

Perception of discrimination and ethnocultural variables in a diverse group of adolescents

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Despite current interest in the multi-dimensionality of culture and ethnicity there are few studies that have explored the role of discrimination with ethnocultural variables. In this study social identity theory was used as a framework to test the relation between discrimination and components of ethnic identity, and attitudes towards out-groups. A school-based survey in a large south-west metropolitan area in 1994 was undertaken with students ($n = 3071$) of African-American, European-American, Mexican-American, and Vietnamese-American descent using multiple measures of ethnicity. Hierarchical multiple regression results indicated that two components of ethnic identity played different roles in the relation between discrimination and attitudes towards others. Consistent with social identity theory, results indicated that perception of more discrimination was predicted by high ethnic exploration, and having more negative attitudes towards out-groups. However, ethnic affirmation, which is a positive sense of belonging to one's ethnic group, was only indirectly related to discrimination through attitudes toward others. In fact, contrary to social identity theory, a stronger sense of belonging to one's group was associated with more positive attitudes toward out-groups. Results have important implications for race relations.

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Introduction

Studies dealing with the nature of prejudice and discrimination have produced part of the foundation for research in social psychology (Allport, 1954). Yet, it is only recently that researchers have changed the focus of prejudice research from the psychology of the dominant groups to the psychology of the oppressed groups. In this sense the research focus is shifting from the question “why are individuals prejudiced” to “how does the experience of racism impact individuals”. Researchers now appear to be acknowledging that discrimination is a fundamental aspect of the social structure in the United States, and is part of daily life for many minority ethnic groups (Jackson *et al.*, 1996; Williams, 1996). This realization has led researchers to acknowledge that ethnicity involves more than just cultural behaviors; it also incorporates present sociological factors, economic conditions, and social and political realities (Weinreich, 1983; Roberts, 1988; Smith, 1990; Phinney, 1996). As a result, investigators are exploring not only the psychological impact of discrimination but also how minority status and the experience of discrimination influence ethnocultural variables such as ethnic identity and acculturation (Trimble, 1990–91; Phinney, 1996; Williams, 1996).

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Additionally, there is a need to address the influence of ethnocultural variables in the development of youth as mainstream developmental psychology begins to acknowledge the acquisition of culture as a key element in development (Aboud, 1987; Greenfield, 1993; Williams-Morris, 1996). The purpose of the current study was to better understand the relation between perception of discrimination and ethnocultural variables. Social identity theory was used as a framework to understand the relationship between ethnic identity, attitudes toward out-groups, and the perception of discrimination in young adolescents.

Defining culture, ethnicity, and discrimination

The multitude of definitions of culture and ethnicity often cloud the understanding of both concepts. An ethnic group can be defined as a group in which the members have a similar social heritage involving practices, values, and beliefs (Atkinson *et al.*, 1983; Ocampo *et al.*, 1993). Members of an ethnic group are defined by common exposure to *cultural* elements. According to Foster and Martinez (1995) and Triandis *et al.* (1980), culture is more inclusive than ethnicity and combines physical objects, subjective experiences, beliefs, and norms. The term race is not used here to indicate cultural differences; race refers to a *biological* category that is primarily manifested in physical appearance and is not related to *learned* cultural characteristics that are relevant to ethnic groups (Phinney, 1996). Prejudice describes negative *attitudes* toward out-groups; whereas discrimination describes negative *behaviors* toward out-groups. Prejudice is based on a negative belief and attitude about an out-group that allows individuals to categorically reject groups of people (Williams-Morris, 1996). Prejudice may lead to differential treatment towards these out-groups that denies opportunities or rights.

Summary of social identity theory

Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory was employed in the current study to explore the relation between ethnic identity, attitudes toward out-groups, and perception of discrimination. To date, the relation between these three variables has not been explored with data from ethnically diverse samples of youth. Tajfel and Turner (1986) argued that social identity is part of an individual's self-image that is derived from social categories. Social identities are based on one's sense of belonging to a group and the emotional value related to the attitudes and feelings that come from one's group membership (Tajfel, 1982). Social identity theory posits that social identities are central to one's self-concept and in the quest to maintain self-esteem individuals look to the evaluation of their in-groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Consequently, self-esteem is based on the positive evaluation of one's in-group (a group that one has membership in) when compared to out-groups (a group that one does not have membership in). The tenets of social identity theory describe a situation where in-group bias and negative attitudes toward out-groups can thrive based on group categorization and group comparison. Through comparing one's in-group to other negative groups, a situation is created where prejudice and discrimination may thrive. Social identity theory was used in the current study in order to hypothesize relations between group identities, attitudes toward out-groups, and the perception of discrimination. It was proposed that individuals who have higher ethnic identity would be more likely to perceive more discrimination and have more negative attitudes toward other groups based on the situation created by group identities and social evaluation described by Tajfel and Turner (1986).

