

Ethnicity and Image: Correlates of Crowd Affiliation Among Ethnic Minority Youth

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Because ethnicity is a basis for defining peer crowds in ethnically diverse American high schools, some may question whether crowds foster discrimination and stereotyping or affirm minority youths' positive ties to their ethnic background. Through examination of both self- and peer ratings of crowd affiliation among 2,465 high school youth aged 14–19 years, this study assesses the likelihood that African American, Asian American, Latino, and multiethnic adolescents are associated with ethnically defined crowds. Crowd affiliations are related to friendship patterns among all groups, positive features of ethnic orientation for Asian and Latino youth, but also some aspects of stereotyping and discrimination for Latinos. Results emphasize ethnic diversity in the role that peer crowds play in minority adolescents' social experiences.

A common and persistent feature of the social system in American high schools is the emergence of peer crowds (Coleman, 1961; Hussong, 2002; Larkin, 1979). In contrast to smaller, interaction-based friendship groups (or cliques), crowds emphasize an adolescent's image or reputation among peers, thus reflecting identity development as well as social relationships (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994). Some scholars portray crowds as the reproduction in a high school setting of the broader community's division into socioeconomic strata; they are a vehicle for socializing youth into social class roles and identities (Eckert, 1989; Hollingshead, 1949). Others point out that socioeconomic background is not necessarily the distinguishing feature of these groups (Adler & Adler, 1998; Kinney, 1993). Instead, crowds embody social identities constructed around salient individual abil-

ities and interests or sociometric status within the peer group.

With the proliferation of multiethnic schools, however, it has become more common for peer groups to emerge with reference to students' ethnic background (Foley, 1990; Lee, 1996; MacLeod, 2004; Thurlow, 2001). Although ethnicity might supersede other factors in defining crowds in multiethnic schools, it is also possible that it simply becomes an additional basis for identifying groups. In this case, just as not all athletes are members of the "jock" crowd and not all high achievers are considered to be part of the "brains," one would not expect all ethnic minority students to be associated with an ethnic crowd. Given the association between crowd affiliation and various prosocial and antisocial behaviors, as well as continuing concerns about discrimination and stereotyping of ethnic minority youth, it is important to understand the factors explaining the type of crowd with which youth of different ethnicities are associated. The current study was designed to explore these factors.

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Importance of Crowd Affiliation

Peer crowds emerge in early adolescence and become especially salient to young people in the early high school years (Eder, 1985; Kinney, 1993). Newman and Newman (2001) postulate that, during these

portions of adolescence, group affiliations are crucial components of identity development, not only in their provision of social support but also in demarcating different values and lifestyles that can form the core of an individual's identity. Thus, it is not surprising that crowds differentiate young people on a variety of behaviors of keen interest to scholars of adolescent development, including rates of alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drug use (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Brown, Lamborn, Mounts, & Steinberg, 1993; Sussman et al., 1994), sexual activity (Dolcini & Adler, 1994; La Greca, Prinstein, & Fetter, 2001), academic achievement or commitment to school (Brown et al., 1993; Eckert, 1989; Kinney, 1993), and levels of psychiatric symptomatology (Prinstein & La Greca, 2002). Crowds also differ on social characteristics such as social acceptance or popularity among peers (Eder, 1985; Merten, 1996), exposure to peer pressures (Clasen & Brown, 1985), and the qualities and features of friendships (Eckert, 1989; Eder, 1985). Crowd affiliation can constrain one's choice of friends and extracurricular activities (Barber et al., 2001; Deyhle, 1986; Foley, 1990; Kinney, 1993).

In view of this, one might expect adolescents to invest considerable energy into being associated with the "right" crowd. Yet, crowd affiliation is not simply a matter of free choice; it also depends upon one's reputation among peers. Although adolescents may strive to influence their image among peers, their efforts are not always successful (Eckert, 1989; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Kinney, 1993). In some cases, crowd affiliation seems to be determined more by peer labeling than one's own efforts to be part of a particular group (e.g., Merten, 1996).

This tendency may be especially important with reference to ethnic minority youth because of a curious but consistent finding in studies of peer crowds in multiethnic schools. Ethnic labels for crowds are common in such settings but are rarely applied to European American youth (see, e.g., Foley, 1990; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Although a school may feature several crowds with clear ethnic referents, groups that are dominated by European Americans tend to be labeled with regard to abilities (brains), interests and activities (jocks, druggies), socioeconomic background (richies, farmers), or social status (populars, nerds). It is as if ethnicity sets certain groups apart from the mainstream of the adolescent culture, begging the question of whether ethnically based crowds are best viewed as part of normative processes of social and identity development (Newman & Newman, 2001) or as an outgrowth of ethnic stereotyping and discrimination (Ogbu & Davis, 2003). The answer may lie in the characteristics that differentiate members of ethnically based versus nonethnic crowds.

Possible Correlates of Peer Assessments of One's Crowd Affiliation

To date, most efforts to understand the role of ethnicity in adolescent crowd affiliation have involved qualitative, ethnographic studies of youth in a single school or community. Some large-scale (multischool), quantitative investigations have considered ethnic issues in friendship selection (e.g., Hamm, Brown, & Heck, 2005; Quillian & Campbell, 2003) but not crowd affiliation. Our approach draws from several theories of adolescent development and social behavior. We postulate that there are three basic factors that might persuade adolescents to associate an ethnic minority peer with an ethnically oriented crowd. The first involves *extrinsic ethnic markers* that are essentially beyond the individual's control. Immigrant youth whose families do not use English as their primary language might be especially susceptible to these markers, as their use of a different language and adoption of home culture dress and grooming styles could set them apart. For example, Southeast Asian youth who routinely use their native language in everyday conversations, dress in traditional styles, and follow their native country's rules for interpersonal communication and relationships, are often referred to as "fobby" (slang for "fresh off the boat") even by ethnic peers (Pyke & Dang, 2003). Minority youth who encounter high levels of ethnic discrimination may also find themselves routinely associated with ethnically oriented crowds.

These extrinsic ethnic markers may be especially influential in combination with a second factor, namely, the *absence of distinctive individual characteristics* or behaviors unrelated to ethnicity. If an adolescent does not stand out from peers in some way, then peers may have little besides extrinsic markers, such as ethnicity, on which to base their assessment of the young person. This is particularly the case if youth in one ethnic group have little contact with European American or other ethnic peers, either in school classes or in extracurricular activities. Social contact theory (Aronson, 1978) stipulates that friendships are more likely to form among youth from different backgrounds if adolescents have sufficient opportunity to interact under conditions of equality. Hamm et al. (2005) reported that cross-ethnic friend nominations were more frequent among Latino youth in college-bound versus lower academic tracks and among African American youth of higher academic achievement levels. Similar results were reported in Tuma and Hallinan's (1979) study of African American youth. Other investigators have found that cross-race friendships are less common in schools in which

most Black students are assigned to lower academic tracks than most White students or in which economics and logistics (such as lack of transportation) deter minority youth from engaging in extracurricular activities (Mickelson, 2001; Moody, 2001; Schofield, 1982). In other words, through lack of involvement in school activities or more advanced academic curricula, ethnic minority youth not only limit their opportunities to be known by European American peers but also miss opportunities to stand out among peers in terms other than their ethnicity. This allows little opportunity for "decategorization" or the tendency to evaluate a peer in terms of individual characteristics rather than simply as a member of an (ethnic) out-group category (Brewer & Miller, 1984). Thus, ethnic crowd affiliation should be more common among ethnic minority youth who avoid school extracurricular activities and are in less advanced academic tracks.

