

Reconstructing Latino Identity: The Influence of Cognitive Development on the Ethnic Identity Process of Latino Students

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The influence of cognitive development on ethnic identity development is investigated in the context of a qualitative longitudinal study of Latina/o college students. Findings indicate that when students reconstruct social knowledge their ethnic identity is positively influenced. Strategies and mechanisms for positively influencing identity development are discussed within a holistic development framework.

Recent research on ethnic identity development provides insight into how Latino/a students make meaning of their ethnicity and offer faculty and practitioners a better understanding of the developmental issues Latino/a students face (Hurtado & Gurin, 1995; Phinney, 1993; Torres, 1999, 2003). Although traditional identity theories or models offer frameworks that place Latino/a students within categories, stages, or conditions, they exemplify a snapshot of development rather than explain the developmental process. Existing ethnic identity theories seldom incorporate the interrelationship among the multiple dimensions of development and provide little insight into how change occurs during the process of developing identity. Though these theories offer insight on the potential stages of identity there is a need to understand “the factors that might promote (or attenuate) those changes” that occur during the identity

development process (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 166). Understanding the change process would provide information about how institutions can create better learning environments and promote positive identity development among Latino/a students (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

The limited information on the developmental change process in Latino/a ethnic identity prompted this exploration into the nature and influence of how Latino/a students make meaning of their ethnic identity during the college years. A qualitative longitudinal study of Latino/a college students illustrates how ethnic identity is influenced by the individual’s cognitive development. In this article, we discuss longitudinal data on Latino/a college students who reconstructed negative messages about their ethnicity into positive images and the process that prompted that reconstruction of social knowledge. The findings from this study necessitate considering identity development as an interrelationship among multiple dimensions in which change is likely to occur as a result of the interrelationship between identity and cognitive dimensions. A brief review of the existing literature on the developmental change process through the theoretical perspectives of ethnic/racial identity, multicultural education, and cognitive development sets

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the stage for the interrelationship of identity and cognitive dimensions. The longitudinal data illustrate this interrelationship. Our analysis incorporates multiple dimensions of development and examines the environmental influences within the educational setting that can assist students in reconstructing their ethnic identity. As part of the implications for practice the application of a holistic learning model is considered as a framework educators can use to help Latino/a students connect their cognitive and ethnic identity development processes while in college.

Existing Literature on the Developmental Change Process

Existing ethnic identity theories refer to critical moments or events that can prompt exploration into one's ethnic/racial identity (Cross, 1995; Phinney, 1993). Cross (1995) described these critical moments as providing African Americans with "exposure to powerful cultural-historical information about the Black experience, previously unknown to the person" (p. 62). This cognitive process of reconstructing social knowledge that can influence identity has received limited attention in the research on ethnic/racial minority college students. However, there are two examples from the multicultural education literature that illustrate the process of reconstructing social knowledge for students. Although the *content* of reconstructing White privilege among majority students is very different than the *content* of reconstructing oppressive social images for ethnic and racial minorities, the *process* for both groups is dependent on the interrelationship of cognitive and identity development.

Ortiz and Rhoads' (2000) framework for multicultural education has provided one

example of promoting the reconstruction of social knowledge as part of the multicultural education process. This framework is focused on pedagogical strategies for challenging students' way of thinking about culture, including deconstructing Whiteness. This framework advocates that educators create teachable moments where students' must rethink their own views and form a greater understanding of their culture. King and Shuford (1996) offered a second example to support the connection between cognitive development and students' ability to understand multicultural issues by illustrating how the development of reasoning skills can help students understand differing points of view. King and Shuford advocated the uses of learning strategies that prompt students to question and define their own values and knowledge as an important step in understanding others.

The existing research focused on ethnic/racial identity development refers to a critical moment as the possible starting point of exploration into the development of ethnic/racial identity, yet the process or factors that influence that process are not fully explored. Research in multicultural education considers the process of reconstructing social knowledge, but these frameworks have not been fully explored within the context of ethnic identity theories. As mentioned previously, although the content of the reconstruction process among majority and minority students is very different, there are potential implications about the interrelationship between identity development and cognitive development that should be considered. This interrelationship is the foundation of a holistic view of development.

