

**The Relationship between Perceived Ethnic
Discrimination and Ethnic Identity Exploration as
Mediated by Ethnic Identity Crisis**

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Abstract

In the adolescent identity formation literature, negative experiences of stress in particular, gender discrimination, and difficulties with work, relationships, finances, health, and experiences with death have been associated with increased identity exploration (Anthis, 2002a,b). Despite these findings, little research has been conducted to examine the relationship between ethnic identity discrimination and ethnic identity exploration. Some 106 males, now 18-28 years of age who entered Norway as unaccompanied minors, were the participants of this investigation. All participants volunteered to take part in the Youth, Culture, and Competence Study (YCC) conducted by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. Items from Phinney's MEIM and additional questions regarding participants' experiences of ethnic identity crisis and ethnic discrimination were administered in a survey as part of a larger investigation of coping and cultural competence among youths living in Norway. This study aims to detail the relationship between experiences of ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration, whereby ethnic identity crisis was considered as a possible mediator. Results showed that the experience of ethnic discrimination was associated with increased identity exploration and increased level of identity crisis. However, identity crisis was not a mediator between these two variables, as anticipated. This research should enable a deeper understanding of the role that ethnic discrimination may

play in ethnic identity development among unaccompanied minors living in Norway.

Key words: ethnic identity, ethnic discrimination, identity, unaccompanied minor refugees

Introduction

Identity concerns are a fundamental dimension of an adolescent's life. Questions related to who one is, where one is from, and what vocational choices one should make become important in the young person's life. Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1967) have both contributed to an understanding of the identity formation process during adolescence. According to Erikson (1968), forming an identity is a fundamental task of adolescence and the foundation for entry into adult life. Both Erikson and Marcia agree that adolescence is a time of exploration of various vocational, religious, political, social, and sexual values and of finding resolutions as to how they will enter adult life.

As identity development is a general concern for young people of many backgrounds, adolescents with an ethnic minority background often find that this issue is of particular concern in their lives (Phinney, 1996). When developing one's identity, ethnic minority youths must come to terms with the cultural values of their own ethnic group as well as those of the mainstream culture (Guanipa-Ho and Guanipa, 1998). It has been reported that ethnic minority group youths stand in two or more cultures and they must come to understand and live within both; this task demands a different kind of identity formation process than that of majority group adolescents (Reijneveld, et al., 2005). In addition these ethnic minority group youths must often come to terms with the low status associated with their ethnic groups as well as confronting prejudice and discrimination (Pahl

and Way, 2006). According to Aronson et al. (2007), individuals with ethnic minority group backgrounds are often victims of discrimination.

If identity is considered an important concern for young people in general, and for ethnic minority individuals in particular, then this process must be especially difficult for ethnic minority youths who are unaccompanied refugee minors. These unaccompanied minors are often fleeing from traumatic circumstances and must deal with many demanding challenges. Firstly, they often come from conditions of war, in which many of their friends and relatives have died. Secondly, they are alone, without their parents to support and guide them through the stressful circumstances of leaving their homelands. And thirdly, they are entering a foreign country to which they must try to adapt. Factors such as the above may place these individuals at risk for developing psychosocial problems (Mels, Derluyn & Broekaer, 2008). Situations such as these can make the process of forming an identity especially difficult for these youths.

Research has shown that the support a young person receives from his social and cultural environments, as well as significant others are essential for gaining knowledge about one's culture. Oppedal et al. (2004) and Sperm (2007) found that social support from friends and families enhances the exploration of both one's ethnic cultural competence as well as one's host cultural competence. Concern for economic problems, longing for one's family back home, and the experience of discrimination are stressful life events that may affect identity

development among unaccompanied minor refugees (Christoffesen, 2007).

Negative experience of stress and discrimination have been related to increased identity exploration (Anthis, 2002a; Antthis 2002b; Høgsæth, 2006; Kroger and Green, 1996). Likewise, an experience of sexiest discrimination as a stressful life event has been shown to be associated with increased identity exploration in women who encounter this kind of experience in the workplace (Anthis, 2002a).

To date, little research has been undertaken on ethnic discrimination and its role in ethnic identity development. My goal in this study is to investigate a possible link between the experience of ethnic discrimination, identity crisis, and ethnic identity exploration. Therefore my research question is: *Is ethnic discrimination a factor that triggers identity crisis in unaccompanied minor refugees in Norway which, in turn, leads to ethnic identity exploration?* My research question will be limited to the study of unaccompanied minor refugees living in Norway. It will also be limited to adolescent boys, as there are far fewer girls than boys seeking asylum in this country (Eide, 2001).

Purposes of the study

Ethnic identity development is an important aspect of the identity formation process among adolescents of ethnic minority group backgrounds. Erikson (1968) has described how finding vocational, ideological, and relational commitments are extremely important tasks in his fifth psychosocial stage of personality development--Identity vs. Role confusion. Other researchers (e.g. Phinney, 1989; Phinney 1992; Phinney, 1996) have also stressed the importance of achieving one's sense of ethnic identity during adolescence among ethnic minority youths . Two major contributory factors to the formation of one's ethnic identity are one's feelings about perceived discrimination, stereotyping of one's ethnic group as well as the knowledge of the low status that one's ethnic minority group may have within the host culture (Phinney, 1989; Pahl and Way, 2006). Among ethnic minority adolescents, unaccompanied minors are considered to be at a high risk for mental health difficulties (Derluyn, Mels and Broekaert, 2009; Huemer et al., 2009; Bean, Eurelings-Bontekoe & Spinhoven, 2007). Unaccompanied minors face the same identity challenges of other ethnic minority adolescents, but in addition, they are often alone in a new environment with less social support than their peers (Mels et al., 2008; Derluyn et al., 2009). This study aims to investigate factors impacting the ethnic identity formation process for a group of unaccompanied male minors living in Norway. More specifically, it will explore the relationship between experiences of ethnic discrimination and the potential

role it plays in ethnic identity exploration. Furthermore, it also aims to test whether or not the experience of an ethnic identity crisis may be a mediating factor between ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration

Identity development in Adolescence

In modern times, when individuals are faced with choices in the various roles and values they may adopt, identity has become an important dimension of the human experience. The word identity is commonly used in everyday life, as we often hear the expression, “Everyone has the right to his or her own identity” (Verkuyten, 2005). We are all unique individuals with our own individual personalities. But what do we really mean when we use the term identity? Is identity reflected in being a man or a woman? Is it present when one has become a mature adult? Or is it when one feels that one has become a successful career person? At what point can we say that one has attained a sense of identity?

The process of identity development is something individuals generally try to resolve during adolescence and young adulthood. Various studies within the field of identity emphasize the importance of identity achievement at the developmental phase of adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Adolescence is a time when young people experience diverse physical, emotional, and social changes in their lives, and it is also a time when they "have to make

important decisions that impact on various domains of their current and future lives, such as leisure time, work and relationships" (Luyckx, 2006, p, 7). Thus, identity issues tend to come to the forefront among psychological needs during adolescence.

Erikson's Concept of Identity

Erikson (1968), the first psychoanalyst to define the concept of identity, devoted most of his major work to studying the psychosocial transitions that human beings experience over their life span. His curiosity and interest in the field of life span personality development led him to develop an 8-stage life cycle model, with each stage requiring some form of resolution to a task or a crisis before one can experience optimal personality development (Erikson, 1968; Luyckx, 2006; Kroger, 2007). Optimal task resolution at each phase of the life span is essential for the satisfactory resolution of future psychosocial tasks (Santrock, 2006).

According to Erikson (1968), the fifth stage of psychosocial development refers to a time when an adolescent is faced with the issue of resolving the "Identity versus Role confusion" task. For Erikson, the core to achieving an identity lies in the time an individual spends in a period called "moratorium"--a time when the individual explores different identity alternatives before committing to one set of identity-defining roles and values (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). With this in mind, the inability to make commitments to any kind of

identity-defining roles or values is referred to as a state of identity confusion (Erikson, 1968). During a moratorium, the young person actively searches for some potential vocational, ideological, and relational commitments, the basis for individual identity (Erikson, 1968).

The experience of an achieved identity is described by Erikson as a sense of being at peace with oneself and at peace with others (1968). Furthermore it is also characterized by a "feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of 'knowing where one is going' and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" (Erikson 1968, P, 165). For Erikson (1968), the achievement of one's identity at the stage of adolescence is essential. He considers identity to be the foundation for optimal transition to adult life and the successful resolution of later psychosocial tasks. Thus resolving questions of identity during adolescence provides the foundation psychological development during adulthood; Erikson considers adolescence to be a fundamental transitional period in a person's life (Verkuyten, 2005).

