



# The Role of Attachment in the Development of Ethnic Identity among Second Generation Students

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## Abstract

- Examines the role of attachment in the development of ethnic identity among second generation students
- The population of second generation students in the United States is rapidly increasing. Unfortunately, second generation students tend to have poorer academic and psychological outcomes as they become more assimilated.
- Two factors that affect the outcomes of second generation students are attachment and ethnic identity.
- Therefore, an integrative model utilizing concepts from John Bowlby's (1988) Attachment Theory and Jean Phinney's (1996) Ethnic Identity Theory is proposed to address this issue.

## Questions and Assertion

### Questions:

1. How does an individual form a secure versus insecure attachment style?
2. How does immigration impact attachment among second generation students?
3. How does ethnic identity develop in second generation students?
4. Does an insecure attachment style contribute to an unexamined ethnic identity among second generation students?

### Assertion:

An insecure attachment style contributes to the development of an unexamined ethnic identity among second generation students.

## Literature Review

### Background Information

- Today, almost one in four children in the United States has an immigrant parent. By 2050, immigrant youth are expected to compose one-third of more than 100 million children.
- Second generation students in the United States have increasingly diverse backgrounds with varying immigration histories.
- The diverse backgrounds of second generation students have contributed to highly variable developmental outcomes which are impacted by a variety of risk and resiliency factors.
- A second generation student's attachment and ethnic identity can be a risk or resiliency factor.

### Terms Defined

- **Second generation students**- children who have immigrant parents and are the first of their family to be a naturally born citizen
- **Ethnicity**- Ethnicity categorizes people based on a shared social and cultural context. Ethnicity differs from race.
- **Acculturation**- the process that encompasses the behaviors, attitudes, and values that change when there is contact between different cultures
- **Assimilation**- the aspect of acculturation that encompasses the degree to which an individual adapts or integrates into mainstream society.

## Theoretical Foundations

### John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1988)

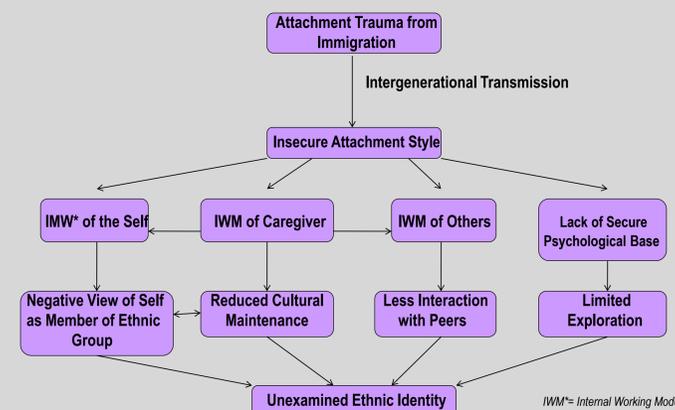
- Internal working models (IWM) develop in early childhood and are based on a caregiver's responsiveness to their child's emotional distress.
- IWM shape the way children mentally represent their caregivers, themselves, and future relationships.
- Children form a secure or insecure attachment style based on their internal working model.
- There is an intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns.
- Children with a secure attachment style internalize their attachment figure as a secure psychological base which provides them with the pervasive sense of security with which to explore the world.
- Immigration places families at greater risk for developing attachment trauma.

### Jean Phinney's Ethnic Identity Theory (1996)

- Ethnic identity includes one's sense of belonging and commitment to one's ethnic group. This can include interest and knowledge about the ethnic group as well as involvement in activities and traditions of the group.
- Three Stage Model of Ethnic Identity:
  1. *Unexamined Ethnic Identity*
  2. *Moratorium or Exploration*
  3. *Achieved Ethnic Identity*
- Ethnic identity development among second generation students is influenced by cultural maintenance by parents, retention of the ethnic language, interactions with peers, and experiences with discrimination.

## Proposed Integrative Model

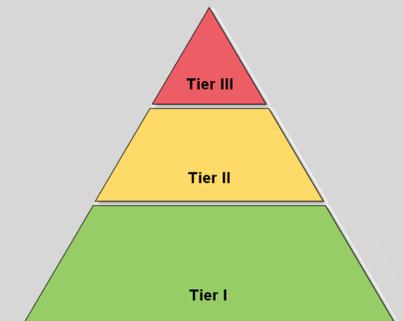
- Attachment trauma from immigration may place immigrant parents at greater risk for developing an insecure attachment style. There may be an intergenerational transmission of an insecure attachment style to their second generation children.
- Second generation students with an insecure attachment style:
  - Develop a negative sense of self which may contribute to a poor sense of self as a member of the ethnic group
  - Tend to have a poorer relationship with their immigrant parents and may not prefer to learn more about their ethnic group
  - Are less likely to interact with peers which is imperative for ethnic identity exploration
  - Lack a secure psychological base with which to explore their ethnic identity



## Application of Integrative Model

- The integrative theoretical model can be applied to second generation students.
- Second generation students with an insecure attachment style often possess a poor sense of self and strained relationship with their parents. They may also have difficulty forming close relationships with others and be fearful of exploring the world.
- The second generation student's insecure attachment style contributes to the development of an unexamined ethnic identity.
- Second generation students with an unexamined ethnic identity demonstrate a lack of interest in their ethnic group and place little importance in their membership of the ethnic group. These students may assimilate to a greater extent because they more easily adopt the values and attitudes present in their community.

## Best Practices



### Response to Intervention (RTI)

#### Tier I (Universal)

- Assessment: Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire, Observations, and Interviews
- Intervention: Anti-Discrimination Program
- Consultation: Staff Training at School or School District

#### Tier II (Targeted)

- Assessment: Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale and Sentence Completion
- Intervention: Multicultural Club or Lunch Bunch
- Consultation: Parent Group and Psychoeducation for Teachers

#### Tier III (Intensive/Individualized)

- Assessment: Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure and Child Attachment Interview
- Intervention: Individual and Family Therapy
- Consultation: Referrals to Needed Resources

## Conclusion and Recommendations

- School psychologists must make a greater effort to promote a secure attachment and positive ethnic identity in the second generation students they serve by:
  - Assessing for insecure attachment and the stage of ethnic identity
  - Providing interventions to support secure attachments and an achieved ethnic identity
  - Acting as consultants and providing psychoeducation to school staff and families about the importance of attachment and ethnic identity
  - Considering and understanding the impact of culture on the experiences of second generation students