

Influences on Ethnic Identity Development of Latino College Students in the First Two Years of College

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In this qualitative study, I use grounded theory methodology to investigate the influences on the ethnic identity development of 10 Latino/a students during their first two years at a highly selective college. The findings indicate that two categories were salient in the first two years: Situating Identity (conditions: environment where they grew up, family influence and generational status, and self-perception of status in society) and Influences on Change (conditions: psychosocial and cognitive development). Conditions and subprocesses involved in each of the categories are discussed.

Higher education researchers have been forecasting an increase in the diversity of students for many years and predicting that Latinos will be the largest minority group by 2020 (Day, 1996). The 2000 census confirmed this increase by reporting that from 1990 to 2000, the percentage of Latinos in the United States increased dramatically, making it the largest minority group many years ahead of the prediction. Although non-Latino Whites increased 5.9%, the Latino population increased by 57.9%. This is the largest increase of any racial or ethnic group in the United States (Asian American population increased by 48.3%; American Indians, 26.4%; and African Americans, 15.6%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

This increase in population has heightened the need to understand the experiences of Latino college students. One of the important theoretical tools that practitioners

have to help them understand diverse populations is identity development theory, through which researchers attempt to explain the developmental process that students encounter. There is general acceptance that identity development during college influences how students adapt to and manage their college experiences, but how this process differs for ethnically diverse students is not as clear (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Few researchers have explored the development of Latino ethnic identity specifically during the college years (Phinney, 1993). The formation of ethnic identity is based on one's sense of self as part of an ethnic group (Bernal, Knight, Ocampo, Garza, & Cota, 1993). This self-identification is mitigated by the choices made between the American and Latino cultures and is therefore an important aspect of development that demands closer examination (Garza & Gallegos, 1995; Torres, 1999).

Few identity development theories have considered the ethnic identity development of students under the broad category of Latino. Despite much diversity among Latinos, "the unique historical and sociological context of the United States creates the backdrop for Latino identity" (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p. 37). This historical and sociological context is illustrated by data from the Department of Education indicating that approximately 45% of Latino students are enrolled in Hispanic serving institutions (Stearns, Watanabe, & Snyder, 2002). Attendance at an Hispanic serving institution

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may provide a critical mass from one country of origin, but that is not guaranteed because the criteria for the Hispanic serving institution designation is that the Latino student enrollment be approximately 25%. In reality the majority (55%) of Latino students attend institutions where they are the minority and as a result often associate with other Latinos (Stearns, Watanabe, & Snyder, 2002). The diversity within the term *Latino* requires that the literature that informs this study also consider this diversity.

This study was informed by Phinney's (1993) model of ethnic identity development, which was created using multiple groups of ethnic students, and the work of Torres (1999) on cultural orientation of Latino students. Care was taken so that the influence of this previous research informed, but did not "hinder the creativity" needed to conduct grounded theory research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 53).

For the purposes of this study, ethnicity is narrowly defined by the distinguishing differences of a group that are based on national or cultural characteristics (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993). These differences are multidimensional and include language, food, behavior, and other customs (Phinney, 1995). Some of the literature on Latinos uses content measures of ethnicity, such as language, to determine ethnic identification. Yet research indicates that pride in one's ethnicity is maintained even when these content measures are not present (Keefe & Padilla, 1987). Because Latino college students tend to be highly acculturated (Sanchez & Fernandez, 1993; Torres, 1999) using ethnic identity models focused only on content measures are not optimal.

Phinney (1993) developed a model based on interviews with adolescents from multiple ethnic groups. In this model, the

researcher focuses on the formation of ethnic identity and how an individual comes to understand his or her ethnicity. The model has three distinguishable stages that develop sequentially (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). The first stage, Unexamined Ethnic Identity, indicates a lack of probing into the concept of ethnicity. Like other racial identity models, individuals in this stage tend to accept the values and attitudes of the majority culture. The second stage is Ethnic Identity Search/Moratorium, which occurs when individuals are faced with a situation that forces them to "initiate an ethnic identity search" (Phinney, 1993, p. 69). The third stage is Ethnic Identity Achievement and is characterized by a clear and confident sense of one's ethnicity (Phinney, 1993).

Using Phinney's model as a framework, Torres (1999) validated the Bicultural Orientation Model (BOM). The conceptual idea behind cultural orientation is to understand the nuances among the Latino college student population by looking at the choices they have made between two cultures. This model is focused on identifying the choices that Latino students make between their culture of origin and the majority culture. In the Torres model there are four cultural orientations that distinguish the Latino students. The first is a Bicultural Orientation, which indicates a comfort level with both cultures. The second is a Latino/Hispanic Orientation, which indicates greater comfort with the culture of origin. The third is an Anglo Orientation, which indicates a greater comfort with the majority culture. And finally the Marginal Orientation indicates discomfort with both cultures and may indicate conflict within the individual (Torres). Individuals are placed in the model through acculturation and ethnic identity scales. Acculturation looks at the choices

made about the majority culture, whereas ethnic identity looks at the maintenance of the culture of origin (Torres). However, this model does not explain the process involved in choosing a cultural orientation. In this study, the scales were not used in the analysis, and only the construct of cultural orientation was considered (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002).

