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Influences of Ethnicity, Interracial Climate, and Racial Majority in School on Adolescent Ethnic Identity

Social workers and others need information that they can use to address issues relating to the increased ethnic diversity in public schools. Diversity issues identified by school social workers include how new immigrants adjust to U.S. school systems (Castex, 1997; Hirayama & Cetingok, 1988), psychological and emotional responses to social adaptation (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993; Levy & Land, 1994), and planning for the needs of Chicano students based on demographic forecasts (Brown & Swanson, 1985). But the school social work literature does not address how diversity in school environment affects student ethnic identity.

This article looks at the influence of social factors on ethnic identity not yet examined by empirical research. Therefore, the results should provide insight into probable ethnic identity development (EID) patterns based on these social factors. Another compelling factor is the growing option of developing a multiethnic or biracial identity. The data should contribute to a school social worker's understanding of how social factors could impede this choice. If the processes of identity development differ for individuals choosing a multiethnic

Using a questionnaire completed in a school setting, the study discussed in this article examined the ethnic identity development of 252 adolescents. The study probed for possible association of ethnic identity development with ethnicity, school interracial climate, and the racial majority in a given school environment. Key measures included were the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Scale, the Interracial Climate Scale, and sociodemographics including ethnic or racial population percentages. Multiple regression analysis showed that being a member of an ethnic minority group and interracial climate accounted for the greatest variance in ethnic identity development, but racial majority in school and socioeconomic status were not significantly associated with ethnic identity development. This study's findings were interpreted in light of previous research on ethnic identity, and implications for how these findings support multicultural efforts in public schools are discussed.

Key words: ethnic identity; ethnic relations; multiculturalism; school integration ·

identity, there may be false assumptions about the influence of social factors on the development of a multiethnic identity.

Effects of Ethnicity, Racial Majority Status, and Interracial Climate Ethnic Identity Development

It is important to identify social factors that influence the development of ethnic identity (Garza &