




### SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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Time of Presentation: Jun 02 5:45 PM - 7:45 PM

Category/Theme: Context and Prevention

#### **Influence and Process of Perceived School Multiculturalism in Relation to Youth Delinquency and Depression**

*S. Johansen<sup>1</sup>; T. Le<sup>1</sup>*

1. Human Development and Family Studies, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, United States.

From a youth developmental perspective, multiculturalism entails the development of empathetic understanding, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, and civic mindfulness (Endicott, Bock, & Narvaez, 2003; Bennett, 1993; & Cushner, 2008). While studies have examined multiculturalism with respect to academics (Chushner, 2008; & Straffon 2003), few studies to date have explored the relation between perceived school multiculturalism and depression and delinquency. This study explores the relation between perceived school multiculturalism and two important youth outcomes, depression and delinquency. Potential mediators including civic engagement, ethno-cultural empathy, ethnic identity, and positive peers were also explored as potential explanatory processes of this link.

The sample consisted of 324 youth (mean age 12.5 years; range 11-15 years old), evenly divided by gender, and 20% first generation, 50% second generation, and 13% third or higher. Almost half of the youth (49%) identified as Asian, 14% as African-American, and 37% as Hispanic. Measures included perceived school multiculturalism (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003), ethnic identity (MEIM; Phinney, 1992), positive peers (WestEd, 2003), ethnocultural empathy (Wang et al. 2003), civic engagement (Keyes 1998), depression (CESD; Radloff, 1977), and delinquency (Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985). Structural equation models (SEM) using Mplus 3.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2003) were used to assess the theorized relations among the variables of interest. Structural models (i.e., no mediation, partial mediation, full mediation) were compared in terms of model fit and parsimony, followed by bootstrapping analyses.

Results revealed support for a full mediation model in which perceived school multiculturalism was positively associated with civic engagement, positive peers, and ethnic identity; civic engagement and positive peers, in turn, were significantly negatively associated with delinquency but not depression. As recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), bootstrapping analyses were conducted to assess the effects of mediators by constructing confidence intervals around the estimates. The results portray that only civic engagement was a significant mediator between multiculturalism and delinquency.

The results of this study reveal that there are potentially different pathways and mechanisms by which multiculturalism operates with respect to different youth outcomes. For delinquency, peer factors and sense of belonging seems to be more influential factors than the ability to tune in to the feelings and experiences of others, whereas such ability is more salient for the positive side of emotional health.

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