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Ethnic and Racial Identity During Adolescence and Into Young Adulthood: An Integrated Conceptualization

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Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group

Abstract

Although ethnic and racial identity (ERI) are central to the normative development of youth of color, there have been few efforts to bring scholars together to discuss the theoretical complexities of these constructs and provide a synthesis of existing work. The Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group was assembled for this purpose. This article provides an overview of the interface of ERI with developmental and contextual issues across development, with an emphasis on adolescence and young adulthood. It proposes a metaconstruct to capture experiences that reflect both individuals' ethnic background and their racialized experiences in a specific sociohistorical context. Finally, it presents milestones in the development of ERI across developmental periods.

Research on ethnic and racial identity (ERI) has grown rapidly in the past several decades (see Schwartz et al., in press), and ERI are increasingly being considered central to the normative development of ethnic and racial minority youth (Lee Williams, Tolan, Durkee, Francois, & Anderson, 2012). However, there have been few efforts to bring scholars together to discuss the theoretical complexities of each of these constructs, provide a synthesis of the existing theoretical work, and provide specific recommendations for how the field might move forward with respect to the conceptualization of these constructs (for an exception, see Ponterotto & Mallinckrodt, 2007). The Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century Study Group was assembled to address this challenge. This article provides an analysis of the interface of ERI with salient developmental and contextual issues from early childhood to young adulthood, with the goal of highlighting key milestones in the development of ERI over time (see Table 1). We focus more heavily on the developmental period of adolescence due to our focus on ethnic and racial *identity* rather than *identification* (distinction elaborated upon next).

Prior to describing developmental milestones, we clarify our use of terminology. After extensive deliberation, the consensus among Study Group members was that we are recommending against making the distinctions that are sometimes made between racial identity and ethnic identity and, instead, propose a metaconstruct: ERI. Most often, whether racial or ethnic is used to describe identity is based on nominal conventions: Racial identity is used, for example, when the groups being investigated are considered racial (e.g., Black) and ethnic identity when the group is considered ethnic (e.g., Latinos) or, if the measure used is labeled as racial (e.g., Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) or ethnic (e.g., Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, Phinney, 1992). Importantly, most racial identity and ethnic identity measures were not designed to be exclusively racial or ethnic, respectively (see Parham & Helms, 1981; the Racial Identity Attitude Scale as an exception). Unsurprisingly, there is considerable empirical and conceptual overlap (e.g., Casey-Cannon, Coleman, Knudtson, & Velazquez, 2011; Cokley, 2005). Studies (e.g., Quintana, 1998) have demonstrated that development of children's and youth's conceptions of ethnicity and race follow similar trajectories. Moreover, ethnic identity development is stimulated by processes that are typically considered racial in nature (Pahl & Way, 2006), and conversely, racial identity attitudes have been shown to be associated with embracing cultural traditions (Cokley, 2005).

Furthermore, the distinctions that North American researchers have historically made between racial identity and ethnic identity may be outdated and overly parochial relative to new generations of youth whose experiences regarding their identities may reflect a more global perspective (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007) and intersections of identities (Warner & Shields, 2013). For example, a racially Black Dominican adolescent may reflect on her experiences of racial oppression in the United States, her ethnic heritage from the Dominican Republic, and the cultural traditions (e.g., Spanish language) that have been passed down when identifying as Dominican. In addition, there are important cultural features associated with an individual's identification with being African American that are lost when the identity is considered racial and not ethnic or cultural (Cokley, 2005). Consistent with this, Cross and Cross (2008) argued that youth do not keep separate the racial from ethnic or cultural components of their identities in their lived experiences, and

suggested that the term racial–ethnic–cultural identity may be more appropriate when attempting to accurately represent the psychological experiences of youth of color forming an identity.

In understanding how youth develop an ERI, we are interested in sociohistorical demographic distinctions and the processes that result based on youth’s experiences as they relate to specific ethnic or racial groups. These identities refer to both (a) racialized experiences due to the ascription of categories such as “Black,” “Asian,” “American Indian,” and “Hispanic or Latino” and (b) the connection and experiences that individuals have based on their particular cultural or ethnic ancestry. We recognize that the constructs of race and ethnicity are distinct and that the long U.S. history of racializing social groups makes it particularly important to recognize that racial categorizations play an important role in the meaning-making process of identity formation. Nevertheless, available evidence suggests considerable overlap between ERI (Casey-Cannon et al., 2011) and their links with adjustment (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). Thus, we propose the term ERI to capture experiences that reflect both individuals’ ethnic background and their racialized experiences as a member of a particular group in the context of the United States. Importantly, similar processes may be relevant in other countries (for a cross-cultural perspective, see Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), but because the social construction of race and ethnicity is bound to the sociohistorical context, and because each nation has a unique history for specific groups, specificity is important in this regard.

We define ERI as a multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic–racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time. The Study Group conceptualized and operationalized this meta-construct based on extensive discussions of existing models of ethnic identity and racial identity (e.g., Cokley, 2005; Cross, 1995; Knight, Bernal, Garza, & Cota, 1993; Phinney, 1992; Quintana, 1998; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bámaca-Gómez, 2004). Within this conceptualization, certain components of ERI reflect *content* and others reflect *process* (Phinney, 1993), and the two are deeply intertwined (Cross, 1971, 1991; Phinney, 1992; Quintana, 1994). Content includes, for example, attitudes and beliefs about one’s group and its relations to other groups, whereas process reflects the mechanisms by which individuals explore, form, and maintain their ERI. Because we approach ERI from multiple perspectives, we draw from broad theoretical traditions including, but not limited to, cognitive-developmental theories (e.g., Piaget & Inhelder, 1966/1973), Erikson’s (1968) theory of psychosocial development, Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory, and nigrescence theory (e.g., Cross, 1971). Thus, ERI does not exclusively refer to the self-categorization or ethnic–racial identification label that an individual chooses (e.g., Latino, Puerto Rican, African American, Chinese), although we do agree that the process of ERI can lead to different choices in self-categorization (e.g., Nishina, Bellmore, Witkow, & Nyland-Gibson, 2010). Similarly, ERI does not merely reflect an endpoint of how one chooses to self-identify, what one believes, or how one feels about one’s group, but also the process by which one arrives at such self-identification choices at any given moment or period of life. Finally, ERI is an interaction between maturation and context, and thus takes different forms and has different meanings across the life span. As depicted in Table 1, the components of

ERI that are relevant at specific developmental periods can be organized with attention to whether they primarily reflect the content of one's ERI or the process of developing an ERI.

