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MODERATING EFFECTS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS ON SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS OF URBAN LATINO/A YOUTH

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MODERATING EFFECTS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN

ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS ON SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS OF URBAN LATINO/A

YOUTH

A CAPSTONE PROJECT SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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BIOGRAPHY

The author was born in Mexico City, Mexico, April 12, 1984. He immigrated to the South Chicago neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois in 1987. He graduated from St. Lawrence Seminary High School, Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin, in 2002. He received his Associate of Arts, With Honors degree from Robert Morris University, Chicago, in 2003. He enlisted in the US Navy from 2004 to 2009; serving as an Aviation Electronics Technician (AT) in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from DePaul University in 2012.

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Abstract

Latinos are the largest growing and overall youngest population in the US, in comparison to other ethnic groups. Nearly 40% of Hispanic youth were found to be living in poverty, the largest group of any minority. As of 2014, 20% of Hispanics had less than a high school education and fourteen percent had an educational attainment between ninth and tenth grades; indicating that they had begun a high school education but were unable to finish. Racial and ethnic disparities have also been found to exist within the justice system; Hispanics accounted for twenty-two percent of the prison population while only accounting for seventeen percent of the general population. Racial disproportionality in school discipline, particularly that of exclusionary punishment such as out-of-school suspensions, may account for differences in educational achievement and negative outcomes associated with these disparities noted to exist between minority groups and their white counterparts. Since the 1990s there has been an increase in use of zero-tolerance policies by school districts nationwide. Use of such policies, and passing of laws by various states mandating the referral to law enforcement for various school infractions, have facilitated the increase in the number of police officers used in schools. Researchers have noted a strong association between the increased use of zero-tolerance policies in school discipline, disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates, and increased use of the criminal justice system. The combined effects of ecological risk factors with school suspensions and arrests, have significantly predicted antisocial behaviors (behaviors warranting school discipline), more out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and school drop-out than to reduce the likelihood of more disruptive behavior. Although Latino/a youth face a plethora of ecological risk within their communities, not all succumb to the same devastating outcomes. This study used resiliency theory as a framework to investigate whether ethnic identity served as a

protective factor to moderate the relationship between ecological risk and out-of-school suspensions. Negative binomial regression analysis on a sample of 362 Latino/a adolescents, from two low-SES community high schools in the Midwest, revealed a statistically significant relationship between the total number of stressors and out-of-school suspensions; such that more reported stressors in 9th grade significantly predicted out-of-school suspension in 10th grade. Ethnic identity did not, however, moderate that relationship; but, stronger ethnic identity did serve to predict fewer out-of-school suspensions. A more sustainable approach to correcting youth behavior in schools is warranted.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the United States of America (US) there is a sense of pride when it comes to diversity. One can look at recruiting materials for almost any institution of higher education to get a sense of how important diversity and being more inclusive to minority populations has become. The same argument could be made for various employment domains in that there is a sense of appreciation for diverse ideas. However, in order for people of color to benefit from the positive outcomes associated with higher learning and gainful employment, they need to survive, and succeed, the increasingly turbulent rite of passage that has become the American high school experience.

Latinos are the largest growing and overall youngest population in the US, in comparison to other ethnic groups, having reached 55.3 million (17.3% of the total population) in 2014 with an average age of 28 years-old (compared to the average age of whites and blacks of 43- and 33-years-old, respectively; Rothe, 2004; Velasco & Lopez, 2011; Stepler & Brown, 2016). Although this is still a relatively small proportion of the general population (17.4% compared to 61.9% White and 12.3% Black), it is projected that Latinos will account for 29% of the US population by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). It is likely, however, that the tremendous projected growth in population will not be reflected in the number of people who will experience positive life outcomes unless disparities are addressed soon.

A report by Velasco and Lopez (2011) found that 6.1 million Hispanic youth were living in poverty, the largest group of any minority. In other words, 37.3% of youth living in poverty were Hispanic compared to 30.5% white and 26.6% black. Many of these youth (4.1 million) were children of immigrant parents. Further, a 2014 American Community Survey (Stepler & Brown, 2016) found that, of people over the age of twenty-five, 20.6% of Hispanics had less than

a high school education (versus 2.4% of whites, 4.3% of blacks), 27.1% had received a high school diploma or equivalent (versus 28.2% of whites, 31.7% of blacks), and only 14.4% had attained a Bachelor's degree or higher (versus 33.6% of whites, 19.8% of blacks). The same study also found that 13.9% of Hispanics had an educational attainment between ninth and tenth grades (versus 5.5% of whites and 11.2% of blacks). This indicates that they had begun a high school education but were unable to finish for reasons that were not discussed. The lack of educational attainment has been linked to various negative outcomes later in life; such as incarceration (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba et. al., 2006; Teske, 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003; Losen, 2011). Given the significant differences in educational achievement between groups and the negative outcomes associated with these disparities, further academic exploration into the factors surrounding this phenomenon is warranted.

Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) investigated racial disproportionality in school discipline using a sample of 11,001 middle-school students of a large Midwestern public school district. 56% of students were listed as black, 42% white, 1.2% Latino/a. 73.4% of the sample's families were financially eligible for free- or reduced-cost lunch; indicating that they were socioeconomically different than the 26.6% of students whose families did not qualify. Results revealed that black and male students were overrepresented on all measures of school discipline (referrals, suspension, and expulsion) compared to their white and female counterparts (Skiba, et al., 2002). Further, disproportionality increased with the severity of the punishment, in that there were increased rates of disproportional punishment for expulsions than for suspensions. In other words, black and male students were more likely to receive a more severe punishment (i.e. suspension rather than a simple referral) than their white and female counterparts.

Disproportionate School Discipline

In 2006, the American Psychological Association (APA) published findings of a Zero-tolerance Task Force (Skiba et al., 2006) in which they examined five beliefs and assumptions that precede such policies. Those assumptions were: 1. School violence is a phenomenon that is at a serious level and increasing enough to warrant such assertive strategies for violence prevention; 2. Zero-tolerance policies are written with safeguards that make the enforcement of discipline practices consistent in integrity and fidelity, thus sending a clear and consisting message to would be offenders; 3. Removing students who violate such policies creates a school climate that is more conducive to learning for the students who are left; 4. Policies with certain punishments deter others from engaging in the same negative behavior; 5. There is overwhelming support by students and their parents for such measures, and that they create a stronger feeling of safety among youth (Skiba, et al., 2006).

Findings by the task force (Skiba et al., 2006) concluded that assumptions were wrong. "Serious and deadly violence" within schools have remained stable since the mid-1980s. Schools that implement such policies were found to have less satisfactory school climate, less satisfactory school governance structures, and actually spent more time entertaining concerns over discipline matters. There also exists wide variability in the enforcement of standardized punishment (Skiba et al., 2006). Furthermore, out-of-school suspensions serve better to predict more suspensions, expulsions, and school drop-out than to reduce the likelihood of more disruptive behavior (Skiba, et al., 2006). Further, Skiba, et al., (2006) also concluded that there exists a need to examine zero-tolerance policies and arrive at alternatives that would minimize iatrogenic effects.

Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, and Catalano (2006) examined the effects both, school suspension rates and arrests by law enforcement, in a sample of

approximately 4000 adolescents (ages 12 – 16). Participants of this study were taken from Washington State, US and Victoria, Australia. In this longitudinal study the authors found that the combined effects of ecological risk factors (e.g. student attitudes favorable toward drugs and antisocial behavior, attention problems, impulsivity, parental favorable attitudes toward antisocial behavior, family conflict, school grades, community disorganization, perceived availability of drugs in the community, and community norms favorable toward drug use) with school suspensions and arrests significantly predicted antisocial behaviors (more than any other variable) one year later (Hemphill, et al., 2006).

Antisocial behavior was operationalized and measured as the number of times the participants engaged in behaviors such as attacking another person, selling of illegal drugs, carrying a handgun to school). Researchers (Hemphill, et al., 2006) also measured the amount of time students were absent from school by tallying the days absent; distinguishing between excused absences and engaging in truancy. Although this study's participants were not ethnically similar to those in the current study, it is important to note that this study included students from two countries located on opposite sides of the world; suggesting that the effects of exclusionary punishment may be universal across demographic variables.

In a study using longitudinal data of 7,250 Latino/a and white high school students, Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011) compared youth's self-reported instances of misbehavior with school district data indicating whether the youth had received some form of discipline. The study found that although both groups of students reported engaging in misbehavior with similar frequency, Latino/a students were more likely to have been disciplined than whites; even when controlling for other variables such as gender and school characteristics.

School discipline is not the only thing in the lives of millions of youth that disproportionately affects the youth of color. Racial and ethnic disparities have also been found to exist within the justice system. According to the US Department of Justice (Carson & Sabol, 2015) there were an estimated 1.5 million prisoners housed in state and federal correctional facilities; other sources estimate closer to two million inmates (Glaze & Parks, 2011). Although the most disparity was found between black (37%) and white (32%) inmate populations, Hispanics accounted for 22% of the prison population (Carson & Sabol, 2015) while only accounting for 17% of the general population. One purported reason for the disproportionality that exists within the American system of justice is the implementation of zero-tolerance and minimum sentencing policies. The infamous 'war on drugs,' for example, arguably demonized the people who were associated with illegal narcotics rather than the narcotics themselves. This allowed for the disproportionate enforcement policies and, some will argue, led to the mass incarceration of black and Latino males (Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

