Does Teacher-Student Relationship Moderate the Link Between Ethnic Harassment and School Adjustment Among Immigrant Youth?

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Abstract

Immigrant students are targets of ethnic harassment in school context in their host country. Prior studies demonstrated that being victim of ethnic harassment has consequences for the psychological, behavioral, and school adjustment of youths with immigrant background. The purpose of this study was to examine if a positive teacher relationship moderated the school adjustment of ethnically harassed immigrant students. Data was gathered from ethnically harassed students in 7th and 8th grade in seven schools of a midsized town in Sweden. In addition to univariate and bivariate correlation analyses, a series of moderated regression analyses were conducted. Significant moderation effects of relationship with teachers were found for two of the school adjustment measures. The results suggested a positive relationship with teachers could play a buffering role for school liking and truancy of students who experience ethnic harassment from their peers. Implications of the findings were discussed in relation to both research and practice.

Keywords: Immigrant students, ethnic harassment, teacher relationship, school adjustment.

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Modererar relationen mellan lärare och elev sambandet mellan etniska trakasserier och skolanpassning hos invandrarelever?

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Sammanfattning


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Better school adjustment and achievement is a gateway to job safety, higher-paying jobs, and better personal health (Card, 1999; Shkolnikov et al., 2012). A transnational study on minority immigrants found that ethnic minority and immigrant students are disadvantaged in education, and in turn, in competing in the labor market and finding long-term jobs (Heath, Rothon & Kilpi, 2008). The pattern of lower grades, higher school dropout (Martinez, DeGarmo & Eddy, 2004) and negative feelings towards school (Zhou, Pererley, Xin, Huang, Wang, 2003) in immigrant youth are repeatedly addressed. But more often, the predictors that partially explain these differences are rarely elaborated upon.

One potential predictor could be the prevalence of ethnic harassment. Immigrant students constitute a substantial risk group in ethnic harassment (Garcia et al., 1996). Ethnic harassment refers to harassment based on another person’s ethnicity, i.e. their beliefs, their customs or culture. A recent study showed that ethnically harassed immigrant youths are more likely to show poor school adjustment, declines in self-esteem, increased feelings of academic failure, and depressive symptoms over time (Bayram-Özdemir et al., 2014). This study also showed that the link between ethnic harassment and poor school adjustment was mediated by increased depressive symptoms in students. These results corroborate with earlier findings of ethnic harassment (Hoglund & Hosan, 2013), suggesting the effects of ethnic harassment are severe enough to qualify as a unique type of harassment. Immigrant students are systematically targeted by harassment on grounds of their origin.

Another predictor that has previously shown to be related to immigrant student’s school adjustment is the positive relationship with a teacher (Berggren, 2015). Current literature on the subject emphasizes that role models are likely to play a central role in bridging the gap and helping to overcome the obstacles of integration in the hosting country (Suárez-Orozco,
Pimentel, Martin, 2009). Additionally, the study suggests this role could be filled out by a teacher (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). Teachers could potentially be powerful assets for the school adjustment of immigrant students.

Prior research suggests that ethnic harassment poses a serious risk for a successful school adjustment (Eccles, Wong, Peck, 2006; Bayram-Özdemir & Stattin, 2014) and that teachers play a central role in immigrant student’s school adjustment (Berggren, 2015; Bayram-Özdemir et al., 2014; Suárez-Orozco, 2009). The present study aims to address the detrimental effects of ethnic harassment on immigrants’ school adjustment. More specifically, the possibility that a positive teacher relationship could moderate the effect of ethnic harassment on school adjustment of immigrant students.

