Ethnic Minority Youths’ Psychosocial Adjustment in School:

Exploring the Ethnic Composition

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Abstract

Ethnically diverse societies generally aim for ethnic groups to mix and especially for schools to be ethnically diverse. The study explored ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment depending on whether they attended schools where they were the minority group or schools that were ethnically diverse. The sample was from a cohort-sequential study and the analytic sample consisted of 229 participants. Psychosocial adjustment was examined through: psychological well-being in terms of self-esteem and school satisfaction; the perception of how one is treated considering peer victimization and ethnic harassment; and identity in regards to ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity. T-tests were conducted on six measures. The results showed that the youths attending ethnically diverse schools had higher levels of school satisfaction, stronger ethnic minority identity and lower levels of Swedish national identity. Correlations were conducted on all of the six measures. There were associations between the measures, but there were few relative differences in the relationships between the two types of schools. The study explores an area, which has not yet been examined in Sweden. Furthermore, the results have implications for policy makers in order to improve psychosocial adjustment in ethnic minority youths.

Keywords: ethnic minority youths, psychosocial adjustment, ethnic composition

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There are currently many societies that have diverse ethnic minority groups (Strohmeier, Kärnä, Salmivalli, 2010) and a vast amount of today’s adolescents will therefore live in other countries than their native country (Strohmier & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2008). Countries generally aspire for integration, with the purpose of ethnic minority groups to become a part of their new country (Svensson, Stattin, & Kerr, 2011), aiming to increase interactions between the different groups (Vervoort, Scholte, & Scheepers, 2011). Although there is a general aim for integrating ethnic minorities into the society, segregation still occurs. Research suggests that segregation could decrease immigrants’ prospects for integration, which in turn leads to the immigrants not being able to take part in their new country in many areas such as education (Musterd, 2005). The education system is one of these areas where there is an aim for integration (Vervoort et al., 2011) as it is considered to be a small-scale version of the rest of the societies, mirroring the societies opinions concerning ethnic diversity (Felix & You, 2011). Furthermore, research suggests that ethnically diverse schools could promote ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2006). Hence, is ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment different depending on the ethnic composition at their schools?

Psychosocial adjustment involves the understanding of an individual’s psychological development in connection to the interaction of the person’s social environment (Väfors Fritz, 2008). Psychosocial adjustment is important for all youths, irrespective of whether the youth belongs to the ethnic majority or minority. However, ethnic minority youths tend to have more challenges in society because they are the minority group, possibly being subjected to ethnic harassment or discrimination (Strohmeier & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2008). Early research on ethnic minority youth found that they are more susceptible to psychosocial adjustment problems compared to the native youths (Aronowitz, 1984), nonetheless, recent research suggest that they
do not have more adjustment problems (Van Geel & Vedder, 2011). Additionally, previous research suggests that the generation of immigration (first, second) could also influence psychosocial adjustment (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). According to the immigrant paradox, ethnic minority youths have higher levels of psychosocial adjustment compared to native youths. Furthermore, the immigrant paradox has also found that first generation ethnic minorities (born in another country) are better adjusted compared to the second-generation of ethnic minorities (parents are born in another country) (Harris, 1999; Rumbaut, 1999, as cited in Sam et. al. 2006). Most of these studies have been conducted in the US and less research has been conducted in Europe (Sam, Veder, Liebkind, Neto, & Virta, 2008). One study which has been conducted in ten European countries, did not find the pattern of the immigrant paradox as this study found that second generation ethnic minority youths were better adjusted suggesting that these youths are not subjected to as much stress as the first generation youths (Sam, Vedder, Ward, & Horenczyk, 2006). Also, there is not a general consensus on how to define ethnic minority youths as some researchers define them based on where they are born (first generation) and other researchers define them based on where their parents are born (second generation) (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b; Vermeij, van Duijn, & Baerveldt, 2009). Thus, there is contradicting evidence concerning the importance of the generation of immigration for the ethnic minority youths. Building on previous research where the majority of studies have found that first generation ethnic minority youths have higher levels of psychosocial adjustment, the youths will be defined as first generation ethnic minorities. In sum, there is contradicting evidence on whether ethnic minority youth have more psychosocial adjustment problems and it is also possible that the generation of immigration could influence psychosocial adjustment, and more research is thus essential.

As previous research has shown that there is contradicting evidence, what could then influence ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment? One possible explanation could be
the context, which is loosely defined as the physical and social environment wherein an individual develops (Steinberg & Avenevoli, 2000). The context where adolescents spend a majority of their time is at school (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a) and research has explored the association between ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment and the ethnic composition of the school (Graham, Bellmore, Nishina, & Juvonen, 2009). Although there is a general aim for schools to be ethnically diverse (Agirdag, Demanet, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2010) there is a limited amount of research, which has explored whether ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment depends on the ethnic composition of the school (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). There is empirical evidence, which has found that the ethnic composition of the school could affect various psychosocial outcomes such as self-esteem (Gray-Little & Carels, 1997; Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000) and peer victimization (Graham, 2006). These studies have found that ethnic minority youths attending schools which are ethnically diverse are more likely to have higher self-esteem, (Gray-Little & Carels, 1997; Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000) and less likely to be victims of peer victimization (Graham, 2006). Thus, previous research suggests that there are certain advantages for ethnic minority youths attending ethnically diverse schools, which could foster psychosocial adjustment in ethnic minority students (Juvonen et al, 2006). In conclusion, by examining the ethnic composition of the school it is plausible to understand the influence it could have on ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment.