The mechanism by which minimum-sentence policies for crime and zero-tolerance policies for school infractions aim to operate the same: remove offenders (youth who were deemed disruptive to the learning environment of others in school) from the environment for a specified period of time utilizing predetermined punishments; regardless of the behavior's gravity or context (Skiba, et al., 2006). Experts argue that it was the enforcement of zero-tolerance drug policies by the federal government that preceded those enforced within our country's schools (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba et. al., 2006; Teske, 2011). Since the 1990s there has been an increase in use of zero-tolerance policies by school districts, and passing of laws by various states mandating the referral to law enforcement for various school infractions, that have facilitated the increase in the number of police officers used in schools (Wald & Losen,

2003). Researchers have noted a strong association between the increased use of zero-tolerance policies in school discipline, disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates, and increased use of the criminal justice system to address behaviors that would have previously warranted less severe penalties (Wald & Losen, 2003; Losen, 2011; Teske, 2011).

Extreme measures such as zero-tolerance policies were arguably created with great intentions and aimed at protecting youth from illegal drugs and gang violence. However, Skiba and Peterson (1999) argue that policies intended for such extreme instances of inappropriate behavior were ultimately used more often on instances that did not warrant such extreme punishment. One example of this broad implementation was the suspension of an Ohio nine-year-old girl for violating a school's zero-tolerance antiviolence policy when she was found to be in possession of a manicure kit that included a one-inch knife (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Although it would be unlikely that such a knife would be used in a violent manner by the young girl, this knife sufficiently satisfied the school officials' interpretation of the policy. Without further inquiry into the case just mentioned, it is unclear as to whether certain discretion is afforded within the enforcement handbook. Chicago Public Schools Student Code of Conduct, for example, indicates that more severe infractions should be reserved for repeated incidents and those perceived to "seriously disrupt the educational process" (Chicago Public Schools [CPS] 2011).

When schools are no longer able to punish youth for behaviors deemed inappropriate by society's standards, the Justice System steps in. Hispanics currently account for 22% of the prison population and possess the lowest levels of education across ethnic groups. Unless something is done soon, it is unlikely that disproportionate outcomes noted previously will alleviate themselves.

Ecological Risk

Negative outcomes that have been found to disproportionately impact people of color (such as incarceration and school discipline) have also been found to be associated with poverty. For example, exposure to violence, being victimized, as well as different types of peer hassles were found to be more prevalent among adolescents living in low-socioeconomic (SES) neighborhoods than their more affluent counterparts (Solberg, Carlstrom, Howard & Jones, 2007). Further, Skiba, Horner, and Chung (2011) found that black and Latino students were more likely to attend schools within low-SES neighborhoods that were more segregated, and had higher rates of poverty, than schools serving their white counterparts. Given the disparity in outcomes that have been noted to exist between white adults and adults of color, it is important to investigate differences that may exist between Latino/a and white students with the equal vigor given to the investigation of differences between black and white students.

Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) investigated racial disproportionality in school discipline using a sample of 11,001 middle-school students of a large Midwestern public school district. 56% of students were listed as black, 42% white, 1.2% Latino/a, and 0.8% Asian-American and Native American. 65.3% of the population's families were financially eligible for free-lunch and 8.1% were eligible for reduced-cost lunch; indicating that they were socioeconomically different than then 26.6% of students whose families did not qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. They found that black and male students were overrepresented on all measures of school discipline (referrals, suspension, and expulsion) compared to their white and female counterparts. Disproportionality increased with the severity of the punishment in that there were increased rates of disproportional punishment for expulsions than suspensions.

In a sample of 316 public high school students, where 59% of the sample qualified for subsidized school lunch, Prelow, Danoff-Burg, Swenson and Pulgiano (2004) examined the interactive effects of ecological risk and perceived discrimination on the psychological adjustment and delinquent behaviors of African-American youth. Researchers (Prelow, et al., 2004) found that students who reported more stressful life events, neighborhood disadvantage, and perceived discrimination also reported higher levels of delinquent behavior and depressive symptoms. Specifically, African-American youth reported more ecological risk than whites and were able to show a statistically significant relationship between stressful events in their environment and self-reported acts of delinquency (Prelow, et al., 2004).

Research on low-income Latino youth (Gudiño, Nadeem, Kataoka, & Lau, 2011) suggests that early exposure to violence is a predictor of youth psychopathology; specifically, symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Mohammad, Shapiro, Wainwright and Carter (2015) examined a sample of 91 mothers, of which 96% met criteria for poverty and more than half of Latino/a descent, and their school-aged children (8 – 17-years-old). Researchers (Mohammad et al., 2015) found that the majority of youth (93%) had experienced at least one type of family violence and 30% had reported witnessing community violence. Additionally, the youth were statistically more likely to exhibit symptoms of aggression and post-traumatic stress (Mohammad, et al., 2015).

