

# Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology

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# School Ethnic–Racial Socialization and Adolescent Ethnic–Racial Identity

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**Objective:** Schools are an influential source of information on the meaning of race and culture in society and adolescents' personal lives. Yet, that influence is understudied in the literature on adolescent ethnic–racial identity (ERI) development. Studies of ethnic–racial socialization tend to focus on the family context; the current study measures adolescents' perceptions of ethnic–racial socialization from the school context. **Methods:** The sample includes 819 youth aged 12–18 ( $M = 15.27$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) from 4 ethnic–racial groups. We used structural equation modeling to examine the relations between ethnic–racial socialization and ERI controlling for race, gender, and age. To examine ethnic–racial group membership as a moderator, a multigroup model was used. **Results:** The findings show that, across ethnic–racial groups, the perceptions of opportunities to learn about one's ethnic–racial background and messages about American values are positively associated with youths' exploration of and commitment to their identities. Furthermore, color-blind socialization messages were associated with lower identity commitment. **Conclusions:** The findings highlight the importance of the school context in shaping students' ethnic–racial socialization and identity. This study investigated how what adolescents learn about race/ethnicity and culture in school is associated with their ERI. The findings indicate that opportunities to learn about one's culture are related to more identity exploration and greater sense of the importance of group membership. Furthermore, opportunities to learn about other cultures promote positive attitudes toward people of different races/ethnicities.

**Keywords:** ethnic–racial identity, socialization, adolescents, school socialization

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Ecological frameworks suggest that youth development results from interactions between individuals and their contexts. Youths' contextual experiences, especially during adolescence, shape development by impacting their perceptions of their current and future self (Bronfenbrenner, 1998; Ogbu, 1981; Spencer et al., 2006). During adolescence, youth grapple with questions about themselves trying to determine who they are, how they compare to others, and what their future might hold. Youths' contextual experiences are critical for shaping answers to these questions by informing their identity development. Identity development is a contextualized process in which experiences in social contexts shape individuals' perceptions of their current and future identities (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman et al., 2006; Oyserman & Destin, 2010).

Adolescents' ethnic–racial identity (ERI) development is particularly salient as youth are learning about themselves as racial beings, how others perceive their race, and how they perceive their own race. Given the negative social implications of race on youth of color

development, studies have mostly explored ERI in youth of color (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). However, ERI has important implications for all youth development and functioning, including European Americans. Moreover, excluding European American youth in ERI studies perpetuates Whiteness as the norm and suggests European Americans do not have an ERI. Thus, there is a need to understand and explore European American youth ERI development (Syed & Juang, 2014). In addition, studies examining ERI development have mainly explored the ways family ethnic–racial socialization (ERS) shape ERI, (Hughes et al., 2016). However, studies have found that the school context plays a critical role in students' understanding and conceptualization of race (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Byrd, 2015, 2017; Legette, 2018; Tyson, 2011). Thus, it is important to explore how the school context might also be associated with students' ERI. The current study aims to fill gaps in current literature by examining the relationship between school ERS and ERI in four ethnic–racial groups.

## Ethnic–Racial Identity

ERI development is the process of navigating one's multiple identities and attempting to understand the personal meaning of one's ethnic–racial group membership in relation to one's experiences, one's community, and society's stereotypes and assumptions (Hughes et al., 2016). Scholars have focused on two aspects of ERI: process and content. Process consists of exploration and commitment. Exploration is the behavioral process of actively seeking out identity-relevant experiences and the cognitive process of reflecting on the same to gain a better sense of the meaning of one's ERI (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Adolescents

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can explore by attending cultural celebrations, seeking out information about their group, or talking to others about their group membership. The positive understanding of the meaning of their ethnic-racial group membership is referred to as commitment. For example, adolescents may decide that their group membership is one of their most important identities and that they feel a sense of belonging to other members of their group. Adolescents may go through multiple cycles of exploration and commitment over time (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

A positive ERI is defined as having spent considerable time exploring and participating in experiences related to one's identity and making a positive commitment (Phinney & Ong, 2007). A positive ERI protects youth against the negative effects of discrimination and is associated with better psychological well-being and academic achievement (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). For instance, in a sample of 660 African American adolescents, a positive ethnic identity was associated with higher academic achievement (Adelabu, 2008). In a similar study with predominantly Latinx adolescents, ethnic identity was positively associated with academic competence and grades (Rivas-Drake, 2011a). Although most research has focused on African American and Latinx youth, meta-analyses confirm that higher exploration and commitment is related to higher academic achievement in Asian American and European American youth as well (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016; Wang et al., 2020).

### Outgroup Attitudes

As youth develop their understanding of their own group membership, they are also coming to terms with their attitudes about outgroup members. Phinney (1992) conceptualized other group orientation as positive attitudes toward and willingness to interact with individuals from other ethnic-racial groups. Individuals who are confident in their own ethnic identity are more likely to have positive outgroup attitudes and feel more comfortable living in a diverse society (Phinney et al., 1998). Positive outgroup attitudes are also associated with better psychological well-being (Lee, 2003; Ponterotto, 2010) and better academic outcomes (Guzmán et al., 2005). For example, a sample of Mexican descent high school adolescents demonstrated that outgroup orientation accounted for 6% of the variation in their attitudes toward school and education (Guzmán et al., 2005).

