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**Racial-Ethnic Identity Development in Hispanic Young Adolescent Students:
Synthesis of the Literature**

by

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Approved by the College of Education and Human Development Honors Committee
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Abstract

This paper serves as a meta-analytic analysis of the research published on the development of racial-ethnic identity development in young adolescent Hispanic students. The purpose of the analysis of the peer-reviewed literature is to help support the instruction and development of young adolescent Hispanic students in the classroom. The major emphases of this paper are the definition of racial-ethnic identity, the background and major theories connected to racial-ethnic identity development, the major factors unique to the racial-ethnic identity of Hispanics students, and a list of research based methods teachers can use to help Hispanic students explore and establish a strong sense of racial-ethnic identity.

Key Words: Hispanic, young adolescent, racial, ethnic, identity

Introduction

A defining aspect of human development found in young adolescence is the formation of personal identity. For educators and school administrators, this is a prevalent concern since students spend the majority of their days at school. Middle and high schools serve to largely shape and determine students' individual and collective identity development experiences (Sadowski 2003). For students from ethnic minority groups, not only do they learn what it means to be themselves as young adults, but they also learn to solidify what it means to be who they are racially and ethnically during young adolescence.

In the midst of standards-based grading, test scores, and the many other challenges teachers are facing in the profession today, the development of a solid racial-ethnic identity may seem of little importance. Yet a critical analysis of the peer-reviewed research on ethnic identity development reveals that teacher understanding and school support for ethnic identity development in young adolescent students is directly correlated to students' success academically, socially, and personally. For ethnic minorities, the formation of a racial-ethnic identity can be monumental in determining future academic achievement (Altschul, 2006; Phinney, 1992; and Schwartz, 2008). The racial-ethnic identity of students has a direct impact on students' learning and the achievement gap (Schwartz, 2008 and Altschul, 2006). Research shows that students with an established and secure sense of identity tend to engage more in critical thinking, have a higher level of moral reasoning, and a higher sense of positive self-esteem (Akos 2008, Holcomb-McCoy 2005). Phinney (1992) examined the link between a developed sense of ethnic-racial identity and academic success and found that students reporting average

grades of A or B had a much more developed sense of who they were racially and ethnically as compared to their peers with lower grades.

A strong racial-ethnic identity has also been shown to protect young adolescent students from harmful or violent behaviors (Choi, Harachi, Gilmore, and Catalano, 2006). Students with an underdeveloped sense of their racial-ethnic identity may internalize the negative social stereotypes and negative views held about their racial or ethnic groups which can prove to be harmful to their mental health and school success (Hudley and Graham, 2001); while a positive sense of racial-ethnic identity serves as a form of protection against racism and prejudice (Quintana and Vera, 1999, Wakefield and Hudley, 2007). For young adolescent educators seeking to best prepare each individual student for success, the link between a solid racial-ethnic identity and students' academic, social, and personal success should lead educators to fully committing to assisting students in developing a strong sense of racial-ethnic identity and overcoming the negative stereotypes of their ethnic identities that might be upheld within their larger communities.

A scope of the literature published on racial and ethnic development reveals that there has been a significant amount of research published on the racial-ethnic identity development of students in mid and later adolescence, but fewer studies have focused on students entering adolescence (Schwartz 2008 & Rivas-Drake, Hughes, and Way 2009). The research that focuses specifically on the development of racial-ethnic identity in young adolescent students indicate that there is a significant increase in understanding and interpreting information, such as ethnic labels and ethnic identifiers, between early childhood and middle childhood (Quintana, 1998). This development is due to cognitive

abilities as well as family characteristics, such as generational level and ethnic pride (Quintana, 1998). Rivas-Drake, Hughes, and Way (2009) note that the growing significance young adolescent students place on peer opinions and friend groups instead of their families and the emotional and physical changes which bring their racial differences to the forefront of their minds all contribute significantly to the formation of students racial-ethnic identities. The majority of research presented in this paper applies to both young and older adolescents students.

Due to the increasing number of Hispanic students in public schools across the United States and the unique struggles and challenges posed to these students' racial-ethnic identity development, this paper is written as a meta-analytic review of research published on the development of racial and ethnic identity among young adolescent Hispanic students. According to the U.S. Census Bureau report in 2008, 45.5 million Hispanics live in the United States. By 2020, it is predicted that Hispanic youth will make up 23% or one in four of all youth in the United States (U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, 2007). According to the Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project in 2008, almost 10 million Hispanic students are in the nation's public schools; making up one out of every five students in public schools across the nation. This research mentions a recently released U.S. Census Bureau population projection that predicts the Hispanic school-age population will increase by 166% by 2050, while the non-Hispanic school-age population will grow by just 4%. Data from the Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project in 2008 shows that Hispanics are the largest minority group of students in the public schools of 22 states. According to the Kentucky Department of Education in 2009, 4.2% of students across Kentucky are identified ethnically as Hispanic. 5.4% of students in

Jefferson County Public Schools are identified as Hispanic (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2011). In Kentucky schools such as public schools in Jefferson County, the number of Hispanic students may not be as high as other places in the country, but the smaller number of students makes it even more essential to focus on their racial-identity development. Effective and equitable educators are fully aware that intentionality and specific focus must be given to students whose needs could be easily overlooked.

The study of Hispanic racial-ethnic identity development is especially complicated because of the complexity of the definition of what it means to be Hispanic. A common definition of Hispanic Americans is a group of Americans who share a heritage, culture, and language that began in Spain (Banks and Banks 2005). According to Banks and Banks (2005), most Hispanics prefer to be called Latinos but the U.S. Census Bureau labels them as Hispanics. Due to the discrepancy in the research regarding the use of Latino vs. Hispanic, I will maintain the use of the term Hispanic throughout my paper, but in discussions with students, teachers would be wise to learn which identity and terms their students use to define themselves. This will help create a safe classroom environment in which students feel safe and accepted.