Recent theoretical perspectives suggest that providing developmental bridges is most effective when development is considered

holistically (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994; King & Baxter Magolda, 2003). The interaction between the individual, the environment, and the larger social issues demonstrates that identity is socially constructed. This understanding of identity places the “self” as central to the construction of knowledge that involves multiple dimensions (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Although these multiple dimensions impact all individuals, research on ethnic identity theories has acknowledged, but not prompted, a clear focus on the interrelationship among the dimensions to assess development. The process of reconstructing knowledge is the result of resolving dissonance between previously held beliefs and new information. This cognitive process of reconstructing social knowledge is at the core of identity development in general, yet it has received limited attention in the research on college students.

Cognitive dissonance is a key factor in developmental change according to cognitive development theories. Piaget (1932) explained developmental growth as accommodating discrepancies between one’s thinking and new information to form more complex perspectives. Theories of intellectual development during college and the adult years portrayed the variations of cognitive dissonance that prompted movement from one way of knowing to another (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1970). Cognitive developmental theorists advocate introducing dissonance through challenging students’ current ways of making meaning, yet providing support for the reconstruction process. Kegan (1994) referred to this process as providing a developmental bridge that simultaneously welcomes students, as

they are, yet invites them to become something more.

Creating intentional bridges that promote student development is critical to the mission of higher education. Although previous research has considered the bridge that connects cognitive development to students’ ability to understand multicultural issues (King & Shuford, 1996; Ortiz, 2000), the exploration of the impact of those bridges on ethnic/racial identity is limited. The longitudinal design of this study allows for data analysis to be conducted over time and provides a mechanism to explore critical moments and follow up with direct questions about the thought process involved in the reconstruction of social knowledge. These developmental points are the focus of this paper. Discussion and interpretation of these data will focus on a holistic learning framework from which to analyze this process of reconstructing ethnic identity and the creation of learning environments that support students’ construction of knowledge.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a constructivist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) epistemological approach to inquiry and grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to guide design and analysis decisions. Constructivist grounded theory recognizes that meaning arises from the experiences of participants as they are shared during the interaction between the researcher and participants; therefore the relationship between participants and researcher is valued, rather than avoided (Charmaz, 2000; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002). Grounded theory methodology was selected because the goal of the research is to “offer insight, enhance understanding, and

provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 12).

Participants

The sample for this study was drawn from seven institutions. The institutions selected represent a variety of college environments with three urban universities, two private universities and two community colleges. The location of the institutions also varied with two in areas where Latino/as are a majority (Southeast and Southwest), three in diverse environments where diversity was represented by various ethnicities and races (Midwest, New England, and Southeast), and two in predominantly White areas (Northwest). All first-time freshmen who self-identified on their institutional records as Latino/a were invited to participate in this study. Open sampling techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used because this technique accepts any participant willing to participate as long as he or she fits the sampling criteria (self-identified Latino/a) for the study. This particular structure in data gathering was also a way to make sure that the sample would not “mislead the analysis or foreclose on discovery” (Strauss & Corbin, p. 206).

A total of 48 interviews were conducted in the first year and for the purpose of this paper only data from the 28 students who were interviewed for at least 2 years were used. The participants represented nine countries of origin with 9 participants from community colleges, 17 from private colleges, and 22 public four-year universities. As the data were collected the primary researcher (Torres) considered the quality and depth of the data collected to determine if the sample was sufficient (Jones, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After the review Torres determined that this sample rea-

sonably represented the theoretical diversity of the Latino students in these contexts (Glaser & Strauss, 1999).