### Ethnic-Racial Socialization

As noted, a particularly important influence on ERI and outgroup attitudes is ERS, which refers to the practices, knowledge, and values about race and culture that are communicated to children (Hughes et al., 2016). Socialization is a dynamic process in which multiple agents convey messages that youth select from and interpret based on their own experiences, beliefs, and knowledge. Since 2000, there have been over 250 published studies on ERS (Hughes et al., 2016), with most research focused on messages parents of color utilize with their children. Most of this literature suggests that ERS has important implications for adolescents' academic performance, behaviors, and mental health (Huguley et al., 2019).

Fewer studies have focused on socialization practices in the school context, however. Recently, Byrd (2015, 2017) integrated the parental socialization and multicultural education literatures to

identify five dimensions of school ERS: (a) cultural socialization: opportunities to learn about one's own culture; (b) promotion of cultural competence: opportunities to learn about other cultures; (c) critical consciousness socialization: opportunities to learn about prejudice and discrimination; (d) mainstream socialization: messages about mainstream U.S. values and norms; and (e) color-blind socialization: messages encouraging students to ignore the role of race in their lives and society.

Ecological models imply the importance of the school context on students' perceptions and understanding of race, particularly during adolescence. Adolescence is an especially crucial time because of changes in youths' cognitive abilities, environments, and social roles (Spencer et al., 2006). Adolescents have increased social-cognitive abilities compared to children and are beginning to expand their social networks outside of the home. These two factors may prompt greater awareness of differences in how individuals and community function in society based on race, such as who is rewarded more often, who is punished, and who is neglected. These observations along with teaching about social issues in the school curriculum and community settings may lead to youth seeking to understand their own positionality within society. Schools in particular can have a very strong influence because of the amount of time youth spend in school and because high schools in particular seek to shape youths' career aspirations and other views of themselves as part of society.

In the following sections, we review existing literature on school socialization to explain how each dimension could be associated with ERI. Because of the limited research in this area, we rely on the parental socialization literature where necessary to further support our predictions. In many ways, parental and school socialization operate similarly (Aldana & Byrd, 2015), but further theoretical work is underway to articulate the differences in the methods and content (Saleem & Byrd, under review).

### Cultural Socialization

A consistent finding in the parental socialization literature is that cultural socialization—opportunities to learn about one's culture—is significantly related to ERI commitment and exploration (e.g., Bennett, 2006; Hughes et al., 2006; Neblett et al., 2009; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006). For instance, African American adolescents' reports of cultural socialization messages from parents associated with a positive racial identity (Neblett et al., 2009). In a meta-analysis, Huguley et al. (2019) found that the correlation between parent cultural socialization and ERI was stronger compared to other dimensions of socialization.

Because of the positive associations in the parent literature, one would expect that opportunities to learn about one's culture at school would also be associated with ERI as they provide direct information about the meaning of one's ethnic-racial group membership. Cultural socialization messages can be conveyed through history and social studies courses where students examine the history and culture of their own ethnic-racial group. Ethnic studies in particular focus on the unique contributions of people of color (de los Ríos et al., 2015; Shockley & Frederick, 2010). Youth can also learn about culture through student organizations and from teachers who work to incorporate culture into their teaching (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Patton, 2010).

Despite the positive and consistent effects for parental cultural socialization, in a review of school ERS for African American

youth, Aldana and Byrd (2015) found mixed evidence for the relation of cultural socialization to ERI: one study showed positive, one study showed no effects, and the third study showed negative effects. A more recent review (Loyd & Williams, 2017) found mostly positive effects. Nevertheless, the socialization sources found in both reviews were programming designed to teach African American youth about their culture, usually in an after-school program. Studies exploring school cultural socialization for youth of other ethnic-racial groups often show positive effects (Brozo et al., 1996; Godina, 2003; Luna et al., 2015; Powers, 2006; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018). However, these studies are focused on interventions rather than the mainstream curriculum. It is not clear to what extent school cultural socialization in normal, everyday classrooms can predict ERI or outgroup attitudes.

### ***Promotion of Cultural Competence***

Promotion of cultural competence—opportunities to learn about other cultures—should also provide comparative information for youth seeking to make meaning of race/ethnicity. Similar to cultural socialization messages, the promotion of cultural competence messages can be conveyed through courses that allow students the opportunity to learn about the history and culture of other ethnic-racial groups, which is associated with more positive attitudes toward outgroups (Okoye-Johnson, 2011; Stephan et al., 2004). A recent meta-analysis found that promotion of cultural competence had an effect size of .488 on reducing adolescents' negative racial attitudes (Okoye-Johnson, 2011). Thus, the promotion of cultural competence relates positively to students' outgroup attitudes.