The fact that multiple ethnic groups were included in the validation of Phinney's (1993) model makes this an attractive model to consider with the broad group of individuals included under the term "Latino." Yet, Phinney did not concentrate solely on college students or Latinos and thus questions remain of how Latino college students fit into the model and begin college at the first stage (Unexamined). In this study I sought to investigate this gap in the research and inform practitioners in student affairs about the development of Latino identity development in college students. The Phinney (1993) and Torres (1999) models raised particular questions that inform this inquiry. Literature was used as a tool to "stimulate thinking about properties and for asking conceptual questions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 47). This study adds to the knowledge by looking at a different context and by using a longitudinal research design. The longitudinal nature of this study allows exploration of individual development. This study is ongoing and this article will focus only on the first two years of college.

RESEARCH DESIGN

I used a constructivist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1994) approach to inquiry and grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to guide design and analysis decisions. By using constructivist grounded

theory I recognize that meaning arises from the experiences of participants as they are shared during the interaction between participants and myself; therefore the relationship between participants and researcher is valued, rather than avoided (Charmaz, 2000). I selected grounded theory methodology for two reasons: first, because the goal of the research is to ground theory in the data and therefore "offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12); and second, because grounded theory acknowledges that the "combining [of] methods may be done for supplementary, complementary, informational, developmental, and other reasons" (p. 28). For the purpose of this study only qualitative methods were used; during sampling procedures participants were asked to self-select from four descriptions that corresponded to cultural orientations (Torres, 1999). At this point in the study, the participants have not been placed in the Bicultural Orientation Model because I did not want to be biased by their placement (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002).

The context for this study is an independent, urban, research university located on the East Coast. In the Fall 1999 semester 43% (8,168) of the student population were undergraduate students and 5% (569) of the undergraduates self-identified as Hispanic (term used by institution to represent Latino students). The freshman class consisted of 2,120 students with a median SAT of 1240. Latino students made up 3.7% (82) of the freshman class. Overall 18.6% (394) of the freshman class came from non-White ethnic or racial groups.

Procedures

Participants. All first-time freshmen who

self-identified with Latino backgrounds to the university were invited to participate in this study. Open sampling techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were initially used. With this technique, the researcher accepts any participant willing to participate as long as he or she fits the sampling need (self-identified Latino/a). The use of this sampling method was advantageous because of the loose structure in data gathering; at this point in the research process a tight data-gathering technique could "mislead the analysis or foreclose on discovery" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 206). On the interview response form, students were also asked to select from four cultural orientation descriptions the one that best represented them. Once the interviews were conducted, I reviewed the characteristics of the participants to determine if inviting others would enhance the sample. After looking at characteristics that previous research identified as providing variety in the sample (i.e., country of origin, generation in the United States, region where students came from, and self-selected cultural orientation), I determined that this sample reasonably represented the theoretical diversity of the Latino students in this context (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Because institutions do not collect data on Latin country of origin, generation in the United States, or cultural orientation, an exact comparison was not feasible; this required me to use my judgment and theoretical sensitivity to determine the diversity of the sample.

Initially, 12 students volunteered in their first year. This article is based on data from the 10 students who continued to participate in their second year. The sample consists of 7 women and 3 men; 8 were born in the United States; and 8 were bilingual. Participants' cultural or ethnic backgrounds were

as follows: 3 Mexican, and 1 each Puerto Rican, Cuban, Venezuelan, El Salvadorian, Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, and Colombian.

Method. Interviews were the primary method used to gather the qualitative data. The interview protocol in the first year was semistructured and was focused on constructs that previous research indicated were relevant to the development of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993; Torres, 1999). The areas covered in the interview included self-identification, cultural orientation, family influence, and the college environment. Although theoretical sensitivity requires that previous knowledge and research be considered, I was open to other issues and framed the interview so that appropriate probes and follow-ups could be done in an easy manner. This protocol was piloted with two older Latino students who I knew well and who had a sense of their ethnic identity and cultural orientation. These students were asked to comment on clarity, comfort with the items, appropriateness of follow-up probes, and completeness of the interview. Feedback from these two students was incorporated into this study.

