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Title: Multiculturalism and Subjective Happiness as Mediated by Cultural and Relational Variables

Text:

A diverse ethnic context and an increasing immigrant youth population will soon become the reality of the U.S. demographic landscape. Research suggests that a multicultural context positively influences ethnic minority and immigrant youth by fostering ethnic identity and psychosocial development. However, it is unknown whether and how perceived multiculturalism can affect positive youth outcomes such as life satisfaction and subjective happiness. The primary aim of this study was to examine the relation between youth's perceived school multiculturalism and subjective happiness, as mediated by ethnocultural empathy, social support, ethnic identity, and positive peers. Sample included 338 African American, Asian, and Hispanic youth (mean age = 12.5, range 11-15). Analyses included structural equation modeling using Mplus 5.1, testing for measurement and structural invariances, as well as bootstrapping to assess mediation effects. Results revealed support for strong factorial invariance (lambda, intercepts invariance) in terms of measurement models, as well as full mediation of the structural model. Fit indices included .95 or above for TLI and CFI, and .06 or greater for RMSEA and SRMR. Bootstrapping results revealed that of all the mediators, ethnocultural empathy was statistically significant as a mediator for all groups except Hispanic, and the overall model (predictor and mediator) was significant for all groups including Hispanic. Ethnocultural empathy accounted for the largest explanatory variance in subjective happiness, followed by social support. The findings of this study point to important policy considerations in terms of ethnic minority and immigrant youth's well-being. In order for immigrant and minority youth to thrive in their immediate context as well as society in general, they must learn the skills necessary to manage within the mainstream as well as in their diverse proximal context. Multiculturalism, however, goes beyond the mere physical presence of multiple groups, but also includes the norm-setting, knowledge- and resource-building aspect of teaching youth to interact with others from different cultural backgrounds. Benefits can include decreasing racial stereotypes and prejudices (Carpenter, Zarate, & Garza, 2007), increasing creativity (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008), and enhancing social support and ethnocultural/racial empathy among youth in diverse contexts. As such, multicultural competence is likely to lead to healthy well-being and positive intergroup relations. Schools have an important role in providing the opportunity for this important skill.

Theme Groups: 1 Key social relationships