

# Chapter 3

## Canaries and Bellwethers: What Can We Learn About Racial Justice from Studying Ethnic-Racial Identity Within and Across Groups?



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In popular culture and in developmental science, we hear a lot about the changing US demographics, especially among the youth population. We know that the changing landscape of people means we can look forward to a future in which the youngest, and most diverse, segment of our society will be parents, neighbors, employees, and voters of a place foreign to many of us (adults) (Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2019). As the title of this volume suggests, well-known projections show that in just a little over two decades, we can expect the White population to decline with the concurrent emergence of a majority composed of Black, Latinx, Asian, and multiracial youth (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Although significant, these changes are not the whole, or even most important part, of the history we are living.

An exclusive focus on the narrative of the future of the United States that highlights our growing diversity unquestionably risks overlooking the clear warning signs of racism in the air we breathe every day, that is evident in the daily lives of marginalized youth of color, and that will not simply disappear with greater racial diversity (Tatum, 2017). The very same youth who are contributing to the new emerging majority of the United States are growing up in a world that exposes them to racism time and again over the course of their lives. Indeed, their exposure to racism begins very early on when they are subjected to disciplinary disproportionalities in the early childhood classroom (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014), policies and practices meant to reject who they are (e.g., English only policies) and even their bodies as such (e.g., hair policies in schools and sports), and

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expressions of political precarity and threats meant to inflict psychological and even physical harm (Unite the Right rally; Trump tweets; COVID-related racism; e.g., Ruiz et al., 2020). No town or city is exempt from or immune to these realities, and the global protests in support of Black Lives Matter suggest that young people are growing up keenly aware of them (Rogers et al., 2020b). One way to attend to the racism with which young people are growing up, as a field, is to intentionally orient ourselves to the pursuit of racial justice, or actions that foster the equality of status, opportunity, health, civic life, and well-being of racially marginalized people while recognizing their inherent humanity and worth.

In this chapter, we argue that the study of ethnic-racial identity (ERI) in youth can benefit from an explicit orientation to racial justice. ERI involves the beliefs and feelings young people have about their ethnic-racial group, their understanding of the role of race and ethnicity in their lives, and the processes by which they arrive at such beliefs, feelings, and understanding (Sellers et al., 1998; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Supporting ERI development among Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color (BIPOC) is a way to recognize their worth by encouraging a sense of connection to their ethnic-racial group and rejecting the erasure of their experiences and histories. We can consider how the harms of racism may interfere with ERI development; in this way, we might use ERI as a “canary-in-the-coalmine” gauge of exposure to the toxicity of racism. Under certain conditions, moreover, ERI is also an aspect of youths’ social development that may help them understand and work toward racial justice (Mathews et al., 2019). In this sense, ERI can also be used as a “bellwether” to gauge those conditions—that is, policies and practices—that aim to or are the result of social change. Thus, to the extent that ERI can be leveraged to support the equal status, opportunity, health, civic life, and well-being of BIPOC, specifically, then it can be a lever for racial justice. This is especially the case as certain aspects of ERI are associated with better mental health, well-being, and greater engagement in civic life among these communities.

A growing body of literature suggests ERI promotes positive development across youth of color, and protects these youth from negative environmental forces, such as discrimination (Neblett et al., 2012; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b; Yip et al., 2019). Reviews of the literature have found that youth of color with a strong and positive connection to their ethnic-racial group report better academic adjustment (i.e., achievement and attitudes), better psychosocial functioning, and less negative adjustment (e.g., fewer internalizing and externalizing symptoms) compared to youth of color with a weaker or more negative connection (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016; Neblett et al., 2012; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014b). When ERI is assessed as a single composite of the Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) that includes exploration, achievement, positive affect, and/or group belonging, it is related to higher academic achievement and mitigates the negative role of discrimination on youth’s mental health (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016; Yip et al., 2019). Although not the focus of the literature to date, an emerging body of work also suggests that ERI is positively linked to civic and political engagement and dispositions among diverse youth of color (Bañales et al., 2020; Fish et al., 2021; Hope et al., 2019; Pinetta et al., 2020; Wray-Lake et al., 2017).

