

# Ethnic-Racial Identity as a Protective Factor in Youth Leadership Identity Development: A Cross-Cultural Conceptual Framework

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## Abstract

Dominant educational systems rarely create the conditions for cultural identity to be recognized as a foundation for leadership, leaving many high school students from multicultural backgrounds unable to see themselves as leaders. Research on ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development suggests that adolescents who lack sustained opportunities to explore and affirm their cultural backgrounds may face challenges in developing the secure sense of self from which leadership identity can grow. Yet the relationship between ERI and leadership identity development in high school youth remains largely under-explored, particularly across cultural contexts. This paper proposes a conceptual framework, the Cultural Identity and Leadership Development (CILD) model, that examines how ERI may serve as a protective factor in the leadership identity development of high school youth from multicultural backgrounds. Drawing on the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model and a synthesis of existing literature on ERI, youth leadership, and cross-cultural identity development, this paper argues that three conditions — cultural identity recognition, peer community, and program design — meaningfully shape students' capacity to move beyond positional conceptions of leadership. The aim of this paper is to advance an organizing framework for culturally grounded leadership development and identify key gaps in the literature for future research. The following paper contributes to a growing body of scholarship calling for culturally responsive approaches to leadership development in educational settings.

**Keywords:** Ethnic-Racial Identity; Leadership; Leadership Identity Development; Multicultural Youth; Youth Leadership Programs