Social identity theory and ethnic identity

Ethnic identity can be considered a social identity in that ethnic groups can be seen as social groups. Therefore, ethnic identity can be one type of group identity that will influence the self-concept of members of ethnic groups as in social identity theory. [Phinney's \(1989\)](#) conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity are based on the description of social identity by [Tajfel and Turner \(1986\)](#) and the development of identity by [Erikson \(1968\)](#). Empirical work utilizing [Phinney's \(1992\)](#) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) has found two distinct but related factors within adolescent ethnic identity that reflect the fundamental theoretical basis proposed by Phinney ([Roberts et al., 1996](#)). One factor, ethnic affirmation, is composed of positive attitudes toward one's ethnic group, a sense of belonging, and commitment to the group. This factor represents the social identity aspect of ethnic identity, which involves feelings of attachment, belonging, and the attitudes associated with this belonging ([Roberts et al., 1996](#)). The second factor, ethnic exploration, involves exploration of one's ethnic background, such as reading about, talking to people about, thinking about one's ethnicity, and participating in cultural practices and behaviors. The second factor represents the second major component of Phinney's conceptualization of ethnic identity, that is the process by which individuals explore, learn, and become involved in their ethnic group. This factor is based on the developmental theory of [Erikson \(1968\)](#) according to which identity formation is achieved through a process of exploration.

In accord with both factors there is evidence that ethnic identity becomes most salient for individuals during their adolescence, as individuals begin to focus on developing their self-identity ([Erikson, 1968](#); [Aries and Moorehead, 1989](#); [Phinney, 1990](#)). In terms of ethnic identity development, [Phinney \(1990\)](#) proposes that individuals begin with a lack of awareness of their ethnicity in the pre-encounter stage. Once issues of ethnicity are made salient, adolescents engage in exploration to learn more about their group in the immersion/moratorium stage; this is reflected in factor two, ethnic exploration. This process concludes with an achieved ethnic identity that involves a commitment to one's ethnicity and a secure sense of identity and group membership which is reflected in factor one, ethnic affirmation ([Phinney, 1990](#); [Roberts et al., 1996](#)). It seems clear from previous research that ethnic identity is a meaningful concept to adolescents ([Aries and Moorehead, 1989](#); [Phinney and Alipuria, 1990](#); [Roberts et al., 1996](#)). It is proposed in the current study that perception of discrimination will be influenced in a similar manner by both components of ethnic identity because the two factors are related but still distinct.

Contributing factors to the perception of discrimination

[Tajfel and Turner \(1986\)](#) additionally discuss how other variables, such as social mobility, will influence intergroup relations. Specifically, when social stratification is based on unequal division of scarce resources, there should be higher rates of ethnocentrism and out-group antagonism between both over-privileged and under-privileged groups ([Tajfel and Turner, 1986](#)). Therefore, individuals who perceive that they are of lower socio-economic status may be likely to perceive more discrimination and have more negative attitudes toward out-groups. Furthermore, [Tajfel and Turner \(1986\)](#) elaborate on this topic, stating that for lower social class groups an active and new search for a positive group identity will reawaken claims to scarce resources. Therefore, it is likely that

individuals with stronger ethnic exploration will be more likely to perceive discrimination and have negative attitudes toward other groups.

Additionally, [Tajfel and Turner \(1986\)](#) address the importance of internalization of group membership to the understanding of social identity in naturally existing social groups. Therefore, it is likely that elements of acculturation may determine social identity to the extent that acculturation reflects how much individuals retain their culture when exposed to other cultures. In other words, ethnocultural variables, such as elements of acculturation, beyond ethnic label will be important to understanding the link between social identity and discrimination. It is likely that individuals who are less acculturated will be closer to their culture of origin, and therefore will tend to have higher ethnic identity and may perceive more discrimination. In fact, [Félix-Ortiz et al. \(1994\)](#), using their cultural identification model, found that perception of more discrimination is associated with elements of acculturation such as preference to speak Spanish and preference to be around other Latinos. Language use remains central in the measurement of acculturation ([Marin, 1992](#)); however research indicates that there are other multiple dimensions within the topic of acculturation and cultural identification ([Keefe and Padilla, 1987](#); [Félix-Ortiz et al., 1994](#)). The current study will only address the component of language use and generation level in regard to acculturation. Overall, social identity theory suggests that less English language use, earlier generation level, and lower socio-economic status may be related to higher ethnic identity and perception of more discrimination in diverse populations.