Not all youth who experience risk, however, suffer negative outcomes. In fact, there are those who thrive regardless of high levels of experienced risk. This study used resiliency theory as a framework to investigate ethnic identity as a protective factor that might serve to moderate the relationship between ecological stress and out-of-school suspensions.

Resilience Theory

Adolescents, especially those residing in low-SES communities, are exposed to factors that have potentially negative outcomes. However, not all adolescents who are surrounded by risk factors fall victim to those negative outcomes. The investigation as to why some youth thrived in the face of adversity, while others did not, allowed for the emergence of research on resilience (Fergus, & Zimmerman, 2005, Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010; Zimmerman, Stoddard, Eisman, Caldwell, Aiyer, & Miller, 2013) Resilience theory is a strengths-based approach to understanding factors that contribute to healthy and positive outcomes in spite of being exposed to risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman, et al., 2013). Three models of resilience have been identified: compensatory, protective, and challenge (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman, 2013). All three models present different mechanisms by which protective factors and risk factors interact to produce positive outcomes.

Protective factors can be either assets (intrinsic qualities such as high self-esteem, coping skills, or ethnic identity) or resources (extrinsic factors in an individuals' environment such as parental support and adult mentors) (Fergus, & Zimmerman, 2005, Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010; Zimmerman, et al., 2013). The protective model of resiliency provides us with an explanation as to how protective factors can outweigh risk factors to produce a desirable outcome (Zimmerman et al., 2002). This model suggests that protective factors moderate, or buffer, the negative effects of the risk factors. For instance, strong levels of ethnic identity could produce favorable outcomes in unfavorable conditions.

Ethnic Identity as a Protective Factor

This study examines the moderating role of ethnic identity (EI) on the relationship between ecological stressors and student exclusionary punishment, specifically, out-of-school suspensions. As conceptualized and measured by Phinney's Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure

(MEIM; Phinney, 1992), ethnic identity is a complex, dynamic, and fluid construct. It is an aspect of an individual's overall self-concept that stems from an individual's membership to a particular ethnic group. Phinney (1992) conceptualized ethnic identity to include four separate facets that could be measured across ethnic groups (Schwartz, et al., 2014): self-identification to a particular ethnic group, behaviors and practices, affirmation and belonging, and ethnic identity achievement (Phinney, 1992). As such, participants of the present study who identified as Mexican or Puerto Rican were examined together even though differences may exist between the two cultures.

Ethnic behaviors and practices refers to the involvement in social activities and participation in cultural traditions. Affirmation and belonging refers to the extent to which individuals "feel good" about their membership in a particular ethnic group and around others of that group. Ethnic identity achievement refers to individuals securely identifying as a member of a particular minority group (Phinney, 1992). This construct has been shown to provide individuals with protection against the negative effects of stressful life events.

A study by Khaylis, Waelde, and Bruce, (2007) examined a diverse sample from an urban school district consisting of 307 middle and high school students, ranging in age from 12-18 years-old, and tested whether or not ethnic identity buffered the relationship between race-related stress and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This study's sample included Caucasian (31%), Latinos (24%), Asian (29%), African American (7%), and students of other and mixed ethnicities (8%) within an urban school system. Results indicated race-related stress predicted more PTSD symptoms, and ethnic identity moderated this relationship (Khaylis, Waelde, & Bruce; 2007).

Using the same urban school district sample, Bruce and Wealde (2008) examined the

relationship between symptoms of trauma, ethnic identity, and self-reported delinquent behavior,

such as aggression that would warrant exclusionary punishments in school. Delinquent behavior

was found to be positively correlated with trauma, but negatively correlated with ethnic identity

(Bruce & Wealde, 2008). Further, this study found that ethnic identity served to predict less

reported delinquent behavior; in particular for students who identified as an ethnic minority

(Bruce & Wealde, 2008).

Current Study

The present study tested the hypothesis that more ecological stressors in 9th grade

students experienced the more out-of-school suspensions they would receive in 10th grade, while

controlling for 9th grade suspensions. In addition, this study tested whether ethnic identity

moderated the association between ecological stressors and out-of-school suspensions.

Specifically, among youth with stronger ethnic identity, it was hypothesized that the association

between stressors and punishments would be weaker compared to the association for youth with

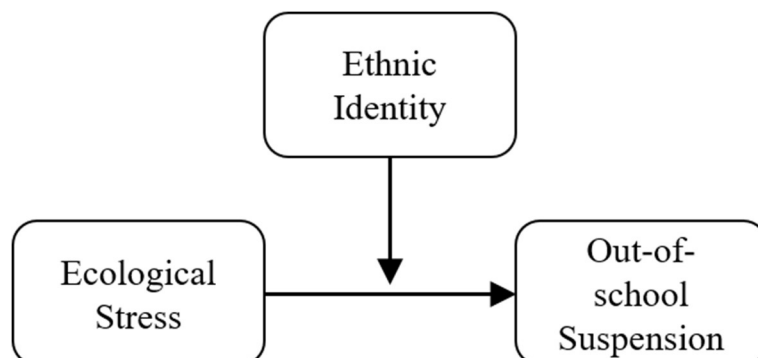weaker ethnic identity (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. A model demonstrating the relationship between variables used in the current study.