The following sections proceed as follows. First, we illuminate the affordances for advancing racial justice provided by commonly used ERI theory and research with youth populations. In particular, we consider ERI as a psychological, social/contextual, and temporal phenomenon in order to describe facets that are common and those that are unique across groups. We then discuss how different measures have attempted to capture the psychological, social/contextual, and temporal spaces inhabited by youth across various groups, and we highlight conceptual issues that arise in ERI measurement in single- and multi-group studies. Following this discussion, we highlight findings that indicate for whom and how ERI can be leveraged to support the academic adjustment, psychological health, and civic engagement of racially marginalized youth. We conclude by providing recommendations for how to attend to these complexities when integrating ERI concepts into new and ongoing empirical studies.

### **Affordances of Common Approaches to Conceptualizing ERI in Studies of Youth**

In the United States, the developmental science of ERI was founded on models that focus on the experiences of particular ethnic-racial groups, especially Black Americans (e.g., Cross, 1991), but it has been *popularized* with the study of this phenomenon across multiple groups (e.g., Phinney, 1990). That is, a developmental perspective on ERI did not originate with Phinney’s work; scholars such as Cross (1991) theorized about the nature and quality of change in racial identity among Black people, primarily adults. However, Phinney’s conceptualizations (1989, 1990, 1992; Phinney & Ong, 2007) of ethnic identity form the basis of the majority of research on ERI in *youth* (see Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a; Yip et al., 2019). This perspective advanced the idea that ethnic identity is a part of the normative development of any youth who are ethnic-racial minorities in the United States due to their marginalization (Phinney, 1990). She also conceptualized the developmental aspect by emphasizing the universal importance of arriving at an ERI through one’s own exploration and meaning-making (for a fuller overview of this approach, see Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2019). Importantly, Phinney’s conceptualization—and later elaborations by scholars such as Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004)—has served to advance the phenomenon of ERI as a worthy subject of scholarly inquiry in mainstream developmental science and to highlight a key ethnic-racial asset in child development.<sup>1</sup> Thus, this work sets a foundation for scholars of ERI to claim “air-time” in the developmental science of diverse ethnic-racial minority children—figuratively and literally, in terms of the presence of this research in our peer-reviewed journals.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Sellers et al. (1998) for a discussion of *mainstream* versus *underground* approaches to racial identity at that time.

A group-specific approach, by contrast, is grounded in the unique experiences of particular ethnic-racial groups. This approach has operated to advance racial justice in multiple ways. First, group-specific models introduce ideas and phenomena that attend explicitly and consciously to the reality that such groups must contend with racism at the societal and interpersonal levels in daily life, along with the recognition of individual variability in the extent to which they are aware of these issues (Sellers et al., 1998). Further, from this perspective, ERI development not only occurs against the backdrop of such racism but also has unique elements rooted in the sociopolitical and historical contexts of a particular ethnic or racial group. In addition, some of the rationale for the development of these models involve a conscious rejection of a color-evasive and racism-avoidant approach to the psychological study of particular groups. For example, Cross (1991) and Sellers et al. (1997) proffered conceptualizations of racial identity that sought to *center* the experiences of diverse Black or African American individuals (i.e., adults) as well as the value of theorizing about those experiences due to the inherent worth and dignity of this group, in particular. These perspectives have also challenged the idea that there is a singular “optimal” racial identity, as different understandings of racial identity could be adaptive depending on the realities of individuals’ proximal contexts.

Yet, over time, aspects of Sellers et al.’s (1997, 1998) Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) have become widely used in developmental science of ERI focused on *youth*, generally, and among non-African American youth populations, in particular (see Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a; Yip et al., 2019). For this reason, and for the purpose of this chapter and volume, it is important to clarify here as has been done elsewhere (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2014) that a subset of components of the MMRI has been applied to the study of ERI with diverse populations. The justification for this has been that, with the exception of the ideology dimension—which refers to individuals’ beliefs about how other group members should think and behave (Sellers et al., 1998)—the dimensions of salience, centrality, and regard articulated in the MMRI were drawn from theories that were grounded in universal experiences and transcended the unique experiences of African Americans (e.g., social identity theory; see also Schwartz et al., 2014 for additional discussion). Thus, as discussed further below, these dimensions have been studied in diverse populations, ranging from Chinese American college students (e.g., salience; Yip, 2005) to Dominican sixth graders (e.g., regard; Rivas-Drake et al., 2009). This translational use of MMRI concepts has allowed for the representation of ERI content among youth of color in ways that do not necessarily imply a single optimal identity, which is consistent in principle with the original model.

