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## Brief report

## Family ethnic socialization predicts better academic outcomes via proactive coping with discrimination and increased self-efficacy

Elana R. McDermott<sup>a,\*</sup>, Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor<sup>a</sup>, Stefanie Martinez-Fuentes<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Harvard Graduate School of Education, United States<sup>b</sup> Arizona State University, United States

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## ABSTRACT

As the U.S. Latino youth population grows, understanding how family and individual resources may promote Latino adolescents' academic outcomes is important. The current investigation examined whether family ethnic socialization predicted adolescents' use of proactive strategies for coping with ethnic-racial discrimination and examined a potential pathway through which these contextual and individual resources may relate to educational outcomes. Drawing on data from a sample of Latino adolescents ( $n = 321$ ;  $Mage = 15.31$  years,  $SD = .76$ ; 49.5% female), results of a cross-sectional structural equation model showed a double mediation of the relation between family ethnic socialization and GPA by proactive coping strategies and self-efficacy. Alternate models, limitations of the current investigation, and implications for future research are discussed.

Latinos comprise almost a quarter of the current U.S. youth population, with projections indicating that Latinos will account for 34 percent of the youth population by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). As Latino students constitute a significant and *increasingly more significant* share of the nation's future, ensuring that they are academically well-prepared for the workforce is important for the U.S. to thrive on a global level. Although the dropout rate has decreased over the past two decades, Latino students in the U.S. drop out of school at a rate two times higher than their White counterparts (Gramlich, 2017). These educational disparities could be related to Latino youths' experiences with ethnic-racial discrimination (e.g., prejudiced comments, negative stereotypes, and negative actions toward individuals based on their ethnic group membership; Brondolo, Ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009). Latino adolescents report a high prevalence of experiences with ethnic-racial discrimination (Flores, Tschann, Dimas, Pasch, & de Groat, 2010), and these experiences are negatively related to their academic achievement (e.g., Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; McWhirter, Garcia, & Bines, 2017).

Indeed, consistent with theoretical notions advanced in the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997), repeat exposure to discriminatory experiences during adolescence may form patterns of responses that shape developmental trajectories and identities via self-system processes. However, adolescents' *proactive coping strategies* (i.e., strategies through which they actively engage in efforts to resolve stressors) may mitigate the effects of discrimination (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009) and these coping responses may in turn be incorporated into adolescents' emerging identities (Spencer et al., 1997). In fact, research shows that proactive coping strategies are positively related to adolescents' self-esteem, ethnic-racial identity, and positive affect (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Vera et al., 2012). It is especially important to understand the mechanisms underlying adolescents' approaches for coping proactively with discrimination due to the negative health effects that discrimination poses *specifically* during adolescence (e.g., sleep disturbances; Zeiders, Updegraff, Kuo, Umaña-Taylor, & McHale, 2017), and because

\* Corresponding author. Harvard Graduate School of Education, Larsen Hall 607, 14 Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138, United States.  
E-mail address: [elana\\_mcdermott@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:elana_mcdermott@gse.harvard.edu) (E.R. McDermott).

evidence suggests that adolescence is a sensitive period during which the negative effects of discrimination can become embedded in biological systems and lead to significant health problems evidenced in adulthood (Adam et al., 2015). Furthermore, relative to earlier periods of development, the advances in cognitive functioning evidenced during adolescence make it an ideal time to study coping strategies because developing social-cognitive capabilities enable youth to think about their experiences of unfair treatment regarding abstract concepts such as race and ethnicity (Umaña-Taylor, 2018). Put differently, understanding the benefits of using proactive strategies for coping with discrimination during adolescence can have significant positive implications for multiple developmental periods during the lifespan.

