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## Ethnic socialization, ethnic identity, life satisfaction and school achievement of Roma ethnic minority youth

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### ABSTRACT

This article is part of a Special Issue entitled Explaining Positive Adaptation of Immigrant Youth across Cultures.

This study tested a mediation model of ethnic socialization (i.e., parental practices that promote children's knowledge about their history, heritage culture, cultural authenticity, and ethnic bias management) in Roma youth. Roma are the largest ethnic minority group in Europe subjected to severe discrimination, both currently and historically. Participants were 202 Roma youth aged 14 to 19 years old ( $M = 16.25$ , 53% females), who provided self-reports on their experience of ethnic socialization, ethnic identity, school achievement, and life satisfaction. Cultural pride reinforcement was related to better school achievement, whereas cultural coping with antagonism was positively related to life satisfaction. The study confirmed the model in that ethnic socialization was positively related to life satisfaction through effects on ethnic identity but negatively associated with school achievement. Findings have implications for adaptive cultural mechanisms promoting positive developmental outcomes among historically disadvantaged groups including those intersecting immigrant and multigenerational ethnic minority group categories.

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Increasingly research has been devoted to understanding the ways parents from diverse ethnic groups transmit socialization messages to their children about ethnicity and about the meaning of their ethnic group membership (e.g., ethnic pride, group history and traditions, awareness of discrimination, appreciation of diversity, and equality across groups) (Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). Relatedly, across a variety of studies and cultural groups, ethnic socialization (i.e., parental practices that promote children's knowledge about group history, heritage culture, cultural authenticity, and ethnic bias management) has been generally associated with multiple components of youths' ethnic identity (i.e., knowledge about group history and traditions, ethnic pride and behaviors) (Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2009). A key gap in existing literature is the lack of studies on relationships between ethnic socialization, ethnic identity, and youths' outcomes. Additionally, existent literature has been limited to racial and ethnic minorities groups in the U.S. (Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown, & Ezell, 2007; Hughes et al., 2006). The study of immigrant and ethnic minority groups in global

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contexts represent a burgeoning new area of research. Testing models of identity more globally may increase our understanding of bias in oppressed groups across contexts. A recent study featuring transracial adoptees in Europe (Ferrari, Ranieri, Barni, & Rosnati, 2015) explored cultural socialization by adoptive parents rearing immigrant children. Ferrari et al. (2015) found that both ethnic and national identity were predictive of self-esteem. Enculturation, a dimension of cultural socialization and specifically pride development, was linked to self-esteem through ethnic identity exploration.

The current study expands the literature by examining ethnic socialization, ethnic identity, life satisfaction, and school achievement in a sample of Roma ethnic minority youth in Europe. In contrast to groups that have been most commonly researched, understanding Roma youth's experiences is critical given their distinctive features with regard to ethnic socialization. To do so adequately requires some additional information regarding their background and history.

The Roma number between 300,000 and 800,000 people among nearly seven million in Bulgaria (National Statistics Institute, 2011; Petersen, Koller, Motti-Stefanidi & Verman, 2016). The overall deplorable circumstances of the Roma people are due to both economic and societal transitions after the end of communism, coupled with a very old history of discrimination and exclusion (Barany, 2001). This historical record of ethnic tensions featured severe assimilation campaigns and strict repression of ethnic identity of Roma (Csepeli & Simon, 2004). After the fall of the communist state, Roma were provided the status of protected ethnic minority by the government, yet still exposed to considerable geographic segregation and lack of access to adequate social and educational services (Amnesty International, 2013). The extreme marginalization of their ethnic identity, unevenly applied social policies resulting in economic, educational, and ethnic segregation (Dimitrova et al., 2017), systematic discrimination, and exposure to negative group stereotypes (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010) have been the cornerstones of their experiences influencing their educational and psychological outcomes. Roma are also categorized as immigrants, who maintain both impervious cultural boundaries and fierce loyalty to family (Dimitrova et al., 2017). Under more extreme policy conditions one study demonstrated that ethnic identity was rendered ineffectual as a buffer protecting psychosocial and academic outcomes (Dimitrova, Johnson, Adams, Thelamour, & Sankar, 2016). These studies demonstrate that identity can matter as a buffering factor; further study focusing on the promotive effects of parental ethnic socialization and ethnic identity among multiply marginalized youth is needed.

A few studies linking ethnic identity, ethnic socialization, and youth outcomes have been conducted. In comparative studies of Roma and other youth, ethnic identity has been associated with wellbeing and school success (Dimitrova et al., 2017); this multinational study by Dimitrova et al. (2017) found that national identity was unrelated to well-being among Roma in some countries but not others, demonstrating that the relationship is susceptible to context.

Evidence also supports the influence of ethnic socialization on ethnic identity and psychological and academic outcomes among ethnic minority youth. Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, and West-Bey (2009) report that youth who reported cultural pride messages also reported higher ethnic identity and self-esteem; ethnic socialization messages, focusing on cultural pride development and preparation for bias, were associated with more positive beliefs about their ability to master academic work. Similarly, Murry, Berkel, Brody, Miller, and Chen (2009) showed that youth who reported receiving a combination of these two message types had greater self-esteem and racial identity and were less likely to devalue their academic achievements. Roma youth labor under discrimination regularly in communities and schools. Messaging around pride reinforcement or cultural socialization (historical legacy or group pride) may enhance school success, whereas the recognition of bias may inhibit school success or promote skills to overcome adversity.

## 1. Theoretical framework

The present study advances research on ethnic minority adolescent development by integrating elements from different frameworks. The first model focuses on the mechanisms through which ethnic socialization influences youths' psychological and academic outcomes, drawing on the model by Hughes et al. (2006). Our model postulates that ethnic socialization is associated with outcomes and that ethnic identity provides a central pathway through which ethnic socialization influences youths' psychological and academic outcomes. So, ethnic identity is taken to be more proximal to the model outcomes than ethnic socialization. Specifically, the model tests the notion that ethnic socialization and child outcomes are mediated through ethnic identity. The model has been supported in studies testing the hypothesized paths in predominantly US-based ethnic minority samples (Hughes et al., 2009; Murry et al., 2009), typically centering on the relationship between racial identity and socialization processes.

The second model is the well-regarded integrative model by Garcia Coll et al. (1996) that incorporates constructs salient to children and families with ethnic minority backgrounds along with presumed universal aspects of development. The model posits that social position variables (e.g., race, gender, social class, and minority status) indirectly relate to development through the mechanisms of racism, prejudice, and discrimination leading to varying experiences of segregation (residential, economic, and psychological) as well as differential access to quality institutions (e.g., schools, neighborhoods, and health care services) that promote or inhibit coping. We follow the reasoning that it is important to distinguish more distal and more proximal (parental teachings) variables, including the importance of context to understand Roma outcomes.

Elaborations on the Garcia Coll et al. (1996) model are drawn from Ferguson, Bornstein and Pottinger's (2012) tridimensional perspective on cultural alignment among immigrant groups. Postulating beyond the dichotomous views of Berry (1997) emphasizing home v. host cultures and adopting a blended view of cultural alignment across multiple cultures as producing the healthiest outcomes for youth. Dichotomous views of Roma identity are plentiful, often measured as ingroup/outgroup identity with propositions that center on group affinity and loyalty (Dimitrova, Ferrer-Wreder, & Trost, 2015). In the

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