## **ERI As a Psychological Place, In Context, and Over Time**

To describe how ERI may operate across groups, it may be instructive to consider that at a broader level, beyond the perspective reflected in any given model, we can conceptualize ERI as a psychological (i.e., what Cross et al. (2017) describe as the

“being, feeling, and knowing” aspect), contextual (i.e., shaped by the environment) (Cross et al., 2017; Verkuyten, 2016), and temporal, or time-dependent, phenomenon (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). As scholars have noted, an individual’s ERI is an ever-changing psychological place that an individual inhabits, carries with them, and is continuously influenced by the environment (Cross et al., 2017; Verkuyten, 2016). A number of theoretical frameworks—for example, social identity theory (Verkuyten, 2016), Boykin’s (1983) Triple Quandary framework, Berry’s (1997) acculturation model and Cross et al.’s (2017) identity enactments model—have argued that social milieus position individuals so they must negotiate internal (intra-personal) and external (interpersonal/intergroup) facets of their ERI. For example, Boykin’s (1983) Triple Quandary framework delineated how racially marginalized people must maneuver through three different cultural realms: the mainstream, the oppressed minority, and the ethnic. Berry’s (1997) acculturation model similarly theorizes that immigrant or immigrant-origin individuals must navigate their ERI across multiple realms including the non-dominant as well as the mainstream and dominant. Navigating both the mainstream and dominant culture has distinct implications for youths’ ERI. For example, Latinx adolescents who experienced more acculturation-related conflict with their parents reported less ERI *private regard*, or perceived their ethnic-racial group less positively, when faced with discrimination from peers (Huq et al., 2016). Indeed, the strategies of biculturalism and *code-switching*, both of which involve oscillating between multiple languages or modes of identity expression, exemplify how people regulate their ERI across various cultural spheres (e.g., Birnie-Smith, 2016; Cross et al., 2017). Cross et al.’ (2017) ERI enactments model draws from all of the aforementioned perspectives to provide an integrative framework of how ERI is enacted across different *intra-* and *intergroup* contexts. Findings from Birnie-Smith (2016) illustrate the context-dependent nature of ERI expression. Chinese Indonesian young adults altered their language to differentially express or de-emphasize aspects of their ERI on distinct social network sites (i.e., posted in English or in Indonesian). More specifically, their language use was contingent on what social factors they encountered on those social network sites, such as the ERIs of their friends on that social network (Birnie-Smith, 2016). Taken together, these perspectives thus illuminate that ERI resides not only in the intrapsychological affect and meaning one ascribes to one’s ethnic-racial group membership but also the places one inhabits in response to dominant societal views and expectations for members of that group relative to others.

Further, youth make meaning of their ethnicity and race amidst landscapes marked by psychological, symbolic, and physical borders. The complex placemaking involved in navigating one’s ERI amidst opposing cultural realms or “borders” is illustrated by Anzaldúa’s (1999) *Borderlands*. Anzaldúa captures the stigmatizing experiences of inhabiting and shifting between the physical borderlands or *fronteras* of Texas and Mexico as “swimming” in the often contradicting psychological and linguistic landscapes of American and Mexican culture (Anzaldúa, 1999). Wilson et al. (2014) expand on Anzaldúa’s *fronteras* and describe the educational borderlands traversed by Latinx immigrant youth as “physical and/or contextual landscapes where one must negotiate notions of cultural difference” (Wilson et al., 2014,

p. 3). For some ethnic-minority youth, borderlands manifest in the disconnect between lived experiences at home and in school contexts. For example, scholars have found that Native American youth must traverse sociolinguistic borderlands as they negotiate their Indigenous heritage, multiple languages, and exclusionary school environments that oppress and erase their Native American upbringings (McCarty, 2014). Montoya (2020) notes how transformative educators can openly discuss dynamic issues such as racism, xenophobia, legality, and current immigration policy to encourage Latinx youth to embody, embrace, and even challenge their *borderlands identity* in the classroom. Moreover, the ways in which specific ethnic-racial groups are allowed to navigate such obstacles vary greatly and are context-dependent.