In the second year, the interviews were less structured and focused on the process of changes in the participants' perceptions of their self-identification, cultural orientation, and college experiences. During the second-year interviews, I asked participants about their self-selected cultural orientation and if that had changed. The taped interviews were conducted during the Spring semester each year and lasted 30 to 60 minutes.

Establishing trustworthiness. The notion of trustworthiness refers to the internal and external validity of the qualitative research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several methods were used to establish the trustworthiness of the research. First, because this

is a longitudinal study there was sufficient time to test misinformation and to allow participants to correct misinformation. This process was achieved through member checks (Lincoln & Guba) at the end of each year. In the first year, I shared with the participants the emerging categories among the all the participants. In the second year, I created a case report for each participant that included quotes illustrating how their interview fit into some of the emerging themes. Participants were asked if the reports accurately reflected their experiences and if they found any incorrect information. At this time the participants were asked permission for the possible use of these quotes in scholarly publications.

The second method used for establishing trustworthiness was to intentionally conduct debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with a Latina whose experiences differed from my own. A debriefer is a professional peer who can hold conversations with the researcher and challenge the process when he or she feels other interpretations should be considered (Lincoln & Guba). I chose to debrief with a Latina who was third generation in the United States and whose ancestors came from a different country of origin than mine did. The peer debriefing challenged or confirmed impressions about the developmental process and provided insight from another perspective.

The third method was to maintain a researcher's journal that both chronicled research decisions and noted times when I felt that my interpretations could be based on my own experiences, thus possibly not reflective of the student's voice. Because I am a Latina, this process is important to note. Researcher positioning as a Latina required me to reflect and use peer debriefing to intentionally evaluate my own interpretations of the students' stories.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysis of the data began with a microscopic (line-by-line) examination of each interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The microscopic examination was the first step in the open coding process used to create initial categories for comparisons among the cases. During open coding, "data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 102). The similarities are then grouped into abstract concepts called categories. Once initial categories emerged, the analysis moved into axial coding, thus connecting categories to subcategories, which explain the concepts in the categories. This is all done in order to reassemble the data in such a manner that can better explain the complete phenomenon. Because this study is ongoing, I did not include a discussion of selective coding in this article. Instead, I chose to focus on coding for process, identifying the connections between the categories, and identifying the components of the change process (Strauss & Corbin).

FINDINGS

The two major categories that emerged during the first two years of interviews are the focus of this paper. The categories are: Situating Identity (the starting point of identity development in college) and Influences on Change in identity development. These categories are being shared at this point in the research process because these categories emerged from these first two years of interviews and can be considered saturated because they occurred during a specific time frame in the longitudinal study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each category is discussed separately along with the conditions that ex-

plain the why and how of the phenomenon.

Situating Identity

Because this research is focused on the identity development process it is important to evaluate the different starting points and how those differences influence the phenomenon of ethnic identity or cultural orientation. Consistent with grounded theory methodology, analysis of data reveals three conditions that help explain the Situating Identity category and help answer questions about the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The conditions are related to the how and why issues of the category. In this case they identify the influences that distinguish the different starting points of the participants. The conditions are: the environment where they grew up, family influences and generation in the United States, and self-perception of status in society.

Environment where they grew up. The makeup of the environment where the students came from influenced both how they ethnically self-identified and their cultural orientation. The major property of this condition is the existence or non-existence of diversity in their environment. The diversity of the environment should be seen as a continuous dimension rather than dichotomous. For illustrative purposes the ends of the dimensional continuum will be used to demonstrate differences. Students who came from diverse environments tended to have a strong sense of ethnicity and were more likely to enjoy the diversity around them. Jackie described the environment where she grew up and its influence on her by saying:

There's a lot of different cultures [in my high school], and we get a lot of international students and stuff. So I have always . . . participated in Asian

programs, African American programs. It hasn't been only Hispanic. But I am very proud of being Hispanic, but I don't think anything less of other races just because they are another race.

Students from areas where Latinos are a critical mass did not see themselves as in the minority until they arrived on the predominantly White campus. This change in their environment prompted a stronger tie to their ethnicity rather than assimilation. Carlos described his reaction like this:

Before, when I was at home, everybody knew I was Hispanic . . . Everybody knows I am Mexican, and it is just part of everyday life. Ninety percent of the students where I was going to school were of Hispanic background. Now I come and I have to say my name differently. Instead of saying [Spanish pronunciation], I say [Americanized pronunciation], because everybody is like, "What did you say?" You know, . . . I have to educate people about who I am, where I am from, what the reality of my life is, in contrast to what they think the reality of my life is.

On the other end of the dimension are those who came from environments where there was mainly a White European influence. These students tended to define their ethnicity as where they are from—using a geographic definition. Juan, who in his first year identified himself as an American or Texan (northern area), stated that this self-identification was "just that—that is my location on the map." Or in Elizabeth's case, whose father is Latino and mother is Anglo, she described herself with a: "Spanish background. Like a Latina. Have a Latin background."

