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Extra-curricular activity participation and psychological school engagement in ethnically diverse middle school students

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Extra-curricular Activity Participation and Psychological School Engagement in
Ethnically Diverse Middle School Students

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

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Abstract

Students of diverse populations have the highest risk of becoming disengaged from school and dropping out. This study investigated the relationship between extra-curricular activity participation and psychological school engagement among a group of fifty-three diverse middle school students. The sample studied mostly lived in the United States their entire lives, participated in extra-curricular activities, and reported being psychologically “engaged” in school. Among the students studied, no correlation between participation in extra-curricular activities was observed. Students of all ethnicities reported similar levels of psychological school engagement. However, a difference was found in Hispanic/Latino students, in that those who had spent less than their entire life in the United States were involved less in extra-curricular activities than other ethnic groups.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The United States is becoming an increasingly diverse country. During the last century, the population of residents other than white that live in the United States has doubled (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). The fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States are the Hispanic and Asian populations with a growth rate of 43% between the years 2000 and 2010 (Humes & Ramirez, 2011). According to the 2010 US Census, more than one in four people reported being of a race other than White. For the purposes of the Census, Hispanic/Latino was not recognized as a racial category for the Census. Considering that Hispanic/Latino is often referred to as a racial identification, the number of individuals in the United States that identify with a minority race is probably more like one in three (Humes & Ramirez, 2011).

The rise in the nation's diversity is also reflected in data collected in the United States public schools. Public school enrollment figures from 1997 through 2007 demonstrate that students of an ethnicity other than White increased from 36.5% to 44.2% during those ten years (Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Kena, Kewal Ramini, Kemp, Bianco & Dinkes, 2009). At the same time, the ethnicity of school personnel such as teachers continues to be predominantly White. The most recent data available states that 83% of school teachers in the United States identify White as their ethnicity (Planty et al., 2009).

As the ethnic make-up of the United States rapidly changes, it is becoming more important than ever to understand how the nation's public schools will accommodate an

increasingly diverse population. The current National Association of School Psychologists Principals for Professional Ethics manual calls for school psychologists to *pursue awareness and knowledge of how diversity factors may influence child development, behavior, and school learning...(Standard I.3.2)* and *strive to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from school programs...(Standard I.3.4)*.

This call comes during a time when the reality is that still many students engage in delinquent behavior which prevents their full access and engagement of school. Research has suggested that when students are more involved and engaged in school, they feel more connected and exhibit more pro social behavior (Finn, 1989). A recent survey of 81,499 high school students found that 24% of students report they have “considered dropping out of school” and 28% of students report disengagement from school (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Despite a falling high-school drop-out rate, approximately nine percent of students continue to drop out of school prior to obtaining their diploma (Planty et al., 2009). Of students who drop out of school, students of ethnicities other than White are nearly twice as likely to drop out compared to their White peers. Most recent figures in the United States indicate that one in three Hispanic students who are foreign born drop out of school prior to finishing high school (Planty et. al., 2009). This data suggests that our schools are still figuring out how to foster a sense of engagement among all students, especially among populations that are further removed from the dominant White culture in the United States.

In order to begin to determine how to foster a sense of school engagement among ethnically diverse populations, it may help to assess how current activities in the school, such as extra-curricular activities, are accessed by students from backgrounds other than the dominant White culture in the United States. Furthermore, understanding how school engagement is fostered in ethnically diverse populations in school may help school systems plan and structure activities in school with increased cultural sensitivity, awareness, and understanding that ultimately encourages students from all backgrounds to actively engage and achieve in school.

School Engagement

The concept of school engagement has been acknowledged as a key factor in successful completion of school for all students. For decades, researchers have studied a variety of factors related to school engagement. Recently, many have focused on defining what constructs determine whether or not a student is engaged in school (Appleton, Christianson & Furlong, 2008). Appleton, Christenson & Furlong (2008) conceptualized school engagement research as having a cognitive, psychological and behavioral component. A study measuring all of these components as overall student engagement found that there may be an “engagement gap” similar to the “achievement gap” in the literature. The study found that White and Asian students reported being more engaged than any other race, girls reported higher levels of engagement than boys, and students eligible for free and reduced lunch reported lower levels of engagement than those not eligible (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Given that the purpose of this project is to examine the relationship between psychological and behavioral components of school engagement

across ethnicities, these are the pieces that were reviewed in the research. The psychological component of school engagement consists of an individual's affective connections to school that foster a sense of belonging in their educational environment. The behavioral component consists of an individual's active participation in school related tasks and activities. However, for the scope of this project, student's participation in after-school extra-curricular activities was the focus area of behavioral engagement.

