

# Stability and Change in Ethnic Identity among Latino Emerging Adults in Two Contexts

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This longitudinal study investigated ethnic identity development among Latinos during the first year of college in two contexts. The contexts differed in both the density of ethnic minorities and the density of the target group studied. Participants were 128 first-year Latino college students from two public universities in California. Change in ethnic identity was analyzed in two ways: change in strength of ethnic identity using ANCOVA, and change in membership in ethnic identity statuses using cluster analysis. ANCOVAs yielded no significant overall changes in ethnic identity across time in either of the two contexts. Cluster analyses yielded three interpretable clusters: achieved, moratorium, and unexamined. Shifts in cluster membership across time were consistent with developmental models of ethnic identity change.

For adolescents and emerging adults, and particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, ethnicity can be an important identity domain that must be negotiated (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). Ethnic identity refers to one's identity, or sense of self, as a member of an ethnic group and the feelings that accompany such membership (Phinney, 1990). Individuals' ethnic identities can shift as a result of both developmental factors and new contexts and experiences (Phinney, 2006). In this study, we investigated potential changes in emerging adults' ethnic identities during their first year of college in two contexts.

In developmental psychology, much of the research on ethnic identity has been situated within social identity theory (see Phinney, 1990), which empha-

sizes aspects of an individual's identity that are derived from membership in groups (Brewer & Hewstone, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). "Groups" can take on a wide range of meanings, from social categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, and social class) to groups that are artificially created in a laboratory setting. Belonging to social groups provides opportunities for individuals to derive high self-esteem. However, due to the structural characteristics of most societies, which include the power differential among groups, some groups are valued less than others (e.g., in the United States ethnic minorities, women, and the poor and working class). According to social identity theory, identification with a subordinate group is heightened in minority contexts as a way of preserving a positive sense of self. Choosing to identify with the group in a given context can lead to an increase in self-esteem, whereas choosing not to identify with the group can lead to a decrease in self-esteem. Thus, for ethnic minorities in the United States identifying with their ethnic group can lead to a more positive sense of self and protect them from the negative impact of the prejudice and discrimination they experience as members of lower-status groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Ethnic identity in particular is distinguished by the fact that it is largely ascribed to individuals on the basis of their ancestral group and is not freely chosen to the extent that an occupation may be. Nevertheless, individuals have options in how they identify with their ethnic group, and they construct their own sense of self as a group member just as they construct a personal identity. Thus, the process of developing an ethnic identity can be studied using Marcia's (1966; 1980) identity status model. Marcia conceptualized identity formation as involving the processes of exploration (e.g., examining alternatives) and making a commitment (e.g., making a decision in salient identity domains, such as occupation). Marcia did not include ethnic or other social identities in his research, but ethnic identity development can be similarly conceptualized as resulting from the two processes of exploration and a commitment (Phinney, 1989; Roberts et al., 1999).

Ethnic identity develops over time, beginning in childhood (Ruble et al., 2004). Exploration of ethnicity is assumed to take place primarily during adolescence and emerging adulthood, as individuals encounter ethnically-charged situations and attempt to make sense of the meaning of their ethnicity within the larger setting (Phinney, 2006). Commitment reflects the quality of one's sense of group belonging and becomes stronger over time as individuals develop a clearer understanding of ethnicity (Quintana, Castaneda-English, & Ybarra, 1999). Exploration and commitment can be used to define qualitatively different types of identity structures, called *statuses*, which depend on the individual's extent of exploration and commitment. Theoretically, following Marcia (1980), four identity statuses can be defined; the absence of both exploration and commitment defines ethnic identity diffusion, while the presence of both defines an achieved ethnic identity. Interme-

diate are foreclosure (commitment without exploration) and moratorium (exploration without commitment).