In the parent literature, the construct most similar to the promotion of cultural competence is promotion of egalitarian beliefs, which has a small but positive correlation with ERI (Huguley et al., 2019). Extant work on the promotion of cultural competence in schools has mixed findings: Chang and Le (2010) found that multiculturalism did not predict ERI for Asian American or Latinx high schoolers, although two studies, one with immigrant German youth and one with diverse U.S. youth found positive relationships to exploration and commitment (Camacho et al., 2018; Schachner et al., 2016). However, the measure of multiculturalism used in these studies combined opportunities to learn about other cultures with fairness and opportunities to interact with students of other races (Brand et al., 2003). One study found that teachers' reports of teaching about cultural diversity was associated with a stronger ethnic identity in students of color (Brown & Chu, 2012). No studies have examined students' isolated perceptions of the promotion of cultural competence on ERI. Thus, there is limited empirical evidence that the promotion of cultural competence enhances adolescents' understanding of their ERIs.

### ***Critical Consciousness Socialization***

Critical consciousness socialization is somewhat similar to some constructs in the parental literature but differs in important ways. Preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust refer to messages about discrimination and prejudice an adolescent will experience because of their group membership (Hughes et al., 2006). Critical consciousness socialization is similar because it promotes youths' understanding of racial inequality in society. However, critical consciousness socialization also promotes awareness beyond the

individual level to structural inequality. When thinking of structural inequality, both racially minoritized and European American youth can be complicit in maintaining oppression. Therefore, youth of color can receive messages about what it means to be victims of oppression as well as colluders with oppression, and European American youth can understand their role as beneficiaries of unearned privilege.

ERI theory would suggest that experiencing discrimination can serve as an encounter experience that sparks youths' interest in understanding their identities in more in-depth ways (Cross, 1995), thus we might expect that learning about discrimination through critical consciousness socialization would also be associated with more exploration. This teaching could also assist youth in consolidating their identity beliefs. Aldana and Byrd (2015) did find research showing that critical consciousness socialization is associated with positive outgroup attitudes and awareness of racism (Aldana et al., 2012; Dessel et al., 2006; Spencer et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2008). For example, a study of African American children found that teachers' reports of their beliefs about racism in society and their negative outgroup attitudes were associated with the children's belief in racism and the mistrust of outgroup members (Smith et al., 2003). In the parental socialization literature, a study in four ethnic-racial groups found no effects of preparation for bias on ERI commitment or exploration (Rivas-Drake et al., 2009), but a subsample of that data excluding European American youth showed a relation for exploration (Hughes, Hagelskamp, et al., 2009). Another study found a link between preparation for bias and exploration in a sample of African American children (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Although the construct of preparation for bias is slightly different from what is conceptualized here as critical consciousness socialization, Huguley et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis found a small but positive correlation between parental preparation for bias and ERI.

A downside to critical consciousness socialization is that it may lead to negative attitudes toward outgroup members. Several studies suggest that preparation for bias socialization is linked to perceptions that outgroup members have negative views of one's group (Rivas-Drake et al., 2009; Rivas-Drake, 2011b). Youth may respond to these negative perceptions by devaluing those who are more privileged, including European Americans or other minority groups with more positive stereotypes. In this sense, then, critical consciousness socialization could predict more negative outgroup attitudes among students of color. In contrast, European American students might reduce their negative attitudes by understanding their role in racial oppression. For example, a study of teaching children about racism saw improved outgroup attitudes in European American children (Hughes et al., 2007). Therefore, one might expect effects in opposite directions for European American youth and youth of color.

### ***Mainstream Socialization***

Mainstream socialization—messages about mainstream U.S. values and norms—is based on work on cultural mismatch and home-school dissonance (e.g., Kumar, 2006; Tyler et al., 2005; Vera et al., 2018). For students of color, the values and behaviors expected in school may differ from what is expected at home. Schools can reflect Eurocentric values such as individualism and competition in contrast with the values of some families of color,

such as communalism (Perry, 2001; Tyler et al., 2005). For example, schools reward sitting silently in rows throughout a class whereas a child's home may be characterized by a great deal of movement and overlapping conversations. As these norms might be experienced as invisible rather than explicit (Perry, 2001), the perceptions of them are unlikely to have a strong influence on youths' identity exploration and commitment as well as their outgroup attitudes.

Studies have not examined the relation between school mainstream socialization and students' ERI or outgroup attitudes. In the parental literature, Thornton (1997) identified messages emphasizing blending in with mainstream culture, and such messages were marginally associated with African American adolescents' positive evaluation of their group and the importance of their group (Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). In addition, a few studies indicate that African American adolescents who receive messages emphasizing the importance of mainstream values from parents tend to have more negative psychological outcomes (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Davis & Stevenson, 2006), and some qualitative research has highlighted the negative effects of similar socialization messages from schools (Joseph & Hunter, 2011). Given that a weaker ERI is associated with negative psychological outcomes (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014), it might be expected that messages discouraging reflection on race and ethnicity would be associated with lower ERI exploration and commitment.