Psychological School Engagement.

The psychological component of school engagement is encapsulated by previous research on school belonging, school membership, affiliation, involvement, attachment, commitment and bonding (Finn, 1989). The need to belong within an environment has been acknowledged as an essential human need that prevents the development of psychopathology and other developmental problems (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The school is an environment in which all adolescents spend a majority of their waking hours. Maslow (1962) claimed that in order for students to be able to learn, achieve, and reach self-actualization they must feel a sense of connection to others. Research has also investigated how students that feel alienated are most often the students that withdraw from school due to their lack of perceived sense of belonging and purpose (Finn, 1989).

Wehlage (1989) discussed that a sense of school membership is garnered as a result of acceptance among peers and approval among adults. Moreover, he proposed that the school has the ability to meet student's socio-emotional needs. In turn, the student is better prepared for educational needs to be met (Wehlage, 1989). More recently, Hamm and Faircloth (2005) have explored how friendship in the school context fosters a sense

of school belonging by interviewing adolescent students in high school. Responses from their study suggest that friendships not only serve as a resiliency factor for social problems faced by adolescents, but also is acknowledged by students as allowing them to feel a greater sense of belonging to the school (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005).

The school belonging construct was developed to account for the social and emotional factors that influence the academic success of students in school. Finn (1989) discussed the idea of a participation-identification model to account for misbehavior and students' dropping out of school. Essentially, the model proposes school drop-out and delinquency is less likely for students who experience a greater sense of connection and belonging in school (Finn, 1989). Subsequently, Goodenow (1993) proposed that the psychological construct of school belonging is what influences motivation and participation in school.

Goodenow (1993a) conducted a series of studies on school belonging using her scale with middle school students. According to her sample, girls' sense of school belonging was higher than boys sense of school belonging. Additionally, long-time residents in suburban schools reported higher levels of school belonging. In a study among urban students, the ethnic majority of the school was more likely to report higher levels of school belonging; however, school belongingness did not differ between ethnicities or grade-level in her sample of three schools (Goodenow, 1993b).

A study of a group of high school students, also found that students who had lived in the vicinity of school longer, were more likely to feel as though they belonged at school than student's who had lived within school boundaries less than two years. This

study also suggested that students who reported higher quality of family life were more likely to feel a sense of belonging at school. Unlike Goodenow's data on middle schoolers, the sample of high school students revealed that high school seniors reported a greater sense of school belonging than high school freshmen (Gallagher, 1996).

A more recent study of school belonging in middle and high school students among Latino and White students did not find a significant difference in school belonging between the two ethnic groups. However, due to some variability among Latino ethnicities, the researcher recommended that future studies take into account within group differences among the Latino population (Vaquera, 2009). Other research has demonstrated that students, including Hispanic students, experience a greater sense of school belonging when instruction is focused on mastery of skills rather than performance (Stevens, Hammond, & Olivarez Jr., 2007).

In a study of African American students sense of school belonging, students were more likely to express higher levels of school belonging when they felt accepted and appreciated by others at school, especially by teachers. Moreover, African American students tended to express affiliation in extra-curricular activities at school as an important factor of their sense of belongingness (Booker, 2007).

The school belonging literature provides a basis for understanding psychological school engagement. The school and student engagement literature has encompassed the school belonging literature as the basis of affective aspects of student engagement in school. The student engagement literature, especially the affective or psychological aspects of engagement, appears to be an emerging body of literature for understanding

how students experience socio-emotional development in school and for prevention of delinquency and school drop-out among adolescents.

Studies have begun to focus on sense of school belonging and engagement between different ethnicities, but it seems as though more needs research needs to focus on the implications of affective engagement among students of different cultural backgrounds.

Behavioral Engagement - School Extra-curricular Activities.

