

**Ethnic Identity, Academic Self-Concept and Future
Orientation as Predictors of School Engagement,
Academic Achievement and Risk Behaviors among
Druze Adolescents in Israel**

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Abstract

The objective of the current research was to examine to what extent ethnic identity and personality-psychological variables derived from it contribute to the student school-engagement, academic achievement and risk behaviors of Druze adolescent's ethnic minority in Israel.

Studies which have been conducted among Druze community in Israel had examined the relationship between ethnic group identification and other functional factors. The main renewal of the current study was addressing ethnic identity as a psychological structure, i.e. an individual set of feelings, attitudes and perceptions toward his or her ethnic group, for example: "Are you proud of being Druze"?, "Do you participate in traditional ceremonies"?, "How often do you search for your ethnic group sources"?

The main hypothesis was that a strong ethnic identity will have a significant impact on the adolescent: it will strengthen his or her academic self-concept and contribute to the development of a positive future orientation; the student will adopt norms of school engagement, will have higher academic achievements, and will be less involved in high risk behaviors. Due to the tracking process which is implemented in high school setting, the secondary hypothesis raised was that, all of the examined factors would be more positive among students in both, scientific and excellence tracks, while students learning in technical tracks would be more involved in risk behaviors.

The dissertation's sample included 317 Druze adolescents ($M_{age} = 17.65$ years old, $SD = 0.54$; 65% girls, 35% boys) studying in six formal high schools in Israel divided to three types of classes (Tracks): technical classes, scientific classes and excellence classes (where students study both, scientific and technical domains). Participants completed an annual survey at their classes. Factor analysis was conducted to compare all studied factors in three different tracks mentioned above as well as indicating differences between boys and girls. Correlations and regression analysis were conducted to examine direct relationships of ethnic identity with school engagement, academic achievement and risk behavior and to test whether psychological factors; academic self-concept and future orientation moderate relationships between ethnic identity and outcomes.

Based on the analysis, findings indicate a positive and strong correlation between ethnic identity, academic self-concept and future orientation and with students' school engagement and academic achievement whereas negative high correlation was revealed with risk behaviors. These findings not only support the main hypothesis, Moreover, they are found to be in line with other findings revealed from studies which have addressed different ethnic minorities around the world such as Afro-Americans or Asians in the U.S.A.; Extra findings indicate that Druze teenagers studying in scientific or excellence classes compared to technical classes are more likely to have higher positive values of academic self-concept and future orientation, Furthermore, their school engagement and academic achievement are greater and they tend to be less involved in risk behaviors such as smoking, alcohol drinking, substance abuse and bullying or other violent behaviors. Similarly, factor analysis, comparing boys and girls indicates an advantage for girls in all factors, except in risk behaviors involvement which was higher among boys.

Key findings highlight the promotive role of strong and positive ethnic identity among ethnic minorities' lives as a protective factor against risk behaviors that are common to teenagers; as well as an accelerator of academic and general success. Such a role gets more significant impact among students in low tracks appearing in this study as technical tracks.

Future research is necessary. Conducting longitudinal studies that integrate quantitative and qualitative methods are recommended in order to elucidate further the nature and importance of shaping positive ethnic identity to Druze youth. Further educational and practical implications are discussed.