### **Color-Blind Socialization**

Color-blind socialization actively discourages consideration of the role of race and culture in society and one's personal life. Color-blind ideology appears to be nonracist by not focusing on racial differences, but it allows individuals to ignore structural racism and their own prejudice and bias (Bell, 2002; Walton et al., 2014). Color-blind views can be counterproductive in school settings, for example, by increasing European American students' racial bias and limiting their ability to understand racial inequality (Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Hughes et al., 2007; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Schofield, 2006). For students of color, color-blind ideology invalidates their racialized experiences and undermines their sense of self (Arrington et al., 2003; Garrett-Rosas, 2013; Hurd, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Schofield, 2006). Thus, color-blind socialization might have implications for adolescents' ERI and outgroup attitudes. Color-blind socialization has not been examined in the parental literature separate from what has previously been discussed as egalitarianism.

### **Differences by Ethnic-Racial Group**

As much of the research on ERS has focused on African American youth and there are few studies that directly compare estimates by ethnic-racial groups, it is difficult to propose differential paths. The research already reviewed suggests some potential variations, that is, critical consciousness socialization might improve outgroup attitudes for European American youth but worsen them for students of color. In addition, we would expect the effects of ERS to be weaker for European American students compared to students of color given that students of color tend to view their group membership as more central to their identity and experiences (Syed & Juang, 2014). In some studies, ERI is more strongly associated with

psychological and academic outcomes for youth of color compared to European Americans (Yasui et al., 2004). Furthermore, European American families report engaging in less ERS compared to families of color (Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Hamm, 2001; Priest et al., 2014), so European American youth might be less prepared to interpret and apply ERS messages from school.

For the most part, the studies of parental socialization have found no path differences across ethnic-racial groups (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006). For example, Else-Quest and Morse (2015) found similar relations between parental socialization and ERI commitment or exploration when comparing African American, European American, Asian American, and Latinx 10th graders. However, Hughes, Witherspoon, et al. (2009) explored differences in parental socialization predicting commitment and showed that preparation for bias had a stronger (negative) effect on commitment for European American children compared to African American children (4th–6th grade). There were no differences for cultural socialization. In their meta-analysis, Huguley et al. (2019) saw significantly stronger relations between parent socialization and ERI for Latinx youth compared to Asian American and African American.

### **Hypotheses**

The current study advances knowledge of ERI development by investigating how perceptions of five types of school ERS are associated with exploration, commitment, and other group orientation in four ethnic-racial groups. The research questions were as follows:

1. How are dimensions of school racial socialization associated with ERI and outgroup attitudes?
2. Do these relations vary by ethnic-racial group?

Because of the lack of research in this area, our hypotheses are exploratory. Based on the research reviewed, our hypotheses were that cultural socialization, promotion of cultural competence, and critical consciousness socialization would be significantly and positively associated with ERI exploration and commitment and that color-blind socialization would be negatively associated with exploration and commitment. We also expected the promotion of cultural competence to be positively associated with outgroup attitudes. Furthermore, we expected critical consciousness socialization to be positively related to outgroup attitudes in European Americans but negatively related in the minority groups, and that overall the relations would be weaker for European American youth. We did not have hypotheses about mainstream socialization or about differences between minority ethnic-racial groups.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants were 819 6th–12th grade students ( $M_{\text{age}} = 15.27$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) recruited through nationwide panels by Qualtrics, an online survey company. The sample was 55% female, 25% European American, 25% Latinx, 25% African American, and 25% Asian with 20% in middle school and 80% in high school. The participants lived in 49 states and the District of Columbia. The top five states of residence were as follows: California (13.9%), Texas

(11.0%), New York (7.3%), Florida (6.6%), and Georgia (4.8%). Socioeconomic and immigration status were not collected.

Procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Qualtrics delivered the survey to adolescents on selected panels. Participants were asked to obtain parental consent before completing the demographic questions. At that point, those who were between the ages of 12 and 18; who were in 6th to 12th grade; and who identified as European American, African American, Asian American, or Latinx were allowed to continue. Participants were further excluded if they completed the survey in less than 5 min or failed attention checks. Data collection continued until there were approximately 200 participants in each of the four ethnic–racial groups. Participants were compensated in credit that could be used to redeem rewards through Qualtrics.

**Measures**

Participants selected their ethnicity/race from eight categories, their gender from two options, and entered their age. Some argue that racial identity and racial socialization constructs are most suited to constructs involving oppression and privilege whereas ethnic identity and ethnic socialization are more concerned with cultural norms and values (e.g., Cokley, 2007). It is our position that both sets of constructs are relevant to adolescent development and are best described under the label “ethnic–racial.” Although our outcome measure is considered a measure of “ethnic identity,” the identities that youth are exploring and committing to are “ethnic” for some, “racial” for others, and “ethnic–racial” for still others. Youth tend to respond to measures of identity similar regardless of the exact term used (e.g., Casey-Cannon et al., 2011), so we have modified the measures to refer to “racial/ethnic groups” and use the term “ethnic–racial” to refer to the predictors and outcomes. However, race and ethnicity are complex, socially constructed, and context-dependent constructs (Williams et al., 2012), and further research is needed to clarify how youth relate to these terms.

