



**ETHNIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN CHIAPAS: EXAMINING THE
ROLE OF HIGHER INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION MODEL**

**LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD ÉTNICA EN CHIAPAS:
EXAMINANDO EL ROL DE UN MODELO DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR IN-
TERCULTURAL**

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ABSTRACT

This study explored ethnic identity among 410 mestizo students who were attending one of three universities, which varied in their ethnic composition and their educative model. One of these universities was private and had mostly mestizo students such as the public one did. The third educative context, also public, had an intercultural model of education and the students were mixed among mestizo and indigenous. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) was administered to high school students in order to compare their scores on ethnic identity and its components: affirmation, belonging or commitment and exploration. Principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation and tests of mean group differences are performed. The results showed significant differences between

the studied groups. Scores on ethnic identity and its components were significantly higher among mestizos group from University with intercultural model of education than mestizos from public and private universities of the same region. Implications of these findings for education are considered, as they are the strengths as well as the limitations of this research.

KEY WORDS: Ethnic Identity, The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, Intercultural Education model, ecological theory.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora la identidad étnica en 410 estudiantes mestizos que asistían a una de tres universidades, que variaban en su com-

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posición étnica y en su modelo educativo. Una de estas universidades era privada con una mayoría de estudiantes mestizos al igual que otra Universidad pública. El tercero contexto educativo era también público pero tenía un modelo educativo intercultural y los estudiantes eran mestizos e indígenas. Se administró el Cuestionario de Identidad Étnica Multigrupo (CIEM) a los estudiantes con el objetivo de comparar sus resultados en identidad étnica y sus componentes: afirmación e identificación y exploración. Se realizó un análisis factorial de componentes con rotación varimax y una prueba de comparación de medias. Los resultados mostraron diferencias estadísticamente significativas en los grupos estudiados. Los estudiantes mestizos de la Universidad con un modelo educativo intercultural puntuaron significativamente superior en identidad étnica y sus componentes en comparación con los estudiantes de la universidad privada y pública de la misma región. Se consideran las implicaciones educativas de estos resultados, así como las limitaciones y aportaciones de este estudio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Identidad étnica, la Escala de Identidad Étnica Multigrupo, modelo educativo intercultural, teoría ecológica

INTRODUCTION

The increasing presence of visible ethnic minorities has had profound effects on the trainee needs of mental health and educational professionals. In particular, the American Psychological Association (APA) has encouraged “psychologist to recognize ethnicity and culture as significant parameters in understanding psychological process” (APA, 2002, p. 3). A major vehicle for cultivating this understanding has been through multicultural training (Banks, 1993). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of empirical studies investigating the consequence of intercultural education on ethnic identity formation.

The influence of ethnic identity development on adolescent’s achievement, self

concept, self-esteem, well-being, abilities to cope with racism and discrimination, and psychological and sociocultural adaptation in minority groups has been reviewed extensively in the literature (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). However, the role that higher educative context plays in ethnic identity of majority social group has received little attention. This article reviews the definition of ethnic identity according Phinney’s theoretical model and the influence of intercultural model of education on ethnic identity.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ITS COMPONENTS

Many authors have written about the importance of achieving an identity in adolescent development (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). Erikson suggested that one achieves an identity by means of a process of search or exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to a period of active questioning and engagement in choosing among meaningful alternatives. Commitment refers to the presence or absence of decisions in a particular ideology, role, or occupation. In this sense, Phinney (1990) views the process of ethnic identity development as a progression from an unexamined ethnic identity through a period of exploration to an achieved or committed ethnic identity development. Specifically, for minority adolescents, their ethnicity can play an important role in their identity (Phinney, 1992). However, ethnic identity stage theorists propose psychological correlates for each stage of development. This process has not been clearly defined and it has not been proven that it progresses in stages. For example, other scholars have found that some minority ethnic adolescents claim a particular ethnic identity without extensive exploration of it (Hutnik, 1991). While ethnic identity formation theories suggest that ethnic identity development is predominantly an internal or intro-psychic

process, social theorists indicate that ethnic identity is largely influenced by relationships and external forces. According to this perspective, the ethnic individual develops an identity from his or her own group as well as from the “countergroup” (Yeh & Huang, 1996).

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 (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 sense of self as a group member that develops over time through an active process of investigation, learning, and commitment” (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 279). 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.