The PVEST model further notes that different cultural contexts may influence how adolescents view themselves as they make sense of and integrate cultural meanings about their experiences into their personal identities (Spencer et al., 1997). In particular, family ethnic socialization (FES; families' efforts to teach their children about the cultural traditions and values or their ethnic group; Umaña-Taylor, Alfaro, Bámaca, & Guimond, 2009) may operate as a contextual resource to promote adolescents' positive outcomes. Indeed, higher FES is related to lower depressive symptoms (Liu & Lau, 2013), greater ethnic identity exploration and resolution (e.g., Supple, Ghazarian, Frabutt, Plunkett, & Sands, 2006), greater well-being (Wang & Benner, 2016), and may mediate the relation between ethnic-racial discrimination and adolescents' self-esteem (e.g., Brondolo, Blair, & Kaur, 2018; Brondolo et al., 2009; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009).

Importantly, contextual resources such as FES may inform adolescents' individual resources. Consistent with the PVEST model, FES may have indirect effects on adolescents' academic outcomes through their self-systems (Hughes et al., 2006). It is possible that FES practices provide Latino adolescents with the tools to proactively cope (e.g., coping with the stressor directly) with discrimination because they prepare adolescents with knowledge about, and may instill feelings of pride in, their ethnic background, which can be useful in the face of discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006). Moreover, as youth use proactive coping strategies for dealing with discrimination, they may feel more efficacious in managing their environments and behavior (Valiente, Eisenberg, Fabes, Spinrad, & Sulik, 2015). As previously noted, proactive coping strategies are positively related to positive youth outcomes (e.g., self-esteem, ethnic-racial identity, and positive affect; Dumont & Provost, 1999; Vera et al., 2012). Furthermore, Latino adolescents' control beliefs (e.g., self-efficacy) mediate the relation between their strategies for coping with intragroup rejection and their grades in school (Basáñez, Warren, Crano, & Unger, 2014) and have direct effects on their academic outcomes (e.g., You, Hong, & Ho, 2011).

## 1. The current study

In the current study, we examined the relations between FES, proactive strategies for coping with ethnic-racial discrimination, self-efficacy, and Latino adolescents' academic outcomes. In doing so, the current investigation fills two gaps in the literature. First, few studies have examined coping strategies specific to ethnic-racial discrimination (e.g., Wei, Alvarez, Ku, Russell, & Bonett, 2010) and even less research examines the factors that may predict the use of proactive coping strategies. Second, although FES is positively related to a variety of developmental outcomes among Latino adolescents (e.g., ethnic identity), it is unclear whether FES promotes adolescents' use of proactive strategies for coping with discrimination. To fill these gaps, we conducted a series of structural equation models examining the relation between FES and Latino adolescents' academic achievement as mediated by proactive coping strategies and self-efficacy. We hypothesized that high FES would predict adolescents' greater engagement in proactive strategies for coping with discrimination. Next, we hypothesized that as adolescents responded to experiences of discrimination with proactive coping strategies, these responses would reinforce their personal beliefs about their self-efficacy (i.e., their capability to influence events in their lives; Bandura, 2005), and these stronger feelings of efficacy would in turn relate to better academic outcomes.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Sample

Data for the current study came from one wave of a larger longitudinal study focused on Latino adolescents' ethnic identity development. The sample consisted of 323 Latino adolescents (49.5% female;  $M_{age} = 15.31$  years,  $SD = .76$ ) attending one of five high schools in non-metropolitan communities in Illinois in which Latino students comprised the numerical minority (8%–18%) of the student body. A majority of participants ( $n = 249$ ; 77.1%) were of Mexican origin.

### 2.2. Procedure

Latino ninth and tenth grade students, identified through school records, were invited to attend an informational session, during which parental consent and youth assent forms were distributed. Adolescents who returned parental consent and assent forms completed a self-administered survey, which took approximately 45 min to complete. Adolescents received \$10 for their participation.

### 2.3. Measures

#### 2.3.1. Familial ethnic socialization

The 12-item Familial Ethnic Socialization Measure (Umaña-Taylor, 2001; Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bámaca-Gómez, 2004) assessed the degree to which participants perceived that their families socialized them with respect to their native culture. Items (e.g.,

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