**School ERS**

ERS was measured using the School Climate for Diversity Scale—Secondary (Byrd, 2017), which shows strong validity and

reliability across ethnic–racial groups in early and late adolescent samples. The subscales include promotion of cultural competence, which consists of six items ( $\alpha = .90$ ); cultural socialization consists of three items ( $\alpha = .83$ ); critical consciousness socialization consists of four items ( $\alpha = .73$ ); mainstream socialization consists of four items ( $\alpha = .83$ ); and color-blind socialization consists of four items ( $\alpha = .70$ ). All items were on a response scale of 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*completely true*). Composite scores were formed by taking the average of the items, with higher scores indicating higher values. The items and information on measurement invariance are described in the Supplemental Materials.

**ERI and Outgroup Attitudes**

ERI was measured using the exploration and commitment subscales of the Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Exploration consisted of three items on how much youth attempted to learn about their group membership ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Commitment was also three items on sense of attachment to one’s group and understanding of the meaning of one’s group membership ( $\alpha = .79$ ). Finally, the other group orientation subscale of the MEIM (Phinney, 1992) measured interest in interacting with and getting to know people from other ethnic–racial groups with three items ( $\alpha = .70$ ). Items in all three subscales were modified to refer to “racial/ethnic” group membership instead of “ethnic” group membership. Composite scores were formed by taking the average of the items, with higher scores indicating higher values. The MEIM and MEIM-R are the most commonly used scales to measure ERI and have shown reliability and validity in diverse adolescent samples (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

**Plan of Analysis**

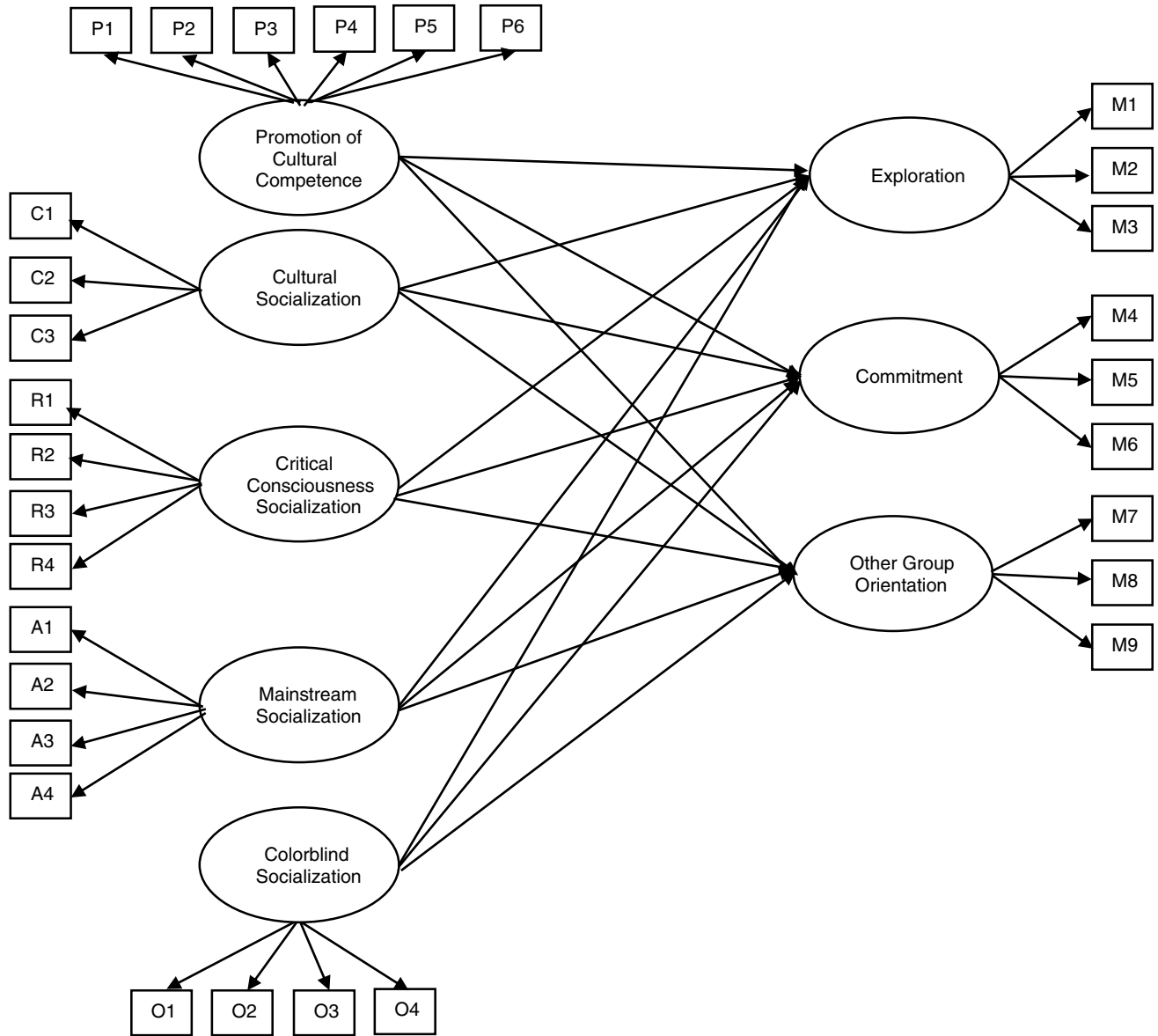
Bivariate correlations between school ERS and ERI were computed (see Table 1). In addition, a one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni post hoc tests compared mean values for each variable by ethnic–racial group. We then examined and verified key assumptions for structural equation modeling before constructing a measurement model. Then, to answer both research questions, a structural model was created as shown in Figure 1. The model to

