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School context and American Indian substance use

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ABSTRACT

The present study extends prior research exploring the role of school contextual factors in predicting individual adolescent substance use by examining how a school's racial composition is associated with American Indian adolescent tobacco and marijuana use. Using a subsample of 523 American Indian students from the restricted use Add Health data, we consider both individual and school contextual factors across 99 schools. Our results suggest that a school's racial composition is associated with individual tobacco and marijuana use among American Indian youth, but in different ways depending upon the substance. Our findings illustrate the importance of extending research on the correlates of substance use for racial and ethnic minorities beyond studies examining African-Americans and/or Hispanics.

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1. Introduction

Of the voluminous number of studies that have explored the risk and protective factors associated with adolescent substance use, scholars have only recently begun to fully consider the role of the larger social context in understanding individual substance use behaviors (Ennett & Haws, 2010; Galea, Rudenstine, & Vlahov, 2005). And while this research area has clearly blossomed in the past couple of decades, most of the studies exploring contextual and individual correlates of adolescent substance use have examined either non-Hispanic white populations, or white, Black, and (less frequently) Latino adolescent groups—other racial groups have largely been omitted from these multilevel studies. In particular, there exists only a few published studies that have examined the role of school characteristics on American Indian adolescent sub-

stance use, despite considerable evidence that American Indian adolescents may be more likely to engage in certain substance use behaviors (relative to others). Further, while research has established racial differences in adolescent substance use behaviors (e.g., Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2007), there exists a relatively sparse literature examining the role of contextual factors' influence on racial and ethnic minority substance use behaviors, including the potential role that the racial composition of schools may play in understanding such behavior (Cronley et al., 2012). In the present study, we expand prior research by examining the influence of the school contextual and individual factors in understanding substance use behaviors among a national sample of adolescents (the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health) with an exclusive focus on the American Indian students.

2. Background

While researchers have generated a large amount of research exploring the role of individual, peer, and family

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characteristics associated with adolescent substance use, the role of contextual factors has received considerably less attention (Cronley et al., 2012; Galea et al., 2005). Although the use of multilevel models to assess the complex associations between contextual factors and individual level factors on health generally is still a relatively recent phenomenon (Kawachi & Berkman, 2003), there is an emerging literature that examines the role of contextual factors for a variety of health outcomes (Boardman, Finch, Ellison, Williams, & Jackson, 2001; Boardman, Saint Onge, Rogers, & Denney, 2005; Choi, Harachi, & Catalano, 2006; Hill, Ross, & Angel, 2005; Kawachi & Berkman, 2003; Latkin & Curry, 2003; Ross & Mirowsky, 2009; Wright, Bobashev, & Folsom, 2007; see Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000 for a review). A strong trend in health research is multilevel explorations of the role of school factors/characteristics in explaining various adolescent health outcomes (e.g., Kulis, Marsiglia, Nieri, Sicotte, & Hohmann-Marriott, 2004; Leatherdale, Brown, Cameron, & McDonald, 2005; Monshouwer et al., 2007).

Despite the rapid growth in research exploring the role that contextual factors play in influencing physical and mental health outcomes, only more recently has research explored how such characteristics may be predictive of substance use and misuse specifically (Galea et al., 2005). Only a handful of studies have explored the role of school contextual factors in explaining individual substance use behaviors using multilevel statistical modeling (e.g., Botticello, 2009; Kulis et al., 2004; Leatherdale et al., 2005; Monshouwer et al., 2007; Mrug, Gaines, Su, & Windle, 2010). Generally, these studies have found support for the basic thesis that school context is associated with student substance use behaviors. In their comprehensive review of multilevel studies of the role of school context on student substance use, Ennett and Haws (2010) note that such variables as school-level substance/alcohol use prevalence rates (Botticello, 2009; Leatherdale et al., 2005; Mrug et al., 2010), peer disapproval/perceived harm (Kumar, O'Malley, Johnston, Schulenberg, & Bachman, 2002), school climate or school attachment (Henry & Slater, 2007; Mayberry, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009), and school enforcement/prevention policies (Kumar et al., 2002; Wakefield et al., 2000) have been found to be predictive of individual substance use behaviors, either directly or in interaction with individual level variables. Although not unequivocal, the majority of such research denotes that school context should be considered when explaining adolescent substance use.

2.1. Student racial composition and substance use

One of the quandaries facing those interested in examining and understanding the role of both context and individual factors associated with substance use is the race/ethnicity/SES paradox. For example, most community-level explanations of crime and delinquency have emphasized the causal role that economic deprivation plays in explaining high crime and delinquency rates in impoverished communities (e.g., social disorganization theory, relative deprivation, concentrated disadvantage). However, multilevel studies of neighborhood disadvantage and substance use have produced mixed results,

with some studies finding economic disadvantage to be positively associated with substance use behaviors (e.g., Chuang, Ennett, Bauman, & Foshee, 2005; Frank, Cerda, & Rendon, 2007; Henry & Slater, 2007; Hoffmann, 2002; Whaley, Smith, & Hayes-Smith, 2011; Xue, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2007; see Gardner, Barajas, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010 for a comprehensive review), while others have found that community affluence, rather than disadvantage is associated with a higher likelihood of adolescent substance use (Cronley et al., 2012; Reboussin, Preisser, Song, & Wolfson, 2010; Snedker, Herting, and Walton 2009). Likewise, despite the reality that many racial and ethnic minorities disproportionately reside in economically disadvantaged communities, cumulative evidence suggests that most racial and ethnic minority youth in America use substances less frequently than (both non-Hispanic and Hispanic) whites (SAMHSA 2009; Wallace et al., 2009). As noted, "it appears that community characteristics may be differently associated with substance use than they are with delinquency" (2012: 54–55; see also Amey & Albrecht, 1998).

The same can be said about school characteristics as well. A number of multilevel studies of adolescent substance use have explored the role of a school's racial/ethnic composition in explaining individual student substance use, either directly or indirectly in cross-level interactions, with racial/ethnic composition serving as a moderator (e.g., Kulis et al., 2004; Monshouwer et al., 2007; Mrug et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2007). Of these studies, most have found that percent minority is associated with a lower probability of individual student substance use (e.g., Kulis et al., 2004; Monshouwer et al., 2007; Wallace et al., 2007), although some inquiries have failed to find school racial/ethnic composition to be a predictor of individual substance use (Mrug et al., 2010).

As to why racial/ethnic composition may influence individual student substance use, Kulis et al. (2004) noted that a number of different explanations that have been forwarded, including the insulation hypothesis, the subjective culture hypothesis, and the bicultural competence hypothesis. Both the *insulation* and *subjective culture* hypotheses suggest that the experiences associated with being an ethnic/racial minority in a predominately white student body creates adverse consequences for minority students. In the former, while white students experience cultural reinforcement, minority students experience dissonant cultural environments (Kulis et al., 2004, p. 372). The subjective culture hypothesis suggests that minority students will be evaluated unjustly by white standards (Kulis et al., 2004, p. 372). Alternatively, the bicultural competence hypothesis suggests that rather than produce stress for minority students, being a numerical minority in a predominately white student population creates the opportunity for minority students to develop superior coping skills (Kulis et al., 2004, p. 372). Hence, while the first two hypotheses suggest that being a minority student in a predominately white population will produce stress that serves to increase the risk of substance use, the bicultural competence hypothesis implies that minority students will be less likely to engage in substance use due to exposure to a predominately white student body that might contribute

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