The link between harassment and school adjustment

Harassment or bullying is a general problem among students in school (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). The definition of bullying or peer victimization is often based on the description proposed by the Scandinavian scientist Dan Olweus (Olweus, 1994, p.1173). He states that "A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” He adds that there ought to be an "imbalance in strength" if bullying should be used as a term, meaning children/adolescents who are vulnerable to bad actions, are having a hard time defending themselves. They are helpless in the situation, where they are being harassed (Olweus, 1994). Extensive research has been done on the effects of bullying on the victims. The most frequently observed results are decreases in the victims’ self-esteem (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff & Sriken, 2014), self-efficacy (Özer, Totan, Atik, 2011) and an increase of depressive symptoms (Hoglund & Hosan, 2013). After controlling for the influence of background and school structure findings show that being bullied does have an impact on performance at school (Williams & Peguero, 2013). In a paper assessing 20 years of research on negative effects in victims of bullying,
depressive symptoms were found to be the most commonly occurring problem (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Support from a close friend or parents moderated depressive symptoms in male victims of bullying (Tanigawa, Michael, Felix & Sharkey, 2011). No moderating effects from these relationships were found in girls of the same study. However, bullied female victims were found to benefit directly from support from parents, teachers, classmates and close friends (Tanigawa et al., 2011). In conclusion, the general effects of bullying have several severe consequences for victims in school and life in general.

Studies on ethnic harassment show similar results. Immigrant youth achieve lower school grades when the school environment is connected with feelings of fear and violence (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, Martin, 2009). Ethnicity is an important factor in the understanding of victimization and the authors argue the vital role of ethnic composition and distribution in majority-minority in schools (Juvonen et al., 2001). Olweus (1994) states a cause of being a victim could be “asymmetric power relations”. This could mean members of the minority group would be more vulnerable to victimization than majority-group members. Members of majority-groups are also less likely to be victimized and more likely to harass others (Juvonen, et al., 2001). Further, elementary school students in schools of ethnical and religious heterogeneity did not perceive ethnicity to be a prominent cause of harassment. Ethnic harassment was more prominent in schools where the majority of students were of Swedish origin and the minority of students was of immigrant origin (Skolverket, 2009). All in all, ethnicity and the distribution of ethnic groups throughout the school seems to be important factors in victimization and furthermore in immigrant students school outcomes.

Further, a study showed that discrimination and low level of help from adults poses major difficulties in school adjustment of immigrant students, which often results in less successful grades and a greater risk for dropping out of school. In contrast, to succeed in school, the same study, show that parent’s support of their children's school work and support
from adults in school out of the normal curriculum could work as a protector (Martinez et al., 2004). Thus, adults at school are important for immigrant students’ success in school.

In the case of student motivation and achievement, effects of decreases in student motivation and student achievement were found in junior high school students who were harassed on the grounds of origin daily (Eccles et al., 2006). Though, the effects were smaller for students whose racial identity is positively linked to their culture (Eccles et al., 2006). Similarly, a study of immigrants showed that support from parents affected the immigrants’ adaptation to school positively (Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti & Solheim, 2004). Related to this, support from parents made it easier for the immigrant students to handle the victimization they experienced at school (Liebkind et al., 2004). A study of first generation Chinese-American youth (Zhou et al., 2003), compared to students from mainland China and European American students, showed that Chinese-American students had a hard time adjusting to school. The immigrant students felt misunderstood and unfairly treated, showed more negative feelings towards their teachers, and the students did not believe in their academic abilities (Zhou et al., 2003). In sum, there are documented effects of ethnic harassment on school adjustment, and the significance of a good relationship between student and teacher on school adjustment. The literature does, however, not provide a substantial explanation for how a teacher-student relationship moderates the effects of ethnic harassment.

The role of student-teacher relationships on youth’s school adjustment

School adjustment is an abstract term, and there are several ways to operationalize school adjustment into observable measures. However, some specific aspects of school adjustment have shown to benefit from a positive teacher relationship. Liking of school, for example. Students in general with a supportive teacher relationship showed increases in motivation and engagement (Stroet, Opdenakker & Minnaert, 2013). The explanation for this pattern could lie in the emotional as well as the practical support perceived by the students (Suárez-Orozco,
Pimentel, Martin, 2009). Further, findings for the role of a positive teacher relationship in immigrant students corroborate well with the significance of a positive teacher relationship in general. Immigrant students have shown to benefit more from supportive teacher relationships than do native students (Berggren, 2015). The difference was notably larger in student motivation and engagement. These findings are supported by a North American study, where increased teacher support for immigrant students predicted more academic engagement (Green, Rhodes, Hirsch, Suáres-Orozco, Campic, 2008). In another study, the impact of a positive teacher relationship were more striking when cultures were different in school and in the student’s home (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, Martin, 2009). The study also found that supportive teacher relationships seem to be important for immigrant students’ academic engagement, and especially for students raised in diverse cultures. The overall findings on the impact of a positive teacher relationship in school liking strongly suggest that the two are intimately related.

