

## **Discrimination Distress During Adolescence**

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*Amidst changing patterns of accommodation and conflict among American ethnic groups, there remains a paucity of research on the nature and impact of racial and ethnic discrimination on development in multiethnic samples of youth. The Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index along with measures of caregiver racial bias preparation and self-esteem was administered to 177 adolescents drawn from 9th–12th graders self-identified as African American, Hispanic, East Asian, South Asian, and non-Hispanic white. Youth from all ethnic backgrounds reported distress associated with instances of perceived racial prejudice encountered in educational contexts. Instances of institutional discrimination in stores and by police were higher for older youth and particularly for African American and Hispanic teenagers. Encounters with peer discrimination were reported most frequently by Asian youth. Reports of racial bias preparation were associated with distress in response to institutional and educational discrimination and self-esteem scores were negatively correlated with distress caused by educational and peer discrimination. The importance of research on discrimination distress to understanding adolescent development in multiethnic ecologies is discussed here.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Ethnic groups in the United States have had different encounters with discrimination (Laosa, 1984). Those of African descent have a long record of harsh oppression rooted in legally sanctioned slavery and segregation. Those of Hispanic, Native American, and East and South Asian heritage have experienced historical and contemporary narratives of military conquest, displacement, and economic exploitation. Some non-Hispanic whites also share family histories of discriminatory immigration laws and socially sanctioned barriers to educational and employment opportunities. Many individuals making up this country's ethnic mosaic have ancestral or personal experiences with oppression in their native homelands.

As the demographic landscape of the United States continues to become more ethnically diverse (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991), old prejudices and historical forms of ethnic and racial discrimination are giving way to new ideals based on respect for culturally diverse practices. At the same time, new forms of ethnic stereotypes and racialistic practices have emerged (Chun, 1995; Demo and Hughes, 1990, Essed, 1991; Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986). Current patterns of ethnocentrism, competition, and differential power continue to place those of African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American descent in minority positions within the American stratification system (Harrison *et al.*, 1990). There are numerous indicators that discrimination in jobs, housing, education, juvenile justice, and social services continues to be a risk factor for minority youth (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; National Research Council, 1993; Rumberger and Willems, 1992; Takeuchi, 1998; U.S. Sentencing Commission, 1995; Vega and Amaro, 1994).

The paradoxical nature of contemporary relations among different ethnic groups in the United States can make current forms of intolerance confusing and stressful for adolescents (Camino, 1995; DiTomaso, 1998; Glazer, 1997). The pioneering work in this area has largely focused on the incidence of and stress related to daily encounters with racism and discrimination within samples of African American adults and the development of racial mistrust, culturally marginalized identities, and stereotype threat in African American children (Biafora *et al.*, 1993; Bowman and Howard, 1985; Boykin and Toms, 1985; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Gaines and Reed, 1995; Klonoff *et al.*, 1999; Steele, 1997; Terrell and Miller, 1988; Terrell *et al.*, 1993; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Utsey and Ponterotto, 1996). A few studies have begun to examine the effects of racial prejudice on adults and teenagers of Hispanic and East and South Asian descent (Cuellar *et al.*, 1995; Dion and Kawakami, 1996; Ghuman, 1998; Phinney and Charvira, 1995). Yet, despite the ubiquitous nature of racial and ethnic discrimination in the lives of many American youth, its impact on adolescent development and well-being continues to be ignored in mainstream research (Fisher *et al.*, 1997).

Amidst changing cultural patterns of discrimination and ethnic tension there also remains a paucity of research on the relationship between discrimination distress and how today's parents prepare for and react to the strains their children

experience in multiethnic ecologies (Marshall, 1995; Rotheram and Phinney, 1987; Stevenson, 1997). Recent data indicate that some parents adopt a reactive socialization style, preparing children for racial barriers by emphasizing racism awareness (Hughes and Chen, 1997; Stevenson, 1994, 1997). Research with African American, Mexican American, and Chinese American families also suggests that some parents take a proactive stance, socializing their children to be proud of their race as a means of developing coping styles to deal with discriminatory practices and negative ethnic stereotypes (Bowman and Howard, 1985; Demo and Hughes, 1990; Knight *et al.*, 1993; Rosenthal and Feldman, 1992; Spencer, 1983; Thornton *et al.*, 1990). Teenagers socialized to be aware of and respond proactively to racism have been found to have a greater sense of personal efficacy and self-esteem (Bowman and Howard, 1985; Phinney and Chavira, 1995).