Summary and hypotheses

The goal of this study was to use social identity theory ([Tajfel and Turner, 1986](#)) and Phinney and colleague's ([Phinney and Tarver, 1988](#); [Phinney, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1996](#)) work on ethnic identity to generate hypotheses that will further consolidate research in regard to discrimination, ethnic identity, and attitudes toward out-groups. The following hypotheses have been generated based on previous discussion on the link between ethnic identity components, perception of discrimination, attitudes towards others, socio-economic status, and elements of acculturation as established with the social identity theory and Phinney's work on ethnic identity. (See [Figure 1](#) for a summary diagram of all hypotheses.)

Hypothesis 1. It was hypothesized that perception of more discrimination would be predicted by higher ethnic identification. Specifically, it was hypothesized that both components of ethnic identity, ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration, would predict perception of more discrimination.

Hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that attitudes towards out-groups would be predicted by both components of ethnic identification and lower socio-economic status. Specifically, both components of ethnic identity, ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration, would be related negatively to attitudes toward out-groups, such that higher identity would be associated with more negative attitudes towards others. Individuals with lower socio-economic status would be more likely to have more negative attitudes toward out-groups.

Hypothesis 3. It was hypothesized that perception of more discrimination would be predicted by negative attitudes towards out-groups. Additionally, individuals of lower socio-economic status would perceive more discrimination.

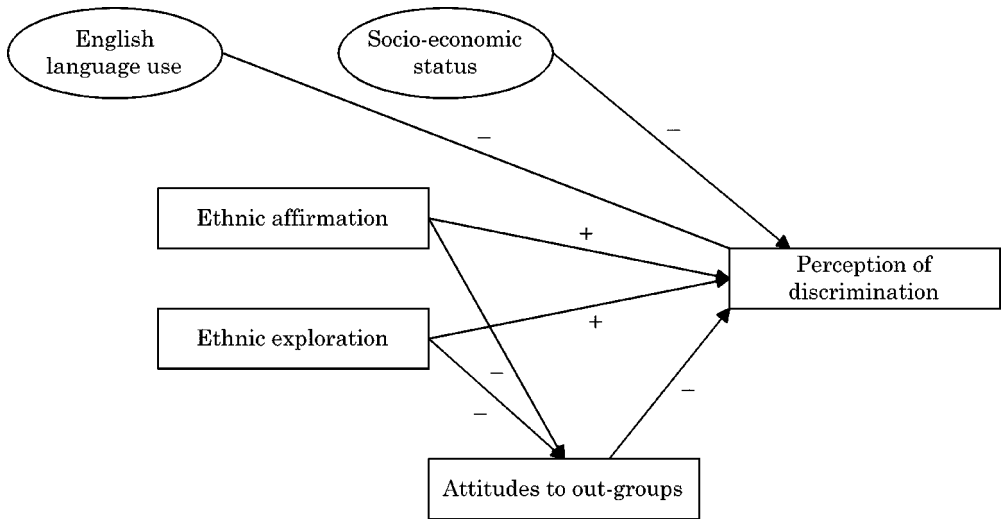


Figure 1. Diagram of hypothesized relations between components of ethnic identity, perception of discrimination, attitudes towards other groups, and demographic variables.

Hypothesis 4. It was hypothesized that perception of discrimination would be predicted by language use and generation level (measures related to acculturation). Specifically, individuals who speak less English and are of first generation should perceive more discrimination.

Methods

Sampling

The sample was derived from an original survey including five middle schools enrolling 6400 students in grades 6–8. Usable questionnaires were obtained from 5423 respondents ranging in age from 10–17 years. Both passive parental and active student consent procedures were used. The questionnaires were administered by project field staff in classroom settings in a school-based survey conducted in the Houston, Texas, metropolitan area in 1994. Questionnaires were in English. There were a number of different ethnic groups included in the study; however, only data on the four largest ethnic groups are presented in the current study. In this sample there were 1237 African–Americans, 775 non-Hispanic European–Americans, 755 Mexican–Americans, and 304 Vietnamese–Americans. Thus, a total of 3071 respondents were used in our analyses. Participants self-selected their ethnic group from a comprehensive list of ethnic groups. Sample characteristics are presented in [Table 1](#).

Socio-economic status was measured by assessing perceived socio-economic status (SES) compared to peers ([Gore et al., 1992](#)). The measure of perceived socio-economic status is based on a range of 1 = much worse off to 5 = much better off. The mean score for perceived SES is $M=3.42$, $S.D.=0.88$.