In line with this reasoning the ethnic identity has two components. The first one is the exploration (cognitive component), defined as the degree to which adolescents have explored the meanings of their membership of the ethnic group seeking information, knowledge, beliefs, and experiences relevant to one’s ethnicity. The second one is the identity commitment – affirmation (the affective – evaluative component), defined as the extent to which adolescents feel connected to their group and attaches positive feelings to this group membership. In order to measure

these components Phinney (1992) develop the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). The revised 12-item MEIM (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999) included seven items that are designed to assess affirmation or commitment component, and five items that assessed exploration component. The MEIM is related to psychological well-being across diverse samples (Roberts et al., 1999; Pegg & Plybon, 2005).

THE ROLE OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION CONTEXT ON ETHNIC IDENTITY

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 (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota, & Ocampo, 1993; Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2006), peer (Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002), and school domains (Esteban, Bastiani, & Vila, 2009; Umaña-Taylor, 2004). We know, for example, that a cohesive and well-functioning family environment, supported by peers and teachers, is associated with a positive identity (Schwartz, 2008). Nevertheless, there are a few empirical works that explored ethnic groups in divergent multicultural contexts. An exception is, on the one hand, the work of Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor and, on the other hand, the studies that analyze the effect of multicultural curricula on ethnic identity (Chan, 2007; Perkins & Mebert, 2005). The first one, suggest that the experience of being a minority foster ethnic identity. The second one emphasizes the nature of educational approach or the impact of multicultural curricula on ethnic identity. Both research lines put forward the role of the context in the construction of the ethnic identity. Specifically, two reasons in order to reply why the multicultural education setting might enhance the ethnic identity development. In short: the experience of being a minority (Umaña-Taylor, 2004) and the nature of the educational approach (Chan, 2007; Perkins & Mebert, 2005).

Umaña-Taylor (2004) 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. Unfortunately, this work does not examine the ethnic identity in a majority group but emphasizes that multiple layers of context could influence on ethnic identity development. Bronfenbrenner's theory defines complex layers of environment, each having an effect on a person's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). In this sense, the university could be viewed as a "microsystem", the immediate environment, through students develop their ethnic identity. Specifically, when a group identity is problematic, for example when a minority group is subject to discrimination or negative stereotyping, group members attempt to assert a positive conception of their group through reaffirmation and revitalization (Hutnik, 1991; Tajfel, 1981). In this line of reasoning, the salience of ethnicity for minority group members has been demonstrated in studies with college students (Pegg & Plybon, 2005; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Roberts et al., 1999; Umaña-Taylor, 2004). Therefore, it would expect minority groups to have stronger ethnic identity than members from the dominant majority.

Another line of research is the effect of multicultural education for the development of identity. Chan (2007) examined ways in which students' experiences of a culturally-sensitive curriculum contribute to their developing sense of ethnic identity. "Culturally-sensitive curriculum" means school curriculum that accepts and merges ethnic, linguistic, and religious students' backgrounds. Perkins

& Mebert (2005) shows the efficacy of multicultural curricula for the development of "racial expertise" (domain-specific racial knowledge). Specifically, the results of the Perkins & Mebert (2005) study support the notion that multicultural education increases children's domain-specific knowledge of some aspects of race. These studies predicted that students enrolled in the multicultural courses or school activities would show increases in ethnic identity development. However, the role that higher education model plays in ethnic identity of majority social group has not been studied.

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 Mayan descent (957 255). However, the predominant state's population consists of Mestizos. That is, people of mixed European and Amerindian ancestry that speak Spanish as their first language. 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 (Tzeltal, Tsotsil, Ch'ol, Zoque, Tojolab'al, Kanjobal, Mame and Chuj). The tzeltal indigenous group is the bigger with 362 658 people (Esteban & Rivas, 2008).

Our study has been developed in three Universities from Chiapas: the first one is public (PubUni), the second one is private (PrivUni), and the third one is public and intercultural (IntUni). Mestizo is the predominant social group in both the PubUni and PrivUni. In this context, the Intercultural Universities are developed with, but not exclusively for, indigenous groups and the curriculum incor-

porates the perspective of the indigenous peoples of Mexico within their knowledge and languages (Tsotsil, Tseltal, Tojol-ab'al, Ch'ol, Zoque). For example, mestizo students learn indigenous languages such as tsotsil or tseltal. The mission of the University is to serve as a center for the protection, revitalization, and promotion of Mexico's indigenous language, traditions, and cultures. Therefore, the aim is to increase higher education access for low-income youth and accept the diversity of the territory (Esteban & Bastiani, 2007; Esteban & Rivas, 2008). This multicultural context offers an authentic natural laboratory in order to study the effect of intercultural education on self-concept (Esteban, Bastiani, & Vila, 2009) and ethnic identity.

OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

The aim of this study was to examine ethnic identity, ethnic identity commitment sub-component, and ethnic identity exploration subcomponent among college students from three different universities in Chiapas, to determine associations or relationships between educational setting (public, private, intercultural) and MEIM scores.

Following Chan (2007) and Perkins & Mebert (2005) it might be expected that mestizo students experiencing an intercultural model of education would contribute to the development of expertise in the domain of racial and cultural diversity. This type of education offers students the opportunity to develop knowledge about indigenous and the ethnicity

of the region. Moreover, in the intercultural university the mestizos are not the predominant group. In 2007, it was estimated that 55% of the students (518) were indigenous. Then, following Umaña-Taylor (2004), we expected high scores on ethnic identity when compared to students, in both public and private universities, who were not enrolled in diversity context. Consequently, our general hypothesis is Mestizos attending intercultural university would have more scores on ethnic identity and its components than would mestizos attending public and private Chiapas universities. Our hypothesis was: 1) Students from intercultural university would score significantly higher on ethnic identity, evaluated by MEIM, than students from public and private universities; 2) Students from intercultural university would score significantly higher on exploration component of ethnic identity, evaluated by MEIM, than students from public and private universities; 3) Students from intercultural university would score significantly higher on commitment – affirmation component of ethnic identity, evaluated by MEIM, than students from public and private universities.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 410 mestizos from the three universities of Chiapas with different educative model and different ethnic composition (Table 1). The mean age was 20.5 years (SD = 3.03; range: 17 - 37). There were more girls (51.5%) than boys.

TABLE 1. The demographic characteristics of the sample by university group

| University | N | Gender distribution | | Ethnic composition* |
|--------------|-----|---------------------|---------|---------------------|
| | | Males | Females | |
| PubUni | 124 | 66 | 58 | 70% mestizos |
| PriUni | 142 | 68 | 74 | 100% mestizos |
| IntUni | 144 | 65 | 79 | 45% mestizos |
| <i>Total</i> | 410 | 199 | 211 | |

MEASURE

We used the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), developed to provide a way to assess ethnic identity and its components across diverse samples (Phinney, 1992). Participants completed the revisited 12-item MEIM (Roberts et al., 1999) in Spanish version (Smith, 2002). The MEIM included seven items that are designed to assess Affirmation, Belonging and Commitment component, and five items that assessed Exploration component, including the original Ethnic Behaviors items (Roberts, et al., 1999). The items of affirmation subscale assess how strongly and positively individuals feel about their ethnic group (e.g., "I am happy that I am a member of the group that I belong to"). The items of exploration subscale assess how an active exploration of one's cultural background (e.g., "I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, its history, traditions, and customs"). 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. Possible scores ranged from 1 to 4. Individual scores for ethnic identity exploration ranged from 1 to 3.8 ($X = 2.33$, $SD = 0.61$); individual scores for ethnic identity commitment ranged from 1 to 4 ($X = 2.88$, $SD = 0.6$) The MEIM is a widely used measure of ethnic identity and is related to psychological well-being across diverse sample (Roberts et al., 1999; Phinney & Ong, 2007). The measure has a reported reliability of .81 with high school students and .90 with college students (Phinney, 1992). This scale showed good internal consistency in our sample (alpha coefficient of .86 for the entire sample and .80 and .77 for achievement and exploration subcomponents, respectively).

PROCEDURE

Prior to beginning the study, the investigators obtained the collaboration and support of

administrators and teaching staff members at the universities. Students received information about the aim of the research and signed an informed consent agreement. After that, one member of the research staff visited the Universities 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 courses. Completion took approximately 20 min on average. The data was collected during September's month of academic year 2007/2008.