Encounters in multicultural contexts also influence how adolescents perceive and experience the self. According to Spencer (1999), self-appraisal processes are unavoidably linked to phenomenological stressors related to inferences about how one is perceived by others. For adolescents belonging to visible minorities in particular, negative self-evaluations may emerge from continuous experiences with discriminatory exclusion from opportunities and racially prejudiced attitudes (Spencer, 1999; Steele, 1997).

In a multiethnic society, adolescents from all cultures may come in contact with adults and peers from other ethnic groups who knowingly or unknowingly hold stereotypic prejudices (Peters, 1988; Polakow-Suransky and Ulaby, 1990; Rumbaut and Ima, 1988). Investigations that inform us about the extent to which adolescent stress reactions converge or diverge in multiethnic samples are thus of both empirical and societal import (Berry, 1989; Phinney, 1992; Phinney and Chavira, 1995). For example, although adolescents from different ethnic groups may have unique ways of interpreting, responding to, and preparing for intolerance, distress in response to a perceived discriminatory incident may be common across groups (Fisher *et al.*, 1997; Graham, 1992; Jackson and Sellers, 1997; Spencer, 1999; Takanishi, 1994). The major goal of this study was to begin to examine the extent to which adolescents from different ethnic and racial backgrounds experience distress in response to perceived instances of racial discrimination. A secondary goal was to explore the relationship of discrimination-based distress to parental messages about race relationships and self-esteem.

## METHOD

### Participants

The 177 participants (78 males, 98 females, 1 unidentified) attended an ethnically diverse academically competitive urban public school. Students ranged in age from 13 to 19 years, with a mean age of 16 years and were drawn from the 9th (16%), 10th (13%), 11th (30%), and 12th (41%) grades. Twenty-one percent

of students self-identified as African American with recent family histories rooted in America, Africa, or the Caribbean; 23% as Hispanic with family origins in the Caribbean, Central or South America; 25% as East Asian with Chinese or Korean heritage; 8% as South Asian with family origins in India; and 23% as non-Hispanic white with family origins in Europe, Russia, and the Mid-East. Student responses to questions concerning parental employment and education revealed a wide range of socioeconomic levels: 10% unskilled laborers; 20% semiskilled workers; 8% skilled workers; 24% minor professional and technical; and 38% major business or professional (Entwisle and Astone, 1994). Fifty-two high school juniors and seniors were available for retesting 2 weeks following the initial testing: 11%, 13%, 32%, 4%, and 40% African American, Hispanic, East Asian, South Asian, and non-Hispanic white, respectively.

## Measures

### *The Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI)*

A new 15-item measure was created for this study to tap adolescent distress in response to perceived instances of racially motivated discrimination in institutional (e.g., stores, restaurants), educational (e.g., teacher evaluations), and peer contexts. After each statement, students were asked to indicate whether they had experienced the type of discrimination *because of their race or ethnicity* and if they had, to rate how much it had upset them, on a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *extremely*. Numeric responses were summed to yield full-scale and subscale (institutional, educational, and peer discrimination) scores. Statements were initially constructed based upon existing literature, reports in the news media, personal experiences of the multiethnic research team, and the Racial Discrimination Index designed for African Americans (Terrell and Miller, 1988). These items were then modified for clarity, terminology, and relevance, after review by 28 high school students of African American, Hispanic, East Asian, South Asian, and non-Hispanic white descent.<sup>4</sup>

A 3-factor principal-components analysis yielded a Kaiser-Meyer-Okin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .68 and a Bartlett Test of Sphericity = 499.49,  $p < .0001$ , indicating a good distribution of values not deviating from multivariate normality. Each item loaded onto 1 of 3 factors representing 3 distinct subscales: (1) The 6 items constituting the Institutional Discrimination subscale yielded an eigenvalue = 3.38, accounting for 22% of the variance; (2) the 4 items loading on the Educational Discrimination subscale factor yielded an eigenvalue = 2.00,