Marcia's (1980) identity status model has been applied to a wide array of identity domains, including occupation, religion, and political ideology. Although Phinney (1989) proposed that the identity status model could be applied to the study of ethnic identity, very few studies have done so. In one of the few existing studies using ethnic identity statuses, Phinney (1989) used responses to in-depth interviews to classify adolescents into one of the four identity statuses. She identified both achieved and moratorium statuses, but was unable to differentiate reliably between foreclosed and diffused individuals, resulting in a single 'unexamined' category. Individuals in the achieved status showed evidence of exploring what their ethnicity meant to them, together with a sense of acceptance and internalization of their ethnicity as an identity. Those in the moratorium status displayed an increasing awareness of their ethnicity, and were actively engaged in the process of exploring its meaning to them, without having made a commitment. The unexamined status included adolescents who would typically be classified as diffused, as they showed minimal exploration of the meaning of their ethnicity along with no clear personal understanding of their ethnicity. However, in contrast to Marcia's model, the unexamined status also included adolescents who had accepted their ethnic background without giving it much thought, and therefore would be considered foreclosed in Marcia's scheme. These two facets of the unexamined status are similar in that they are both characterized by a lack of interest in or exploration of one's ethnic background. The ethnic identity status model is comparable in some ways to Cross' (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001) model of African American identity development, in that Black identity evolves over time as individuals explore the meaning of being Black in different contexts and developmental periods.

In support of social identity theory and Phinney's ethnic identity development model, research with adolescents found that those who exhibited an achieved ethnic identity showed better psychological adjustment than those in the other statuses (Phinney, 1989; Seaton, Scottham, & Sellers, 2006). Indeed, the positive association between ethnic identity and self-esteem has been robust throughout the literature (e.g., Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999; Umaña-Taylor, 2004; but see, Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002). It has been suggested that this link exists because a positive ethnic identity provides a sense of belonging that can act as a buffer against perceived discrimination and negative stereotypes (e.g., Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Although the importance of ethnic identity has been highlighted in the literature, ethnic identity as a developmental process is much less understood. Thus, the first goal of the present study was to investigate the changes in ethnic identity longitudinally. To do this, we examined both the processes of exploration and commitment and the ethnic identity statuses.

## Ethnic Identity in Emerging Adulthood

Like Erikson (1968), ethnic identity researchers subscribe to the idea that identity is a dynamic, multidimensional *process* rather than a static state of being (Phinney, 1989). However, the majority of research on ethnic identity has been constrained by two factors: it focuses mostly on adolescence, and it uses cross-sectional designs (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2002). Accordingly, our understanding of ethnic identity as a process that evolves over time or a state of being is not clear in older populations, such as emerging adults.

In proposing his theory of emerging adulthood, Arnett (2000) argued that what was considered the 'normative' period of settling into adult roles has shifted significantly in industrialized nations. The period of emerging adulthood is nested between adolescence and young adulthood and involves a continued exploration of identity. This is also the case for ethnic identity, particularly for those who change their surrounding context such as attending college (Phinney, 2006). Changes in context may stimulate a reexamination of race and ethnicity due to new situations and experiences even if an achieved ethnic identity had previously been attained (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Because of this potential reexamination, which is consistent with Erikson's (1968) proposal that identity development is a life-long process, ethnic identity needs to be understood in emerging adulthood and beyond. Longitudinal studies of ethnic identity development are especially needed to understand emerging adults' ongoing explorations.

## Longitudinal Research

Much of the existing longitudinal work on ethnic identity is concentrated in adolescence, before the transition to emerging adulthood and college (e.g., French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006; Pahl & Way, 2006). In the only longitudinal study we know of that examined changes in ethnic identity statuses during the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood, Phinney and Chavira (1992) explored ethnic identity development over the course of 3 years, from 16 to 19 years of age. By emerging adulthood, most participants had moved towards an achieved identity from unexamined and moratorium statuses in adolescence. However, some regressed to earlier statuses, lending support to the notions that an achieved ethnic identity is not necessarily an end point, and that the negotiation of ethnic identity may continue into emerging adulthood and beyond (Phinney, 2006). Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) note similarly that individuals may "recycle" or modify their racial identity over time as they encounter new challenges.

