

Racial Identity Honors Project

Thesis: Bias and stereotypes within a school environment can increase student concerns about social acceptance and increase their feelings of inadequacy when it comes to their racial identity and academic performance in general. Educators and schools play a heavy role in helping students negotiate with their race, culture and social surrounding.

Definition of racial identity for people of color: “The term racial identity, encompasses more than a person’s categorization based on physical traits, **it entails a sense of group or collective identity** based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group.” - Janet Helms, research psychologist

- Cultural conflict within and across diverse racial/ethnic groups continues to a large extent. Those who experience the most **prejudice and discrimination in many schools** continue to include persons of color (Aguirre & Turner, 2003).
- Na’im Akbar says the **first function of education is to provide an understanding of cultural/ethnic identity**, which lays the foundation for what people will be able to do and what they must learn. Schools must provide an “**immunity**” to social diseases like institutional and cultural racism.
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Question: Is racial identity related to achievement?

- Peter C. Murrell argued that historically underserved students fall into three broad categories: those who persist in enduring schooling even though it has ceased to **make sense to them**; those who eventually check out of schooling activity; and those who persist because they find **meaning, purpose, and academic identity**.
- Derald Wing Sue, asserts that in any given school community, there may be major resistance to spotlighting the need for greater self-awareness of one’s racial identity and the possible relationship to educational opportunities and outcomes.

Source: Chapter 1, Walking the equity Talk: A Guide for Culturally Courageous Leadership in School Communities

How students of color in New York City public schools develop their racial identity?

*The middle grades, is a critical time period for racial identity development. Previous research showed that after this period concrete ideas of self and race are established permanently.

“In one year, I moved from a diverse school where **I felt pretty and smart** to a predominantly **White school where I felt ugly and dumb.**” - A little African American girl’s transfer from an urban to a suburban school

Part 1: Curriculum

Curriculum’s importance in the development of racial identity:

- “The lack of representation in curriculum presents a developmental challenge for students of color striving to establish their identity and sense of self; it also presents an academic challenge, as research shows that students engage more deeply and achieve at higher levels **when their curriculum connects to their identities and experiences.**”
 - a. Research demonstrates that for students of color, culturally responsive education decreases dropout rates and suspensions, and **increases grade point averages**, student participation, **self-image**, critical thinking skills and graduation rates..
 - b. As scholar Rudine Sims Bishop stated, “When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are **devalued in the society of which they are a part**” (Bishop, 1990).

Curriculum in Public Schools:

- The NYU Metropolitan Center reported that while 85% of NYC public school students are Black, Latinx or Asian, **84% of the books in ten commonly-used K-5th grade curricula are written by white authors** and mostly consist of white main characters.
- More than **875,000 children** in 3-K to 8th grade in NYC public schools continue to spend their days immersed in a curriculum that largely does not reflect their identities.

Tie to racism and value in the world: If white students see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world - a dangerous ethnocentrism (1990).

Funding’s role: Purchasing from vendors who sell white-dominated curriculum, and invest funds to create or purchase a culturally responsive curriculum.

Part 2: Social Relationships and Experiences

Social Relationships and Experiences importance in development of racial identity:

- Adolescents spend a large amount of time in the school environment and with their peers, becoming a major influence on racial identity development.
- This development of racial identity is directly influenced by one's **identification with a social group** and the emotional significance of attachment to that group. Having a clear sense of group membership and what one's ethnicity means to the individual is also significant (Tajfel, 1981).

Peer relationships and school environment in Public Schools:

- Studies examining discrimination have found that youth, especially those of color, who report higher levels of discrimination had lower self-esteem, lower academic performance and more depression (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Dubois et al., 2002).

