that stronger ethnic identity (a composite measure of positive feelings and ethnic behaviors) was related to higher drug use among Native American youth from an urban area in the Southwest.

The association between ERI and substance use outcomes among Native American youth may vary by gender. For example, Jones and Galliher (2007) found that lower drug use frequency was related to greater ethnic belonging among adolescent Navajo boys, but greater ethnic exploration was related to lower drug frequency among girls in their sample. A complex multiyear project conducted in conjunction with community agencies and individuals by Petoskey, Van Stelle, and De Jong (1998) reported that importance of Native American identity was related to more marijuana use among boys, but lower alcohol use among girls in 4th to 12th grades from reservations in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

### **Summary**

The associations between ERI and health risk behaviors are less consistent than are the associations of ERI with psychosocial functioning. The mixed findings for Latinos and the small number of studies involving ERI and risk behavior among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and among Native Americans precludes drawing definitive conclusions regarding these groups. It is possible that the meaning of specific risk behaviors, such as alcohol use among Latinos and the use of some substances among Native Americans, varies between and among groups and may affect the associations between ERI and these risk behaviors. Differing gender roles across groups may also affect the links between ERI and sexual behavior but more research, both within and across groups, is needed to understand these associations. Although gender differences per se have been infrequently observed in ERI research—as demonstrated by the lack of differences found in the two available meta-analyses (Rivas-Drake et al., in press; Smith & Silva, 2011)—very little research has examined how more dynamic aspects of gender, such as gender identity or gender roles, intersect with ERI constructs.



## General Summary and Discussion

Our review of the empirical literature suggests that diverse aspects of ERI were generally associated with positive psychosocial functioning and mental health outcomes among minority adolescents. To provide additional clarity regarding the patterns of findings, we have further summarized the results for specific dimensions (e.g., exploration, regard) for which disaggregated information could be obtained (see Table 1). The outcomes most often examined—and for which more consistently positive associations with ERI were found—pertain to psychosocial functioning and mental health.

One key finding of this review is that several aspects of ERI, particularly positive feelings about their ethnic or racial group (e.g., affirmation, private regard), are consistently associated with positive psychosocial adjustment among African American and Latino youth, and with academic outcomes among African American, Latino, and Asian American and Pacific Islander youth to some extent. Findings regarding psychosocial functioning and academic outcomes were more inconsistent among Native American youth. The least consistent findings were in the area of health risk outcomes. Discrepancies in findings preclude making definitive statements about the relation of ERI with health risk outcomes, particularly substance use, among Latino and Native American youth. Similar caution is warranted for Asian American and Pacific Islander youth due to a dearth of studies among this group.

One methodological reason for the discrepant research findings concerns the different ways in which ERI dimensions have been operationalized and whether multiple dimensions are examined simultaneously. For example, there does not appear to be a consensus regarding how the MEIM should be scored: Whereas some studies examined dimensions (e.g., affirmation, exploration), other studies examined composite scores (e.g., achievement), and still other studies examined identity statuses (e.g., diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achieved). Consequently, there is very little consistency across studies regarding the way in which ERI is assessed, particularly when the MEIM is used (see Schwartz et al., in press). It is difficult to ascertain the independent influences of exploration, in particular, because it is often combined with affirmation, whereas there are many more studies that examine affirmation and the conceptually overlapping constructs of pride and private regard and thus more conclusive statements can be made about this aspect of ERI (i.e., positive feelings about the group).

Another issue related to the lack of consistent measurement of ERI constructs is that this review was circumscribed to affective and cognitive aspects of ethnic identity encompassing selected dimensions—an approach that was conducive to a more parsimonious treatment of the topic. There are numerous other studies of outcomes of related constructs such as cultural knowledge and participation, acculturation, biculturalism, and multicultural affiliations that were outside the scope of this article. The extent to which affective-cognitive dimensions of ERI can and need to be parsed from cultural participation and engagement remains an important conceptual and empirical question. Recent research on ethnic exploration has suggested that the process of exploration can be either positively or negatively associated with psychosocial adjustment, depending on whether it involves

searching for an ethnic identity or participating in ethnically related activities (Syed et al., 2013). Thus, for those studies that include exploration and adjust for the influences of cultural practices, ERI likely refers to a cognitive-affective searching process, which may be predictive of risk-taking behavior (see Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Considering these nuances in both operationalization and modeling may help shed further light on discrepancies highlighted in this review.