Exploring the ethnic composition of the schools, could thus give us a broader picture of ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment (Graham, 2006; Kiang, Harter & Whitesell, 2007). There is a general assumption that the school is supposed to be a safe and encouraging institution that foster various psychological experiences in terms of supporting ones well-being such as sustaining and improving self-esteem (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004) and school satisfaction (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a), but also the perception of how one is treated by other students such
as preventing peer victimization (Juvonen et al., 2006) and ethnic harassment (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). Furthermore, the ethnic composition of the school could also be associated with ethnic minority youths’ identity such as enhancing their levels of national identity of the country they are living in (Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2011) as well as promote positive feelings for their ethnic minority identity (Sabatier, 2008). To conclude, there is a limited amount of results on whether ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment depends on the ethnic composition of the school and there is therefore a gap in the research in this area. Furthermore, taking the school context into account is vital when exploring psychosocial adjustment in ethnic minority groups.

**Psychological well-being**

Psychosocial adjustment in ethnic minority youths could be explored through examining psychological well-being (Vacek, Coyle, & Vera, 2010). The term psychological well-being is a wide term and could thus be explored through a variety of measures such as school satisfaction (Lent, 2004) and self-esteem (Vacek, Coyle, & Vera, 2010). Schools generally aim to promote and enhance youths’ psychological well-being (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a) and empirical evidence suggests that the ethnic composition of the school could affect this (Juvonen et al., 2006).

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem is a concept, which involves how we feel about ourselves and has been widely studied as it has been shown to have an influence on our lives (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, 1989). Additionally, schools have the responsibility to encourage and reinforce students’ self-esteem (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). Previous research suggests that there could be an association between the school context and ethnic minority students’ self-esteem, thus it is vital to include the ethnic composition of the school when examining ethnic minority students’ self-esteem (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). There has been extensive research on ethnic minority students’ level of self esteem based on the school context. However, the majority of research on
ethnic minority students’ self-esteem has mainly been conducted in American schools with white and African American students. Some of these studies found that African American students had higher self-esteem when attending ethnically diverse schools compared to being the minority ethnic group (Gray-Little & Carels, 1997; Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). A study conducted in the Netherlands did also find differences on ethnic students level of self-esteem and the ethnic composition of the school (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004). In short, previous research has found that the ethnic composition of the school was associated with ethnic students’ level of self-esteem.

School satisfaction. Schools are places that are supposed to be a safe and joyful learning experience and students spend a lot of their youth in school, therefore, it is important that they feel satisfied there (Verkuyten, & Thijs, 2002a). The factors that affect school satisfaction are important, as research has shown that the level of school satisfaction is associated with various psychosocial outcomes such as academic achievement (Ainley, Foreman, & Sheret, 1991) and drop-out rate (Reyes & Jason, 1993). There has been little research conducted on whether school satisfaction differs with the ethnic composition of the school, and a study in the Netherlands found that the ethnic composition was not associated with ethnic minority students’ school satisfaction (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a). Thus, the limited amount of research has found that there is not an association between the ethnic composition of the school and ethnic minority youth’s perception of school satisfaction.

Perception of how one is treated by others

Although schools strive to be a safe environment for youths, many students perceive to be subjected to victimization (Graham, 2005) and this could take its form in either peer victimization or ethnic harassment. Although, both of these terms involve bullying, there are however distinct differences between these two (McKenney, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006). Peer victimization involves being the victim of bullying and could take various forms of abuse by one’s peers such as verbal or physical (Graham, 2005). Ethnic harassment, on the other hand
is defined as individuals being the victims of bullying specifically based on their ethnicity, such as making derogatory statements about one’s cultural background (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). Thus, ethnic harassment means that the youths are harassed because of their ethnicity, whereas peer victimization does not target ones’ ethnic background. Also, there is empirical evidence, which suggests that victims of bullying are more likely to have psychosocial adjustment problems (Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005). To summarize, there is a difference between peer victimization and ethnic harassment, however both of these bullying types could lead to psychosocial adjustment problems.

**Peer victimization.** Peer victimization is a widespread problem across countries, and is especially salient in the school context (Graham, 2005). There has been a considerable amount of research conducted in this area where some studies have focused solely on peer victimization and ethnicity (Graham, 2006). Studies on peer victimization have found that bullying is more likely to occur where there is an imbalance of power between the victim and the aggressors (Olweus, 1994). Building on this theory there could also be an imbalance in power due to the ethnic composition of the school. If a school has a minority group of ethnic students, they could be victimized due to an imbalance in power due to the ethnic group being smaller than the major native group. This theory is supported by previous research where the minority groups in an American school were more likely to nominate same ethnicity peers as being victims and nominate the majority ethnic groups as the bullies (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). Other studies conducted in the USA have also found that ethnic minority groups are more likely to be victims of bullying in schools, which are not ethnically diverse (Graham, 2006; Juvonen et al., 2006). These findings propose that it is not the ethnic group by itself that is of importance for peer victimization but rather it is the persons’ ethnicity within a certain context that is important in predicting their vulnerability to peer harassment. Thus, there is research, which suggests that
Ethnic minority students are less victimized in schools that are ethnically diverse compared to schools where they are a minority and this could be explained by the imbalance of power theory.