These students tended to associate with the majority culture and found the diversity

in the college environment as presenting some conflict for them. Elizabeth described it this way:

I have felt that I have been more segregated [in college] because when I was in high school, there weren't many Hispanics, and so like I [being Cuban] . . . would be neat, like, "Yes, I am Cuban, and this is how we do things."

And here there are so many Hispanics, but most of them have grown up with both Hispanic parents, or in a Hispanic neighborhood, or in a Hispanic country, and so they are like very, very cultural, and I am like half and half, so sometimes I feel like a . . . an outsider in the Hispanic group, but then like I don't want to be, because that is like my culture, but I don't speak fluent Spanish anymore, and they [other Latino students] do things different than I would.

Family influence and generation in the United States. Differences among the generational status of the participants began emerging in the first year of interviews because of the types of issues these students were dealing with. By looking at the generation in the United States, I explored the properties associated with level of acculturation of the student as well as the parents and the dimensions of this condition within the context of the college environment.

The most obvious dimension that emerged is that students identified themselves using the same terms and language their parents used. This was evident by the term they selected to describe themselves and their reaction to the college environment. For example students who chose to describe themselves using their familial country of origin, such as Mexican American, talked about how their parents talked about their Mexican culture. Other students who used

more generic terms like *Hispanic* also talked about how their parents used that term. This dimension became obvious when I asked students what influence their family had on how they see themselves. All of the students credited their parents for their views on ethnicity and its role in their life. They also talked about their Latino ethnicity in a positive manner and attributed this positive meaning of ethnicity to their parents. The more parents participated in culturally relevant activities, such as speaking Spanish at home and attending Latino social functions, the more students identified with their ethnic identity. Those students who came from families where one parent was Latino and the other was not tended to talk about their desire to learn more about the culture.

The second dimension is the generational status of the participants and their parents. Students who are the first generation in the United States struggled with the unknown expectations of the college environment. Though all students make some adjustments, first generation in the United States students also struggled to balance the college expectations with those of their parents. For example, Sara exemplified this dimension when she talked about the issues she had to deal with from her parents: "That is one thing I don't like about my roots, because my parents are so strict. That is how their parents grew up." Sara's parents held on to many of the traditions of their country of origin and therefore expected Sara to live by their rules even when she was on her own in college. Her mother called daily and expected Sara to be in her residence hall room to receive the phone call. Freedom was seen as an American value and Sara's parents had not acculturated to the majority culture in a manner that would make them feel comfortable with the freedoms associated

with college life.

This balancing of acculturation levels seemed to have two consequences. First, students like Sara, who tried to please her parents by being in her room every night when they called, ended up feeling a little alienated from their peers because they would not tell them what they were dealing with. This consequence could cause conflicts and be stressful. Sara described her feelings of alienation:

When someone asked me, "What is going on?" I am just, oh, this, this, and that. . . . So I am trying to isolate myself a little from them, because I don't want them to think that I am nuts or something. . . . I have a lot of pressure [from my parents] now.

The second consequence was that students kept things from their parents. Diana, was born in the United States, but she and her family returned to their country of origin when she was still a baby. She did not tell her parents she was engaged. She felt they would be upset by this information. This consequence seemed to come from a desire to respect and protect parents rather from a desire to rebel or reject.

Students who are the first generation in the United States also sometimes feel alienated from the mainstream because they do not understand things that are taken for granted by others in the majority culture. They feel caught between the two cultures, not completely fitting in with either culture. Diana described it like this:

I always feel like I am left out, and I think that I'm going to be for the rest of my life. I am left out here because—everybody talks about their experience before I came here, like elementary school, and middle school—I have no idea about that. I can't even . . . know

songs they used to [sing] when they were little. . . . And when I go [back to my family's country of origin] I feel left out because of the things that I have missed [since] I came here. So I am never going to be settled anywhere.

These students are caught between the expectations, traditions, and knowledge from the majority culture and their culture of origin.

At the other end of the array in this dimension are the students who are second and third generation in the United States who assume the mingling of the two cultures. When I asked Carlos, a second-generation student, about the values he felt his mother had instilled in him and if they were connected to the Latino culture, he responded by saying:

I would say half of them are consistent with the Latino culture, because a lot of what she has instilled in me is a sense of family, a sense of community. But the rest just has to do with who [I am as] a person and the experiences that a person has had.

These students tend to have less conflict with parents and are comfortable with the role their parents play in their identification. This condition points out the unclear transition from issues of acculturation to development of ethnic identity. All of these students can be seen as highly acculturated and have no accent when they speak English. Yet, as in the case of the first-generation students, they were continuing to deal with issues of acculturation to the majority culture. Their parents' views of American values associated with freedom, for example, created additional stressors for these students.