Finally, youth may be identified by their ethnicity through engaging in behaviors that call attention to it. They may emphasize their ethnicity or ethnically oriented issues in conversations with others, show a preference for interacting with ethnic peers (Wade & Okesola, 2002), or draw friends disproportionately from their own ethnic group (Quillian & Campbell, 2003). Such behaviors could be part of a conscientious effort to cultivate a positive sense of identity rooted in one's ethnic background (Tatum, 1997). In this case, rather than being a default identification by peers, ethnic crowd affiliation would signal peers' recognition of the *salience of ethnicity* to the individual. MacLeod (2004), for example, describes how a group of African American youth known as the Brothers expressed solidarity, ethnic pride, and optimism that, through educational achievement, they could overcome economic disadvantage and chart a path to successful adulthood.

Possible Correlates of Self-Perceived Crowd Affiliation

An important feature of peer crowd affiliation is that it is equivocal. Peers may disagree with one another as to the particular crowd to which an adolescent belongs, and even if there is strong consensus among peers, the adolescent may claim membership in a different crowd from the one to which she or he is assigned by peers (Brown, Von Bank, & Steinberg, in press). This makes it important to consider both self- and peer perceptions of crowd affiliation. We postulate that there are two basic factors that could lead an ethnic minority youth to claim membership in an ethnically oriented crowd. These factors are related but not equivalent to the

factors, outlined above, underlying peers' assignment of young people to crowds.

The first factor builds upon Ogbu's theory of oppositional identity development among members of oppressed minority groups (Ogbu & Davis, 2003). This theory stipulates that encountering racial or ethnic prejudice and impediments to occupational advancement or social acceptance can prompt individuals to reject majority culture institutions, crafting an identity that opposes the norms and expectations of these institutions. If affiliation with ethnically oriented crowds is primarily a *manifestation of oppositional identity*, then one would expect members of these crowds to display low levels of achievement, little interest in school or school staff, and low participation in school extracurricular activities. From this perspective, youth in ethnically oriented crowds are taking a more defensive posture toward their ethnic identity.

An alternative possibility is that claiming membership in an ethnically oriented crowd stems from an *emphasis on ethnicity* as a positive, central feature of one's self-concept development. Ethnicity is a component of one's sense of identity for most ethnic minority youth in the United States (Phinney, 2003), although the salience of ethnic identity can vary as a function of both personal and contextual factors (Herman, 2004; Peshkin, 1991; Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). Youth who have a high regard for their ethnic background and think it is important for others to appreciate their ethnicity are likely to seek out ethnic peers as close friends and affiliate with ethnically oriented peer groups.

In sum, rather than restricting our focus to a single theoretical perspective, we draw upon multiple theories to identify several factors that may underlie adolescents' inclination to associate an ethnic minority peer with an ethnically oriented crowd. Whereas such crowd assignments could be an indicator of ethnic discrimination and stereotyping, they may instead be peer acknowledgment of the individual's more positive emphasis on ethnicity or simply a method of categorizing someone who is not known well enough or not distinctive enough on individual abilities or interests to classify in other terms. Likewise, self-identification with an ethnically oriented crowd may be part of a pattern of oppositional identity borne out of experiences with discrimination or a more positive statement about the salience of ethnicity to one's sense of self. To date, the empirical and theoretical literature on social patterns among ethnic minority youth is too sparse to provide sound predictions of which factor will be most salient in crowd affiliations, nor is there sound reason to expect

the same factor or factors to be prominent across ethnic groups.

Moreover, many youth come from multiple ethnic backgrounds, and this provides another layer of complexity to the issue of membership in ethnically oriented crowds. Adolescents with both ethnic minority and European American ancestry are of particular interest in this study. Many of these individuals are not clearly accepted by peers from either of their primary ethnic backgrounds (Gaskins, 1999; Rockquemore & Brunson, 2002), and the ethnic affiliation that they claim fluctuates over time (Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006; Root, 1997). In effect, they may be caught between ethnically defined crowds on the one hand and groups defined by abilities and interests (in the European American tradition) on the other. Their friendship networks are more varied and they are better able to span boundaries between social groups than are monoracial youth (Corrin & Cook, 1999). Thus, the image they project to peers may not be as clearly or consistently focused on ethnic background. As a result, we expect that multiethnic youth will not be as strongly associated with ethnically defined crowds as their peers from a single ethnic minority group.

Study Objectives

Our objective in this study is to examine possible variables that differentiate adolescents from various ethnic minority backgrounds who are associated with ethnically based crowds from those associated with nonethnic crowds. We consider variables related to several factors that could influence self- and peer ratings of crowd affiliation. To our knowledge, this is the first study to consider both self- and peer ratings in examining ethnically oriented crowd affiliations

across multiple ethnic groups. We include three broad ethnic groupings in analyses: African American, Latino, and Asian American youth, including multiethnic adolescents who possess one or more of these backgrounds. We group respondents into broad ethnic categories rather than assessing more specific groups (e.g., Mexican Americans or Korean Americans) in deference to the inclination of many students in participating schools to use only more general ethnic crowd labels such as "Hispanics" or "Asians." Likewise, we do not distinguish between ethnic and racial categorizations because American adolescents do not routinely make this distinction. Indeed, Hirschmann, Alba, and Farley (2000) argue that race is losing its conventional meaning among most Americans. It is replaced by a more general sense of cultural heritage as multiracial background becomes more common.

Method

Sample and Procedures

Respondents were drawn from seven public, multiethnic high schools (Grades 9–12) in the Midwest and West Coast. Schools varied substantially in demographic characteristics (see Table 1). In two of the schools, no single ethnic group constituted a numerical majority. In the remaining schools, the numerical majority of students was European American but over 30% of the student body were from two or more other ethnic groups.

Self-report questionnaires were completed in the spring of the academic year by all students enrolled in each high school except for those who refused to participate or whose parents proscribed their participation (8%), special education students who were

Table 1
Characteristics of Participating Schools

School	Enrollment	Percentage distribution of students by ethnicity				Parental education
		African American	Asian American	Latino	European American	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
1	1,128	2 (1)	7 (2)	32 (1)	58	5.01 (1.70)
2	732	16 (1)	8 (2)	15 (1)	62	5.81 (1.82)
3	965	9 (1)	30 (3)	16 (1)	44	5.02 (1.43)
4	1,437	46 (3)	6 (0)	14 (1)	36	4.94 (1.65)
5	1,428	5 (1)	17 (3)	11 (2)	56	5.91 (1.61)
6	1,152	2 (1)	17 (2)	18 (2)	63	4.68 (1.45)
7	1,548	3 (1)	20 (2)	14 (1)	64	5.56 (1.49)

Note. Enrollment refers to total school enrollment across four grade levels. The first four schools listed participated in peer ratings of crowd affiliation. Numbers in parentheses in columns 3–5 indicate the number of ethnically based crowds of that ethnic group in the school.

unable to complete the surveys independently (6%), and students who were absent or unavailable during the hour designated for survey administration (13%); participation did not differ significantly by ethnicity. Data analyses for this study focused on members of three major ethnic groups: 570 African American, 1,004 Asian American, and 963 Latino respondents, some of whom were multiethnic (total $n = 2,465$). Data on self-perceived crowd affiliation were derived from self-report questionnaires. Peer-rated crowd affiliation came from a rating procedure completed in four of the seven schools (school administrators in the other three schools placed time constraints on the study that obviated collection of these ratings) and were therefore confined to 550 African American, 377 Asian American, and 590 Latino respondents (again, including some multiethnic youth).