Public schools have been a primary place for providing opportunities for students' to develop social skills and build connections with other peers outside of typical classroom activities by providing after-school extra-curricular activities. At many schools, students have the option of participating in clubs, sports, or other organizations. Participation in these types of activities is believed to assist in positive socio-emotional development among adolescents in students because students have an opportunity to gain interests and new skills as well as develop stronger relationships with their peers and adults at the school (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005).

Student participation in structured extra-curricular activities has long been linked to academic, social, and mental benefits for those individuals who access these activities (Miller, Gilman, & Martens, 2008). For example, research has found that extra-curricular activities increase student academic success in school (Gerber, 1996), pro-social behavior (Jenkins, 1997), and likelihood of graduation from high school (Calabrese & Poe, 1990). Participation in extra-curricular activities, both in and out of school, has been demonstrated to be a correlated factor influencing a student's sense of belonging and

connection to their school (Brown & Evans, 2002; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). There also is substantial evidence that a moderate amount of participation in organized activities results in better emotional and social outcomes for adolescents (Randall & Bohnert, 2009).

Longitudinal research suggests that earlier participation in extra-curricular activities prevents developmental problems later on in adolescence (Denault & Poulin, 2009). As students age, Denault & Poulin (2009) found that students tend to participate less intensely and in fewer extra-curricular activities; however, students who participated in extra-curricular activities early on exhibited better outcomes than those that did not participate in extra-curricular activities at all.

Studies of ethnicity and extra-curricular activity participation have found that students of diverse populations in the United States are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities than their White peers (Brown & Evans, 2002). However, the relationship between extra-curricular participation and different diverse populations has been very mixed in the literature. Some studies have found that Latino students are less likely than White students to participate in extra-curricular activities at school; however, other studies suggest that Latino students are more involved in school based extra-curricular activities than their White peers (Peguero, 2010). Additionally, Peguero (2010) found that within the Latino population, immigration status affected extra-curricular participation as first generation Latino students were less likely to be involved than Latinos born in the United States.

Previous studies also have found that African American students tend to participate in more extra-curricular activities in school, particularly when it comes to athletics, than White students (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Another finding that should be noted is that out of school extra-curricular participation in activities has been associated with greater school connection; at the same time, Hispanic students appear to be less likely to participate in out of school activities than students of other ethnicities (Brown & Evans, 2002).

Extra-curricular activity participation in school does appear to relate positively to school belonging across ethnic groups. Four ethnicities – African American, Asian American, European American, and Latino American - involvement in extra-curricular activities were studied as a factor of school belonging. Results of the study demonstrated that time spent on extra-curricular activities was significantly related to school belonging. In this study the effect sizes ranged from .16 for Asian Americans to .31 for Latino Americans (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). This finding is consistent with the theory that school membership contains a component which is contingent upon involvement in school activities and tasks (Hagborg, 1994).

Given the previous research on extra-curricular activity participation in diverse populations, it seems as though extra-curricular activity participation is likely to provide benefits to any person who participates. However, it does also appear that participation rates and effects can differ across ethnicities. Therefore, continuing to explore how diverse populations access extra-curricular activities is important in understanding how

all individuals in school can best be given opportunities to create more connection to school.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Given the evidence that extra-curricular activities are associated with greater sense of connection to school, it is likely that students who are more involved in extra-curricular activities will report a higher sense of psychological school engagement than students who are less involved in extra-curricular activities.

Hypothesis 2

Due to previous research on ethnic participation in extra-curricular activities suggesting White students participate in more out of school activities (Brown & Evans, 2002), students of ethnicities other than White will participate in fewer out of school extra-curricular activities than their White peers. Additionally, it is expected that African-American students will participate more in sports than their peers of other ethnicities. Students of ethnicities other than White are expected to participate in fewer activities than White students due to less cultural emphasis on extra-curricular involvement.

Hypothesis 3

Due to the known correlation between extra-curricular activities and student's sense of belonging, it may be projected that students of ethnicities other than White will report lower levels of psychological school engagement than their White peers.