For youth of color, the xenophobic, racist, and oppressive sociopolitical climate that characterizes their experiences determines both the literal and metaphorical boundaries they are encouraged or allowed to cross (Huq et al., 2016; Seaton et al., 2009). Restrictive anti-immigrant and xenophobic US policies enforced by the Trump administration inhibit the physical borders immigrants can cross and have led to thousands of forced family separations, resulting in detrimental consequences for migrant families' and youth's well-being (Dreby, 2015; Enchautegui & Menjívar, 2015). Furthermore, historical events that are widely understood as racialized, such as endemic anti-Black police brutality (Rogers et al., 2020b), the 2008 Presidential election (Fuller-Rowell et al., 2011), and the 2016 Presidential election (Wray-Lake et al., 2018) can contribute to shifts in ERI among children and adolescents. Youth must thus make sense of what it means to be part of their ethnic-racial groups amidst the ever-present boundaries of racial stratification, discriminatory stereotypes, and oppression (Yip, 2018; Seaton et al., 2009). Indeed, throughout the Trump administration's implementation of anti-immigrant policy and xenophobic rhetoric, Latinx youth described having low ERI *public regard*, or more negative views of others' perceptions of their ethnic-racial group, as well as fear and anxiety around their ethnic-racial group affiliation (Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Ultimately, identifying the societal and psychological "borders" experienced by various ethnic-racial groups can aid scholars in understanding the shared, distinct, and dynamic racialized realities across groups.

### ***A Temporal Phenomenon***

ERI is not a collection of individual static characteristics but rather consists of constellations of content (i.e., significance and meaning) obtained or constructed through processes that unfold over time (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2017). The significance and meaning of ERI can encompass beliefs and attitudes such as how positively one feels about one's ethnic-racial group (i.e., private regard). The processes by which ERI develops, by contrast, underscore that it is a temporal phenomenon that unfolds and fluctuates over time (Rivas-Drake et al. 2014a, b; Wang et al., 2017). Age-dependent factors such as cognitive abilities and



environmental factors such as historical events can inform when, how, and what aspects of ERI develop throughout the lifespan (Williams et al., 2020). Through a developmental lens, how a person identifies with their ethnic-racial group in early childhood differs drastically from how they do so in adolescence, middle adulthood, and so on (Rogers et al., 2020a; Williams et al., 2020). Whereas the extent of an infant's ERI may be a visual preference for members of their ethnic-racial group (Liu et al., 2015), an adolescent's ERI involves more agency, such as actively exploring activities and traditions valued within their ethnic-racial group (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Even more, during middle childhood, youth have early understandings of social hierarchies across racial groups (e.g., Rogers et al., 2012). For example, an ethnically and racially diverse sample of second and fourth graders described more perceptual aspects of ERI such as language or physical appearance, as well as more complex and less observable dimensions such as culture and relative social position (Rogers et al., 2012).

Although the field has predominantly relied on cross-sectional, retrospective self-reports of ERI dimensions and development (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a), scholars have looked to daily diary and longitudinal methods to capture daily fluctuations and trajectories of ERI (Wang et al., 2017). Chinese American adolescents' daily involvement in ethnic behaviors such as speaking Chinese or celebrating a Chinese holiday was positively associated with ethnic salience, regardless of their overall ERI (Yip & Fuligni, 2002). Other work shows that Black youth's daily decreases in public regard exacerbated depressive symptoms linked to previous-day experiences of racial discrimination (Seaton & Iida, 2019). Longitudinal studies have also captured the time-varying nature of ERI. Findings from Douglass and Umaña-Taylor (2016) suggest the positive association between Latinx adolescents' family ethnic socialization and ERI exploration strengthen from middle-to-late adolescence, whereas the positive link between family ethnic socialization and ERI resolution weakens. Other findings from Wang et al. (2017) suggest that over time, adolescents' ERI commitment predicted greater daily ethnic-racial salience, whereas greater variability in daily ethnic-racial salience prospectively predicted greater ERI exploration.

However, the distinction between environmental influences and the time-dependent nature of ERI is not always clear. Environmental influences such as the current ethnic-racial makeup of peers (Douglass et al., 2017), ethnic language proficiency (Phinney & Ong, 2007), exposure to ethnic-racial discrimination (Yip, 2018) and interracial contact (Wang & Yip, 2020), as well as the diversity of one's school environment can contribute to shifts in ERI over short periods of time. For instance, Yip (2005) found that among Chinese American college students, ethnic composition, predominant spoken language, and presence of family in their immediate environment were associated with higher ethnic centrality. In this same sample, when students were in the presence of family, increased ERI centrality was associated with greater ethnic salience (Yip, 2005). Kiang and Fuligni (2009) found similar contextual variations among a racially and ethnically diverse sample of young adults. ERI belonging and exploration were the highest when youth were in the presence of parents, decreased when surrounded by co-ethnic peers, and were at

their lowest with different-ethnic peers (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009). Compared to their Asian American, Filipino American, and White counterparts, Latinx youth showed the highest levels of ethnic exploration and belonging with family (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009). Ultimately, acknowledging ERI as a temporal phenomenon also requires that we recognize the role of context in shaping youth's ERI.