Measures of Independent Variables

In addition to basic demographic information (gender, grade level, ethnic group membership, parental education), the questionnaire included measures of variables that, according to factors outlined in the Introduction, could be associated with crowd assignment: self-reported measures of academic engagement, extracurricular participation, ethnic orientation, family immigration status, facility with English language, friendship preferences, and perceptions of discrimination based on ethnic group membership. Mean scores and standard deviations for all these variables, calculated within each ethnic group, are presented in Table 2. Table 3 reports intercorrelations among independent variables (again, within ethnic group).

Ethnic background. From a list of 16 ethnic/racial categories, which described countries or regions of ethnic ancestry, respondents indicated the background of each of their biological parents, checking all categories that applied to each parent. Categories were collapsed into six superordinate groups: African American, Asian American, Latino, European American, Native American, and Middle Eastern. About 73% of respondents in the current study listed categories in the same superordinate group for both parents and were easily classified into one ethnic group. The other 27% either had parents from different superordinate groups or one parent from multiple superordinate groups. Most (20%) of these respondents listed "White/Caucasian" (European American) for one parent and an ethnic minority group for the other parent. The remainder identified parents as being from two different ethnic minority groups.

We included respondents in analyses for a target ethnic group if they indicated that either biological parent had that ethnic background. For instance, adolescents who reported that both parents were African American or that one parent was African American and the other was European American were included in the African American sample only. An adolescent who reported a Latino mother and African American father was included in both the Latino and the African American samples. Thus, all multiethnic youth were included in data analyses, but a small percentage of respondents were included in more than one ethnic sample. This necessitated separate analyses for each target ethnic group in order to maintain the independence of samples.

Information on parents' ethnic background was used to differentiate respondents with "monoethnic" (i.e., the same, single category listed for both parents)

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Independent Variables

Independent variable	African American ($n = 570$)		Asian American ($n = 1,004$)		Latino ($n = 963$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parental education	3.14	0.71	3.72	0.87	2.61	0.97
Cultural integration	NA	NA	0.02	0.99	0.03	0.94
Perceived ethnic discrimination	0.02	0.89	0.01	0.86	0.01	0.85
Academic achievement (GPA)	2.50	0.74	3.07	0.79	2.48	0.81
Extracurricular involvement	1.50	1.69	1.86	2.01	2.00	2.11
Bonding with teachers	3.04	0.61	2.99	0.58	2.98	0.62
Ethnic exclusivity of friends	3.39	1.20	2.84	1.22	2.83	1.24
Emphasis on ethnicity	2.42	1.29	2.46	1.18	2.49	1.23
Feelings about ethnicity	4.53	1.35	4.26	1.27	4.45	1.29
Percentage in college-bound track	50.8		52.9		29.9	

Note. NA = not asked; GPA = grade point average.

Table 3
Correlation Matrix for Independent Variables Within Each Ethnic Group

Ethnic group variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
African American									
1. Parental education									
2. Cultural integration	NA								
3. Perceived ethnic discrimination	-.03	NA							
4. Academic achievement (GPA)	.03	NA	-.05						
5. Academic track	.09	NA	-.15	.11					
6. Extracurricular involvement	-.01	NA	-.09	-.09	-.05				
7. Bonding with teachers	.01	NA	-.08	.22	-.05	-.06			
8. Ethnic exclusivity of friends	-.05	NA	.11	-.07	-.05	.02	-.03		
9. Emphasis on ethnicity	.03	NA	.01	.00	-.12	-.03	.12	.07	
10. Feelings about ethnicity	.10	NA	-.07	.07	.04	-.02	-.16	.16	.27
Asian American									
1. Parental education									
2. Cultural integration	.28								
3. Perceived ethnic discrimination	-.08	-.28							
4. Academic achievement (GPA)	.20	.02	-.08						
5. Academic track	.16	.28	-.16	.33					
6. Extracurricular involvement	-.09	-.06	.01	-.20	-.19				
7. Bonding with teachers	-.01	.02	-.16	.19	.08	-.12			
8. Ethnic exclusivity of friends	-.04	-.26	.10	.02	-.02	-.04	.01		
9. Emphasis on ethnicity	-.03	-.14	.06	.09	.01	-.04	.14	.13	
10. Feelings about ethnicity	-.01	.04	.08	.09	.11	-.07	.07	.10	.27
Latino									
1. Parental education									
2. Cultural integration	.20								
3. Perceived ethnic discrimination	-.08	-.17							
4. Academic achievement (GPA)	.09	-.03	-.06						
5. Academic track	.22	.26	-.19	.32					
6. Extracurricular involvement	-.06	-.11	-.06	-.06	-.15				
7. Bonding with teachers	.02	.01	-.01	.23	.02	-.02			
8. Ethnic exclusivity of friends	-.23	-.17	.08	-.05	-.19	.05	.04		
9. Emphasis on ethnicity	-.06	-.12	.09	.03	.01	.03	.16	.16	
10. Feelings about ethnicity	.01	.03	-.05	.11	.09	.03	.08	.08	.29

Note. Correlation coefficients .08 and larger are significant at $p < .05$ for the Asian American and Latino samples. Correlation coefficients .09 and larger are significant at $p < .05$ for the African American sample. NA = not asked; GPA = grade point average.

versus multiethnic backgrounds (i.e., different categories listed for each parent or multiple categories listed for at least one parent). Monoethnic youth were coded as 0 and multiethnic coded as 1.

Parental educational attainment. Respondents reported the highest level of education completed by each parent; response options ranged from 1 (*some grade school*) to 8 (*professional/graduate degree*). Scores for each parent were averaged into a single, continuous indicator of parental education. If a participant responded for just one parent, this response was used as the indicator. Parental education served as a proxy for socioeconomic status because adolescents are not reliable reporters of other indicators (parental occupation and family income).

Cultural integration. Participants' generation status was determined by a question in which students indicated (yes, no, or do not know) whether they, their mother, father, and maternal and paternal grandparents were born in the United States. Respondents were coded as either 1 (immigrant: participant was born in another country but immigrated to the United States), 2 (U.S.-born participant of a parent who immigrated), 3 (both parents and participant U.S. born), or 4 (at least one grandparent was U.S. born, in addition to parents and participant being U.S. born). Facility with English was determined by participants' responses, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all well*) to 5 (*extremely well*), to how well they spoke English and how well they understood English.

Within each ethnic group, these two items were highly correlated ($r_s = .73-.81$) and were averaged into a single language facility score.

The generation status and language facility variables were sufficiently intercorrelated within each ethnic group (r_s ranged from .36 to .43) to suggest that they represented the same underlying construct. Preliminary analyses treating them as independent variables confirmed that they operated in tandem rather than independently. Thus, we standardized each variable and then combined the two to create a single composite measure of cultural integration. Higher scores reflected greater English-speaking facility and less recent family immigration. This variable was calculated only for the Asian-descent and Latino samples. Nearly all African American participants reported that they and their families were U.S. born and native English speakers.