Marcia's Identity Statuses

Marcia (1967) developed his identity status model based on an extension of Erikson's concept of ego identity. Marcia and Erikson agree that the process of identity formation is an important aspect of adolescence. For Marcia, identity development is characterized by two distinct processes, exploration and

commitment. The concept of crisis or exploration is described as a time when the individual examines and explores different alternative roles and values such as choice of career and, ideological, and sexual values before committing to a specific alternative (Erikson, 1968). By contrast, commitment is understood to be the time when a person makes meaningful decisions about where to invest time and energy in the societal roles that are available (Erikson, 1968). However, a person can commit to ideological values without searching, and this type of commitment is referred to by Marcia (1967) as identity foreclosure. In contrast to Erikson's theory, Marcia believed that the construct of identity consisted of four, not two, different dimensions, or styles by which youths make identity-defining decisions. According to Marcia, the identity formation process may have four distinct phases: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. The four phases illustrate the various ways an adolescent might approach the process of making identity-defining decisions.

"Identity diffusion" refers to an adolescent's inability to explore and commit to various sets of roles and ideological values. This status is a period where the young person basically does not show willingness or a desire to explore identity issues or show any form of commitment (Marcia, 1967). A person that falls within the status of identity diffusion often experiences high levels of neuroticism and anxiety (Luyckx, 2006). Such persons have low self-esteem and also have the tendency of experiencing problems at school as well as a hard time

in building intimate relationships; they may furthermore be involved in drug use. (Luyckx, 2006).

“Identity foreclosure” is characterized by making a commitment to roles and values without searching and evaluating different alternatives beforehand (Marcia, 1967). Foreclosed adolescents have low experiences of anxiety and often have good relationship with others; however they tend to be less open-minded and avoid any kind of change (Luyckx, 2006). Foreclosures have the tendency to avoid conflict; they also tend to be very authoritarian and rigid in their values (Luyckx, 2006).

“Moratorium” is the identity status in which individual explores different roles and values but has not yet made commitments to particular vocational, ideological, and sexual roles. The moratorium status is characterised by a "high level of moral development and cognitive complexity" (Luyckx, 2006, p, 12). Moratorium adolescents are open to new experiences; this in some cases makes it easy for them to be persuaded into drug use (Luyckx, 2006). Furthermore these adolescents have the tendency to be insecure in their attachment styles (Kroger, 2004).

“Identity achieved” adolescents have undertaken a high level of identity exploration, and they have made strong identity-defining commitments. These individuals spend time searching and evaluating various identity choices before making a firm decision (Marcia, 1967). Their sense of autonomy makes them less

likely to conform to the opinion of others (Luyckx, 2006). Adolescents of this status often display characteristics such as high levels of self-esteem and an internal locus of control (Luyckx, 2006).

Ethnic Identity Development

Identity issues are something that most young people seek to resolve. When identity is functioning well, it can be taken for granted. However, when one experiences issues of difference, such as with ethnicity, cultural difference and race, identity questions often become even more prominent. According Guanipa-Ho and Guanipa (1998), identity development is a complex situation for adolescents in general; however for young people with an ethnic minority background, this process is even more difficult. These young people have not only their own cultural orientation to consider, but also that of the mainstream culture. These individuals must come to terms with the values and beliefs represented by their parents, as well as gaining a meaningful understanding of the cultural values within the mainstream society (Guanipa-Ho and Guanipa, 1998). These factors act together and may make the process of ethnic identity formation very stressful.

Ethnic identity development is a concept that is difficult to define; it is often misunderstood and in many cases misinterpreted to be associated with race. But race and ethnicity are two concepts with different meanings. Holcomb-McCoy (2005) describe race as the biological aspect of a particular group that

make them different from other groups, whereas ethnicity refers to a group's shared values, behaviours and language that are related to the cultural heritage of a specific group (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). According to Phinney (1996), to understand the concept ethnicity and its psychological implications, one needs to examine the various elements of this concept. The author argues that ethnicity consists of three components: (1) group cultural values (the values and behaviors specific to the particular ethnic group to which one belongs), (2) minority group status, or the prejudice and discrimination imposed upon minority groups by the majority group and (3) the individual's ethnic identity (the feeling of being part of a specific ethnic group).

In some cases, people refer to ethnicity as culture (Phinney, 1996). This is because the two terms similarly apply to the same aspects of values, attitudes, behaviors and norms that we associate with ethnic group heritage--something transferred from generation to generation. Ethnicity, as a minority status, may have some implications for people with an ethnic minority background, especially among ethnic groups of color; this status may bring about feelings of powerlessness, being discriminated against, as well as encounters of prejudice because of one's membership to a particular ethnic group. As mentioned in the perceived discrimination section, ethnic minority groups are often a target for discrimination and prejudice.

Verkuyten (2005) also comments on this issue. He argued that when scholars discuss ethnic minority status, they focus more on the kind of low status that minority groups often have in society and how individuals from the majority group are more privileged than those of the minority group. He disagrees with the major focus that is often placed on one's minority status and stresses on the fact that although this kind of focus might help us to understand the situations that minority groups may face, putting so much emphasis on discrimination can only keep us from gaining a deeper understanding of other experiences related to ethnic identity development (Verkuyten, 2005). In addition, he emphasizes that the history of an ethnic minority group, their homeland, as well as their culture are three important sources that impact ethnic minority youths in their identity formation experiences (Verkuyten, 2005).

Another component of ethnicity, ethnic identity, is a complex, multidimensional term. Phinney (1996) defines ethnic identity as “an enduring foundational aspect of the self that includes a sense of membership in an ethnic group and the attitudes and feelings associated with that membership” (p. 922). Although ethnic identity is a concern for most people with an ethnic minority background, this concern becomes a major issue for ethnic groups of color. Phinney (1996) also found that the way in which people value their ethnic identity varies across individuals and groups. The more value a person places on his or her ethnic identity, the more impact it may have on the way that person views him or

herself. Basically, a strong sense of ethnic identity might have a positive influence on an individual's sense of well-being. Moreover, the feeling of having a strong sense of ethnic identity may differ among members of the same ethnic group. While one person may have a positive view of his ethnic group's values and appreciate them, another person may perceive these same values in a negative way. Also, over a period of time, one's mode of addressing ethnic identity concerns may change. One may swing from not showing any interest in one's ethnic background to a process of searching and making meaningful commitment to one's ethnic group and one's place in the majority culture. Hopefully, an individual will attain a sense of ethnic identity and well-being by feeling as part of their particular ethnic group or as a member of the majority culture (Phinney, 1996).

Phinney (1992), describes ethnic identity as being embedded in an individual's social identity. Social identity is one's perception of him self taken from the knowledge, emotions and values the person experiences as being a member of an ethnic group. Verkuyten (2005) agrees with Phinney (1992) on this point. He argues that ethnic identity is regarded by most scholars as a person's social or collective identity (Verkuyten, 2005). Verkuyten's definition of social identity is described as the interaction between an individual and the surroundings. He also emphasized the fact that, as a person begins to see him- or

herself as part of their ethnic group, the person's feelings, thoughts and actions come into line with their group's values.

According to Verkuyten (2005), it is important to distinguish between the concept of social identity and a person's subjective experience of him or herself. He illustrates by giving an example from one participant in his 2005 study. The participant, of Chinese origin, saw herself as being Dutch, but felt that others perceived her as Chinese because of her appearance. To Verkuyten, a person's ethnic identification does not necessary need to be in line with their social identity. He says that a person's self identification refers to the individual's psychological understanding of himself, whereas social identity is more of a socially constructed phenomenon, or the way the society perceives the individual. Phinney (1992) also stressed the distinction between these two concepts. The author referred to self identification as the kind of ethnic label an individual applies to herself, but that social identity (or ethnicity as referred to by Phinney 1992) is the ethnic heritage that members of the group have attained over the years. According to Phinney (1992, p. 158), "self-identification as a member of an ethnic group is a necessary precondition for ethnic identity and should be explicitly assessed in order to avoid confounding ethnic identity with ethnicity".

When developing one's ethnic identity there are several steps that one undergoes to optimally resolve this task. Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development suggests that ethnic identity development is a process that occurs

during adolescence and involves exploring various aspects of one's ethnic group heritage, such as the values, behaviours and cultural beliefs related this ethnic group. Phinney (1996) has developed a three stage model of the ethnic identity formation process: (a) An unexamined stage - here a person either accepts the view their ethnic group holds, or they may simply take the view that the mainstream society holds about their ethnic group without further consideration, (b) moratorium/exploration stage -- here the individual explores the values, behaviours, and cultural practices of their ethnic group. (c) The achieved ethnic identity stage – here the individual has searched for and examined the views and values embedded in their ethnic group and formed commitments regarding the roles that these ethnic values will play in their lives.