Unlike other minority groups, such as African Americans, Hispanics are not one race, culture, or nation but a combination of races and nationalities (Umana-Taylor & Fine 2001). Dating back to 1980, the United States Census researchers have tended to classify Hispanics both by racial designation (White, African American, or other) and an ethnic identification (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc.) (Kao and Vaquera 2006). This tendency continued into the 21st century as seen in the 2000 United States Census acknowledgement that Hispanics can be of any race (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). The

primary ethnic identity of Hispanics in the United States varies from Mexican American, Puerto Rican, to Cuban American. Racial categories are seen as important for Hispanics, but for adolescents, ethnic identity seems to be more prevalent due to its concrete nature as compared to racial categories (Kao & Vaquera 2006). This division between racial and ethnic identity is necessary to understand if educators are to be successful in understanding and helping students embrace their racial-ethnic identity.

The specific and unique history of Hispanic young adolescent students in the United States makes the establishment of their racial-ethnic identity distinct from any other minority group of students such as African American or Asian students (Fergus 2004). Multiple studies done with Hispanic young adolescent students reveal that any sense of ethnic pride Hispanic students possess is continually challenged as both schools and larger institutions of society insist on these students blindly conforming to both the language and customs of the majority without a respect for students' unique backgrounds (Valenzual, 2005 and Gonzalez 2009). The heated controversy over Hispanic immigration to the United States, the debate over the place of the Spanish language in schools, and the devaluing of religious or social aspects of Spanish culture are all critical factors that affect the development of a positive sense of racial-ethnic identity for Hispanic students across the United States. In light of the research revealing the impact of a positive sense of racial-ethnic identity on student success, the growing number of Hispanic students, and challenges these students must overcome in order to develop a strong sense of racial-ethnic identity, educators need the knowledge and specific strategies to help their Hispanic students develop a strong sense of racial-ethnic identity.

The purpose of this work is to be a current research compilation for teachers on the racial-ethnic identity development of young adolescent Hispanic students. The information provided in the research presented in this paper will serve to help teachers develop a working knowledge of the definition of racial-ethnic identity, the background and major theories connected to racial-ethnic identity development, the major factors that hinder or challenge the racial-ethnic identity of Hispanics students, and provide research-based methods teachers can use to help Hispanic students explore and establish a strong sense of racial-ethnic identity. This paper will serve to define what is meant by racial-ethnic identity and examine the racial-identity development models of Cross (1971, 1991), Phinney (1992), and Helms (1994). This work will provide an in-depth look at the challenges to the racial-ethnic identity development of young adolescent Hispanic students including “hyphenated-identification”, prejudice against Hispanic family and culture values, devaluing of the Spanish language, attitudes of educators towards their Hispanic students and their academic capabilities, the portrayal of Hispanics in the media, and immigration trends. The final part of this paper focuses on research-based methods educators can use to help young adolescent Hispanic students develop a positive sense of racial-ethnic identity. In light of all of the research on the racial-ethnic identity development presented in this piece, it is important to note that some of these findings can apply not just for Hispanic students but to every student.

Definition of Racial-Ethnic Identity

In order to lay the foundation in which to examine the development of racial-ethnic identity among young adolescents, it is important to define what is meant by racial-ethnic identity in the literature. Scholarship on personal identity and scholarship on ethnic and

cultural identity has been traditionally separated, but as one will see through the research presented, for students from differing racial backgrounds, their identity development is a racial process (Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross 2006). The tendency of scholarly research to separate the construction of personal identity from cultural and ethnic identity is a deficiency in the scholarship that must be taken into account in review of the research published on the topic of young adolescent development (Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross 2006). The general framework of young adolescent identity development and the different theories of ethnic identity development presented in educational literature must be considered together to build a strong foundation for successfully developing classrooms and school wide communities that embrace and support various ethnic identities.

Identity is defined as the “embodiment of self-understanding”, lived and shaped throughout daily experiences (Nakkula, 2003, p. 7). According to Butler (2005), identity is not a fixed essence but changes over time. Erikson (1968) posits that identity is located in the core of the individual and the core of one’s relationships with others, in which an individual combines how they personally perceive themselves with the perceptions others have of them. Social identity (who a person is in relation to others and impacted by racial identity) is constructed, valued, complex, and historic (Ramos 2012). Identity is developed through relationships both socially and individually. Since social identity is constructed and historic, the implications of racism and prejudice play a direct role on the identity development of Hispanic students (Ramos 2012). Early adolescence is marked by a trend among young adolescent students to place a growing significance on their peers’ opinions above that of their families. Along with social and relational changes, significant

emotional and physical changes also accompany the departure from childhood into adulthood. These specific developmental changes unique to adolescence also serve to bring racial differences to the forefront of students' minds and contribute significantly to the formation of students' racial-ethnic identities (Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way 2009). Ethnic identity has been established as critical component of a young adolescent's identity because it focuses on the attitude and emotions connected with membership in a specific ethnic group (Bernal and Knight 1993). Like all other young adolescent students, Hispanic students formulate their sense of what it means to be a Hispanic in light of their own personal opinions and meanings coupled with those given by society. According to Baustia (2001), social identity theory has served as the theoretical basis for several ethnic and racial identity models.

