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Author(s): Jaana Juvonen, Adrienne Nishina and Sandra Graham

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## Research Article

# Ethnic Diversity and Perceptions of Safety in Urban Middle Schools

Jaana Juvonen,<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Nishina,<sup>2</sup> and Sandra Graham<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles; <sup>2</sup>Department of Human and Community Development, University of California, Davis; and <sup>3</sup>Department of Education, University of California, Los Angeles

**ABSTRACT**—Students' perceptions of their safety and vulnerability were investigated in 11 public middle schools (more than 70 sixth-grade classrooms) that varied in ethnic diversity. Results of hierarchical linear modeling analyses indicate that higher classroom diversity is associated with feelings of safety and social satisfaction. African American ( $n = 511$ ) and Latino ( $n = 910$ ) students felt safer in school, were less harassed by peers, felt less lonely, and had higher self-worth the more ethnically diverse their classrooms were, even when controlling for classroom differences in academic engagement. Results at the school level were similar to those at the classroom level; higher ethnic diversity was associated with lower levels of self-reported vulnerability (but no difference in self-worth) in both fall and spring of sixth grade. In the spirit of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the current findings offer new empirical evidence for the psychological benefits of multi-ethnic schools.

The 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 2004 and recent Supreme Court cases affirming the significance of race in higher-education admissions have sparked public discourse on the benefits of ethnic diversity in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities. That discourse reveals that kindergarten through 12th-grade schooling in America has not lived up to the promise of *Brown*. Although the number of 5- through 17-year-old children of races other than White quadrupled between 1970 and 2000, students continue to be educated largely in ethnically segregated schools (Orfield, 2001; Pettigrew, 2004).

Address correspondence to Jaana Juvonen, Department of Psychology, UCLA Psychology, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563, e-mail: juvonen@psych.ucla.edu.

For example, African American children were more likely to attend schools with an African American majority in 2000 (70%) than at any time since the 1960s (Pettigrew, 2004). Latino students are even more likely than African American students to attend schools serving predominantly ethnic minorities (Orfield & Lee, 2006). When reflecting on the legacy of *Brown* in light of such statistics, it seems timely to reexamine the psychological benefits associated with ethnic diversity in schools.

Although much research on desegregation followed the *Brown* decision, that empirical literature is limited in helping to clarify the psychological effects of ethnic diversity in today's schools. Studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s typically examined the effects of racially mixed educational environments on Black students' achievement or self-esteem in predominantly White schools (see Pettigrew, 2004; Schofield & Hausmann, 2004). Ethnicity was limited to two groups and often confounded with numerical representation (i.e., Whites the numerical majority, Blacks the minority), as well as social class. Although much of the earlier research on self-esteem was inconclusive (e.g., Epps, 1975; St. John, 1975), several studies indicated that African American students displayed higher self-esteem when they attended racially segregated rather than integrated schools, a finding that sheds little light on the psychological benefits of greater diversity (e.g., Gray-Little & Carels, 1997; Verna & Runion, 1985; see review in Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000).

How might youth benefit from a diverse student body? Research on college students suggests that ethnic diversity contributes to critical-thinking skills among White students who learn to incorporate multiple perspectives of a diverse student body (Antonio et al., 2004; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Milem & Umbach, 2003). Research on adolescents reveals that racially diverse schools and classrooms facilitate cross-ethnic friendships (e.g., Damico & Sparks, 1986; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987), which are presumed to reduce negative or stereotypical attitudes

toward out-group members. For students of color, cross-race interactions have been hypothesized to foster development of interpersonal skills relevant in other racially diverse settings, such as college or the workplace (e.g., Wells, 1995). But, again, such studies on friendship patterns and social interactions have focused mainly on White and Black youth.