Method

Torres met with all students on their campuses and used a semistructured interview format in the first year. The questions focused on previously identified facets in the development of Latina/o freshmen. These facets included ethnic self-identification, cultural orientation, family influences, and the college environment. In the subsequent years the focus was on choices and changes during the previous year. For example, most interviews began with a broad question asking how participants were doing since the last interview. Follow-up probes focused on change and the thought process used in making the changes. Each participant was asked to create a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality, and all interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participant and later transcribed.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the credibility of the qualitative research process (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Denzin, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Several methods were used to establish trustworthiness during the research process. First, because this is a longitudinal study there was sufficient time to test misinformation and to allow participants to correct both information and interpretation. These member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 2000) were conducted at the end of each year. Second, peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with Baxter Magolda, who was not involved in the data collection or analysis, contributed to establishing trustworthiness. These conversations with a more objective peer helped check bias and elicit

alternative interpretations. Third, maintaining a researcher's journal that both chronicled research decisions and allowed for follow-up on issues in the next interview was a critical aspect of this research because the analysis was conducted over time. In addition, the primary researcher positions herself as a Latina, thus requiring intentional reflection and evaluation of the interpretations of students' stories (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Torres, 2003).

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Critical moments, or movement points, are best illustrated with in-depth details of the participants' narratives over time. Though most of the 28 students exhibited some movement points, the depth and clarity of that movement varied greatly. This article is focused on 2 students who demonstrated multiple changes in the construction of social knowledge and their identity. Sagi, who has been interviewed for 2 years, and Angelica, who has been interviewed for 4 years, were chosen as the best examples of identity reconstruction. Each of these women illustrates different starting points, issues, and processes in their identity development, providing very different examples in terms of depth of development, length of participation, and personal opportunities. Sagi was selected because she illustrates the immigrant population, which is a growing group of college students with little research on their experiences. She also illustrates the intersection among issues of limited language, self-esteem, and identity. Angelica, on the other hand, illustrates the group of Latino students who have choices about how they are identified. Her background, education, and abilities provide her with certain opportunities that are important and seldom

discussed in the research. Angelica's academic achievement makes her the type of Latina student that institutions desire in their student body. These differences also illustrate multiple paths that movement points can exemplify during the process of reconstructing knowledge in a manner that influences identity.

Sagi

Sagi came to the United States when she was 14 years old and graduated from high school in the US. Sagi is easily recognized as not being from the majority culture. Being in the US for only 5 years presented challenges for Sagi. As a freshman at a community college in a metropolitan area, Sagi began in English as a Second Language courses and at the time of the interview she was enrolled in regular freshman courses that would count towards a degree.

Though Sagi was very excited about the possibility of gaining an education in the US, she had begun to have doubts about her ability to succeed as a college student. She described her realization like this:

Now . . . I see [the] reality when you are with Americans. Sometimes they know a whole lot more than you do. Well, it has changed for me—my perspective—because I feel like it is almost impossible for me to get a major and graduate [from college] in the United States. . . . I don't think I will be as prepared as they are.

When asked why she felt Americans know more, Sagi shared that she was uncomfortable socializing with Americans because of her level of English proficiency. The concern was based on a perception of ability rather than actual academic ability. Because English was her second language she felt she would always be seen as inferior.

She described her feelings about being in college by saying:

I feel ashamed . . . because I have an accent, if I am confused, people judge me more, because you have accent. But if you are an American and you say something and it doesn't come out right then they say, well, can you explain that a little more and they can explain it. They have more words to explain it. And when you are a second language learner, you don't. Besides when [the professor] gives you this look, then she makes you feel embarrassed, it makes it hard to come up with a word.

These feelings of inadequacy revolved around issues of language and her perception of people with accents. After speaking English for a while, she switched to Spanish and stated that she believed that people with accents did not seem as well educated. When asked how this influences how she sees herself, she put it like this (translated by researcher from Spanish): "Yes, this affects me. It affects me because when I have an accent, I see myself as not being well [educated]."

Sagi illustrates the internalization of negative stereotypes about immigrants. This vulnerability to stereotypes encourages her to maintain a negative image of her self (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The information she received and the reactions from faculty reinforced this negative image and prompted her to question her ability to be a college student in the US.