The Importance of Ethnic Identity Development

A number of research studies suggest that ethnic identity is an issue that is of a great concern amongst young people with ethnic minority backgrounds. Studies have shown that a well-defined ethnic identity is associated with psychological well being, high self esteem, low depression, and less drug use (Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff, 2007; Verkuyten and Brug, 2002; Marsiglia et al., 2001; Phinney, 2004). Moreover, a well-defined ethnic identity has also been shown to serve as a buffer against prejudice and discrimination (Verkuyten and Brug 2002; Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff, 2007).

Umana-Taylor and Updegraff (2007) conducted a study to explore the links between perceived discrimination, self-esteem, and depression symptom. Their findings showed that a positive self-concept, assessed in terms of ethnic identity and self-esteem levels, had the potential to minimise perceived discrimination and other negative affects and risk potentials. Umana-Taylor and Updegraff (2007) also reported that as levels of adolescent ethnic identity achievement increased, self-esteem also increased. This finding may indicate that high self-esteem can reduce the risk of perceived discrimination as well as improve upon some mental health dimensions. Their results, furthermore showed that when participants reported increased experiences of discrimination, self-esteem decreased; this decrease in self-esteem was associated with further depressive symptoms. However, when participants reported increased exploration as well as resolving questions of ethnic identity, self-esteem also increased. Discrimination associated with self-esteem had both a direct and indirect effect on participants' depressive symptoms.

The findings above were especially evident among boys more than in girls. It may be that ethnic minority boys were more exposed to the majority culture than ethnic minority girls. Girls from a Latino background, were more family-oriented and were expected by their family members to be at home and to help out with domestic issues, while the Latino boys were more likely to socialize with people from the host culture. However, their frequent exposure to

mainstream society may also place these boys in a more vulnerable position for the experience of discrimination. Nevertheless, further findings indicated that the frequent involvement of participants with their cultural traditions could buffer the effect of discrimination on self-esteem. In the case of male participants, the less the involvement with ethnic cultural traditions, the more significant the negative impact of discrimination was on mental health and self-esteem factors. This association was not found in the males with higher levels of ethnic cultural orientation.

Pahl and Way (2006) found that perceived racial discrimination may highlight aspects of ethnic identity. Their study showed that the perception of peer discrimination has a greater effect on their lives during the time of ethnic identity exploration than it had on an adult who is likely to have established a sense of identity. Further findings suggested that a strong sense of ethnic identity may protect the individual against the negative effects that discrimination may have on mental health. The study noted that Black adolescents who had a strong affiliation with their ethnic group and a strong sense of pride and positive reflection on being black could reject the negative label associated with being black. These adolescents had the tendency to also explore their ethnic backgrounds because of their history of African American struggles. However this same finding was not shown in the Latino participants of this study. The results suggest that Latino adolescents spent less time exploring their ethnic identities, as these youths were

more likely to be perceived as part of a majority group. This circumstance may create a sense of ethnic support during the time of ethnic identity development.

Spending time exploring one's ethnic identity has been associated with increased positive responses towards one's ethnic group, and this association has also been linked with increasingly positive self-concepts and a reduction of behavioural problems. A study by Wissink et al. (2008) suggested that Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch youth spent more time exploring their ethnic backgrounds than adolescents of Dutch origin. This exploration was associated with a favourable feeling about one's ethnic group. The study suggests that stimulating ethnic identity exploration and commitment to one's ethnic identity may have positive mental health outcomes. A comparison study done between Surinamese and Dutch adolescent's showed that youths with a Surinamese ethnic background had more frequent experiences of discrimination than Dutch youths (Verkuyten and Brug 2002). Further findings also suggested increased concern about one's ethnic identity within the Surinamese group compared with their Dutch peers (Verkuyten and Brug 2002). There was also a much higher level of ethnic identity exploration and achievement among the Surinamese youth than that of the Dutch adolescents.

A study by Marsiglia et al. (2001) suggests that an individual's ethnic label and sense of ethnic pride may be associated with drug use. Their findings reported that minority students who had a positive feeling of ethnic pride were

less likely to use drugs. These findings were not, however, replicated among white peers who also held a strong sense of ethnicity. In fact, the more pride these white youths felt about their ethnicity, the more they used drugs. On the other hand, Marsiglia et al. (2001) showed that the more an individual associated with their ethnic group, the more they tended to use drugs. However the study stressed that an ethnic label on its own could not predict the use of drugs among the different ethnic groups. The authors concluded that it was the mixture of ethnic labeling and use of various ethnic identity measures that predicted drug use among these youths with different ethnic backgrounds.

A person's relationship with his or her ethnic group has been shown to be associated with psychological adaptation. Wong et al. (2003) found that African American adolescents' good relationships with their ethnic groups buffered them from the effect of discrimination. Their responses to discrimination were also linked with the African American parental strategy of preparing their children to face negative societal stereotypes about their ethnic group. Wong et al. (2003) stressed that the families of these youths helped them to understand why their ethnic group experienced discrimination; the families also encouraged their teens to aspire to academic success at school. The study also showed differences in how these adolescents coped with discrimination. The experience of discrimination may trigger either academic accomplishment or academic failure.

Unaccompanied refugee minors in Norway

The number of people seeking asylum in Norway has been increasing over the past two years. A report by UNHCR shows that in 2008, among the 51 countries included in their report, where the asylum seekers want to seek asylum, "an estimated 383,000 asylum applications were recorded in the course of the year, 41,600 more than the year before" (UNHCR, 2009, p. 4). This figure represents an increase of 12 per cent, when compared to the previous year. This increase is reported to be higher in the European countries; there are nearly 13 percent more claims in 2008 than in 2007 (UNHCR, 2009). Among those seeking asylum, some are children travelling without parents or caretakers; these children are called "unaccompanied refugee minors".

In Norway, unaccompanied refugee minors, also called separated children, are defined as "children under 18 years who come as asylum seekers or transfer refugees, either alone or with someone" (Eide, 2000, p 14). In some cases these children are accompanied by other adults such as uncles, aunts or older siblings. For this reason, the Norwegian definition of unaccompanied refugee minors is broader than that of UNHCR (2004) which defines them as " children under 18 years of age who have been separated from both parents and not being cared for by any adult who by law or custom is responsible to do so" (p. 2). Not only does the Norwegian definition apply to the UNHCRs definition but it also takes into account minors who are accompanied by other adults when they enter Norway.

According to Eide (2000) the Norwegian definition indicates that Norwegian authorities consider all refugee children under 18 who are without their parents as a particularly vulnerable group. The vulnerability and the need for special protection makes the process of identifying unaccompanied refugee minors, as distinct from other asylum seekers, more crucial at the beginning of the asylum process. For this reason, most asylum seeking countries are developing better systems for identifying this group of children.

The word asylum seeker refers to a person who seeks protection from being persecuted based on their race, nationality, religion or their political view (Statistics Norway, 2007). Unaccompanied refugee minors generally meet this definition. They are commonly fleeing from their countries or origin to come to a safer place, both to avoid armed conflict and also to avoid being forced into the military (Eide, 2000). Sometimes situations such as hunger, rebellion, or disasters can be the cause of fleeing for this group. It has been argued that in most cases the reason for escape is involuntary, and that parents or others often send the children away to be with other relatives (UDI 2006).

A number of youths over the age limit have tried to enter new host countries as unaccompanied minors. Various methods have been used to address this problem. In some countries, a combination of age assessment methods and wrist x-ray examinations are used to identify age (UNHCR, 2004). The most commonly used method of age assessment here in Norway has been through tooth

and wrist x-ray examination. Results from these age assessment tests have shown that only about half of those who took the test were under 18 (UDI, 2006b, UNHCR, 2004).

Since the 90s, the numbers of unaccompanied refugee minors coming to Norway have increased, and most are boys (Eide, 2000). They come from countries with conflict such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka (Eide, 2000; UDI, 2006a). According to report by Statistics Norway (2007, p. 5), from the year 1996 to 2005, about 4824 persons have applied for resident permit as an unaccompanied minor; moreover out of these 4824 persons, 3041 of them have been given a resident permit and a personal number. In 2003 there were about 12,800 unaccompanied refugee minor application claims in 28 countries. Norway was among the countries receiving the most applications, with about 920 asylum applications (UNHCR, 2004). While 2001 was the peak year for major claims from unaccompanied refugee minors in the world (UNHCR, 2004), it was not until 2002 that Norway received its highest number of applications, with about 894 asylum claims (UDI, 2006a; UDI, 2006b). This group consisted of people from over 60 countries, most of them from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

When an unaccompanied refugee minor applies for asylum in Norway, the individual is placed in an asylum reception center for minors while waiting for the application to be processed. In general, the processing period takes up to 6,5

months (UDI, 2006a). This means that a person might have to spend about 6 months or more at the asylum reception center before getting a response from the Norwegian authorities. Once an unaccompanied refugee minor is given a resident permit, he or she is resettled in various municipalities, where they receive help from a legal guardian (UDI, 2009). A guardian is meant to ensure that the minor receives the care and help they need throughout their stay in Norway (UDI, 2006a). Additionally a guardian is supposed to protect the child's rights as well as play a supporting role during the asylum process (UDI 2009). When it comes to the resettlement of unaccompanied refugee minors, the responsibility is divided between the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDI) who are responsible for unaccompanied refugee minors between the age of 15 and 18 years, and the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, who have the responsibility for unaccompanied refugees below 15 years of age (UDI, 2009).