Another researched aspect of school adjustment is truancy. Previous studies suggested that perceived support from adults, including teachers, are important for immigrant students engagement and retention in school (Martinez et al., 2004). Parents’ support of their children's school work as well as support from adults at school could work as a protective factor for truancy. Students who perceived themselves being discriminated and having low support from adults were at greater risk for dropping out of school and getting lower grades, than other students (Martinez et al., 2004). Additionally, studies has been made on hidden drop-out in school, among second generation immigrant students. Hidden drop-out was defined as behavioral and cognitive disengagement (Makarova & Herzog, 2013). Results show that immigrants who perform poorly and think low about school are most likely to be part of the students with hidden drop-out. These students often report having bad relationships with peers and teachers. Altogether, current research on the role of a teacher for student retention in
school suggest that parents and teachers are important for immigrant students’ engagement and stay in school.

Finally, there is the aspect of a perceived academic failure in school adjustment. A study by Bayram-Özdemir and Stattin (2014) found that being ethnically harassed led to increases in perceived academic failure. Additionally, self-esteem was negatively affected in ethnically harassed students. These findings corroborate prior research, which suggests that negative effects of ethnic harassment resembles the ones in general harassment (Hoglund et al., 2013). Consequently, broader fields of research become available. The literature is rich on the effects of bullying (i.e. general peer harassment) in the victim. For instance, victims of bullying have shown low self-esteem, a negative outlook on their situation and feelings of academic inadequacy (Olweus, 1994). Other studies have shown the importance of a supportive teacher in the victims of bullying. An empowering student-teacher relationship was associated with low perceived harassment in students (Nation, Vieno, Perkins & Sanitello, 2008). Students who felt disempowered such as not being encouraged to express themselves by their teachers, became victims of bullying or started to bully their peers. The significance of a supportive teacher relationship in immigrant students could potentially be explained by the emotional support of the teacher (Suárez- Orozco et al., 2009).

The protective role of a positive teacher relationship has been suggested throughout three different measures of school adjustment: school liking, truancy and perceived academic failure. These will be the aspects of school adjustment covered in this study.

**The Current Study**

To test our research question, we used longitudinal data from immigrant adolescent students. School adjustment was operationalized into three measures: school liking, truancy and perceived academic failure. We used positive student-teacher relationship as moderating factor and ethnic harassment as the predictor variable in moderated regression models.
Our overall research question is: Does student-teacher relationship moderate the link between ethnic harassment and school adjustment among immigrant youths? We have tested three specific hypotheses to answer this research question:

1. A positive teacher relationship moderates the link between ethnic harassment and school liking.

2. A positive teacher relationship moderates the link between ethnic harassment and truancy.

3. A positive teacher relationship moderates the link between ethnic harassment and perceived academic failure.

Method

Participants

Participants of the study were part of the “Seven Schools Project”, which was developed and implemented by Professors Håkan Stattin and Margaret Kerr of Örebro University. This longitudinal project collected data from students in grade 7 to 9 who attended seven different schools in a midsized town in Sweden over a period of three years. To reach a study sample that is representative of the overall socio-demographic characteristics of the town, the participating schools were selected from socioeconomically different neighborhoods. Because of the longitudinal design, the current study used data only from the students who were in 7th and 8th grade, and those whose parents were born outside of Sweden or a Nordic country. Only the 7th and 8th grade students were selected because they were able to respond the questionnaires at two occasions, one year apart. Students in the 9th grade did not have the opportunity to answer the questionnaires a second time because they change school after this year. Therefore, grade 9 students were excluded from the current analyses. From these filters, 304 immigrant students were included. Participants were 168 immigrant boys and 136 immigrant girls in the 7th and 8th grade. The age of the participants ranged from 12 to 16. Of
the 304 participants, 216 answered all of the questions at the first and second waves of data collection. The first and second waves of data collection will be referred to as T1 and T2, respectively.