In her second year, Sagi was more confident about what she was doing and understood more clearly the things she needed to do. Though she had not decided on a major, she had received a scholarship from the college and felt optimistic about her ability to be a college student. When asked

about her classes she described her behavior like this:

Yeah, going better. Now I participate more. I mean sometimes I am very shy. I don't want to speak in front of people, because I am the only student that has a second language in the class. And I am not—now I am not afraid to speak out, so it is good. Like not being afraid to speak up.

In addition, Sagi made an intentional change by accepting a job that required her to speak more English. Previously she worked in an office run by a Latino and most of the clientele spoke Spanish. This year she accepted a job in an office with mostly English speaking clientele and she describes her experiences as:

Sometimes I feel kind of insecure. Because mostly my job is talking over the phone and I feel like, "Oh, my God, I am not ready." . . . I can't express myself the way I want, but I keep trying, and I keep trying. I feel like I want to show them that I can do the job, even though I have an accent, I am able to be understood to other people, Americans, and I am trying. I am trying.

These examples illustrate a change in thinking about herself and her language abilities. These changes or movement points also influenced how she perceived her own abilities and opportunities in the US. The process of this movement was explored when she was asked what changed her views about her accent, Sagi shared her process of change by reflecting on the situation and the influences that prompted the change.

Maybe because I realized that I have to express myself. I have to know how to express myself to be here [in the US] . . . People have to understand me. It is

a way to communicate. I want to be able to communicate with them.

Through follow-up questions about the process that brought her to these new understandings she shared her reaction to the interview the previous year.

I remember when I told you [Torres] about how I felt about my accent, and you said there are a lot of professional people that have accents, and that, I think that really helped me to realize that . . . sometimes you just like think that you are the only one, there are not other people that have an accent, or you don't feel comfortable, but I mean I realize there are so many people too.

I mean I shouldn't be afraid. I should feel proud of my accent, and it shows that I speak another language and I am from another country. So [the interview] really helped me.

The interview can be seen as an intervening event that positively influenced her view of knowledge about herself and other Latinos who are the first generation in their families in the US. The interaction during the interview allowed new information to be brought to her attention, yet consistent with a constructivist epistemology, it was Sagi who made meaning of this information. This redefining of how she saw herself and what the accent said about her also influenced how she perceived others' reaction to her. She expressed this change by saying:

I feel more a part of the group. I don't feel left out now. I feel like I belong. And I also found out that people are very—like my classmates—are very understanding and caring. And they want to find out more about me, and that makes me feel good.

These changes helped her to redefine her

identity and how others perceived her ethnicity.

At this point Sagi places herself at the center of the learning process and illustrates the importance of identity in the knowledge construction process. The interview process exposed her to Torres, a Latina who is first generation in the US and also considers English her second language. The movement point illustrated in this example is the influence of new knowledge provided by a different authority, which prompted a reconstruction of her views about people with accents and immigrant status that was no longer negative or self-defeating. As a result of this reconstruction Sagi tested different behaviors (speaking up in class and a new job) that were rewarded. This affirmation of her new understanding strengthens her reconstruction of knowledge and prompted her to rethink her own stereotypes, thus influencing her identity in a positive manner. This reconstruction is more self-empowering.

Angelica

Angelica attended a private research university located in a metropolitan city. The first contact Torres had with Angelica was through e-mail when she responded to the invitation to participate in the study. Her e-mail inquiry shows her self-perception and understanding of her ethnicity. She sent this message because she thought she may not be a good representative for the study; as she put it:

I would be of no help to you because I AM Latino, I do not look it and have never been recognized (by looks) as Latino. I have to tell most people and they are shocked that my mother is Mexican.

During the first interview Angelica

explained that she was proud of being Mexican because her mother and maternal grandmother had taught her both the language and culture, yet when asked about what meaning she attached to the label she described the meaning of being half Mexican in this manner:

Like there's a lot of people that crack jokes about [Mexicans], but it really doesn't pertain to me. . . . Maybe that is bad. May[be] I don't identify with the people they are making jokes about because a lot of people you know, they are gardeners, and stuff like that . . . which is awful that they say that.

Though she seemed to recognize the negative stereotype as problematic, she separated herself from other Mexicans.