Unaccompanied refugee minors and mental health

Although little is known about unaccompanied refugee minors and their state of mental well being, some studies conducted with this group have emphasized their vulnerability for developing psychological problems. Especially when compared with accompanied refugee minors and adolescents of the host society, this group has been shown to be at greater risk for developing mental health problems (Huemer et al, 2009, Bean et al., 2007, Derluyn et al., 2009). Some of the common challenges unaccompanied minors encounter, such as social isolation and few opportunities to interact with and adapt to their new host country, are factors impacting the mental health of this group.

Hermer et al. (2009) reviewed 22 papers on mental health problems regarding unaccompanied refugee minors. The review was categorized by 5 types of designs, (1) "comparing unaccompanied refugee minors to accompanied minors or non refugees", (2) "quantitative studies", (3) "follow-up studies", (4) "qualitative interventions" (5) "validation of instruments studies". Results from their study showed that unaccompanied refugee minors have higher levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms when compared to the general population as well as to refugee minors accompanied by parents. Their findings also showed that despite the different backgrounds within this group, factors such as their stressful pasts and challenging legal issues contributed to making unaccompanied refugee minors more vulnerable to mental health problems.

Additionally the authors found that an increase in age was associated with psychological distress coming from stressful life events and emotional problems.

Derluyn et al. (2009) compared mental health problems such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress, depression and traumatic experiences among separated refugee adolescents living in Belgium to those of accompanied refugee adolescents living in Belgium with their parents. Their study revealed that two-thirds of separated refugee adolescents were male; moreover this group was more often likely to encounter different types of traumatic experience compared with accompanied minors. Separated refugee adolescents experienced more frequent traumatic life events, depression, PTSD intrusion, avoidance, and hyper-arousal symptoms in comparison with accompanied minors. Result also showed that the more traumatic the experience one encountered, the more detrimental were the mental health problems that one developed. This study concluded that the "interplay between traumatic experience, lack of parental and social support, and multiple losses may be factors that have contributed to the frequent mental health problems among unaccompanied refugee minors" (Derluyn et al., 2009, p. 295).

Bean et al. (2007) examined the cause and prediction of psychological problems among unaccompanied refugee adolescents in the Netherlands. Their data was based on a longitudinal study with a sample of 582 accompanied refugee adolescents, teachers, and legal guardians. Their study reported that refugee children living in the Netherlands without family members showed a significantly

higher internalizing distress score ($p < .001$) than those living with family members; this means that refugee children without family members experience depression, anxiety or some form of behavioral problems (Bean et al., 2007) more strongly than those refugee children living with family members. The authors also stated that the process of being placed in a large reception center and the period of uncertainty surrounding the application for a residence permit have been associated with high levels of psychological distress. In accordance with previous findings, this study reported that unaccompanied refugee adolescents were a group with high experiences of traumatic stress, in contrast to adolescents in the general population of the host society. Bean et al. (2007) concluded that the type of trauma one encountered as well as the frequency of this traumatic experience were better predictors of psychological distress in unaccompanied refugee minor adolescents than age, gender, or nationality.

Hodes et al. (2008) also examined accompanied and unaccompanied refugee minors from the Balkans and Africa, who are now living in the United Kingdom. These researchers showed that the unaccompanied minors had more frequently experienced situations of war and had lost more family members compared with peers who were accompanied by their families. This study also revealed that about half of the unaccompanied minors were at risk of developing posttraumatic stress in contrast to accompanied minors. Further findings in this study were similar to findings from Huermer et al. (2008) that increase in age was

associated with higher levels of psychological distress. The authors reported that the older an unaccompanied refugee minor was, the more vulnerable they were to depression and posttraumatic symptoms. They explained their findings by arguing that as the adolescents became older and were more likely to live alone, they became more aware of the uncertainty of their legal situation in the host country. This uncertainty might be linked with the uncertainty that unaccompanied minors had experienced during previous times of war in their home countries, thus making this group particularly vulnerable to the psychological distress mentioned above.

Other researchers have shown that social support can have a buffering effect on the mental health of unaccompanied refugee minors. Mels et al. (2008) undertook a qualitative study on the implications of social support as a buffer. Based on 12 unaccompanied refugee minor's reports, social support came primarily from the asylum centres; however these same centres were also perceived to be places of social conflict. The authors also showed that unaccompanied refugee minors experienced difficulties when integrating into their new country. They often had difficulty in making friends with other young people from the host country. According to this study, these difficulties may have had an effect on the psychological well-being this group. Social support provided by ethnic groups and peer groups were also important factors that helped them to cope with stressful circumstances.

Derluyn and Broekaert's (2008) case study of unaccompanied refugee minors in Belgium also reported that these adolescents were a particularly vulnerable group with a distinctive need for protection and care. They were also a group with many worries, particularly about the future and their residential status. According to the authors, this uncertainty could be a threat to the emotional well-being of these young people both in terms of their integration process as well as in building a their futures. Further findings also indicated that care provided for these unaccompanied refugee minors living in Belgium was generally poor. One conclusion from this study was that using the "legal perspective as a starting point for the reception and care system leads to the application of lower quality of care standards compared to the native-born children and adolescents, which, of course raises tremendous ethical questions" (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008)p, 328).

The question of whether unaccompanied refugee minors are treated differently from native born children (Larssen and Heryerdahl, 2004) is a debate in Norway at present. Larssen and Heyerdahl (2004) raised several concerns that the manner in which authorities meet with asylum-seeker refugee minors may not be in line with the Children's Convention. Their arguments were that (1) there is little money provided to cater for the needs of unaccompanied refugee minors in contrast to the amount of money given to general child welfare. (2) The standard of the placement institutions is extremely poor. (3) Because unaccompanied refugee minors lack adult support, their rights are not being protected.

Impact of perceived ethnic discrimination.

Discrimination can be defined as an "unjustified negative or harmful action toward a member of a group simply because of his or her membership in that group" (Aronson et al., 2007, p 421). Discrimination is also a behavioural component of prejudice, which is defined as a negative or unfriendly attitude towards people from a particular group, because of their association with that group (Aronson et al., 2007). Prejudice is a perception that is generally learned in the early stages of life through socialization practices by parents, family members, peers, and the media (Jackson et al., 1998).

As people from diverse groups can be victims of prejudice and discrimination, people of a different racial or ethnic group are said to be a "major focal point for prejudiced attitudes" (Aronson et al., 2007, p, 421). Discrimination based on one's membership in an ethnic group is seen as "the most serious form of discrimination" (Oppedal et al., 2009, p. 30). This kind of discrimination is characterized by ethnic minority groups being looked down upon or being treated differently because of their ethnic background (Oppedal et al., 2009). Although the act of prejudice and discrimination towards a minority group might be different across countries, some similarities have been found. These similarities are beliefs and attitudes imposed on minority groups as a low ranking group in the society (Jackson et al., 1998). Likewise, the few political options available to

such groups are also one of the similarities found across countries (Jackson et al., 1998). Being a member of a subordinate group or a low ranking group in a society may bring about some social, psychological, and material disadvantages for that individual (Jackson et al., 1998). In this study, discrimination is referred to as perceived discrimination. Perceived discrimination is said to be an unclear form of discrimination, and is often experienced by those who are being discriminated against as an uncontrollable stressor (Noh et al., 1999).

Not much research has been undertaken on the impact of perceived discrimination on ethnic identity development among minority youths (Umaña-Taylor and Updegraff, 2007). Nevertheless, the few studies that have been done in this area indicate that the experience of discrimination may be associated with negative effects on the mental health and identity development of those who are being discriminated against. A recent report by Oppedal et al. (2009) showed that about 11% of the unaccompanied refugee minors in their study said that they had experienced an attack mainly for being from a different ethnic background. They also found that the experience of being discriminated against was associated with depressive symptoms, but that there were some differences in these results, depending on an individual's nationality. Oppedal et al. (2009) found no correlation between discrimination and depression amongst the unaccompanied refugee minors originating from Somalia and Iraq, but there was a strong correlation between experiences of discrimination and depression among the

Tamil minors originating from Sri Lanka. The researchers concluded that the unaccompanied minors in their study had the capacity to cope with discrimination, apart from the Tamils.