<sup>4</sup>There were originally 19 items on the scale. Three of the items not retained were vaguely worded (e.g., "People wrongly assumed you had done something wrong," "People were impolite to you," and "People acted as if they thought you were dishonest") and consequently loaded highly (.40 or above) on more than one component. A fourth non-retained item ("You were made to leave a store or a public place") was the least frequent discriminatory event, reported by only 11% of the respondents, and did not exceed a .22 loading on any factor.

**Table I.** Factor Structure for Institutional Discrimination, Educational Discrimination, and Peer Discrimination subscales of the Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI)

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	M	SD
<b>Institutional Discrimination Distress Subscale</b>					
You were hassled by a store clerk or store guard (10)	.73	.19	-.08	2.62	1.98
People acted as if they were afraid of you (14)	.72	-.06	-.04	1.87	1.48
People acted as if they thought you were not smart (13)	.67	.12	.13	2.63	2.07
People expected less of you than they expected of others your age (7)	.62	-.08	.30	1.85	1.63
You were hassled by police (9)	.50	.13	-.11	1.82	1.69
You received poor service at a restaurant (12)	.48	.34	.18	2.75	1.88
<b>Educational Discrimination Distress Subscale</b>					
You were discouraged from joining an advanced level class (1)	-.03	.71	.15	1.68	1.44
You were given a lower grade than you deserved (3)	.23	.70	.01	2.67	2.09
People expected more of you than they expected of others your age (6)	.01	.61	.27	2.47	1.65
You were wrongly disciplined or given after-school detention (2)	.33	.49	-.27	1.74	1.61
<b>Peer Discrimination Distress Subscale</b>					
You were called racially insulting names (11)	.11	.10	.77	3.20	2.16
Others your age did not include you in their activities (5)	.07	.21	.63	2.40	1.83
You were threatened (15)	-.18	.22	.58	2.20	1.89
You were discouraged from joining a club (4)	.00	-.13	.48	1.62	1.30
People assumed your English was poor (8)	.38	.05	.47	3.28	1.95

Note. Figures in parentheses represent the item number.

accounting for 13% of the common variance; and (3) the 5 items constituting the Peer Discrimination subscale yielded an eigenvalue = 1.44, accounting for 10% of the common variance. The institutional subscale correlated .34 and .26 with the educational and peer subscales, which correlated .23 with each other, indicating significant ( $p < .01$ ) overlapping but distinct constructs. Interitem reliability and test-retest reliability were good for the institutional ( $\alpha = .72, r_{50} = .76$ ), educational ( $\alpha = .60, r_{47} = .53$ ), and peer ( $\alpha = .60, r_{49} = .75$ ) discrimination subscales. The 15 items of the ADDI are listed along with their subscale factor loadings, mean response scores, and standard deviations in Table I.

### *The Racial Bias Preparation Scale (RBPS)*

The Racial Bias Preparation Scale (RBPS) was constructed as a measure of the frequency with which adolescents perceive that they experience messages from their primary caretakers in preparation for living in a multiethnic society. The RBPS consists of 10 Reactive Messages reflecting ethnic prejudice awareness (e.g., “Racism may hinder your success in life,” “You have to work twice as hard as children of other races to get ahead in this world”), 10 Proactive Messages reflecting ethnic pride reinforcement (e.g., “Our race is capable of succeeding in

anything,” “You should be proud of your race”), and 10 contrast items (“Your race will not really affect your success in life,” “All races are equal”). Students responded to each item on a 3-point Likert-type scale (1: *never*, 2: *a few times*, 3: *a lot*) and were asked to “circle the number that corresponds to how often, if ever, any of your primary caregivers said any of the following statements to you now or when you were younger.” Numeric responses to the reactive and proactive statements were summed to yield subscale scores.