The research published on the topic of racial-ethnic identity development differs in using the terms "racial" or "ethnic" identity. According to Akos (2008), Holcomb-McCoy (2005), and Wakefield & Hudley (2007), racial identity development is more specific to phenotype or biological factors as compared to ethnic identity. Akos (2008) defines ethnic identity in the words of Phinney (1996) who described it as a devotion and sense of being a part of one's ethnic group, interest and appreciation of the group, and involvement in the traditions and activities of one's ethnic group. Some researchers such as Smith (1991) have argued that ethnic identity falls beneath racial identity in importance because of the social issues attached to a student's racial identity, yet other researchers argue the opposite, pointing out that ethnic identity seems to be more prevalent for young adolescent students due to its concrete nature as compared to racial categories (Kao & Vaquera 2006). For the sake of the scope of this paper, the term racial-

ethnic identity is used to comment on both racial and ethnic development among young adolescent students. This decision is grounded in the work of Altschul (2006), who combines both race and ethnicity together (REI). Racial and ethnic developments are not distinct processes among young adolescent students but happen simultaneously.

In light of the literature published on the formation of racial-ethnic identity, Fergus (2004) comments that many tend to label the racial-ethnic identity of minority students from the perspective of essence, in which all students from a certain race or ethnicity share the same identity. According to Hall (1998), much of this is linked to skin color, which is seen as the “floating signifier” (p. 11). As Akos (2008) points out, skin color often plays a central theme in identity development which is not the case for many White American students. Yet, literature published by Nagel (1994) argues for a “layering of identity” in which individuals assert agency as construct their identities to meet different needs imposed by themselves, the group, and other outside influences. Just like the identity of White American students are uniquely different as compared to other White American students, so it is with the racial-ethnic identity of minority groups. Moya (2000) believes that the first issue with the idea of seeing identity from the perspective of essence is that it causes people to see one aspect of identity, such as skin color, as the sole reason for determining the social meaning of an individual’s experience. Instead, identity is developed by the interaction between various aspects such as race, ethnicity, and class together (Butler 2005). As Fergus (2004) points out, the literature published on this topic reveals that labeling students’ racial-ethnic identities simply by their skin color does not take into consideration the complexity of factors that play into identity development.

Fergus's (2004) research revealed that students themselves may develop an identity completely distinct from the racial identity assumed of them because of their color.

According to Altschul (2006), there are three aspects to racial-ethnic identity (REI); 1) connectedness to one's racial-ethnic group, 2) awareness of racism, and 3) embedded achievement (how much one's racial-ethnic group is characterized by academic attainment). REI changes during adolescence, which fits perfectly with Erikson's idea that early adolescence is a time of identity exploration. The identity work done in adolescence is a re-assessment of students by how connected do they feel to their racial-ethnic group, to what extent their racial-ethnic group is appreciated or stereotyped against, and what emphasis does their racial-ethnic group place on education. Altschul (2006) argues REI affects student academic achievement through Steele's (2004) work on stereotype threat and stereotype lift. According to this theory, if students' racial or ethnic group has a negative stereotype attached to their racial-ethnic identity regarding academics, simply being reminded of their membership in that group will decrease academic performance. Altschul (2006) warns that if students are not able to overcome those negative stereotypes, they will suffer greatly academically. Hudley and Graham (2001) suggest that young adolescent students tend to assume the low achievers in schools are male, Latino and African American students. Although the scope of this paper is not wide enough to consider this proposition, the research of Oyserman, Gant, and Ager (1995) suggests that the impact of racial-ethnic identity may be gendered, impacting males more than females. In light of Hudley and Graham's research (2001) regarding the trend of low achievement among Latino students, the focus of this paper

will be on how to support the REI development of Hispanic students and in turn increase their academic success.

Theories of Racial-Ethnic Identity Development

The REI development of young adolescent Hispanic students cannot be effectively promoted by educators apart from a general knowledge and understanding of the key theories of racial-ethnic identity development. Many different models have been developed to explore the REI development of Hispanics. Cross, Phinney, and Helm's models remain the most widely used (Pabon 2010), along with James Marcia who has elaborated on Eric Erikson's model of identity development. John Ogbu (1991) developed a theory as well that examines the influence of immigration on young adolescent Hispanic REI development. In the following few pages, these models will be considered in perspective of their impact on the REI development of young adolescent Hispanic students.

Eric Erikson's (1968) Model of Young Adolescent Development

The key theory of young adolescent identity development is contributed to Eric Erikson who did extensive work on the topic of identity formation across the human age span. Erikson's theory (1968) is a stage-like theory, in which people are unable to move to the next stage of identity or emotional development until they meet the criteria for each of the preceding stages. When discussing the stage of early adolescence, Erikson (1968) uses the term, "identity crisis", which is defined as the process in which someone deals with who he or she is in the core of their being and the core of collective society. In essence, one judges oneself in light of who they personally see themselves to be, along with assessing themselves in view of how others perceive them. According to Erikson's

theory, adolescence is the last opportunity for someone to revisit the previous crises of development which will determine the success or failure of an individual's future.

In light of Erikson's theory, Goldstein (2010) warns against the Universalist approach found in the scholarship on adolescent identity development which tends to assume that educators can apply everything they have learned about one group of students to all groups of students. For example, just because White American educators have learned and can relate to how White American young adolescents develop their identities, does not mean they can apply those insights to being the same for students of different ethnic groups. For young adolescent students of minority groups, their identity formation is shaped in large part by how they themselves and others view their racial and ethnic characteristics. Students who belong to the dominant group tend to place much less value than their racially diverse peers on their color as it pertains to who they are during early adolescence (Tatum 1997 & Nogura 2008). As Tatum so succinctly states, "all adolescents look at themselves in new ways, but not all adolescents think about themselves in racial terms" (Tatum, 1997, p. 53). The treatment of students' heritages and languages connected to their race plays a direct impact on how students learn to perceive themselves and their race's position in society (Valenzuela 2005). The identity formation of Hispanic students has racial implications and challenges that impact how they see themselves.