Academic variables. Respondents reported the grades they usually received (mostly A's, mostly A's or B's to mostly F's) in each of four key academic disciplines (English, science, math, social studies). Responses were converted to the standard 4-point grade point average (GPA) scale (0 = F, 4 = A) and then averaged to create a measure of self-reported academic achievement. Self-reported grades have been found to correlate satisfactorily ($r = .76$) with students' actual grades (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Academic track was assessed in response to the question, "How would you describe most of the courses you are taking?" Those who checked "college prep" were classified as college bound (scored as a 1); all other responses (general, business, vocational, remedial, special education) were scored 0.

School-related variables. Two aspects of social involvement in the school were measured. Based on the work of Hirschi (1969), Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) developed a 6-item scale to measure students' bonding with teachers. Sample items include "Teachers care how I am doing" and "Teachers are willing to talk things over with me." Students responded to these items on a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Item scores were averaged, with higher scores indicating stronger bonding. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .73 among African American and .76 among Latino and Asian-descent respondents. Additionally, respondents were given a list of 20 categories of school-sponsored extracurricular activities (including specific sports teams, clubs, performing activities such as band or forensics, and service activities such as student government or Key Club) and asked to check all that they had participated in during the

current school year. The total number checked constituted our measure of extracurricular involvement. Breadth was considered a more salient facet of extracurricular participation than depth of involvement (e.g., number of hours per week in an activity) because it indicated exposure to a broader array of peers, who could then get to know the student beyond more superficial, extrinsic characteristics.

Ethnic orientation. The data set included three measures of respondents' orientation toward their ethnic background. Emphasis on ethnicity was assessed with one question: "Suppose you wanted some people to know all about you. How important would it be for them to know about your ethnic background?" Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*). Feelings about ethnicity were measured by the item, "Overall, my feelings about my ethnic background are: ..." Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly negative*) to 6 (*strongly positive*). To estimate the ethnic exclusiveness of friends, we asked respondents to indicate, on a scale from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*all*), the proportion of their close friends who were from their own ethnic background. These measures were intercorrelated but at low levels (all correlations were below .28). Thus, we treated each as a separate indicator. These same items have been used to describe ethnic orientation in previous studies (Hamm et al., 2005). Although they are not as elaborate as scales assessing ethnic identity, they focus on more observable features of adolescents' ethnic orientation, which should be more salient in peer ratings than personal thoughts or feelings reflected in ethnic identity measures. They also incorporate the three major components of ethnic identity according to Phinney (2000).

Three other items formed a perceived discrimination scale. On a 5-point Likert scale (from *almost never* to *almost always*), participants indicated how frequently teachers, other adults at school, and other students, respectively, were unfair or negative toward them based on their ethnic background. Items were standardized; ratings were averaged across the items to form a scale score. The scale's Cronbach's alpha was .75 for African American and Asian American respondents and .72 for Latino respondents.

All independent variables were standardized within school, within each ethnic group. We standardized within ethnic group because analyses were conducted separately within ethnic group. We standardized within school so that the values represented relative standing on variables within each school context. As a result, a value of 0 on an independent variable indicates that the student has an average score among all students from their ethnic group in

their own school. Standardization of these values was conducted using data from all valid cases in the school, which included cases later dropped from analyses because of missing data. Consequently, within the sample that could be included in the substantive analyses, the means may differ slightly from 0.

Dependent Variables: Crowd Affiliation Measures

Respondents' self-perceived and peer-rated crowd affiliations were derived from Brown's (1989) Social Type Rating (STR) procedure. Prior to administering the self-report questionnaire, we conducted multiple focus group interviews with small groups of students (5–8 participants) in each grade level in each school. Focus group members were nominated by a knowledgeable staff person in each school to represent a cross-section of the student body in terms of demographics, achievement, and school involvement. Within each focus group, members listed the major crowds they perceived in the school, based on defining crowds as "a label you hang on students who act the same way or do the same sort of things, even if they don't all hang out together." Individual lists were collated and then refined through focus group discussion to result in a master list of crowds from each focus group. Interviewers probed for the defining features of each crowd to help respondents determine whether crowds with similar names should be combined or remain separate. Crowd lists from all focus groups in a given school were then combined to form a final list of 10–19 crowds per school. For the purpose of data analyses for the current study, responses were collapsed into two categories: ethnically based and nonethnic crowds. Ethnically based crowds included groups referring to a particular country of origin (e.g., Vietnamese, Mexicans), groups with more generic ethnic labels (e.g., Blacks, Asians, Hispanics), and groups whose labels referred to activities or interests (e.g., rappers) but for which ethnicity was always a central defining characteristic (e.g., "Black kids who sit together and rap in the lunchroom"). All other crowds (e.g., brains, jocks, high society, loners, partyers, punks, skaters) were placed in the nonethnic category. Schools contained between four and six ethnically based crowds. Table 1 indicates the number of such crowds for each major ethnic group in each school.

Self-perceived crowd affiliation. On the self-report questionnaire, respondents were presented with the list of crowds for their school and asked, "Which ONE of these crowds do you believe YOU belong to?" The majority of respondents listed a specific crowd but

14% claimed that they were not members of any crowd. Virtually all (99%) the respondents who claimed membership in an ethnically based crowd selected a crowd corresponding to their own ethnic background. Respondents who listed an ethnically based crowd received a score of 1; those who claimed to belong to nonethnic crowds or none of the crowds were scored 0.

Peer-rated crowd affiliation. After focus groups reached consensus on school crowds, each member was asked to list classmates who were exemplars of the school's major crowds. Collated across groups, this list of students formed the rater pool for STR interviews (see Brown, 1989). In these individual interviews, conducted several months prior to questionnaire administration, raters were presented with the list of major crowds in their school and then asked to indicate the crowd with which each student in their grade (not just ethnic minority classmates) was most closely associated. All of a school's major crowds were represented by at least 1 but no more than 3 raters per grade. Although we did not ask STR raters to specify their ethnic background from outward appearances (name and physical features), they seemed to reflect the ethnic diversity of the schools from which they were drawn. The ratings of 7 STR raters were considered unreliable, and therefore omitted, because for at least 20% of their classmates they indicated that they did not know the student well enough to place in a crowd. All study participants were assigned a crowd affiliation by at least 10 raters.

The peer-rated crowd affiliation dependent variable accounted for both the number of STR raters who assigned crowd membership to each study participant and the number of those raters who placed each study participant in an ethnic-based crowd. In order to account for variation in the number of STR raters per participant, a binomial probability was calculated from these two values (number of raters and number assigning to an ethnically based crowd) to represent the probability that any single rater would place the participant in an ethnically based crowd. This probability value more accurately represents reputation among peers for crowd affiliation than assignment to a single crowd category coded from the peer ratings; it also preserves more of the variability in STR ratings than category assignment (see Brown et al., 1993). As already noted, the individual student ratings were gathered for students in four of the seven schools.

