

# Education Plans Among Racially Minoritized Youth During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## INTRODUCTION

- The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted racially minoritized communities on both individual and communal levels as they have experienced disturbingly high rates of infection and morbidity as well as enhanced rates of racial discrimination (Tummala-Narra et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022).
- Minoritized youth specifically experienced higher rates of disruptive change and stress due to the pandemic in areas concerning academic performance, family life, mental health, education plans, and finances (Molock & Parchem, 2020; Scott et al., 2020)
- Importantly, a strong sense of ethnic identity has been shown to be a protective factor against racial discrimination, lower academic achievement, and experiences with depression and anxiety (Adelabu, 2008; Piña-Watson et al. 2018).
- However, we do not know the extent to which ethnic-racial identity may have played a protective role for youth during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Thus, we examined whether ethnic-racial identity was positively associated with youth's post-high school plans during the pandemic.
- Given that past research highlights the importance of ethnic-racial identity, we also explored whether facing challenges during the pandemic posed a risk to ethnic-racial identity.

## METHODS

- Cross-sectional data were collected from a study of low-income, predominately Latinx and Black youth (n=288).
- Youth completed an online survey during the summer of 2020.

### Measures

- Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Youth reported on exploring their identities, knowing what their identity means to them, and their feelings towards being a part of a specific ethnic group.
  - Exploration/resolution subscale (4-item;  $\alpha = .81$ )
  - Affirmation subscale (3-item;  $\alpha = .74$ )
- Participants reported on the extent to which they faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic on a 5-point metric ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (4 items; e.g., risks related to finances, post-high school plans, basic needs, psychological health).
- Participants were asked to report on their post-secondary education plans within the next 5 years (e.g., attending a 4-year college, community college, vocational/technical school, getting an unpaid internship) on a 5-point scale (not likely at all, a little likely, somewhat likely, very likely, have already done this).

## RESULTS

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Variable	M (or %)	SD
Age (years)	20.27	2.23
Gender		
Female	57.3%	
Male	42.7%	
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	63.5%	
Latino/a/x/e	28.5%	
Biracial, Native American, Other	8%	

**Table 2**  
*Summary of Correlations for Ethnic-Racial Identity and Education Planning Among Racial Minoritized Youth During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

	Ethnic-Racial Identity Total Scale	Exploration/Resolution	Affirmation
Attending a 4-year college	0.21**	0.21**	0.03
Attending a community college	0.17**	0.20**	-0.06
Attending a vocational/technical school	-0.01	0.02	-0.06
Getting an unpaid internship	0.12	0.14*	-0.07
Challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.12*	0.14*	-0.02

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ ; Elevated scores on all scales indicate higher ethnic-racial identity overall, ethnic identity exploration/resolution, and ethnic identity affirmation; participants reporting that they were more likely to attend a 4-year college, community college, vocational/technical school, and getting an unpaid internship; and facing more challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Bivariate correlational analyses were conducted among all education planning, ethnic-racial identity, and COVID-19 variables.
- Youth who reported a stronger ethnic-racial identity and more exploration of their ethnic-racial identity were also more likely to report plans to attend college, including both 4-year schools and community college.
- Notably, facing a higher degree of challenges during the pandemic was positively linked to overall ethnic-racial identity and ethnic identity exploration/resolution.

## DISCUSSION

- The results suggest that ethnic-racial identity may be a protective factor for Black and Latinx youth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Furthermore, findings suggest that the risks of the pandemic did not interfere with the ethnic-racial identity among youth. Moreover, it could be that youth's observations of their communities' successful coping with the pandemic helped strengthen a sense of pride in their ethnic-racial groups.
- Limitations of this study include its cross-sectional nature and lack of generalizability across a wider range of racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups.
- Nevertheless, this study is important because it underscores the importance of supporting the development of positive ethnic-racial identity. Culturally responsive supports may be particularly helpful to racially minoritized youth with plans to attend higher education in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- Next steps involve coding of qualitative data. Youth were asked to respond to the following open-ended prompts: "Describe one thing in the past year that made you proud or brought you joy." and "What is one thing that you are looking forward to in the future?"

### Example quote:

#### What is one thing you are looking forward to in the future?

"Becoming a nurse. I love helping people and find joy in doing so. I can't wait to build up and also further my education."

- Other future directions for this research include conducting multivariate analyses. Using a mixed methods approach could help us gain a deeper understanding of youth's post-high school plans and ethnic-racial identity during the pandemic. Furthermore, the qualitative data could help us interpret the quantitative findings, as well as help us understand the strengths of racially minoritized youth during an extraordinarily challenging time in our society's history.

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