Two recent studies have also considered the ethnic identity status model, one using a longitudinal design (Seaton et al., 2006) and the other using a cross-sectional design (Yip, Seaton & Sellers, 2006). Both studies used cluster analysis to assign participants to ethnic identity statuses based on the combination of exploration and

commitment scale scores. In the longitudinal study, conducted with adolescents, the researchers found that more than half of the participants shifted status over a one-year period<sup>1</sup>. These shifts were evenly distributed between progressive shifts (i.e., strengthening of identity) and regressive shifts (i.e., weakening of identity; Waterman, 1982, 1999), showing evidence of shifting statuses during adolescence, but not necessarily towards an achieved ethnic identity. The cross-sectional study included a college student sample and indicated that nearly half of them had reached the achieved status, compared to only 27% of their adolescent sample. The college students ranged in age from 18 to 23 years, which has been previously shown to be a significant time of shifts in the identity status literature, particularly towards achievement (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999). Unfortunately, because age differences within the college student sample were not explored, this study is not informative about whether the proportion of achieved individuals differed by class standing (e.g., first-year students versus seniors).

Although there has not been longitudinal work on the ethnic identity statuses in emerging adulthood, there is an abundance of longitudinal studies on the identity statuses in other domains that may be relevant for understanding ethnic identity development. It should be noted that there are some important differences between Marcia's and Phinney's models that preclude direct comparison, specifically the number of statuses in the model. Nevertheless, meta-analytic results suggest that adolescence is marked by a move out of diffusion (towards moratorium, foreclosure, and achieved), whereas emerging adulthood is marked by a move towards achievement (away from moratorium and diffusion; Meeus et al., 1999). Furthermore, progressive developmental shifts are more common in emerging adulthood than in adolescence, particularly when looking within specific identity domains (e.g., occupation, ideology). Therefore, the same developmental trend may hold for ethnic identity as well.

Taken together, the longitudinal studies conducted on ethnic identity in adolescence (e.g., French et al., 2006; Way & Pahl, 2006) suggest an increase in ethnic identity exploration from early to mid adolescence, at which point exploration peaks and then begins to decrease into late adolescence. The rise in ethnic identity exploration from early to mid-adolescence coincides with the transition to high school, which could provide new contexts and experiences for individuals to engage in exploration of their ethnicities.

Research also suggests that the transition to college provides an important context for re-examining ethnic identity (Chavous, Rivas, Green, & Helaire, 2002;

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<sup>1</sup>Seaton et al. (2006) derived four ethnic identity statuses rather than three as in the present study. These differences may stem from differing cluster analytic methods used (*k*-means versus hierarchical). Both a four-status and three-status model can be consistent with theory on ethnic identity statuses, depending on whether one adopts Marcia's (1980) identity status model or Phinney's (1989) ethnic identity status model, respectively.

Ethier & Deaux, 1994). For example, Saylor and Aries (1999) found that ethnic minority students, regardless of initial levels of ethnic identity, increased in strength of ethnic identity across their first year of college, although those with lower precollege ethnic identity showed a greater increase. Saylor and Aries suggested that this change could be due to the fact that the college they attended was predominantly European American, and therefore their ethnicity was more salient to them, leading them to seek out resources that would strengthen their ethnic identity. In the present study, we examined Saylor and Aries' suggestion by investigating ethnic identity development among Latinos in two university contexts, one a primarily European American university and another in which European Americans were a minority and Latinos were the majority. We focused on a single ethnic group, Latinos, because Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in California, the geographical location for the study (US Census Bureau, 2000), and are the largest ethnic minority group at both universities.

### Social Context

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development stresses a need to move beyond examining individuals without consideration of the context in which they are embedded. Situating identity theories (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) within the multiple levels of ecological theory may help draw attention to the numerous contextual factors that can influence ethnic identity development. One factor is the social milieu that the individual is embedded in, such as the university.

Ethnic minority emerging adults, many of whom are the first members of their family to attend college, face greater social and academic challenges during the transition to college than do ethnic majority emerging adults, although the gap has been found to narrow during the first year (Azmitia et al., 2003). Because of the greater challenges they face, ethnic minority students may also face more changes in their social and personal worlds that lead them to reflect upon and potentially renegotiate their ethnic identities. As shown by Saylor and Aries (1999), one such change is the density of one's ethnic group in the home community versus the new college community.