Yip et al. (2008) research on 2,047 Asian immigrants residing in the United States also showed that the experience of discrimination was associated with certain mental health outcomes. Among some of their participants who were 30 years of age, they found discrimination was positively correlated with distress. Furthermore, they reported that a strong ethnic identity can be a buffer against discrimination. Among participants between the ages of 41 and 50 years, those with a strong sense of ethnic identity said they felt less distressed even when they reported that they had been discriminated against. Their study showed that age may serve as a buffer between discrimination and distress in the ethnic identity formation process (Yip et al., 2008).

In a review study of the impact of perceived racial and ethnic discrimination on health, Williams et al. (2003) found that discrimination is related to several degrees of both physical and mental health consequences. Discrimination experienced as an attack against one's self and sense of belonging and may have some impact on psychological well-being. Additionally, frequent encounters with discrimination may have long term effects on the individuals being discriminated against. Discrimination, in general, can bring about distress; however, the authors found that a strong sense of ethnic identity had a buffering

effect on the negative consequences of ethnic discrimination for Filipino Americans 18 to 65 years of age. Nevertheless, a person's country of origin, age and ethnic identity resolution were factors that served as mediators between ethnic identity and discrimination. According to these authors, much work is needed to construct a better understanding of how discrimination affects the psychological well being of those being discriminated against and also how personality differences may be a moderating factor in the relationship between ethnic identity and discrimination. The authors stressed that a more complete understanding of these issues could help ethnic minority group members to develop environmental and psychological resources that may be a protective shield against the impact of discrimination.

In contrast to most of the findings between a well developed ethnic identity and the reduced impact of discrimination on mental health outcomes, a study by Noh et al. (1999) on Canadian Southeast Asian refugees produced contrary findings. Their study showed that perceived discrimination was associated with increased depressive symptoms, but they did not find ethnic identity to be a mediator between discrimination and depression. They also found that those who were already depressed remembered discriminatory encounters; likewise, people who had a strong sense of ethnic identity were more likely to remember being discriminated against. The majority of their subjects who reported experiences of discrimination said that the forms of discrimination they

had encountered were of a subtle nature, such as being treated unjustly or being perceived negatively. According to the study, this form of perceived discrimination was hard to delineate. For this reason, the authors emphasized the importance of future research on discrimination and more refined measures that could detect this interaction.

The experience of discrimination is thought to be associated with identity development. Previous literature has found that various stressors such as gender discrimination, critical life event, death of a friend and losing a job (Anthis, 2002a, 2002b; Kroger and Green, 1996; Høgseth, 2006) may be associated with increased identity exploration and commitment. For example Anthis (2002a) found that the experience of sexist discrimination to be associated with increased identity exploration for women in the workplace; however the author did not find that sexist discrimination predicted decreased changes in identity commitment. She also found that the current experience of sexist discrimination was related to earlier experiences of discrimination; women who reported high levels of current sexist discrimination also said they had experienced similar forms of discrimination in the past. In conclusion, Anthis argued that the reason why sexist discrimination did not have an association with identity commitment among these women might be that the identity commitment measure used in the study was not sensitive enough to detect change. Another reason might also be that only certain types of sexist discrimination, such as the continual experience of sexist

discrimination versus discrimination with regard to some specific event, can have an impact on changes in identity commitment. The author further argued that the 5 month time interval used in her longitudinal study may have been too short to detect any change in commitment level. For these reasons, sexist discrimination may be associated with changes in identity commitments, but that association will appear only over much longer intervals of time.

A study done by Kroger and Green (1996) examined whether or not seven different types of life events (e.g. "influence of significant other," age-graded, history-graded, "critical life event", "lack of opportunity", "different milieu", internal change, and "family life cycle stage") might be associated with changes in identity status in late adolescence, young, and mid-adulthood. The study reported that various types of life events were associated with changes in identity status. "Internal change" was related most often to changes within the moratorium, diffusion and achievement. Furthermore, the influence of a significant other was the life event that was most commonly associated with change from the foreclosure status. The findings also indicated that change in identity status was less related to demographic features (age, sex, education level, marital and parental status, etc.) than to various types of life events.

Likewise, findings of Anthis (2002b) were also in line with Kroger and Green (1996). Anthis' research showed that stressful life events were associated with both increases or decreases in identity exploration and commitment. The

experience of a stressful life event, like financial distress over a period of time, was related to a decrease in identity exploration, and that separation or reconciliation with a spouse or mate and becoming a single parent could be associated with an increase in identity commitment.

Høgseth (2006) undertook a short-term longitudinal study of factors that might be associated with changes in individual identity status. He showed that stressful life events, such as the “changes in the number of conflict with partner”; “death of a friend”; “committed a minor offense” and “loss of a job” were significantly correlated with changes in identity status. For instance, the study reported that death of a close friend was positively correlated with changes in four different types of identity status scales -- “ideological moratorium, interpersonal diffusion and interpersonal foreclosure”. On the other hand, the stressful life event of “losing a job” was negatively correlated with the moratorium scale. The outcome of this research suggests that the experience of a stressful life event may have a positive impact on psychological maturity”(Hogseth, 2006 p, 26).

In summary, the experience of discrimination and prejudice is not a pleasant thing to encounter and appears, generally, to be associated with detrimental mental health outcomes. As such, ethnic minority groups are at risk of becoming victims of discrimination and prejudice. Discrimination is a stressful life event that may contribute to mental health issues such as the increase of

depressive symptoms. The literature stresses the negative impact that discrimination may have on the physical and mental health of its victims.

Unaccompanied refugee minors and identity challenges

According to Erikson (1968), the process of identity development requires information and support from the environment and social networks to which an individual belongs, especially from significant others. For unaccompanied refugee minors, separated from their familiar social environments and the people close to them, these youths are also removed from an important source of support and guidance as they develop their identities. Erikson has described the importance of identification as the foundation for the identity formation process, and most adolescents will identify with parents or other significant adults. But for the unaccompanied refugee minor, what significant others will provide the basis for identification and their identity formation processes? Will it continue to be family members in their homeland, or will it be others in the host country in which they live? In short, who are the role models with whom they will identify during the period of identity formation?

In most research on unaccompanied refugee minors, these youths are often described as a group who are vulnerable to mental health difficulties (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008; Hodes et al., 2008; Mels et al., 2008). This vulnerability can, in turn, present even further challenges for the identity formation process. According to Eide (2000), one will have to be aware of the arenas in which these youths live and work as well the kinds of attitudes the host society holds towards them in order to understand fully the life circumstances of unaccompanied refugee minors and their difficulties with the identity formation process.

Several pieces of research have examined difficulties faced by unaccompanied minors. Barlingdhag (2005) studied unaccompanied minors living in Norway and found that most of them felt isolated from people of the host society and had few or no contact with other Norwegians. In addition they felt that the Norwegians did not show interest in them, especially because of their status as a refugee. One of the participants said that when he entered into a relationship with a Norwegian girl, he never told her that he was an unaccompanied refugee minor because he saw this status as degrading, and he feared that she wouldn't want to be with him because of this. Similarly, Derluyn and Broekaert (2008) also found that having the status of an unaccompanied refugee minor became a hindrance to making friends and interacting with people of the host society. Participants reported that they found it difficult making friends

with peers from the host country. Some participant's even said that they felt like the people from the host society were racist in their attitudes towards them.

Some of the reasons why host society members do not make contact and build friendships with these youths can be seen in the kinds of negative perceptions the media and the society in general holds about foreigners and refugees (Barlingdhag, 2005). Christoffersen's (2007) research on Somali unaccompanied refugee minors in Norway reported that the experience of discrimination, economical problems and longing for family members back home were challenges facing these young people. For instance, participants reported that their status as Somalis made it difficult for them to get jobs, as employers had a judgmental, negative and discriminative view against Somali people.

Challenges like the above may have a negative impact on the mental health of these unaccompanied refugee minors (Christoffersen, 2007). Additionally having difficult economic circumstances may also cause these youths to be excluded from society. According to Christoffersen (2007), in addition to the challenges mentioned above, unaccompanied refugee minors faced identity issues as any other young person at this stage, where they were meant to examine and make meaningful decisions about their ethnic identity as well as planning for their futures. The author found that participants had difficulty aspiring for future events, as they were unsure about what the outcome of their

futures would be. They were also more focused on their current situations than future events (Christoffersen, 2007).

Social support by family and friends are important factors at the time when an individual is exploring his or her ethnic culture and that of the mainstream culture. For example, Oppedal et al. (2004) revealed that support from family and classmates influenced immigrant youths' acculturation processes. Their findings indicated that family support was associated with changes in the way these youths examined their ethnic cultural heritage, whereas the support from classmates was related to changes in how they acquired knowledge of the host culture. As support from both friends and family decreased, the individual became reluctant to explore his or her own ethnic identity and cultural origins as well as the practices of the host culture. Further findings indicated that participants were strongly affected by the experience of discrimination and identity crisis when support from family and friends decreased (Oppedal et al., 2004). Exploring both one's own ethnic culture and that of the host society was also shown to be essential to these youths, especially with regards to the identity transitions of late adolescence. According to the authors, if the young person experienced an identity crisis because of an unpleasant encounter with the host society because of their ethnicity, the individual may be "at risk for developing what has been labelled adversarial identity" (Oppedal et al., 2004; citing Suarez and Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Oppedal et al., (2004) concluded that the experience

of being an ethnic minority group member during adolescence adversely impact mental health outcomes.