Today's multiethnic urban schools, which vary both in the number of different groups represented and the relative proportion of each, provide ideal conditions for further examination of the effects of diversity. By studying multiethnic urban schools, it is possible to test for the effects of diversity that are independent of any particular ethnic-group membership and to consider whether such effects vary for different ethnic minority groups. In the current study, we examined students' perceptions of safety and vulnerability, a topic that is virtually unexplored in the school-desegregation literature. We hypothesized that greater diversity promotes perceptions of safety and lessens feelings of vulnerability because in diverse settings, students belong to one of many ethnic groups that share a balance of power (i.e., there is no numerical majority group). We based this hypothesis on findings from the peer-victimization literature suggesting that a numerical imbalance of power is an antecedent of peer-directed hostility (Olweus, 1993).

There are other possible explanations why schools' ethnic diversity might be related to greater perceived safety. For example, school administrators and teachers in ethnically diverse schools might be especially sensitive to the possibility of ethnic conflict and therefore work to improve intergroup relations by implementing multicultural or antibias curricula. However, program evaluations of multicultural curricula suggest that high dosages of exposure are needed to produce any positive effects (e.g., Banks, 1995), and when group differences are overemphasized, such curricula can even backfire (see Park & Judd, 2005). Moreover, the conditions for rigorously implementing multicultural programs are far from ideal in large urban secondary schools (such as those included in the current study) struggling with limited resources and facing substantial academic pressures.

We examined the effects of ethnic diversity on social perceptions of a large sample of sixth-grade students in 11 urban middle schools that differed in ethnic composition. Ethnic diversity was conceptualized as a continuum that varies as a function of both the number of groups present and the relative representation of those groups. We investigated whether ethnic diversity is associated with students' perceptions of school safety (cf. collective sense of vulnerability), personal feelings of peer victimization (i.e., individual vulnerability), feelings of social dissatisfaction (referred to hereafter as loneliness), and self-worth (cf. esteem)—outcomes we jointly refer to as perceived safety and vulnerability. Because a school's ethnic composition is not necessarily reflected at the classroom level (Schofield, 1995; Wells, 1995), we conducted separate analyses at the classroom and school levels. We focused on sixth-grade students during their first year in middle school inasmuch as

large, urban middle schools are more likely to be diverse than neighborhood elementary schools. Moreover, early adolescence and the accompanying transition to middle school is a time of heightened concern about "fitting in" within the new social setting (see Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Both fall and spring assessments were included because initial feelings of vulnerability may dissipate across a school year, as students get acclimated to the new social setting (Verna & Runion, 1985).

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants for the current analyses were from a larger longitudinal study of approximately 2,000 sixth-grade students selected from 99 classrooms in 11 middle schools located in greater Los Angeles (for complete information about the full sample, see Bellmore, Witkow, Graham, & Juvonen, 2004, and Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005). Based on self-report, the ethnic breakdown of the sample was 46% Latino (primarily of Mexican origin), 29% African American, 9% Asian (predominantly of East Asian origin), 9% Caucasian, and 7% multiracial. The 11 middle schools were carefully selected to represent a continuum of ethnic diversity in low-income communities, eligible for Title I compensatory funding. Although our measures of school and classroom diversity were based on all ethnic groups in the sample, the main analyses focus on the two ethnic groups (Latino and African American) with sufficient representation across all our schools and classrooms. This target sample consisted of 1,421 sixth-grade students (45% male, 55% female), of whom 64% were Latino ( $n = 910$ ) and 36% were African American ( $n = 511$ ).

### Procedure

Sixth-grade students whose homeroom teachers expressed interest in the study took home letters and consent forms that explained the study. Of the 3,511 distributed consent forms, 75% were returned, with 89% granting parental permission to participate.

Students and teachers completed written questionnaires during the fall and spring semesters in classroom settings. All instructions and questionnaire items were read aloud while students recorded their own responses. Help was available to individual students as needed.