William E. Cross Jr.'s (1971) Model of Racial-Ethnic Identity Development

The first model to be developed that examined REI development was introduced by William E. Cross, Jr.'s model in 1971. This model is specifically centered on the ethnic identity development of African Americans but has been useful in developing a working

knowledge of the ethnic identity development of Hispanic students. Cross's original model had five stages but was later revised to consist of four stages: *pre-encounter stage* (period of being unaware of the implications of race or ethnicity), *encounter stage* (period in which an individual undergoes an experience that brings their race and ethnicity to the forefront of their mind), *immersion-emersion stage* (period in which an individual realizes their ethnicity and works to establish a strong sense of what it means to be African American and fights against conforming to the dominant culture), and the *internalization stage* (period in which an individual works out the conflicts between their REI and the dominant culture, establishing a strong and positive sense of what it means to be African American while still being successful in dominant society). This model is not linear like Erikson's model of identity development as individuals can revisit stages throughout their lives, developing a stronger sense of what it means to be who they are racially and ethnically.

Jean Phinney's 1992 Model of Racial-Ethnic Identity Development

One of the other key models of young adolescent ethnic identity development was developed by Jean Phinney (1992) who developed her theory by incorporating her findings with the main ideas from Erikson's theory of identity development. Phinney's model adds to Erikson's by focusing on the racial and ethnic components of early adolescent identity development. She links these two theories together instead of treating them as separate entities. Phinney's model is made up of three distinct stages, 1) unexamined ethnic identity, 2) ethnic identity search, and 3) achieved ethnic identity. Students in the first stage, unexamined ethnic identity, are not concerned with issues of race or ethnicity. In the second stage, ethnic identity search, students are actively working

to define what their race and ethnicity means to them personally. The last stage, achieved ethnic identity, students have a clear sense of racial or ethnic identity. Phinney's first model for ethnic identity (1989) has different names for the stages but the general premise remains the same. As a stage theory, Phinney's model progresses in a predictable manner throughout time and students' experiences. The stage in which young adolescents students are in regarding this theory is the ethnic identity search and this aligns with Erickson's idea of an identity crisis in which students are struggling to determine their own identity. Introduction to this stage is through some significant experience that highlights a student's ethnic or racial identity such as discrimination. This encounter stage is also found in Cross (1971, 1991) model of racial identity in which a situation or experience calls a student's racial identity to the forefront. This leads students to a search to actively define who they are which can result in either a positive or negative sense of identity. The desired result is achieved ethnic identity in which students possess a solid understanding of their culture, who they are in relation to their heritage, and their commitment to their ethnicity.

An interesting component to Phinney's older model (1989) is that in the first stage where students experience little exploration of their ethnic identity, students are orientated towards White Americans as their reference group despite their race. This correlates with the research of both Tatum (1997) and Nogura (2008), which shares that students from different ethnic groups have an overwhelming task of both personal and ethnic identity development together. Unlike White American young adolescent students, many students of differing races have grown up associating with White American race as their reference point and then during the encounter stage they realize their identity is

different and they may be perceived differently than their white peers. For educators, this is important to note because the classroom environment plays a key component in helping students work through this stage to the last stage of achieved ethnic identity (Akos, 2008; Sadowski, 2003).

Helm's (1994) Model of Racial-Ethnic Identity Development

Helm's (1994) theory of REI development is especially important for educators to consider as it is based on the premise that every person with whom a child comes into contact with at school is also in some stage of identity development, including teachers. Helms' theory proposes that there are three potential interactions that can take place in a school setting depending upon the REI of the people involved. The first interaction is a parallel relationship, in which both the student and educator are at the same stage of REI development. In the parallel relationship, teachers are unable to help students explore their REI at a deeper level because they are on the same level as the student, requiring the same exploration of their own identity required for the student. The second interaction is a regressive relationship, in which the educator's REI development is less developed as that of the student and attempts to change the student's thinking and behavior because the teacher is far more uncomfortable facing racial issues and topics than the student. The last interaction is a progressive relationship in which the teacher's sense of REI development is ahead of the student, and the teacher can effectively offer experiences and model behavior that aids the student in exploring their own sense of racial-ethnic identity. This theory establishes an importance for teachers to explore and reflect on their own REI as means to be able to more fully help their students develop their own personal sense of REI.

John Ogbu's 1991 Cultural Ecological Model

A critical factor affecting a large majority of Hispanic students as they form their REIs is the realities and labels that accompany immigration. This proposition in the literature is connected to Ogbu's (1991) cultural ecological model in which two types of ethnic minority groups exist within the United States, voluntary and involuntary immigrants. Ethnic groups such as Asian Americans would be labeled as voluntary immigrants, while Hispanics, Mexican Americans, and African Americans would be categorized as involuntary immigrants. This is largely a result of the United State's conquest and annexation of Mexican territory in 1848, in which many Hispanics became subject to White domination against their will. According to Ogbu (1991), historically involuntary immigrants have been subjected to menial jobs and statuses in American society, and have therefore had a difficult time fitting into the mainstream educational system. Texas and California also outlawed the use of Spanish in the schools which fostered a sense of hostility and respect for Spanish culture. Due to the reality of often being overlooked, these young adolescent students don't see the point in doing well in school and tend to associate school expectations as symbols of the white majority group instead of skills needed to be successful. Ogbu (1991) and Valenzuela (2004) note that in the minds of many of these students, the expectations of American society and its' schools take away from or diminish the value of their own personal REIs. According to Fergus (2004), second generation Mexican students must chose between doing well in school and maintaining their REI. Flores-Gonzalez (1999) even goes so far as to argue that academic successes or failures of Puerto Rican students depend upon how they see themselves and how society sees them, which connects to Erikson's theory of identity being both

