Ethnic Identity in an Intercultural Geography:

An Empirical Study

L'IDENTITÉ ETHNIQUE DANS UNE GÉOGRAPHIE INTERCULTURELLE:

UNE ÉTUDE EMPIRIQUE

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Abstract: This study explored the ethnic identity among 331 emerging adults (144 mestizos and 187 indigenous) from the Intercultural University of Chiapas (México). Scholars suggest that ethnicity is much more salient for ethnic minority adolescents than for adolescents who are members of the ethnic majority. Our aim was to compare the results of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) between the majority ethnic group and the minority group studied. Specifically, the following hypothesis was examined: adolescents who are members of the ethnic minority group (indigenous) will score significantly higher on ethnic identity than adolescents who are members of the ethnic majority group (mestizos). The results supported these hypothesis. We suggest that the effect of an intercultural educative model could explain these results.
Key words: Ethnic identity; Emerging adults; Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM); Intercultural educational model

Résumé: Cette étude a exploré l'identité ethnique parmi les 331 adultes naissants (144 métis et 187 indigènes) de l'université interculturelle deChiapas (México). Les chercheurs proposent que l'appartenance ethnique soit beaucoup plus saillante pour des adolescents de minorité ethnique que pour les adolescents qui sont des membres de la majorité ethnique. Notre but était de comparer les résultats de la mesure d'identité ethnique de Multigroup (MEIM) entre l'ethnie de majorité et le groupe minoritaire étudiés. Spécifiquement, l'hypothèse suivante a été examinée: les adolescents qui sont des membres du groupe minoritaire ethnique (indigène) marqueront sensiblement plus haut sur l'identité ethnique que les adolescents qui sont des membres du groupe ethnique de majorité (métis). Les résultats ont soutenu cette hypothèse. Nous proposons que l'effet d'un modèle éducatif interculturel pourrait expliquer ces résultats.
Mots clés: Identité ethnique; Adultes naissants; Mesure d'identité ethnique de Multigroup (MEIM); Modèle éducatif interculturel.

1. INTRODUCTION

Previous research suggests that ethnic identity is a crucial task in adolescence because of its relationship to the psychological well-being of ethnic minority group members. It has been related to outcome variables such as academic achievement (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006); abilities to cope with racism and discrimination (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007; Umaña-Taylor, Vargas-Chanes, Garcia, Gonzales-Backen, 2008; Wissink, Dekovic, Yagmur, Stams & de Hann, 2008); self-esteem (Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Umaña-Taylor, 2004) and psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Berry, Phinney, Sam, Vedder, 2006). Specifically, ethnic identity was positively related to measures of psychological well being such as coping ability, mastery, self-esteem and optimism, and negatively to measures of loneliness and depression (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts & Romero, 1999; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007).

Different scholars suggest that one area of interest for researchers in identity is the way in which its formation is influenced by contextual processes in the family (Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004), peer (Meeus, Oosterwegel & Vollebergh, 2002), and school domains (Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005). We know, for example, that a cohesive and well-functioning family environment, support from peers and teachers, is associated with a positive identity (Schwartz, 2008).

1.1 Definition and components of ethnic identity

Ethnic identity has been defined in many ways. Some writers considered self-identity the key aspect; others emphasized feelings of belonging and commitment, the sense of shared values and attitudes or attitudes toward one's group (for a review, Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

For us, the ethnic identity is part of social identity. That is, "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). According to Phinney (1990) there are common characteristics with the ethnic identity. The self-identification as a group member, a sense of belonging and attitudes toward one's group are elements of the ethnic identity in diverse cultural groups. She maintains that ethnic identity is "a multidimensional, dynamic construct that develops over time through a process of exploration and commitment" (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 271). It is a dynamic construct because it can be modified during a person's life. So the ethnic identity is also part of the developmental process.

Identity formation is particularly critical during adolescence because the adolescent becomes capable of considering abstract concepts such as ethnicity (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004) and they begin to exhibit social and cognitive maturity (Marcia, 1980). According to Erikson's theory (1968), it is the central task of adolescent. The identity develops through an ongoing process of exploration and resolution of crises that continues throughout the life span. Phinney (1989) proposed a three-stage progression from an unexamined ethnic identity through a period of exploration to an achieved or committed ethnic identity. That is to say, secure commitment to one's group, based on knowledge and understanding obtained through an active exploration of one's cultural background.

