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## Ethnic-Racial Identity and Social Outcomes in Childhood: A Research Review

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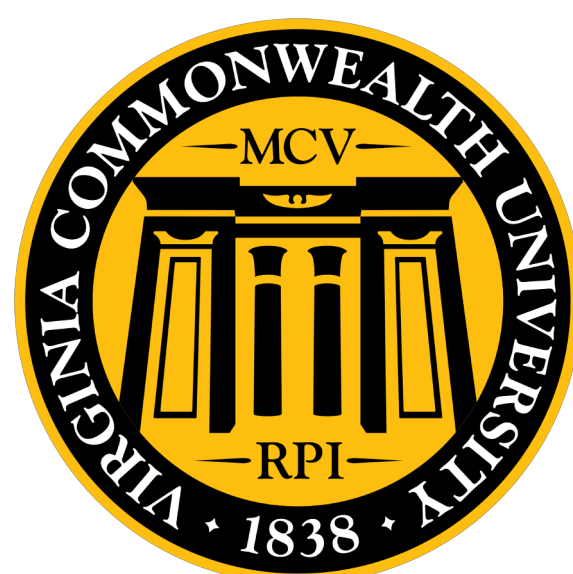
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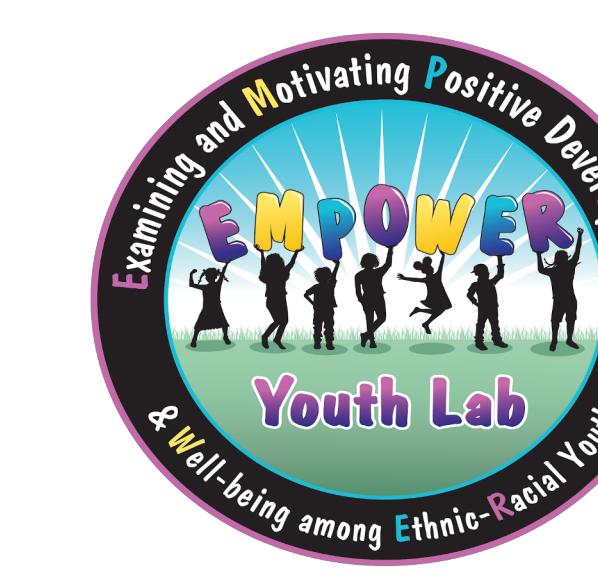
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# Ethnic-Racial Identity and Social Outcomes in Childhood: A Narrative Research Review

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## ABSTRACT

Ethnic-racial Identity (ERI) is the labeling, identification, and processing regarding ethnicity-race that takes place during childhood (Umaña-Taylor, 2014). Development of ERI begins as early as 4 years (Derlan et al., 2017), and may have implications for social outcomes, such as prosocial and externalizing behaviors. The aim of the current narrative review was to review research that has tested how ERI is associated with social outcomes, and identify gaps in this field. The results of the narrative review suggest that, in adolescence, higher ERI is associated with better social outcomes, such as prosocial behaviors (Armenta et al 2011; Streit et al 2020). Further, findings of the review indicated that limited work has included individuals younger than adolescents; one study that did found that lower ERI was linked with more externalizing problem behaviors (Smith et al., 2009). The review also highlighted various gaps in this literature, such as that an operational definition of prosocial behavior in the context of ERI needs to be established, and there is a lack of research that includes multiracial individuals, and individuals younger than adolescents. Future research should investigate ERI and social outcomes in childhood with diverse samples, as such research may provide important information to school systems, counselors, and caregivers about the development of ERI and its implications for development.

## BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

- Ethnic-racial identity (ERI) is multidimensional and psychological, and involves the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have regarding their ethnic-racial group membership (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014)
- Although scholars have suggested that ERI processes during childhood prime and expose children to ethnicity-race, and are instrumental to ERI formation during adolescence (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), much less is known about ERI outside of adolescence.
- Children as young as 4 years old have a sense of what ethnicity and race mean (Quintana, 1998) and use ethnicity/race as a meaningful to understand others (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001)
- Given that ERI has been found to impact how children understand others, it might also impact how they interact with others socially (i.e., social behaviors).
- Given this possibility, the current review was conducted to understand the research that has already been conducted and what is still needed regarding links between ERI and social outcomes among children under the age of 18.
- Theory supports the notion that identity should be related to social outcomes.
- In particular, the Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (or PVEST) posits that emergent identities that are relevant during an individual's developmental period, such as ethnic-racial identity or identification should be linked with stage-specific outcomes, either positive or negative. Throughout childhood and adolescence social competence and behaviors are an important stage-specific outcomes. Accordingly, ethnic-racial identity should be associated with greater social competence.