**Measures**

**Ethnic harassment.** The measure for ethnic harassment consisted of six items, (e.g., ”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?” Has anyone made fun of you in a derogatory way because you come from another country?”). Participants answered these items on a 5-point response scale (i.e., 1=Daily, 5=Never). The mean of the items was computed to create the scale score, and higher values indicated frequent exposure to ethnic harassment. In the current study, ethnic harassment measured at T1 was used. The inter-item reliability of the measure was α=.83.

**Student-teacher relationship.** The measure for student-teacher relationship included both negative and positive relationships with teachers, though we have only used measures for positive relationships with teachers for this study. The measure consisted of six items (e.g., ”Are the teachers at school fair towards the students?”, “Do the teachers give the students praise when they are doing a good job?”, “Do the teachers at the school like the students?”). The statements and questions were answered with two different response formats, and the higher values referred to positive relationship with teachers. The scale score was created by computing the mean of the items. Student-teacher relationship data collected at T1, was used in the current study. The inter-item reliability of the measure was α=.87.

**School adjustment.** Three different school adjustment measures were used in the current study: school liking, truancy, and perceived academic failure.

**School liking.** School liking measure assessed students’ attitudes towards school context using five items (e.g., “How do you like school?”), How would you describe the
relationship between yourself and school?” and “Do you do your best in school?” The questions were answered with four different response formats each ranging from 1 to 5, and lower values indicating more liking of school. Thus, the items were reverse coded, and then the mean of the items were computed to create the scale score. The data for school liking was collected at both T1 and T2. Inter-item reliability of the measure was $\alpha=.75$ at T1, and $\alpha=.62$ at T2.

**Truancy.** Truancy was assessed using a single item measure (e.g., “Have you cut class this semester (i.e., been away from school for an entire day)”). Responses were given on a scale of 1 to 5 (i.e., 1=No, it has not happened, and 5=More than 10 times). A high score represented a high frequency of truancy. The data for truancy was collected at two occasions. Because the measure was composed of a single item, reliability could not be estimated.

**Perceived academic failure.** Perceived academic failure was assessed by using a subset of items from a measure that assess problems that students experience in school. Six items were used to assess students’ perceived failure in school (e.g., “This semester I… ‘have been failing in school’”, ‘have a hard time keeping up with the work’, ‘had not been motivated to do well in school’). The responses were given on a scale ranging from of 1 to 4 (i.e., 1=”Don’t agree at all” and 5=”Agree completely”). The inter-item reliability of the measure was $\alpha=.85$ at T1, and $\alpha=.88$ at T2.

**Demographic variables**

Perceived family SES was assessed using measures of two constructs: subjective reports of family’s finances and perceptions of family economy. Subjective report of family’s finances was measured using one item i.e., “Do you have more or less money in your family than other families in your area?”). The response were given on a range of 1 to 5, a higher score refers to perceiving own family to have more money than other families. Subjective reports of family’s finances were collected once along with the independent variables and the moderating
variable. Perceptions of family economy was assessed from four items (e.g., “What is the financial situation in your family”, “If you compare yourself with others in your class - do you have more or less money to buy things for?”, “Have you not been able to do something with your friends this semester because you couldn’t afford it?”). Two response formats were available, one with a range of 1 to 3, where 1= “Yes, several times” and 3=”No”. A higher score refers to perceiving not having less money than classmates. The responses to these items were rescaled to equate the response options to those of other items. The other response format had a range of 1-5 where a higher score refer to perceive having more money than classmates. The mean of the items were computed to create a scale score. The inter-item reliability of the measure was $\alpha=.71$.

Additional demographic data such as age, gender, and immigrations status were also collected from the participants. Adolescents´ parents’ birth place was used to define immigration status. Adolescents whose parents were born outside of Sweden and in Nordic countries (e.g., Denmark, Norway and Finland) were considered as immigrants. Less than 3 % of the sample had only one parent born outside of Sweden and in Nordic countries. This small group was not included in the study because of low statistical power.

**Procedure**

The parents were informed about the study in advance, and asked to provide passive consent by returning a consent form using a pre-paid envelope if they wished their child not to participate in the study. Parents who did not return the consent form were considered as if they approved the study.

