

# 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 for ethnic minority females (Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, & Guimond, 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 adolescence (Huang & Stormshak, 2011) through early adulthood (Syed & Azmitia, 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 developmental processes 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 ( $SD = .48$ ) y/o on average at W1

### Middle Adolescents ( $n = 168$ )

- 15.21 ( $SD = .46$ ) 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.

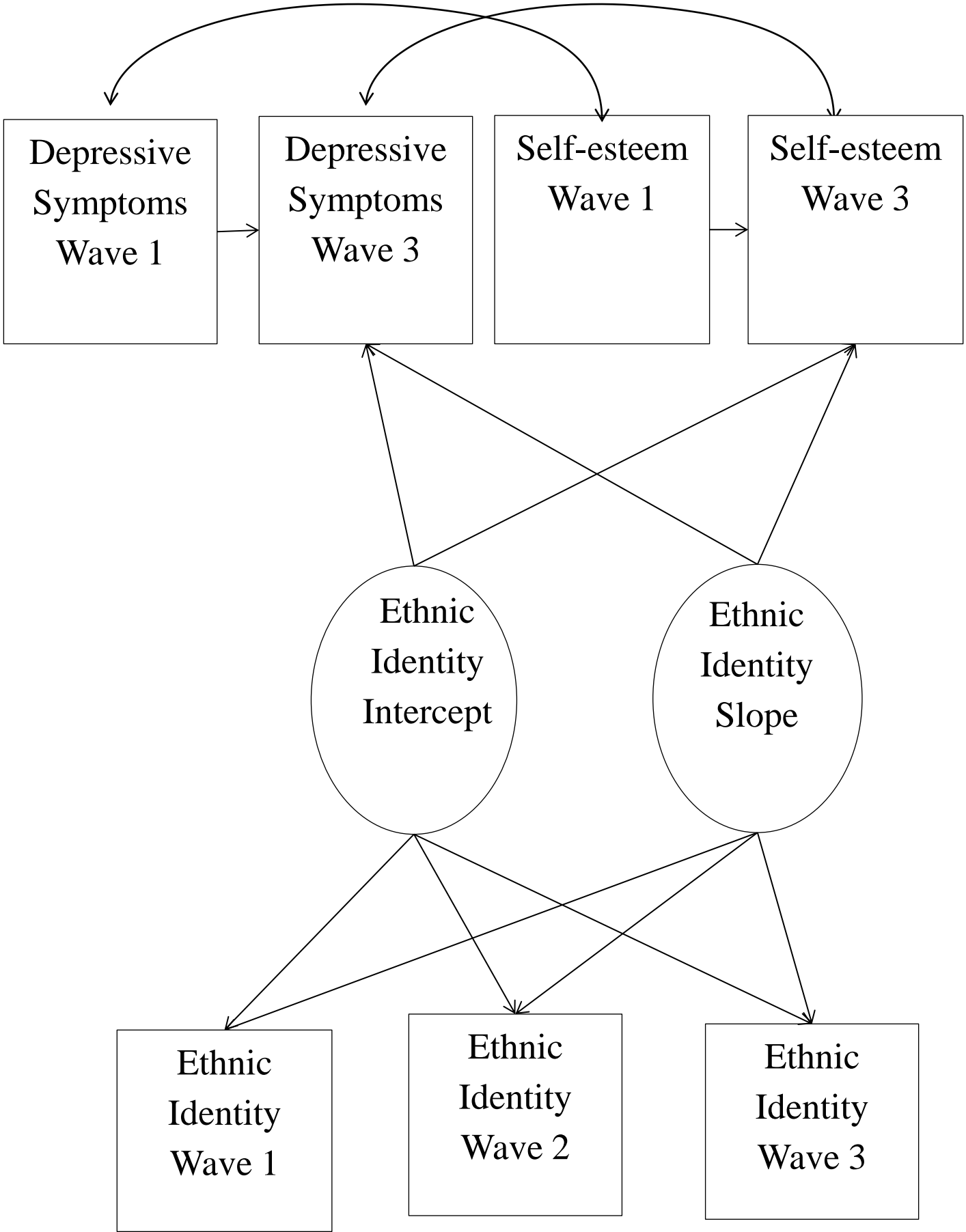
### Measures

#### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979)

- Assessed adolescents' global evaluation of themselves.
- 10 items ( $\alpha = .73-.77$ ); e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Multi-group Latent Growth Curve with Ethnic Identity Intercept and Slope Predicting Depressive Symptoms and Self-esteem.



Note: Models were estimated separately for ethnic identity exploration and resolution.

### Measures, continued

#### Center for Epidemiological Survey- Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977)

- Assessed symptoms of depression.
- 20 items ( $\alpha = .89-.91$ ); e.g., "I have felt down and unhappy this week."

#### Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004)

- EI exploration (7 items ( $\alpha = .78-.81$ ); e.g., "I have participated in activities that have taught me about my ethnicity.")
- EI resolution (4 items ( $\alpha = .79-.86$ ); e.g., "I am clear about what my ethnicity means to me.")

## 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,  $\chi^2(1) = 7.55, p < .01$ , and resolution  $\chi^2(1) = 3.72, p < .05$ , 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).

Table 1

Unstandardized Parameter Estimates (Standard Errors) for the Multi-group Latent Growth Curve Models by Cohort

	Exploration		Resolution	
Model Fit Indices				
Chi-Square (df)	22.19 (14)		13.26 (13)	
RMSEA	.06		.01	
CFI	.96		.99	
	Early Adolescents	Middle Adolescents	Early Adolescents	Middle Adolescents
Paths				
EI Intercept → DS W3	.03 (.24)	-.63 (.23)**	-.77 (3.92)	-.03 (.92)
EI Slope → DS W3	1.50 (.72)*	-1.59 (1.00)†	.11 (.96)	-1.81 (1.67)
DS W1 → DS W3	.40 (.13)**	.24 (.08)**	-.06 (3.60)	.80 (.46)*
EI Intercept → SE W3	-.21 (.37)	.33 (.23)	-.84 (1.76)	-.32 (.88)
EI Slope → SE W3	.96 (.96)	.97 (.89)	1.45 (1.28)	1.37 (1.60)
SE W1 → SE W3	.36 (.24)†	.41 (.12)***	.74 (1.01)	.73 (.32)*
Factor covariance				
EI Intercept ↔ EI	.00 (.02)	-.06 (.06)	.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)
Slope				
Factor means				
EI Intercept	2.58 (.05)***	2.78 (.05)***	2.92 (.06)***	3.08 (.06)***
EI Slope	.09 (.02)***	.06 (.02)**	.09 (.03)**	.11 (.03)***
Factor variances				
EI Intercept	.12 (.07)†	.31 (.20)	.06 (.04)	.07 (.04)
EI Slope	.02 (.01)*	.03 (.02)	.02 (.01)	.01 (.01)

Note: df = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; EI = Ethnic Identity; SE = Self-esteem; DS = Depressive Symptoms; W1 = Wave 1; W3 = Wave 3.

† $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## DISCUSSION, CONTINUED

- Older adolescents' social and cognitive maturity may play a role in ethnic identity development and its importance for well-being.
- Early adolescents' exploration may be motivated by a heightened state of identity crisis which may contribute to the positive association between exploration and depressive symptoms among this group.

## 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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