**Ethnic harassment.** A theory aiming to explain harassment suggests that students who are bullied by their peers are more likely to stand out from the group norm (Wright, Giammarino, Parad, 1986). This theory is called the misfit theory and suggests that a students’ ethnicity could be a distinctive feature, which makes them stand out from the group and thus makes them more susceptible to bullying (Graham, Bellmore, et al, 2009). Research conducted in the Netherlands have found that ethnic minority students were subjected to less ethnic harassment in schools that were more ethnically diverse compared to schools where they were the minority (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). These findings suggest that ethnic minorities are more likely to be subjective to ethnic harassment in schools where they are a minority because they stand out from the majority group. On the other hand, a study conducted in an Austrian setting found that ethnic minority students were not subjected to more ethnic harassment where they were the minority compared to ethnic minority students in a more ethnically diverse school (Strohmeier & Spiel, 2003). To conclude, there are contradicting results, as some studies have found that ethnic minority students are more often ethnically harassed in schools where they are the minority, whereas other studies did not find any differences.

**Perception of identity**

Another important aspect concerning youths’ psychosocial adjustment is identity. Adolescence is a critical time for developing an identity (Erikson, 1968) and individuals have many identities that they could identify with (Barrett, 2007) such as ethnic minority identity (Verkuyten & Lay, 1998) and national identity (Sabatier, 2008). Research has found that the context is an important factor when trying to understand a person’s identity, as it is believed that the context could influence an individuals’ identity (Nishina, Bellmore, Witkow, & Nylund-Gibson, 2010). The context where youths spend a lot of their time in is at school (Agirdag et al,
2010 and it is at this age where peers become very important and could influence a youths’ identity (Simmons & Blythe, 1987, as cited in Nishina et al., 2010). Research suggests that the ethnic composition of the school could influence youths’ ethnic minority identity and national identity as they aim to fit in and adapt to the majority identity in their specific school (Agirdag et al, 2011; Nishina et al., 2010). Additionally, ethnic minority groups are confronted on whether to hold on to their own culture or to embrace their host countries’ culture. This struggle is considered to be associated with one’s ethnic minority identity (Verkuyten & Lay, 1998) and national identity (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), which in turn could lead to psychosocial adjustment (Verkuyten & Lay, 1998; Phinney et al., 2001). Previous research suggests that ethnic minority identity and national identity are not two independent constructs but they should be seen as dimensional (Phinney et al., 2001). Moreover, having a strong ethnic minority identity as well as being able to identify with ones host country has been found to promote ethnic minorities’ psychological well-being (Phinney et al., 2001). For this reason, examining whether ethnic minority identity and national identification depends on the ethnic composition of the school is of importance.

**Ethnic minority identity.** Although ethnic groups in the USA are often homogenous, this however is not often the case in countries in Europe. Additionally, as ethnic groups are more homogenous in the US (Svensson et al., 2011), research has compared ethnic identity across these different groups, such as comparing African Americans and Latinos (Spears Brown, Alabi, Huynh, & Masten, 2011). However, the ethnic minority groups in Europe are not as clear (Svensson et al., 2011) and it is possible that they would put more emphasis on their ethnic minority identity compared to ethnic identity (Verkuyten & Lay, 1998). The reason for this could be because there is often a difference made between the native group and other ethnicities in European countries. This difference is often based on majority versus minority groups (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). Furthermore, in Sweden, as well as in many other countries in
Europe, ethnic groups mix more with other ethnic minority groups, compared to ethnic groups in USA, thus the ethnic groups in Sweden are not as homogenous (Svensson et al., 2011). Although there has not been any research conducted on whether there is an association between ethnic minority identity and the ethnic composition of the school, there has been research conducted on ethnic identity and the association with the ethnic composition of the school (Kiang, et al., 2007; Tsai & Fuligni, 2012). A study conducted in the US found that ethnic minority youths have higher levels of ethnic identity in contexts where there is a majority of the same ethnic group, compared to contexts where there is a minority of their ethnic group (Kiang, et al., 2007). This could suggest that being in a school with the majority of one’s own ethnic group enhances one’s own ethnic identity. On the other hand, the youths attending schools where they were the ethnic minority could have lower levels of ethnic identity because they try to assimilate and take on the majority groups’ culture (Tsai & Fuligni, 2012). A study conducted in France, however, found that ethnic identity was not associated with the ethnic composition of the school (Sabatier, 2008).

Hence, as there is research that has shown that the ethnic composition of the school does matter for ethnic identity, it is possible that it could also matter in Sweden in terms of ethnic minority identity. Additionally, due to the diverse ethnic groups in Sweden and that they interact more with other ethnic groups, it is suggestible to explore the ethnic minority identity rather than the ethnic identity.

Swedish national identity. National identity involves thoughts and feelings towards being a member of one’s national group (Barrett, 2007). However, a more suitable term for ethnic minority youths would be host national identity, which is how they identify with the majority group (Virta, Sam, & Westin, 2004), in this case their Swedish national identity. Previous research has found that ethnic minorities have lower levels of the national identity of their host country compared to the native youths (Barrett, 2007). In addition, research has found that there could be an association between host national identity and the ethnic composition of the school.
A recent study conducted in Belgium found that ethnic minority groups who attended schools where they were a minority had higher levels of Belgian national identity compared to students who attended schools that were more ethnically diverse (Agirdag et al, 2011). According to the reference group theory this is because the ethnic minority group uses the majority group as a normative reference group (Kelley, 1952, as cited in Agirdag et al., 2011). This suggests that the ethnic minority groups have high levels of Belgian national identity because they use the majority group as a norm and identifies with them (Agirdag et al, 2010). To conclude, an individual could identify with many different identities and the context could be an important part as the ethnic composition of the school has been found in some studies to be associated with levels of ethnic minority identity and national identity in ethnic minority youths. Additionally, identifying with one’s ethnic minority identity as well as the host country’s national identity could promote psychosocial adjustment.