CHAPTER II: DESIGN

Method

Participants of this study were part of a larger longitudinal study that examined the roles of environmental and psychological factors, academic behaviors, and racial and cultural processes of urban, low-income Latino/a adolescents. Participants who identified with ethnicities other than Latino/a were not used for this study.

Participants

This study examined participants ($N = 362$) from two predominately Latino/a, urban, low-income high schools in a large Midwestern city. Each school consisted largely of low-income (94% and 96%), Latino/a/Hispanic (89% and 95%) students (Illinois Report Card, 2016). The majority of participants identified as "Mexican" ($n = 322$; 89%), followed by "Puerto Rican" ($n = 19$; 5.2%). There were 189 (52.2%) female participants and $n = 173$ (47.8%) males with an average age of $M = 15.9$ years ($SD = .58$). It should be noted that although all participants were in the same academic grade, their ages ranged from 11.5 years to 18.6 years. Table 1 presents participant descriptive statistics.

Procedure

To ensure that varying levels of abilities were represented, all 9th-grade students in each school were targeted through presentations in their homeroom classes. This served as the first time-point for data collection. The same participants were targeted during their 10th grade year for the second time-point of data collection. The presentations were conducted in both English and Spanish by a trained research team. An informed consent process was conducted; students were informed of their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw at any time as well as the right for their information to remain confidential. All students were encouraged to return

the parental consent forms regardless of their decision to participate so that the research group can better understand parents' and students' interest in the study. Incentive to return the consent/assent forms were given; each participant received a candy bar and was placed in a raffle to win a pair of movie tickets or an iPod Touch. Parental consent forms and youth assent forms were signed by study participants.

Students completed self-administered surveys in school during school hours by a trained research team. The surveys were available in both English and Spanish. Participants took the survey in a classroom setting as a research assistant read the survey aloud with a completion time of about 40-45 minutes. Each survey was assigned a random identification number to ensure participant confidentiality. After completing the survey each participant received a $10 gift card to either Target or GameStop. Participants completed the same survey in both 9th and 10th grade; the same incentive was provided both times.

Measures

Demographics. Participants reported their birthday and was later used to calculate their age. Among other demographic information pertinent to this study, participants were asked their gender (*Male* = 1, *Female* = 2), and ethnicity. Participants were asked to check all choices listed that applied to them: *Latino/a Puerto Rican, Latino/a Mexican, Latino/a other, African American/Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Native American,* and *White/Caucasian.*

Exclusionary Punishment. Records obtained from the school district provided all instances in which participants received an infraction resulting in an out-of-school suspension during the academic year. This study utilized the total number of times in which a student was

suspended during the 10th grade as a dependent variable. Ninth-grade data regarding out-of-school suspension was used as a control variable in the analysis.

Ecological Stressors. Ecological stress was measured by administering a shortened version of the Multicultural Events Schedule for Adolescence (MESA; Gonzales, Gunnoe, Jackson, & Samaniego, 1995; Appendix A). This measure consisted of 27 items asking whether or not specific stressful life events were experienced within the three months prior to the assessment. Stressors were categorized under six subscales: *Discrimination* (6 items); *Economic Hassles* (1 item); *School Hassle* (3 items); *Family Trouble/Change* (5 items); *Peer Hassles* (7 items); and *Violence/Victimization* (5 items). A sample item from the *Discrimination* subscale is "*You were unfairly accused of something because of your race, ethnicity, or culture.*" A sample item from the *Economic Hassles* subscale is "*Your parent lost his/her job.*" A sample item from the *School Hassles* subscale is "*You had a serious problem with a teacher or principle.*" A sample item from the *Family Trouble/Change* subscale is "*Close family member was seriously ill or injured.*" A sample item from the *Peer Hassles* subscale is "*You were pressured to do drugs or drink alcohol.*" A sample item from the *Violence/Victimization* subscale is "*You were attacked by someone not in your family.*" For each item participants revealed whether or not the event had been experienced within the last three months by indicating *yes* = 1 or *no* = 0. To capture the cumulative effects of ecological stressors, the total number of *yes* scores was calculated for each participant in 9th grade and used as an independent variable in the analyses. This measure has been found to be significantly correlated with conduct problems, which is related to out-of-school suspensions (Gonzales et al., 1995).

Ethnic Identity. Phinney's Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992; Appendix B) was used to measure participants' level of ethnic identity. This 14 item Likert-type

scale assessed three aspects of ethnic identity that were determined to universally capture aspects of the construct that are common across ethnic groups (e.g. behaviors, practices, and affirmation and belonging). This analysis utilized 9th grade responses as a moderator.

