

**DECONSTRUCTING ADOLESCENT ETHNICITY:  
A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF YOUTH ETHNIC IDENTITY  
AND CLASSIFICATION IN A MULTI-CULTURAL US SCHOOL**

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## *SELF & STATE CLASSIFICATIONS, 2009*

	<b>MS Self (n=517)</b>	<b>MS ODE Data (n=575)</b>	<b>HS Self (n=519)</b>	<b>HS ODE Data (n=1324)</b>
<b>Black</b>	6.7↑	6.2	7.0↓	8.4
<b>Hispanic</b>	12.8↓	14.9	10.8↓	13.9
<b>Multiracial</b>	20.4↑↑	13.1	18.9↑↑	8.4
<b>White</b>	57.6↓	65.4	61.8↓	69.0

*In our 2009 surveys, three (3) students identified as Asian, and ten (10) as Native American.*

## *Ethnic Classification vs. Ethnic Identity*

**Ethnic Classification/Identification:** Limited to one's "ability to define him/herself as a member of a certain group." Identification is a more narrow classification of the self as compared to ethnic identity. (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams).

**Ethnic Identity:** A sense of belonging and commitment to an ethnic group, in addition to an understanding of their behavior, language, and history (Phinney & Rosenthal).

A growing amount of research suggests that youth begin to interpret the complexity of identity as a result of an increased *group consciousness perspective* of ethnic and racial identity (ERI), and therefore this influences self-identity in relation to other individuals (Quintana; Rivas-Drake).

**ERI = Ethnic/Racial Identity**

## *Have you ever had trouble answering questions about your racial/ethnic classification?*

- *“My Dad just says, ‘check Caucasian’. . . Probably because I look like it, so it’s easier. My Dad is Mexican”* (Multiethnic Female, Gr9, later changed to White).
- *“Well, um, my Grandpa is Mexican, so that makes my Mom Mexican and Black, and my Dad is full Black. So I don’t know”* (African-American Male, Gr 9, later changed to Multiethnic).
- *“I’m not really anything”* (White Female, Gr. 8, never changed).
- *“Um, I mark myself white Caucasian, I think that’s general, . . . I’m okay with that cause I’m not mixed or anything complicated”* (White Female, Gr. 9, never changed)

## *Why is ERI Formation Important?*

*If we've discovered that ethnic identity is important to the perception of self and environment/school climate – **then should we know more about ethnic identity development?** Is it the same for everyone?*

- » Ethnic identity formation: **search** and **commitment**, which is developed and negotiated (Phinney & Tarver)
  - » *[in-group] affirmation of identity* (Umaña-Taylor)
  - » *[out-group] public regard* (Sellers)
  
- » Youth interpret their identities through a developing *group consciousness perspective of ethnic and racial identity, or ERI* (Quintana; Rivas-Drake et. al.)

## *Influence of Public Regard on ERI*

- » *“Everyone goes like you can speak Spanish -- like you a Mexican, so just put Hispanic [for classification]”* (Multiethnic Male, Gr. 11; changed from Af-Am, to Multi, back to Af-Am)
- » *“A lot of people say . . . you gotta watch where you go to college since you can really tell that you are mixed you will get teased. She [Mom] just said you can’t change your color. Some people just don’t like us and you can’t make everybody like you”* (African-American Male, Gr. 9, later changed to Multiethnic)
- » *“Mr. Garcia tries to make me a good example for the other ones [Hispanics] because I do good in school, I don’t get in trouble and I am Hispanic”* (Hispanic Female, Gr. 11, never changed).

## *Data Sources for this investigation*

- » **Student self-classification** of ethnicity/race on surveys given twice a year (fall and spring) over the course of the first three years of study
- » ***Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)*** (Phinney's 12 item scale, 2 removed). Used total score for total Ethnic Identity measure  
*(See section 7 of Student Survey)*

## *Frequencies and Percentages in Changes in Ethnic Classification*

Number of Changes	0	1	2	3	4
Frequency	576	78	73	22	6
Relative Frequency	76.3%	10.3%	9.7%	2.9%	.8%

- 179 or almost 24% of the students changed classification at least once
- **Question: *Who is reclassifying the most? Are there patterns?***
  - Gender, ethnicity, and grade level of the student were found to be significant in explaining the likelihood of changing classification
  - Who is **least likely to change?** White, Female, Grade 10