**Table 1**  
*Mean Values, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations for School Racial Socialization and Ethnic–Racial Identity*

Variables	Exploration	Commitment	Other group orientation	Promotion of cultural competence	Cultural socialization	Critical consciousness socialization	Mainstream socialization	Color-blind socialization
Commitment	0.601**							
Other group orientation	0.238**	0.127**						
Promotion of cultural competence	0.334**	0.234**	0.269**					
Cultural socialization	0.410**	0.288**	0.146**	0.720**				
Critical consciousness socialization	0.377**	0.293**	0.140**	0.720**	0.671**			
Mainstream socialization	0.343**	0.253**	0.239**	0.678**	0.581**	0.583**		
Color-blind socialization	0.114*	0.044	0.047	0.454**	0.353**	0.330**	0.385**	
Mean	3.30	3.55	4.25	3.46	3.00	3.09	3.51	3.10
SD	0.96	0.91	0.74	0.91	1.08	0.90	0.87	0.91

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Figure 1**  
*Structural Model of Ethnic–Racial Identity (ERI) Predicting School Ethnic–Racial Socialization*



answer the first research question (the relations between ERS and ERI) controlled for race, gender, and age.

The second research question, ethnic–racial group membership as a moderator, was tested using a multigroup model. Following recommendations (Byrne, 2013), we tested whether there were any significant differences in the structural parameters between the ethnic–racial groups. The first step of the analysis involved testing a baseline model for the groups (i.e., the structural model developed for Research Question #1). The model was examined across all four ethnic–racial groups collectively, without any equality constraints. Next, we constrained all of the paths to be identical in each group. If the result of a chi-square difference test was significant, we then freed each path to determine where there were

significant differences between groups. If the chi-square test is not significant, that indicates that there is no variation among the four groups.

## Results

### Preliminary Results

Mean values, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations are shown in Table 1. With the exception of color-blind socialization, each dimension of school ERS was positively and significantly related to ERI. Color-blind socialization was positively and significantly related to exploration, but not commitment or other group orientation. Mean values by ethnic–racial group are shown in

**Table 2**  
Mean Values by Ethnic–Racial Group on Ethnic–Racial Identity (ERI) and Ethnic–Racial Socialization

Variable	Asian American		African American		Latinx		European American		F
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Exploration	3.47 <sub>a</sub>	0.86	3.47 <sub>a</sub>	0.93	3.32 <sub>a</sub>	0.97	2.93 <sub>b</sub>	0.97	15.32, <i>p</i> < .001
Commitment	3.61 <sub>a</sub>	0.82	3.81 <sub>a</sub>	0.92	3.53 <sub>c</sub>	0.96	3.26 <sub>b</sub>	0.84	13.44, <i>p</i> < .001
Other group orientation	4.23	0.71	4.39 <sub>a</sub>	0.68	4.25	0.79	4.12 <sub>b</sub>	0.74	4.74, <i>p</i> = .003
Cultural socialization	2.82 <sub>a</sub>	1.08	3.11 <sub>b</sub>	1.15	3.04	1.09	3.04	0.97	2.95, <i>p</i> = .032
Promotion of cultural competence	3.45	0.88	3.46	0.94	3.40	0.95	3.52	0.87	0.57, <i>p</i> = .637
Critical consciousness socialization	3.11	0.86	3.20	0.92	2.99	0.95	3.04	0.86	2.09, <i>p</i> = .100
Mainstream socialization	3.40	0.82	3.61	0.90	3.46	0.93	3.56	0.82	2.49, <i>p</i> = .059
Color-blind socialization	3.11	0.82	2.94 <sub>a</sub>	0.93	3.14	0.95	3.22 <sub>b</sub>	0.92	3.54, <i>p</i> = .014

Note. Groups with different subscripts are significantly different from each other.

Table 2. There were significant differences between groups in ERI and ERS perceptions, particularly between African American and European American youth.

**Structural Equation Model**

Missing data were handled by full information maximum likelihood implemented in Mplus 8.1 (Muthen & Muthen, 2017). Missing data (no more than 1% for any variable) were not related to specific variables or demographic categories.