Because fewer cases were available for analyses of peer-rated than self-perceived crowd affiliation, we ran analyses related to self-perceived crowd affiliation twice, once with the full sample and again with the sample restricted to respondents in schools that

participated in STR ratings. There were no substantive difference in findings; therefore, only results with the full sample are reported for self-rated crowd affiliation.

Plan of Analyses

Each school constituted a different context for ethnic and nonethnic crowds, within which students developed specific peer group affiliations. Self- and peer ratings made by participants attending the same school represented nested data structures; that is, they are not independent observations. In a practical sense, the specific crowds available within the peer system and the image or reputation of each group differs across schools (Brown & Klute, 2003; Coleman, 1961); differences in school social structure can distinguish the peer affiliations of students across high schools (Hamm et al., 2005; Moody, 2001). We used hierarchical generalized linear modeling (HGLM), which enabled us to control for shared variance within schools by partitioning the total variance of each dependent variable into between- and within-school components. Because of the low number of schools ($n = 4$ for peer ratings, and $n = 7$ for self-ratings), we could not include specific school-level independent variables in these models.

For each ethnic group, and for each dependent variable, we first estimated an unconditional model to separate the total variance into Level 1 (within-school) and Level 2 (between-school) components. In contrast to more commonly used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) procedures, for which the Level 1 variance is estimated, HGLM models assign the Level 1 variance a value of $(\pi)^2/3$ (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). The variances for higher levels represented within the HGLM models are estimated in relation to that Level 1 variance value, permitting, like in HLM, the calculation of an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) that indicates the ratio of Level 2 (between-school) variance to total variance in the outcome scores. We report the ICCs for each dependent variable, for each ethnic group. Each ICC was tested for significance using a chi-square distribution to ensure that a multilevel model is appropriate.

Next, we estimated a student-level model to assess the relationship of specific student characteristics or experiences to the within-school probability that students were designated (by self or peers) as ethnically based crowd members. All continuous independent variables were grand-mean centered within each ethnic group. As a result, the intercept can be interpreted as the predicted outcome score for a "typical" student, one who has an average value on all continuous independent variables, within the

sample for that ethnic group, and who is a member of the two referent groups for dichotomous independent variables (monoethnic background and in a non-college-bound track).

For these HGLM models, in which the outcome variable is defined in terms of a probability (of self- or peer assignment to an ethnically based crowd), a log-odds transformation of the outcome variable is used to improve estimation. Interpretation of the intercept term or the "effects" of independent variables is not a direct translation of coefficients as is the case in HLM procedures that do not use a transformation of the outcome variable. It is necessary to "undo" the transformation on the outcome score in order to interpret the meaning of the coefficients.

To facilitate interpretation of the magnitude of the effect associated with independent variables with significant coefficients, we calculated two predicted outcome scores to compare. For continuous independent variables, the basis of comparison is the predicted outcome score for the typical participant, which is given by the intercept value in the model. The predicted outcome score for a participant with a value 1 *SD* above the grand mean on the independent variable of interest was calculated by adding the intercept and the coefficient for that independent variable. These two predicted scores (intercept and intercept plus coefficient) were then converted to probabilities by undoing the log-odds transformation. The difference in these two probabilities is the magnitude of the effect. For dichotomous independent variables, the predicted scores for the two groups are compared. For these variables, we calculated predicted scores for each of the two groups and then converted these scores to probabilities by undoing the log-odds transformation. The difference in these probabilities represents the magnitude of the effect of the dichotomous independent variable. In the Results section, we illustrate this process by providing a detailed example for interpretation of a significant coefficient for the African American sample, for both dependent variables.

Although grade-level differences were not hypothesized, we initially included grade level in the model as a possible moderating variable. Because grade level did not serve as a significant moderator of the effects that we observed, we omitted this variable in our subsequent analyses.

Results

The results of the analyses are reported in terms of predicted probabilities of self- or peer identification with an ethnically based crowd. The predicted probabilities have been computed from the coefficients

that were estimated in the analytic models. Two examples of this process are provided. For the sake of readability, we refer to these values simply as probabilities. The magnitudes of effects for independent variables that have significant coefficients in the models are presented in terms of changes to the probability of self- or peer identification with an ethnically based crowd. The point of reference for these comparisons is the probability of identification with an ethnically based crowd for what we have called a "typical student" who has values at the grand mean on all continuous independent variables, and who reported a monoethnic background and is in a non-college-bound track.

For continuous independent variables, change in probability is associated with a 1 *SD* difference on the independent variable. All continuous independent variables were standardized within ethnic group, within school. Values on these variables represent relative standing within the ethnic group, within the school. The 1 *SD* difference used to examine the magnitude of effects on the dependent variable corresponds to a 1 *SD* difference in relative standing within the ethnic group, within the school.

Crowd Affiliation Rates

A relatively small proportion of respondents, roughly equivalent across ethnic categories, self-identified with ethnic based crowds: 15.6% of the

African American, 16.2% of the Asian descent, and 13.5% of the Latino students. When based on peer ratings, the average proportion of ethnic-based crowd ratings for participants within each ethnic group was similarly modest: 28% for African American, 31% for Asian descent, and 37% for Latino participants.

Self-Rated Crowd Affiliations

Analyses that involved self-rated peer group affiliation involved a series of HGLM for Bernoulli distributions, the appropriate distribution for a dichotomous outcome score, conducted for each of the three ethnic groups. These models indicated the extent to which, within schools, the student-level variables we specified were associated with higher or lower probabilities that students self-identified with an ethnically based peer group. Parameter estimates for the unconditional model and for the student-level model are presented in Table 4.

African American students. Results from the unconditional model indicate that there was significant variance between schools, accounting for 13% of the variance in African American adolescents' self-nomination into ethnically based peer crowds, $\chi^2(6) = 14.40, p < .001$. Having controlled for all student-level factors, the predicted probability that a typical African American student would affiliate with an ethnically defined crowd is .34, which was calculated as follows.

Table 4

Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling Parameter Estimates for Self-Identification With an Ethnically Based Crowd

Independent variable	African American (<i>n</i> = 570)		Asian American (<i>n</i> = 1,004)		Latino (<i>n</i> = 963)	
	Coefficient	<i>SE</i>	Coefficient	<i>SE</i>	Coefficient	<i>SE</i>
Unconditional model						
Intercept	-1.05**	.22	-1.45***	.21	-1.52***	.27
Level I (student-level) model						
Intercept	-.67	.42	-1.35***	.30	-1.48**	.31
Parental education	-.15	.14	.10	.11	-.61**	.17
Cultural integration	—	—	-.51**	.14	-.18	.18
Perceived ethnic discrimination	-.01	.17	.04	.13	.41*	.16
Academic achievement (GPA)	-.12	.16	-.10	.13	.29	.17
Academic track	-.36	.33	-.01	.30	-.48	.33
Extracurricular involvement	-.09	.14	.10	.12	.39*	.15
Bonding with teachers	-.20	.15	-.06	.11	-.20	.16
Ethnic exclusivity of friends	.67***	.17	.73***	.12	.95**	.17
Emphasis on ethnicity	.23	.15	-.17	.11	.11	.17
Feelings about ethnicity	.06	.16	.30**	.12	.04	.17
Multiethnic background	.01	.31	-.67*	.28	-.55	.35

Note. Codes for multiethnic background were 1 = *multiethnic*, 0 = *monoethnic*; codes for academic track were 1 = *college-bound track*, 0 = *non-college-bound track*. GPA = grade point average.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

The student-level model intercept of -0.67 is the outcome score for a typical African American student and is the log-odds of the probability that such a student would self-identify into an ethnically based crowd. The log-odds of a probability is given by the equation $y = \log(p/(1 - p))$. This equation is solved for p , $p = 1/(1 + e^{(-y)})$, to convert the log-odds value of -0.67 to a probability. Evaluating the expression $1/(1 + e^{(-y)})$ for $y = -0.67$ yields a probability of .34. This probability is the reference point for determining the magnitude of effects of independent variables with significant coefficients.