Self-perception of status in society. This

condition is often associated with social economic status, but here it is more generally described as students perceiving some advantage or privilege as compared to others. The basic dimension of this condition is the perception or nonperception of privilege. Those who talked about privilege tended to believe in the negative stereotypes associated with Latinos; they just did not see themselves as associated with those negative stereotypes. For example, Juan, who came from an economically privileged family, elaborated on his interpretation of the term *Tejano* by saying:

It's like you are Mexican, and you were born and raised in Texas, and you have loyalties to the Mexican people, which I have never had. Because growing up in my city, the Mexican people were in the ghettos, or in the bad parts, and if there was vandalism, that is where you kind of thought of.

But I lived in the White part of town, because my dad is a doctor. And all my friends were White, and . . . in my high school . . . I [had] the highest male GPA. And that completely separated me from the rest of them.

On the other end of this dimensional range, Diana, who did not perceive any privilege or advantage over others, described her interpretation of the differences between her culture of origin and the American culture like this:

Having gone through a different way of living over there, especially . . . when I was little, it helps me see things in a different way. It makes me more open-minded about other people and other ways of living.

This condition was focused more on how the participants reacted to others and their ability to recognize racism when it is occurring to them or around them. Juan

seemed to believe the negative stereotypes, but did not see them as including him, whereas Diana expressed that her experiences with different cultures made her more open. In other parts of the interview Diana was able to identify when she experience racism, whereas Juan did not see racism at all.

Influences on Change in Identity Development

This category emerged while I was coding for process between the first and second-year interviews. This type of coding emphasizes the relationship between process and structure while connecting the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Two subprocesses of cultural dissonance and change in relationships within the environment emerged as relevant conditions and influenced change in the participant's ethnic identity.

Cultural dissonance. The behaviors that are expressed within this condition refer to the experience of dissonance or conflict between one's own sense of culture and what others expect. Though this type of conflict with the culture intersected with other conditions mentioned earlier, there was sufficient evidence to consider it a condition of change (see Figure 1). For the students who came from first generation in the United States families, conflicts with their parents' cultural expectations led them to desire more association with the majority culture. This is exemplified by Sara in her second-year interview:

I am not as comfortable with [the Latino culture], because . . . I won't accept some of the things that my parents believe, and I know that is part of my culture, I just don't think it is right. I think that my parents shouldn't totally stick with the culture that they grew up with because that is not where we live,