Hypothesis 4

Previous research on school belonging suggests that students who have been in the United States longer, report higher levels of school engagement. Therefore, it is conceivable that students who have lived longer in the United States will report higher levels of participation in extra-curricular activities and psychological school engagement in this study.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of fifty-three middle school students from a semi-urban school system. The school system is an ethnically diverse school system in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and home to 11,225 students. The school system provides English as a Second Language services to 21.4% of the school population. Fifty-percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

The students in the sample were from three middle school campuses. Each school's enrollment is approximately 400 students with similar grade, gender, and ethnicity demographics. The participants in this study were in sixth through eighth grades with 44% seventh grade, 37% eighth grade, and 19% sixth grade students. The majority of the participants were female, 69%, and 31% of students surveyed were male. The ethnic make-up of the three middle schools ranges from 39% to 47% African American/Black, 31% to 34% Hispanic, 10% to 13% White, 8% to 10% Asian/Pacific Islander/American Indian, and 4% to 5% Unspecified. The ethnic make-up of the sample studied was similar to the overall make-up of the schools consisting of 36% African

American/Black, 19% Hispanic/Latino, 15% Asian American, 8% White, 4% Arab American, 13% Multi-ethnic, and 6% Unspecified students.

The participants in this study were mostly students who have been in the United States their entire lives (60%), yet the remainder of the sample reported United States residency of less than a year (10%), one to three years (4%), three to five years (6%), five to seven years (10%), seven to ten years (4%), and ten to twelve years but not all of their life (6%). Approximately half of the participants speak a language other than English or in addition to English in their home. Of those students, 22% reported speaking only a language other than English at home.

The rate of extra-curricular participation of students in this study was much higher than national statistics suggest. Nationally, educational data suggests that 45.2% of students in grades six through eight participate in at least one type of extra-curricular activity (U.S. Department of Education Statistics, 2007). Approximately 81% of the participants in this study reported participating in at least one extra-curricular activity.

Procedures

The researcher constructed a consent form for participation in the research since the study was conducted with individuals who are under the age of eighteen. The consent form outlined the nature of the study, explained what will be required of the participants, highlighted potential risks and benefits of the study and reminded parents of their right to withdraw their child from the study at anytime. The consent form also provided an area where the legal guardian of the participant was able to sign to provide consent for their child's participation in the study. The researcher provided the consent forms to students

at the middle school through Health/Physical Education classes. Students who received consent forms were informed that they would be entered in a drawing for gift cards to local stores for returning their consent form. The form also contained a signature line for parents to sign opting for their student to not participate in the study, but to be entered in the drawing for the gift cards. Students who returned parental consent indicating permission or declining approval to participate in the study as noted by a parent signature were entered in the raffle.

Students who returned parental consent forms acknowledging consent to participate in the study were called in small groups or individually to the computer lab to complete the online survey at a time approved by the building administrator and the students' teacher. Prior to completing the survey students were provided an opportunity to opt out of the study and were informed that their participation on all parts of the survey was voluntary.

Students who opted to complete the survey who had also returned parental consent with a parent signature had the opportunity to complete demographic questions such as grade level, ethnicity, language/s spoken in the home, and years they have lived in the United States (Appendix A). They were also asked to specify their involvement in extra-curricular activities. Specifically, a list of the school's extra-curricular activities was provided with check-boxes for participants to complete along with an estimate of the amount of time in hours the student spends in activities each week (Appendix B). Finally, participants answered a series of psychological school engagement questions from the *Student Engagement Instrument* (Appendix C).

Instruments

The survey provided to students to complete as part of this study consisted of demographic questions, questions about students' participation in extra-curricular activities, and a series of statements from the affective portion of the *Student Engagement Instrument* (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006). The survey items were administered online using Google Survey.

Students were asked demographic questions such as their grade level, gender, ethnicity, language/s spoken at home and number of years they have lived in the United States (Appendix A). Then, they were asked a series of questions about the breadth and intensity of their extra-curricular participation (Appendix B). The survey allowed students to identify activities they are involved within the categories of sports, performance and fine arts, academic clubs, service clubs, and community oriented activities. Examples were provided of activities offered by the school for students to check-off in order to ensure that students accurately identify categories for each extra-curricular activity. Participants also had a space in which they could identify additional activities that were not listed in each category. Finally, students were asked to estimate the amount of time in hours that they spend participating in after-school extracurricular activities every week from a list of options in a drop-down box.