In the sections that follow, we first present how the components of ERI can be understood and organized along a developmental timeline, and which features of development may facilitate or prompt development of certain aspects of ERI. Second, we note that the construction of ERI is not only developmentally grounded but also shaped by the social-environmental contexts within which these identities are developing. We discuss various contexts within which individuals' lives are embedded and how they inform the development of ERI. Finally, we conclude by suggesting that, given the extent to which ethnicity and race are interwoven in young people's identity constructions, a critical empirical distinction that needs to be made in future work is with respect to the specific components of ERI (e.g., exploration, centrality) that operate in any given situation during a specified developmental period.

The discussion that follows represents the Study Group's consensus regarding the central components that capture ERI formation from early adolescence through emerging adulthood. Accordingly, the constructs on which we focus next are not *exclusively* applicable to ethnic identity or racial identity, but rather reflect those considered by the Study Group to be essential to understanding ERI among youth. Moreover, the aspects of ERI we delineate next are applicable, conceptually speaking, to both ethnic identity and racial identity formation; however, to date some aspects have been empirically examined only in relation to either ethnic or racial identity.

ERI Formation: A Developmental Timeline

With respect to *developmental* influences on ERI formation, cognitive capabilities and socioemotional dynamics play a large role in determining what components of ERI are developing and salient during a particular developmental period. To date, there has been a dearth of discussion of the interrelation of ERI and other normative developmental processes (for a recent comment on this issue, see Lee Williams et al., 2012). Individuals reach many social and cognitive milestones during childhood and adolescence, and knowledge of these developmental periods helps to organize an understanding of how and when the different components of ERI begin to emerge.

We specifically use the term ethnic-racial *identification* to describe ethnic-racial self-labeling and identifications during childhood, and reserve the term *ERI* for the developmental process that occurs subsequent to childhood. As noted in Table 1, the ERI components that are particularly salient during the developmental periods of early to middle childhood are ethnic-racial labeling (self and other), ethnic-racial knowledge (including behaviors), and ethnic-racial constancy, which largely capture the process of ethnic identification (for works covering the periods of early to middle childhood, see Aboud, 1988; Clark & Clark, 1950; Knight et al., 1993; Quintana, 1998; Semaj, 1980; Spencer, 1984). These experiences in childhood expose and prime children for ERI formation, and their advanced cognitive and socioemotional development in adolescence enables the interpretive and meaning-making capacities that result in ERI (Cross & Cross, 2008). Given

our focus on *identity* in the current article, we elaborate next on the developmental periods of adolescence and young adulthood.

Early to Late Adolescence

As noted above, ERI formation during early to middle childhood largely involves children developing the ability to identify and categorize themselves and others according to ethnic and racial labels; however, during adolescence, with increased social-cognitive maturity and the ability to understand how one's race-ethnicity impacts individuals' life chances and social experiences, the process of ERI involves exploring one's race-ethnicity and internalizing values from one's ethnic and racial groups (Quintana, 1998). Just as adolescence is a time when personal identity emerges from a synthesis and exploration of sets of potential goals, values, and beliefs (Erikson, 1968), ERI develops during adolescence from children's ethnic-racial self-identifications that developed in childhood.

Most research on ERI has focused on adolescence, which is not surprising given that Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development identifies the adolescent years as critical for identity formation. Although the content of ERI during adolescence involves some of the features from childhood (e.g., centrality, affect), it also evolves to include an understanding of a *common fate or shared destiny* based on ethnic or racial group membership, and that these shared experiences differ from the experiences of individuals from other groups (Syed & Azmitia, 2008). These dimensions of ERI content are not relevant during earlier developmental periods, as children typically do not have the social exposure combined with the cognitive capabilities to understand other people's perspectives (Quintana, 1994). Indeed, scholars have suggested that it is not until adolescence that individuals possess the abstract and counterfactual thinking skills necessary to consider identity issues (Marcia, 1994).

With respect to specific cognitive abilities, youth's increasingly sophisticated perspective-taking abilities have direct implications for ERI development during adolescence (see Quintana, 1994). Adolescents have the capacity to merge their personal identity or sense of self with their reference group (Cross & Cross, 2008) and develop an ethnic group consciousness (Quintana, 1998). Individuals in late adolescence and young adulthood possess more advanced perspective-taking skills compared to young or middle adolescents, demonstrating an age-related developmental trend (Moshman, 2011). In terms of ERI, these new cognitive capacities give adolescents the ability to explore what ERI means to them with respect to their ethnic or racial reference group, apart from what it means to their parents. Given these changes, the construct of ERI *exploration* or *search* is particularly salient during this developmental period (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Exploration captures the aspect of ERI in which youth seek information or are exposed to information about their ethnic-racial group. Exploration can consist of thinking about one's ethnicity, talking with others about it, and participating in activities that represent one's ethnic group (Syed et al., 2013). It represents a quest for knowledge and understanding about one's ethnic and racial heritage. This increased awareness can help individuals as they grapple with answering the question "Who am I?" which is considered a key developmental task of adolescence.