Items are measured on a four-point Likert-type scale where 1= *Strongly disagree*; 2 = *Somewhat disagree*; 3 = *Somewhat agree*; 4 = *Strongly agree*. Negatively worded items were reverse coded and mean scores were then calculated using all 14 items. The calculated mean score represented how strongly an individual identified with their ethnic group. Scores closer to "1" indicated weaker ethnic identity while those closer to "4" indicated a stronger ethnic identity. The measure's three subscales were the following: Affirmation and Belonging (5 items); Ethnic Identity Achievement (7 items); and Ethnic Behaviors (2 items). A sample item from the Affirmation and Belonging subscale is "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to." A sample item from the Ethnic Identity Achievement subscale is "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means to me." A sample item from the Ethnic Behaviors subscale is "*I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs*."

Chapter III: RESULTS

Participants reported experiencing up to 23 stressors during their ninth-grade year. Fifteen percent of participants reported having experienced 10 or more stressors. The overwhelming majority of participants (85.9%) did not receive any out-of-school suspensions during their tenth-grade year. However, those who did (14.1%), received anywhere between 1 – 19 suspensions. This was a drastic change from ninth-grade in which only one student was found to have received eleven suspensions (the maximum number reported). In general, participants' reported moderate levels of ethnic identity. Table 1 presents participant demographics.

Table 1.
Participant Demographic and Variable Descriptive Statistics

	n	*%*	*M (SD)*
Ethnicity			
Mexican	322	89	
Puerto Rican	19	5.2	
Other	21	5.8	
Female	189	52.2	
Male	173	47.8	
Age (Years)			*15.9 (.58)*

The dependent variable in this study (the number of out-of-school suspensions each participant received) consisted of count data. Therefore, Poisson and negative binomial regression, the preferred method for analysis of such data (Huang & Cornell, 2012), was used to test the hypotheses. A Poisson regression analysis revealed a high goodness of fit Chi-Square value, which indicated that data was overdispersed due to the large majority of participants (*n* = 311) who did not receive an out-of-school suspension. To account for these excess zeros negative binomial regression was utilized. The goodness of fit Chi-Squared value in the negative binomial analysis was corrected. A correlation matrix of variables used in this study can be found in Table 2.

Separate regression analyses were conducted to test each hypothesis. To test the first, total out-of-school suspensions in 10th grade was entered as the outcome variable. Total stressors in 9th grade was entered as a predictor, and the total number of 9th grade out-of-school suspensions was entered as the control variable. Support for the first hypothesis was found in that total stressors in 9th grade significantly predicted out-of-school suspensions in 10th grade.

Table 2.
Correlation Matrix of Variables

	M (SD)	Stress 9th Grade	Stress 10th Grade	EID 9th Grade	EID 10th Grade	Suspensions 9th Grade	Suspensions 10th Grade
Stress 9th Grade	*5.39 (4.11)*	--					
Stress 10th Grade	*5.42 (4.23)*	.547**	--				
EID 9th Grade	*2.84 (.45)*	-.139**	-.126*	--			
EID 10th Grade	*2.88 (.45)*	-.071	.022	.496**	--		
Suspensions 9th Grade	*.20 (.98)*	.108*	.181**	-.140**	-.048	--	
Suspensions 10th Grade	*.75 (2.45)*	.150**	.200**	-.129*	-.083	.177**	--

Note. EID = Ethnic Identity

N = 362; * $p < .05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Incident rate ratios (IRR) for the first hypothesized model are provided in Table 3. With continuous variables, this value represents the change in outcome variable for each unit of change in the independent variable. For each unit of increase in total stressors, participants were 1.1% more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension in 10th grade.

Table 3.
9th grade Stressors as Predictor of Out-of-school Suspension in 10th Grade

	B(SE)	IRR
Intercept	-.86 (.14)	.42
Total Stressors 9th grade	.09 (.02)*	1.1

Note. IRR – incident rate ratio.
* $p < .000$

To test the second hypothesis, an interaction term was created. To do so, ethnic identity in 9th grade and total stressors in 9th grade was each centered and computed into new variables. The new variables were multiplied together to create the interaction term. Total out-of-school suspensions in 10th grade was entered as the outcome variable. Total stressors in 9th grade, ethnic identity in 9th grade, and the interaction were entered as predictors; while controlling for

out-of-school suspensions in 9th grade. Support for this hypothesis was not found. Ethnic

identity did not significantly moderate the relationship between ecological stressors in 9th grade

and out-of-school suspensions in 10th grade. However, ethnic identity in 9th grade was

negatively related to suspensions. Specifically, a more positive ethnic identity predicted fewer

out-of-school suspensions. Incident rate ratios (IRR) for the second hypothesized model are

provided in Table 4.