Although family support is considered to be an important resource in the process of ethnic identity formation among unaccompanied minors, Spaum's (2007) study suggests peers had a more significant impact on the participant's acculturation process than families. The author argued that separation from family as well as lack of interaction with them may minimize the kind of impact that families might have on the lives of their unaccompanied minors. Further findings also showed that the relationship with peers from a similar ethnic background brought forth ethnic cultural competence; host culture competence was achieved through the support of family members living abroad. In addition, the number of Norwegian friends an individual had also predicted ethnic cultural competence (Spaum, 2006). Other interesting findings showed that contact with family members living in the host country (Norway) did not predict a strong sense of ethnic cultural competence (Spaum, 2006).

Asylum centres are considered to be the greatest providers of social support for unaccompanied minors (Mels et al., 2008). The asylum centres provide both social and emotional support; workers at the centres are considered to be close or significant people in the lives these young people. These workers are the perhaps the most available social resources the unaccompanied minors have (Mels et al., 2008). However, the asylum centre is also a place where the

unaccompanied refugee minors experience stress and conflict, mostly because of the communal living situation.

Hypotheses for Investigation

Very little research has been undertaken on unaccompanied minors. The most recent research that has been conducted revealed that these individuals are often categorized as vulnerable to psychological problems due to the fact that they are likely to be victims of traumatic life events such as war and loss. Some unaccompanied minors have lost or been separated from their parents or families, while others have families but have been sent to safety in other countries. Adapting to life in a foreign country, dealing with the emotional consequences of separation from or loss of some or all family members as well as dealing with normative questions of identity are among the many challenges that unaccompanied minor refugees are likely to face. Erikson (1968) has described the primary task of late adolescence as one of identity development. One particular identity issue of concern for unaccompanied minors is the development of an ethnic identity.

Research to date has pinpointed a number of factors associated with the development of a strong ethnic identity. For example, Spaum (2007) has shown that support from one's family is an important means of acquiring competence of one's ethnic culture. Other factors such as a strong sense of affiliation, pride or positive reflection on one's ethnic background (Pahl and Way, 2006) as well as support from friends (Spaum, 2007; Oppedal et al., 2004) have also been associated with the development of ethnic identity. For unaccompanied minors, these more traditional supports are often absent or minimal. In addition, ethnic minority group members are more likely to experience discrimination and prejudice than host culture members (Aronson, 2002), and unaccompanied minors are also often targets for such practices.

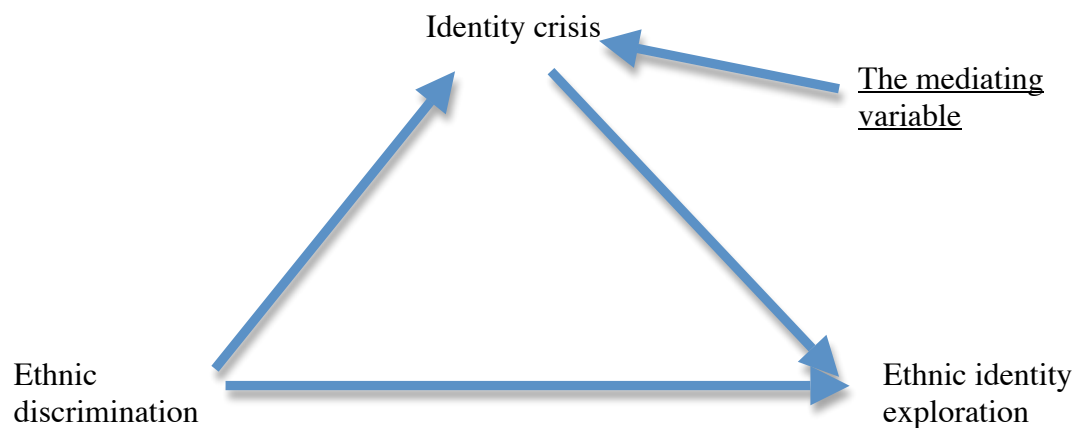
A number of studies suggest that negative experiences of stress and discrimination are associated with identity exploration (Anthis, 2002b; Høysæt, 2006). Høysæt (2006) found that life events such as the death of a close friend, conflict with a partner, or conflicting relationships as well as violation of the law were associated with an increase in identity exploration. Anthis (2002a) showed that the experience of sexist discrimination among adult women is a stressful life event associated with identity crises in these women. The experience of discrimination led to re-examination of identity among these women (Anthis, 2002b). Moreover, discrimination based on race has been documented to be associated with stress (Anthis, 2002b).

Little research has been undertaken on the effect that ethnic discrimination might have on ethnic identity exploration in general; virtually no research has

been undertaken on this issue with respect to unaccompanied minor refugees. Furthermore, is there a direct link between the experience of an ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration, or is this link likely to be mediated by an ethnic identity crises. My goal in this study is to investigate the possible links between the experience of ethnic discrimination, ethnic identity crisis, and ethnic identity exploration. The following hypothesis will be examined: Ethnic identity crisis will mediate the link between ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration among unaccompanied minor refugees living in Norway.

The model I will test is found in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. The mediation model



Mediation Model

A mediator refers to a third variable explaining the connection between a predictor and an outcome variable (Baron and Kenny, 1986). That is, a mediation model represents a more advanced explanatory mechanism for the observed direct linear association between a predictor and an outcome variable. According to Baron and Kenny (1986) three conditions are necessary to assume mediation: the independent variable must be significantly correlated with (a) the mediator variable, (b) the dependent variable, and (c) the mediator must be significantly related with the outcome variable after controlling for the independent variable. In case of complete mediation, the path between the predictor and the outcome variable (i.e., the beta coefficient) is reduced to zero after controlling for the mediator. Complete mediation is however seldom present. More often, partial mediation may be the case, which is present if the mediation path is significantly reduced compared with the direct path, but does not approach zero. If partial mediation is the case, other variables have to be sought and added to the mediation model to achieve a more thorough explanation of how a predictor affects an outcome variable.

Method

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Division of Mental Health, under the Youth, Culture and Competence Program (YCC), provided the data on

“unaccompanied minors” for this investigation. The aim of their project was to learn what kinds of challenges were faced by children and youth, particularly those with diverse ethnic backgrounds, living in Norway today, and what kinds of resources are available for them to help cope with unfamiliar difficulties.

Their several studies are conducted in various municipalities in Norway and included a family study, a study on Tamil youths mental health issues, and a study on mental health issues among unaccompanied refugee minors living in Norway. There were two waves of data for the unaccompanied study, collected over the course of 3 years. I am using for my research the second wave because it contains an ethnic identity measure needed for my investigation. Both waves focus on mental health concerns; however in the wave two data, additional measures, such as an aggression scale, antisocial behaviour scales, and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement (Phinney, 1992) are included.

Subjects

Subjects were 106 unaccompanied male refugee minors from Afghanistan, Burma, China, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Gambia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Somalia, Sri Lanka and The Democratic Republic of Congo. All were boys who were under the age of 18 years when they first came to Norway between the year 2000-2009. Only males were examined in this investigation, since there were far fewer refugee minor females entering Norway and included in the FHI database. Ages of the

unaccompanied minor boys at the time of data collection ranged from 14-28 years. They have been followed by the YCC Study for approximately five years, since 2006. Individuals in the present study participated in Wave 2 of the YCC Study which started data collection in 2008. Subjects were recruited through refugee services or childcare services in municipalities throughout Norway. Most participants are from Bergen and Oslo, since more immigrants are living in these areas.

Instruments

All unaccompanied minor participants received a 224 Item instrument, comprised of the following measures: A demographic survey with questionnaires measuring: Acculturation Hassles; Discrimination; Ethnic Identity Crisis; Posttraumatic Stress (PTS); PTSD Events; Economic Strains; Social Skills; Traumatic Life Event; Social Support; Attachment Structure; Social Network; Culture Competence (Oppedal et al., 2004); Religious Affiliation; The Brief COPE Scale (Carver, 1997) ; Aggression, Moral Disengagement scale (Bandura et al, 1996); Quality of Life Scale (Flanagan, 1982); Family Achievement Values; Social Anxiety Scales for Children and Adolescents (La Greca and Lopez, 1998); Somatisation Language; Education and additional scales such as Center for Epidemiologic studies Depression scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977), and Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement.