Those two theoretical approaches, social identity and developmental perspective, are distinct conceptually but they stress two important components of the ethnic identity, that is, the self identification as a member of a particular social group (with strong attachment) and the developmental aspect of the ethnic identity throughout exploration process (seeking information, knowledge, believes, and experiences relevant to one's ethnicity). We make a distinction, so, between ethnic identity exploration (the cognitive component), defined as the degree to which adolescents have explored the meanings of their membership of the ethnic group, and ethnic identity commitment – affirmation (the affective – evaluative aspect of ethnic identity), defined as the extent to which adolescents feel connected to their group and attach positive feelings to this group membership.

In this sense, Phinney pioneering work (1992) proposed a global measure of ethnic identity based on young adults and adolescents containing three connected sub-dimensions or aspects of ethnic identity. However, a reexamination of the factorial structure with a large sample of adolescents identified two distinct although connected dimensions: affirmation (as well as sense of belonging) and exploration (Roberts et al., 1999). This finding is consistent with other works (Pegg & Plybon, 2005; French, Seidman, LaRue & Aber, 2006; Sabatier, 2008; Dandy, Durkin, McEvoy, Barber & Houghton, 2008).

1.2 Ethnic identity in minority groups

Ethnic identity is particularly an important aspect of identity for ethnic minority adolescents because, in the process of becoming a member of both their own group and of mainstream society, they have to explore the values of the host society and those of their own ethnic or cultural group. In other words, they have to deal with the additional burden of having a dual reference point. Ethnic identity for minority adolescents often becomes an important and overruling aspect of their personality (Phinney, 1990).

Phinney and Alipuria (1990), in a seminal work, showed that ethnic identity issues were significantly higher among minority group (Asian-American, Black, and Mexican-American) compared to majority group (White people and college students). Other empirical studies, with different samples, supported this hypothesis (Phinney, 1992; Smith, 2002; Wissink et al., 2008). Social identity theorists maintain that, especially when people of subordinate groups perceive illegitimate and fixed intergroup status differences, they have to counteract negative social identity and they will therefore tend to stress ethnic identity through a process of reaffirmation and revitalization (Tajfel, 1981).

The ethnic identity issue is meaningful only in situations in which two or more cultural groups are in contact. In a culturally homogeneous society, ethnic identity is not a useful concept (Phinney, 1990). It is evident, so, that all studies of this topic compared minority groups versus majority groups. However, there are few empirical works that explored ethnic groups in divergent contexts. An exception is the work of Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor. She studied Latino adolescents

attending a predominantly non-Latino high school, a predominantly Latino high school or a balanced Latino/non-Latino high school. She concluded that predominantly non-Latino school reported significantly higher levels of ethnic identity than other adolescents. The ethnic identity is more salient for adolescents who are in a minority context than their counterparts who are attending a school where their ethnic group represents the largest ethnic population in the school or is clearly in the majority (Umaña-Taylor, 2004). But, what happens with ethnic identity of the majority group? What happens when two ethnic groups are located in the same space and one of the two is a minority in the social context but majority in the University?

1.3 The context of the investigation: the cultural diversity of Chiapas and the Intercultural University

Chiapas is the southernmost state of Mexico, located towards the southeast of the country. Chiapas has an area of 28 653 sq mi. The 2005 census population was 4 293 459 people. About one quarter of the population is of full or predominant Maya descent (957 255). Most people in Chiapas are poor, rural small farmers. The state suffers from the highest rate of malnutrition in Mexico, estimated to affect more than 40% of the population. In Chiapas there are eight ethno linguistic groups (Tseltal, Tsotsil, Ch'ol, Zoque, Tojol-ab'al, Kanjobal, Mame and Chuj). The tseltal indigenous group is the bigger with 362 658 people (Fábregas, 2006).