The only student-level factor significantly related to self-identification as an African American-based crowd member was ethnic exclusiveness of the participant's friendship network. Respondents who were 1 *SD* above the mean on this variable had a predicted probability of .50 to self-identify as an ethnically based crowd member, calculated as follows.

The sum of the student-level model intercept of -0.67 and the coefficient .67 for ethnic exclusiveness of the participant's friendship network is the outcome score for an African American student whose score on this independent variable is 1 *SD* above the grand mean. This outcome score, $y = -0.67 + 0.67 = 0$ is the log-odds of the probability that such a student would self-identify into an ethnically based crowd. Evaluating the expression $1/(1 + e^{(-y)})$ for the value $y = 0$ yields a probability of .50.

Having a more ethnically exclusive friendship network, 1 *SD* above the mean, increased the probability of self-identifying with an ethnically based crowd from .34 to .50.

Asian students. For adolescents of Asian descent, between-school differences accounted for a significant, but quite small, proportion (2%) of the variability in self-nomination as an ethnically based crowd member, $\chi^2(6) = 24.35, p < .001$. From the student-level model, with all the independent variables included, the probability that a typical Asian participant would self-identify as an ethnically based crowd member was .21. This probability increased to .35 for students whose ratings of the ethnic exclusiveness of their friendship network were 1 *SD* greater than that of the average Asian participant. Holding more positive orientations toward one's ethnic group membership resulted in a higher probability of an ethnically based crowd affiliation (.26 for a student whose rating of positive feelings toward the ethnic group was 1 *SD* above the mean rating for this variable); the probability was lower (.13) for students whose measure of cultural integration was 1 *SD* above the mean.

Having a multiethnic background significantly reduced the probability that adolescents in this ethnic

group would report affiliation with an ethnically based crowd. Probabilities associated with self-nomination as an ethnically based crowd member were .21 for monoethnic Asian-descent adolescents and .12 for multiethnic students who had some non-Asian ancestry.

In summary, self-nomination into an Asian crowd was more likely among monoethnic Asian participants who had more ethnically exclusive friendship networks and more positive feelings about their ethnic group and who had lower levels of integration into American culture.

Latino students. School-level differences accounted for a statistically significant but very small proportion (less than 2%) of variance in Latino adolescents' self-perceived nominations as Latino crowd members, $\chi^2(6) = 23.08, p < .001$. Results from the student-level model with all independent variables included indicated that the probability that the average Latino participant would self-nominate as an ethnically based crowd member was .19. This probability increased to .37 for a student with ethnic homogeneity of friendship network, 1 *SD* above the average for Latino respondents, to .25 for those who reported 1 *SD* above the average level of extracurricular activity participation, and to .26 for those 1 *SD* above the average on perception of ethnically based discrimination. The probability of self-identification into an ethnically based crowd dropped to .11 for students who reported parental education levels 1 *SD* above the average for this ethnic group.

In summary, self-identification with an ethnic crowd was more likely among Latino students whose friends tended to be Latinos, who perceived greater ethnically based discrimination at school, and who reported greater involvement in extracurricular activities. It was also higher among Latino students whose parents had attained lower levels of education.

Peer-Rated Crowd Affiliations

For peer-rated crowd affiliation, the outcome variable in the model was the log-odds of the probability that a peer rater identified the study participant with an ethnically based crowd. This outcome is distributed as a binomial variable, associated with the number of ethnically based crowd nominations received, given the total number of raters. A series of HGLM analyses was conducted for this binomial outcome variable, including the same independent variables as for the self-rated crowd analyses. Parameter estimates are reported in Table 5. Interpretation of the magnitude of effects of independent variables with significant coefficients followed the same procedure as for self-rated crowd affiliation, converting

Table 5
 Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling Parameter Estimates for Peer Identification With an Ethnically Based Crowd

Independent variable	African American (n = 550)		Asian American (n = 377)		Latino (n = 590)	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Unconditional model						
Intercept	-1.11	.30	-3.13	1.02	-1.18***	.10
Level I (student-level) model						
Intercept	-1.06	.31	-3.64	1.05	-.97***	.14
Parental education	-.13**	.04	-.10	.07	-.22***	.05
Cultural integration	—	—	.16	.09	-.04	.06
Perceived ethnic discrimination	.08	.05	-.22**	.08	.17**	.05
Academic achievement (GPA)	-.14***	.04	-.26**	.07	-.13*	.05
Academic track	.06	.10	-.64**	.19	-.28**	.11
Extracurricular involvement	.04	.03	-.06	.06	.18***	.05
Bonding with teachers	-.06	.04	-.12	.07	-.08	.04
Ethnic exclusivity of friends	.32***	.05	.37***	.07	.09*	.05
Emphasis on ethnicity	-.14**	.04	.08	.07	.16**	.05
Feelings about ethnicity	.01	.05	.16*	.07	.04	.05
Multiethnic background	-.02	.08	-.22	.14	-.32**	.10

Note. Codes for multiethnic background were 1 = *multiethnic*, 0 = *monoethnic*; codes for academic track were 1 = *college-bound track*, 0 = *non-college-bound track*. Although coefficients for the intercept terms are more than two times the standard error, some are not significant due to the small degrees of freedom for the intercept terms (number of schools - 1). GPA = grade point average.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

outcome scores to probabilities that a peer rater would identify a study participant with an ethnically based crowd.

African American students. Results from the unconditional model indicated that school-level factors accounted for approximately 9% of the variance in the extent to which peers assigned African American students to ethnically defined crowds, $\chi^2(3) = 138.28$, $p < .001$. From the student-level model with all independent variables included, the probability that a peer rater would classify a typical African American student as a member of an ethnically based crowd was .26. This probability increased to .32 for those who reported a level of ethnic exclusivity in their friendship network that was 1 *SD* above that of the average African American student. The probability diminished to .23 for three variables: when the students' GPA, the emphasis they placed on their ethnic group membership, or their parents' reported educational attainment was 1 *SD* above that of the typical African American student.

In summary, the African American respondents who were more likely to be rated by peers as African American crowd members were those whose friends tended to be African American, who placed less significance on being African American, who had lower GPAs, or who came from families with lower educational attainment.