Student Engagement Instrument

Participants were also asked to complete eleven items from the psychological construct of the *Student Engagement Instrument* (Appleton, et. al, 2006). The eleven items are statements of connection to adults and peers at school completed by students on

a Likert scale from one, Strongly Disagree, to four, Strongly Agree. The eleven items were chosen from the teacher-student relationship and peer support for learning portions of the instrument, which when combined contribute to the affective component of engagement. The reliability of the teacher-student relationship subscale was measured to be .88 and an internal consistency of .82 was yielded for the peer support for learning subscale. Teacher-student relationship and peer support for learning have the highest reliability of the factors that were found to contribute to psychological engagement. The average of all items from the two subscales was used to provide a measurement for the student's sense of psychological school engagement.

Results

To test if hours of extra-curricular participation was correlated with psychological engagement in this sample of students, a scatter plot (Figure 1) was created to analyze the relationship and determine if a correlation analysis could be run. The scatter plot of the two variables suggested no correlation between reported hours of extra-curricular participation and psychological school engagement among students surveyed. As a result, a correlation analysis was not subsequently run to further analyze the data. However, across all reported hours of participation in extra-curricular activities students reported "engaged" levels of psychological engagement, a finding that contradicts previous research suggesting that participation in extra-curricular activities increases sense of belonging and connectedness to school (Brown & Evans, 2002; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). The reason for this may be due to the nature of the sample studied which is addressed further in the discussion of this study.

Determining if extra-curricular participation differed between students self-identifying as White and students identified as other ethnicities was unable to be accomplished in this study given the small sample size of students indentifying as White (N=4). As a result, Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the various ethnic groups related to the specified number of hours of extra-curricular participation each week. According to the data, Hispanic/Latino students in the study report participating in significantly less hours of extra-curricular activities per week ($M = .70$, $SD = .68$) compared to students of ethnicities other than Hispanic/Latino included in the study ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 2.33$). This finding is consistent with previous research findings that Hispanics participate in fewer extra-curricular activities than their peers (Peguero, 2010). All other ethnic groups with more than two people in the sample appear to have similar levels of extra-curricular participation ranging from Multi-racial with 1.86 to Asian American with 2.75.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for Extra-curricular Activity Participation (hours per week)

Ethnic Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Black/African American	19	2.05	1.87
Hispanic/Latino	10	0.70*	.68
Asian American	8	2.75	3.28
White	4	2.5	3.70
Arab American	2	4.00	.00
Multi-Racial	7	1.86	1.95

Total (Aggregate)	50	1.98	2.20
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*Statistically significant at $p < .05$ compared to all other ethnicity participation

The third hypothesis of this study was that students who identify with ethnicities other than White would report lower levels of school engagement than their White peers. Again, this specific comparison was unable to be made given the small sample size of students identifying as White that participated in the study ($N=4$). However, the reported level of psychological engagement of students between ethnicities does appear to be similar as they all fall between 3.08 and 3.25. Students from all ethnicities who participated in this study report fairly high levels of psychological engagement given that students rating a three or four on the Likert scale used to measure psychological engagement would be considered “engaged”. The similar levels of psychological engagement among ethnicities in this study are consistent with research that has found no significant difference between sense of school belonging between ethnicities (Goodenow, 1993b; Vaquera, 2009).

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for Psychological School Engagement

Ethnic Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Black/African American	19	3.14	.30
Hispanic/Latino	10	3.25	.35
Asian American	8	3.17	.35
White	4	3.11	.48
Arab American	2	3.15	.08