In this context, the Intercultural University of Chiapas in San Cristóbal de las Casas opened on August 22, year 2005, to serve as a center for the protection, revitalization, and promotion of Mexico's indigenous languages, traditions, and cultures. The Intercultural University of Chiapas offers training in four major areas: tourism, intercultural communication, language and culture, and sustainable development. The school had a student body of 945 (427 mestizons and 518 indigenous) in the 2007 academic course. The aim is to increase higher education access for low-income youth and accept the diversity of the territory. The spaces are developed with, but not exclusively for, indigenous groups and the curriculum incorporates the cosmovision of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, their knowledge and languages (Tsotsil, Tseltal, Tojol-ab'al, Ch'ol, Zoque) together with the vision, knowledge and languages of the Western culture (Spanish and English).

Which is the effect of this educational context in the ethnic identity of students? Are there differences between mestizos and indigenous?

1.4 Research goal and hypothesis

Our aim in this study is to test whether there are ethnic differences in ethnic identity exploration and ethnic identity commitment – affirmation. Based on theory and previous findings, we expect ethnic majority adolescents to show lower levels of both dimensions of ethnic identity than ethnic minority adolescents. In other words, we expected mestizos adolescents (majority group in social context) to demonstrate lower levels of both ethnic identity exploration and ethnic identity commitment – affirmation that the indigenous (minority group). Moreover, adolescents who are members of the ethnic minority group (indigenous) will score significantly higher on ethnic identity than adolescents who are members of the ethnic majority group (mestizos). So we proposed three hypotheses:

(1) Indigenous will score significantly higher on ethnic identity than mestizos.

(2) Indigenous will score significantly higher on exploration component of ethnic identity than mestizos.

(3) Indigenous will score significantly higher on commitment – affirmation component of ethnic identity than mestizos.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

Participants were 331 students (144 mestizos and 187 indigenous) from the Intercultural University of Chiapas (México). The mean age was 21.7 years (SD = 2.65; range: 17 - 40). There were more females (51.1%) than males. The percentage of ethnic minorities in our sample (56.5%) closely reflects that of the general University population: in 2007, it was estimated that 55% of the students (518) were indigenous.

2.2 Measure

Participants completed the 12-item MEIM (Roberts et al., 1999) in Spanish version (Esteban, 2010; Smith, 2002), developed to provide a way to assess ethnic identity across diverse samples (Phinney, 1992). The MEIM included seven items that are designed to asses Affirmation, Belonging and Commitment component, and five items that assessed Exploration component (Roberts, et al., 1999). Items were scored on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), were coded in such a way that higher values indicated higher ethnic identity. The measure

has a reported reliability of .81 with high school students and .90 with college students (Roberts et al., 1999). In the current study, reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were calculated for each sample separately for the measure of ethnic identity and two of its subscales. Overall reliability of the 12-item Ethnic Identity Scale was 0.84 for the indigenous sample and 0.83 for the mestizo sample. For the 7 items Ethnic Identity Affirmation subscale, reliabilities were .81 and .79 for the indigenous and mestizos samples, respectively. For the 5 item Ethnic Exploration subscale were .76 and .80, respectively, for the two groups.

2.3 Procedure

Prior to beginning the study, the investigators obtained the collaboration and support of administrators and teaching staff members at the University. Participants received information about the aim of the research and signed an informed consent agreement. After that, one member of the research staff visited the University and administered the scale with students who volunteered and, after a random drawing, participated in the study. Completion of the scales took place in classrooms during school hours thirteen classes of different races and different courses. Completion took approximately 15 min on average.

2.4 Data analysis

To determine the factorial structure of the MEIM, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The exploratory factor analysis was conducted in SPSS for windows 15 (2006). For this analysis, cases were excluded pairwise and the analysis was carried out using principal component as the method of estimation and with an oblimin rotation. To determine the stability of the factorial structure of the MEIM across groups, confirmatory multigroup analyses were performed using LISREL 8 procedures (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989).

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Levene test was used to examine differences in ethnic identity and its components among ethnic groups. We used the Welch's *t* test with two samples having unequal variances (in the case of Commitment and Exploration components). The Affirmation subscale includes items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12. The Exploration subscale includes items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10 (Roberts et al., 1999).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Factorial Structures of MEIM

As discussed earlier, it was expected that the items in the MEIM would reflect the social identity and developmental components of ethnic identity. An exploratory factor analysis and then a confirmatory factor analysis were conducted.