### Measures of Context

#### *School and Classroom Ethnic Diversity*

An index of ethnic diversity was created using a formula that captures both the number of different groups in the setting and the relative representation of each group (Simpson, 1949):

$$D_C = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^g p_i^2,$$

where  $D_C$  represents the ethnic diversity of a given context and  $p_i$  is the proportion of students in the context who belong to ethnic group  $i$ . The  $p_i^2$  is summed across  $g$  groups in a classroom. Substantively, this index calculates the probability that any two students randomly selected from the same setting will be from different ethnic groups (see Moody, 2001, for a similar measure that is labeled school *heterogeneity*). Scores can range from 0 to approximately 1, with higher numbers reflecting greater ethnic diversity. For example, in a classroom where 75% of the students are Latino and 25% are African American, ethnic diversity is .375; in a classroom that is half Latino and half African American, ethnic diversity is .5; and in a classroom where three ethnic groups are represented fairly equally (e.g., 40% Latino, 30% African American, 30% Caucasian), ethnic diversity is around .66.

We calculated classroom ethnic diversity based on five groups: Latino, African American, Asian–Pacific Islander, Caucasian, and multiracial. To improve the accuracy of our estimate of classroom ethnic diversity, we examined only classrooms with greater than 50% participation at the specified time point. This resulted in 80 and 74 classrooms (out of 99) being retained in the analyses for the fall and spring semesters, respectively. Classroom diversity ranged from 0 to .77 ( $M = .48$ ,  $SD = .22$ ) during the fall and from 0 to .78 ( $M = .53$ ,  $SD = .21$ ) during the spring. The slight differences between the two semesters reflect minor movement of students among classrooms.

We based our estimate of school-level diversity on four ethnic groups (African American, Asian–Pacific Islander, Caucasian, and Latino), using information obtained from *DataQuest*, a database provided by the California Department of Education (information retrieved April 1, 2003, from <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>). Multiethnic students were excluded from the school-level diversity indices because the California Department of Education collapses multiethnic youth and nonrespondents into a single category. Across the 11 middle schools, the school diversity index ranged from .06 to .71 ( $M = .48$ ,  $SD = .19$ ), indicating substantial variation. In low-diversity schools ( $D_C < .50$ ), classroom diversity ranged from 0 to .62 during the fall and from 0 to .65 during the spring. In schools with higher diversity ( $D_C > .50$ ), classroom ethnic diversity ranged from .30 to .77 during the fall and from .30 to .78 during the spring. The correlations ( $r$ ) between school-level diversity and classroom-level diversity were .80 and .78 for the fall and spring, respectively. Thus, although there was overlap between the ethnic diversity in schools and the ethnic diversity in classrooms, they were not identical.

### Classroom Engagement

Given that middle schools are likely to rely on academic-tracking practices that are implicit, the effects of ethnic diversity on students' perceptions of safety and vulnerability might be confounded by classroom differences in students' academic engagement. Likewise, students' engagement could affect perceived vulnerability independently of classroom ethnic com-

position. To take into account such effects, we also tested models that included classroom-level aggregates of teacher ratings of students' academic engagement. Homeroom teachers completed a six-item measure for each participating student (e.g., "In my class, this student likes to figure things out for him/herself."), rating the items on a 4-point scale from 1, *never*, to 4, *always*. The mean rating for the six items was the measure of the student's academic engagement; higher scores indicated more engagement (fall  $\alpha = .88$ ; spring  $\alpha = .92$ ). The average engagement score across all students in the classroom was then calculated. Classroom engagement ranged from 1.78 to 3.52 and from 1.83 to 3.25 for the fall and spring, respectively.

### Outcome Measures: Perceptions of Safety and Vulnerability

#### School Safety

Perceptions of school safety were measured using a 10-item subscale of the Effective School Battery (Gottfredson, 1984). Items tapped general perceptions of safety at school and on the way to school (e.g., "How often do you feel safe while in your school building?") and were rated from 1, *never*, to 5, *always*. A mean of the items was calculated, such that higher scores reflect stronger perceptions of school safety (fall  $\alpha = .72$ ; spring  $\alpha = .71$ ).