Two studies have directly examined the association between contextual variations in the density of adolescents' or emerging adults' ethnic representation and variations in their ethnic identities. Umaña-Taylor (2004) studied Latino adolescents in three high schools that varied in the percent of Latinos in attendance. As predicted, Umaña-Taylor found that the strength of ethnic identity differed by context, with Latino adolescents attending a primarily non-Latino high school reporting higher levels of ethnic identity than adolescents at both mostly Latino and ethnically balanced schools. This finding is consistent with what would be predicted

by social identity theory, i.e., that one's ethnic identity is more salient when one is a numerical minority in a particular context. In contrast, Juang, Nguyen, and Lin (2006) found no difference in the strength of ethnic identity when comparing Asian American emerging adults from two social contexts that differed in terms of ethnic group density.

There were several differences between the Umaña-Taylor (2004) and Juang et al. (2006) studies that may explain the conflicting results. Most importantly, they differed in the ethnic population (Latino versus Asian) and the developmental period (adolescence versus emerging adulthood) studied. There is evidence suggesting that the process of developing an ethnic identity is different for various ethnic groups (e.g., Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). Furthermore, adolescents and emerging adults have been shown to differ in their ethnic identity status (Phinney, 1989). A question that has not been addressed in the literature is whether change in ethnic identity over time varies by context. Answering this question was the second goal of the present study.

#### Within-group Variation: Gender, Social Class, and Immigrant Generational Status

How individual differences in gender, social class (SES), and immigrant generational status contribute to ethnic identity development has not been well explicated in the theoretical and empirical literature. Gender is frequently described as a salient marker for the division of labor and basis of parental treatment (Leaper & Friedman, 2006), suggesting that these differences may contribute to ethnic identity. However, studies on ethnic identity development have not yielded gender differences, possibly because gender may be less related to ethnic identity processes of exploration and commitment than to parental treatment (Pahl & Way, 2006). How SES is associated with ethnic identity development is even less clear, as most researchers do not include it in their analyses. The currently available evidence suggests that SES may play a role in ethnic identity development, although perhaps indirectly through other factors such as cultural socialization and language use (Phinney et al., 2001). However, the relation between SES and ethnic identity is far from conclusive. Finally, immigrant generational status has received the most empirical attention, and consistently shows a decrease in strength of ethnic identity from first to second generation (Phinney, 2003). Clearly, the role of these factors (gender, social class, and immigrant generational status) in ethnic identity development is not well understood. Furthermore, few studies have examined how gender, social class, and immigrant generational status are related to change in ethnic identity over time. The third goal of the present study was to fill this gap in the literature.

## The Present Study

The present study investigated change in ethnic identity development longitudinally across the first year of college and compared the process in two contexts that differed in both the density of ethnic minorities and the density of the target group we studied, Latinos. The first goal of the study was to assess change in ethnic identity during the first year of college. Change in ethnic identity was assessed in two ways: examining the change in ethnic identity exploration and commitment, and examining shifts in Phinney's (1989) ethnic identity statuses. On the basis of the developmental model of ethnic identity, we expected increases in both exploration and commitment and also expected that at the end of the first year of college, compared to the beginning, students would be in more advanced statuses, i.e., those reflecting more exploration and commitment. The second goal of the study was to assess whether potential changes in ethnic identity over the first year of college differed in the two university contexts. Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and prior research (e.g., Ethier & Deaux, 1994) highlight the importance of context, but because of conflicting empirical results, we made no prediction as to the direction of difference. The third goal of the study was to explore whether gender, social class, and immigrant generational status moderated the patterns of change over time.

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants were 128 first-year college students drawn from two public universities in California, one in Los Angeles and the other in a small coastal city in northern California. The university in Los Angeles was part of the California State University system (CSU). The university in the small coastal city was part of the University of California system (UC). All participants in this study self-identified as Chicano/Latino. The UC sample included 37 self-identified Chicano/Latino students with a mean age of 17.89 years at Time 1 ( $SD = 0.47$ ; 51% female). Twelve participants were of mixed ethnic heritage, but were included in the study as they indicated Chicano/Latino as their primary ethnic group affiliation. The CSU sample included 91 self-identified Chicano/Latino students with a mean age of 17.95 years at Time 1 ( $SD = 0.62$ ; 73% female). All participants in the CSU sample had two Chicano/Latino parents. The two samples differed in the distribution of gender and mother's and father's place of birth (US versus other; see Table 1). SES was computed as a composite of parent education and occupation using the Hollingshead (1975) classification system and collapsed into a three-point scale (1 = low, 2 = middle, 3 = high). There were no sample differences in participants' age, place of birth (US versus other), or SES. Additionally, most of the Chicano/Latino