Exploratory factor analysis. Results from this factor analysis indicated two factors. The two-factor solution explained 58.8% of the toal variance with Factor 1 and Factor 2 explaining 40.7% and 18.1% of the total variance, respectively. Item loadings for this two-factor solution are presented in Table 1. Factor 1 was made up of seven items and Factor 2 was made up of five items. The first factor was termed Affirmation, Belonging, and Commitment. The second factor was termed Exploration.

Table 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) Items Using a Total Sample of 331 Students

Item	Factor 1 (affirmation)	Factor 2 (exploration)
Happy to be member	**.82**	-.15
Feel good about culture	**.81**	-.10
Pride in ethnic group	**.76**	.05
Understand group membership	**.63**	.13
Clear sense of ethnic background	**.54**	.26
Strong attachment to group	**.53**	.35
Sense of belonging to group	**.45**	.34
Active in ethnic organizations	-.16	**.78**
Participate in cultural practices	.02	**.66**
Talked to others about group	.16	**.54**
Think about group membership	.01	**.52**
Spend time to learn	.23	**.51**

Multigroup confirmatory analysis. Preparation for the multigroup analyses consisted of establishing well-fitting baseline models. Such models were obtained by cross-validating the factorial structure obtained with the exploratory factor analysis before conducting independent confirmatory factor analyses with each of the two largest ethnic groups

(indigenous and mestizos). The standardized factor loadings for each group are presented in Table 2. Across groups the loadings of Factor 1 were in general higher than Factor 2, and across groups items that had lower loadings on Factor 1 also were found to have the same pattern across groups. Such patterns in the item loadings indicated that Factors 1 and 2 had a uniform interpretation. The correlations between the two factors were comparable and high for each of the two ethnic groups: $r = .76$ for the indigenous, $r = .74$ for the mestizos. The results supported the hypothesis of two factors that corresponded to the two theoretical approaches. The two factors were distinct but nevertheless highly correlated.

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) Items for Indigenous (Group 1) and Mestizos (Group 2)

| | Factor 1* (Affirmation) | | Factor 2** (Exploration) | |
| | Group | | Group | |
Item	1	2	1	2
Happy to be member	.80	.76	-	-
Feel good about culture	.85	.78	-	-
Pride in ethnic group	.78	.86	-	-
Understand group membership	.69	.78	-	-
Clear sense of ethnic background	.71	.69	-	-
Strong attachment to group	.72	.76	-	-
Sense of belonging to group	.70	.65	-	-
Active in ethnic organizations	-	-	.67	.59
Participate in cultural practices	-	-	.65	.67
Talked to others about group	-	-	.61	.60
Think about group membership	-	-	.57	.54
Spend time to learn	-	-	.67	.45

NOTE: Interfactor correlations of the two factors for Indigenous, and Mestizos were .078, and 0.76 respectively.
*Factor 1 reflected affirmation, belonging, and commitment.
**Factor 2 reflected exploration of and active involvement in group identity.

3.2 Ethnic group differences

The first hypothesis was that indigenous would score significantly higher on Ethnic Identity than mestizos. The mean Ethnic Identity scores, using the 12-item MEIM, were calculated separately for each ethnic group with 331 participants. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences among groups (mestizos versus indigenous). These results indicated that significant differences existed between ethnic groups (Table 3).

Table 3: Subjects, Means, Standard Deviations and Welch's *T* Test in Two Components of the Ethnic Identity

Component	Ethnic group	N	M*	SD	*t*	Sig.
Affirmation	Mestizos	144	22.85	3.34	12.004	.001
	Indigenous	187	24.08	2.98		
Exploration	Mestizos	144	13.94	2.32	.008	.930
	Indigenous	187	13.97	2.53		

* Range Affirmation component = 7-28   Range Exploration component = 5-20

The second hypothesis was that indigenous would score significantly higher on Exploration component of ethnic identity than mestizos. And, finally, the third hypothesis was that indigenous would score significantly higher on Affirmation component of ethnic identity than mestizos. The mean ethnic identity components scores, using the 12-item MEIM, were calculated separately for components, Exploration and Affirmation. The Levene test for equality of variances determined equal variances not assumed in both components (Table 4). The Welch's *t* test indicated that significant differences existed between ethnic groups in the commitment component of the ethnic identity (Table 5). But these results indicated that there are not significant differences in exploration component (Table 5).