### ***A Social Contextual Phenomenon***

ERI is a dynamic phenomenon influenced by social contexts. Indeed, much of the situational variations in ERI have been demonstrated across various ethnic-racial groups and throughout the lifespan (Yip & Fuligni, 2002). As posited by social identity theory, we conceptualize ERI as a social, contextual phenomenon in that the salience of one's identity varies based on that ethnic-racial group's representation and status in any given context (e.g., Syed et al., 2018; Verkuyten, 2016; Yip, 2005). Via an ecological/transactional lens, environmental changes within *micro-systems*, or settings most proximal to youth, are often associated with ethnic-racial identity shifts among youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hughes et al., 2016). To fully capture the complexity of ERI, Syed et al. (2018) emphasize the need to assess distinct environmental characteristics within ethnic-racial settings: *objective/subjective perspective, differentiation, heterogeneity, and proximity*. Measuring objective perspectives of youth's environments such as the ethnic-racial composition of neighborhoods, schools, and peer networks is important in assessing their opportunities to interact with members of other ethnic-racial groups (Syed et al., 2018). The ethnic-racial differentiation and heterogeneity aspects of the environment also matter for youth ERI. *Differentiation*, or how groups are defined within a setting, as well as *heterogeneity*, or the ethnic-racial diversity of an environment, informs how youth make sense of their ethnic-racial group membership (Syed et al., 2018).

Black youth who live in primarily Black neighborhoods report fewer instances of racial discrimination and greater racial centrality, or a stronger sense of their ethnic-racial group membership (Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). For BIPOC youth, living in a predominantly White neighborhood may result in greater exposure to discrimination, racial profiling and racial microaggressions, all of which inform youths' ERI (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2016; Stewart et al., 2009). Experiences of racial discrimination also relate to how youth of color perceive their own ethnic-racial groups. Perceptions of racial discrimination have been negatively associated with perceptions of group status and opportunity among Latinx (e.g., Constante et al., 2021), African American (Seaton et al., 2009), and diverse youth of color (Del Toro et al., 2020). Further, Latinx adolescents who resided in neighborhoods with higher percentages of Latinx neighbors showed greater ERI affirmation, or positive feelings about their ethnic-racial group (Supple et al., 2006). For multiracial youth, the environment in which they are embedded informs their racial identity development



(Csizmadia et al., 2012). Multiracial youth who identified as both White and Latinx identified more often as White when in a predominantly White social setting (Herman, 2008).

*Proximity*, or how close a person is to another person within a setting, also informs youth ERI. Friend and peer networks capture youths' proximity to different ethnic-racial groups and have implications for ERI formation (Rivas-Drake et al., 2017; Santos et al., 2017). For example, Kiang and Johnson (2013) found that Asian adolescents' ethnic identity labels when surrounded by Asian peers differed from when they were surrounded by non-Asian peers. Adolescents who reported a greater proportion of same ethnic-racial friends also felt their ethnicity/race was important to their identity 6 months later (Douglass et al., 2017). However, Douglass et al. (2017) also found that this association was inverse for adolescents who reported fewer same ethnic-racial peers at school, further underscoring the context-dependent nature of ERI.

Importantly, youths' subjective perspective of ethnic-racial settings can shed light on their understanding of racial hierarchies and power disparities between groups (Syed et al., 2018). For example, ethnic-racial minority youth report more perceived racial injustice within the criminal system compared to White youth (Hagan et al., 2005). Moreover, the filters through which youth interpret their experiences of racial marginalization are also continuously changing, as Seider et al. (2019) have shown that Black and Latinx adolescents' awareness of the links between structural factors and racism increase over time. An awareness of one's marginalized social position informs how youth learn about and relate to their ethnic-racial group. For example, stereotypes of Black racial identities as criminal, dangerous, unprofessional, or damaging are examples of stressors Black youth contend with on a daily basis (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). From early childhood, Black youth receive more parental messages that prepare them for navigating and coping with negative stereotypes and racial bias (Neblett et al., 2009). Preparation for bias messages such as these has been linked to great exploration of one's ethnic-racial group membership (Hughes & Johnson, 2001).