CATEGORIES

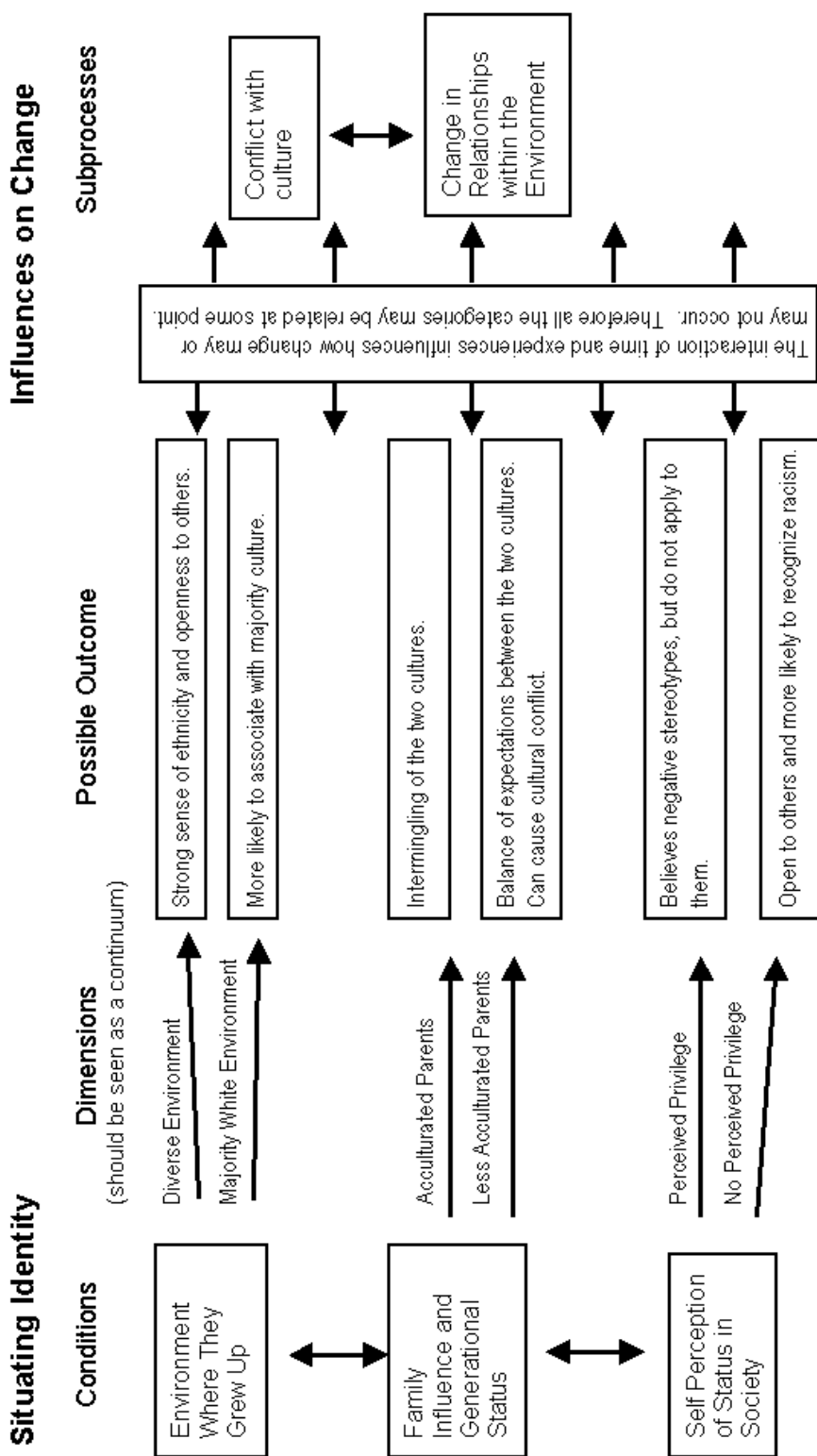


FIGURE 1: Conceptual figure of the categories influencing ethnic identity development in the first two years of college.

Arrows represent connections and interactions.

and that is not like the influences that I have. So they expect me to kind of live by that culture . . . [even though] I am not living anywhere near it right now.

The magnitude of the dissonance forced the change to occur. In her first year, Sara had self-selected the Bicultural Orientation description and in her second year she described herself as having an Anglo Orientation (Torres, 1999). Her change focused on retreating from the cultural dissonance her parents created with their rules. Sara began to associate ethnicity with her parents' strictness. Though Sara's self-selected cultural orientation description changed, her pride in ethnicity had not lessened; she sought out an internship with a Latino organization in the city. Though this pride was intact, her movement towards more ethnic awareness was clearly on standby. The dissonance between her own and what she perceived as her parents' definition of culture had created a type of critical moment that had not been resolved and seemed to cause stagnation in her development.

Elizabeth experienced a different type of cultural dissonance, which produced a different type of change in her self-identification. In her first-year interview Elizabeth had mentioned that her lack of speaking Spanish made her feel alienated from other Latinos on the campus. In her second year, her attempt to make meaning of this issue was described like this:

I was in a class this past semester with a professor. . . . And there are a lot, like tons, of Hispanic kids in that class. And my last name is [common Spanish surname], so everyone looks at me, even at [the food court on campus], the people that work there will speak Spanish to me, and I'm just like, I can understand them but I can't really speak back, I mean I could, but it would take

me a while. . . . So, in that class, I just really felt Whiter than White, like more American than ever, and they would stay afterwards with the professor and speak Spanish and . . . oh, I just hurt. I really want to be able to do that and that's like a really big deal why I am studying [abroad] the entire year, because my Spanish is horrendous and . . . I want to be fluent by the time I get back. I want to be able to read in Spanish, write in Spanish and be good at it. And it's been really hard because the Hispanic kids don't look at me as very Hispanic. But the White kids or the American kids, . . . [with] their racism issue, they'll look at me and they'll hear me sing a Spanish song or listen to Spanish music or, you know, things like that, or I want to eat Spanish food and they look at me like, "Oh, God, she is so Spanish," you know, and I'm not. It's just because it's so different to them. So, I don't know, it's hard.

The change that happened to Elizabeth revolved around her quest to know about her ethnicity and the language. She described the meaning behind her search:

My quest or journey to learn Spanish is a really big deal but also the education I get and the different classes in Latin America . . . they all kind of deal with like the same things, like cultural identity, and that's why I am really, really interested in anthropology. But that's like a really big deal, how people see themselves, how people [self-identify] because it really has an effect on your whole outlook on life.

This passage illustrates the search Elizabeth has begun and her own descriptions of a cultural orientation that changed from an Anglo Orientation in her first year to a Bicultural Orientation in her second year.