### Implications and Directions for Future Work

One of the major challenges for reviewing the empirical work was the lack of consistent definition and measurement of many ERI constructs, even those that are purportedly drawn from the same model or measures. This is a major concern and caveat of our analysis of the literature. Although diversity of approach within the literature is intellectually healthy and useful, a common set of operational definitions is essential to support integrative analyses across studies and groups. One of the major divisions in the ERI literature is between studies that employ composite measures (combining multiple dimensions, such as using a composite MEIM score) and those that employ disaggregated measures (e.g., exploration, commitment, affirmation). If we are to fully realize the goal of describing ERI constructions and explicating their importance in normative development, then clear and precise foci on particular dimensions will be more informative than a composite that provides no clear indication of the contribution of different dimensions to its overall value. Indeed, one would not argue that individuals have “high” or “low” ERI, but rather that those identities represent constellations of different cognitions and affect as well as exploration experiences. Moreover, longitudinal and multivariate studies lend empirical support for utility of the multidimensional approach. Different dimensions of ERI have been shown to follow different developmental courses from early adolescence to young adulthood (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006; Hughes, Way, & Rivas-Drake, 2011; Pahl & Way, 2006; Syed & Azmitia, 2009), and multivariate studies indicate that dimensions differentially predict adjustment (e.g., Lee, Yoo, & Roberts, 2004). Accordingly, future analysis of extant constructs will require approaches that clearly identify particular aspects of ethnic-racial belief systems individually, or those that examine constellations of such belief systems in concert such as in latent profile analysis (Collins & Lanza, 2011). Regardless of which approach is adopted, it is essential to clarify the contribution of each ERI component, even as we elucidate how they function synergistically.

Another long-standing issue in the literature concerns the distinction between race and ethnicity for non-White populations (Cokley, 2007; Helms, 2007). Our review suggests that a given cognitive or affective dimension may promote positive youth adjustment regardless of whether the group referenced is an ethnic or racial one. We observed similar implications for ethnic pride and private racial regard (two manifestations of what might be considered *positive ethnic-racial affect*) among African American youth. Moreover, the positive associations evidenced for what is often referred to as ethnic affirmation among Latinos, Asian American and Pacific Islander and Native American youth are analogous to those for what is termed private racial regard among African American youth (see Table 1). The similarity in form (definition) and function (association) may signal that these concepts are essentially isomorphic, perhaps due to some shared quality of experiences that cuts across

ethnic-racial lines; whether and how experience implied by such constructs is indeed shared across groups merits further investigation.

We recognize that there are elements of ethnic identity that are indeed distinct from racial identity. However, we suggest that more studies are needed that seek to identify common elements of African American, Latino, Asian American, or Native American youth's group identities that are neither explicitly *ethnic* nor *racial* but instead ethnic-racial, and that this represents a critical new avenue for research. Studies that examine these sorts of connections in the experiences of diverse youth of color will provide new insights needed to better conceptualize the role of ethnicity and race in youth development, and identify which processes are important to understand for all youth of color in the United States.

In addition, it is important to note that there is a critical lack of research with youth from mixed-ethnic and multiracial backgrounds, both in terms of the meaning of ERI and how ERI is related to a number of outcomes. Historically, there has been a negative stereotype about mixed-ethnic and multiracial youth, rooted in Stonequist's (1937) "marginal man" theory, suggesting a life of difficult social relations and poor psychological functioning (see also Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The empirical support for this view is questionable, and more recent work has begun to examine the strengths that mixed-ethnic and multiracial youth draw upon as they navigate the complexities of ethnicity (e.g., Root, 1996). Although there are increasing numbers of empirical studies that examine the focal ERI dimensions of this review among mixed-ethnic and multiracial adolescents (e.g., Bracey et al., 2004; Charmaraman & Grossmann, 2010), the number remains so few that it precludes any form of systematic review.