Further, understanding that ERI is a contextual/societal phenomenon also requires we conceptualize it as a bidirectional one (Rogers et al., 2020a; Yip, 2018). Just as the environment shapes ERI, ERI can provide a lens through which youth acknowledge and navigate social inequities, racial injustice, and ultimately change their environment (Aldana et al., 2012; Rogers et al., 2020b; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). Youths' experiences of oppression and racial marginalization inform their ERI, motivate them to join social movements, and contribute to their critical consciousness (Fish et al., 2021; Mathews et al., 2019). Other work by Szymanski and Lewis (2015) and Hope et al. (2019, 2020) suggests associations between dimensions of Black youths' racial identity and their activism. Taken together, understanding the reciprocal relationship between youth ERI and the environment is paramount in understanding ERI as a tool for racial justice. Next, we discuss common conceptual and measurement issues that arise when studying ERI within and across various ethnic-racial groups.

## Measurement Issues: Single- Versus Multiple-Group Research

Whether to examine ERI in a specific ethnic-racial group or across multiple ethnic-racial groups depends on the research question under investigation (Schwartz et al., 2014). Given that ERI is a context-driven phenomenon, single-group research addresses a particular group's sociocultural history, which may not be applicable to other groups. Empirical research with ethnically and racially diverse samples supports the notion that aspects of ERI content are group specific (Hughes et al., 2017; Phinney & Ong, 2007). For example, Black, Dominican and Chinese adolescents reported greater ERI exploration than White youth, which parallels prior research that shows BIPOC youth navigate ethnic-racial experiences more frequently than non-BIPOC youth (Csizmadia et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2017). Black and Dominican youth also reported higher ERI commitment compared to White adolescents. Additionally, Black youth reported the lowest public regard, whereas White youth reported the highest public regard (Hughes et al., 2017). These findings reflect theories of Black racial identity that have focused on Black people's status and awareness of their stigmatization within the U.S and the identities that form within this context (Sellers et al., 1998). The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) is a measure that captures these beliefs, in addition to various ideologies specific to African Americans (Sellers et al., 1997). Additional measures, such as Cross's Racial Identity Scale (Vandiver et al., 2002), capture not only ERI content specific to African Americans but also developmental processes specific to African Americans, and thus are not appropriate for use with other groups.

However, Schwartz et al. (2014) note limitations with the single-group approach—namely, that defining group boundaries is messy. They argue it is not always clear where to draw the line of what constitutes a group. For instance, some studies may examine Asian Americans as a panethnic category and others may examine Korean Americans more specifically. Thus, racial and ethnic labels are important when creating and selecting measures that define particular groups of individuals. Among college students of African origin, those who used the self-label Black also reported a less Afrocentric racial identity (Anglin & Whaley, 2006). Students who self-labeled as African American also reported more assimilated racial identities, whereas those who self-labeled as West Indian also endorsed more negative stereotypes of African-origin people (Anglin & Whaley, 2006). Further, due to histories of migration, a person may identify as belonging to multiple, overlapping ethnic-racial groups. Although some groups classified as a singular group, such as Latinx, are often considered one homogenous group, they are in fact racially diverse, with wide variations in European, Native American, and African ancestry (Bryc et al., 2015; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2001). Such variation within the Latinx population has been shown to have implications for ERI content and development (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). Among a sample of Latinx adolescents, the MEIM has shown the strongest internal reliability for Puerto Rican and Nicaraguan adolescents, and the lowest internal reliability for Guatemalan and Honduran youth (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2001).

Further, some youth have a parent who does not share the same ethnicity or race as the other parent, and thus might identify as biracial or multiracial. Multiracial BIPOC youth remain an understudied group in the field and questions remain as to the best way to categorize them and capture their experiences (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). Rockquemore et al. (2009) have suggested that in order to fully understand multiracial youth's ERI development, scholars must differentiate between their *racial category* (the racial identity chosen in specific environments), their *racial identity* (their own understanding of their race) and their *racial identification* (how others group them). Consequently, the limited research on multiracial youth supports the notion that the extent to which they identify with a racial group is context-dependent (Renn, 2000). Importantly, considering where these constructs are similar or overlap, and where they differ is crucial in understanding the multiracial experience of BIPOC youth (Rockquemore et al., 2009; see also Abigail et al., Chap. 7 in this volume).