#### Peer Victimization

Perceptions of personal experiences of victimization by peers were measured using a modified six-item version of the Peer Victimization Survey (Neary & Joseph, 1994). The original and the modified survey are designed similarly to Harter's (1987) Self-Perception Profile for Children: Respondents first decide which of two options (types of students) is more like them (e.g., "Some kids are often picked on by other kids, BUT Other kids are not picked on by other kids."). Participants then indicate whether that option is "sort of true for me" or "really true for me." Items were scored on a 4-point scale, and a mean of the six items was computed, such that higher scores indicate higher levels of peer victimization (fall  $\alpha = .81$ ; spring  $\alpha = .83$ ).

#### Loneliness

Sixteen items from Asher and Wheeler's (1985) Loneliness Scale were used to assess feelings of loneliness at school (e.g., "I have nobody to talk to."). Items were rated on a 5-point scale from 1, *not true at all*, to 5, *always true*. A mean of the 16 items was created, such that higher scores reflect greater loneliness at school (fall  $\alpha = .84$ ; spring  $\alpha = .86$ ).

#### Self-Worth

The six-item global self-worth subscale from Harter's (1987) Self-Perception Profile for Children was used to assess self-worth (e.g., "Some kids are often unhappy with themselves, BUT Other kids are pretty pleased with themselves."). Items were scored on a 4-point scale, and a mean of the six items was

**TABLE 1**  
*Estimated Coefficients and Standard Errors for the Classroom-Level Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analyses*

Outcome	Level 1: intercept	Level 2: ethnic diversity	Percentage of between-classrooms variance explained by ethnic diversity
Fall of 6th grade			
Peer victimization	2.08 (0.03)***	-0.52 (0.14)***	29
Loneliness	1.77 (0.02)***	-0.56 (0.10)***	70
School safety	4.10 (0.03)***	0.84 (0.14)***	45
Self-worth	3.20 (0.03)***	0.30 (0.12)**	34
Spring of 6th grade			
Peer victimization	2.08 (0.03)***	-0.56 (0.15)***	49
Loneliness	1.72 (0.02)***	-0.53 (0.11)***	97
School safety	4.17 (0.02)***	0.75 (0.13)***	56
Self-worth	3.16 (0.03)***	0.29 (0.14)*	46

Note. Standard errors are given in parentheses.  
 \* $p_{rep} > .87$ . \*\* $p_{rep} > .95$ . \*\*\* $p_{rep} > .99$ .

computed, such that higher scores indicate higher self-worth (fall  $\alpha = .77$ ; spring  $\alpha = .80$ ).

#### Data Analysis

We used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to assess the contextual effects of ethnic diversity on perceptions of safety and vulnerability. HLM could account for the fact that students who shared the same context (i.e., classroom or school) were likely to be more similar to one another than students from different contexts (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). HLM also allowed us to control for individual differences (i.e., sex and ethnicity) while testing for the effects of the ethnic diversity of the context. Classroom and school effects were examined separately because a school's ethnic composition restricted the range of its classroom diversity.

Both ethnicity (Latino or African American) and gender were dummy-coded and grand-mean-centered for all analyses. Ethnic diversity at the classroom and school levels was centered at .50, which reflects a moderate amount of diversity and was close to the mean in this study. Thus, perceptions of safety and vulnerability were modeled as a function of individual characteristics (i.e., gender and ethnicity) at Level 1 and contextual features (i.e., ethnic diversity) at Level 2. The intercept for ethnic diversity was modeled as a random parameter, and the error variances for gender and ethnicity were constrained to zero. Initial analyses suggested that the remaining error variance for these predictors was nonsignificant, and this approach allowed us to retain the most parsimonious model.

## RESULTS

We first present the findings from analyses testing whether classroom ethnic diversity predicted students' perceptions of

safety and vulnerability in fall and spring of their first year in middle school. We then consider the impact of ethnic diversity at the school level on the same outcomes.