Table 1 *Characteristics of sample*

	<i>n</i>	%
Age (years)		
11 or younger	301	9.8
12	799	26.0
13	993	32.3
14	730	23.8
15 or older	229	7.4
Gender		
Male	1515	49.3
Female	1495	48.7
Perceived socio-economic status		
Worse off	238	7.8
About the same	1472	47.9
Better off	1079	35.2
Ethnic label		
African-American	1237	40.3
European-American	775	25.2
Mexican-American	755	24.6
Vietnamese-American	304	9.9
Generation		
First	365	11.9
Second	2468	80.4

Measures

Elements of acculturation. Generation refers to how long an individual's family has resided in the United States. Generally, over a period of several generations families tend to replace their native language and customs with those of the majority culture (Alba, 1990; Suinn *et al.*, 1992). Generational status is an item inquiring about: birthplace of the adolescent, birthplace of both parents, and birthplace of both maternal and paternal grandparents. However, due to the amount of missing data regarding parents and grandparents, youth were categorized into (1) first generation (not born in the U.S.) or (2) later generation.

Measures of language usage have been found to be reliable and valid instruments to account for variance in acculturation levels (Marin, 1992). Language use was assessed with two separate items, asking the students how often they speak English with their family and how often they speak English with their friends. These items used a 1 (not at all)–5 (all of the time) Likert-type scale.

Subjective components. Ethnic identity taps the extent to which an individual identifies with, feels belonging to, has pride in, and has knowledge of his or her ethnic background (Phinney, 1992). The measure of ethnic identity used in this survey is the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992). The items in this measure are based on a 1–4 Likert-type scale, higher scores indicating higher ethnic identity. The 14-item scale had an overall internal consistency of $\alpha=0.82$, and a range of acceptable

reliabilities from $\alpha=0.80-0.84$ across ethnic groups. For a comprehensive study of the psychometric of this scale with the sample used in the current study, see Roberts *et al.* (1996). Based on the findings of Roberts *et al.* (1996) the MEIM scale was divided into the two subscales, ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration. Ethnic affirmation is composed of seven items and ethnic exploration is composed of five items. When subjects were missing four or fewer items out of the 14-item MEIM, scores were imputed for missing items using the means based on gender and ethnic group.

The variable attitudes toward out-groups is composed of six items developed by Phinney (1992) in conjunction with the MEIM scale. These items are based on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1–4), with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward other groups. The attitude scale is independent of the MEIM scale. The internal consistency reliabilities ranged between $\alpha=0.64-0.78$ for all ethnic groups. When subjects were missing two or fewer items on the attitudes toward out-groups the scores for missing items were imputed by using the means based on gender and ethnicity.

Perception of discrimination. Perceived discrimination consisted of two items. One item inquired about the amount of perceived discrimination at present against people with the student's ethnic background. The other item inquired about the amount of discrimination the student had personally experienced. These items were based on a 1–4 scale, with higher scores indicating perception of more discrimination.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Analyses were conducted using the SPSS statistical package. Descriptive statistics were first obtained on each measure of ethnicity for each of the four ethnic groups. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics by ethnic group for language use, ethnic affirmation, ethnic exploration, discrimination, attitudes toward out-groups, and generation level.

Table 2 also indicates significant ethnic differences between means for each ethnocultural variable based on one-way ANOVA tests with Tukey HSD *post hoc* tests. The

Table 2 Mean of ethnic indicators by ethnic group

Ethnic indicators ^a	European-American		African-American		Mexican-American		Vietnamese-American	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Discrimination	2.39(0.84)		2.84(0.72) ^b		2.64(0.79) ^{bc}		2.67(0.74) ^{bc}	
Attitudes to others	3.30(0.64)		3.07(0.61) ^b		3.03(0.62) ^b		3.11(0.62) ^b	
Ethnic affirmation	3.01(0.67)		3.33(0.63) ^b		3.30(0.60) ^b		3.20(0.63) ^{bc}	
Ethnic exploration	2.28(0.67)		2.69(0.67) ^b		2.59(0.62) ^{bc}		2.76(0.59) ^{bcd}	
Generation	1.98(0.14)		1.94(0.24) ^b		1.74(0.44) ^{bc}		1.60(0.49) ^{bcd}	
Language use	4.90(0.29)		4.79(0.50) ^b		3.81(0.84) ^{bc}		3.89(0.67) ^{bc}	

^aEthnic affirmation, ethnic exploration, and attitudes to others have a range of (1–4); language use has a range of (1–5); discrimination has a range of (1–4); and generation has a range of (1–2).