On the basis of our review of the literature, we posit that ERI dimensions may operate differently depending on the specific outcome under investigation and on the social and cognitive demands of everyday contexts in which such identities are expressed. When considering the implications of ERI for just one or two of these domains, it is important to consider the potential intersections of psychosocial, academic, and health risk outcomes in adolescence as well as the social ecologies encompassing the behaviors (outcomes) of interest. Drawing from integrative minority youth development frameworks (García Coll et al., 1996; Spencer, 2006), it is important to ask: How do youth with particular beliefs and feelings about their ethnicity or race experience school, peer, family, and community factors leading to risky behaviors and, conversely, opportunities for promoting positive adjustment? Our primary recommendation in this regard is first to expand the realm of outcomes studied with ERI constructs. The field should venture further beyond outcomes pertinent to psychosocial functioning, which comprise the bulk of the literature to date. Although the associations with psychosocial outcomes are clearly the most consistent (and positive), our review highlights other important domains (i.e., academics, health risk) that have life-span implications for which ERI may be relevant. With regard to health risk outcomes, studies have generally addressed substance use and sexual attitudes and behaviors, which have potentially long-term implications (e.g., pregnancy, HIV transmission, addiction) and thus remain important areas for continued investigation. However, there is a dearth of studies examining linkages between ERI and obesity-related outcomes, which also have life-span implications. Moreover, examining these outcomes within the same study could help

elucidate the role of ERI in intra- and intergroup linkages observed between mental and physical health.

Our second recommendation is to further theorize the role of social ecologies in the linkages between adolescents' ERIs and their adjustment in various life domains. A closer look at contextual mechanisms would also help more clearly delineate variations in how ERI is related to adjustment *within* ethnic and racial groups. Because we presented the findings from our review separately by ethnic-racial group, it may give the mistaken impression that ERI operates the same for all members of the group. The reality is that despite the fact that most ERI research focuses on a single group, there has been minimal research on within-group differences generally and on contextual moderators, in particular. Gender, social class, and immigrant generational status (for Latinos and Asian Americans) have been some of the most commonly studied within-group factors, but have yet to be studied consistently enough to allow for any conclusions. Explicit examination of youth's everyday contexts—family, school, and peer dynamics—will be another important avenue for future work on both between- and within-group variations in ERI and adolescent adjustment.

## Conclusion

This review suggests that aspects of ERI are linked to psychosocial functioning, academic adjustment, and health risk behaviors and attitudes among adolescents of color. There seems to be a clear convergence of evidence to support the development of a construct such as positive ethnic-racial affect (reflecting the overlap of affirmation, private regard, and pride), or the extent to which an adolescent feels positively about his or her ethnicity or race. Future attempts to study unifying concepts such as ethnic-racial affect, and its expression in particular contexts, may be a useful way to explicate ethnic and racial phenomena that are shared among diverse youth of color and thus provide important new insights into the ever-diversifying worlds of youth in the United States.

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**Table 1**  
 Summary of Direct Linkages Between Selected Ethnic and Racial Identity Dimensions and Youth Adjustment

Dimension	Definition	Examples of adjustment correlates
Exploration or search	Extent to which youth has thought about or explored meaning of group membership	<i>Psychosocial:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive self-esteem; fewer depressive symptoms</li> </ul>
Resolution	Extent to which youth has resolved what group membership means to them	<i>Academic:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More interest in learning</li> </ul>
Centrality or importance	Importance of group membership to self-concept or self-definition	<i>Academic:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More interest in learning</li> </ul> <i>Psychosocial:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prosocial tendencies; peer acceptance and popularity</li> </ul>
Positive affect (affirmation, private regard, pride)	Own evaluations of and affect toward group; sometimes refers to belongingness as well	<i>Academic:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher academic motivation</li> </ul> <i>Psychosocial:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive self-esteem, self-concept, mood</li> <li>• Prosocial tendencies, peer acceptance, positive interpersonal functioning</li> <li>• Fewer depressive symptoms</li> </ul>
Public regard	Perceptions of others' evaluations of group	<i>Academic:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive academic efficacy, engagement, achievement, self-competence</li> <li>• Greater school success, utility value of school, school connectedness</li> </ul> <i>Health risk:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less drug use and exposure, intention to use drugs</li> <li>• Greater efficacy for refusal of unwanted sex</li> </ul>
		<i>Psychosocial:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer somatic symptoms</li> </ul>
		<i>Academic:</i>



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Dimension	Definition	Examples of adjustment correlates
		• Greater school belonging, academic competence; higher grades

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