personal and communal. Suarez-Orozco (2001) as cited in Suarez-Orozco, Doucet, and Suarez-Orozco's (2004) research shares that immigrant youth deal with the regular struggles of developing identity in adolescence while also fighting against the "winds of xenophobia their presence generates" (p. 428). Suarez-Orozco, Doucet, and Suarez-Orozco's (2004) work shares a survey done by the Harvard Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaption study which reveals that 65% of the students surveyed were acutely aware of the negative connotations connected to their racial-ethnic identity. One Mexican American boy surveyed shared that he believed most Americans think of them as "lazy, gangsters, drug addicts that only come to take their jobs away" (Suarez-Orozco, Doucet, and Suarez-Orozco, 2004, p. 428). Research published by Valenzuela (2005) supports this opinion by adding that Mexican American young adolescent students are continually victims of negative messages about their language, history, and culture. According to Pabon (2010), everything Hispanic immigrant families do is questioned and social injustice becomes a part of the daily experiences of Hispanic adolescents.

Many times these students are faced with four possible responses to the clash of their own cultural identities with American culture (Tatum 1997). Students and their families can assimilate into the already existing culture, withdraw into themselves and shut out all culture, combine either identities together (biculturalism), or marginalization in which they stay firmly within their own cultural and racial groups. Suarez-Orozco, Doucet, Suarez-Orozco (2004) suggest that there are two responses to the clash of cultural identities. The first response is *ethnic flight identity* in which students embrace the dominant culture and reject their own, and the second is *co-ethnic identity* in which students cling to their own ethnic culture, choosing to reject the dominant culture.

Suarez-Orozco, Doucet, Suarez-Orozco (2004) see the best form of this being an adaptive sense of racial-ethnic identity in which students can easily move between cultures depending upon the context of the situation. According to Goldstein (2012), students in minority groups can develop self-affirming racial-ethnic identities by choosing to either assimilate or develop an oppositional identity to mainstream society. The downside is they may either be cut off from mainstream society or seem like sell-outs in their homes and ethnic communities.

As one reflects on these theories of REI development, it is important to note that except for Cross and Ogbu's model, most of the theories of REI development are seen as a linear continuum and not as a cycle influenced by social interactions. According to Pabon (2010), the majority of theories fail to take note of the multiple ways individuals go back and forth between the stages of ethnic-racial development. Especially in the case of Hispanic immigrants, research has shown that new immigrants often question their sense of established REI when faced with new traditions, customs, or systems (Umana-Taylor and Fine 2004). For educators, they must not view the progress of their students as a step by step process but recognize their students will more likely go back and forth between the various stages.

Major Factors That Impact REI Development among Young Adolescent Hispanic Students

Along with the characteristics common for the REI development of all young adolescent students detailed in the theories discussed above, there are specific major factors that play a unique role in the REI development of young adolescent Hispanic students. Many factors that do not effect the REI development of White or African

American or other racially and culturally diverse students effect the REI development of young adolescent Hispanic students. These factors include hyphenated identification, Hispanic cultural values, minority status, devaluing of the Spanish language, prejudices and misunderstandings accompanying stereotypes, and the portrayal of Hispanics in the media. The influence that these factors have on the REI development is significant enough to support the need to analyze each factor and its consequences individually.

“Hyphenated Identification”

The peer-reviewed literature that examines how Mexican American, Latino, Puerto Rican, or Chicano young adolescents develop their racial–ethnic identities is varied in the many different factors it takes into consideration. Fergus (2004), shares that “hyphenated identification” in which students combine their national/ancestral ties with their cultural ties is one of the tools students use in forming their self-identity. For example, some students choose to define themselves as Mexican-American instead of Latino, Puerto Rican, or Chicano. Surveys done by Fergus with Mexican American students reveal that these students describe their REI by their history, family, and religion. When asked what it meant to be Mexican American, one of the young men interviewed by Fergus answered by saying that he would “tell them about the Aztecs and all that stuff” (2004, p. 59). Clearly this student’s sense of identity was linked to the honor and prestige he found in his culture’s history instead of his skin color or other factors.

According to Fergus (2004), similar to Mexican Americans but yet also distinct in some ways, is the manner in which Puerto Rican students define their REI. Surveys done with Puerto Rican students reveal that they define themselves through their ancestry, material artifacts, ancestry, or social relations. There is less historical focus as seen

among Mexican American students and more of a defining of REI through common, communal aspects. When asked what it meant to be Puerto Rican, one of the young men interviewed by Fergus responded, “I would say Puerto Rican are fun to be around and with; they’ll teach you things you have never known before” (2004, p. 56). Similar to the Mexican American student, this student did not define himself in terms of race, but unlike his Mexican American peer, he saw his REI in light of the social relationships within his ethnic group.

Hispanic Cultural Values

An important aspect that is often overlooked in the promotion of REI development among Hispanic students is the Hispanic values of *familismo* and *comunidad* (Pabon 2010). According to Pabon (2010), *familismo* is defined as the connection and commitment that characterizes the relationships in Hispanic families. *Comunidad* refers how students understand their ethnic communities and their roles within them. Students develop their racial-ethnic identities in light of their sense of duty and respect to their families and communities. These family and community values impact the gender roles of Hispanic students. These two gender concepts are known as *machismo* and *marianismo*. *Machismo* means to be brave and respectful, to work hard and be a leader, whereas *marianismo* means to be pure, submissive, and a caretaker. Hispanic males are expected by their families and communities to uphold the qualities of *machismo*, while females are represent *marianismo* qualities. This is significant to the REI of Hispanic students, yet unfortunately; the mainstream media and society mock such Hispanic values as conservative and old-fashioned. Hispanic students struggle with how to relate and grow into young men and women when the cultural values they hold to and are taught are

continually challenged by the society in which they live (Pabon 2010). The natural response is to give in and accept what mainstream society values or to withdraw and cling fast to cultural beliefs and traditions.