Multi-Racial	7	3.08	.46
Total (Aggregate)	50	3.14	.35

Finally, a correlation analysis was conducted to test if students who have lived longer in the United States experience higher levels of psychological engagement and report more time spent participating in after-school extra-curricular activities. A scatter plot of the data suggested no correlation between time spent in the United States and psychological engagement or participation in after-school extra-curricular activities. As a result, it was not appropriate to obtain a correlation coefficient for either variable. The picture that emerged appeared as though a majority of the participants in the study spent their entire lives in the United States and that across all amounts of time spent in the United States students report feeling psychologically “engaged” in school. However, an interesting finding in the data was that all Hispanic students in the study reported living in the United States less than their entire life. The reported finding earlier that Hispanic students participated in less activities than their peers along with the information that this subgroup of students has lived in the United States less than their peers is consistent with previous findings in the literature that Hispanic/Latino students who have less experience with the language and the culture of the United States are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities (Peguro, 2010). The finding is addressed further in the discussion of this project.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between diverse middle school students' participation in extra-curricular activities and their affective, or psychological, engagement in school. The student participants in the study were primarily students of ethnicities other than White and attend a diverse school in which ninety percent of the school is of an ethnicity other than White. A majority of participants in the study have been residents of the United States their entire life. Interestingly, a strong majority of participants, 81%, reported some level of involvement in extra-curricular activities compared to national statistics that suggest less than half of middle school individuals participate in at least one extra-curricular activity (U.S. Department of Education Statistics, 2007). Given that student participants in the study likely had to experience some level of engagement in school to listen to directions for participating in the study and take initiative to obtain parental consent and then return the signed consent form, it may be that the participants in this study represent a sample of involved and "psychologically engaged" students in school. Therefore, the primary finding of this study is that within this particular middle school setting it is possible for individuals across all ethnicities and backgrounds to feel supported by their school and peers. This outcome contradicts previous research suggesting that White and Asian students report feeling more engaged than any other race (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). However, that finding was based on a more comprehensive survey of engagement that included questions about cognitive engagement. Further investigation of students' cognitive and behavioral engagement in this particular school system might want to be

considered to determine if these areas of engagement are more sensitive to ethnic differences.

In addition, it should be mentioned that a vast majority of participants were female. The voluntary nature of participation in this research project may be helpful for understanding this phenomenon. Prior research on volunteering has found that females are more likely to altruistically volunteer time for civic causes than males (Wilson, 2000). Therefore, females at the school may have been more likely to prioritize getting consent to participate in a research project that was presented as an opportunity to help people learn about students' participation in extra-curricular activities and their feelings about school. Moreover, previous research has found that female students tend to be more engaged than male students (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). As stated before, it may be possible that the students who decided to participate in this study happened to be students who appear to be engaged; consequently, the sample yielded a larger number of female participants than male participants.

Another finding in this study that should be further investigated is a significant difference in extra-curricular participation between Hispanic/Latino students and students of other ethnicities. This finding should be included in the previously contradictory research regarding Hispanic/Latino students and their participation in extra-curricular activities (Brown & Evans, 2002; Peguero, 2010). Interestingly, the Hispanic/Latino student participants in this study all reported living in the United States less than their entire lives. As a result, the lower reported levels of extra-curricular activity participation by Hispanic/Latino students appears to be consistent with prior findings that first

generation Latino students participate in fewer extra-curricular activities than students in further generations (Peguero, 2010). Surprisingly, although Hispanic/Latino students reported lower extra-curricular activity participation, their levels of psychological engagement in school did not differ from other ethnicities in this study. The reasons for this should be further explored both nationally and by the Alexandria City Public School system. For instance, it may be useful to figure out if the lower rates of participation are due to intentional choice to not participate, acculturation factors, or whether there are existing barriers for first-generation Hispanic/Latino students that prevent awareness and access to available activities in the school and community. Considering that previous research has found that Latino involvement in extra-curricular activities prevents school drop-out (Calabrese & Poe, 1990; Brown & Evans, 2002; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005, Peguero, 2010) and the high rates of dropout among first generation Latino students, it may be that the school and community need to make conscious efforts to recruit and invite first-generation Latino students to participate in school and community based extra-curricular activities. A program that facilitates connecting newcomers to the United States to available activities at the school and in the community may be a beneficial resource to consider in communities that have significant numbers of immigrant students. On the other hand, previous research with Hispanic/Latino students found that other classroom variables such as mastery rather than performance based instruction are more important for fostering a sense of school belonging (Stevens, Hammond, & Olivarez Jr., 2007).. Therefore, school systems should not assume that increasing extra-curricular participation will increase school belonging. Rather, other variables of the educational

environment need to also be considered when pursuing culturally sensitive and competent programming to foster connectedness and prevent school drop-out.