#### Classroom-Level Ethnic Diversity

Table 1 shows the results of the HLM analyses for both fall and spring of sixth grade. The intercept column indicates the estimated value of the outcome variables, controlling for gender and ethnicity, when the ethnic-diversity index is .50 (i.e., grand-mean-centered). The second column indicates the degree to which perceptions of safety and vulnerability increase or decrease as a function of classroom ethnic diversity. The third column presents the percentage of between-classrooms variation in safety and vulnerability explained by diversity (compared with the percentage explained in the unconditional-means model).

As shown in Table 1, in both fall and spring of sixth grade, greater ethnic diversity in the classroom was associated with lower levels of perceived peer victimization ( $b = -0.52, p_{rep} > .99$ , in fall;  $b = -0.56, p_{rep} > .99$ , in spring). Similarly, classroom diversity was associated with less loneliness ( $b = -0.56, p_{rep} > .99$ , in fall;  $b = -0.53, p_{rep} > .99$ , in spring). Greater classroom ethnic diversity also predicted increased perceptions of school safety ( $b = 0.84, p_{rep} > .99$ , in fall;  $b = 0.75, p_{rep} > .99$ , in spring) and self-worth ( $b = 0.30, p_{rep} = .971$ , in fall;  $b = 0.29, p_{rep} = .93$ , in spring). The table also shows that ethnic diversity accounted for slightly more of the between-classrooms variability in the spring than the fall: In the spring, ethnic diversity accounted for almost half of between-classrooms variance in peer victimization (49%) and self-worth (46%), more than half (56%) of between-classrooms variance in school safety, and nearly all (97%) between-classrooms variability in loneliness.

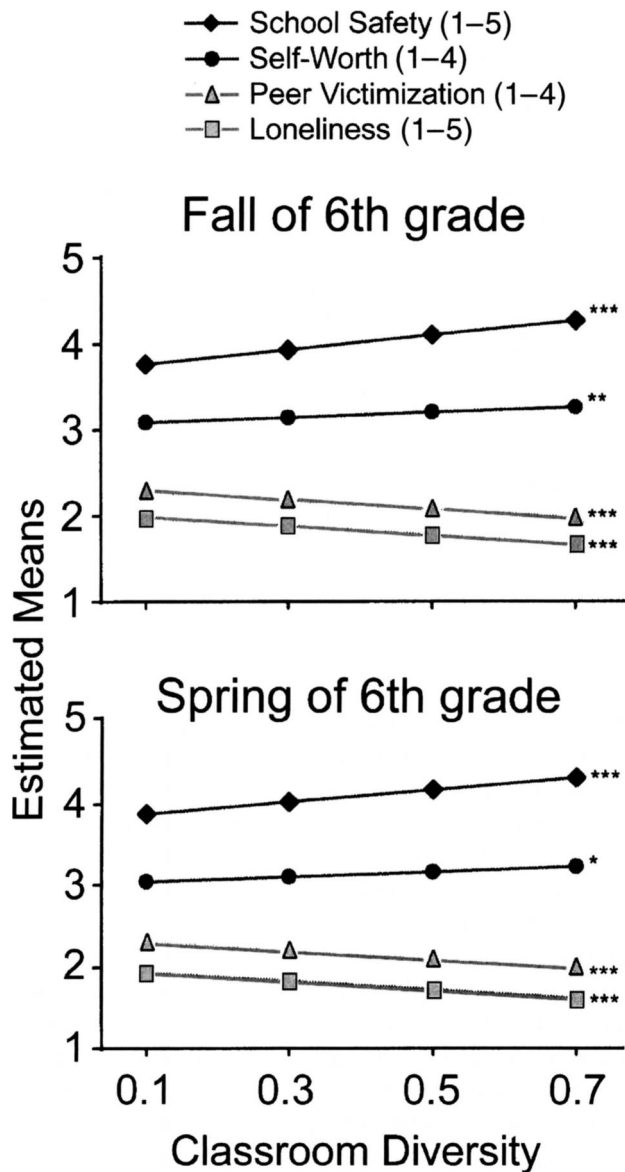


Fig. 1. Effects of classroom-level diversity on perceived safety and vulnerability, controlling for sex and ethnicity (\* $p_{rep} > .87$ , \*\* $p_{rep} > .95$ , \*\*\* $p_{rep} > .99$ ).