The construct of exploration was central in Phinney's (1990) seminal work on ethnic identity, in which she extended Erikson's (1968) and Marcia's (1994) theoretical work on personal identity to the domain of ethnic identity. Erikson suggests it is through exploration of options, followed by firm commitments to a career choice and a set of core beliefs that individuals come to achieve a secure identity. Marcia operationalized Erikson's ideas for empirical research by delineating four identity statuses (i.e., achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion). Achievement refers to commitments enacted following a period of exploration, moratorium denotes active identity exploration in the absence of commitments, foreclosure represents commitments made without much prior exploration, and diffusion represents an absence of commitments coupled with an absence of systematic exploration. According to Phinney, ethnic identity is a process that takes place over time as individuals explore and make decisions concerning the meaningfulness of their ethnicity in their lives. Individuals achieve a sense of ethnic identity only after they have explored their ethnicity and what it means to them, and after they have accepted and internalized their ethnicity (i.e., enacted commitments).

Although the performance ramifications of an achieved status are implied rather than made explicit, one line of work has attempted to merge the ERI socialization literature with an identity-performance perspective based on Goffman's (1959) concept of the presentation of self in everyday life. ERI socialization studies (e.g., Hughes et al., 2006) show parents preparing their youth for what Boykin (1986) calls encounters and experiences with (a) discrimination and stigmatization; (b) activities within the mainstream such as schooling, employment, and health care (as examples); and (c) everyday life within one's ethnic-racial community. Youth are expected to develop transactional competencies in each of these areas, meaning that a mature achieved identity status is linked to competence in the execution of a range (repertoire) of identity enactments.

Increased functional autonomy and movement toward independence (e.g., being legally of age to obtain a driver's license and to be employed) is an additional social-developmental change during adolescence that is pertinent to ERI development (Lerner, Freund, DeStefanis, & Habermas, 2001). The construction of a peer group that is distinct from the adult world is an important manifestation of increased autonomy (Brown, 1990). Because of this increase in functional autonomy and the influence of peers in early adolescence, in particular, younger adolescents may rely more on peers for constructing ERI than do older adolescents. Increased resistance to peer pressure beginning in middle adolescence (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007) and increased independence in decision making, however, may lead middle and older adolescents toward more exploration about their ethnicity, rather than relying solely on tacit agreement with parental or peer socialization influences.

Other social demands and transitions, including exposure to discrimination, different groups of people, and ethnic clubs, increase during adolescence and likely stimulate exploration (Phinney, 1990), contestation, negotiation, or reexamination (e.g., Cross, 1971, 1991) of one's ERI. Notably, the school context can play a significant role in the ERI formation process and in the extent to which ERI is linked to adjustment, as evidenced by prior work focused on ERI and the ethnic composition of schools (e.g., Kiang, Witkow, Baldelomar, & Fuligni, 2010). Changes in school context (e.g., more self-segregation by ethnicity, more

exposure to diversity) can lead to increases in relevance of ethnic identity in early to middle adolescence (Huang & Stormshak, 2011). For instance, Huang and Stormshak (2011) found that among a diverse sample of ethnic minority youth followed from sixth to ninth grades, the most common pattern of change in the sample was one where youth evidenced an increasing trajectory of ethnic identity (operationalized as a composite of exploration, resolution, and affirmation) over the 4-year period. Indeed, ERI formation during this developmental period consists of developing a greater *certainty* in identification with one's ethnic and racial group even when there are discrepancies in racial and ethnic experiences, such as discrimination and racism that could lead a person to question one's ERI. In this respect, certainty is an elaboration on ethnic labeling and constancy that develops with refinement of cognitive abilities and is reinforced by family and the emergence of peer influences.

Not surprisingly, the increased exposure to extrafamilial socialization experiences, coupled with the expanded social demands and transitions that accompany adolescence, can make ethnicity-race more salient to youth. *Salience* specifically refers to the extent to which one's ethnicity-race is relevant to one's self-concept in a particular situation; importantly, salience is determined by the interface of the context of the situation and the individual's tendency to define himself or herself in terms of ethnicity-race (Sellers et al., 1998). Thus, salience of ethnicity-race varies across individuals within the same situation, and will vary within individuals across different situations (Yip, Douglass, & Shelton, in press). In a study including a diverse sample, Yip (in press) found that adolescents reporting an achieved identity (high commitment and high exploration) reported the highest level of salience across situations. As individuals spend more time in school and work contexts and away from their families, more opportunities arise for issues regarding ethnicity-race to be raised—hence the importance of ERI salience during adolescence.

Once race–ethnicity is made salient to youth, adolescents may begin to incorporate these experiences into their self-concept. ERI *centrality* refers to the extent to which a person considers his or her race to be an important aspect of his or her self-concept (Sellers et al., 1998). Prior work has found that, as adolescents report increased ethnic centrality, they tend to report increases in affirmation and exploration (Kiang et al., 2010). Kiang et al. (2010) suggest that to the extent that their ethnicity is central to their lives, adolescents are increasingly motivated to explore their ERI and feel more connected to their ethnic group. Similarly, Yip, Seaton, and Sellers (2006) found that individuals classified as achieved status (i.e., high exploration, high commitment) in their ERI tended to report the highest levels of centrality. Narrative-based ERI research is consistent with this corpus of findings based on survey measures, demonstrating that youth in the achieved status are most likely to retell stories about either discriminatory experiences or moments when they felt particularly connected to their cultural background (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2010).

Another important component of ERI that has been studied extensively during the period of adolescence pertains to the positive affect that individuals feel toward their ethnic–racial group (see Rivas-Drake et al., in press). This affect is referred to variously as affirmation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004), private regard (Sellers et al., 1998), and group esteem (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). Regardless of the specific term used, the positive affect that

individuals feel toward their ethnic–racial group is a critical component of ERI and has been demonstrated to be associated with positive adjustment across different developmental periods (Rivas-Drake et al., in press). Furthermore, ERI affirmation tends to increase during the transition from early to middle adolescence, particularly for Latino and African American youth (French et al., 2006). Interestingly, research suggests that a steeper increase in affirmation is evident during school transitions, such as the transition from elementary to junior high school and from junior high to high school (French et al., 2006). Although researchers have not examined longitudinal changes in salience during these same developmental and transitional periods, it is possible that increases in the salience of race–ethnicity that tend to accompany these transitions may drive the increases in affirmation that emerge during these times of transition.