Change in relationships within the environment. The prominent dimension of this condition is the peer group that the individual seeks out while in college. In the case of Carlos, who was already comfortable with his ethnicity and self-selected the Bicultural Orientation description, the change he saw in himself and his environment came by seeking out the diverse group of friendships he valued, but had not found in his first year of college. He described how much better adjusted he felt in his second year by saying:

I definitely found my place. I know a lot more Hispanic students. That's great; I can speak Spanish with them a lot and love that. Also I've learned to live with like the fact that I am different culturally, myself. I've learned to integrate myself and I've culturalized [adapted].

I focused the follow-up questions on further exploring how that adjustment happened and he responded with:

The way I found it is not by trying to change others, but just by trying to understand and making them understand more about me. The Mexican culture within the Hispanic culture is different and I talk about it in conversation, but I also learned not to focus on the fact that my skin may be a different color or my name might be a lot different than others, but rather that all our blood is red. In a way I have become blind to it, but not completely blind to it. . . . In a way I accept it more. and I think that through me accepting it like that, I think others accept.

Carlos never expressed "a critical moment" in his development and that may be because he grew up in an environment where he was the majority; thus providing him with a strong sense of ethnicity and

strong coping skills for issues that emerged in the college environment. Carlos' cultural orientation remained bicultural for the two years. Carlos keeps up with the Latino student group on campus, but does not participate in the group's activities. When asked about that he indicated it was an issue of time rather than interest.

The experiences of Sarah also exemplified change, but from a different perspective. (Note that because two students selected the same pseudonym, this name is spelled with an *h* to differentiate from the other participant.) Sarah is half Latina, and her Latino father was not part of her growing up years. Prior to starting college, Sarah visited her father's country of origin and felt a need to further explore this side of her. In her second-year interview, Sarah talked about joining the Latino student group on campus and meeting a friend she related to and enjoyed spending time with. When I asked what kinds of things she had learned about herself, Sarah responded:

Just about my heritage, and just how because as I was growing up, I never really thought of myself as a Latina. Like it wasn't very important in life, and I am just realizing how important it is, and how I want to learn more about the culture, and just to learn more about my family, and my ancestors, and what not. . . . It broadened my horizon, and it made me want to explore, and that is very important.

Sarah illustrated the beginning of the search process and was cautious about her exploration. For example, Sarah also talked about wanting to learn Spanish, but had not taken any active steps to fulfill that desire. In her first year, Sarah self-selected the Anglo Orientation description and in her second-year interview she selected the

Bicultural Orientation description (Torres, 1999). This illustrated the change in her identity, yet this needs to be considered along with her safe progression into the search for ethnic identity.

Both of these examples illustrate how changes in personal relationships and involvement in Latino student groups can influence personal growth and identity development. As the students progress during their college years, these conditions may become even more salient.

DISCUSSION

This study clearly illustrates that not all Latino students begin college with Unexamined Ethnic Identities (Phinney, 1993). The influences of where they grew up, their generational status in the United States, and self-perception of societal status play a major role in situating their identity in their first year of college.

The students who came from diverse environments self-selected the descriptions associated with the Bicultural or Latino Orientations (Torres, 1999). Their selection seems to depend on how they perceived the campus' diversity. The students who found the college environment as not accepting of diversity would identify with a Latino Orientation wanting to focus their orientation towards those who share their interest in diversity. The other students who acknowledged the lack of diversity, but were not as critical of the environment, would self-select the bicultural description in their orientation. In general, these students did not take on the values of the majority culture, but they were also not in a search of their ethnic identity, indicating that there is not a clear fit with Phinney's (1993) first stage of Unexamined Identity. It is important to note that students

who come from environments where they have been the majority may come to college without ever going through the Unexamined Ethnic Identity or Ethnic Identity Search stages (Phinney).

The students from majority-White environments tended to identify with an Anglo Orientation or Bicultural Orientation (Torres, 1999) and seemed to fit the description of Stage 1: Unexamined Ethnic Identity (Phinney, 1993). The environment where they grew up did not provide extensive exposure to their own culture, or diversity in general, thus prompting them to mainly identify with the majority culture. Even though these students were more likely to associate with the majority culture, they still maintained a positive view of their Latino background. This draws into question the use of deficiency models of identity development with college students. There was no evidence that these students had negative views about being Latino.

It should be noted that though students who are first generation in the United States may have a stronger tie to their country of origin, they are also the ones that experienced more dissonance with their culture of origin. This dissonance was a result of the acculturation level of their parents and their desire to balance their parents' expectations with their own. The salience of generational status seems evident, but the resulting behavior can have much variation (Garza & Gallegos, 1995).