In her second year, she decided to transfer to an institution closer to home. She felt she would fit in better if she was closer to the area where she had grown up. The separation from "other" Mexicans continued in her second year even though she had transferred to a university in the southwestern part of the US. She described herself in the same way and stated that she didn't "know any Latinos that live anywhere around me."

It was not until her third year of college that Angelica began to recognize some of the stereotypes she held and began to question her own beliefs. These changes began as a result of academic courses that provided her with additional challenges about her views and thus prompted the process of change. Angelica transferred back to the school where she had begun college because she felt like she was not academically challenged in the other school. This decision to accept and embrace the notion of being academically challenged made her view coursework and her purpose in college in a different manner.

The changes in the third year interview were immediately noticeable. When asked how things were, she responded with:

So I am starting to question things a lot more lately. I have started like a journal this year. And . . . this year I have started to write down my thoughts and where I see myself now, what I am interested in doing later. What kind of topics interest me. What my political beliefs are. What my ideologies are and stuff like that.

By reflecting on these concerns, Angelica felt that she was beginning to see how her studies applied to her life. She reported:

And I think that it's amazing how all my classes tie in. How much I am really learning, and how much I am planning life. Like I am studying about research and communication research and political ideologies and [about] socialization from when we were children and so forth.

So I am starting to realize that a lot of things that I am learning apply to my life and I am able to see things in perspective, and kind of draw opinions about other people. . . . Like [my roommate] is a person who is super-dependent on her family. So [everyday] I would learn something about the way you are socialized for your political beliefs, or dependency on family, I would come back and we would just have a normal conversation, I'd realize that she is the ideal subject that we've discussed in my classes.

The same with my family, I think. Like my mom, we talk a lot about where do you come from, and this ties in to being from Mexico. Where you come from, where your ideas came. So a lot more lately I am thinking about it. I wonder what beliefs and stuff that my grandma had that influenced my mother

to what she believes today and how much that influenced me.

So I have been taking a lot in my conversations with my mother, thinking what issues do my [mother] and I really agree on and disagree. Like, what did I really take from her?

When asked about the process she uses now when she is exposed to new ideas she responded by saying: "I think at first my initial response to hearing something new that maybe I am not used to, . . . is to accept it. To go along with it. A prime example would be my mother telling me anything." Though this statement implies Angelica is guided by authority, she is analyzing what is taken from her mother and what is her thinking. The statement that followed explains that now as she is "exposed to a variety of things, and I hate to say this, . . . I take a class on it, and the more I read about it, the more I am willing to learn and kind of accept other views." After making these statements Angelica was able to provide specific examples of how she had re-examined her beliefs about a communist world leader and questioned what she had been previously taught.

At this point, she had still not committed to her new ways of thinking, instead she described the process as:

I don't know necessarily that I have been drawing so many conclusions. I think I am more wishy-washy now than I was before . . . my knowledge on issues and my ability to debate and bring forth issues makes me feel more secure [about] what I know.

Angelica provided evidence that her academic courses were influencing her shift towards new ways of thinking and how the behaviors required in these courses illustrates her development.

Well, my classes are all political communications classes now so they are much more fun versus even last semester—I had statistics. And I still have chemistry. I just don't like that stuff, so I am glad it is all done. I will never have to take that stuff again. So I am all poli-comm now so it is much more interesting . . . Because I would much rather read a book on someone's opinions where I don't necessarily have to accept it. Science, you read it, and that is theory and that is the way it is. Whereas, I can read a poli-comm book on media effects, and I can agree or disagree with it.

This new way of thinking was also shifting her views about personal relationships.

I am a lot more critical of my father's role in my life and what he represents. . . . Plus with my mom's new job, we discuss—actually since my freshman year, I think my mother and I have gone from the mother-daughter relationship to the friend-friend relationship. I actually even have now a serious boyfriend, and so I live with him when I go home.