Minority Status

The struggles of some young adolescent students to maintain a sense of their individual REI in light of being different from many of their other peers is further revealed in the literature. One of the Latino students interviewed in a research study by Fergus (2004) shares that his sister and him were the only Latinos in the school. In light of that, he believed he had started to lose his Spanish speaking skills and wanted to change his name. This student shares that he no longer wanted to be Mexican and wanted to instead assimilate into the white culture. Seen in the light of Cross's (1991) model of REI, this student's experience during the *encounter stage* called his racial identity to the forefront of his mind. Instead of fully exploring what his REI was and reaching a sense of REI pride and achievement, he wanted to take on a different ethnic identity. Yet the interesting thing revealed in Fergus's interview was that this student said as soon as he started high school, he was surrounded by more Latinos and then he wanted to embrace his REI. When reflecting on his experience in middle school, he shares, "I lost my self identity during middle school" (2004, p. 70). As this comment reveals, the stages of Phinney's model of ethnic development are not easily obtained for all students. As Gonzalez (2009) points out, in order to form a coherent identity, students must integrate both their own self-perceptions and the opinions of society which can prove to be quite demanding.

Devaluing of The Spanish Language

The literature published on this topic reveals that schools play an instrumental part in either helping these students to develop a clear sense of REI or a contested sense of REI. A significant issue highlighted across the research is the connection between Spanish and students' REI. According to Valenzuela (2005) and Jimenez (2000), Mexican identity and Spanish are inseparable. Gonzalez (2009) argues that providing students opportunities to use their Spanish in the classroom and even helping other students learn pieces of Spanish is a valuable support for the formation of a positive sense of REI. A loss of language equals a loss of identity. Valenzuela (2005) draws on research from Trueba in 1993 which concluded that language is one of the most influential tools humans possess to maintain a sense of self-identity and belonging within one's ethnic group. Tatum (1997) shares the findings of a research study done by Maria Zavala in which different Puerto Rican students were interviewed about the importance of their language. The running theme in the majority of the interviews was that to lose Spanish meant to also lose what it meant to be Puerto Rican. Yet despite the significance research places on the link between Spanish and Mexican identity, both Texas and California public schools (schools with the highest population of Hispanic students in the United States) outlawed speaking in Spanish in school as illegal.

According to Tatum (1997), this discrimination against Spanish can be internalized by many students and can hinder students in developing a positive sense of REI. According to Valenzuela (2005), the achievement of minority students is compromised when bilingualism is not promoted but discouraged. Not only are many Hispanic students not given the opportunity to use their language in school, but Valenzuela (2005) mentions the tendency of some teachers to shorten the names of their Mexican American students or

not use their real names. For example, renaming a student who is called Loreto by Laredo instead or Azucena becoming Suzy (Valenzuela, 2005). This decision to not call students by their names is even more detrimental in middle school when students are actively exploring who they are and what it means to be an individual.

Prejudices or Misunderstandings That Accompany Stereotypes

The REI development of Hispanic students is also impacted by the opinions and attitudes of educators and peers towards what it means to be Hispanic. According to Saltman (2005), educators overlook the reality that REI construction is affected by power relationships in society and therefore the issues of prejudice and racism are avoided in the classroom. Saltman (2005) points out that individuals exist within a larger sphere of social relationships and hierarchical relationships which contribute to the creation of specific identities. Noguera (2008) points out that adolescents seek acceptance from their peer groups and if students' REIs are not seen as equal or valued, students will struggle in achieving their personal REIs. Goldstein (2010) shares that students can become frustrated and despair when assumptions are made about who they are based on their race. Students struggle to discover who they really are as people set expectations for them and assume who they are based on their color or culture before students have even embraced who they are themselves. In other words, students are told who they are and the implications of that based on their color or race before they even have a chance to establish their own personal sense of identity. Way, Rogers, and Hughes (2013) discovered that young adolescent students express who they are in terms of their ethnicity or race through connecting together all of the common stereotypes they find. For example, being black meant being able to play basketball well. Their research also

revealed that by the 8th grade, students of ethnic minorities strive hard to fight against the stereotypes that are supposed to define them (Way, Rogers, and Hughes, 2013).

Portrayal of Hispanic Students in the Media

Another factor that influences the formation of REI among Hispanic students is the portrayal of Hispanics in the media. The reality is that the majority of Hispanics portrayed in the media are mostly assigned roles that reinforce stereotypes (Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Kopacz, 2008). For example, Latinos are portrayed as lazy, non-educated, and criminals instead of being given respectable and positive images. These less than ideal images of Hispanics in media play a direct role in the social identity development of Hispanic students.

Support for the REI Development of Young Adolescent Hispanic Students

The understanding of REI development among young adolescent Hispanic students must be put into practice on a practical level if these students are to be effectively supported in their classrooms, schools, and communities. Support for the REI development of these students must include teacher, classroom, school-wide, and family support. An analysis of what peer-reviewed literature suggests in these areas is necessary, for many strategies and ideas have been tried and proven, and will prove useful to teachers, administrators, school staff, and communities that serve young adolescent Hispanic students.

Teacher Support

According to Noguera (2008), in the United States we have deep rooted stereotypes that connect REI to academic ability and unless educators are aware of those stereotypes and purposely choose to fight against it, they tend to accept those ideas. Akos (2008)

states that teachers must first reflect on their own REI and examine themselves for personal biases against various ethnic groups before they can be effective in helping students develop a solid REI.