The association between classroom ethnic diversity and feelings of safety and vulnerability is summarized in Figure 1.

The analysis of classroom-level ethnic diversity showed very few ethnicity or gender effects, suggesting that the relations between classroom ethnic diversity and perceived safety and vulnerability were similar for Latino and African American boys and girls.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>During spring, girls reported higher levels of perceived school safety ( $b = 0.09$ ,  $p_{rep} = .95$ ) and lower levels of peer victimization ( $b = -0.12$ ,  $p_{rep} = .96$ ) than did boys. The association between classroom diversity and school safety was weaker for Latino than African American students ( $b = -0.67$ ,  $p_{rep} = .94$ ) in spring. Similar individual differences were found for school-level diversity.

To approximate the effect size, we examined the magnitude of the diversity effects by comparing the estimated difference in safety and vulnerability in lower-diversity classrooms ( $D_C = .2$ ) versus higher-diversity classrooms ( $D_C = .7$ ) with the standard deviations for the full sample ( $SDs = .79, .64, .70$ , and  $.71$  for peer victimization, loneliness, school safety, and self-worth, respectively). The difference between lower- and higher-diversity contexts reflected one third of the sample's standard deviation for peer victimization, almost one half (.43) of a standard deviation for loneliness, almost two thirds (.60) of a standard deviation for school safety, and one fifth of a standard deviation for self-worth in the fall. The effects of classroom ethnic diversity were similar for spring.

### Controlling for Classroom Differences in Student Engagement

As a comparison, we also tested whether student engagement affected the classroom-level findings just described. Classroom-level academic engagement was not directly associated with classroom ethnic diversity in the fall ( $r = .16$ , n.s.) or spring ( $r = .12$ , n.s.). We conducted HLM analyses by adding classroom-level academic engagement (grand-mean-centered) as another Level 2 (i.e., contextual) predictor of safety and vulnerability.

Holding classroom-level academic engagement constant, classroom ethnic diversity remained a significant predictor of the outcome variables; the coefficients were similar to those presented in Table 1. Classroom-level academic engagement also independently predicted peer victimization, loneliness, and self-worth during the fall: As classroom academic engagement increased, peer victimization ( $b = -0.18$ ,  $p_{rep} = .93$ ) and loneliness ( $b = -0.14$ ,  $p_{rep} = .941$ ) decreased, and self-worth increased ( $b = 0.15$ ,  $p_{rep} = .93$ ). However, by spring of sixth grade, the independent effects of classroom-level academic engagement on feelings of vulnerability and self-worth dissipated ( $p_{rep} < .87$ ).

In sum, perceptions of vulnerability and self-worth improved with increased ethnic diversity. Students' academic engagement at the classroom level did not account for these findings. The positive effects of diversity remained significant in both fall and spring, whereas classroom-level academic engagement was predictive of positive outcomes only in the fall.

### School-Level Ethnic Diversity

The results for school-level ethnic diversity are presented in Table 2. In both fall and spring, school diversity predicted all of the outcomes except self-worth. That is, greater ethnic diversity within the school was associated with lower levels of peer victimization and loneliness and higher perceptions of school safety (see Fig. 2). Note that by spring of sixth grade, school ethnic diversity accounted for 69% of the between-schools variability in peer victimization, nearly all (96%) the between-

**TABLE 2**  
*Estimated Coefficients and Standard Errors for the School-Level Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analyses*