And when I see my mother it is not—"Don't forget to leave me the keys today. Don't forget to do your chores"—or whatever. It is more, "How has your semester been? How is that influencing you? What are you learning?" So [our conversations have changed] completely, we spend less time together, but we have a lot more content. A lot more connecting in our relationships, so I think starting with this, we discuss a lot how I was socialized, how I was raised, how I viewed things then. But I think even now, if we were to discuss a lot more my relationship with my mother it would be a lot more—it would have a little more content because I know her more as a person, and how she sees this.

As the interview progressed the conversation shifted towards understanding stereotypes. At this point Angelica shared that in her freshman year she did not want her mother to answer the phone in case her new roommate called. Because her mother has a Spanish accent she did not want her new roommate to “draw the conclusion from the sound of [my mother’s] voice that we are Mexicans, and [think] ‘Oh, I am going to be rooming with a Mexican.’” After telling this story Angelica reflected on the effect this behavior might have had:

I didn’t think about the impact of me saying that to my mother, but my mom kind of understood at the time. Nor did I understand the impact of what I was saying in general. . . . I remember my mother did answer the phone when they did call, and she apologized to me.

This story illustrates a new willingness to question the stereotypes she held and how those stereotypes might impact others. The story also illustrates the changes in her thinking during her first year when she stated that she did not believe that the stereotypes about Mexicans pertained to her, to her third year when she was willing to admit that she was beginning to understand the impact of stereotypes about Mexicans on her and her family. Angelica recognized that she wanted to do things differently, but had not necessarily committed to her own sense of identity or beliefs. At the close of the interview she shared that these insights had not caused her to change the way she actually did things, instead it made her “look more into the reasons why I do the things I do.”

During her fourth year in college, Angelica enrolled in a course on race and politics. This course allowed her to explore issues in the context of academic research and influenced her thinking about ethnicity.

There was a certain safety in exploring ethnicity through an academic research lens. As a result of the research required in this course, she decided to conduct her senior research on a Latino-oriented topic dealing with Spanish language advertising for political candidates. This newly found interest and information resulted in a decision to seek employment dealing with the issues of Latino advertising and politics. She described her motivation for this type of work: “It wasn’t because I am half Mexican that made me interested in the topic, but it is because I am half Mexican that has made me more passionate about the topic.” As she made plans for after graduation she was looking forward to living in an area with a strong Latino presence and questioned why she had not previously made Mexican friends. Though Angelica was still exploring her ethnicity during her final year of college, it was clear that she had new information and new ways of thinking about herself and culture.

Sagi and Angelica’s examples illustrate movement from a negative way of thinking about aspects of their ethnic identity towards a more positive and integrated view of their identity. The movement points were prompted by the reconstruction of knowledge and their ability to integrate this new way of thinking into a holistic sense of self. Both of these participants talked about how they tested their new understandings in the educational setting and the importance of positive reinforcement. These findings provide insight into ways interactions in the education environment can promote a more intentional learning environment in higher education. These intentional teachable moments necessitate that the development of ethnic identity be considered from a holistic view of development.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

Understanding the complexity of the identity reconstruction process necessitates placing it in the context of holistic development. Sagi's and Angelica's ethnic identity development is in the foreground of their interviews, yet their narratives reveal that ethnic identity (the intrapersonal dimension) is intricately interwoven with cognitive and interpersonal dimensions of development. Framing their narratives in a three-dimensional picture of development reveals how movement points in one dimension, in this case the cognitive, prompt reconstruction in other dimensions, in this case the intrapersonal.

The common theme between these two in-depth examples is the holistic integration of the relationship between the intrapersonal—or identity—the interpersonal and cognitive developmental domains. As Kegan (1982) and Baxter Magolda (2001) articulated, it is the integration of these domains that promotes self-authorship among college students. Creating educational environments where students are allowed to both explore and express their identity is critical in helping students construct an internal sense of identity and their own belief systems. It is through these new perspectives that students can reconstruct their worldview to be more complex, integrated, and inclusive. Although the works of these researchers have focused on White students, they offer useful lenses for viewing the change process for all students because of their holistic foundation. For this reason, in the analysis we will view the developmental, or change, process through this lens.