In their study of African Americans, Yip et al. (2006) found that individuals in the ethnic identity achieved status reported the highest levels of private regard across all four ethnic identity statuses. Thus, those in the achieved status felt most positively about their African American ethnicity. However, unlike the personal identity literature, where commitment is almost universally linked with positive psychosocial adjustment (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, & Pollock, 2008), positive feelings about race–ethnicity may not necessarily reflect better adjustment. In fact, the links between affirmation and adjustment may be dependent on salience, centrality, and the specific situational context. In one study of Latino early adolescents, for example, higher levels of affirmation were associated with decreases in academic adjustment from seventh to eighth grades (Umaña-Taylor, Wong, Gonzales, & Dumka, 2012).

Although positive affect has typically been considered as a promotive factor for youth adjustment, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2012) suggested that during middle school, when academic tracking becomes more prominent, Latino adolescents may begin noticing that Latinos are being segregated into lower achieving tracks. This awareness may result in poorer academic adjustment among Latino adolescents who have relatively more positive feelings about their ethnicity—put differently, youth who feel a stronger connection with a stereotyped group may begin to underperform, consistent with the stereotype about their group. Thus, it is important to consider that the multiple components of ERI that become important during this developmental period must be studied in tandem, along with attention to features of the social context, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the processes at work and their links to adjustment.

A related but distinct form of affect relevant to ERI is public regard. *Public regard* refers to the extent to which youth feel that others (individuals, groups, and the broader society) view their ethnic–racial group positively or negatively (Sellers et al., 1998). Public regard takes shape as youth develop a more advanced Piagetian thinking style of formal operations, including metacognition or the ability to reflect upon one's own thoughts and behaviors (Moshman, 2011). Public regard tends to operate in a more independent way from the other ERI components. That is, it does not uniformly correlate positively with centrality and positive regard. There also is some evidence to suggest that the association between public and private regard varies by ethnic–racial group. Among African American youth and young adults, there tends to be either a zero-order or small positive relation (Scottham, Sellers, &

Nguyen, 2008), whereas public and private regard are more positively correlated for Asian Americans and Whites (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994).

Similar to other ERI components, public regard is associated with perceived discrimination, both as an outcome and as a protective factor. In a longitudinal study of African American adolescents, Seaton, Yip, and Sellers (2009) found that perceived discrimination was negatively related to ERI public regard 1 year later. Interestingly, African American adolescents who reported low public regard demonstrated relatively weaker associations between perceived discrimination and psychological adjustment compared to their counterparts reporting high public regard, suggesting a buffering effect (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). In addition, perceptions of how one's ethnic-racial group is viewed or valued may encompass positive and negative stereotypes that can impact other aspects of functioning. For instance, Rivas-Drake (2011) found public regard to correlate positively with academic adjustment among Latino adolescents.

The awareness and internalization of positive and negative stereotypes is a unique aspect of public regard that common ERI measures do not currently assess. Stereotype threat, which is an outgrowth of stereotype consciousness (McKown & Weinstein, 2003), can be construed as a specific expression of public regard in which an individual is at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one's ethnic-racial group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The internalization of positive stereotypes also reflects public regard. For example, the internalization of the model minority myth is a particularly relevant expression of public regard for Asian American youth (Yoo, Burrola, & Steger, 2010). Yoo et al. (2010) found that belief in the stereotype that Asian Americans are more achievement oriented is related to more positive affect in one's ERI, whereas the belief that Asian Americans have unrestricted mobility is related negatively to the positive affect component of ERI. For youth who develop low public regard during late adolescence and emerging adulthood, *identity self-denial* in which there is an attempt to hide or minimize one's ethnic-racial background, including being afraid to express feelings about the in-group (Driedger, 1976), may emerge. Identity self-denial arguably may be a combination of low positive affect (private regard, affirmation) and low centrality or importance, even when there is high certainty in this identity. Self-denial also may reflect low certainty, such as the case of some Korean Americans who were adopted internationally into White families (Tuan & Shiao, 2011). In short, identity self-denial may occur when group dynamics, including greater awareness of negative stereotypes, necessitate or impel individuals to deny their ERI.

Finally, an experience unique to adolescence, which may further inform how ERI unfolds, is the onset of puberty. Berzonsky and Lombardo (1983) found an association between pubertal timing and personal identity crises status. We speculate that this association also may hold true for ERI development. In an unpublished dissertation, Song (2009) found a significant negative correlation between age of menarche and weight preoccupation among adopted Korean American adolescent girls. Menarche, however, was not associated with a measure of racial discomfort (e.g., I feel ashamed about my race, I wish I was a different race) for this specific ethnic-racial group. Pubertal changes may prompt individuals to be more self-conscious and may raise concerns regarding body image (Franko & Striegel-Moore, 2002). These changes may result in youth engaging in increased comparisons with

ethnic in- and out-group members, as a point of reference for understanding the changes they are experiencing. Given the significance of pubertal changes during adolescence, this is an area in which empirical studies are sorely needed.

Young Adulthood to Adulthood Proper

Turning to another developmental period of interest stressed in a traditional perspective on identity and self-concept, a life-span approach to ERI must include attention to how this process continues to unfold through young adulthood and into adulthood proper. Until recently, there were relatively few studies focused on ERI development in young adulthood, with the vast majority of studies focusing on adolescence. There is now some evidence that ERI during adulthood entails a continuation of the processes that were salient during adolescence (Syed & Azmitia, 2009), and that ERI components similarly inform adjustment during adulthood (e.g., Bair & Steele, 2010).

