

# The Psychosocial Aspects of Ethnic Identity Development among African American College Students

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## INTRODUCTION

- Black ethnic identity is the degree of satisfaction one feels about being Black.
- Ethnic identity relevance is dependent on minority/majority status (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).
- Higher ethnic identity for African Americans/Blacks means higher self-esteem and grades, greater resistance to peer pressure and increased resiliency (Ellis, 2000; Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Phinney, Cantu & Kurtz, 1997; Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002; Umaña-Taylor, Updegraff, & Gonzales-Backen, 2011).
- Ethnic identity has also been linked to lower stress, fighting behaviors, susceptibility to peer pressure, and drug use (Arbona, Jackson, McCoy, & Blakely, 1999; Espinosa, Tikhonov, Elleman, Kern, Lui & Anglin, 2018; Marsiglia, Kulis & Hecht, 2001).
- African American students at HBCUs are more likely to have strong racial pride (Berger & Milem, 2000).
- However, ethnic/racial identity and/or ethnic socialization is different in America than in other countries of origin for Blacks immigrating to America (Case & Hunter, 2014; Lincoln, Chatters, Taylor, & Jackson, 2007; Miranda, Siddique, Belin & Kohn-Wood, 2005; Ryan, Gee, & Laflamme, 2006; Williams et. al., 2007).
- Data was collected at a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) located in a wealthy predominantly Black city and county whose current undergraduate enrollment of 4,368 and is largely comprised of African American students (84%).

## PROCEDURES

- Cross-sectional, Quantitative, Quasi-Experimental
- Stratified random sampling by major
- Data collected between 2012 and 2015
- Sample drawn from a larger sample of 508 undergraduates (analysis only includes African American students N= 379)

## MEASURES

- Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992, 20-items) -- "I am happy that I am a member of the ethnic group I belong to."
- Center for Epidemiological Study Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977; 10-items) -- "I was bothered by things that don't bother me."
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965, 10-items) -- "I take a positive view of myself."
- Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; 10 items) -- "Have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life."
- Contingencies of Self-Worth (Approval from Others Subscale) -- (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003; 10 items) -- "I can't respect myself if others don't respect me."
- Brief Resiliency Scale (Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Toomey, Christopher & Bernard, 2008; 10-items) -- "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times."
- Academic Competence Scale (10 items) -- "I feel I'm just as smart as other students my age."
- Peer Competence Scale (10 items) -- "I am really easy to like."
- Social Deviance Scale (10 items) -- "How wrong do you think it is to shoplift from a store."
- Behavior Scales developed by the authors for alcohol consumption and illegal substance use.

## SAMPLE DESCRIPTION & RESULTS

Variable	N (%)
Gender	
Female	264 (72.3%)
Male	101 (27.4%)
Father Attend Some College	
Yes	166 (45.0%)
No	189 (51.2%)
Mother Attend Some College	
Yes	226 (61.2%)
No	136 (36.9%)
Variable	M (SD)
Age	22.35 (5.65)
Grade Point Average	2.97 (0.52)

	Total Ethnic Identity	Ethnic Identity Commitment	Ethnic Identity Exploration
Exploration	.86***	--	.55***
Commitment	.86***	.55***	--
Grade Point Average	-.07	-.04	-.02
Self-Esteem	.28***	.34***	.13*
Social Deviance	-.25***	-.26***	-.19***
Need for Approval	-.04	.00	.16**
Resiliency	.12**	.12**	.02
Academic Competence	.23***	.22***	.13*
Depression	-.05	-.06	.02
Perceived Stress	-.16**	-.17**	.05
Peer Competence	.30***	.30***	.19**

	African American	African Caribbean	African	F	p	$\eta^2$
Ethnic Identity Exploration	14.40 (2.62)	14.37 (3.14)	16.00 (2.54)	5.03	.007	.03
Ethnic Identity Commitment	23.48 (3.09)	23.26 (3.38)	25.41 (2.91)	5.72	.004	.03
Total Ethnic Identity	43.63 (5.50)	43.81 (6.61)	47.97 (5.40)	8.62	.000	.05

Note: African students had significantly higher EI exploration than African Americans; African students significantly higher EI commitment and EI total scores than both African American and African Caribbean students.

	Beta (SE)	R <sup>2</sup> Change
Step 1 (Personal Resources): Resiliency Academic Competence	.16 (.07) <sup>b</sup> .13 (.05) <sup>a</sup>	.32 <sup>c</sup>
Step 2 (Personal Stressors/Stresses): Depression Perceived Stress	-.09 (.06) -.10 (.05)	.04 <sup>c</sup>
Step 3 (Social Factors): Need for Approval Peer Competence Tolerance for deviance	-.30 (.52) <sup>c</sup> .11 (.04) <sup>b</sup> -.08 (.03)	.11 <sup>c</sup>
Step 4: Ethnic Identity	.22 (.08) <sup>c</sup>	.04 <sup>c</sup>
Total R <sup>2</sup>		.51***

Note: R<sup>2</sup> Change represents the final step of the regression analysis  
<sup>a</sup>p < .05, <sup>b</sup>p < .01, <sup>c</sup>p < .001; R<sup>2</sup> = .51, F (8, 245) = 31.67, p < .001

	Predictors of Total Ethnic Identity		Predictors of Ethnic Identity Commitment		Predictors of Ethnic Identity Exploration	
	Beta (SE)	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta (SE)	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta (SE)	R <sup>2</sup>
Step 2 (Personal Resources and Stressors and Social Stressors and Resources)		.17 <sup>c</sup>		.18 <sup>c</sup>		.11 <sup>c</sup>
Self-Esteem	.15(.08) <sup>a</sup>		.25(.02) <sup>f</sup>		.16(.04)	
Resiliency	.10(.09)		.12(.02)		.04(.03)	
Academic Comp	-.08(.06)		.02(.02)		-.12(.02) <sup>b</sup>	
Stress	-.09(.07)		-.08(.02)		.25(.35) <sup>f</sup>	
Deviance	-.18(.04) <sup>b</sup>		-.17(.01) <sup>b</sup>		.11(.03)	
Peer Comp	-.16(.06) <sup>b</sup>		-.14(.02) <sup>b</sup>			
R <sup>2</sup> = .17, F (6, 292) = 10.02, p < .001			R <sup>2</sup> = .18, F (6, 287) = 10.45, p < .001		R <sup>2</sup> = .11, F (5, 299) = 7.10, p < .001	

Note: R<sup>2</sup> represents the final step of analysis; <sup>a</sup>p < .05, <sup>b</sup>p < .01, <sup>c</sup>p < .001

## DISCUSSION

- Ethnic identity total and commitment scores function similarly in relation to other measures of well-being.
- Ethnic identity exploration scores is unrelated to stress and leaves the individual vulnerable to influence of others.
- There are ethnic variation in ethnic identity scores among African Americans with African students reporting the highest scores.
- Ethnic identity is important to self-esteem for Black college students after accounting for several other factors even in an environment that is predominantly Black.

## IMPLICATIONS

- It is important for future studies to avoid using ethnic identity total score and instead use commitment and exploration scores since they function differently.
- It is important for Black students to have positive cultural experiences and role model when exploring their ethnic identity because ethnic identity exploration can leave the individual vulnerable to negative influences.