The participants began their college experience following external formulas (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Both Sagi and

Angelica relied on authorities as a source of absolute knowledge. Sagi accepted stereotypes of Mexicans as the truth, apparent in her belief that she could not succeed at college due to her accent and level of English proficiency. Angelica accepted stereotypes of Mexicans as well, although she did not perceive that the stereotypes applied to her personally due to her grandmother's class position in Mexican society. Angelica knew that others, including her potential roommates, held these stereotypes and she made efforts to insure that they knew the stereotypes did not apply to her. However, she did not question the truth of the stereotypes for other Mexicans initially. Participants who were following external formulas lacked an internal basis for evaluating knowledge claims; they relied on external authorities to define their beliefs, making them vulnerable to ethnic stereotypes. Similarly, their lack of awareness of their own values and social identity, the lack of coordination of components of identity, and the need for others' approval combined to yield an externally defined identity. Sagi initially defined herself as incapable of succeeding due to the lack of others' approval. Angelica introduced her ethnic identity once she was sure others would not disapprove. This illustrates how their ethnic identities were susceptible to external pressures.

A common movement point that prompted participants to abandon external formulas was cognitive dissonance. Sagi encountered dissonance early in college. On the one hand, she received messages from authorities that her English proficiency meant she was less prepared and less likely to succeed. Instructors' impatience with her attempts to express her ideas led her to assume that her lack of English proficiency was a major obstacle. On the other hand, Sagi received alternative

messages, also from authorities, that prompted her to question these formulas. Because she perceived Torres as an authority, she was influenced by Torres' statement in their interview that there are successful professionals with accents. Torres was also a model of this success. Sagi also won a scholarship—another message that she was valued as a student who could succeed. Testing out these alternative messages prompted her to abandon the external formula of stereotype vulnerability by listening to authorities who conveyed that the formula was not true. Although Sagi was still reliant on authorities and external formulas at this point, they were healthier formulas for her ongoing ethnic identity reconstruction because they allowed her to value herself and to have more affirming relationships with her peers. They gave her the confidence to keep trying to express herself, both in class and in her work setting.

Angelica's encounter with cognitive dissonance came in her third year of college, perhaps because she started college with a healthier external formula for her ethnic identity. Angelica's physical appearance allowed her the choice to introduce her ethnic identity in interactions with others, and the positive picture her mother and grandmother painted of her heritage helped her value it. In her junior year, she encountered classes in which she was challenged to question authority. Her academic work emphasized that socialization had some impact on how people constructed knowledge, opening the door for the cognitive realization that truth is not absolute but rather constructed by individuals. Recognizing her earlier approach of accepting what others told her, she began to make conscious efforts to identify her own thinking through journaling. She also engaged her family in conver-

sation to figure out how her socialization had influenced her and on what beliefs she and her mother and grandmother might disagree. Her newfound ability to critique what she read and heard opened the door to entertaining new possibilities.

Angelica's movement point led her to abandon external formulas completely, resulting in her finding herself at a crossroads (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Her evolving awareness and acceptance of uncertainty and multiple perspectives led to movement away from authority's knowledge claims to personal processes for adopting knowledge claims—a shift in the cognitive dimension of development. Similarly, her critique of her own family socialization and attempts to examine her ethnic identity reveal her evolving awareness of her own values and sense of identity distinct from external others' perceptions. Angelica's exploration reflects the intrapersonal dimension of the crossroads because she weighed external perspectives and her own internal voice to figure out what she really believed. She noted that she seems more wishy-washy in her perspectives—a sign that she has abandoned the truth of external formulas but has not yet settled on a set of criteria for being sure of her own perspectives. Angelica took these shifts in the cognitive and intrapersonal dimensions of development into her relationships. She described the shift of mother-daughter to adult friends by describing less dependence on her mother and more mutual exchange between them about meaningful topics. Angelica recognized the need to bring her newly constructed identity into a more independent relationship with her mother. She also relished the opportunity to live in a community (where her boyfriend lived) that afforded her the opportunity to interact with more Mexicans, to get more involved

in Mexican issues. Her openness to diverse relationships reflected her openness to multiple possibilities. Angelica's cognitive shift gave her the capacity to reframe the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of her experience. Her increasing cognitive maturity supported the initial development of an internal sense of self, which in turn supported more mature relationships.