It is important to note that a majority of the ERI research with young adults has been conducted with individuals attending college (for an exception, see Umaña-Taylor, Zeiders, & Updegraff, 2013). Accordingly, many studies have examined the degree to which features of the college context may be related to ERI development (e.g., Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004). College is often referred to as a consciousness-raising experience, as the diversity in peers, coursework, and social spheres often prompt individuals to think about their ERI in new ways (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008). Due to greater maturity and potentially broader perspectives based on more extensive life experiences, ERI during this period begins to involve greater exploration, deeper reflection, and increased flexibility (Azmitia et al., 2008). Indeed, the personal identity literature suggests that identity development becomes more focused yet flexible during the adult years (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992).

The burgeoning literature on ERI in young adulthood suggests that *complexity* may be a distinguishing feature of this development period. Whereas ERI during childhood is concerned with ethnic categorization, knowledge, and behaviors, and ERI during adolescence is focused on affective, cognitive, and exploratory processes that imbue ERI with a sense of personal meaning, ERI during young adulthood reflects an expansion of the life domains in which ERI may be potentially relevant (Azmitia et al., 2008; Syed, 2010). Unlike other developmental periods that are characterized by dramatic changes in cognitive abilities that determine which components of ERI will emerge at certain developmental periods, during adulthood most cognitive abilities are fully online. What is probably most unique about this developmental phase, however, is that individuals begin to think about the intersections among their multiple important identity domains, consistent with notions from Erikson (1968). No longer is ERI considered in isolation, but also how it intersects with gender identity, social class identity, national identity, career identity, and political identity, as examples (Bowleg, 2008; Syed, 2010). Thus, over time, ERI becomes increasingly integrated with other aspects of the self to create a coherent overall identity (Erikson, 1968).

One of the ways that individuals develop a sense of personal coherence is by constructing elaborate narratives that help them make sense of the complexity of their identity (McAdams, 2001). These narratives are expected to continuously evolve, and the content

and meaning making of these narratives will be largely informed by the features of the multiple contexts (e.g., family, work, community) in which individuals' lives are embedded (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). It is also possible that this process of identity coherence will cause individuals to become increasingly rigid in their views of race and ethnicity, particularly given the social context within which they were raised and their educational and occupational experiences. Thus, there may be different paths based on the broader ecological contexts and life experiences of individuals.

As noted by Oyserman and Destin (2010), identities are scripts (meaning-making systems) that guide action, doing, and living life. In the course of a 14-day daily diary study (Strauss & Cross, 2005), Black participants enacted identity protection (buffering) when faced with insulting and discriminatory events and experiences, identity shifting (code-switching) when participants found themselves moving in and out of contexts scripted by mainstream norms and expectations, and identity intimacy and friendship (bridging) reflected the negotiation of friendships and bonding across racial (i.e., ERI) boundaries. Buffering, code switching, and bridging underscored the management of intergroup relations, while other enactments revealed intergroup transactional competence. In the same study, activities that seemed to bind and connect the person to other (in-group) members as well as share in the group's culture were labeled attachment bonding. Other transactional activities were connected to negative exchanges within one's group and labeled as within-group-buffering. Cross, Smith, and Payne (2002) theorize that the enactments do not reflect fragmentation; rather, it is proposed that an integrated ERI sense of self is expressed differently in accordance to the contours of the situation.

We further suggest that one's ERI during adulthood becomes part of the person's psychological platform for negotiating employment and career choices, continuing formal education, community and political participation, cultural activities, and partner intimacy reticulated by commitment leading to family formation. This foundational sense of self is referenced as the "achieved identity" to signify that it has been selected (commitment), explored (moratorium), and internalized (achieved). A lifespan perspective (Cross & Cross, 2008) suggests that between early adulthood through advanced aging, there are multiple ERI trajectories, most of which have yet to be adequately theorized and researched. However, one pathway that has been the subject of considerable scrutiny is adult identity transformations or dramatic ERI-related attitude change. Starting in the late 1960s through to the present, practically every important and historically marginalized group—gays and lesbians, women, Native Americans, Latinas-Latinos, the disabled, and African Americans—has included in its broader cultural narrative a discussion of how adult members of their group experience ERI-related epiphanies (e.g., Cass, 1979; Gill & Cross, 2010). One could readily make the argument that the discourse on ERI transformation in adults *preceded* the current emphasis, as explored above, on traditional identity development.

ERI-related epiphanies are linked but not explicated by traditional developmental theory. The link can be found in the starting point for the epiphany: the adult, foundational, achieved identity, as captured in Erikson's (1950) notion of maturity and Marcia's (2002) concept of achieved identity. Many adult members of ethnic-racial minority groups enter adulthood with an identity that is psychologically functional and positive, yet culturally limited and

even corrupted with miseducation (i.e., views about the group thought to be true that are in fact negative stereotypes; e.g., Cross & Cross, 2008; Neville, Spanierman, & Doan, 2006). For example, an ERI member who embraces a strong, positive but assimilated frame of reference may possess a social identity that is limited in its capacity to engage cultural–political challenges faced by the group. Indeed, research on colorblind perspectives held by ethnic–racial minority group members (Neville et al., 2006) and Perkins’s (2010) work on false consciousness both point to ethnic–racial minority group members who are at risk for identity change.

Many ERI models for young adults have been proposed for specific ethnic–racial groups and for people of color in general. For instance, Kim (2001) has constructed an adult change model applicable to persons of Asian American heritage, Helms (1990) has proffered a model for people of color in general, and perhaps the most deeply theorized and heavily researched model is the Cross model on psychological nigrescence (Cross, 1971, 1991). All such models are content rich and descriptive, with generic psychological dimensions embedded in stages depicting identity change rather than made explicit. The models tend to describe identity change in five stages, starting with a description of the adult, achieved identity that will become the object of change (pre-encounter stage); a stage depicting events or experiences that trigger an epiphany, aha-moment, radicalization, and extreme consciousness raising (encounter stage); a period of in-betweenness wherein the old and new sense of self are in open conflict for dominance of the self-concept (immersion–emersion stage); a phase signaling resolution and habituation (internalization stage); and a culminating phase wherein the new identity becomes a platform for long-term commitment to the group, its social challenges and problems, and dedication to the study, perpetuation, and sustainment of the group’s culture and history.