In constructing the RBPS, items that could be related to a multiethnic sample were drawn from the Teenager Experience of Racial Socialization Scale developed by Stevenson and colleagues (Stevenson, 1994, 1997; Stevenson *et al.*, 1996) for African Americans. Additional statements were added based upon reviews of the literature and then modified following critiques from the multiethnic sample of 28 adolescent raters who assisted in the evaluation of the ADDI. A principal-components analysis performed on the 20 target items identified as reactive and proactive demonstrated that the 2-factor solution was most interpretable with all 20 items loading .40 or more on either the Reactive Messages (eigenvalue = 6.72; 33% of variance) or Proactive Messages (eigenvalue = 2.04; 11% variance) subscales. The reactive and proactive subscales correlated  $r_{169} = .56$  with each other ( $p < .001$ ). Interitem reliabilities and test-retest ( $p < .001$ ) reliabilities were good for the Reactive Messages ( $\alpha = .86$ ,  $r_{50} = .87$ ), and Proactive Messages ( $\alpha = .83$ ,  $r_{50} = .76$ ) subscales. On the basis of these intercorrelations, the RBPS subscales can be conceptualized as related yet distinct measures of perceived racial bias preparation.<sup>5</sup>

*Self-Esteem.* Participants also completed the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1986) to examine the possibility that negative self-evaluations may emerge from continuous experiences with discriminatory exclusion from opportunities and racially prejudiced attitudes. This measure has been widely used with multiethnic samples and consists of positive and negative statements rated on 4-point scales ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Scores range from 0–6.

## Procedure

Active parental permission and student assent forms were distributed in social studies classes, a class on African American history, and meetings of the student Hispanic organization. Parents and students were informed that all information would be confidential, that participation was voluntary, and that students would be answering questions about their experiences with discrimination, feelings of well-being, and what caregivers had told them about their culture. Student participation rates varied across classes ranging from 30%–70%. Testing took approximately 40 min and was conducted during a class period or club meeting.

<sup>5</sup>The Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index and the Preparation for Racial Bias Scale are available upon request to the first author.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Factors

Chi-square analyses indicated no significant differences in the ethnic distribution of students by gender or grade. An ANOVA yielded a significant main effect of ethnic group on socioeconomic level,  $F(3, 113) = 6.03$ ,  $p = .0008$ . A Tukey HSD test with significance level at .05 indicated that non-Hispanic white students ( $M = 51$ , range = 19–66) were at higher SES levels than either Hispanics ( $M = 35$ , range = 13–61) or East Asians ( $M = 42$ , range = 12–61) were. These groups did not differ significantly from either African American ( $M = 45$ , range = 26–61) or South Asian students ( $M = 47$ , range = 24–66). Bivariate correlations yielded no significant relationships between SES and scores on the Institutional, Educational, or Peer Discrimination subscales ( $r_{109-112} = -.02, .04, .01$ , respectively). Socioeconomic status, although not statistically related to the Proactive Messages subscale of the Racial Bias Preparation Scale ( $r_{110} = -.13$ ,  $p = .17$ ), was significantly correlated with the Reactive Messages subscale ( $r_{112} = -.26$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Consequently, SES was included as a covariate when relationships between discrimination distress and scores on RBPS scales were analyzed.

Many students reported that at least one of their primary caregivers had emigrated to the United States (43%, 98%, 88%, 93%, and 35% of students of African, East and South Asian, Hispanic, and European descent, respectively). More of the East and South Asian students (38%, 53%) were born outside the United States compared with African American (21%), Hispanic (15%), and non-Hispanic white (10%) participants. Fifty percent of the Hispanic students and 55% and 40% of the East and South Asian students reported not speaking English at home, compared with 5% of both African American and non-Hispanic white students. The majority of students spoke only English with their friends (92%, 86%, 84%, 93% and 92% for students of African, East and South Asian, Hispanic, and European descent, respectively). None of these demographic characteristics correlated significantly with the ADDI subscales.

### Ethnic Group Variation in Distress Reactions to Perceived Discrimination

Means and standard deviations for scores on the subscales of the Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index are provided in Table II. We first sought to examine whether distress brought about by negative events perceived to be motivated by racial/ethnic discrimination would be significantly higher for ethnic minority than for non-Hispanic white adolescents.