Table 4.
Predictors of Out-of-school Suspension 10th Grade

	B(SE)	IRR
Intercept	1.33 (.55)	3.77
Total Stressors 9th grade	.08 (.02)*	1.08
Ethnic Identity 9th grade	-.77 (.19)*	.46
Ethnic ID 9th * Total Stress 9th grade	.01 (.05)	1.01

Note. IRR – incident rate ratio.
* $p < .000$

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

Support for the first hypotheses was found. A statistically significant relationship

between the total number of ecological stressors and out-of-school suspensions was such that

more reported environmental stressors in 9th grade significantly predicted out-of-school

suspension in 10th grade. This relationship was found to exist regardless of the fact that a

relatively small proportion of the sample had actually received at least one suspension. Although

ethnic identity did not moderate that relationship, stronger ethnic identity did serve to predict

fewer out-of-school suspensions. It is possible that this construct may serve as a promotive

factor within the compensatory model of resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman,

2013), rather than within the protective factor model. The compensatory model suggests that

such factors neutralize risk by counteracting risk (Zimmerman, 2013).

Participants of this study were mainly of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent. Each school's population was reflective of the community in which they were located; the high number of free-lunches indicated that they were not particularly affluent communities. Findings of this study support the body of literature showing the detrimental effects of well-intentioned means of disciplining youth within our school systems; particularly youth of color who experience more ecological stressors associated with low-SES communities (Hemphill, et al., 2006; Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011; Skiba, et al., 2002; Skiba, et al., 2006). The unexpected result indicating that stronger levels of ethnic identity predicted less out-of-school suspensions could serve to demonstrate the benefit of fostering the development of intrinsic assets early on.

Several studies have shown that ethnic identity serve to predict less behavior deemed inappropriate by schools and society (Bruce & Wealde; 2008; Khaylis, Waelde, & Bruce; 2007). A study by Williams, Aiyer, Durkee, and Tolan (2013), however, found that ethnic identity achievement and affirmation (subscales of the MEIM) had varying moderating effects at various time points, and in the face of different forms of stressors (Williams et al., 2013). For example, high levels of ethnic identity achievement and low levels of affirmation resulted in a positive association between discrimination and delinquency; but there was no significant association between discrimination and delinquency for participants who reported low ethnic identity achievement and affirmation scores (Williams et al., 2013). It is possible that a similar phenomenon occurred within the sample of the present study; however, subscales of ethnic identity were not examined independently.

Phinney's Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) has been shown to be contextual. In a high school in which the minority student population was white, for example, white students' levels of ethnic identity were higher than in contexts where they were

the majority (Phinney, 1992). It is unclear what effect, if any, this phenomenon had on the levels of ethnic identity reported by the participants of this study. Developmental differences have also been found to exist using this instrument. Specifically, college-aged participants scored significantly higher in the ethnic identity achievement subscale than participants in high school (Phinney, 1992). The age range of the current study's sample varied greatly considering that all participants were pooled from the same academic grade. Given the developmental differences that we know to exist between pre-teens and older teens, it is difficult to argue for measures of discipline that assume that all youth have equal capacity because they are in the same academic year in school. More exploration into this phenomenon is warranted.

Limitations of the Present Study

In attempt to measure ecological stress a short version of Multicultural Events Schedule for Adolescents (MESA) was used. Although participants were informed that their responses would be de-identified, it is impossible to be sure whether their responses accurately describe their experiences. Particularly in regards to questions that inquire about their witnessing or participation in events that could be embarrassing or even criminal.

Participants for this study attended two different schools within the same school district; yet, the schools were inconsistent in recording data. For instance, one school only reported misconduct that resulted in out-of-school suspensions, while the other also included minor infractions. Where one school provided the level of infraction and the number of days a student was suspended, the latter was rarely provided by the other school. Reasons for this discrepancy in reporting are unknown and outside the scope of this paper. However, consistent and complete data collection by school districts would help to improve the validity of future findings.

Much of the existing literature on the topic of disproportional outcomes for students of color focused on the differences between black and white students (Skiba et al., 2011). Studies that have aimed to investigate differences between Latino/a and white students often produce inconsistent results (Skiba et al., 2011). The studies presented by Skiba and Noguera (2011) in a review of the literature seem to have used standardized demographic methods that may not always allow for Latino/a to be counted.

In order to fully understand the effects of current discipline policies on youth, and to minimize the negative effects that are being found to exist, there needs to be more consistent methods for collecting data for analysis. Gonzalez-Barrera and Lopez (2015) found that the Latino/a community varied the most in regard to how its members chose to identify. When Americans were asked to racially identify, the overwhelming majority of people (94%) were able to do so using one of five categories: white, black, Asian, American Indian or Pacific Islander. According to the authors, there may have been confusion for those whom identify as Latino/a or Hispanic but did not have the option to do so; "Hispanic" is regarded as an ethnicity and not a race by federal standards (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez 2015).