DATA ANALYSIS

To determine the factorial structure of the MEIM, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted with responses from 410 students. The exploratory factor analysis was conducted in SPSS 14.0 version for windows. Analysis was carried out using principal components as the method of estimation and varimax rotation to maximize the variance of each factor. Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the relationship between ethnic identity commitment and ethnic identity exploration. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tamhane post hoc test for unequal variances was used to examine differences in ethnic identity among groups (students from IntUni, PubUni, and PrivUni). The Levene test is used in order to assess the equality of variance.

RESULTS

Factorial Structure of MEIM in our sample

Results from the factor analysis indicated two factors. The two factors explained 57.5% of the total variance with Factor 1 and Factor 2 explained 39% and 18.5% of the total variance, respectively. Factor 1 was made up of seven items. Following others studies (Roberts

et al., 1999; Pegg & Plybon, 2005; Smith, 2002) this factor was termed *commitment, affirmation, and belonging*. Factor 2 was made

up of five items and it was termed *exploration*. Item loadings for this two-factor solution are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) items using a sample of 150 students

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Factor 1</i> | <i>Factor 2</i> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | <i>(affirmation)</i> | <i>(exploration)</i> |
| Happy to be member | .87 | -.09 |
| Feel good about culture | .78 | -.20 |
| Pride in ethnic group | .75 | .21 |
| Understand group membership | .68 | .24 |
| Clear sense of ethnic background | .58 | .23 |
| Strong attachment to group | .53 | .43 |
| Sense of belonging to group | .44 | .32 |
| Active in ethnic organizations | -.04 | .76 |
| Participate in cultural practices | .22 | .67 |
| Talked to others about group | .17 | .56 |
| Think about group membership | .01 | .54 |
| Spend time to learn | .21 | .52 |

The relationship of both factors (commitment component and exploration component) was assessed by means of Pearson product moment correlations, overall, for each university

group. Ethnic identity commitment was significantly related to ethnic identity exploration for three university groups (see Table 3). To summarize, these factors are related in this sample.

TABLE 3. Correlations between ethnic identity commitment and exploration variables by universities

| <i>University</i> | <i>Correlations</i> |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| PubUni | 0.87* |
| PriUni | 0.89* |
| IntUni | 0.90* |

* $p < 0.01$

MESTIZO GROUP DIFFERENCES

The mean ethnic identity scores, using the 12-item MEIM, were calculated separately for each mestizo group (PubUni, PriUni, IntUni) and also by sex (see Table 4). An analysis of variance with Tamhane post hoc comparisons was used to examine differences among groups. These results indicated that significant differences existed between groups. Based on post hoc contrasts using Tamhane test, the

mestizo group of students from IntUni scored significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher than all other groups in ethnic identity and its components (commitment and exploration). Mestizos from IntUni ($M = 3.07$) obtained Ethnic identity significantly higher than PubUni ($M = 2.63$) and PriUni ($M = 2.50$); Ethnic identity commitment and ethnic identity exploration were also higher between IntUni ($M = 3.26$, $M = 2.99$) than PubUni ($M = 2.56$, $M = 2.72$) and PriUni ($M = 2.52$, $M = 2.46$). Moreover, PubUni

mestizo group (M = 2.72) scored significantly higher than PriUni mestizo group (M = 2.46) in the exploration component (means differ-

ence = -.258, $p < 0.02$). In fact, is the only significant difference between PubUni and PriUni.

TABLE 4. Mean scores for ethnic identity and its components by university and gender

| | PubUni | | PriUni | | IntUni | | Total | |
|------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Commitment | 2.56 | (.544) | 2.52 | (.676) | 3.26 | (.477) | 2.79 | (.669) |
| Males | 2.56 | (.486) | 2.59 | (.522) | 3.21 | (.472) | 2.78 | (.575) |
| Females | 2.55 | (.609) | 2.46 | (.790) | 3.31 | (.480) | 2.80 | (.748) |
| Exploration | 2.72 | (.563) | 2.46 | (.662) | 2.99 | (.428) | 2.73 | (.599) |
| Males | 2.69 | (.581) | 2.52 | (.435) | 3.02 | (.442) | 2.74 | (.525) |
| Females | 2.78 | (.504) | 2.42 | (.795) | 2.97 | (.418) | 2.72 | (.663) |
| Ethnic identity | 2.63 | (.480) | 2.50 | (.646) | 3.07 | (.414) | 2.74 | (.579) |
| Males | 2.57 | (.482) | 2.55 | (.459) | 3.04 | (.400) | 2.73 | (.525) |
| Females | 2.69 | (.573) | 2.45 | (.770) | 3.09 | (.426) | 2.74 | (.663) |

In our sample, there were no significant differences by gender. The maximum differences between males and females is in the exploration component in PubUni and PriUni but were not statistically significant.

