The Impact of Ethnic Identity and a Caring Culture on Adolescent Development

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Questions and Hypothesis

Questions
What is the culture of care, and what are the components of a culture of care? How does the culture of care promote a positive ethnic identity (a component of the culture of care)? What is positive ethnic identity, and how does it contribute to an insecure attachment? What is the relationship between ethnic identity and attachment?

Assertion
The culture of care serves as a protective factor against problem behavior that lead to school suspension and/or expulsion among Latina/o adolescents who are identified as insecurely attached.

Abstract
Addresses the impact of problem behaviors, particularly for a population that has become the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, the Latino population.

Explores how the Culture of Care can foster a positive ethnic identity for insecurely attached adolescents who exhibit problem behaviors.


Theoretical Foundations

Ainsworth’s Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, 1970; 1978); (Main 1986)

Mary Ainsworth (1970) described attachment as an affectionate bond between child and primary caregiver. In an effort to induce and observe attachment behaviors of infants, Ainsworth designed the Strange Situation. The infants’ responses to the Strange Situation were classified into one of three categories of attachment:

1. secure
2. insecure avoidant
3. insecure ambivalent

Main & Solomon (1986) replicated Ainsworth’s initial study and added a fourth attachment style. Main & Solomon (1986) chose the term “disorganized/disoriented” when infants exhibit many diverse behaviors and could not be easily classified as secure, insecure avoidant, or resistant-ambivalent.


Three Stage Model:

Stage 1: Unexamined ethnic identity
Stage 2: Exploration of one’s own ethnicity
Stage 3: Ethnic identity achievement

To develop a positive ethnic identity, an adolescent must progress through clear stages of self-awareness, belonging, and identity formation. A focus on healthy positive relationships provides students with the opportunities to engage and build the necessary skills to be successful.

Proposed Integrative Model

Culture of Care

When students are provided with environments that foster a culture of care where ethnic groups and bilingual identities are accepted, students with insecure attachment can develop a positive ethnic identity.

A focus on healthy positive relationships provides students with the opportunities to engage and build the necessary skills to be successful.

Application of Integrative Model

The integrative model can be applied to adolescents of Latino ancestry. Without a caring culture, insecurely attached adolescents are at greater risk of exhibiting problem behaviors that lead to suspension. Additionally, they are more likely to have poor academic achievement, poor relationships with school staff and peers, and an unsupported ethnic identity development. When there is no support for positive ethnic identity development and secure attachment, an insecurely attached adolescent is more likely to disengage academically or discontinue their education altogether.

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