Outcome	Level 1: intercept	Level 2: ethnic diversity	Percentage of between-schools variance explained by ethnic diversity
Fall of 6th grade			
Peer victimization	2.10 (0.04) <sup>***</sup>	-0.61 (0.25) <sup>*</sup>	29
Loneliness	1.80 (0.04) <sup>***</sup>	-0.63 (0.24) <sup>*</sup>	38
School safety	4.08 (0.06) <sup>***</sup>	0.83 (0.33) <sup>*</sup>	31
Self-worth	3.19 (0.03) <sup>***</sup>	0.21 (0.20)	—
Spring of 6th grade			
Peer victimization	2.05 (0.03) <sup>***</sup>	-0.69 (0.19) <sup>**</sup>	69
Loneliness	1.72 (0.02) <sup>***</sup>	-0.52 (0.002) <sup>***</sup>	96
School safety	4.21 (0.04) <sup>***</sup>	0.79 (0.25) <sup>**</sup>	45
Self-worth	3.18 (0.04) <sup>***</sup>	0.33 (0.24)	—

Note. Standard errors are given in parentheses.  
<sup>\*</sup> $p_{rep} > .87$ . <sup>\*\*</sup> $p_{rep} > .95$ . <sup>\*\*\*</sup> $p_{rep} > .99$ .

schools variability in loneliness, and almost half of the between-schools variation in school safety (45%).

To summarize, results at the school level were similar to the classroom-level findings. Greater ethnic diversity at the school level was associated with lower levels of self-reported social vulnerability and safety (but no difference in self-worth) in both fall and spring of sixth grade. Thus, attending an ethnically diverse school, like belonging to an ethnically diverse classroom, was associated with the best overall outcomes for Latino and African American students.

## DISCUSSION

Our results indicate that ethnic diversity is associated with feelings of safety and social satisfaction in school. Students felt safer, less harassed, and less lonely in more ethnically diverse contexts. These findings were robust across the two levels of analyses (i.e., classroom and school), two ethnic groups (African American and Latino), and two time points (fall and spring of sixth grade), and were independent of average levels of academic engagement in the classrooms. We do not know of prior studies investigating perceived safety as a function of ethnic diversity.

Why would ethnic diversity protect students from perceptions of vulnerability? We proposed that the power relations are more balanced in ethnically diverse schools with multiple ethnic groups than in less diverse schools. For example, in a context with five ethnic groups equally represented (each at 20%), the balance of power is unlikely to be tipped in favor of one group over another. The lack of power differentials may reduce incidents of peer harassment that, in turn, affect perceptions of safety.

It also is likely that the emotional effects of perceived threat are less painful or detrimental in diverse as opposed to nondiverse settings. For example, one of our recent studies showed that victimization by peers was less strongly associated with distress when students had few, as opposed to many, classmates of their own ethnicity (Bellmore et al., 2004). We proposed that students who belong to numerical minority groups (few same-ethnicity classmates) can attribute their plight to the prejudice of other people, but those who are in the numerical majority (many same-ethnicity classmates) are more likely to blame themselves for their victimization. Whereas external attributions to the prejudice of others can be self-protective (cf. Crocker & Major, 1989), self-blaming attributions are associated with heightened distress (Graham & Juvonen, 1998).

Our analyses focused on the psychological benefits of an ethnically diverse student body, with diversity operationalized as the numerical representation of various ethnic groups. Specifically, our approach, and our measurement of ethnic diversity, underscores the importance of contexts that have multiple ethnic groups that are relatively evenly represented. Although the school-desegregation literature also includes studies of substantive diversity, that literature typically focuses on organizational characteristics that promote positive interracial interactions (e.g., Feld & Carter, 1998; Hallinan & Williams, 1989; Moody, 2001). For example, studies have documented that when academic tracking in diverse schools does not re-segregate students along racial and ethnic lines, or when extracurricular activities are structured to attract an ethnic mix of students, interracial relations improve (see Moody, 2001). Although such studies have primarily examined formation of interracial friendships, there is reason to believe that organizing diverse schools to facilitate the interaction opportunities of