**Association between psychological well-being, perception of how one is treated by others and perception of identity**

Psychosocial adjustment involves the understanding of both social and psychological constructs (Väfors Fritz, 2008) such as psychological well-being (Vacek et al., 2010), the perception of how one is treated by others (Graham, 2005) and perception of identity (Agirdag et al., 2010). Additionally, research suggests that these factors are associated with one and other and that the associations may depend on the ethnic composition of the school. Empirical evidence has found that ethnic minority youths who attended ethnically diverse schools were less likely to be subjected to peer victimization which in turn was found to promote self-esteem (Juvonen & Graham, 2001) and school satisfaction (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a). This suggests that ethnically diverse schools could protect ethnic minority youths from being subjected to peer victimization as well as enhancing self-esteem and school satisfaction. Thus, exploring the protective factors, in this case ethnically diverse schools, could decrease peer victimization,
which could lead to better self-esteem and school satisfaction in ethnic minority youths (Juvenen & Graham, 2001; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a). Similarly, Verkuyten and Thijs (2006) found that ethnic minority youths who were subjected to ethnic harassment were more likely to have a lower strength of ethnic identity, which in turn could lead to lower self-esteem. In addition, the ethnic minority groups who had stronger levels of ethnic identity did not distinguish ethnic harassment and peer victimization. This could suggest that due to their strong ethnic identities they assume that when they are subjected to victimization they consider more often that it is due to their ethnic background. However, the ethnic composition was not included in that study. Thus, there seems to be empirical evidence that psychological well-being, the perception of how one is treated by others and identity could be influenced by each other in whereas ways and this could also depend on the ethnic composition of the school. To summarize, exploring whether these concepts are related to each other and whether they depend on the ethnic composition of the school is of importance as studies have shown that ethnically diverse schools could promote psychosocial adjustment.

**The present study**

In sum, there are reasons to expect that the ethnic composition of the school will influence ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment, as there are studies that have found that there are advantages for them to attend ethnically diverse schools. There is a growing interest in research on ethnic minority students’ psychosocial adjustment and whether this could depend on the ethnic composition of the schools; however, there has not yet been any research conducted on this in Sweden. The purpose of this study is thus to examine the ethnic composition of schools and ethnic minorities’ psychosocial adjustment, more specifically; psychological well-being in terms of self-esteem and school satisfaction, the perception of treatment by others in terms of peer victimization and ethnic harassment, and identity in terms of Swedish national
identity and ethnic minority identity in Sweden. Hence, the following research questions were asked:

1. Does ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment depend on the ethnic composition of the school, in terms of:
   a) Psychological well-being, in terms of self-esteem and school satisfaction.
   b) The perception of how one is treated by others, with regards to peer victimization and ethnic harassment.
   c) Identity, more specifically ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity.

2. Are any of the measures of psychosocial adjustment related to each other and are there any differences in the relationships between the schools that are ethnically diverse and the schools where there is a minority of ethnic students?

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample was from a cohort-sequential study and about 1,600 students took part annually. The study was conducted in the middle of Sweden in a medium sized city (total population approximately 132,000). The data was collected when the adolescents attended grade 7 to 9 where students are 12 to 16 years old. There were seven schools involved in the study. The schools included in the study were chosen based on their ethnic composition, with the purpose of including a variety of schools. There were three schools that had a majority of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, and four schools with a minority of ethnic minority students. The study was conducted over 4 years.

The analytic sample consisted of 229 adolescents from ethnic minority backgrounds. The analytic sample was tested at one time-point, in 2008. The sample consisted of 119 boys and 110 girls. The age range of the sample was 12 to 17 years ($M = 14.67, SD = 1.04$). Participants who were not born in Sweden were categorized as ethnic minority. Participants born in other Nordic
countries were defined as Swedish (due to similarities of the Nordic countries). 84.3% of the sample was defined as Swedish, and 15.6% were defined as immigrants. The schools that were ethnically diverse had a percentage range of ethnic minority youths between 51.5% and 73.1%. The schools where the youths were in minority ranged from 7.8% to 18%. Based on these percentages they were divided into two types of schools, ethnically diverse and where the ethnic youths were in minority. The participant’s countries of origin were Middle Eastern countries, former Yugoslavian countries, Somalia and Eritrea, Eastern European countries, Asian countries and Western Europe.

**Measures**

**Psychological well-being.**

**Self-esteem.** The measure for self-esteem was the classic Rosenberg scale (Rosenberg, 1979), which had been translated into Swedish and consisted of ten items. The items included “On the whole, you are satisfied with yourself”, “At times you think you are no good at all”, “You feel that you have a number of good qualities”, “You are able to do things as well as most other people”, “You feel you do not have much to be proud of”, “You certainly feel useless at times”, “You feel that you are a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”, “You wish you could have more respect for yourself”, “All in all, you are inclined to think you are a failure”, “You take a positive attitude towards yourself”. The participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (don’t agree at all) to 4 (agree completely). The internal consistency was Cronbach’s alpha .85.

**School satisfaction.** School satisfaction was measured through asking the participants four questions. For these questions the participants responded to three scales, depending on the question. The first question asked “How do you like school?” and the participants could respond from 1 (a lot) to 5 (not at all). The second part included two questions, “Do you do your best in school?” and “Are you satisfied with your school work?” and the responses ranged from 1 (most
often) to 5 (almost never). The final question asked, “How would you describe the relationship between yourself and school?” and the response options ranged from 1 (as best friends) to 5 (as enemies). The Cronbach’s alpha was .77.