## RESULTS: ERI & SOCIAL OUTCOMES AMONG ADOLESCENTS

- Ethnic group attachment (e.g., "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.") led to American-Mexican adolescents engaging in "compliant, emotional, dire, and anonymous helping" (Armenta et al 2011)
- ERI (e.g., "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs") was associated with U.S Latino college students prosocial behaviors towards both family and friends (Streit et al 2020)
- A meta-analysis in this area found that positive Ethnic Racial attitudes are related to African American, Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, or American Indian adolescents' positive social functioning (Rivas-Drake et al 2014)
- Latino/a eighth graders with higher ERI centrality (e.g., "People of other ethnicities think that people from my ethnic group have made important contributions.") adjust their ERI to the ERI of their peers (Santos et al 2017)
- Adolescents with higher ERI centrality had higher levels of peer support (e.g., "If I were to describe myself to someone, one of the first things I would tell them is my ethnicity".) (Hoffman et al 2019)
- High ERI centrality correlated with high levels of peer acceptance amongst African American adolescent peers (e.g., " My race is an important reflection of who I am") (Rock et al 2011)



## RESULTS: ERI & SOCIAL OUTCOMES AMONG SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

- Parents reported higher levels of externalizing and aggressive behaviors among African American children that reported lower levels of ERI (e.g., " I have feel strong attachment toward my own ethnic group.") (Smith et al., 2009)
- Serrano-Villar & Calzada (2016) found that among Dominican and Mexican 4 and 5 year old children, ERI constancy and knowledge were associated with greater adaptive behavior (including social skills), and ERI constancy was associated with less maladaptive social behavior (i.e., externalizing behavior).

## DISCUSSION

- There is a lot of work investigating adolescent ERI related to social outcomes (e.g., play or interactions with others) and externalizing behavior (e.g., aggression). This work overall shows a relation between levels of high ERI and prosocial tendencies.
- There is a lack of work related to childhood ERI and social outcomes. Results from our review indicated that there are only two studies to date that have focused on youth younger than adolescents. This is an important gap to address because children think about race at a very young age (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001), and the two studies with children found that ERI is important for social outcomes.
- The review also highlighted various gaps that may serve as important future research directions:
  - Social outcomes have been narrowly defined and studied. For example, work in this area has called the construct "popularity" or "friendships" or "helping behavior," but there is no specific consistency across studies, making it difficult to understand and further this area of research.
  - Studies have predominantly only focused ERI centrality, which is just one type of the many different types of ERI that could be studied.
  - Many studies focused more on social behaviors as outcomes and less on externalizing behaviors. This is important to understand because the methods for addressing problem behaviors versus prosocial behaviors and how ERI could be helpful may be different based on the outcome.
  - Ethnicity/race of youth typically included in studies have been Latino and/or African American. It is unclear if similar findings emerge for biracial/multiracial youth and/or youth with other racial backgrounds.
  - A lot of the work is cross-sectional (collected at one time point), so we don't know if findings last over time. For example, do positive findings about ERI increasing social outcomes carry into adulthood (e.g., increased confidence/ambition, finding/applying for jobs, making friends at work)?



## CONCLUSION

- Work with adolescents has shown that ERI has positive effects on youth, and this is a promising area for children's equity and success in school settings, but more work needs to be done.
- Given that children spend a lot of time in school (Groen et al., 2019), these findings could be useful for school counselors and teachers.
- Additionally, more programming and interventions need to be created in schools that provide opportunities for youth to learn about their ethnicity/race and develop their ERI (e.g., clubs, curriculum/class material, textbooks, celebrations of youths' culture).