The collection of data was done by research assistants. The assistants were trained on skills such as maintaining a calm working climate and being able to answer any questions the participants may have about the survey. Information about anonymity, confidentiality and the right to stop at any time without penalty were presented orally to the participants. Students
who accepted the terms and whose parents had not objected in the prior consent letter were given the questionnaires. A small group of students did not want to participate and was assigned with school work. The average time for completing the questionnaires was 90 minutes. Less than 5% of the participants had language difficulties and were assisted by the research assistants in Swedish or in their native language. Assistance was given in Swedish when no bilingual research assistants were present. The procedure in this study was approved by the Regional Ethics Review Board.

**Statistical analyses**

For the analysis of the data, we used both univariate and multivariate analysis techniques. We used zero-order correlations and t-test for descriptive purposes. We used multiple regression analysis to test main effect of the predictor variables, and the moderating role of teacher-relationship on the effect of ethnic harassment experiences on school adjustment outcomes. PROCESS module developed for SPSS program by Andrew Hayes (Hayes, 2013) was used for testing the hypothesized moderation effects. In all models, we controlled for the T1 assessment of the outcome measure. This method allowed us to predict the “changes” in the respective outcome measure over time. The PROCESS program provides simple slope test for moderation models, and confidence intervals of the main and interaction effects. Interaction effects were deemed statistically significant on a 95% confidence interval. The simple slope-test displays the interaction effects in detail, at high and low levels of the moderating variable. The predictor was introduced in the PROCESS program in several steps. The appropriate interaction model was selected as well as the mean center for products and data for plotting. In the PROCESS program, the default method of analysis with missing data is listwise deletion. Only the participants with valid data on all model variables are retained in the analysis, and others were excluded. We used listwise deletion because there was no
systematic difference between the participants who responded the surveys at both T1 and T2, and those who dropped out of the study at T2.

**Attrition Analysis**

To examine whether the participants who responded the surveys at both time points (n = 216) were systematically different from those who dropped out of the study at T2, we compared these two groups on all study variables assessed at T1 using t-test. The results showed that the largest t-statistics was -1.30, and the smallest p-value was p = .195. T-statistics needs to be larger than +/-1.96 to be statistically significant at p = .05. Thus, we concluded that there was no systematic difference between the students who remained in the study over two years and those who dropped out of the study at T2. In other words, attrition and the use of listwise deletion to estimate models were not likely to lead any biased statistical conclusions.

**Results**

**Descriptive analysis**

The bivariate correlation analysis showed that ethnic harassment was related to the moderator and the school adjustment variables consistent with the expected direction (see Table 1). Specifically, ethnic harassment was negatively correlated with positive relationship with teacher (r = -.39, p < .01), school liking at both T1 and T2 (r = -.34, p < .01; r = -.21, p < .01). In addition, ethnic harassment was positively correlated with truancy at both T1 and T2 (r = .24, p < .01; r = .16, p < .05), and perceived academic failure at T1 and T2 (r = .39, p < .01; r = .24, p < .01). Furthermore, positive relationship with teacher was positively correlated to school liking at both T1 and T2 (r = .50, p < .01; r = .31, p < .01) and negatively correlated with truancy at both T1 and T2 (r = -.17, p < .01; r = -.21, p < .01) and perceived academic failure at T1 and T2 both (r = -.32, p < .01; r = -.28, p < .01). As for the school adjustment outcomes, school liking at T1 and T2 was negatively correlated with truancy at T1 and T2, and perceived academic failure at T1 and T2. Additionally, perceived family SES correlated
Does positive teacher relationship moderate the link between ethnic harassment and school liking?

The result of the test of moderating role of positive teacher-relationship on the link between ethnic harassment and liking school are present in Table 3. The model explained 18% of the changes in liking school over a two-year period, \( R^2 = .18, F(4, 224)=12.50, p<0.01. \) Ethnic harassment did not significantly predict liking school, \( \beta =-.16, t(228)=-1.89, p =.060. \) However, positive relationship with teachers positively predicted students´ tendency to like school over time, \( \beta =.14, t(228)=2.08, p=.038, \) suggesting that students who maintain positive relationships with their teachers are more likely to think well of school. Next, there was a significant interaction effect, \( \beta =-.15, t(228)=-2.17, p=.031, \) suggesting that positive relationships with teachers significantly moderated the link between ethnic harassment and liking school. A follow-up simple slope test was used to examine the interaction effect in detail (see Figure 1). The simple slope test showed that students with a high ethnic harassment
did not report higher school liking when they have a good relationship to a teacher. In contrast, students with low levels of ethnic harassment felt a higher school liking when they reported a positive teacher relationship.