To summarize, the only significant differences in ethnic identity, ethnic identity commitment, and ethnic identity exploration were the differences among the three university settings. Specifically, mestizos from IntUni scored higher on the MEIM than the other groups (PubUni and PriUni). We hypothesized that ethnic iden-

tity (hypothesis 1), ethnic identity exploration (hypothesis 2), and ethnic identity commitment (hypothesis 3) would be higher among mestizo students from intercultural institution than students from public and private universities; the results support the hypothesis. Consequently, the main findings of this study is that students in the public setting with a multicultural mission report higher levels of ethnic identity, commitment ethnic identity and ethnic identity exploration on average than students in another public university and students in a private institution, both without an intercultural mission.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of intercultural education model on ethnic identity using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) with a sample of 410 students from three universities (public, private, and intercultural) of the same region (Chiapas). Our findings suggest that the intercultural education model correlates students' ethnic identity with its two components, commitment and exploration. Nonetheless, our results are open to interpretation, and need to be considered in relation to the findings reported previously by other investigators. It is not possible to conclude that the differences in the MEIM scores simply reflect the educational setting because mestizos are not randomly assigned to universities and there is no data about ethnic identity after and before attending these universities. Further research is needed in order to show the effect of intercultural education on ethnic identity. In this sense, a longitudinal design would permit to obtain a pretest (MEIM scores before attending an intercultural, public, and private universities) and a post-test (MEIM scores after participating in the respective activities of each university).

Two approaches proposed for understanding the effect of multicultural setting on ethnic identity are reflected in the two research lines reported in the introduction. According to Umaña-Taylor (2004) Latino adolescents attending a predominantly non-Latino school reported significantly higher levels of ethnic identity than adolescents attending a predominantly Latino high school or a balanced Latino/non-Latino high school. In terms of social identity theory (Hutnik, 1991; Tajfel, 1981) the ethnic identity minority group members attribute greater importance to their ethnicity than the one that members of the dominant majority do, because in the process of becoming a member of both their own group and the mainstream society, they have

to explore the values of the host society and those of their own ethnic, religion or cultural group (Phinney, 1992). In other words, when people from subordinated 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, 1991). In our study, mestizos attending a multicultural university, balanced indigenous/mestizos, is the group that has obtained the highest scores on ethnic identity. It would be possible that the interaction with the out-group, indigenous, makes identity more salient in the intercultural university. Therefore, the experience of being a minority in the mestizos intercultural university could explain their high scores on ethnic identity, ethnic identity commitment and ethnic identity exploration. Moreover, in the public university lacking a multicultural mission we have obtained higher levels of exploration than students in the private setting. A possible interpretation of that is that there is more presence of indigenous in this university than in a private university. The mestizos of public institutions and, of course of intercultural settings, are involved in the exploration process, seeking information, knowledge, beliefs and experiences relevant to one's ethnicity throughout the differentiation between social groups.

Another possibility is that group differences observed are not a function of the interaction with the out-group, but of the multicultural curriculum or education model, as suggested by some scholars (Banks, 1993; Chan, 2007; Perkins & Mebert, 2005). In this sense, the intercultural university may foster a stronger ethnic identity. When mestizos learn an indigenous language and their traditions, beliefs and customs they could be more conscientious about the ethnicity for differentiation to indigenous. Ethnic identity is meaningful in situations in which two or more cultural groups are in contact, as an intercultural university.

The multicultural curriculum could contribute to the development of expertise in the domain of racial and cultural diversity (Perkins & Mebert, 2005). That is to say, this education model could encourage the students feel connected to their group and attach positive feeling to this group membership (commitment, affirmation and belonging component of the ethnic identity) and foster the process through which individuals explore, learn about, and become involved in their ethnic group (exploration component of the ethnic identity). This process includes questioning preexistent ethnic attitudes and searching into the past and present experiences of one's group and its relations with other groups.