Asian students. In contrast to analyses of other groups, a substantial proportion of the variance (56%) in peer-rated crowd affiliation among students of Asian descent could be attributed to school-level differences, $\chi^2(3) = 1,397.33$, $p < .001$. The student-level model indicated that, with all independent variables entered, the probability that an average Asian-descent student would be nominated by peers as ethnically based crowd members was .03. This low probability is a statistical artifact of the substantial number of Asian American students in three schools who received no peer ratings into ethnic crowds. Several variables had a significant influence on this probability; although the relative change in the proportion of nominations was high, the absolute proportion of peer-rated ethnic-based crowd affiliations remained very small. The probability of ethnically based crowd nominations was significantly higher (.04) for students who reported a friendship network that was 1 *SD* above the grand mean in ethnic homogeneity or who reported more positive feelings (1 *SD* above the mean) about their ethnic group membership (.04). GPA and reporting of ethnic discrimination at school had significant and negative effects on the probability that a peer rater would identify an Asian participant as an Asian crowd member (.02 in both cases). Finally, probabilities of ethnic-based crowd assignments were higher for

those in general academic tracks (.05) than in college-bound tracks (.03).

In summary, Asian-descent youth were more likely to be associated, by peers, with ethnically based crowds if they had more positive feelings about their ethnicity, had comparatively lower GPAs, more strictly confined their friendship networks to Asian-descent peers, or were in lower academic tracks. Association by peers with ethnically oriented crowds was also more likely for students of Asian descent who perceived relatively lower rates of ethnic discrimination at school. However, even when these characteristics are taken into consideration, the probability of being perceived by peers as an ethnically based crowd member remained small.

Latino students. A small (less than 2%) but significant portion of the variance in peer ratings of Latino students' crowd affiliation could be attributed to school-level differences, $\chi^2(3) = 18.00, p < .001$. Results from the student-level model indicated numerous correlates of peer-rated ethnic crowd affiliation for Latino students. Compared to a probability of .28 that the average Latino student would be associated by peers with an ethnically based crowd, the probability was modestly higher if respondents were 1 *SD* above the average of their peers in the ethnic exclusiveness of their friendship network (.29), in the importance that others know their ethnic background (.31), in the amount of ethnic discrimination they perceived at school (.31), or in their involvement in extracurricular activities (.31). The probability was lower for Latino students who were 1 *SD* above the average of their Latino schoolmates in GPA (.25) or parental education level (.23). The probability of peer-rated ethnically based crowd affiliation was significantly lower for college-bound (.22) than for non-college-bound participants (.28). Finally, multiethnic respondents had a lower probability (.22) of peer ratings into an ethnically based crowd than monoethnic Latino youth (.28).

In sum, Latino students were more likely to be assigned to ethnically based crowds if they were monoethnic, in non-college-bound tracks, placed greater emphasis on their ethnic group membership, perceived greater discrimination at school, were more involved in extracurricular activities, were lower achieving, had more ethnically homogeneous friendship networks, or came from families with lower levels of parental education attainment.

Discussion

Adolescent crowds are often disparaged as instruments of peer pressure and stereotyping that interfere

with healthy identity development. Our findings suggest that this might be true for ethnically oriented crowds in multiethnic American high schools, at least among Latino youth. In other respects, however, our findings suggest that ethnically oriented crowd affiliations can reflect and contribute to healthy identity and social development, particularly among adolescents of Asian and Latino backgrounds. How can one explain these apparently contradictory results?

Rates of Ethnic Crowd Affiliation

An important finding in this study is that adolescents do not routinely associate minority peers with ethnically oriented crowds, nor do minority students themselves typically claim membership in such crowds. Adolescents in all three ethnic categories that we studied were more likely to be placed by peers—and place themselves—in peer groups *not* defined by ethnic background. Apparently, ethnicity is not a superordinate characteristic by which American adolescents in multiethnic high schools routinely judge or understand their ethnic minority peers. Nevertheless, ethnicity is a highly salient factor in self-image or peer reputation for a substantial number of minority youth, so it is important to understand the circumstances under which ethnic minority adolescents come to be associated with ethnically oriented crowds.

One could interpret our results as evidence that self-ratings into ethnically based crowds are less common than peer assignments to these crowds. However, self-rated and peer-rated crowd affiliations were calculated in different ways. Peer ratings were based on the proportion of raters who assigned an individual to ethnically defined crowds, whereas individual respondents did not have a similar opportunity to partition their affiliation among several groups. In effect, peer ratings revealed the *consistency* of adolescents' reputation as an ethnically defined crowd member, whereas self-ratings revealed the *primacy* of such a reputation. This could account for apparent discrepancies between self- and peer perceptions in rates of ethnic crowd affiliation.

Correlates of Self-Ratings of Ethnic Crowd Affiliation

The one consistent correlate of self-ratings into an ethnically based crowd, statistically significant across all ethnic groupings, involved friendship choice. The more that adolescents confined friendship choices to co-ethnic peers, the more likely they were to regard themselves or be regarded by peers as

members of ethnically oriented crowds. This echoed scholars' claims that crowds channel adolescents into certain interpersonal relationships (Brown et al., 1994; Eckert, 1989; Kinney, 1993), but it also suggests the possibility that ethnic crowds are identified by affiliation patterns. The visibility of ethnically defined crowds is undoubtedly enhanced when young people from a given ethnic group "hang out" together in friendship groups. This is common among youth from most ethnic backgrounds in multiethnic schools, with little change across generations among immigrant groups (Hamm et al., 2005; Quillian & Campbell, 2003).

We postulated that ethnic crowd affiliation might reflect adolescents' positive attitudes toward ethnic identity. There was some evidence to support this assumption among Asian American respondents, for whom self-identification with an ethnic crowd was also correlated with positive feelings about their ethnic background and low levels of integration into American culture. Their status as the "model minority," easily accepted by the dominant White middle-class population (Lee, 1996), could make it easier for Asian youth to regard ethnic crowd affiliation from a positive perspective. We acknowledged, however, that ethnic crowd affiliation also could be tied to elements of an oppositional identity (Ogbu & Davis, 2003). Consistent with this perspective, Latino youth were more likely to associate with an ethnically oriented crowd if they came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and reported higher levels of ethnic discrimination. Their tendency to select ethnic peers as friends and situate themselves in Latino oriented crowds could be viewed as a defense against negative experiences with other peers and adults at school. This was true of some—but not all—of the crowds that Matute-Bianchi (1986) identified in her ethnographic study of a Mexican immigrant population.

Correlates of Peer Ratings of Ethnic Crowd Affiliation

Significant correlates of crowd affiliation were much more numerous for peer than self-ratings. This is not surprising because peer ratings are not clouded by efforts at impression management, as self-ratings are likely to be. Both qualitative (Eder, 1985; Merten, 1996) and quantitative researchers (Brown et al., in press) provide evidence that adolescents may misperceive or misrepresent their crowd affiliation in an effort to escape the negative appraisals from peers that crowd labels can reflect. It is also possible that observable behaviors, on which we focused, were more salient to peer assessments of crowd affiliation than self-assessments.

We postulated that peers might associate an ethnic minority adolescent with an ethnically oriented crowd simply on the basis of extrinsic ethnic markers, especially if that person failed to display any distinctive characteristics (through contact with majority group peers in classes and extracurricular activities) allowing peers to regard the individual in terms other than ethnicity. Alternatively, we suggested that peer assignment to ethnically oriented crowds might be more characteristic of youth who displayed a strong positive orientation toward their ethnicity.

As with self-ratings, there was evidence to support the salience of a positive ethnic orientation. Across all three ethnic groups, rates of peer assignment to an ethnically oriented crowd were higher when respondents tended to select friends from their own ethnic background. Peer-rated ethnic crowd affiliation was also correlated with positive feelings about one's ethnicity among respondents of Asian descent and with Latino respondents' emphasis on ethnicity in conversations with others. African American youth, however, failed to provide any additional evidence to support the importance of ethnic orientation to peer crowd assignments.