Rather than Phinney or Erikson, the epiphany models are guided by Festinger’s (1957) dissonance theory, Fanon’s (1994) discourse on cultural liberation, Rokeach’s (1968) writings on attitude–value change, and Freire’s (1970) conscientização (i.e., critical consciousness). These models have been the focus of over 40 years of empirical research (see Worrell, 2012); however, here we limit the discussion to a few findings that shed light on points made earlier. Unlike Phinney’s model, which tends to underplay the importance of content relative to process, nigrescence theory suggests that content is core, as it decodes the meaning-making system that guides the person’s everyday choices in life. Nigrescence research shows that ERI members with an adult achieved identity characterized by an assimilationist frame evidence as much psychological integrity (e.g., self-esteem, ego strength, general personality strength) as other ethnic–racial minority group members for whom race, ethnicity, and culture are more important (Cross, 1991; Worrell, 2012; Yip & Cross, 2004). However, ERI members who are more attached to their cultural group show greater cultural involvement and participation. Put differently, embracing one’s culture, race, and ethnicity may not provide any particular psychological advantage over an assimilated identity. When the focus of the outcome is on the group and not just the individual, an ERI member embracing a social identity script for which race, culture, and ethnicity are important is more likely than the assimilated to struggle with the group, celebrate with the group, and work to sustain the group’s heritage and culture (Cross, 1991; Yip & Cross,

2004). Such findings call for more studies stressing cultural participatory outcomes in addition to the collection of traditional outcomes (e.g., self-esteem).

ERI Formation: Considering the Social Environmental Context

In addition to considering how ERI unfolds along a developmental timeline, attention to the social environmental context within which individuals' lives are embedded is critical to understanding how ERI develops and the consequences of ERI for individuals' adjustment. Drawing from social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), individuals are embedded within not just one social context, but rather within many proximal (e.g., family, peer, community) and distal (e.g., local, national, global) contexts. ERI must, therefore, be understood within the context of the many experiences, relationships, and institutions that individuals encounter across the life span. As noted above, identities emerge and develop as a consequence of dynamic interactions between the individual and her or his social context (Erikson, 1968). Each context presents a range of affordances, and because individuals' identities are developing and evolving in response to daily interactions with others (Erikson, 1968), specific features of the social environmental context are critical to consider to gain a more comprehensive understanding of ERI. In particular, the support versus stress presented by given social-contextual forces likely determines the ways in which the various ERI processes unfold.

The family is perhaps the most important proximal social context that guides ERI formation (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). Indeed, the family is viewed as critical for helping children learn values and behaviors that facilitate their adaptation to a particular environment (Parke & Buriel, 1998). Many studies have identified familial ethnic socialization as a critical influence on ERI formation (e.g., Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, & Guimond, 2009). Furthermore, studies with ethnic minority youth have noted that close and warm relationships with parents are associated with more well-developed ERI components (e.g., Huang & Stormshak, 2011).

Influences outside the family context have received less attention but are nonetheless critically important during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Examples include peers, both in and out of school (Kiang, Harter, & Whitesell, 2007; Yip et al., in press), mentors (Hurd, Sánchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012), and neighbors (Rivas-Drake & Witherspoon, in press). Drawing on social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) theories, it is necessary to acknowledge that the importance and salience of ERI formation is predicated upon a societal context that makes ethnicity and race particularly relevant for those who are members of the numerical minority—largely through individual and institutional discrimination and marginalization. Given the increased amount of time that youth spend outside of the family context (in school, with peers, and at work) during early adolescence and beyond, it is critical to understand the role that nonfamilial socialization agents and contexts play in the process of ERI formation. Indeed, Kiang et al. (2007) found that youth's ethnic identity varied based on whether they were engaging with same-ethnicity or different-ethnicity peers. Similarly, research has found that among Latino adolescents, ethnic identity affirmation may increase significantly from middle to late adolescence for youth attending predominantly

White schools (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009), but that ethnic identity affirmation may not change over time among youth attending schools where the majority of students are from ethnic minority groups (Pahl & Way, 2006). In addition, among Asian American adolescents, contact with other Asians was associated with more positive feelings about ethnicity (i.e., private regard) among youth attending a predominantly White or racially heterogeneous school, whereas for youth attending a predominantly Asian school, there was no association between same-ethnicity contact and private regard (Yip et al., in press). For youth attending schools that are predominantly White, ethnicity may be particularly salient (because of one's status as a numerical minority). In turn, being a member of a numerical minority group may prompt increases in ERI affirmation as a way of preserving one's self-concept as a member of a devalued ethnic group (Schwartz, Vignoles, Brown, & Zagefka, in press). Finally, in a study of friendship pairs of emerging adults, Syed and Juan (2012) found that levels of ethnic identity exploration and commitment tended to be similar among friends, and that this similarity could be accounted for by the frequency with which they talk with their friends—but not family—about ethnicity-related experiences. These findings underscore the need to systematically examine social-contextual forces that may initiate and maintain specific ERI processes.

In addition to considering social relationships as an important context for ERI development, it is important to consider that the specific actors and interactions present within any particular context are likely to engage or disengage certain dimensions of an individual's ERI. As noted by Brewer (1991) in her discussion of optimal distinctiveness theory, individuals' self-conceptions with respect to their various social identities increase or decrease in salience based on the specific interactive context in which the person lives her or his daily life. Brewer notes that individuals have a need for both deindividuation (i.e., feeling connected to something) and distinctiveness (i.e., feeling unique), and that social identities can simultaneously satisfy both needs. Specifically, the need for deindividuation is satisfied by identifying with a specific set of social groups, whereas the need for distinctiveness is satisfied by the ability to make out-group comparisons (i.e., differentiating oneself and other in-group members from members of out-groups). It is only possible to delineate the various out-groups once one has designated an in-group to which she or he belongs (Brewer, 1991). With respect to ERI, the demarcation between deindividuation and distinctiveness is useful because it facilitates an understanding of the reasons why ERI may be salient and adaptive in certain contexts but not in others.