In her fourth-year interview, Angelica offered evidence of approaching the next movement point. She realized that she would need to take responsibility for what she believed, how she constructed her ethnic identity, and how she shaped her relationships with others. This realization is the movement point that prompts leaving the crossroads and becoming the author of one's life (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Her comments suggest that she has not yet acted on this realization but has plans to do so. She is cognitively aware of the need to construct an internal belief system and an internally generated sense of self to take into authentic relationships with others. Although she has yet to construct herself along these dimensions, her cognitive awareness of the need to allows her to articulate her future plans.

The implications for this research concentrate on the role the educational environment can play for students with negative ethnic imagines. Although the implications can spark many ideas for practitioners, it is important to note that the limitations of this study are similar to other qualitative research studies. The generalizability of the data is limited to the contexts described in this study.

Implications

Decreasing stereotype vulnerability to reconstruct their ethnic identity in increasingly positive ways was crucial for Sagi,

Angelica, and the other participants in the study. In this particular study, cognitive dissonance and the construction of more complex ways of thinking was key to decreasing susceptibility to stereotype vulnerability and creating positive images of their ethnicity. Cognitive movement points seemed to enable complementary shifts in intrapersonal and interpersonal developmental dimensions. In the case of these participants, ethnic identity reconstruction was intricately interwoven with cognitive and relationship reconstruction.

These participants' reports of what influenced changes in their cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal constructions suggest that current models for promoting development in general are also crucial for promoting ethnic identity development. The movement points Sagi and Angelica describe reflect some of the components of Baxter Magolda's learning partnership model (2004). This model, emerging from a 17-year study of young adults learning and development from age 18 to 35 (Baxter Magolda, 2001), blends three challenges and three supports to construct learning partnerships that offer developmental bridges. The first challenge, *knowledge is complex and socially constructed*, emerged in Sagi's experience when her interviewer introduced her to alternative messages about Latinos with accents. Angelica initially encountered this challenge in constructing different categories of Mexicans and later in much of her academic work that emphasized the social construction of knowledge. Angelica experienced the second challenge, that *self is central to knowledge construction*, in her coursework's emphasis on the centrality of identity in one's views. Sagi's encounter with this challenge was more subtle. Although her courses did not explicitly raise this issue, she

encountered the need to express herself to succeed in her academic and work settings. The third challenge, *authority and expertise is shared in mutual knowledge construction*, is less evident in the participants' reports. Learning partnerships emphasize mutual construction with learners to promote their cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal maturity. This was potentially a missing piece in these participants' college environment.

Support for these three challenges includes *validating students' capacity to know, situating learning in their experience, and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning*. Sagi found support for her new vision of herself as a successful student. Her scholarship, Torres' support, and her success at work all validated her capacity to know. Angelica experienced this validation from her mother and grandmother as well as from successes in her academic work. Learning was situated in Angelica's experience by virtue of her courses inviting her to explore her ethnic identity. Similarly, learning was situated in Sagi's work and academic experience as she struggled to overcome her English language challenges. It does not appear that learning was defined

as mutual construction in the contexts these women and their peers encountered.

Encountering some of the components of the learning partnerships model aided participants in exploring their ethnic identity. Similar to Ortiz and Rhoads' multicultural education framework (2000), they were introduced to cognitive challenges regarding the concept of culture and invited to explore their own culture. Similarities in the learning partnerships model and the multicultural education framework (Hornak & Ortiz, 2004) reveal that engaging students in the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions simultaneously has the potential to promote their ethnic identity development during college. These similarities also illustrate the need to provide students with opportunities to explore race and ethnic issues within the classroom and as part of other learning opportunities. The potential outcomes of these opportunities integrate the development of cognitive processes with identity development. For this integration of developmental constructs to be done well, faculty and administrators must understand the symbiotic relationship between cognitive development issues and identity development issues. Using these models, higher

education can better inform and promote students' learning processes.

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