^bIndicates a significant difference compared to European group; ^cindicates a significant difference compared to African-American group; ^dindicates a significant difference compared to Mexican-American group.

Table 3 Means of ethnocultural variables by age and gender

	Age (years)		Gender	
	10–13	14–17	Male	Female
Discrimination	2.59	2.69***	2.65	2.59
Attitudes to others	3.17	3.13*	3.11	3.21***
Ethnic affirmation	3.25	3.21	3.22	3.26***
Ethnic exploration	2.63	2.60	2.59	2.66***
Generation	1.82	1.72***	1.79	1.79
Language use	4.41	4.28***	4.36	4.39

* $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.0001$.

European–American group had lower mean scores for ethnic affirmation, ethnic exploration, and discrimination than all other ethnic groups. The European–American group spoke more English, had more positive attitudes towards out-groups, and they were more likely to be second generation or later than any other ethnic group. African–Americans spoke more English, perceived more discrimination, and tended to be of second generation or later compared to Mexican–Americans or Vietnamese–Americans. African–Americans and Vietnamese–Americans also had higher mean scores on ethnic exploration than Mexican–Americans. Vietnamese–Americans tended to be of first generation more than Mexican–Americans and had a lower mean score on ethnic affirmation than African–Americans.

Table 3 presents the means for ethnocultural variables by age and gender. These results indicate that older students spoke less English, perceived more discrimination, had lower than average generation level, and more negative attitudes toward others. This table also demonstrates the presence of gender differences such that females had higher scores on ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration and more positive attitudes towards others. A correlation matrix of variables of interest is provided in Table 4. Due to the large sample size and number of tests used, a Bonferroni inequality correction was used, so that only significance levels $p < 0.01$ were reported (Hays, 1994). This table clearly demonstrates that ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration are significantly correlated.

Table 4 Correlations of variables of interest

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Discrimination	1.00								
2. Attitude to others	-0.09*	1.00							
3. Ethnic affirmation	0.07*	0.31*	1.00						
4. Ethnic exploration	0.15*	0.14*	0.57*	1.00					
5. Language	-0.05	0.14*	-0.06	-0.12*	1.00				
6. Generation	-0.02	0.07*	-0.07*	-0.09*	0.42*	1.00			
7. Gender	-0.04	0.08*	0.04	0.05*	0.02	0.01	1.00		
8. Age	0.09*	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.10*	-0.11*	-0.07*	1.00	
9. SES	-0.02	0.01	0.10*	0.11*	0.04*	0.002	-0.04	0.01	1.00

* $p < 0.01$.

Table 5 Hierarchical regression results by hypotheses

Regression step		R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	Std. β	t
Hypothesis 1: predictor dimension = discrimination						
1	Gender	0.002	0.001	0.002	-0.04	-1.78
2	Ethnic affirmation	0.038	0.036	0.036	-0.03	-0.92
	Ethnic exploration	0.038	0.036	0.036	0.20	7.57***
Hypothesis 2: predictor dimension = attitudes towards out-groups						
1	Gender	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.06	2.95**
2	Ethnic affirmation	0.090	0.089	0.086	0.31	13.39***
	Ethnic exploration	0.090	0.089	0.086	-0.04	-1.52
3	SES	0.091	0.089	0.001	-0.02	-0.84
Hypothesis 3: predictor dimension = discrimination						
1	Gender	0.012	0.011	0.012	-0.04	-1.82
	Age	0.012	0.011	0.012	0.10	4.07***
2	Attitudes to others	0.024	0.023	0.012	-0.11	-4.63***
3	SES	0.025	0.022	0.001	-0.02	-0.79
Hypothesis 4: predictor dimension = discrimination						
1	Age	0.013	0.013	0.013	0.12	5.04***
2	Generation level	0.016	0.015	0.003	0.01	0.25
	Language Use	0.016	0.015	0.003	-0.06	-2.41*

Hypotheses

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were run in order to test the proposed hypotheses. Results are organized by hypotheses and presented in Table 5. Based on the preceding analyses, which indicated that age and gender differences were present in the variables of interest, hierarchical regression was employed to determine if the variables of interest accounted for prediction beyond that afforded by demographic differences. Gender and age are only used here as control variables and are addressed as covariates in the regression analyses. Based on previous findings that indicate different patterns for subscales of ethnic identity, ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration are kept separate in the analyses (Roberts *et al.*, 1996).