**Perception of how one is treated by others.**

**Peer victimization.** Participants were asked to answer three questions concerning their experiences of being bullied by peers in their school. The items for this scale were ”Have you been mocked, teased in an unpleasant way, or has anyone said nasty things to you at school or on the way to or from school (this semester)?”, “Have you been beaten, kicked, or assaulted in a nasty way by anyone at school or on the way to or from school (this semester)?” and ”Sometimes one can be ostracized by someone or some people and not be allowed to hang out with them. Has this ever happened to you (this semester)?”. The participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (no, it has not happened) to 4 (yes, it has happened several times a week). The Cronbach's alpha was .65

**Ethnic harassment.** This measure assessed whether the participants had experienced ethnic harassment in school. The participants replied to seven items; “Has anyone said anything derogatory about your origin, for example words like nigger, darky, damned immigrant, ink face, chingchong or something else?”, ”Has anyone looked at you in a way that makes you certain they have a negative attitude towards you, just because you or your parents come from another country?”, ”Has anyone said that you are doing something wrong because you don’t do it like Swedish people do?”. ”Has anyone treated you very differently from Swedes, because you come from another country?”, ”Have you been exposed to things that made you wish you didn't come from another country or made you feel ashamed you came from another country?”, ”Has anyone made fun of you in a derogatory way because you come from another country?”, and ”Have you ever been blamed for something that isn't true, only because you come from another
country?”. The participants responded from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). The Cronbach’s alpha was .83.

**Perception of identity.**

**Ethnic minority identity.** This measure examined the participants’ levels of ethnic identity. The participants responded to three items; “I feel like an ‘immigrant’”, ”I have a different upbringing because I am an immigrant”, and ”I do not want to become too “Swedish”, but would rather stick to my own culture”. The participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (don’t agree at all) to 4 (agree completely). The Cronbach’s alpha was .64.

**Swedish national identity.** The participants level of their Swedish national identity was measured through asking the participants three questions; “In my family we try to live according to Swedish traditions”, ”I feel like a “Swede”” and ”I want others to see me as a Swede”. The participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (don’t agree at all) to 4 (agree completely). The internal consistency was Cronbach’s alpha .78.

**Procedure**

The municipality’s local education authority agreed to let the students be involved in the research project and the management of each school also agreed to let the students be tested. The adolescents’ parents were informed of the aim of the research project by mail. The parents were also informed that they could decline their youth taking part in the study (1% declined) and that they were free to withdraw their child at anytime throughout the study. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires during the participants’ regular school hours. The participants’ teachers were not present during the administrating of the questionnaires. The students who had literacy difficulties had the questionnaire read out to them by a research assistant. The questionnaires were in Swedish and participants who had language difficulties received help from the research assistants by having the questions read and explained to them. All of the participants were told that participation was voluntary and that they were free to
withdraw at anytime throughout the process. If they decided not to take part, they had to complete another task during the time their peers were filling out the questionnaire. A research assistant returned a second time to the classes after data collection, in order to gather the data from students who missed the data collection the first time round. The participants were assured that the information would be confidential and anonymous. The Regional Research Ethics Committee has approved the study.

**Plan of analyses.**

The schools were divided into two types based on the ethnic composition of the students at the schools, whether the schools had a minority of immigrant students or a majority of immigrant students (ethnically diverse schools). Independent samples t-test were conducted on all of the six measures, in order to examine whether there were any differences based on the ethnic composition on the school. Before the analyses were conducted, all of the measures were standardized. Correlations were done on all of the six measures to examine whether they were related to each other and whether there were any differences in the relationships between the two types of schools.

**Results**

Research question 1a asked whether there are any associations between the ethnic composition of the school and ethnic minorities psychological well-being. The results show that participants who attended ethnically diverse schools experienced on average higher levels of self-esteem \( M = -.05, SD = .60 \) compared to participants attending schools where they were a minority \( M = -..03, SD = .49 \). However, there was not a significant difference on self-esteem levels between the schools \( t(217) = .126, p >.05 \). Thus, the ethnic composition of the school did not matter.

Participants experienced on average more school satisfaction in ethnically diverse schools \( M = .34, SD = .64 \) compared to schools where they were a minority \( M = -.01, SD = .59 \). This
difference was significant $t(208) = -3.36$, $p < .001$. The ethnic minority students were more satisfied in schools, which were more ethnically diverse compared to schools where they were a minority. In short, the ethnic composition of the school does matter, as ethnic minority youth were more satisfied in ethnically diverse schools. Thus, it seems that the psychological well-being of ethnic minority youths depends on the ethnic composition of the school in terms of school satisfaction as the youths had higher levels in ethnically diverse schools, but not in regards to self-esteem.

Research question 1b asked whether there was an association between the ethnic composition of the school and how ethnic minority students’ perception of how one is treated by others. The results showed that there was no significant difference $t(208) = -1.33$, $p > .05$. in whether participants perceived to be a victim of bullying in the schools where immigrants were a minority ($M = -.09, SD = .66$) compared to the participants experience in ethnically diverse schools ($M = .08, SD = .85$). The ethnic minority youths were not bullied more in schools where they were a minority, thus, it did not matter whether ethnic minority youths went to ethnically diverse schools or where they were a minority.