Nevertheless, the results of the present study must be considered cautiously. The results do not explain anything about developmental trajectories. Consequently, it is not possible to assess the longitudinal stability of the identity process we have considered. Thus, as we suggested previously, future research should be conducted using longitudinal approach in order to assess trajectories of identity processes, and to examine the ethnic identity after and before participating in a multicultural educative context. It could be argued, for example, that students at one university may have much higher socio-economic status, access to social capital or mestizo students who are attracted to studying at the Intercultural University may be more culturally aware and more advanced in their ethnic identity development than students who apply to the other universities.

In a similar vein, the current study is limited in its ability to examine the role of ethnic identity on psychological adjustment or the impact of ethnic identity on attitudes toward both the other ethnic groups (indigenous). To clarify the picture, future research should include others measures (e.g., self-esteem, racial and ethnic attitudes or well-being). Further work is likewise necessary to assess the rela-

tionship between ethnic identity and psychological and behavioral outcomes, specifically across various stages of adolescents, ethnicities, gender, and contexts (e.g., ethnically homogeneous vs. heterogeneous schools like in our study).

In line with previous findings (Dandy, Durkin, McEvoy, Barber, & Houghton, 2008; Pegg & Plybon, 2005), MEIM has demonstrated good internal consistency. Factor analysis lend further support to Roberts et al. (1999) solution in which ethnic identity consists of two distinct but related factors, the ethnic identity affirmation, belonging or commitment, and ethnic identity exploration. Therefore, our study supports the bifactorial Roberts solution with a sample that has not been studied before.

Contrary to other studies (Dukes & Martinez, 1997; Fritz & Zhong, 2007) in this sample there were no differences between males and females in ethnic identity. Nonetheless, this finding is consistent with other research (Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999). Further research is needed to clarify the possible relationship between gender and ethnic identity.

The social importance of the ethnic identity is that this construct correlate with adolescent's achievement, self-esteem, well-being or abilities to cope with racism and discrimination. High scores on ethnic identity are a significant predictor of social adaptation and emotional adjustment. Different studies shows that in the case of immigrants and minority groups a strong ethnic identity promote the best adaptation (Berry et al., 2006), well-being (Roberts et al., 1999), and adequate ethnic attitudes (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). So it is very important to promote the multicultural education in order to construct positive racial and ethnic attitudes in this current cultural diversity world (Banks, 1993), not only in minority groups but also in majority social

groups. Previous findings show that students with an undifferentiated or flat white ethnic identity profile scored significantly higher in racist attitudes than participants with other ethnic identity profiles (Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004). In this sense it is relevant to foster the knowledge of ethnic diversity in minority and majority social groups in order to protect and revitalize the cultural diversity.

The results of our study suggest a relationship between Intercultural University and ethnic identity for mestizos. Other mestizos from the same region obtained lower scores on ethnic identity and its components (affirmation, belonging or commitment component and exploration component), most of them attending a private university. It might be that, in line with other studies (Banks, 1993; Perkins & Mebert, 2005) in a multicultural or intercultural education model the development of expertise in the domain of racial and cultural diversity would be better. One hypothesis would be that the contact of cultural groups is positive because it fosters the ethnic identity and the knowledge of the culture diversity.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest the notion that multicultural university influences students' ethnic identity and its components (affirmation, belonging or commitment and exploration). An initial step toward the reduction of negative attitudes toward other ethnic groups is the ability to explore and affirm one's cultural group in order to know, respect and appreciate the traditions, beliefs or costumes of the different social groups. It would be expected that adolescents exposed to multicultural curricula and intercultural settings tend to view people in more positive than negative ways (Banks, 1993; Perkins & Mebert, 2005). In a world where the populations of most countries are increasingly diverse, it is relevant to understand the psychological impact of such diversity. In doing so, further research is needed to explore the impact of sociocultural contexts on ethnic

identity. It is possible that the context of the university in which these youth develop influences their sense of ethnic identity and meaning of self. According to ecological framework all the layers of the social environment are important, including family, friends, community, school, university, social structure, and the perception of discrimination (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Sabatier, 2008; Umaña-Taylor, 2004). One may not be able to generalize these results to differing gender, ethnic, age, and contextual samples. The present study is part of an on-going research line on culture and identity. We are currently carrying out studies to further refine and validate the ethnic identity measure in multicultural settings. Further research is needed to assess the development of ethnic identity and validate the factors of ethnic identity exploration and ethnic identity commitment across various ethnic and contextual samples attending ethnically homogenous and heterogeneous schools.

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