The findings of this study also have implications for school psychologists. As professionals who are ethically mandated to ensure equal access to school programs and services for all students, school psychologists should not assume that all ethnic groups participate equally in school programs. School psychologists should be aware of potential barriers that exist and advocate for programs and services that equalize access to school and community based programs that are perceived to potentially benefit individuals. First-generation students are less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities and are a greater risk to drop-out of school, especially students of Hispanic/Latino decent. Therefore, school psychologists need to monitor and pay particular attention to first-generation students in the school to ensure that they are aware of all opportunities offered by the school and community. Moreover, school psychologists should be cognizant that students may experience feel affectively engaged at school even without participation in extra-curricular activities. There are likely many variables in addition to those in the study that contribute to students feeling connected and engaged in school and those variables may be different for the unique needs of each individual student. In sum, psychologists in the schools need to investigate individual characteristics that contribute to students' lack of feelings of engagement to school and then act in a way that promotes an environment that adapts to the individual needs of all students.

Limitations

The limitations of this study must be discussed and considered when analyzing the results of this study and for considering future directions in research. One major limitation consisted of the small sample size (N=53) that prevented the investigation of differences extra-curricular participation and school engagement between students identifying as White and students of other ethnicities. Given the small sample size, those informed of this study should exhibit caution in generalizing the findings of this study to all middle school students or even all middle school students at the particular middle school investigated. Future researchers at this middle school should attempt to obtain greater participation rates through providing more incentives for participation or by better informing students of the benefits they may experience from participating in research projects about their school. Alternatively, the school may want to consider pursuing a system wide investigation to evaluate extra-curricular participation and student engagement in order obtain results that are more representative of the Alexandria City Public School system.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the ethnic make-up of the school and community is more diverse than the ethnic make-up of the United States as a country. The culture of the school studied may be more influenced by typically minority ethnicities nationally. As a result, the findings may not be able to be generalized nationally to middle school students since the findings may have been influenced by the ethnic make-up of the school studied.

Another weakness of this study is that it did not investigate within-ethnicity differences which have been identified as a need in engagement research (Peguaro,

2010). Certainly, it is possible that there are nuances within-cultures that could affect student participation rates in extra-curricular activities and feelings of school engagement. These types of differences may be best explored by future research with studies that are more qualitative in nature consisting of student interviews and/or focus groups. Continued research on adolescents' extra-curricular activity participation and school engagement will likely be beneficial for evaluating the effectiveness of United States public schools and for implementing school structures and programs that assist all students experience connectedness and lead to higher learning motivation and achievement.

Appendix A

Grade: 6th 7th 8thGender: Girl Boy

Years I have lived in the United States (check one):

- 0-1
- 1-3
- 3-5
- 5-7
- 7-10
- 10-12
- More than 12 but not all my life
- All my life

What language(s) is/are spoken in your home?

Ethnicity (check one or more):

- African American/Black
- Asian American
- Hispanic/Latino
- White
- Arab American
- Other Specify: _____

Appendix B

Please look at the activities list on page 4 to complete the following:

Check the after-school sports/athletics you have participated in:

Boys' Volleyball
 Cheer Team
 Girls' Running
 Intramural Flag Football
 Intramural Basketball
 Intramural Soccer
 Intramural Volleyball
 Intramural Hockey
 Intramural Ultimate Frisbee
 Wiffle Ball

Other: _____

Check any music, drama, or dance activities you have participated in that required you to attend practices or events outside of regular school hours:

Chamber Orchestra Rehearsal
 Drama Club

Other: _____

Check any academic/special interest clubs you are a member of:

Book Club
 Club B.I.L.I.
 Colton Journal News Club
 Creative Writing Club
 Digital Music Creation
 Girls' Book Club
 Hacky Sack Club
 Hammerheads
 Knitting Club
 Latin Club
 Logic Games Club
 Media Team

Other: _____

Check any service clubs that you are a member of:

Appendix C

1. Other students here like me the way I am.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. Adults at my school listen to the students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. Other students at school care about me.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. Students at my school are there for me when I need them.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. The school rules are fair.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. Students here respect what I have to say.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. Overall, my teachers are open and honest with me.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. Overall, Adults at my school treat students fairly.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. I enjoy talking to the students here.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
10. I have some friends at school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. At my school, teachers care about students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

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