Given the focus placed on ethnicity-race within U.S. society, it is not surprising that social identities relevant to ethnicity-race are especially central for ethnic and racial minority individuals—being a member of a seemingly permanent out-group (cf. perpetual foreigner syndrome; Armenta et al., 2013; Chernyn & Monin, 2005) subjects the person to intentional and unintentional acts of discrimination, hostility, and marginalization. However, optimal distinctiveness theory also helps to focus our attention on the particular context of interest and understand why, in contexts where individuals are a numerical majority, ERI may be less relevant because the need for deindividuation may need to be satisfied with a different social identity that is more salient in that context and that provides a more readily accessible out-group comparison. Indeed, research has shown that in such situations, adolescents make

distinctions based on other social categories (e.g., immigration status, socioeconomic status, language ability; Lee, 2009).

We have provided examples of proximal and distal contexts, and how the characteristics of these contexts can shape ERI components at different developmental periods. A final point is that there are events or experiences that are less universal, but critical for—and should be considered in attempts to understand—ERI development. Notably, migration history must be considered when studying ERI development (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). To date, migration history has largely been studied in terms of generation status. Research has documented that immigrant generation is an important sociodemographic characteristic that can modify the process by which ERI develops (e.g., Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). The experiences of the U.S.-born second generation (and those who came to the United States as young children) are often different from those of individuals who migrated as older children or adolescents. For example, Tsai, Ying, and Lee (2000) found that “being Chinese” and “being American” were unrelated for American-born Chinese Americans but negatively related for immigrant Chinese Americans.

Age of immigration also plays an important role in ERI development and acculturation processes in general (Rumbaut, 2004). Rumbaut (2004) differentiated between immigrant children who arrived between 0–5 years of age, 6–12 years of age, and 13 years of age and older, arguing that these three age groups are at distinct developmental life stages at the time of immigration and thus begin their adaptation processes, including ERI development, in very different social contexts. In Rumbaut’s (1994) seminal study on children of immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean in San Diego and Miami, he found that youth who lived in the United States for fewer than 10 years had distinct ethnic and racial identities compared to U.S.-born youth.

Reasons for immigration similarly must be taken into consideration when understanding ERI development. It can be argued that most ERI research on children from immigrant backgrounds presumes a voluntary legal migration history, which is a problematic approach to understanding immigration. Undocumented and involuntary immigrants constitute a significant portion of the immigrant population in the United States. The Department of Homeland Security estimates approximately 11.5 million unauthorized or undocumented immigrants currently reside in the country (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2012). It also is estimated that over 2.6 million refugees entered the United States between 1980 and 2011 (Immigration Statistics Yearbook, 2012, Table 13). In addition, there are 1.9 million resident nonimmigrants (i.e., temporary workers and families, students and families) with an estimated 20% under 18 years of age (Baker, 2012). Many of these resident nonimmigrant individuals have children born in this country and eventually become permanent residents and citizens themselves.

Children who were internationally adopted by American families reflect another understudied population whose migration histories are quite distinct from children raised in biological families (Lee, 2003). For instance, collective self-verification “refers to a more calibrated phenomenon whereby others verify a group member’s specific views of where he or she stands on group relevant attribute dimensions” (Chen, Taylor, & Jeung, 2006, p. 102).

This ERI process, which becomes more pronounced during adolescence and into young adulthood, can affect the development of ERI content components. In the example of Korean Americans adopted by White families, Korean Americans from immigrant Korean families may not perceive adopted Koreans as ethnically Korean enough, thus contributing to the latter group as self-identifying as Korean adoptees or adopted Koreans, instead of as Korean Americans (Meier, 1999). Similar processes operate within mixed-ethnic and linguistic minority groups, who may experience exclusion from a group with which they identify because of having multiple ethnic heritages or not speaking a language that is often linked to the ethnic group (e.g., Spanish among Latinos; Way, Santos, Niwa, & Kim-Gerver, 2008). These experiences can affect ERI development in unique ways that are not well understood in the field.

Migration history, however, is more relevant to groups who have a more recent history of immigration. Indeed, recent work with Mexican-origin late adolescents and young adults (i.e., Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013) found that the degree to which youth elicit ethnic socialization messages from their families, which then inform their ethnic identity exploration and resolution, varies considerably based on the family's immigrant status. For youth in immigrant families (i.e., parents born outside of the United States), ERI development was driven by family members' ethnic socialization efforts, whereas in families where parents were U.S.-born, family socialization efforts were driven by youth's ERI. Because race and ethnicity are social constructions and are contextually bound (Cokley, 2007), the degree of exposure to mainstream society is expected to play a large role in how ERI unfolds among individuals in more recent immigrant families.

These findings illustrate the need to consider the diversity introduced into the process of ERI development based on migration history. As noted by García Coll et al. (1996), the intragroup variability that exists within ethnic minority populations must be at the core of theoretical formulations that drive our understanding of child development. For example, pan-ethnic groups such as "Black," "Latino," and "Asian" mask significant within-group variability. The heading of "Black" includes African Americans, Jamaicans, and Nigerians, to name a few. The heading of "Latino" includes indigenous Mexicans, Black Dominicans, and Italian-descent Argentinians, for example. The heading of "Asian" includes Indians, Sri Lankans, and Koreans. Furthermore, U.S.-American youth increasingly come from multiple ethnic backgrounds, a trend that is rapidly increasing (Lee & Bean, 2004). Nearly 25 years ago, Phinney (1990) identified mixed-ethnic or biracial populations as a critical challenge to theory and research on ERI—not because such youth are problematic, but rather because they require researchers and policy makers to question many of the fundamental assumptions about race and ethnicity. To date, ERI development research has largely failed to step up to this challenge (see Syed, 2013). To be clear, the number of studies focusing on ERI among mixed-ethnic populations is increasing (e.g., Syed & Azmitia, 2008), but this important group remains undertheorized and underresearched.