This finding also brings to light the possibility of some type of retreat or escape, as Perry (1970) might consider it, during the developmental process. This deflection may be the outcome of the strong dissonance felt by the students in their ethnic identity development. This interpretation connects ethnic identity with cognitive development

and illustrates the process of meaning making in the process of identity development (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Although first-generation-in-the-United-States students experience cultural dissonance, the evidence seems to indicate that later generations resolve those conflicts and emerge with strong ethnic identities. In the case of the students in this study, those from the later generations seem to be more active in acknowledging the influence of their ethnicity and in wanting to express their ethnicity. This finding provides further insight into the work of Keefe and Padilla (1987) who found that between the first and second generation of Mexican Americans there was a drop in Ethnic Loyalty, a concept similar to ethnic identity, yet later generations of Mexican Americans maintained a fairly consistent level of Ethnic Loyalty. The concept of the melting pot does not seem to be as salient today as in previous generations.

The condition of self-perceived status illustrates the intragroup differences among the Latino population. In several cases, the students with self-perceptions of privilege could be placed in Stage 1 (Unexamined Ethnic Identity; Phinney, 1993); they tended to select the Anglo Orientation description. Those who did not perceive privilege varied in their starting points on Phinney's model and were more likely to recognize and talk about how racist behaviors have impacted their sense of identity. Their cultural orientation tended to be dependent on other issues and therefore no clear conclusions can be made.

Influences on Change illustrated the process of identity development. The students who in their first year wanted to know more about their culture tended to self-

identify themselves as Anglo Orientation (Torres, 1999) and were likely to be in Stage 1 of Phinney's (1993) model. Yet as illustrated in the quoted passage by Elizabeth, a desire to explore cultural background can create movement towards Phinney's Stage 2 (Ethnic Identity Search). The cultural dissonance can also change students in other ways, as was illustrated by Sara, who changed her choice of descriptions from Bicultural to Anglo Orientation as a result of the magnitude of dissonance she felt between her own beliefs and those of her parents. This internal process requires us to be aware of many factors that may not be readily acknowledged by the student, yet these factors (such as generation in the United States) can cause stress for these students.

Implications for Practitioners and Researchers

Student affairs practitioners need to reflect on their own assumptions about the Latino students on their campus and identify how they are applying ethnic identity development theories. To serve all Latino students intentionally, it is important for practitioners to understand how these factors will affect the experiences of Latino students on their campus. Ethnic identity development is another tool in a practitioner's toolbox of developmental theories and should help administrators better understand Latino students. The same way a practitioner gets to know a student to gain insight as to where he or she is developmentally could be used to explore the factors that could influence how a Latino student's ethnic identity may evolve. This understanding could broaden conversations to be more intentional and allow non-Latinos glimpses of the issues that are relevant in the Latino student experience.

Participants who were first generation in the United States shared how difficult it was to talk to non-Latinos about the pressure they feel from their parents. The level of stress can be an underlying issue for students with academic or social problems. Practitioners must have sensitivity to these issues when dealing with Latino students.

There is much more research that can be done in the area of Latino ethnic identity development. One issue that emerged during data analysis and deserves further exploration is the transition from acculturation to the ethnic identity development. Much of the growth in the Latino population comes from new immigrants who will soon be first-generation-in-the-United-States college students. At what point do these students transition from acculturating to the majority culture into a process of developing an ethnic identity? There is probably no clear-cut answer to this question, but further understanding is clearly needed to serve the Latino students coming into higher education.

Different contexts should also be considered for further research. The context of this study does not reflect all institutions in the United States. There is a great need to better understand the role of ethnic identity development at community colleges, where the majority of Latino students enroll. In addition, different social environments need to be investigated. If a student does not leave a geographic area where Latinos are a critical mass, would his or her development differ from students who relocate? Researchers have only begun to scratch the surface of the experiences of Latino college students and each study brings forth more information that can inform practice and improve the experiences of Latino students in college.

Limitations

The findings of this study are limited to the

context of the study and the participants in the study. These students are probably similar to many other college students, yet their stories are unique to their experiences. The diversity among the Latino population is also a limitation because it is difficult to represent all the cultures incorporated under this label. The students who participated in this study clearly illustrate a variety of experiences and in turn reflect some of the diversity in the Latino college student population. In an effort to respect this diversity, I have tried to draw out findings that truly reflect their stories and experiences. Despite this effort, in qualitative studies the researcher is the instrument of the research and therefore this should be noted as a possible limitation.

CONCLUSION

Because this is a longitudinal study using grounded theory methodology, this article should be seen as a first installment on the theory-building process concerning the ethnic identity development of Latino college students. By sharing the categories that emerged in the first two years of this study, I hope to provide information that practitioners in higher education can use immediately and in turn create a better environment for Latino college students. My responsibility as a Latina researcher is to interpret the student stories and to formulate meaning around those stories. It is up to practitioners and other researchers to implement the knowledge and improve the experiences of Latino students.

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