Hypothesis 1 stated that perception of more discrimination would be predicted by high ethnic exploration and high ethnic affirmation. Based on the preceding findings of gender differences in both ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration, gender was added into the equation in step 1, and then ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration were added in step 2 (see Table 5 for regression results). After step 1, with gender in the equation, $R^2=0.002$, $F(1, 1881)=3.17$, $p < 0.075$. After step 2, with gender, ethnic affirmation, and ethnic exploration added to the equation, $R^2=0.038$, $\Delta R^2=0.036$, $F(3, 1879)=24.54$, $p < 0.0001$. Higher ethnic exploration predicted perception of more discrimination. Ethnic affirmation did not significantly predict discrimination in this model. Hypothesis 1 was partially supported because one factor of ethnic identity (ethnic exploration) predicted perception of more discrimination when gender was controlled.

Hypothesis 2 stated that negative attitudes toward out-groups would be predicted by

high ethnic exploration, high ethnic affirmation, and lower socio-economic status. Since there were gender differences in both ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration, gender was added to step 1, ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration were added to step 2, and then perceived socio-economic status was added to step 3 (see Table 5). After step 1, with gender in the equation, $R^2=0.004$, $F(1, 2337)=8.70$, $p < 0.003$. Females were more likely to have positive attitudes towards other groups. After step 2, with gender, ethnic affirmation, and ethnic exploration added, $R^2=0.090$, $\Delta R^2=0.086$, $F(3, 2335)=77.44$, $p < 0.0001$. Higher ethnic affirmation was associated with more positive attitudes towards other ethnic groups. After step 3, with gender, ethnic affirmation, ethnic exploration, and perceived SES added, $R^2=0.091$, $\Delta R^2=0.001$, $F(4, 2334)=58.25$, $p < 0.0001$. In the final model, perceived SES and ethnic exploration were not significant; however ethnic affirmation significantly predicted attitudes toward out-groups. Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that perception of more discrimination would be predicted by more negative attitudes towards out-groups and lower socio-economic status. Since age and gender differences were found for attitudes towards others, age and gender were added to the equation in step 1, age, gender, and attitudes toward out-groups were added in step 2, and then age, gender, attitudes toward out-groups, and perceived SES were added to the equation in step 3 (see Table 5). After step 1, with age and gender in the equation, $R^2=0.012$, $F(2, 1720)=10.62$, $p < 0.0001$. Age was significant but gender was not. Older students perceived more discrimination. After step 2, with age, gender, and attitudes toward out-groups added, $R^2=0.024$, $\Delta R^2=0.012$, $F(3, 1719)=14.30$, $p < 0.0001$. The variable attitudes towards out-groups were significant. After step 3, with age, gender, attitudes toward out-groups, and perceived SES added, $R^2=0.025$, $\Delta R^2=0.001$, $F(4, 1718)=10.88$, $p < 0.0001$. Individuals who were more negative towards other groups perceived more discrimination. Hypothesis 3 was partially supported in that negative attitudes toward out-groups predicted perception of more discrimination when controlling for age and gender. However, perceived SES was not a significant predictor in this model.

Hypothesis 4 stated that individuals who speak less English and who are immigrants would be more likely to perceive more discrimination. Based on the preceding findings that there were age differences in language use, age was added in step 1, and then generation and language were added to the equation in step 2 (see Table 5 for regression results). After step 1, with age and ethnic label in the equation, $R^2=0.013$, $F(1, 1905)=25.37$, $p < 0.0001$. Age was significant, with older students perceiving more discrimination. After step 2, with age, generation, and language use added, $R^2=0.016$, $\Delta R^2=0.003$, $F(3, 1903)=10.57$, $p < 0.0001$. Language use significantly predicted discrimination, such that individuals who spoke less English perceived more discrimination.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relation between components of ethnic identity, discrimination, and attitudes towards others. Adolescents of European–American, African–Mexican, Mexican–American, and Vietnamese– American descent were surveyed on the following variables of interest: generation level, language

usage, ethnic identity (ethnic affirmation and ethnic exploration), perception of discrimination, and attitudes toward other groups. Hypotheses, based on [Tajfel and Turner's \(1986\)](#) social identity theory and [Phinney's](#) work on ethnic identity, were partially supported. Supported hypotheses indicated that when age and gender were controlled, higher ethnic exploration and negative attitudes towards out-groups predict perception of more discrimination. However, contrary to the hypothesized relation, higher ethnic affirmation predicted more positive attitudes towards out-groups. It is a significant finding that components of ethnic identity function in different manners to influence perception of discrimination. This indicates that there may be multiple complex components of ethnic identity that may function in different manners and be differentially related to ethnocultural variables.