On average, participants experienced being subjected to more ethnic harassment in the schools where there was a minority of ethnic students ($M = .11, SD = .69$) compared to participants in ethnically diverse schools ($M = -.06, SD = .60$). However, the results showed that there was not a significant difference $t(218) = 1.7$, $p > .05$. In short, the ethnic composition of the school does not matter in terms of ethnic minority students’ experience of ethnic harassment. To conclude, in terms of ethnic minority youths’ perception of how they are treated by others, the ethnic composition of the school does not matter.

Research question 1c asked whether there was an association between the ethnic composition of the school and ethnic minority youths’ identity, in regards to ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity. Participants experienced on average higher levels of
ethnic identity in ethnically diverse schools \( (M = 2.7, SE = .71) \) compared to schools where they were a minority \( (M = 2.2, SE = .87) \). This difference was significant \( t(218) = -4.5, p < .001 \). Thus, the ethnic composition of the school did matter, as ethnic minority had higher levels in schools that were more ethnically diverse.

Participants who attended schools where they were a minority experienced on average higher levels of Swedish national identity \( (M = 2.16, SE = .93) \) compared to participants attending ethnically diverse schools \( (M = 1.6, SE = .63) \). There was a significant difference on levels of Swedish national identity between the schools \( t(217) = 3.93, p < 0.001 \). To conclude, the ethnic composition of the school did matter as ethnic minority student’s experienced higher levels of Swedish national identity in schools were they were a minority. In short, it seems that the ethnic minority youths’ identity does depend on the ethnic composition of the school as the youths had higher levels of ethnic minority identity and lower levels of Swedish national identity in ethnically diverse schools.

The second research question asked whether any of the measures of psychosocial adjustment were related to each other and whether there were any relative differences in the relationships between the schools that are ethnically diverse and the schools where there is a minority of ethnic students. The results showed that there were few relative differences between the two types of schools (see table 1).

First, peer victimization was found to be negatively associated with school satisfaction, which was expected and the association was stronger in schools where they were the minority. Ethnic harassment was found to be negatively associated with school satisfaction but only in schools that were ethnically diverse. There was also a positive association between ethnic harassment and peer victimization, this was stronger in schools where the youths where a minority. Ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity was found to be negatively associated, this was found to be stronger in schools where they were a minority. Lastly,
psychological well-being in terms of self-esteem and school satisfaction was not found to be associated with identity in regards to ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity.

Moreover, there were no relatively differences between the schools. To summarize, the answer to the research question is that there were significant associations between the measures and few relatively differences between the two types of schools. Firstly, as peer victimization increases, school satisfaction decreases, in both types of schools. Secondly, being ethnically harassed in schools that are ethnically diverse tends to decrease the youths’ school satisfaction. Also, as ethnic harassment increases, so does peer victimization, however, especially in schools where they are the minority. Furthermore, as ethnic minority identity decreases, Swedish national identity increases. Finally, the youths’ identity did not depend on psychological well-being and it did not matter what type of school they attended.
Table 1

Correlation of psychosocial adjustment depending on ethnic composition of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self-esteem</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School satisfaction</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Peer victimization</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.51***</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ethnic harassment</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.34***</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ethnic minority identity</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Swedish national identity</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.27***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The upper part of the table shows the schools where the youths are in minority and the bottom part of the table shows the schools that are ethnically diverse.*

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

Discussion

Policy makers generally aim for schools to be ethnically diverse (Agirdag et al, 2011) with the purpose of increasing interethnic contact (Vervoort et al 2011) and promoting psychosocial adjustment (Graham 2006). However, there has not yet been any research conducted on the psychosocial adjustment on ethnic minority youths in Sweden. As there has not been any research so far to support these policies, the purpose of this study was to examine whether there was an association between the ethnic composition of the school and the psychosocial adjustment in ethnic minority youths.

To answer the first research question, that is whether ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment depends on the ethnic composition of the school, it seems that it does, however only in regards to school satisfaction. Research question 1a explored whether ethnic minority students’ psychological well-being, in terms of self-esteem and school satisfaction, depended on the ethnic composition of the school. The results showed that the ethnic composition of the school did not matter in terms of self-esteem, however it did matter for school satisfaction in
schools that were ethnically diverse. Research question 1b examined how ethnic minority students perceived to be treated by others. The results showed that the ethnic composition of the school did not matter in terms of peer victimization. However, it did matter for being ethnically harassed as the students experienced more ethnic harassment by their peers in schools where they were the minority. Lastly, research question 1c explored whether identity, in terms of ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity depended on the ethnic composition of the school. The results found that there was a difference depending on the ethnic composition of the school as students had higher levels of ethnic minority identity in ethnically diverse schools and had higher levels of Swedish national identity in schools where they were the minority group. To conclude, the results indicate that ethnic minority youths attending ethnically diverse schools is associated with promoting psychological well-being, fostering ethnic minority identity and reducing ethnic harassment. However, it does not promote Swedish national identity. Finally, the ethnic composition of the school does matter, as ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment differed between the two types of schools.

The results showed that the ethnic composition of the schools did not matter in terms of self-esteem. These results are not in line with previous research, which suggests that ethnic minorities have lower self-esteem in schools where they are the minority (Gray-Little & Carels, 1997; Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000) and could be explained by the insulation hypothesis (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972). This theory suggests that ethnic minority groups are more likely to be subjected to negative attitudes (i.e. ethnic harassment, differences in cultural norms) in schools where they are the minority, which in turn could affect their self-esteem. Furthermore, previous research suggests that there is an association between having low self-esteem and being victimized by peers (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). However, the findings in this study showed that ethnic minority youths were not more likely to have lower levels of self-esteem and were not more likely to be ethnically harassed in schools where they were the minority, thus it is possible
that there is not a link in this particular sample. Thus, the ethnic composition of the school did not matter in terms of self-esteem.