Peer relationships:

- a. One study found that only discrimination **from peers, and not adults**, was associated with adolescents' own perceptions about their ethnic group (Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009).
- b. This is particularly alarming, as Rivas-Drake and colleagues (2009) have found that the more negative ethnic messages youth received from multiple sources (**e.g., peers, teachers, neighbors**), the more it impacted youth's perceptions of their own ethnicity.
- c. Some African American students come to reject achievement related attitudes and behaviors; as a result, the correlation between self-esteem and academic outcomes decrease steadily among these students. These students may deliberately **reject academic achievement as acting white, instead choosing to play the role of class clown or embrace stereotypes.** - Osborne, 1977

School Environment:

- As many as 46% of African American and 50% of Hispanic/Latino students reported **receiving lower grades based on their race and ethnicity.** Disparities in the number of office referral rates and types of referrals for minority youth have been found.
- Latino and African American youth receiving significantly more referrals for delinquency, aggression, disrespect, and attendance than other youth (Kaufman et al., 2010).

Role in addressing issues: Promoting cultural sensitivity among students and staff can decrease negative peer interactions (e.g., bullying) and other negative social experiences, thereby decreasing the risk of poor academic and psychological outcomes for adolescents at risk of experiencing adversity.

Part 3: Teachers and Educators influence on Racial identity development

Teachers role in education in general:

- Teachers act as role models, mentors, caregivers and advisers. They can have a profound effect on the lives of their students. Primarily, teachers will impart knowledge to their students to help them learn new things about a specific group of subjects. This in a large part will contribute to the trajectory of the lives of many students.

Teacher Expectation:

- Teachers' expectations of a student's academic performance also contribute to youth's perceptions of a supportive teacher-student relationship. As evidenced by a classic social psychology experiment by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966), teachers unintentionally behaved differently based on the academic expectations they had of the students in their classroom.
- Students who **the teachers expected** to do well received advantages that promoted their learning, such as more opportunities to respond to the classroom, more feedback from their teacher, and more positive reinforcement and praise.

Teacher's Race and Perceptions of Race:

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAME-RACE TEACHERS

- "Minority students often **perform better** on standardized tests, have improved attendance, and are suspended less frequently (which may suggest either different degrees of behavior or different treatment, or both) when they have at least one same-race teacher." - Brookings Research
- "If a black male student has at least one black teacher in the third, fourth, or fifth grade, he is significantly **less likely to drop out of high school** and more likely to aspire to attend a four-year college (as proxied by taking a college entrance exam)" - Brookings Research

REPRESENTATION WITH TEACHERS

- Using data from the American Community Survey, they show that in 2015 just over half of American children aged 5 to 17 were white, but nearly 80 percent of young teachers (whom they define as individuals aged 25 to 34, with a bachelor's degree, and teaching at the prekindergarten through high school level) were white.
 - a. How much do racial and ethnic gaps in college completion explain diversity gaps in the teaching force?
- White college graduates become teachers at relatively higher rates than black and Hispanic college graduates.

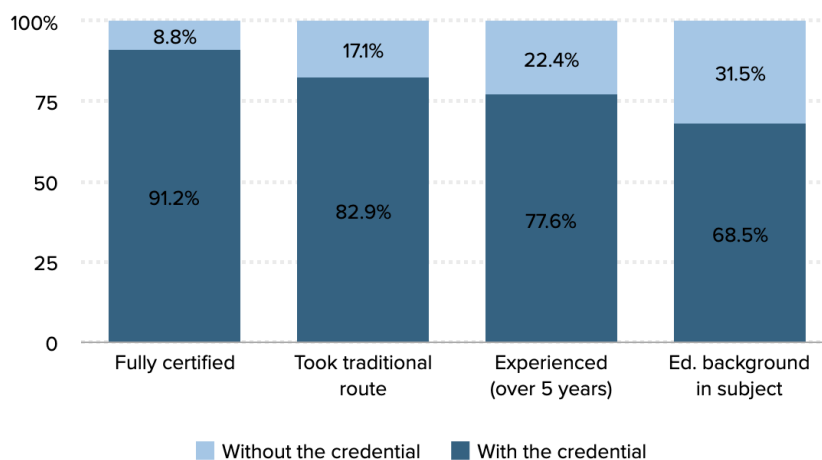
Final note: Having same-race role models could inspire minority students, especially black and brown students, and may affect **teacher expectations as well**. For instance, there exists some evidence that black teachers expect more from black students than white teachers do. And same-race teachers may be more able to link **cultural contexts to learning in ways** that could empower racial and ethnic minority students who are embedded with the idea they are less valuable.