Demographic differences

Results indicate that European–American adolescents in this sample were significantly different from all other ethnic groups on all dimensions of ethnicity measured in the current study. Our results are consistent with previous research in that European–Americans were found to have lower ethnic affirmation and exploration than all other groups ([Phinney, 1996](#)). Furthermore, European–American adolescents in the current sample report experiencing less discrimination and having more positive attitudes towards other groups. These findings are congruent with social identity theory, which suggests that dominant groups may be more positive toward out-groups due to less competition for resources ([Stephan and Stephan, 1985](#); [Tajfel and Turner, 1986](#)). Based on social identity theory, if European–American adolescents are less aware of their ethnicity (diffuse ethnic identity), they may be less aware of other groups and may have less intergroup differentiation, which would account for perception of less discrimination and more positive attitudes toward others. However, there is previous research which provides counterexamples, such as the work by [Ickes \(1984\)](#) on dyadic interactions which found that European–Americans were more likely than African–Americans to purposely avoid members of ethnic groups other than their own. Therefore, European–Americans may report more positive attitudes but behave in a manner incongruent with these attitudes, and consequently more research is needed to clarify the link between prejudice attitudes and discriminatory behavior.

Although European–American adolescents were different from other groups in the current sample, there also are differences between the non-European– American groups. For example, similar to previous research, African–American youths reported some of the highest levels of ethnic affirmation and perceived discrimination ([Phinney, 1996](#)). Additionally, Vietnamese–American and Mexican–American youth tended to be significantly different from the other two groups in terms of behavioral aspects, such as being from earlier generation levels and speaking less English. It is also interesting to note that Vietnamese–American adolescents in this sample reported the highest average ethnic exploration of all groups.

There also were significant differences found for age and gender for some of the variables of interest. For example, older students were more likely to perceive more discrimination and have more positive attitudes towards out-groups. This is consistent with existing ethnic identity models which argue that the interpretation and response to prejudice will change over time as one matures and develops a clear identity ([Phinney, 1989](#); [Helms,](#)

1990; Cross, 1991). However, to more fully understand the dynamics of ethnicity it is necessary to conduct longitudinal research in order to assess how individuals change and develop over time in regard to ethnic identity. Gender differences also were found in relation to ethnic identity, such that female students had higher ethnic affirmation and higher ethnic exploration than male students. It is possible that because female adolescents often mature at a faster rate than males during adolescence (Cole and Cole, 1993), they may be at different stages in development of ethnic identity. However, there is some research that indicates that women have greater involvement in culture than men, which also may account for gender differences in regard to awareness of culture and ethnicity (Phinney, 1990). Gender differences should be explored further in future studies of ethnicity development and socialization.

Perception of discrimination

To some extent, social identity theory was supported in terms of the relations between perception of discrimination, components of ethnic identity, and attitudes towards out-groups. Results indicate that hypothesis 1, which stated that high ethnic identity was predictive of the perception of more discrimination, was partially supported. These findings suggest that ethnic identity and its relation to other ethnocultural variables is more complex than literature previously suggested. Empirical findings suggest that the different factors of ethnic identity play different roles in the prediction of perception of discrimination. High ethnic exploration was predictive of perception of more discrimination, whereas ethnic affirmation was not directly related to discrimination. Roberts *et al.* (1996) discuss ethnic exploration as the aspect of ethnic identity which reflects the developmental stage where individuals are exploring and learning more about their ancestry. It may be that as individuals of certain minority groups learn more about the history of their ethnic group in the United States, they become more aware of the injustices and unequal distribution of resources and thus become more aware of current discrimination (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Additionally, during this developmental stage of identity (exploring) individuals may be more aware of out-groups thereby enhancing their awareness of discrimination.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that hypothesis 2 was not supported. In fact the results were the opposite of what was hypothesized. High ethnic affirmation predicted positive attitudes towards out-groups. Additionally, it was found that ethnic exploration and socio-economic status were not related to negative attitudes towards others. It is intriguing that the results appear counterintuitive. Originally, Tajfel and Turner (1986) proposed that in-group favorability, which is represented by ethnic affirmation, would lead to more intergroup conflict. However, it seems that certain aspects of in-group favorability may lead to more positive interactions between groups. This is highly significant in terms of understanding ethnic tensions and intergroup relations because group identities may be much more complex than originally thought. Additionally, there is recent research which supports the findings of the current study. Phinney *et al.* (1997) report that positive attitudes toward one's in-group, which is similar to ethnic affirmation, are related to positive attitudes toward out-groups.