The youths in this sample were more satisfied in schools that were more ethnically diverse, compared to where they were a minority, however this is not in line with previous research (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a). It is possible that ethnic minority youths are less satisfied in schools where they are the minority because they stand out from the majority group and are thus more likely being subjected to negative bias or ethnic harassment, whereas a more diverse ethnic setting could reduce this as the youths could be supported more by their peers who have the same status as them (Greene et al., 2006; Graham, Bellmore, et al., 2009). Although there was a significant association between ethnic minority youths’ experience of school satisfaction and the ethnic composition of the school, it is also possible that other school factors influenced the results. Previous research suggests that there is an association between school satisfaction and the classroom climate, i.e. a supportive and caring environment (Baker, 1998). Thus, it is possible that the ethnically diverse schools students had a more positive classroom climate and a more caring and supportive atmosphere. This is something for future research to elaborate on. In short, ethnic minority youths are more satisfied in schools that are more ethnically diverse, which could be explained by being less likely to be subjected to victimization and more likely to feel like they fit in.

Interestingly, contrary to previous research, the youths in this sample did not perceive to be subjected to more peer victimization in schools where they were a minority. Previous research has consistently found that ethnic minority students are more likely to be subjected to peer victimization in schools where they are a minority (Juvonen et al., 2006; Graham, 2006; Graham, 2005) suggesting that ethnic minority youths are more likely be subjected to peer victimization as there might be an imbalance of power due to the ethnic composition of the school (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). Considering this theory for the results in this study, it is possible that the ethnic
minority groups were so small in the schools where they were a minority, that the majority group (native youths) did not perceive the minority group as a threat to power. Research suggests that ethnically diverse schools could promote psychosocial adjustment, as there is a better balance of power between ethnic groups due to more equally sized groups (Graham, 2006). However, the findings in this study showed that the ethnic composition of the school did not matter in terms of ethnic minority youths’ experience of victimization by their peers.

Also, the results showed that the ethnic composition of the school did not matter in terms of ethnic harassment. This is not in line with previous research, which suggests that ethnic minority youths are more susceptible to ethnic harassment in less ethnically diverse schools (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). Based on the misfit theory, ethnic minority youths are more likely to be ethnically harassed as they stand out from the group norm due to visual ethnic differences (Wright et al, 1986). Yet, this was not the case for this sample. It would thus be expected that ethnic minority youths would be more subjected to ethnic harassment in schools where they were the minority. Furthermore, previous research suggests that ethnic minority students who feel that they can tell the teacher about ethnic harassment and that the teacher would do something about it if it did happen, reported being less subjected to ethnic harassment (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002b). This suggests that teachers could be influential in the experience of ethnic harassment as it is possible that the youths experienced trust in their teachers at schools where they were a minority and therefore did not experience ethnic harassment. This could be examined in future research. In order to reduce ethnic harassment, schools need to support and promote interethnic interactions, which in turn could enhance psychosocial adjustment (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Nickmans, 2006). In short, the ethnic composition of the school does not matter in terms of peer victimization or being ethnically harassed.
Moreover, the present study explores parts of ethnic minority youths’ identity, which has not yet been explored in Sweden. In terms of ethnic minority identity, the levels were higher in ethnically diverse schools. This finding is not surprising and a possible explanation for this result could be that attending an ethnically diverse school enhances one’s own ethnic minority identity, as one identifies more to the majority group, i.e. the ethnic minority identity (Umana-Taylor, 2004). Furthermore, the youths who attended schools where they were the minority had lower levels of ethnic minority identity, this finding could be explained through the youths trying to assimilate to the majority native culture, by wanting to fit in and be accepted by the majority native group (Tsai & Fuligni, 2012). Previous research has been contradicting on the association between ethnic minority identity and the ethnic composition of the schools (Kiang et al., 2007; Sabatier, 2008) however, the current results indicate that the ethnic composition of the school should be considered while exploring ethnic minority identity.

Although ethnic minority identity was stronger in ethnically diverse schools, Swedish national identity on the other hand, was found to be higher in schools where they were the minority. This is in line with previous research (Agirdag et al 2011) and could be explained through the reference group theory, which suggests that ethnic minority youths use the majority native group as a normative reference group (Kelley, 1952, as cited in Agirdag et al., 2011). This suggests that the ethnic minority group aim to blend in and be recognized by the majority native group. On the other hand, the ethnic minority youths in ethnically diverse schools had lower levels of Swedish national identity. This suggests that they aim to identify with the majority group in that school, which in this case is the ethnic minority identity. Furthermore, previous research suggests that ethnic minority youth’s psychosocial adjustment is enhanced when they have a strong ethnic identity as well as being able to relate to the native host country (Phinney et al, 2001), in this case having a strong Swedish national identity. Adapting this kind of identity makes an individual feel that they belong to an ethnic group but also feeling part of the host
country. This could promote psychosocial adjustment as previous research suggests that giving up one’s own ethnic minority identity could lead to psychosocial maladjustment (Phinney et al, 2001). The findings in this study suggest that ethnically diverse schools support youths’ ethnic minority identity, whereas schools where they are the minority did not. However, ethnically diverse schools did not support ethnic minority youths’ Swedish national identity. Previous research conducted in France found that the ethnic composition of the school was not associated with the ethnic identity or French national identification (Sabatier, 2008). Sabatier (2008) suggests that this is due to France’s policy towards ethnic minorities, which instils the importance of equality for all ethnicities. For this reason, educational policy makers should strive to enhance youths’ ethnic minority identity as well as their Swedish national identity as this could promote ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment. In short, the youths identify with the majority group at their school, whether it is ethnic minority identity or the Swedish national identity.