For the purposes of this study, only information regarding the measures on reported discrimination, ethnic identity crisis and, Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement, are used. Participants completed a questionnaire that was admitted to them by a trained research assistant under a meeting place at the youth center where the participants live or at a meeting place where they feel comfortable to meet. All questions were in the Norwegian language. Participants were offered a translator when needed and a trained research assistant was also available to assist them with help when they needed clarification of the questions they did not understand. The questionnaires contained items regarding the participants' backgrounds, mental health, identity status and how they related to others in their social network.

Discrimination

The experience of discrimination was assessed by 5 Items. The items consisted of questions such as, "how much do you agree with these claims; 1, *I think that others have behaved unfairly or negatively to people from my culture*, 2) *I, I feel that people from other cultures do not accept me*, 3, *I feel that people from other cultures have something against me*, 4, *I have been teased and offended because of my cultural background*, 5, *I have been threatened or attacked because of my cultural background*". Participants had to answer on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1= disagree, 2= partly disagree, 3= partly agree and 4= agree.

The 5 items were summed up to measure feelings of discrimination. The discrimination measure has been used in a variety of studies and has shown Cronbach's alphas ranging from .68 to .81 (Verkuyten, 1998; Oppedal et al., 2005; Liebkind and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2000). In the present study the Cronbach's alpha for the discrimination measure was .77.

Ethnic identity crisis

Ethnic identity crisis was measured by seven items. Some of the questions were as follows; *It is difficult to decide whether I want to live as a child/young person in Norway. It is difficult to decide if I should live as a child/young person in the country I come from.* These questions were measured on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1= disagree, 2= partly disagree, 3= partly agree and 4= agree. The reliability for this measurement has shown different result across studies. When assessing for ethnic identity crisis in their study, Oppedal et al. (2004) found that the Cronbach's alpha was .59; however Oppedal et al (2005) reported a Cronbach's alpha = .73. The Cronbach's alpha for ethnic identity crisis in the present study is .77.

Ethnic identity exploration

A short form of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) is used to assess ethnic identity status in this study. The MEIM consists of 14 items that are intended to measure three features of ethnic identity: two items consist of questions related to individuals' ethnic behaviors and practices; another 7 items are related to individuals' ethnic identity achievement as well as the process of identity crisis and exploration; and five items assess a person's sense of belonging and their positive attitude in relation to their ethnicity (Phinney, 1992). The rate on the scale for these items ranges from 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 as the highest. In order to decide the total level of ethnic identity achievement, the items are summed. The MEIM is a frequently used measurement in the broad study of ethnic identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006), and it can also be used to study variation as well as similarity within and across various ethnic groups (Phinney, 1992; Vadder and Virta, 2005). The validity for the MEIM is well established, as it has been consistently shown to be positively correlated with various assessments of psychological well-being (Vadder and Virta, 2005). Previous research using this same measure has shown that these items have a good reliability in the form of Cronbach's alpha = .75-.90 (Vadder and Virta, 2005). In the present study the Cronbach's alpha for *ethnic identity exploration* is .78.

Procedure

Lists of unaccompanied minors living in Norway were provided by The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Participants first received a letter with information about the purpose of the project and an invitation to participate in the study. Participants voluntarily choose to take part in the study. Subsequently, meetings with research assistants were arranged, the legal guardians of the participants under 16 were contacted to get permission to participate in the project. Workers responsible for unaccompanied minors in the municipalities were also asked to hand out information to the children and ask them if they would like to participate in the study. The research assistants met the participants in the various municipalities in Norway, mostly in small groups at a location familiar to and convenient for participants. In order to create an informal setting, participants were often served pizza to eat, as they filled out the questionnaires. Participants received information about the purpose of the study, and then they were invited to sign an agreement contract before responding to questions. Participants were provided with a translator if needed, otherwise research assistants were there to clarify any questions they might have. At the end of the meeting, participants received 200 Norwegian kroner in appreciation for participation in the project.

Statistical Analyses

All data were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Science). The presence of a mediation mechanism was tested by using the Sobel test.

Results

Demographic characteristic

The descriptive analyses were conducted to describe the sample in this study (see Table 1). The number of subjects participating in this study were 106, with an age range of 14 – 28 years at the time of data collection ($M = 20.3$, $SD = 1.95$). About 4 percent of the subjects were under 15 years of age, 33 percent between 16 – 19 years of age, and 53 percent above 20 years of age.

The cultural background of the participants was quite broad in terms of nationalities, races, ethnicities and religions. The majority came from Afghanistan ($N = 41$, 32%), followed by Sri Lanka ($N = 18$, 16%), and then Somalia ($N = 13$, 12%). The remaining subjects ($N = 27$, 24%) came from countries such as Iraq, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma, Kazakhstan and China. What were their religions?

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of demographic variables.*

Full sample (N = 106)			
Variables	N (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age (Range 14-28)		20.2	2.71
<15	4 (3 %)		
16-19	35 (32 %)		
> 20	53 (63 %)		
Country of origin			
Afghanistan	41 (38 %)		
Sri Lanka	18 (16 %)		
Somalia	13 (12 %)		
Other	27 (24 %)		
	.		

In Table 2, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviations) and correlations between the predictor and the outcome variables are presented. Correlation analyses were performed to examine the relationship between the three variables: ethnic discrimination, identity crisis and identity exploration. The correlation between *ethnic discrimination* and *identity crisis* was significant ($r = .48, p < .01$). There was likewise a significant positive relationship between

ethnic discrimination and *identity exploration* ($r = .29, p < .01$), and between *identity exploration* and *identity crisis* ($r = .22, p < .05$).

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation for Total Variables

Variable	Sample ($N = 106$)		Correlations	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	X	M
X= ethnic discrimination	2.17	.64		
M= identity crisis	1.77	.64	.48**	
Y= identity exploration	2.63	.84	.29**	.22*

** = $p < .01$ * = $P < .05$

Analysis of mediation

The study examined whether the association between *ethnic discrimination* (X) and *identity exploration* (Y) could be mediated (explained) by degree of *identity crisis* (M). Two of the assumptions for building a mediation model were fulfilled, namely a significant correlation between the predictor and the outcome, and the predictor and the mediator. However, the regression coefficient between the mediator and the outcome was not significant ($\beta = .17, p = .22$) after controlling for the predictor. But as the direct relation between X and M was quite strong (β

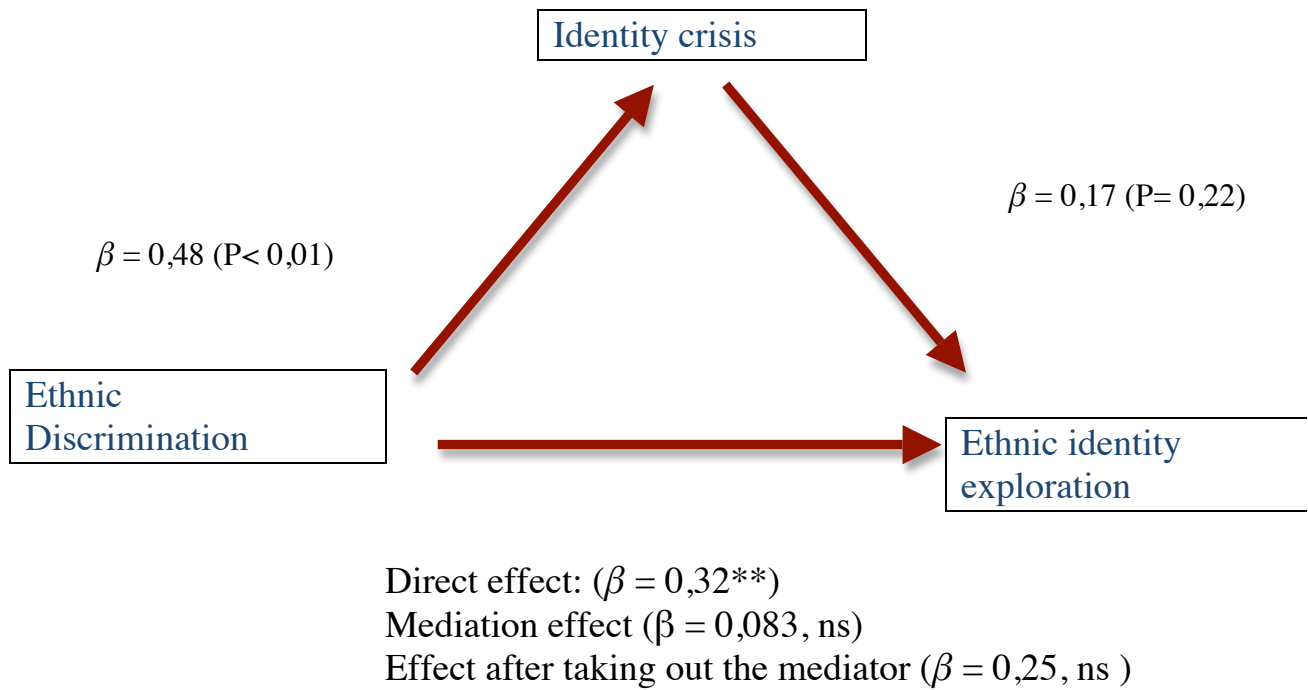
= .48, $p < .01$), the Sobel test was nevertheless conducted. The coefficients from the analysis are presented in Table 3. In the first step, *ethnic discrimination* was entered as a predictor of *identity* exploration ($\beta = .32, p < .05$). In the second step, *identity crisis* was added to the equation. The mediation effect was not significant as the reduction in the beta coefficient from the first to the second step was not significant. The combined mediation path ($a*b$) was hence small and statistically non-significant ($\beta = .08, p = .25$).

