Ethnic Identity Trajectories among Mexican-origin Girls During Early and Middle Adolescence: Predicting Psychosocial Well-being

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BACKGROUND
- For ethnic minority adolescents, including Mexican Americans, a salient domain of identity is ethnic identity (Branch, 2001) which has been consistently associated with psychosocial well-being (Smith & Silva, 2010).
- In addition, research suggests that ethnic identity formation might be a particularly salient process among Mexican minority females (Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, & Guirmand, 2009).
- Research has demonstrated a developmental pattern in ethnic identity that involves greater exploration and resolution over time (Meeus, 2011), and this pattern is apparent during early to middle adolescence (Huang & Stormshak, 2011) through early adulthood (Seyd & Armita, 2009).
- It remains unclear what ethnic identity formation looks like across adolescence, because most studies have focused on middle or late adolescence.

GOALS AND HYPOTHESES
- The current study examined trajectories of ethnic identity (EI) exploration and resolution among two cohorts of Mexican-origin females: early adolescents and middle adolescents.
- We hypothesized that exploration and resolution would increase over time, and that these increases would be greater for middle adolescents than for early adolescents.
- Further, we examined the longitudinal associations of exploration and resolution with adolescent well-being (i.e., self-esteem and depressive symptoms), and expected higher initial levels and greater rate of change of EI to be associated with higher levels of self-esteem and fewer depressive symptoms at Wave 3.

METHOD
Participants
- Data were drawn from a three wave longitudinal study on cultural and ethnic identity among Mexican-origin females (n = 338).
- The majority of participants were U.S.-born (65.7%) and lived with both biological parents (59.8%).
- Early Adolescents (n = 170) 12.27 (SD = 4.8) y/o on average at W1
- Middle Adolescents (n = 168) 15.21 (SD = 4.0) y/o on average at W1

Procedure
- At Wave 1 (Fall 2006) Participants completed self-administered surveys during after school that took approximately 1 hour to complete.
- Participants completed surveys via mail during Spring 2009 (Wave 2) and Spring 2010 (Wave 3).
- Surveys were available in English and Spanish.

Measures
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979)
- Assessed adolescents' global evaluation of themselves.
- 10 items (n = .73-.77), e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."

RESULTS
- The multiple group linear growth models were run by cohort and fit the data well for exploration and resolution (see Table 1).
- The hypothesis that EI would increase over time was supported, as exploration and resolution increased across the three waves. As hypothesized, middle adolescents had significantly higher initial levels of exploration, \( \gamma(1) = 7.55, p < .01 \), and resolution \( \gamma(1) = 3.72, p < .05 \) compared to early adolescents.
- The hypothesis that change in EI would be associated with adolescent well-being was partially supported. Specifically, higher Wave 1 exploration was associated with fewer depressive symptoms at Wave 3, controlling for Wave 1 levels, among early and middle adolescents. A greater rate of change in exploration was associated with fewer depressive symptoms at Wave 3 among middle adolescents at trend level.
- Contrary to our hypothesis, growth in exploration was associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms among early adolescents. Exploration was not associated with self-esteem among early or middle adolescents. Ethnic identity resolution was not associated with depressive symptoms or self-esteem among either group.

DISCUSSION
- This study highlights the developmental and multifaceted nature of ethnic identity by demonstrating differences in initial levels of ethnic identity between early and middle adolescent Mexican-origin girls, and provides further evidence for the developmental nature of ethnic identity exploration and resolution.
- In addition, formation of ethnic identity exploration was associated with well-being. This finding supports previous findings of the longitudinal association between exploration and well-being (Umaña-Taylor, et al., 2009).

SCHOLARLY ACHIEVEMENTS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS
- This study was presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence in Austin, TX (2014).
- The manuscript based on this study is in progress and will be submitted to an ISI-ranked journal.
- I have built on this project by applying for a grant through The Alcohol Research Foundation/ABMRF to examine the associations between cultural processes like ethnic identity and drinking behaviors among Latino and Asian American emerging adults.
- I am currently preparing to draft a K01 application to NIAAA to examine the longitudinal associations between ethnic identity and alcohol use among Latino adolescents.

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