The second research question examined whether any of the measures of psychosocial adjustment were related to each other and whether there were any relative differences in the relationships between the schools that were ethnically diverse and the schools where there was a minority of ethnic students. The findings showed that there were few relative differences between the two types of schools. As expected, peer victimization was negatively associated with psychological well-being, but only in terms of school satisfaction. Vast amount of research, which has found that youths who are subjected to peer victimization are more likely to be less satisfied in school (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a). Interestingly, there were no relative differences between the schools. Additionally, there was a negative association in terms of ethnic harassment and school satisfaction, however, this was only found in ethnically diverse schools. This suggests that the youths in this sample, who were more ethnically harassed in ethnically diverse schools, were also more likely to be more dissatisfied with school. This is in line with previous research,
which suggests that youths who are ethnically harassed in ethnically diverse schools are more likely to have more psychosocial maladjustment compared to schools where they are the minority (Graham, Bellmore, et al., 2009). The reason for this could be that although the ethnic minority youths are in a majority group, they are still picked on and this could result in worse maladjustment. These students are more likely to blame themselves and view the harassment as an internal attribution such as assuming “there is something wrong with me”, and this is associated with psychological maladjustment. Ethnic minority youths who are ethnically harassed in schools where they are the minority, on the other hand tend to assume that the ethnic harassment is due to external attributions (Graham, Bellmore, et al., 2009) such as other people being prejudice and this attribution is more likely to be protective of one’s self (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity were negatively associated with each other and this was relatively stronger in schools where the youths where a minority. Previous research suggests that having a strong ethnic minority identity and a strong host national identity promotes psychological well-being. The association was stronger in schools where they were the minority. These results could also be explained by the reference group theory, which suggests that they identify more with the majority group identity, in this case the Swedish national identity in schools where they are a minority.

Finally, previous research suggests that having a strong ethnic identity as well as being able to identify with one’s host country is associated with good psychological well-being (Phinney et al., 2001). Surprisingly, in the current study there was no relative difference between psychological well-being in terms of self-esteem and school satisfaction and identity in regards to ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity. To conclude, there were few differences in the associations between the two types of schools. It seems that ethnic harassment and peer victimization are important factors as these were associated with the majority of the
measures, furthermore most of these associations were associated with the ethnic composition of the school. Ethnic minority identity and Swedish national identity were associated with each other and could depend on the ethnic composition of the school. Lastly, psychological well-being and identity were not associated and did not depend on the ethnic composition of the school.

Although the current study provides more knowledge about the psychosocial adjustment in ethnic minority youths it has some limitations. One weakness is that it only derives from self-reported data and it is possible that they were not honest or answered in a sociably desirable way. In order to avoid this problem in the future it would be suitable to also include teacher ratings or parent ratings. Another limitation is that it is only cross-sectional data, that is the data is only from one time-point. It would be beneficial to examine this area with a longitudinal design in order to explore changes over time. Furthermore, this study only included data from one town and it is suggestible for future research to include schools from a variety of towns, as this would increase the generalization of the results.

Although there are certain limitations to this study, there are also various strengths. The main strength with this study is that it examines an area that has not yet been explored in Sweden. This is the first study to explore the association between ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment and the ethnic composition of the school in Sweden. Also, the ethnic minority youths were considered as one group in this sample, however, this could be seen as a limitation as there are cultural and religious differences between these minority ethnic groups. Nevertheless, as ethnic minority youths tend to mix more with other ethnic groups in Sweden (Svensson et al., 2011) and it is possible that they consider their ethnic minority identity as more important than the ethnic identity (Ålund, 1997). It is therefore more crucial to explore ethnic minority youths’ ethnic minority identity, as this is how the reality looks in Sweden compared to the US where ethnic minority groups are more distinct.
The study shows that it essential to also include the context while examining ethnic minority youths, as the results showed that the context influenced the youths’ psychosocial adjustment. Previous research suggests that while exploring youths’ experiences, it is crucial to include the context as these two influences one and other (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Including the context in this study is thus considered a strength, as it does not only examine the individual but also includes the context, i.e. the ethnic composition of the school.

The findings in this study have implications for policy makers and future research as this study has found that ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment does depend on the ethnic composition of the school. There are advantages for ethnic minority youths to attend ethnically diverse schools as they had stronger levels of school satisfaction and ethnic minority identity. For this reason, educational policies need to recognize and address the advantages that the ethnic composition of the school has on ethnic minority students’ psychosocial adjustment (Agirdag et al., 2010). Consequently, more research on the psychosocial effects of ethnic minority youths attending ethnically diverse schools and schools where they are a minority, are needed in order to promote integration policies.

To summarize, the current findings indicates that ethnic minority youth’s attending ethnically diverse schools is beneficial for their psychosocial adjustment. Consequently, it is crucial to explore individual factors as well as contextual factors, in this case the ethnic composition of the school. By examining the interaction between ethnic minority youths’ psychosocial adjustment and the ethnic composition of the school we can gain a better understanding of how to promote psychological well-being, reduce victimization and strengthen their identity.
References