**Does positive teacher relationship moderate the link between ethnic harassment and truancy?**

The results of the test of moderating role of positive teacher-relationship on the link between ethnic harassment and truancy are presented in Table 4. The model explained 20% of the changes in truancy over a two-year period, $R^2 = .20$, $F(4, 226) = 14.32, p < .001$. Ethnic harassment did not significantly predict truancy, $\beta = .27, t(230) = 1.88, p = .062$. However, positive relationship with teachers negatively predicted students’ tendency for truancy over time, $\beta = -.22, t(230) = -2.09, p < .05$, suggesting that students who maintain a positive relationship with their teacher are less likely to indulge in truancy. Next, there was a significant interaction effect, $\beta = .33, t(230) = 2.69, p < .01$, suggesting that positive relationships with teachers significantly moderated the link between ethnic harassment and truancy. A follow up simple slope test was used to examine the interaction effect in detail (see Figure 2). The simple slope test showed that higher levels of teacher relationship was associated with fewer occasions of truancy in students who reported low ethnic harassment (see Figure 2). In addition, students who had low positive relationships with teacher were likely for truancy, even though they experienced lower levels of ethnic harassment. In contrast, when students experienced high levels of ethnic harassment, positive relationship with teacher did not make any difference in students’ reported truancy. In other words, the positive effect of students-teacher relationship vanished when students experienced high levels of ethnic harassment.
Does positive teacher relationship moderate the link between ethnic harassment and perceived academic failure?

The result of the test of moderating role of positive teacher-relationship on the link between ethnic harassment and perceived academic failure are found in Table 5. The model explained 24% of the changes in perceived academic failure over a two-year period, $R^2 = .24$, $F(4, 221) = 17.54$, $p < .001$, suggesting students who maintain a positive relationship with their teacher are less likely to feel a sense of academic failure as a result of ethnic harassment. Ethnic harassment did not predict perceived academic failure, $\beta = .09$, $t(225) = 1.05$, $p > .05$. Additionally, there was no interaction effect of teacher relationship on perceived school failure in ethnically harassed immigrant students, $\beta = .14$, $t(225) = 1.75$, $p > .05$. This finding suggests a positive relationship with a teacher does not protect immigrant students from a sense of academic failure.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine if a positive teacher relationship moderated the school adjustment of ethnically harassed immigrant students. Data was gathered from immigrant students in 7th and 8th grade in seven schools of a midsized town in Sweden. To help answer our question, moderation analysis was conducted, as well as regression analyses for our main hypotheses. Significant moderation effects were found for two of the school adjustment measures. The results suggested that a positive relationship with teachers could moderate the role of role of ethnic harassment on school liking and truancy behaviors of students with immigrant background. Immigrant students who experienced low ethnic harassment liked school more if they maintained positive relationships with their teachers. Similarly, immigrant students who experienced low ethnic harassment were also less likely for truancy. The effects of a positive teacher relationship diminished in students who
experienced high ethnic harassment. Surprisingly, the effect of ethnic harassment on perceived school failure was not moderated by a positive relationship with teacher.