Table 4: Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

	F	Sig.	
Ethnic identity	1,777	,183	Equal variances assumed
Exploration component	1,598	,027	Equal Variances not assumed
Commitment component	5,178	,024	Equal Variances not assumed

Table 5: Subjects, Means, Standard Deviations and Welch's *T* Test in Two Components of the Ethnic Identity

Ethnic group	N	M*	SD	F	Sig.
Indigenous	187	38.1	4.72	5.451	.020
Mestizos	144	36.8	4.97		

* Range = 12 - 48

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that indigenous (ethnic minority group) scores significantly higher on Ethnic Identity and Affirmation component than mestizos whom are members of the ethnic majority group (hypothesis 1 and 3). However, in our sample, contrary to other research, the Ethnic Exploration component did not score highest in minority group in contrast to majority group. An interpretation of these results would require an examination of the experience of those adolescents but a possible explication is that Intercultural University of Chiapas permit to foment ethnic exploration component in both groups (indigenous and mestizos). This University is dedicated to promoting alternatives for the development and integration of different Mexico's native ethnic groups and preserving their languages, knowledge's and traditions. One of the central aims of the Intercultural University is to foment respect for indigenous people and their languages, practices and fight the discrimination and racism that they have faced for centuries. Moreover, not only indigenous people studding in this institution but also mestizo's people live at the University. This may explain why they get higher scores for ethnicity in both groups (although higher in indigenous), as well as almost identical in the ethnic factor exploration. In an intercultural context, where the diversity is accepting, it is hoped that adolescents explore the role of ethnicity in their lives. In this sense, the Intercultural University of Chiapas is a learning support of the ethnicity (languages, dresses, cultures, traditions), as well as in strengthening positive ethnic identities. It will be important for future studies to explore the MEIM scores in another mestizo sample, for example in adolescents that study in Mestizo University, without indigenous or without intercultural educative model. It could be expected these adolescents obtained lower scores in ethnic identity and their components compared to mestizo adolescents in our study.

The purpose for this study was to compare the ethnic identity and their components (exploration and commitment), using the revised 12-item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Roberts et al., 1999; Smith, 2002), between mestizos and indigenous from Intercultural University of Chiapas. In the light of previous works (Phinney and Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, 1992; Smith, 2002; Wissing et al., in press) we expected that emerging adults whom are members of the ethnic minority group will score significantly higher on ethnic identity than emerging adults whom are members of the ethnic majority group (hypothesis 1). The results supported this hypothesis. We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA), showing significant differences in the studied groups.

Our findings suggest three things. The first one is that the indigenous showed higher scores than mestizos in ethnic identity scores (hypothesis 1) and commitment component of the ethnic identity (hypothesis 2). That is, the sense of affirmation or belonging to an ethnic group, together with pride and positive feelings about the group. Specifically, the indigenous showed higher scores than mestizos in item 3 (pride in ethnic group); item 6 (strong attachment to group); item 9 (participate in cultural practices); item 10 (talked to others about group) and item 11 (think about group membership). The second one is that there were no differences in the exploration component of ethnic identity between indigenous and mestizos (the results does not support hypothesis 2). That is, the processes through which adolescents explore, learn about, and become involved in their ethnic group (Roberts et al., 1999). Finally, the results show higher scores on ethnic identity, exploration component and commitment, affirmation or belonging component in both groups. How can we explain these results?

In line with earlier findings (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, 1992; Smith, 2002; Wissink et al., 2008), the minority group (in our study, the indigenous) had shown significantly higher scores on ethnic identity than adolescents whom are members of the ethnic majority group (the mestizos in our sample). According to Phinney the ethnic identity is a social and developmental process consist in develop over time a sense of self as a group member through an active process of learning, belonging and investigation (Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Ong, 2007). This process is more salient in minority or nondominant groups because their membership must resolve two basic conflicts. First, minority group members must resolve the stereotyping and prejudicial treatment of the dominant population. Second, they must resolve the different value systems that there are in a social space. In other words, they must accept a bicultural value system (the ancestral culture or ethnicity and the majority belief and value system) (Phinney, 1990). When minority adolescents that have experienced discrimination and prejudice tend to reaffirmation and revitalization their ethnic identity through a process of exploring the meanings, level of commitment, belonging or affirmation and consequences of one's ethnic group membership in order to maintain their self-esteem (Tajfel, 1981).

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