We composed a measurement model using latent variables based on the confirmatory factor analysis from the study by Byrd (2017). Good fit was considered a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) > .95 and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) < .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1995). The model fit the data well:  $\chi^2 = 882.518, p < .001; RMSEA = .040; CFI = .96$ . Next, we specified a structural model for the entire sample as shown in Figure 1, controlling for age, race, and gender. The fit was also excellent:  $\chi^2 = 1141.803, p < .001; RMSEA = .039; CFI = .95$ . Standardized coefficients for the structural model are shown in Table 3. As expected, promotion of cultural competence was significantly and positively associated with other group orientation ( $B = .605, p < .001$ ). Also as expected, cultural socialization was significantly related to exploration ( $B = .470, p < .001$ ) and commitment ( $B = .253, p = .013$ ). In contrast to the hypothesis,

critical consciousness socialization was not associated with ERI. Partially consistent with the hypothesis, color-blind socialization was associated with lower commitment ( $B = -.122, p = .031$ ), but not significantly less exploration. There was no hypothesis about mainstream socialization, but it was related to greater exploration ( $B = .207, p = .004$ ), commitment ( $B = .160, p = .042$ ), and other group orientation ( $B = .177, p = .020$ ).

The final analysis compared a model in which the paths were allowed to vary between ethnic–racial groups and a model in which the paths were constrained to be equal. The two models did not vary significantly ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 51.466, p = .235$ ), which indicates that the paths were similar in each ethnic–racial group. Thus, the second hypothesis was not supported.

**Discussion**

The goal of the current study was to explore how socialization from teachers, peers, and the curriculum at school was associated with ERI. The findings indicated that, across ethnic–racial groups, the perceptions of socialization messages were related to ERI and outgroup attitudes.

**Cultural Socialization and Promotion of Cultural Competence**

Our hypothesis that cultural socialization and promotion of cultural competence would predict ERI exploration and

**Table 3**  
Standardized Estimates and Standard Errors for Structural Equation Model

Predictor	Exploration		Commitment		Other group orientation	
	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.
Promotion of cultural competence	-0.147	0.125	-0.170	0.137	0.605**	0.132
Cultural socialization	0.470**	0.092	0.253*	0.101	-0.071	0.098
Critical consciousness socialization	0.050	0.137	0.200	0.150	-0.240	0.146
Mainstream socialization	0.207*	0.071	0.160*	0.079	0.177*	0.076
Color-blind socialization	-0.090	0.052	-0.122*	0.057	-0.096	0.055
Age	-0.016	0.034	0.001	0.037	0.098*	0.036
Gender	-0.020	0.033	0.032	0.037	-0.081*	0.035
Asian	0.074	0.041	-0.047	0.045	-0.087*	0.044
Latino	-0.037	0.041	-0.108*	0.045	-0.036	0.043
European American	-0.245**	0.040	-0.263**	0.044	-0.173**	0.043

\* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .001.



commitment was supported only for cultural socialization. The finding for cultural socialization is consistent with the literature showing the links between parental cultural socialization and ERI (e.g., Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Hughes et al., 2006). Perceiving opportunities to learn about one's ethnic-racial group is associated with reflection on one's group membership, seeking out information on one's group, and a sense of commitment to one's group identity. School interventions to promote ERI in African American youth show some positive results (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Loyd & Williams, 2017), and the current findings support the conclusion that even normal classrooms can help youth explore their ethnic-racial backgrounds and come to a strong sense of their identities.

In terms of promotion of cultural competence, existing research was equivocal (Brown & Chu, 2012; Chang & Le, 2010; Schachner et al., 2016) and the current study did not support an association between it and ERI. Promotion of cultural competence was associated with outgroup attitudes, consistent with the literature on multicultural education and prejudice reduction in schools (Okoye-Johnson, 2011; Stephan et al., 2004). It may be that learning about other cultural groups has more relevance for one's attitudes toward those other groups than for one's own identity. This could be due to the fact that lessons about other groups can be taught in ways that emphasize difference and fail to highlight common struggles and power relations that could help youth understand their own group's histories and relation to the group that is the focus of the lesson (Sleeter & Grant, 2011).

### Critical Consciousness Socialization

Our hypothesis was that critical consciousness socialization would be positively related to exploration and commitment. We also expected that there would be differential effects for European American youth and youth of color when it came to critical consciousness socialization and outgroup attitudes. However, there were no significant relations or differences in relations. Some studies of parental socialization have also found no link between preparation for bias and ERI (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Rivas-Drake et al., 2009), though others have (Hughes, Witherspoon, et al., 2009; Hughes & Johnson, 2001).

Unfortunately, few mainstream schools incorporate a curriculum that includes critical discussion of privilege and oppression (Sleeter & Grant, 2011; Walton et al., 2014). Instead, critical consciousness socialization may focus on historical forms of discrimination while ignoring present-day inequalities. Thus, the critical consciousness socialization youth experienced in this study may have been too weak to have effects. For example, if youth learned about segregation but not modern forms of discrimination, the lessons may not trigger an encounter experience that causes youth to reevaluate their attitudes about racism (Byrd & Hope, 2020). Instead, the lessons may reinforce their existing beliefs. Interventions designed to raise youths' awareness about privilege and oppression are effective, but not without intense preparation on the part of instructors and long-term engagement (Paluck & Green, 2009). For example, intergroup dialogue programs involve youth exploring issues over many weeks with specially trained facilitators (Dessel et al., 2006). Compared to schools, parents may be better able to have a high level of engagement around issues of oppression. Parents may additionally be better able to tailor their messages to youths' developmental level, temperament,

and individual experiences. It is important for schools to explore ways to provide critical consciousness socialization in ways that can positively shape youths' beliefs.