Additionally, ethnic-racial experiences may vary within singular groups due to geographic region and immigration status (Agi & Rivas-Drake, 2021; Wiley et al., 2008). As noted by Schwartz et al., (2014), "groups have collective histories that influence what it means to identify with the group" (p. 63), potentially resulting in different meanings attached to one's ERI, both across panethnic categories and within. One study showed that Dominican immigrants predominantly self-identified as Black when in the Dominican Republic and as Latinx or Hispanic when in the U.S (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). Among a separate group of Black immigrant college students of West-Indian origin, second-generation immigrants showed less favorable ERI public regard when compared to first-generation immigrants (Wiley et al., 2008). Contrastingly, findings from the same study showed that second-generation Latinx students showed higher public regard when compared to first-generation students (Wiley et al., 2008). Further, among White first-generation immigrants, ERI importance was linked to both private and public regard, but unrelated to public regard among second-generation immigrants (Wiley et al., 2008). The generational and regional differences found in these studies underscore the variation within singular groups.

Rather than a single-group approach, researchers might examine ERI content and processes across multiple groups. Whereas research with African American samples tends to focus on racial identity and research with Latinx or Asian American samples tends to focus on ethnic identity, previous researchers have argued these groups negotiate both ethnicity and race in their lived experiences (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The multiple-groups approach allows researchers to examine aspects of ERI that are theoretically universal and make cross-group comparisons, contributing to our general understanding of ERI (Phinney & Ong, 2007). For instance, a large body of literature has found both universal processes of developing one's ERI (e.g., exploration, resolution), and specific ERI content dimensions of meaning and importance (e.g., centrality, private regard, public regard) that apply across ethnic-racial groups, including Black, Asian, and Latinx youth (see meta-analysis by Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016).

Examining multiple groups in a single study comes with its own challenges. Namely, the extent to which survey measures function similarly across ethnic-racial groups varies. Some studies have found the full and brief versions of the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS), which are composed of exploration, resolution, and affirmation, demonstrate construct validity across ethnically and racially diverse adolescents and college students (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Other studies have found theoretically universal aspects of the MIBI, such as centrality and public regard, are not fully invariant across groups, with item means varying systematically across ethnic-racial groups as well as geographic regions (Sladek et al., 2020). Given different groups have different stereotypes applied to them, public regard measures may be particularly sensitive to group context. Indeed, the item means of public regard are systematically lower for Black American adolescents compared to Asian American adolescents, and Asian American adolescents vary depending on geographic region (Sladek et al., 2020). Public regard measures the extent to which a person believes other people view their own group positively or negatively, including perceptions of intelligence (Scottham et al., 2008). With longstanding stereotypes that paint people of African-descent as being less intelligent than others, and people of Asian-descent as being more intelligent than others, current ways of measuring public regard may not necessarily capture Asian American experiences (McGee & Martin, 2011; Thompson et al., 2016). For instance, when youth are asked to report whether they believe other people think their ethnic group is as smart as people from other ethnic groups, the prevailing stereotype that Asians are smarter than other groups (Thompson et al., 2016) cannot be captured by either agreeing or disagreeing with the prompt. Ultimately, researchers must ensure their research questions and measures are theoretically driven, whether they opt for a single-group approach or a multiple groups approach.

## **Recommendations for Research Seeking to Incorporate ERI**

In this section, we offer recommendations for scholars seeking to incorporate ERI in their research. Our first recommendation is for researchers to be clear about their epistemological orientation. When studying a phenomenon with underlying ERI questions, scholars should identify whether the aim is to a) shed light on unique experiences of single groups situated within particular sociopolitical, historical, and geographical contexts or b) capture more generalized perspectives of multiple groups. Establishing whether the approach is a single-group or rather a multiple-group approach can distinguish whether a particular ethnic-racial group is granted or denied “airtime” within the developmental science literature (Schwartz et al., 2014). Furthermore, particularly if the aim is to center the ERI experiences of a marginalized group, scholars should acknowledge the backdrop of racism, as well as the sociopolitical and historical landscapes in which ERI develops and fluctuates (Rogers et al., 2020b; Zepeda-Millán & Wallace, 2013). Without doing so, researchers risk dismissing or inaccurately conveying the daily realities and narratives of

entire groups that are often overlooked, understudied, and underestimated within developmental research.