Following a significant multivariate test on all 3 subscales,  $\Lambda(12, 328) = 4.27$ ,  $p < .001$ , and significant univariate tests for the main effect of ethnicity (see Table II), planned comparison tests indicated that students who self-identified

**Table II.** Means and Standard Deviations for Full-Scale and Subscale Scores of the Adolescent Discriminatory Distress Index (ADDI), the Reactive Messages and Proactive Messages Subscales of the Preparation for Racial Bias Scale (PRBS), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory

Instrument	African American (N = 37)				Non-Hispanic White (N = 40)			Main effect of ethnicity
	Multigroup (N = 177)	Hispanic (N = 40)	East Asian (N = 45)	South Asian (N = 15)	White (N = 40)	South Asian (N = 15)	Hispanic (N = 40)	
<b>ADDI</b>								
Institutional	7.54 (7.00)	11.54 (6.21)	10.53 (7.46)	6.08 (4.84)	3.15 (5.54)	6.08 (4.84)	10.53 (7.46)	$F(3, 170) = 15.40^{***}$
Educational	4.50 (4.59)	4.71 (4.97)	5.72 (5.03)	5.07 (5.13)	2.29 (3.28)	5.07 (5.13)	5.72 (5.03)	$F(3, 170) = 4.36^{**}$
Peer	6.87 (5.77)	4.14 (4.81)	6.77 (5.26)	7.93 (6.07)	5.51 (5.37)	7.93 (6.07)	6.77 (5.26)	$F(3, 172) = 8.44^{***}$
<b>PRBS</b>								
Reactive	16.19 (4.67)	18.94 (4.12)	17.45 (4.20)	14.73 (5.29)	12.69 (2.94)	14.73 (5.29)	17.45 (4.20)	$F(4, 111) = 7.77^{***}$
Proactive	20.40 (4.55)	21.46 (4.06)	21.27 (4.39)	21.00 (3.62)	17.60 (5.23)	21.00 (3.62)	21.27 (4.39)	$F(4, 109) = 2.65^*$
Self-Esteem	4.87 (1.37)	5.57 (0.80)	4.87 (1.04)	4.00 (1.92)	5.00 (1.15)	4.00 (1.92)	4.87 (1.04)	$F(4, 176) = 5.45^{***}$

Note. Figures in parentheses represent the standard deviations.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



as non-Hispanic white reported significantly less discriminatory distress arising within institutional,  $t(166) = 4.56$ ,  $p < .001$ , and educational,  $t(166) = 3.34$ ,  $p = .001$ , contexts than students identifying themselves as African American, Hispanic, East or South Asian. Additional tests indicated that African American and Hispanic youth were more likely than their Asian peers to feel victimized by institutional racism,  $t(166) = 4.09$ ,  $p < .001$ . This picture was somewhat reversed when peer discrimination was reported. Students who self-identified as either African American or non-Hispanic white reported significantly less peer-caused distress than their Hispanic, East or South Asian cohorts did,  $t(168) = 3.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , with East Asian students reporting the highest levels of peer discriminatory distress,  $t(168) = 2.25$ ,  $p < .026$ .

### **Ethnic Group Variation in the Proportion of Teenagers Encountering Different Types of Discrimination**

Ethnic variation in the proportion of adolescents who reported having experienced each of the specific racially motivated negative events described in the 15 items of the ADDI can also suggest pathways for future studies, and we highlight some of the findings here. As illustrated in Table III, with respect to items reflecting institutional discrimination, at least half of the African American, Hispanic, and South Asian youth in our sample reported being hassled by store personnel because of their race. Moreover, a large proportion of African American and Hispanic respondents believed that racial biases led others to perceive them as dangerous or not smart and to negative encounters with police. Of further interest is the fact that a majority of ethnic minority and almost one-third of non-Hispanic white respondents perceived that racial discrimination was responsible for poor service they received at restaurants.