Table 3. *Multiple regression of direct and total effect between ethnic discrimination and identity crisis and identity exploration*

<i>Variable</i>	Step 1	Step 2
	β (beta)	β (beta)
Step 1: $\text{Beta}_{Y.X}$		
Ethnic discrimination > <i>identity exploration</i>	.32**	.25
Step 2: $\text{Beta}_{Y.M(X)}$		
Identity crisis > <i>identity exploration</i>		.083

*** = $p < .001$

Figure 2. The mediation effect



Discussion

Finding one's identity is a major concern for most youth in western nations today. For young people with an ethnic minority background, ethnic identity issues are often an additional focal point in their lives. There are several identity challenges that minority youths must face when developing an identity. First they face the same concerns as their ethnic majority peers, such as questions related to who they are, what kind of occupation they should have, what values should they hold

as well as questions related to their sexuality. In addition they also have challenges they may experience, such as prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination based on ethnic group membership as well as the color of their skin.

Amongst ethnic minority youths, unaccompanied minor refugees may face even additional challenges when developing an identity. These young people must explore questions of identity but they must often do so without the support of parents or other close individuals. According to Erikson (1968) the support that the young person receives from his or her environment is an important factor when developing an identity; however for unaccompanied minor refugees this kind of supportive environment is often lacking in as they are living in a foreign land without parents and many family members around them. Most have also experienced stressful life events such as war in their country, death of family members, and they face challenging situations of adapting to their new host country. In addition, they may experience discrimination based on their ethnic background and have low social status as refugees. All of these factors make the process of identity development even more challenging for unaccompanied minor refugee youths.

Previous research has suggested that stressors such as death of close others, economical difficulties, and gender discrimination have been associated with identity exploration (Anthis, 2002a,b). In spite of these findings, however, little

research has been undertaken to explore the relationship between ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration; virtually no published research has examined the relationship between these variables with a sample of unaccompanied minor refugees.

Therefore the main objective of the current study was to investigate the notion that the negative and stressful experience ethnic discrimination might be associated with increased in identity exploration. Furthermore the study anticipated that identity crisis would be a possible mediator between these two variables. Identity crisis has been defined as a time when individuals intensively begin to question their values and roles in life (Erikson, 1968). Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation model was used to test the potential mediation effect of identity crisis on the relationship between ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration for 106 unaccompanied refugee minors living in Norway.

Findings from the current study indicate that there is a significant positive association between ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration. This finding is in line with previous studies that found a link between the experience of sexist discrimination and increased identity exploration among mid-life women (Anthis, 2002a). Similar findings have also been reported by Høgsæt (2006), Anthis (2002b) and Kroger and Green (1996) that showed that various stressful life events have been associated with increased identity exploration. Other findings also indicate that experience of discrimination is associated with distress

and depression (Yip et al., 2008). Additionally, as one becomes depressed, one becomes more sensitive to encounters with discrimination (Noh et al., 1999).

The findings also indicate that people with an ethnic minority background may be victims of prejudice and discrimination (Aronson et al., 2007). Participants in the current study reported several encounters with discrimination, mainly because of their different cultural backgrounds. Some reported that they had been threatened because of their cultural background. This finding is in line with Oppedal et al. (2009) who reported that about 11% of unaccompanied refugee minors were victims of discrimination because they were of a different ethnic background. .

There was also a significant positive association between ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity crisis. This suggests that the perception of ethnic discrimination is linked with an ethnic identity crisis. I found no previous studies that have examined this particular association, even though there are some studies linking the experience of ethnic discrimination with other forms of psychological distress. Previous studies have shown that the experience of ethnic discrimination may be associated with negative effects on mental health, identity development as well as psychological distress (Yip et al., 2008; Oppedal et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2003). A study by Yip et al. (2008) revealed that when their participants under the age of 30 reported experiences of discrimination, they also felt a high level of distress. Likewise experiences of discrimination have been

shown to be associated with depressive symptoms (Oppedal et al., 2009). One interesting explanation factor for the current findings could be seen in the extent to which an individual feels a strong sense of affiliation through his ethnic background or ethnic group.

It has been previously shown that a strong sense of ethnic identity or a stronger feeling of belonging to one's ethnic group may have a buffering effect on the negative consequence of ethnic discrimination (Williams et al., 2003). It may be that participants in the current study had a low affiliation with their ethnic background, and might thus have felt more distressed when they encountered discrimination. However if they had a stronger sense of affiliation with their ethnic group when they encountered discrimination, the outcome of this finding might have been different.

To test whether or not the association between ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration is mediated by an ethnic identity crisis, a Sobel test was conducted. Results showed a non-significant mediational relationship between ethnic identity crisis and ethnic identity exploration. This lack of a significant association may have resulted from any one of several factors. One important reason may be the age range of the participants.

There could have been a stronger effect of ethnic identity crisis amongst the older participants, whilst for the younger participants this effect may be weaker. In that case the effects would have cancelled each other out. I would argue that

there will be a stronger desire to explore one's background for older participants than the younger ones because the older ones have a longer experience, and have most likely lived longer in Norway to see the differences between their culture and the host culture. I believe that the older participants in the current study will feel the differences more than the younger ones, and this might perhaps affect the extent to which they will be longing to know more about their background.

Other reasons could be that the research participants in the present study might have been focusing on challenges other than ethnic identity crises. As we already know from previous research, many unaccompanied minor refugees are struggling with mental health problems (Mels et al., 2008; Bean et al., 2007) and also they experience economic challenges and longing for family members in their homeland (Christoffersen, 2007). According to Phinney (1996), people vary in the way they emphasize their ethnic background thus; some people may place a higher value on membership to their ethnic group, while others may not be so concerned with questions of ethnic identity.

Data regarding ethnic discrimination, ethnic identity crisis, and ethnic identity exploration were collected at the same point in time. Had data on the degree of ethnic identity exploration been collected at a future time point (for example, one year later), then the anticipated relationships among variables may have been obtained. It may be that a longer time frame is needed to demonstrate

the possible mediating effect that an identity crisis has on ethnic identity exploration.

Directions for future research

Further studies will therefore be needed to identify variables that may explain the link between ethnic discrimination and ethnic identity exploration. One might, for example, examine this same mediational model when ethnic identity exploration is assessed at some future point in time. One could also control for age in future tests of this model. One could also examine the model with unaccompanied female minors to test for the possibility of gender differences in ethnic identity exploration.

Summary and Conclusions

The present study enables us to understand how the experience of ethnic discrimination may be associated with ethnic minority youths' identity exploration; moreover, it also adds to the limited number of studies conducted on unaccompanied refugee minors and the challenges they face when adjusting to their new adopted country. Contrary to these strengths there are limitations to this study. As the intentions of this study were to examine whether the association between ethnic identity discrimination and identity exploration may be mediated by an identity crisis, there was no significant support for the mediation effect.

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APPENDIX

Questions Assessing Ethnic Identity Exploration

How do you see yourself	1 Disagree	2 Partly disagree	3 Partly agree	4 Agree
I see myself as a Norwegian				
I consider myself as an Afghan / Somali / Iraqi / Kurd / other....				
I spend time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs				
I feel a strong affinity to my own ethnic group				
I understand very well what				

it means to me to be a part of my ethnic group				
I do a lot to understand my ethnic background better				
I feel a strong connection to my own ethnic group but				
It is important for me to maintain the traditions of my culture				
It is important for me to liked by Norwegian-speaking youth				
It is important for me to be liked by young people from the same culture as me				

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Figure 1. The mediating variable

Identity crisis

Ethnic discrimination

Ethnic identity exploration

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Figure 2. The mediation effect

Ethnic Discrimination - Identity crisis

$\beta = 0,48$ (P< 0,01)

Identity crisis - Ethnic identity exploration

$\beta = 0,17$ (P= 0,22)

Ethnic Discrimination - Ethnic identity exploration

Direct effect: ($\beta = 0,32^{**}$)

Mediation effect ($\beta = 0,083$, ns)

Effect after taking out the mediator ($\beta = 0,25$, ns)