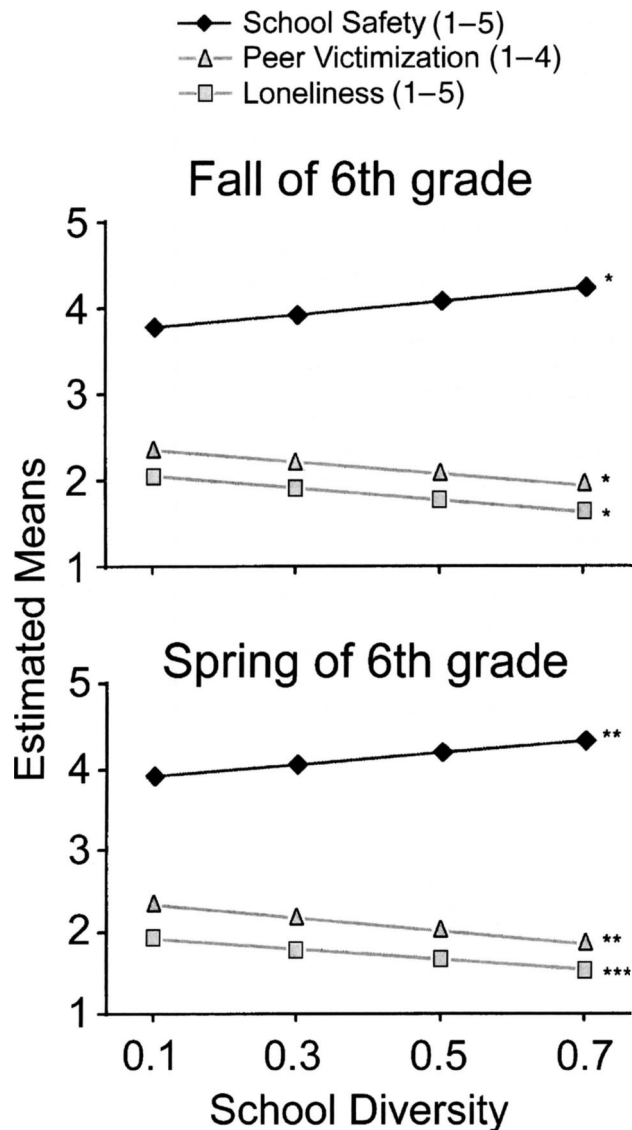


Fig. 2. Effects of school-level diversity on perceived safety and vulnerability, controlling for sex and ethnicity (\* $p_{rep} > .87$ , \*\* $p_{rep} > .95$ , \*\*\* $p_{rep} > .99$ ).

ethnically diverse students should also promote feelings of safety and social satisfaction.

We focused on urban middle schools that served communities of low socioeconomic status (SES). Hence, we do not know whether our findings would be replicated where ethnic groups differ in SES or among students in smaller elementary schools and larger high schools. We also do not know whether selection effects may have influenced our results. For example, it is possible that ethnically diverse middle schools draw on a different set of students (e.g., those who are more tolerant of people who are different from themselves) than less diverse schools do. As we acknowledged in the introduction, it is also possible that school personnel in more ethnically diverse schools frame the discourse on multiculturalism in ways that both promote per-

ceptions of safety and undermine feelings of vulnerability. Because our findings were robust not only across schools but also within schools across classrooms that varied in diversity, these school-level explanations are unlikely to account for our findings. Nevertheless, it will be important for future research to systematically assess various school effects and specifically the behaviors of teachers in more versus less diverse schools.

With the changing demographics in this country, the meaning of race and racial integration has changed substantially. Rather than focusing on Black-White comparisons under conditions in which SES disparities and differences in majority-minority status prevail, future research should capitalize on new opportunities for studying diversity in multiethnic schools. If the current findings can be replicated across schools with different ethnic-group configurations, then they offer new empirical evidence for the psychological benefits of racial integration in the spirit of *Brown*. The possibility that there is safety in diversity—as opposed to safety in numbers—is an optimistic one.

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