Furthermore, Roberts *et al.* (1996) reported that if ethnic affirmation was linked to the committed stage of ethnic identity development, this stage should include more tolerance of other ethnic groups. Therefore, this finding may reflect this committed stage of ethnic

identity in its prediction of more positive attitudes towards other groups. In support of this suggestion, [Phinney et al. \(1997\)](#) reported that ethnic identity increased with age and predicted positive group attitudes, lending credence to the suggestion that ethnic affirmation may be linked to the final committed stage of development. Therefore, this finding begins to contribute a deeper understanding to the relation between social identities and intergroup relations, beyond that of the original work of Tajfel and Turner. This line of research deserves more investigation due to its applicability for improving ethnic tensions among adolescents.

Next, the relation between attitudes towards out-groups and discrimination was tested. We found that hypothesis 3 was partially supported; negative attitudes toward out-groups were predictive of perception of more discrimination. Lower socio-economic status was not significant in either hypothesis 2 or hypothesis 3. This may be a flaw in the measurement of socio-economic status, as perceived socio-economic status was measured rather than more objective measures such as parent education or income. There may have been a positive correlation, which would skew the results, between how adolescent's perceived their economic situation and a positive view of themselves and their group. This is congruent with social identity theory, which states that individuals distinguish their own social group through negative evaluation of other groups. This in turn may heighten intergroup conflict, and consequently the perception of more discrimination. However, it is worth noting that ethnic identity has multiple components, which may influence processes differentially. For example, the positive evaluation of one's in-group was related to positive attitudes towards others, contrary to social identity theory. However, another aspect of identity, ethnic exploration, was not associated with attitudes towards others; yet it did predict the perception of discrimination. This indicates changes in the original figure presented in this study, such that ethnic affirmation was only indirectly linked to discrimination through attitudes toward others, and ethnic exploration was directly associated with discrimination.

Hypothesis 4 was partially supported. Generation level was not a significant predictor of discrimination; however language use was significant. Results indicate that individuals who speak less English perceive more discrimination. This is congruent with previous research that also found language usage was related to perceptions of discrimination ([Félix-Ortiz et al., 1994](#)). The measure of generation level was limited due to the amount of missing data concerning the adolescents' parents and grandparents. It also should be noted that the measure of language used in this study is flawed, in that it only assesses acculturation in one direction, toward the majority. Future studies would be wise to include orthogonal measures of acculturation, and measures that include dimensions other than language (for example [Oetting and Beauvais, 1990–91](#); [Cuéllar et al., 1994](#)).

Conclusion

In summary, hypotheses drawn from social identity theory ([Tajfel and Turner, 1986](#)) and Phinney's ([Phinney and Tarver, 1988](#); [Phinney, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1996](#)) research on ethnic identity were partially supported in the current study that tested the relations between ethnic identity, discrimination, and attitudes toward out-groups. Social identity

theory states that in order to maintain self-esteem individuals often evaluate out-groups negatively in order to perceive their in-group favorably; consequently, more intergroup conflict, discrimination, and negative attitudes toward others may result. In congruence with this theory it was found that higher ethnic exploration and more negative attitudes toward others were associated with the perception of more discrimination. However contrary to social identity theory, findings from the current study indicate that a sense of belonging to one's ethnic group is predictive of more positive attitudes towards other groups, which is supported by recent research (Phinney *et al.*, 1997). Therefore, it seems that intergroup conflict may not be purely based on ethnic identity as a whole, rather it is based on elements of ethnic identity. In fact, it may be that positive evaluation of one's own group may contribute to positive race relations (Phinney, 1990).

It is important to remember that the expression of ethnicity is a dynamic process and the current data were cross-sectional. In future studies, longitudinal data are needed in order to more completely understand the developmental process related to ethnicity. One strength of this study was the inclusion of several ethnic groups and the use of universal measures, which allows for interpretations regarding commonalities and differences between and within minority groups. In addition, the associations between ethnic identity, discrimination, and attitudes toward out-groups have strong implications for ethnic tensions among young people. For example, the implementation of programs to increase ethnic identity may be useful as long as they focus to a greater degree on positive in-group attitudes than negative out-group evaluations. Additionally, the issues of previous injustices and oppression will need to be handled in such a way as to not create current discrimination or conflict, as represented by the relation between exploration and perception of discrimination. Future studies could elaborate on the role that elements of ethnicity play in the development of positive or negative attitudes toward other ethnic groups, and perhaps focus on positive coping mechanisms that mediate the relationships between discrimination and physical and mental health.

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