## Who was most likely to change on our surveys?

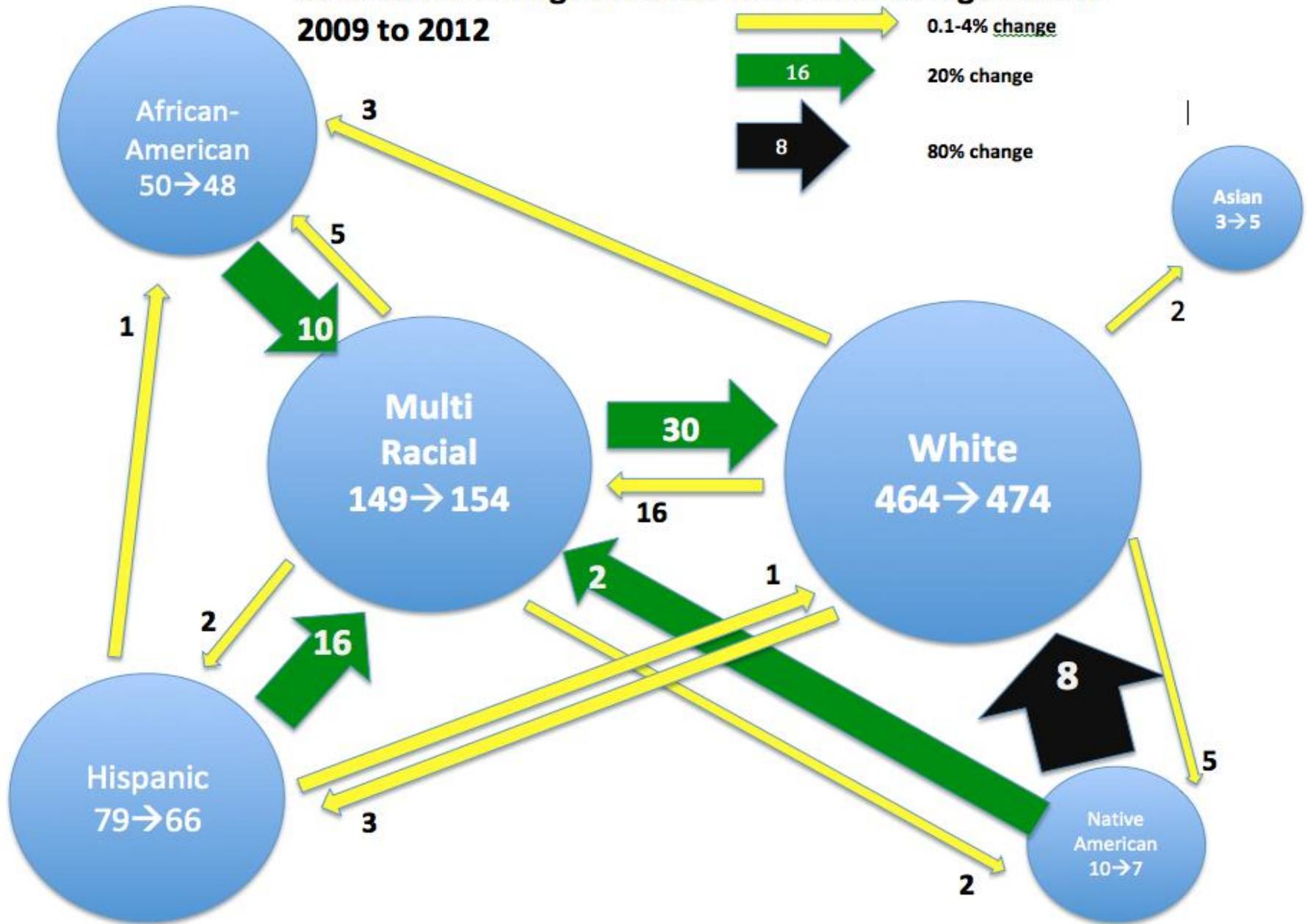
	Odds Ratio Estimate (Reference Class – Least likely to change)
<b>African American students were about 4 times more likely to change classification than white students.</b>	4.056 (White)
<b>Hispanic students were almost 4 times more likely to change classification than white students.</b>	3.730 (White)
<b>Multiracial/ethnic students were almost 6 times more likely to change classification than white students.</b>	5.871 (White)
<b>Male students were twice as likely to change classification as female students.</b>	2.125 (Female)
<b>Grade 7 (2009) was almost 3 times more likely to change classification than 10<sup>th</sup> grade.</b>	2.793 (Grade 10)
<b>Grade 8 (2009) was almost 4 times more likely to change classification than 10<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	3.722 (Grade 10)
<b>Grade 9 (2009) was almost twice as likely to change classification as 10<sup>th</sup> grade students.</b>	1.868 (Grade 10)