### Color-Blind and Mainstream Socialization

We expected color-blind socialization to be negatively related to exploration and commitment. Although the estimates were in the predicted direction, only the effect on commitment was statistically significant. Other ERS messages may be more salient for adolescents. In addition, though research emphasizes the harm of these messages (e.g., Lewis, 2001; Schofield, 2006), it is not clear that all adolescents perceive color-blind messages as devaluing their identities. Those who have received contrasting messages from families or communities or those with more advanced cognitive development may be better able to parse the differences between messages encouraging equality and messages downplaying existing inequality. It is also possible that color-blind messages be related to harm unconsciously via a decreased sense of belonging. Thus, teachers' or observers' reports of color-blind messages may have a stronger relation to youth outcomes compared to youth reports.

We did not have hypotheses for mainstream socialization, but it was positively related to exploration, commitment, and outgroup attitudes. It may be that youth who are most likely to consciously perceive and report on messages about American values and uniqueness are those who are most reflective about race and ethnicity in general. Our study is unique in that we separated the perceptions of mainstream socialization from cultural mismatch or home-school dissonance. Research on home-school dissonance suggests that the feelings of mismatch are related to poorer outcomes (Kumar, 2006; Tyler et al., 2008; Vera et al., 2018). Previous research on mismatch would imply that students' attention to mainstream norms could be uncomfortable or upsetting. The parental literature has also conceptualized mainstream messages as negative, focusing on messages that encourage assimilation (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). However, our findings suggest that students who notice mainstream norms may be better able to negotiate their own and others' identities because they can recognize similarities and differences in behavior, values, and expectations. Observational work on classroom culture highlights potential benefits of encouraging bicultural flexibility and codeswitching (Roulund et al., 2014). Future work should explore both the perceptions of mainstream socialization and mismatch to disentangle the potential effects.

A limitation of the mainstream socialization scale is that the items reference learning about the United States and "American values" very generally, which leaves the participant to determine what they consider those to be. Future work could use scales that measure the perceptions of more specific values.

### Differences by Ethnic-Racial Group

Finally, we expected differential paths by ethnic-racial group but no differences. This finding is consistent with some studies on parental socialization (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006). Although ERI is less salient for European American youth, school ERS practices appear to be related in similar ways. Some studies do find differences by ethnic-racial group, but these

tend to be limited to one geographic area, where there could be more distinct cultural differences and socialization practices by group. When looking at a nationwide sample, as in the current study, these differences could be averaged out. An area of future research would be to consider how the effects of socialization practices vary by geographic area and the racial composition of schools. Lewis (2001) indicated that European American identity is more salient in mixed contexts; thus, we might see differential effects of socialization for European American youth who attend diverse schools compared to those who attend majority European American schools. The same might be true for youth of color, as well.

### Limitations and Future Directions

The strengths of this study were the large sample size that includes diverse youth from across the United States. Although the sample is not nationally representative, it overcomes the limitations of previous studies focused on one geographic area. One limitation was that the study was cross-sectional, which makes it impossible to determine the direction of the relations between variables. Socialization is a bidirectional and reciprocal process, so it is important that longitudinal work explores this question. Future research could collect more specific information to examine variation in the perceptions of school racial climate by school and community demographics, explore how teachers modify their practices in response to the emerging ERIs of their students, and explore how peers influence each other in interpreting socialization messages. Future research can also consider how school messages interact with, are congruent with, or contradict messages from families and communities.

A future direction is to consider how the findings vary by gender and age/grade level. Given the limited research on school ERS, it was beyond the scope of the current study to consider other individual differences. The literature on parental ERS indicates some gender differences for African American youth (e.g., Brown et al., 2009; Smalls & Cooper, 2012), although several others find no gender differences or interactions in multiracial samples (e.g., Scott, 2004; Huynh & Fuligni, 2008). Furthermore, it might also be that differences between middle and high schools change the associations between ERI and ERS. For example, Seaton (2010) proposed that changes in adolescents' cognitive abilities predict the relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being. Her study found that the perceptions of institutional racism were negatively associated with self-esteem in youth with less advanced cognitive development.

Another limitation is shared method variance, as youth self-reported perceptions of school socialization and ERI. The perceptions of socialization are highly individual and based on youths' interpretation of messages sent in their environments, so self-report is the most appropriate source of measurement. However, future work can compare the perceptions of socialization to teacher reports of practices and observer reports of school materials to better understand how youth make sense of their school environments. Finally, future work should consider the intersections of multiple identities in how youth interpret and apply different socialization messages.

### Conclusion

Schools are an influential source of information on the meaning of race and culture in society and adolescents' personal lives. Yet, their

influence is understudied in the literature on adolescent ERI development. The current study has shown that, across several ethnic-racial groups, the perceptions of opportunities to learn about one's ethnic-racial background and messages about American values are associated with youths' exploration of and commitment to their identities. Future research should continue with the systematic analysis of the relations between school ERS and ERI.

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