

## **A Gendered Understanding of Ethnic Identity, Ethnic Self-Labels, and Their Effect in a Group of Urban Minority Youth.**

This study, using a diverse sample of 908 adolescents (52% females; 38% Latino, 31% Black, 12% White, and 19% of another race) aged 12 to 20 years in New York City, examined the relations among gender, ethnic identity and ethnic self-labels, as well as their individual and joint effects on psychosocial outcomes (perceived self-concept, self-reported grades and conduct disorder symptoms). Results suggest that the salience of ethnic identity does not vary by ethnic self-labels. Additionally, males and females experience similar relations among ethnic identity, ethnic self-label and psychosocial outcomes. However, some key differences exist. The subcomponents of ethnic identity, group exploration and esteem, have dissimilar effects for males and females. Group exploration and ethnic identity scores were positively related to higher self-reported grades for females but not males. For males, a higher ethnic group esteem score was related to higher perceived social competence scores.

Approximately 50 percent of the children born in the United States are members of minority groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In addition, by the year 2050 minority groups will comprise more than half of the total American population of 420 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). However, minority children experience the lowest levels of psychological well-being and experience the greatest behavioral and academic difficulties (Phinney, 2004). Within this group, males are more vulnerable to negative psychosocial outcomes (The Boys Initiative, 2011). Understanding the factors related to their psychological, behavioral and academic adjustment is integral to enhancing their present psychosocial functioning and future productivity. Research has consistently indicated that stronger or a more salient ethnic identity is associated with more positive psychosocial outcomes (Phinney, 1990; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Study findings have shown that more specific ethnic self-labels (i.e. national, e.g. Jamaican) are associated with stronger ethnic identity (Anglin & Whaley, 2006). Such research has helped to understand the development of minority children in a range of spheres but has not explained the gender gap that exists in the achievement of positive outcomes (Qin, 2009). The differential development and effect of ethnic identity and self-labels, for males and females, has been understudied.

Adolescents make sense of who they are within the context of their environment. How adolescents view themselves, develop ethnic identity and choose ethnic/racial self-labels are guided by their gendered social experiences (Erikson, 1968). Ethnic identity refers to one's feeling of belonging to an ethnic group, and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership while ethnic self-label refers to an individual's self-identification of their ethnic group (Phinney, 1996). Studies that have examined gendered differences have indicated that adolescent females are more securely attached to their ethnic identity (Qin, 2009) and experience better psychosocial outcomes (Lopez, 2003; Suarez-Orzoco & Qin, 2006). To my knowledge, no studies have examined a gender preference for certain labels. Though studies have examined ethnic identity and its effect in mono ethnic samples, few have used diverse populations to concurrently examine gendered ethnic/racial self-labels and identity differences. Using a diverse racial/ethnic population, this study aims to determine whether ethnic identity is experienced differently for males and females, and whether their choice of labels indicates these differences.

Social identity theory purports that ethnic self-labels may signify the rejection or adoption of negative stereotypes and defining of ethnic identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Studies have also identified a negative relationship depending on the ethnic self-label adopted (Fuligni, Witkow, Kiang & Baldelomar, 2008). Therefore, ethnic identity can be high but depending on the ethnic group, i.e. ethnic self-label, with which one is affiliated strong ethnic identity can have positive or negative effects (Waters, 1990). Prior studies examining the effect of ethnic/racial self-labels have focused on generational and age differences. Minority adolescents experience differential pulls in terms of values and social networks (Qin, 2009). Among immigrant adolescents, changes in ethnic identity and self-labels have been associated with length of time in America (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). The type of ethnic socialization message received also has a varied impact on the development of ethnic identity and self-labels (Hughes et al, 2006; Umana-Taylor & Yazedijan, 2006). However, how these relationships are maintained across males and females in various ethnic minority groups has not been extensively examined or established. As such, this study examined whether ethnic/racial self-labels are related to ethnic identity and associated with more positive or negative psychosocial outcomes.

The following hypotheses were proposed:

- a) Adolescents with narrower ethnic self-labels (i.e. national vs. pan-ethnic) will have higher ethnic identity achievement, higher self-reported grades and fewer symptoms of conduct disorder than adolescents with broader self-labels.
- b) Female adolescents will use narrower ethnic self-labels (i.e., hyphenated and national) and have higher ethnic identity than males, who will have a preference for broader ethnic self-labels.
- c) Female adolescents' use of narrower ethnic self-labels and high ethnic identity will both be associated with higher self-reported grades, higher social competence and fewer problem behaviours than males.

A diverse group of adolescents (52% females; 38% Hispanic Americans, 31% African Americans, 12% European Americans, and 19% of another race; 16% first generation, 66% second generation) aged 12-20 years was used to examine the relation between ethnic identity achievement, ethnic self-labels and psychosocial outcomes. An adaptation of Phinney's (1992) original structured interview on ethnic identity was used to elicit ethnic self-labels and as a measure of ethnic identity and its two subscales, ethnic group esteem and exploration (French et al., 2006). Ethnic self-labels were derived from an open-ended prompt on the questionnaire and four categories were used to code the responses, from narrowest to broadest: national origin, hyphenated, race, and pan ethnic. Psychosocial outcomes included adolescents conduct disorder symptoms, perceived social competence, and self-reported grades.

Results indicate that specificity of ethnic self-labels is not associated with salience of ethnic identity, ( $F(3,754) = .18, p = .91$ ). Narrower ethnic self-labels were not associated with better self-reported grades ( $F(3,691) = .98, p = .40$ ), behavioral symptoms ( $F(3,752) = .97, p = .41$ ) or social competence ( $F(3,751) = 1.02, p = .39$ ). Logistic regression analysis indicates that an ethnic self-label characterized by race is associated with higher levels of ethnic group esteem and exploration ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.22 \& 1.89$ , respectively).

When gender differences were examined, males had a significantly higher symptom disorder score than females ( $t = 7.046, p = .000$ ). In the area of social competence, females reported higher scores than males ( $t = -8.510, p = .000$ ). No gender difference was found for ethnic identity or ethnic self-labels ( $\chi^2(3, N = 758) = 6.29, p = .1$ ). However, the relation between sub components of ethnic identity, group exploration and esteem, and the psychosocial outcomes examined varied

by gender. Group exploration was positively related to academic achievement for females ( $\beta = .66, p = .004$ ), but not males. Higher group esteem scores were related to higher social competence scores for males only ( $\beta = .17, p = .001$ ).

The results do not provide support for the hypotheses proposed, however, they do indicate differential ethnic identity processes at work in the development of positive psychosocial outcomes for males and females, which may often be overlooked. Developmental changes in ethnic identity may have very different implications for males and females. Future research exploring the differential effects of multiple components of ethnic identity would provide greater understanding of the developmental process of ethnic identity.