# What do students change to? 2009-2012

Original ERI classification/ % Remaining and <i>Changing</i>	TO Nat-Am	TO Asian	TO Af-Am	TO Hispanic	TO White	TO Multi	2009 Total
FROM Native American (10→7)	0/0%	0	0	0	8/80%	2/20%	10
FROM Asian (3→5)	0	3/100%	0	0	0	0	3
FROM African American (50→48)	0	0	40/80%	0	0%	10/20%	50
FROM Hispanic (79→66)	0	0	1/1%	61/77%	1/1%	16/20%	79
FROM White (464→474)	5/1%	2/0.4%	3/0.6%	3/0.6%	435/ 94%	16/3%	464
FROM Multiethnic (149→154)	2/1%	0	5/4%	2/1%	30/20%	110/74%	149
<b>2012 Total</b>	7	5	48	66	474	154	

- The 20% of African-American students who changed **all** moved to Multiethnic; no traffic directly from Black to White; 3 White students later changed to Black;
- 20% of Hispanic Students moved to Multiethnic, only 1% moved the other direction;
- White students were least likely to change; 94% stayed the same (All Asians stayed)
- Nearly 25% of Multiracial students changed, mostly to White (20%)
- Likelihood of staying the same: Asian (100%), White (94%), Black (80%), Hispanic (77%), Multiracial (74%), Native American (0%)

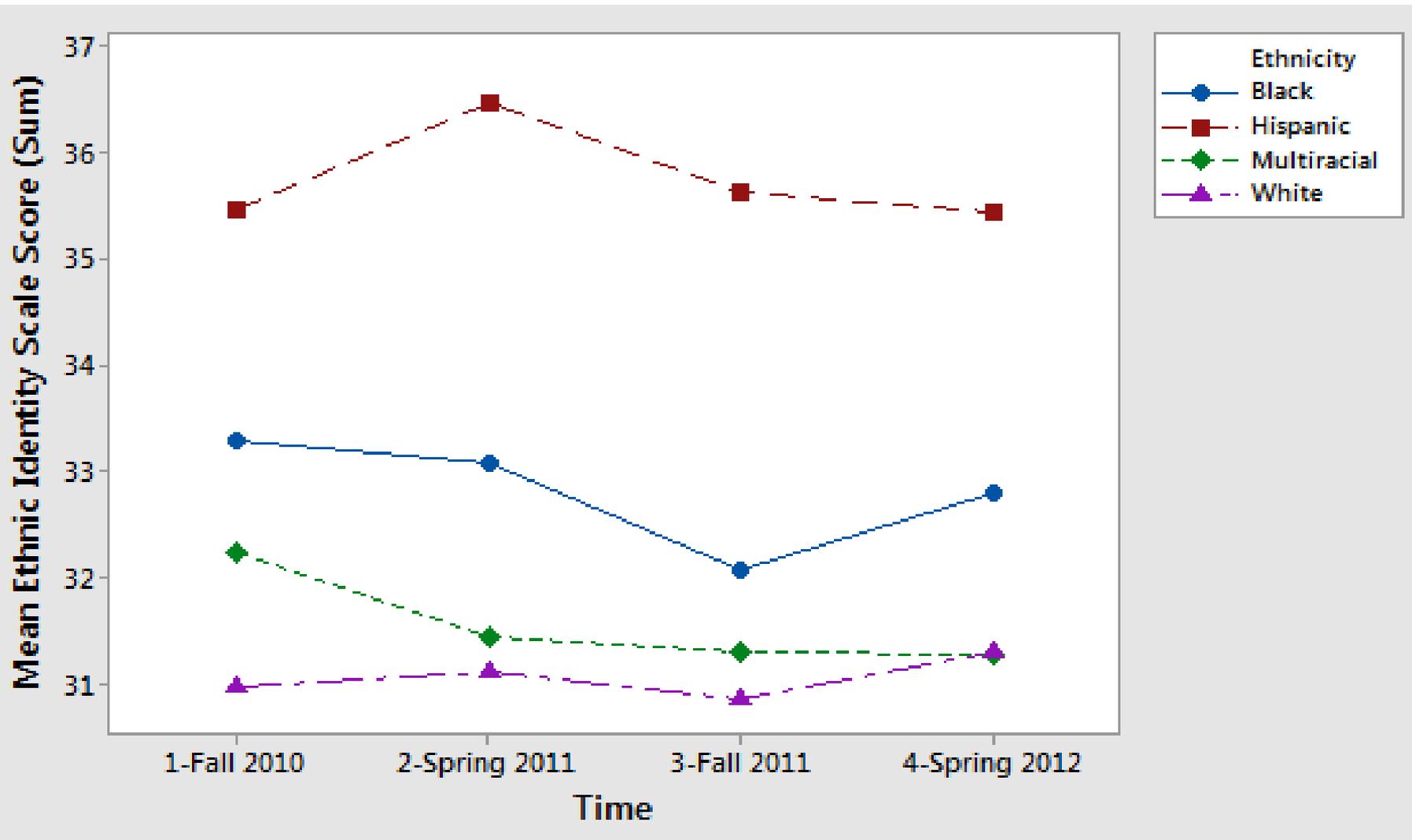
# Cumulative Change in Ethno-Racial Self-Categorization 2009 to 2012