For items associated with discrimination in educational settings, ethnic minority students, more so than their white counterparts, perceived that they were discouraged from joining advanced level classes, and African American and Hispanic students in particular felt that racial discrimination resulted in their wrongly being disciplined in school. Across all ethnic groups, between a quarter to one-half of students thought that racial bias was responsible for receiving a lower grade than they deserved and between 40%–80% thought that ethnic discrimination was responsible for people expecting more of them than others their age. The proportion of youth reporting this latter experience was especially high in the small South Asian sample.

Although reports of racial discrimination by peers was highest for youth of East and South Asian descent, high percentages of teenagers from all ethnic groups reported being called racially insulting names and being excluded from activities because of race. Moreover, Asian and non-Hispanic white teenagers were more likely than African American and Hispanic youth in this sample to feel that they

**Table III.** Percentages and Chi-Square Analyses Across Ethnic Groups for Adolescents Indicating They had Experienced the Type of Events Described in the Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index

	African (N = 37)	Hispanic (N = 40)	East Asian (N = 45)	South Asian (N = 15)	Non-Hispanic White (N = 40)	Multigroup (N = 177)	$\chi^2$
<b>Institutional Discrimination Distress Subscale</b>							
You were hassled by a store clerk or store guard (10)	75	65	23	50	20	45	37.95***
People acted as if they were afraid of you (14)	73	47	9	20	10	32	53.71***
People acted as if they thought you were not smart (13)	65	50	33	33	22	43	21.00***
People expected less of you than they expected of others your age (7)	38	42	18	13	5	24	21.01***
You were hassled by police (9)	28	32	18	13	10	21	7.91
You received poor service at a restaurant (12)	65	50	62	53	27	51	13.99**
<b>Educational Discrimination Distress Subscale</b>							
You were discouraged from joining an advanced level class (1)	24	35	22	27	5	22	10.97*
You were given a lower grade than you deserved (3)	46	50	47	33	25	42	5.99
People expected more of you than they expected of others your age (6)	55	55	59	80	41	55	7.17
You were wrongly disciplined or given after-school detention (2)	27	30	11	20	8	19	9.66*
<b>Peer Discrimination Distress Subscale</b>							
You were called racially insulting names (11)	36	47	84	73	50	57	24.19***
Others your age did not include you in their activities (5)	32	47	47	47	38	42	2.65
You were threatened (15)	19	17	47	33	40	31	12.47*
You were discouraged from joining a club (4)	16	27	24	13	22	22	2.24
People assumed your English was poor (8)	24	55	53	47	17	39	19.68***

Note. Figures in parentheses represent the item number.  
 \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

were threatened because of their race, whereas Hispanic and Asian youth felt ethnic bias was the reason why people assumed their English was poor.

### Developmental Variation

As teenagers move from mid to late adolescence the extent to which they come into contact with individuals from other racial/ethnic groups also increases as they gain employment in ethnically diverse settings and frequent stores and restaurants without their parents. One might expect, therefore, that older teenagers in this sample would report higher levels of discriminatory distress elicited in institutional contexts than younger students would. Consistent with this prediction, a main effect of grade,  $F(3, 170) = 5.78$ ,  $p = .0009$ , emerged significant for the institutional subscale, but not for any of the other subscales. Planned comparisons confirmed that 12th graders ( $M = 9.81$ ) reported significantly more institutional discriminatory distress than 9th–11th graders did  $t(167) = 2.28$ ,  $p = .023$ ;  $M_s = 4.63$ ,  $8.27$ , and  $5.67$ , respectively. Neither the main effect of gender nor any interactions yielded significance for the subscales of the ADDI.

### Relationships Between Levels of Discrimination Distress and Racial Bias Preparation

As indicated in Table II, mean scores on the Reactive and Proactive Messages subscales were significantly higher (Scheffe test  $\alpha = .05$ ) for African American, Hispanic, and East Asian adolescents when compared with non-Hispanic whites. The small number of South Asian teenagers in our sample also reported higher reactive and proactive messages scores than their white cohorts did, but this difference did not emerge significant.