Teacher Education and Pay:

FIGURE B

Teacher credentials

Share of teachers with and without various credentials, by credential, 2015–2016



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- Highly qualified teachers are fully certified, they are experienced (have more than 5 years of experience) and they have a background in the subject of main assignment. Highly qualified teachers are in higher demand and are more likely to be recruited by **higher-income school districts** and to join the staff of schools that provide them with better support and working conditions and more choices of grades and subjects to teach.

Implementation and Enforcement of school dress code in public schools:

- For far too long, students (and teachers) have faced discrimination due to problematic policies. Schools have denied access to enrollment or even graduate because a student's hair didn't fit their standards. Or they weren't wearing the "right" type of clothes.
- One student voiced, "This is just me trying to express me, my culture, and my history".
- "Hairstyles that are disruptive to the educational process are prohibited." One high school's policy stated, "Anything that is deemed inappropriate by the staff is inappropriate."

Connection to Racial identity?

- “A student goes home and cries when he’s the only black child in his fifth-grade class and the white teacher reads “n*gger” and “coon” aloud from The Great Gilly Hopkins.” - A African American Student in lower Manhattan.
- A student disengages from a history curriculum where black Americans are only viewed through the prism of victimhood, slavery and Jim Crow. Reflection on self as the victim in multiple situations.
- A student in an honors class works hard on an assignment, only to have her teacher question whether she did the research herself because it’s so thorough.

Idea of school’s primarily role in developing one’s racial identity:

- “There is a fear among white teachers to talk about race with white teachers and teachers of color,” said Tamarah Rash, a black teacher at Meredith School in Philadelphia. “But we have to move past that [fear].

Part 4: Social Disorder in Public Schools

Mental Health and it’s connection to the development of Racial Identity:

- “People who are faced with a **profound experience (trauma)** or collection of events that are directly linked to their race. **This experience encourages individuals to re-examine their current identity** and create or further develop their Black identity. The reaffirmation or creation of their identity can either be a positive or negative experience. This encounter event can range from the experience of a racist, discriminatory, or **prejudicial event to being socially rejected by White colleagues** or friends and thus encourages the individual to reassess their racial identity. ”

Violence:

- According to CBS, [A student] named E.H. started 9th grade [being] called the n-word repeatedly and told to "go kill himself." That escalated to physical attacks, each one worse than the last and with more and more kids involved. "I'd tell the teachers. They didn't listen. They would get five teachers to follow [me] at the school and make me look like a bad kid with their walkie talkies," he says.

Part 5: When it comes to the Racial Makeup of the School

“The immersion stage encourages people to move to a more positive and internalized world view where they experience Black culture, engage in self-exploration, and experience positive feelings and a sense of unity with other African Americans.” - Janet Helms Racial Identity Model

An Integrated population

- “An integrated school setting is more likely to promote positive ethnic attitudes among all children than one that is racially homogenous” - Kozol

Primarily looking at Asian American students:

- One variable that may contribute to the development of a pan-Asian American identification is experiences with racism (Espiritu, 1992). That is, over time, Asian and Asian Americans may come to see him/herself as representative of a larger community against whom racism is directed, regardless of ethnicity or country of origin.

Final Questions:

Effects of racism on SOC mental health, how it compares in public schools vs private? What is the importance of successfully developing a racial identity? What does an unhealthy development of racial identity look like?

Part 2 to honors project: What does LREI, a private white institution lack when it comes to developing the racial identity of its students? How do the effects of a predominantly white public school compare to a predominantly white private school?

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