## *Discussion*

- » Does this information about changing ethnic classification surprise you?
- » Why do you think almost  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the students change at least once?

## Mean Ethnic Identity Scale Score by Ethnicity and Semester



## *Ethnic Identity Results*

### Means of Ethnic Identity (MEIM) Scale Score by Gender and Ethnicity : Fall 2010

Ethnicity/ Gender	White	Multiracial /ethnic	Hispanic	African American
Male	31.17	31.88	35.33	33.68
Female	30.86	33.20	34.73	38.79
Total	31.01	32.61	35.03	35.66

## *African American Gender Differences in ERI*

Males reported being treated differently, often negatively, because of their ethnicity more often than Females

- » *“They [Black teachers] want me to try my best because of my race -- try better than I usually would try.” (AA Female, Gr. 11)*
- » *“Yeah, I mean I’m a big black guy, so, I tend to stick out from other people, and I guess like other people are afraid of me. But once they get to know me it’s like I’m a whole different person” (AA Male, Gr. 12)*
- » *“Dad thinks, just because I am a big African-American, I sometimes pose a threat to teachers. He said I got to be real careful how I approach them and how I speak to them.” (AA Male, Gr 11)*
- » *“Mostly [by] girls – like they say, ‘my parents say I can’t date a black guy’” (AA Male, Gr. 9)*

## Male Youths: Influences on their ERI Formation

- » “There was a teacher, Mr. Lopez, who was yelling at me because I was missing a lot of school. And he says you gotta prove people wrong because he says that when most people see a Hispanic kid they think they are going to drop out of school” **(Hispanic, Gr. 11)**
- » *A lot of Hispanics here get extra help and so they assume that they need extra. . . .but I don’t.”(Hispanic, Gr 10)*
- » “Like once we went to a country club and she (Mom) be at the table and she say like “don’t act your color.” Which means like don’t be all loud. She thinks that everybody thinks that we are all loud and obnoxious. Just don’t act your color in front of people.” **(AA, Gr 10)**
- » *“Well, in Fremont. . .they will either just like ignore the person [a minority] or they will avoid them completely. . . on the street some of them will cross the street and then cross back over or they will walk a whole block just to avoid someone.”(Multi, Gr. 10)*
- » “I don’t think it [ethnicity] should matter. Maybe to some people. I don’t really know. I’m not racist” **(Wh, Gr. 10).**

## Female Youths *on the influences on their ERI Formation*

- » *“Sometimes they [peers] say, “Oh, you’re good at picking tomatoes.” I’m just like, “shut up.” I don’t care” (Hisp, Gr. 9)*
- » *“No. I don’t have a lot of expectations. I’m just kind of there” (Multiethnic, Gr. 9)*
- » *“We don’t ever really base anything on what ethnicity we are. We just base it on our personality more” (Wh, Gr. 10)*

## *Discussion*

Why does knowing all this matter to us as educators?

1. Does changing ethnic classification matter?
2. Does understanding patterns in ethnic identity change influence our work as educators and our perspectives?

*Thank you!*

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## *Prior research about ERI shows...*

- » Strong ERI among African-Americans can moderate negative public regard, particularly females (Rivas-Drake)
- » Strong ERI among Hispanic youth linked to ethno-national identity (Mexican, Puerto Rican) (Rivas-Drake)
- » ERI less salient for White students (Phinney)
- » Multiethnic students may experience more *exploration*, higher anxiety and depressive symptoms, and less *affirmation* of ERI (Schlabach)
- » Little research on *changes* to ethnic self-identification; suggests that ERI formation may be inconsistent and context-dependent