In this study, having a positive relationship with a teacher positively predicted ethnically harassed immigrant student’s tendency to like school more over time. In other words, the first hypothesis was supported: a positive relationship with a teacher did moderate the effect of school liking in ethnically harassed immigrant students. Prior research is consistent with these findings, the role of a positive student-teacher relationship have shown to be predictive of increases in student motivation and student engagement (Stroet et. al., 2013). According to prior research (Green et al., 2008) immigrant students displayed more engagement during the year when he/she perceived more than ordinary support in school. This was also true the other way around, students displayed smaller engagement during the year of less perceived support in school. Our results showed higher school liking among students who experienced a positive relationship with teachers and low level of ethnic harassment, which is a similar result to Green and colleagues (2008). Our results also showed that school liking was affected in a negative way when students experienced high level of ethnic harassment despite high level of support from teacher. One potential explanation for this finding could be related to the detrimental effect of ethnic harassment experience. When immigrant students experience ethnic harassment from their peers, they may perceive this experience as a threat to their identity. For example, Bayram-Özdemir and Stattin (2014) found that ethnically harassed adolescents decreased in self-esteem. These researchers also found that ethnically harassed youths increased in depressive symptoms over time. Teachers may play an important role for the school adjustment of immigrant youths when they do not perceive a threat to their identity. In contrast, this positive effect may diminish in the presence of ethnic harassment.
Positive teacher relationship did play a moderating role in reducing the frequency in truancy in immigrant students. However, this was only true for students who experienced low ethnic harassment. These findings partly support our hypothesis. Similarly to our findings, previous research reported that students who perceived themselves being discriminated and having low support from adults were at greater risk for dropping out of school and getting lower grades (Martinez et al., 2004). While it was consistent in that students with bad teacher relationship and high ethnic harassment predicted higher frequencies in truancy in the students, it was still surprising that students with a high teacher relationship did not benefit when they experienced high levels of ethnic harassment. A possible interpretation of this finding could be the central role of increased levels of depressive symptoms in victims of ethnic harassment (Bayram-Özdemir & Stattin, 2014). If one feels depressed and not valued in one’s setting, it would seem natural to avoid that particular setting. In this case, to be truant. On the other hand, students who experienced low ethnic harassment, hence lower increases of depressive symptoms, did benefit from having a supportive teacher relationship. The moderating effect of a positive teacher relationship on truancy was more modest than previously anticipated. Nonetheless, the findings on truancy in this study are intriguing. Truancy could lead to other issues, like falling behind in school work and eventually negative attitudes towards school contexts. The findings in this study imply that teachers have a central role of ensuring retention in ethnically harassed youth. This finding supports the notion that immigrants are at particular risk for school adjustment difficulties.

The moderation analysis showed no moderating effects of teacher relationship on perceived academic failure in ethnically harassed immigrant students. In other words, we found no support for our third hypothesis. This result is surprising, as the measure for perceived academic failure was assessed from items closely related to depressive symptoms. Depressive symptoms have previously been shown to be intimately related to ethnic
moderating role with teacher

harassment (Neto, 2009; Rivas-Drake et al., 2008) and to victims of general bullying. Future research may benefit from using measures of academic achievement based on objective measures such as school grades or performance on standardized tests.

There are some limitations to the conclusions that one can draw from this study. All of the study measures were self-report measure. Reports from peers or teachers might strengthen the conclusions. In addition, the measure for truancy consisted of a single item, which asked whether the student had any occasions of truancy during the last semester. First, students might have not reported how often they indulged in truancy either due to memory problems (i.e., it is always difficult to remember details of a fact in the past) or social desirability. Some students might have underreported how often they avoid school days. Also, prior studies (Makarova et al., 2013) have elaborated that the concept of truancy should include not only students who have been truant in the past but also students who are at risk for truancy. The measure we used had no sensitivity to the students’ cognitions about truancy. Thus, future studies may need to rely on school records to obtain an objective measure of truancy and assess students’ cognitions about truancy to obtain better assessments of truancy and risk for truancy.

A possible limitation to this study was that some participants did not attend the second wave of data collection. The attrition analysis showed no significant differences between participants who remained throughout the entire study and those who dropped out. This was indicative of small influence of attrition in the results. However, the attrition analysis was based on the study variables. There may have been differences in the features of the participants that were not included in this study. Thus, attrition in the participants could potentially be a relevant limitation to this study.