As a result, an estimated 19 million people identified using written responses which included labels used widely, such as "Latino" or "Hispanic," while others were more specific such as "Mexican"; indicating that racial and ethnic identities, especially for Latinas/os, is often intertwined (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2015). Given the diversity of physical characteristics expressed within the Latino/a community it is not impossible that past findings could have been skewed because of limited options given for people to identify. It is unclear how to approach mitigating this confound given the diversity that exists within the US.

Future Directions

Methods that are currently being utilized in our society to address the problems found in communities of color are showing to have devastating long-term outcomes. Adolescence is often described as a time when youth can explore the world around them with (relatively) minimal consequence. However, contemporary research on adolescents of color is continuously showing that this assumption regarding the adolescent experience is not universal. The increased use of our justice system within schools raises the stakes for youth who might be struggling to cope with the world as they experience it. It would seem as though current culture dictates that there needs to be a strong reaction to those who behave in ways deemed to be inappropriate. Reactions to the use of drugs, for instance, have led to disproportionate incarceration of black and Latino males. Although this may serve to punish those involved, it does not provide an alternative to the behavior; nor does it address the reasons for which people engage in such behavior in the first place. After incarceration the person is often denied access to resources due to the stigma of having been in incarcerated.

In the same way, youth who are excluded from school as punishment for their negatively deemed behavior are not being provided with the resources to do things differently. Likewise, youth who are suspended from school often may not have the resources at home to positively alter their behavior. A more sustainable approach to correcting youth behavior in schools is warranted. It is unlikely, however, that the sustainable alternative will be reached if a shift in the culture does not also occur. Currently, high levels of crime dictate more resources to punish for, rather than to prevent such behavior. Likewise, increased "crime" in schools dictates the need for more effective ways to "protect" youth by eliminating those who jeopardize the well-being of others.

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Appendix A
Multicultural Events Schedule for Adolescence (MESA)
YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Now we would like to ask about personal experiences you have had.
DIRECTIONS*:* **For the items listed below, circle whether these situations happened to you in the past 3 months.**

1.	Your parent lost his/her job	YES	NO
2.	You had a serious problem with a teacher or principal	YES	NO
3.	You were threatened with a weapon	YES	NO
4.	Your parents separated or divorced	YES	NO
5.	You did poorly on an exam or school assignment	YES	NO
6.	You were excluded from a group because of your race, ethnicity, or culture	YES	NO
7.	Close family member was seriously ill or injured	YES	NO
8.	Kids made fun of you because of the way you look	YES	NO
9.	A teacher or principal criticized you in front of other students	YES	NO
10.	You were unfairly accused of something because of your race or ethnicity	YES	NO
11.	A close family member died	YES	NO
12.	You saw a student who was treated badly or discriminated against	YES	NO
13.	You moved far away from family and friends	YES	NO
14.	Your parent(s) remarried	YES	NO
15.	You had something of value (valued over $5) stolen	YES	NO
16.	You were pressured to do drugs or drink alcohol	YES	NO
17.	You heard other people making jokes about your ethnic or racial group	YES	NO
18.	You were attacked by someone not in your family	YES	NO
19.	You were pressured against your will to join a gang	YES	NO
20.	Someone broke into your home or damaged it	YES	NO
21.	Friends criticized you for hanging out with other racial/ethnic groups	YES	NO
22.	Someone threatened to beat you up	YES	NO
23.	You were called a racial name that was a put down	YES	NO
24.	You had an argument or fight with a friend	YES	NO
25.	Someone put you down for practicing the traditions or customs of your race, ethnicity, culture, or religion	YES	NO
26.	Other kids tried to fight with you	YES	NO
27	Close friend died	YES	NO

MESA

Appendix B
The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)
HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR ETHNIC GROUP

In this country, people come from a lot of different cultures and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or *ethnic groups* that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Mexican-American, Hispanic, Black, Asian-American, American Indian, Anglo-American, and White. Every person is born into an ethnic group, or sometimes two groups, but people differ on how important their *ethnicity* is to them, how they feel about it, and how much their behavior is affected by it. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be

_____.

Directions: Please circle the <u>one</u> answer that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree			

1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.	1	2	3	4
2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.	1	2	3	4
3. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.	1	2	3	4
4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.	1	2	3	4
5. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.	1	2	3	4
6. I am not very clear about the role of my ethnicity in my life.	1	2	3	4
7. I really have not spent much time trying to learn more about the culture and history of my ethnic group.	1	2	3	4
8. I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group.	1	2	3	4
9. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me, in terms of how to relate to my own group and other groups.	1	2	3	4
10. In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.	1	2	3	4
11. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments.	1	2	3	4
12. I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs	1	2	3	4
13. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.	1	2	3	4
14. I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.	1	2	3	4

MEIM (Phinney et al., 1992)