The research published by Noguera (2008) shares that the first step in helping culturally diverse students develop a positive sense of identity educators must talk about the issues these students face in developing their sense of identity with both students and other colleagues. Teachers must create a safe place for discussions with students and not be afraid to approach the topic with other educators. Noguera (2008) acknowledges that such discussions will be difficult at first, but issues of stereotyping and racism that hinder positive REI development will not be fixed without acknowledging and dialoguing about them. Ramos (2012) proposes that dialogue based on the understanding of diversity in racial and cultural distinctions facilitates a development of positive relationships among students of differing racial backgrounds. Gonzalez (2009) states that students need stable schemas to deal with the stereotypes attached to their racial-ethnic identities. Gonzalez (2009) uses the work of Oyserman, Kemmelmeir, Fryberg, Brosh, and Hart-Johnson (2003) which defines schemas as “a coherent cognitive structure integrating thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about these memberships as part of the self-concept” (p. 335). According to Oyserman (2008), the most beneficial schema is one in which students are able to relate well within their own racial and ethnic group and society at large. A study noted by Gonzalez (2009) which was done by Buriel, Perez, DeMent, Chavez, and Moran (1998) discovered a positive link between biculturalism and academic success.

Classroom Support

Banks' (1999) research gives specific strategies to help reduce racial prejudices among students such as including affirmative and realistic images of different ethnic groups in the curriculum, involve students vicarious learning experiences such as field trips that present diverse ethnic groups, and planning cooperative learning strategies that ask all students to work together on classroom assignments. Maxwell (2012) presents specific strategies such as using bibliotherapy (where teachers use books in the classroom that are about people with similar experiences as students of differing ethnic groups which serves to foster a sense of self pride among students), asking students to journal in class or at home about their developmental experiences, and providing opportunities for students to work with one another. Gonzalez (2009) shares that anti-bias and inclusive curriculum, multicultural events and clubs, along with teachers providing multiple opportunities for students to reflect on the role of their race/ethnicity in society and regularly interact with racially similar peers serve as valuable supports for helping students develop their REI. Akos (2008) echoes the encouragement found in much of the other literature to use multicultural curriculum. Gonzalez (2009) adds a condition to planning multicultural events and clubs, stating that is it vital to note that such things proved only to be successful when a) they gave opportunities for students to feel successful, b) provided school-wide recognition as valuable, and c) critically examined stereotypes. Gonozalez (2009) says that educators must be aware that events or clubs arranged only to foster pride or racial celebrations can prove more harmful then beneficial if they do not also led to equal status for those students in the school. Maxwell (2012) also mentions Henriksen and Paladino's (2009) *Multiple Heritage Identity* activity

in which students are given a blank sheet of paper and asked to write “Who I Am” at the top of the paper and then fill in the rest of the paper with pictures or words that describe them. Valenzuela (2004) echoes this thought by suggesting that educators give Hispanic students assignments that ask them to describe what it means to be Mexican. Gonoza (2009) quotes research from Oyserman (2008) which shares that adolescents who celebrate the good contributions of their racial-ethnic groups to society have a more positive sense of REI and therefore are more successful in the classroom. Schwartz (2008) comments that support from peers and teachers can also help to cultivate a positive sense of self-identity among students and improve academic performance.

The research of Zayas (2001) reveal that providing middle school students with opportunities to explore and discuss their ethnic issues is a great benefit to helping students develop a positive sense of REI. Baca and Koss-Chioino (1997) share a counseling strategy which has been proven to be a valid tool to nurture the racial-ethnic identity development among middle school students is group work. They suggest that middle school counselors should develop and put in place “ethnic exploration groups” in which students research their cultural heritages and discuss their ethnic backgrounds with their peers. This provides students the opportunity to both explore their heritages and learn about the experiences of others in an affirmative and supportive environment. This strategy could be implemented on a smaller level in English and Social Studies classrooms, where educators could place students in mixed cultural groups and have them share their experiences as a part of a class paper or project. For example, this group work could be part of the requirements for a brainstorming activity at the beginning of writing

a personal narrative where students could share with others their experiences before they begin to write.

School Support

On a school wide level, educational professionals and leaders can help to develop the REI of Hispanic students through working for heterogeneous schools. Pabon (2010) discovered in her research that Hispanic youth who attend diverse schools are more likely to explore their ethnic identities and attain a positive sense of ethnic-racial identity. Torres (2003) commented that Hispanics who grow in communities that are mainly White tend to have a lower sense of REI. Urban school districts which are many times made up of students from various backgrounds must see this diversity as an asset and make the most of such a beneficial opportunity.

Family Support

Nieto (2011) notes that family is an important cultural value for Hispanics. Quintana and Vera (1999) share that parents contribute significantly to a student's sense of REI. Educators can help support students by creating family like classroom environments and making efforts to bring students' home lives into the classroom. According to Suarez-Orozco, Doucet, and Suarez-Orozco (2004), it is not enough for students to have parent approval, they also need the respect of teachers and peers. However family support plays a significant part in healthy REI development. Pabon (2010) explains that racial-ethnic socialization begins at home through the ways in which parents teach their children about their group membership and social position through both verbal and nonverbal messages. These verbal messages can either be positive or negative, depending upon how parents review their racial-ethnic position in society. Parents who work to actively help their

children embrace their culture and prepare for the biases of society tend to have children who are more likely to explore their identities and have a positive sense of REIs (Umana-Taylor 2004). Akos (2008) and Hudley & Taylor (2006) notes collaborating with families as a great tool in helping students discover who they are racially and ethnically and how that works out itself within the classroom. Rivas-Drake, Hughes, and Way (2009) comment that family support and parental racial socialization are connected with higher levels of ethnic and racial exploration and a stronger sense of belonging to one's ethnic group.