Reactive and proactive caregiver racial bias preparation messages were significantly correlated with scores on the Institutional Discrimination subscale ( $r_{166} = .40$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $r_{165} = .25$ ,  $p = .001$ , respectively) and the Educational Discrimination subscale ( $r_{166} = .30$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $r_{165} = .25$ ,  $p = .001$ , respectively). This pattern of relationships remained significant when ethnic minority status was controlled. When the significant relationship between reactive messages and SES reported earlier was controlled, correlations between the Reactive Messages score and Institutional ( $r_{105} = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Educational Discrimination scores ( $r_{105} = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) remained stable, and an association between reactive messages and peer discrimination emerged significant ( $r_{105} = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### Discrimination Distress and Self-Esteem

Mean scores for self-esteem are provided in Table II. Scheffe tests with a significance level of .05 indicated that self-esteem scores of African American

adolescents were significantly higher than those of their East and South Asian peers. Lower levels of self-esteem were significantly associated with higher levels of distress in response to perceived discrimination in educational and peer contexts ( $r_{171} = -.20$ ,  $p = .007$  and  $r_{173} = -.24$ ,  $p < .002$ , respectively), but not institutional contexts ( $r_{171} = -.03$ ). The relationships between self-esteem and educational and peer discrimination remained significant when ethnic minority status was controlled. By contrast, self-esteem scores were unrelated to either reactive ( $r_{172} = -.06$ ) or proactive ( $r_{171} = .00$ ) racial bias preparation messages.

## DISCUSSION

Social and demographic changes in response to immigration and migration, evolving political conditions and new economies, and the redefinition of communities are challenging the American racial order through conflict and accommodations between traditional and emerging social identities of different ethnic minorities (Fisher *et al.*, 1997). As the importance of ethnic categories in American lives continues to evolve, it is essential to examine the impact of racial discrimination on adolescent development within the multiple contexts in which youth engage in interactions with adults and peers from other ethnic groups. The present study points to the promising nature of the ADDI as a means of examining the perception and impact of ethnic prejudice on youth development.

Levels of discrimination distress assessed through responses to the ADDI suggest that racial discrimination may be a pervasive stressor in the daily lives of many adolescents, especially for members of American minorities. For example, youth from all ethnic backgrounds reported instances of institutional discrimination. At least half of African American and Hispanic youth reported they were hassled by store personnel, viewed as dangerous, or perceived as not smart because of ethnic prejudice. A smaller, but still disconcertingly high, percentage of these youth reported that race was the reason why they were hassled by police. Although these percentages should not be surprising in lieu of recent news media reports documenting racial profiling by police and store security guards, there is a paucity of research examining institutional discrimination and its implications for adaptive youth development.

Steele (1997) has drawn scholarly attention to how negative racial stereotypes can dramatically depress academic performance. In our study, white students reported experiencing less educational discrimination than students from visible minority groups, whereas high proportions of teenagers from all ethnic groups attributed unrealistically high academic expectations and receipt of lower grades than they deserved to racial bias. Moreover, African American and Hispanic students more frequently reported that racial discrimination resulted in their being wrongly disciplined. Our findings of high levels of discrimination distress in educational contexts and the relationship of this distress to lowered self-esteem underscore the

need to heed Steele's call for further investigation of threats to academic success posed by ethnic prejudice and discrimination.

Youth from all ethnic groups felt they were sometimes excluded from peer activities because of their race. As Spencer (1999) points out, cultural themes involved in phenomenological processes during childhood and adolescence fundamentally influence behavior and attributional inferences about oneself and others. The fact that higher levels of peer discrimination distress were also associated with lower levels of self-esteem in our sample, point to the urgency with which additional research is needed to examine the effect of peer discrimination on adolescent social development and well-being. The data on peer discrimination also point to future avenues of research on ethnic group differences. Across instances of peer discrimination, Asian teenagers' distress scores were consistently high. For example, although racial name-calling appeared to be ubiquitous among adolescents of all ethnic groups, it was reported with particularly high frequency by East and South Asian youth. Moreover, Asian teenagers along with their white cohorts were more likely than other youth to report they had been threatened because of their race and along with their Hispanic cohorts to consider assumptions regarding their language proficiency as signs of ethnic prejudice. These findings are intriguing and consistent with reports by Peters (1988) and Rumbaut and Ima (1988) that Southeast Asian students living on the West Coast suffer more incidents of discriminatory acts from schoolmates than that experienced by other ethnic groups.