A related question to ask is, what is the conceptual role of ERI in the phenomenon being studied? How central is ERI to the primary research objectives? Considering the scope of focus on ERI as well as the level of nuance can inform scholars on how to best empirically measure and examine the construct (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a). As scholars have previously shown, ethnic-racial experiences vary within and across ethnic-racial groups (Csizmadá et al., 2012; Del Toro et al., 2020; Seaton et al., 2009; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). Further research should seek to understand the distinct influences of specific ERI dimensions, rather than relying on composite ERI measures (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a). When possible, indicating measurement invariance both between and within groups is essential to ensure instruments are theoretically and psychometrically sound for both the population and phenomenon of interest (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; McGee & Martin, 2011; Sladek et al., 2020).

As with any measurement tool, existing ERI measures such as the MIBI and the EIS have both strengths and limitations (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2014) that scholars must be aware of prior to designing their studies. Whereas the EIS captures both ERI development (i.e., exploration) and content (i.e., affirmation) and is grounded in a universal, multigroup approach, the MIBI was designed to capture only ERI content, and in the original version, beliefs and ideologies that would be pertinent to African Americans. Despite the EIS capturing both ERI process and content, however, scholars have often focused on the process component of the scale (Schwartz et al., 2014), and the affirmation items are also all negatively worded, which may not accurately capture youths' positive feelings about their group (Meca et al., 2021). A shared limitation of both the MIBI and the EIS is that they have not been substantively updated or revised to potentially reflect more contemporary aspects of process and content that may be relevant to youths' ERI (e.g., intersectionality).

In that vein, authors taking a single-group approach should be mindful of what constitutes borders and boundaries when defining groups. When selecting and creating measures, ethnic and panethnic categories must be considered carefully (Anglin & Whaley, 2006; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Additionally, acknowledging and addressing the tension between how researchers categorize groups versus how groups categorize themselves are crucial. Ethnic-racial categories as presented by researchers may not accurately capture youth's ERI. For instance, multiracial adolescents were four times more likely to change their racial category when presented with forced-choice racial categories at two different timepoints (Hitlin et al., 2006). Findings suggest that forced-choice, racial self-categorization is more limiting for multiracial youth when compared to monoracial youth (Hitlin et al., 2006). In addition, scholars have answered calls to the ERI field for more longitudinal, multivariate studies (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014a, b; Schwartz et al., 2014), interdisciplinary approaches (Neblett et al., 2019; Syed et al., 2011) as well as intersectional frameworks (Rogers et al., 2012, 2020a). Regarding interdisciplinary approaches, Syed and colleagues (2011) present prejudice and stereotype threat, social support, and identity

development as three distinct areas of ERI and education research that present opportunities for collaboration across social science disciplines. Seaton et al. (2010) relied on an intersectional approach to examine how age as well as gender and ethnic identity moderated the link between discrimination and Black youth's psychological well-being. Going forward, scholars must determine whether existing measures and frameworks are sufficient, or if it is the case that new measures and approaches are needed to address their research aims.

Regardless of what theoretical orientation or methodological approach is taken, scholars looking to incorporate ERI in their work must consider that the context for ERI development is not equally contentious for all youth. The nature of the contention differs and is contingent upon their group's social position in society, which informs what identities are granted airtime and space (Coll et al., 1996). Revisiting our "canary-in-a coalmine" analogy, social hierarchies determine which identities breathe comfortable or healthily amidst the smog of racism and oppression. As such, ERI not only fosters BIPOC youth's connections to their ethnic-racial group but also promotes well-being, civic and political engagement as well as socioemotional and academic adjustment. Most importantly, ERI can be a catalyst for the true endpoint of our research: social justice. ERI may be conceptualized as a mechanism for youths' growing awareness and understanding of racial hierarchies and power disparities within and between BIPOC groups (Rivas-Drake & Bañales, 2018; Fish et al., 2021; Syed et al., 2018). Consequently, such shared experiences of oppression and marginalization can result in cross-racial coalitions, political activism, allyship and ultimately, solidarity among BIPOC groups (Fish et al., 2021; Hope et al., 2020). The study of ERI sets a stage for scholars to shed light on and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of narratives and histories too often deemed unimportant and unworthy. Only by doing so can scholars actively work to dismantle racism. Ultimately, to take a racial justice approach to ERI research is to understand its potential for promoting equality and inclusivity in terms of opportunity, health, and well-being of youth of color.

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