Reflection and Implications For Educators

As educators, the goal of our research is to transform our classrooms, students, and communities. Out of my meta-analysis review of the literature published on the development of REI among young adolescent Hispanic students, five implications for teachers have emerged. First, teachers must work to maintain a mindset that no two teachers are alike. As teachers, we further serve to limit and stifle students' abilities to explore their REIs in the classroom by grouping all Hispanic students together, denying students their individual lives and experiences. Just because two students are Hispanic does not mean they have the same worldviews, beliefs, background knowledge or experiences. Along with this mindset, teachers often tend to view appropriate culturally responsive teaching as treating each student "equal." This is inappropriate though and will not serve to help support Hispanic or any other students, because students bring different backgrounds and skills sets to the classroom, and what works for one will not necessarily work for everyone else. In order to best support each student and promote the

development of REI among young adolescent students, educators must take the time and effort to build personal relationships with each student.

Second, one of the most significant thing educators can do in helping to support students develop their REIs is first reflect on one's own personal ethnic identity and prejudices. I was surprised how many things I assumed about my students simply because that was my own personal experience. As Helm's (1994) pointed out, students develop their REIs through significant relationships with others, and the most profitable teacher-student relationships are those in which teachers are confident and aware of their own REI, and can help their students explore and embrace their own. As educators, we must also overcome our tendencies as humans to be uncomfortable with differences or unfamiliar situations if we wish to help Hispanic students develop a positive sense of REI. We cannot model to our students how to treat everyone with respect if we are nervous or unsettled by differences.

The third implication that arose from my research is an undying determination to work to build positive relationships with the families of Hispanic students. A common theme I have heard among teachers who have Hispanic students or students from other ethnic backgrounds is that they have tried to reach out to these students and their families, but their parents don't speak English, so they tend to overlook those relationships because they can be challenging and frustrating. Yet as seen in the mentioned research, these students need strong school connections with their families. As educators we must be innovative, persistent, and undeterred from establishing professional and positive relationships with the families of our Hispanic students.

Fourth, the REI of young adolescent Hispanic students can also be supported by educators intentionally providing all students the opportunity to explore their REI. If students from the racial-ethnic majority group were also given the chance and asked to reflect on their identities, then perhaps their attitudes towards and ways of seeing students different than themselves would be transformed. If all students could learn to be secure in who they are racially and ethnically in light of differences among their peers, this could lead to respect and deeper engagement with students different from themselves. A stronger sense of classroom community could be a possible result as well, which would help students feel connected with one another and be secure enough to take academic risks.

The fifth implication for educators is to work to authentically value the heritage and language of Hispanic students in the classroom. As pointed out by Gonzalez (2009), multicultural clubs or events can be more harmful than helpful when they do not lead to equal status for minority students in the school. As educators, sometimes we try to be “multicultural” and attempt to appreciate students’ culture by celebrating holidays or planning lessons about different cultures. While this is useful, it will not effectively help support the REI development of young adolescent Hispanic students. Instead, teachers must allow students’ different cultures and needs to make up the classroom environment by respecting and valuing Spanish, actively encouraging students to share their different perspectives, and planning for group activities that allow students to safely share their experiences with one another.

Future Research Questions

As I reflect on the literature published on the REI development in Hispanic adolescent students, I am thankful for the growing amount of research on the topic. Although not a negative thing, the majority of research on REI development has centered on African American students, but our schools are becoming more diverse with various ethnicities and cultures, such as Hispanic students. I was surprised at the amount of research I found, but there is still much more research to be done. Outside of the research on racial ethnic models, a lot of the research I found was very recent and is still being conducted.

As I read and analyzed the research published on this topic in light of my own experiences, I was also made aware of the number of times at work when co-workers would make jokes or say negative things about those of an Hispanic heritage or when I would hear a White or African American student say, “Dude, you’re a Mexican” to another White or African American peer. Although I did not find my thoughts presented in research, I cannot help but wonder if the face of racism is now showing itself through attitudes toward Hispanic students. This wondering was further fueled by observing in interaction between an African American and Hispanic student in which both were fighting about whose culture was better. Throughout the heated conversation, both students gave specific cultural and historical examples to prove their argument of superiority. Despite the vast amount of research I surveyed, I found very little published on the racial tensions between African American and Hispanic students. These wonderings I believe deserve further attention and interest. They represent the tendency of humankind to continually mock or build up biases against cultures or experiences that do not fit within the norm.

In the research of Pabon (2010), I came across the idea that there is a strong relationship between ethnic identity and spirituality (Chae, Brown, and Boden 2004). This idea was not explored in depth in the research and I believe it deserves a deeper look. Religion is an incremental part of Hispanic culture for many students, and as educators we must possess a working knowledge of this relationship and how it affects their REI development.

The majority of research published focused on the development of REI development among older adolescent students. There is still a need for research and case studies that looks directly at the development of identity at the beginning of adolescence. Although beyond the scope of this paper, it would be interesting to compare the experiences and thoughts of Hispanic students regarding their REI development to those of elementary school. I found a significant amount of research published on the development of identity in college, which was encouraging, but yet if early adolescence is where the development of identity first begins, I believe we need more intentional research and focus there.

Conclusion

As educators, we must be active advocates for Hispanic students in our schools, and refrain from the attitude that our role is to simply teach content instead of being actively involved in helping students make sense of who they are and their place in the community. Students are receiving a message about their position in society whether educators speak up or not. And in light of racism and biases, that message is most likely not beneficial. May the future educators of tomorrow and today be those who actively seek to help students embrace and celebrate the many different components that make them who they are.

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