There are also some strengths to this study. First, the data used for this study was longitudinal, which provides richer information about over time changes than cross sectional
data. It is always preferred to track the participants during a period of time, as it allows for within-participants validity tests. Green et al. (2008) suggest that feelings of support from teachers are fluid in persons and time, which points at the significance of passage of time. Similarly, students’ experiences in school may change over time, and understanding what predicts these changes required longitudinal data. Second, we utilized instruments that has been used in prior research, and shown good reliability and validity. Third, and most importantly, this study brings attention to an area in dire need. Although it has been widely reported that being an immigrant student means increased risk for poor school adjustment, few studies actually address the theoretical explanation for this pattern. Even fewer studies go further than speculating. In our study we found empirical support for the notion that ethnic harassment is strongly related to school adjustment measures and that a positive relationship with a teacher plays a role for the school adjustment of immigrant youths. Contrary to our expectations, our findings showed that teachers’ role is particularly important for immigrant students who experience low ethnic harassment. Despite this incongruence between our hypothesis and empirical results, our findings highlight the important roles of both teachers and ethnic harassment for the immigrant adolescents’ adjustment.

Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, our findings showed that student-teacher relationship is an important factor for the adjustment of immigrant youth in school. To meet immigrant students’ need for support is essential to their success in school. Teachers may play an important role in boosting positive feelings towards an attendance of immigrant students to school. Nevertheless, this positive effect disappears when immigrant adolescents face ethnic harassment from their peers. Adolescents who perceive high harassment from their peers due to their ethnic origin do not benefit from their supportive relationships with teachers. There are important implications of these findings for practice. A first step could be to create a safe and supportive environment.
for immigrant students in school. Neither support from teachers nor prevention of ethnic victimization alone may improve their adjustment in school. A more comprehensive approach, however, which address their need for support from adults and a safe environment free from harassment may promote their school adjustment, and in turn, eventually contribute to their educational and occupational achievement in the future.
References


Table 1. Means, standard deviations, inter-item reliabilities, and the correlations between the study variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>-.09</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>-.34**</td>
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<td>-.32**</td>
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<td>-.33**</td>
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<td>-.52**</td>
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</table>

Mean                  | 13.92| .55  | 3.09 | 1.62 | 3.17 | 4.18 | 3.92 | 1.63 | 2.02 | 1.48 | 1.69 |
Std. Deviation        | .80  | .50  | .72  | .61  | .68  | .70  | .67  | 1.01 | 1.12 | .59  | .70  |
Minimum               | 12   | 0    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1.5  | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    |
Maximum               | 16   | 5    | 5    | 4    | 5    | 5    | 5    | 5    | 4    | 1    | 1    |

Notes: T1 refers to data collected in the first wave, and T2 refers to data collected at second wave. Values on the diagonal are the Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities.

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
Table 2. Result of multiple independent samples T-tests of gender differences.

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<th>Boys</th>
<th></th>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>.69</td>
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<td>1.60</td>
<td>.65</td>
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<td>.045</td>
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Note: To prevent inflated Type-I error due to multiple comparisons, the p-value for significance was set to .05/10 ) .005 following Bonferroni correction guidelines.
Table 3. Results of the moderation analysis testing the moderating role of relationship with teacher on the effect of ethnic harassment on school liking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B (SE)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% Confidence Intervals for B-weight</th>
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<th>Upper bound</th>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship with teacher at T1</td>
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Note: Reported regression coefficients are unstandardized values. The model $R^2 = .18$, $F(4, 224) = 12.50, p < .001$. 
Table 4. Results of the moderation analysis testing the moderating role of relationship with teacher on the effect of ethnic harassment on truancy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B (SE)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% Confidence Intervals for B-weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lower bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.038</td>
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<td>1.88</td>
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<td>Truancy at T1</td>
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<td>6.07</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Notes: Reported regression coefficients are unstandardized values. The model $R^2 = .20$, $F(4, 226) = 14.32, p < .001.$
Table 5. Results of the moderation analysis testing the moderating role of relationship with teacher on the effect of ethnic harassment on perceived school failure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B (SE)</th>
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<th>p</th>
<th>95% Confidence Intervals for B-weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Relationship with teacher at T1</td>
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<td>6.27</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Reported regression coefficients are unstandardized values. The model $R^2 = .24$, $F(4, 221) = 17.54, p < .001$. 
Figure 1. Results of the simple slope test on the moderating role of positive teacher relationship on school liking in ethnically harassed immigrant students.
Figure 2. Results of the simple slope test on the moderating role of positive teacher relationship on truancy in ethnically harassed immigrant students.