On the other hand, there was evidence to support the association between peer ratings into an ethnic crowd and extrinsic ethnic markers only among Latino youth. Specifically, the more ethnically based discrimination these adolescents reported and the lower their parents' education level, the more likely they were to be associated with an ethnically based crowd. Surprisingly, respondents of Asian descent who encountered high levels of discrimination were actually comparatively *less* likely to be linked by peers to an ethnically oriented crowd. These findings may reflect the fact that the reputation or image that Latino crowds have among adolescents (Foley, 1990; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Peshkin, 1991) tends to be more negative in tone than reports of the reputation of Asian crowds (Lee, 1996; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). In any case, they argue against the idea that ethnically oriented crowds are part of a pattern of ethnic stereotyping and discrimination. Instead, such crowds seem to be part of young people's positive orientation toward their ethnic background.

Nevertheless, there is also evidence that peers are inclined to place youth of Asian and Hispanic descent in an ethnically oriented crowd when these young people have low achievement levels and occupy lower academic tracks in high school. This suggests that majority youth, who constituted most of our STR raters and were underrepresented in lower academic tracks, may base their assessment of minority students' crowd affiliation on ethnicity when they have limited exposure to these youth in academic classes.

Such limited exposure could be the result of minority adolescents' withdrawal from traditional venues of success for majority youth in order to express and "oppositional identity" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu & Davis, 2003). Ogbu argues that this dynamic is most applicable to oppressed minority groups, including African American and Latino youth, but Lee (1996) suggests that it also may apply to some Asian American youth, which would be more consistent with our findings.

Consistent with findings from self-ratings, association by peers with ethnically oriented crowds varied directly with Latino adolescents' participation in extracurricular activities, not inversely as we had expected. There is some evidence that extracurricular activities are actually more ethnically homogeneous than school classrooms (Clotfelter, 2002). If Latino adolescents tend to self-select into activities dominated by ethnic peers, their participation might serve to solidify their association with ethnically defined crowds, as it does for crowds based on interests or abilities: jocks dominating athletics, brains dominating academic clubs, and so on (Eccles & Barber, 1999). We did not have enough details about extracurricular participation to examine this possibility.

In sum, our findings indicate that affiliation with an ethnically oriented crowd is associated with primarily positive characteristics (e.g., pride in one's ethnic background) for Asian youth but a more mixed group of characteristics for Latino adolescents, including patterns of discrimination and stereotyping. We were less successful in identifying correlates of African American students' crowd affiliation patterns. The most prominent correlate for this group was the company they keep: The more ethnically homogeneous their friendship network, the more likely they were to self-identify and be identified by peers with African American oriented crowds. We have not made any arguments about the direction of causality on this finding; indeed, the relationship between crowd affiliation and ethnic homogeneity of friendship networks is very likely reciprocal.

More generally, variables included in our analyses accounted for only a modest portion of variance in respondents' crowd assignment. Although this is often the case in social scientific research, it is still puzzling, given the diversity of variables that we examined as possible correlates of crowd affiliation. One must bear in mind, however, the importance of the local ecology in delineating crowds and crowd dynamics. Despite some similarities across schools in crowd types, each school in our study featured a unique list of crowds, and it is likely that member characteristics of crowds varied as well, thus limiting the extent to which *general*

(cross-school) factors could account for affiliation with ethnic or nonethnic peer groups. Among the school-specific factors requiring closer examination is the number of ethnic crowds available to students of a specific ethnic background. The requirements to be associated with the *only* crowd of one's own ethnic background in a school may differ from the requirements of belonging to one of several such peer groups. Likewise, different characteristics may be salient when crowds carry explicit versus implicit ethnic labels (e.g., Blacks vs. rappers). Especially, intriguing are the ramifications for identity development of having *no* crowd of one's own ethnic background with which to affiliate, as was the case for a small group of Asian American youth in one of our schools. Eliminating these youth from analyses did not alter our findings in any substantive way but closer examination of this unusual circumstance is still warranted.

Age and Ethnic Background

In preliminary analyses, we found no evidence that age moderated associations between ethnic crowd affiliation and respondents' behaviors or personal characteristics. This seems to contradict the work of other scholars (Brown et al., 1994; Kinney, 1993; Newman & Newman, 2001), indicating that crowds fade in importance across middle adolescence and that groups may even converge toward the end of high school. These other studies, however, involved youth in predominantly European American schools, and they focused on the *importance* rather than the *type* of crowd affiliation. In multiethnic settings, crowds may retain their salience and distinctiveness throughout high school, at least for ethnic minority youth. This is especially likely if social barriers between ethnic groups do not diminish across this age period.

It was also surprising that multiethnicity was only associated with an ethnically based crowd in some cases. Our analyses may not have been sufficiently fine grained to capture the implications of multiethnicity for crowd affiliation. They may be contingent on the specific ethnicities involved and the way these ethnic groups are regarded in a specific social context rather than the simple fact of having a multiethnic background.

Strengths and Limitations

In interpreting our findings, one must be mindful of the study's strengths and limitations. A strength of our study is its inclusion of multiple school contexts, which provided a larger and more ethnically diverse sample, and a broader array of ethnically based

crowds, than would be found in any single school. Hierarchical modeling enabled us to separate out school-level variance so that standard errors were not reduced by school differences. This analytic approach increased our confidence that significant associations that we observed were a function of respondent characteristics rather than school-specific factors. This is a major advance over previous studies because of evidence that features of the school context differentially shape adolescents' social relationships and interactions (Hamm et al., 2005; Moody, 2001).

Another important strength is our ability to consider both self- and peer ratings of crowd affiliation and to ground each of these assessments in the peer ecology specific to each school (i.e., the crowds most commonly identified in a given school). These procedures are labor intensive, but they provide more ecological validity than using a generic list of adolescent peer groups or relying exclusively on self-assessments of peer affiliation, as many investigators have done (e.g., Barber et al., 2001; Sussman et al., 1994).

The study also is limited by several factors. To investigate school-level effects more thoroughly, it would be helpful to have a larger number of schools in the sample. Furthermore, broadening measures of ethnic orientation or ethnic identity would enhance our understanding of connections between ethnicity and crowd membership. It would also be useful to examine specific national/ethnic groups within the more general categories that were employed in this study. Others have demonstrated significant variability in social interaction patterns and psychological outcomes for youth from various Asian or Hispanic backgrounds (e.g., Lee, 1996; Portes & MacLeod, 1998); such distinctions may also apply to peer crowd affiliations. Finally, extending the study to early adolescence (middle schools) and following participants over time could reveal developmental changes that are not apparent in a single year of data from an exclusively high school age sample.

In this study, we have tried to discern whether, within each of three groups of ethnic minority adolescents, peer crowd affiliations are associated with variables that contribute to positive personal and social development as well as variables that impede it. The findings encourage investigators to move beyond arguments about whether peer crowds constitute positive or negative fixtures in the lives of American adolescents. An important next step for research is to isolate circumstances under which crowds serve to enhance or inhibit healthy development for youth from specific ethnic backgrounds.

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