Conclusion

In closing, members of the Study Group concluded that ERI represents a normative process composed of different components that come to ascendance at different points during

various developmental periods. Because different components of ERI are more or less relevant at different developmental stages, more research focusing on specific components and spanning a broad spectrum of developmental stages is necessary to better understand the processes that underlie ERI formation.

We also propose that a comprehensive understanding of ERI must consider the interface of multiple contexts. Context can be considered from a bioecological as well as temporal perspective. Bioecological contexts can include the individual, family, community, and society. Temporal contexts can include situational, developmental, and historical influences. The interactions between the individual and these contexts affect every aspect of ERI including its relation with other phenomena. Different outcomes are expected to emerge based on the interface of an individual's emerging developmental capabilities and specific properties of the social context. As such, understanding how ERI develops and how the different components of ERI are linked to adjustment must consider both the normative developmental progression of ERI and the socialenvironmental context in which the individual is embedded. As one example, most adolescents possess the social and cognitive capabilities to engage in identity exploration. As a result, stronger family ethnic socialization efforts may prompt increased exploration of ethnicity during adolescence, whereas if family ethnic socialization was similarly high in early childhood, increases in exploration may not be evident. On a related note, we urge scholars to consider bidirectional influences and to design studies in a manner that facilitates investigation of individuals as agentic actors in the processes of ERI formation, while also considering the influence of developmental, social, and environmental factors.

It is our position that future research on ERI must acknowledge the distinctions between process and content, and design studies (and operationalize study constructs) in a manner that enables the many distinctions to be measured validly and reliably (for a more elaborate discussion, see Schwartz et al., in press). An important direction for future research will be to understand how the process and content of ERI simultaneously unfold across the life span. Although a small number of studies have begun to examine the interplay between process and content (e.g., Seaton et al., 2009), only a few studies have meaningfully *distinguished* between ERI process and content (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2010; Yip, in press; Yip et al., 2006). Furthermore, it will be essential to understand the contextual forces that prime certain components of ERI to develop relatively quickly or slowly. A key limitation of existing work is the inability to capture the intricacies of the process of ERI as it unfolds. In addition to the limitations inherent in the measurement of ERI that has sometimes clouded the distinction between process and content (see discussion of limitations of existing ERI measures in Schwartz et al., in press), most ERI studies have been cross-sectional (Smith & Silva, 2011), and the few studies that have been longitudinal have been characterized by long time lags between time points (e.g., annual or semiannual assessments; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). Few studies have been designed to capture changes over smaller time scales for extended periods of time (e.g., daily diary methods over an extended period of time; see Torres & Ong, 2010, for a daily diary study that spanned 13 days). An in-depth analysis over an extended period of time is necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how process and content unfold over time and how they interact with one another. The development and interface of process and content features of ERI occur on a daily basis

(Yip, in press); thus, limiting assessments of these constructs to annual or semiannual observations significantly hinders an understanding of how process and content of ERI unfold across the life span. This is particularly of concern during childhood and adolescence, given the rapid pace at which changes in cognitive abilities take place during these developmental periods.

In addition, although we do not focus extensively on later developmental periods in the current article, we believe that an important avenue for future research will be to utilize a narrative approach with emerging and older adults to gain a more nuanced, and perhaps more comprehensive, understanding of how ERI develops across space and time (see McAdams, 2001; McLean et al., 2007; Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Generally, we believe innovative methods such as these are needed to provide tools with which to understand ERI, which is clearly a complex phenomenon.

Finally, ERI represents one way, but not the only way, to establish groundedness and coherence. For ERI to be adaptive for an individual, the identity should provide a good fit with the person's social, personal, and sociocultural contexts (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). Adaptive ethnic-racial identities are contextually influenced, and thus not *all* youth must engage in each ERI process to a prespecified extent (see Syed, 2010). Furthermore, it is important to situate ethnic-racial identities within the context of other identity domains. For example, ERI may interface with religious or spiritual identity for some groups but not for others (e.g., Kiang et al., 2010). What may be most critical is the extent to which youth's ERI narratives enable them to navigate everyday contextual demands while retaining a coherent sense of self.

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Table 1

Ethnic and Racial Identity (ERI) Development: Cognitive Milestones, Socioenvironmental Features, and Process and Content of ERI Development

	Early childhood	Middle childhood	Adolescence	Young adulthood / Emerging adulthood
Cognitive milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive ability • Refinement • Assimilation • Accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refinement of cognitive abilities (e.g., equity-based reasoning; social comparison, perspective-taking abilities) • Family • Peers • Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract thinking • Introspection • Metacognition • Further development of social-cognitive abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper reflection resulting in ability to construct narratives • Greater flexibility
Physiological			Puberty (body image)	
Social and environmental contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Peers • Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Peers • Social demands and transitions • Navigate expanded social world • Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social world may expand for some but contract for others based on social position • Emancipation • Media
Corresponding ERI components	<p><i>Process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation of self and other • Cognitive development applied to ethnicity and race <p><i>Content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic labeling • Ethnic knowledge • Ethnic constancy 	<p><i>Process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of bias • Understanding of social hierarchy <p><i>Content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salience (triggers) • Centrality (importance) • Affect • Own/in-group • Other/out-group • Public regard 	<p><i>Process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contestation • Elaboration • Negotiation • Internalization of cultural values • Exploratory/search • Collective self-verification <p><i>Content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public regard • Ideology • Affect (affirmation, private regard) • Salience • Centrality • Importance • Understanding of common fate/destiny • Identity self-denial • Certainty 	<p><i>Process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further elaboration, narrowing, and continuation of adolescence processes • Transformation (new possibilities) <p><i>Content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as adolescence