Ethnic minority caregivers were reported to provide more preparation for racial bias than non-Hispanic whites did. However, across all ethnic groups, caregiver messages preparing adolescents for racial bias, especially reactive messages reinforcing expectations for racism, were significantly associated with youth reports of educational, institutional, and peer discrimination. The data prompt examination of the possibility that reactive racial messages may not mitigate, and may even exacerbate, the negative impact of discrimination on adolescent social and emotional development. However, research is still needed to assess whether parental messages regarding racial bias proceed or are in response to adolescent reports of negative racial experiences.

The ADDI measures adolescent self-views as they pertain to whether or not a negative interracial experience was motivated by prejudice. According to Spencer "it is not merely experience, but one's perception of experience in culturally diverse contexts" that influences normal developmental processes (Spencer, 1999, p. 44). Personal encounters with overt ethnic discrimination are unavoidably linked to distress and may lead teenagers and their parents to be wary of contacts with individuals from outside their ethnic group. At the same time, racial and ethnic conflicts covered by the media and discussed with family and same-ethnic group friends may lead adolescents to interpret negative interethnic experiences in terms of racial prejudice, when in some instances the racial bias of the interaction may be ambiguous or nonexistent (Gaertner and Davidio, 1986). As Stevenson (1994) notes, however, adolescent views on race relevant experiences, especially in terms

of how they impact self-esteem and other aspects of identification and well-being, are legitimate in their own right.

For example, high proportions of students from all ethnic groups in our sample attributed unrealistically high academic expectations and low grades to racial bias. These findings are a cause for concern whether or not student perspectives accurately reflect educational discrimination. On the one hand, if adolescent perceptions are accurate, then racial discrimination and resultant stress may be a significant academic risk factor for students attending multiethnic schools. On the other hand, if student perceptions are wrong, then multiethnic schools may run the risk of leading some students to erroneously attribute disappointing academic experiences to racial bias. This in turn may lead students and their families to fail to identify or ignore other personal or contextual factors that may be contributing to their academic problems.

The phenomenological nature of discrimination distress also underscores the need to be cautious about generalizing research results across different cultural ecologies. For example, our sample of students was composed of academically competent teenagers whose families had chosen to place them in a multiethnic public school serving high school students from different neighborhoods. Parents and adolescents in our sample may thus be more positive and open to challenges posed by multiethnic living than family members in other more racially segregated school contexts would. Moreover, school achievement may be an especially salient aspect of self-worth for these students, which in turn may make self-esteem scores particularly vulnerable to perceptions of educational discrimination. Our sample also represents adolescents who reside in New York City where the challenges of living among diverse cultures is a constant media topic and where relationships among members of different ethnic and cultural groups can be among the most harmonious and the most contentious examples of multiethnic living. Adolescent samples growing up in different cultural ecologies may demonstrate different patterns of ethnic group variation in discrimination distress and its association with self-esteem and racial bias preparation messages.

In summary, this study has extended Phinney's initiative (Phinney, 1992) on the development of multigroup assessments of race relevant constructs to the measurement of adolescent self-reports of discrimination distress. The impact of perceived institutional, educational, and peer prejudice remains particularly salient for African American, Hispanic, and East and South Asian youth living in the United States and may also be of concern to non-Hispanic white adolescents whose families have recently immigrated to the United States from countries marked by religious and ethnic oppression. The significance of individual and familial reactions to perceived discrimination for non-Hispanic white adolescents may also be increasing with shifts in perceptions of the racial distribution of economic resources (DiTomaso, 1998) and changes in the demographic landscape that make members of the current majority culture a minority in some settings (Phinney, 1992). The ADDI and other measures of the psychological sequelae of

stressful engagements in diverse cultural contexts have the potential to enhance our understanding of how adolescents living in multiethnic ecologies perceive and experience themselves and the implications of these perceptions for adaptive life course development.

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