TABLE 1  
Sample Differences in Demographic Variables

	UC	CSU	Test Statistic	df	p
Age	17.89 (0.47)	17.95 (0.62)	$t = -0.32$	124	.747
SES	1.69 (0.80)	1.52 (0.60)	$t = 1.24$	123	.218
Female	51%	73%	$\chi^2 = 5.29$	1	.021
US Born	70%	82%	$\chi^2 = 0.93$	1	.334
Mother US Born	31%	11%	$\chi^2 = 7.60$	1	.006
Father U.S. Born	33%	11%	$\chi^2 = 9.47$	1	.002

*Note.* Values in the top half of the table are means with standard deviations in parentheses.

students who attend the UC from which the study participants were drawn come from the Los Angeles area, which is the same general area that attendees of the CSU come from.

### *Sample recruitment.*

Participants in the UC sample were drawn from a larger multi-year longitudinal study on the transition to college. Ethnic minority participants were recruited from a list of all ethnic minority first year students admitted to the university provided by the director of the office of Educational Opportunity Programs<sup>2</sup>. Participants were randomly selected and invited to participate in a longitudinal study of the transition to college in a letter sent to them prior to their enrolling in the university. Students who were interested in participating returned a signed postcard<sup>3</sup>. Approximately 50% of the students who were invited to participate in the study returned a postcard indicating their willingness to participate. In the fall, these students were contacted to determine whether they were still interested in participating; most confirmed their interest to participate. Students were paid \$15 for their participation in the fall and winter sessions and \$20 for their participation in the spring session. Of the Latino participants recruited at the beginning of the study, 86% of them had complete data at both time points and were included in the present study. An analysis comparing students who completed both fall and spring surveys with those who completed only the fall survey revealed no significant differences on the variables of interest in this study.

<sup>2</sup>Because all ethnic minority participants were invited to participate, 62% of the UC sample in this study were not the first in their families to attend college. There were no significant differences in ethnic identity exploration or commitment at either time point between participants who were the first in their families to attend college and those who were not.

<sup>3</sup>If the potential participant was not yet 18 years of age, their parent/guardian also signed the postcard, consenting for the adolescent to participate in the study.

For the CSU sample, entering freshmen were asked to complete a survey in a course required of all incoming freshmen that introduced them to the university. Of the 1174 students enrolled in the course, 856 completed the fall survey. From this larger sample of students, a sub-sample of students was asked to be a part of a longitudinal study of college experience. The criteria for the study included self-identifying as Latino (Mexican or Central American), Chinese, Chinese/Vietnamese, or African American, having parents who did not complete college, and being first-time university students aged 18 or 19. All participants who met the criteria for the study were invited to participate. Of the eligible students, 306 were Latino; 113 of these agreed to participate in the study, 81% of whom had complete data at both time points. An analysis comparing students who completed both fall and spring surveys with those who completed only the fall survey revealed no significant differences on the variables of interest in this study.

#### *Description of the university settings.*

The UC campus from which the study participants were sampled is composed primarily of ethnic majority (European American) students and is located in a primarily middle- to upper-middle class European American community. In 2002, 60% of the incoming students were European American. Chicano/Latinos, who are the largest minority at the school, represent about 15% of the student body. The demographic data for the surrounding town are similar, although there is a smaller percentage of ethnic minorities than at the university. According to the 2000 US Census, 72% of the town was European American and 17.4% was Latino, and the median household income of the area was \$50,605.

The CSU campus from which the study participants were drawn is primarily composed of ethnic minority students and is located in a working-class, predominantly ethnic minority community. In 2002, 7% of the incoming students were European American, while Chicano/Latinos, who are the largest minority at the school, represent about 56% of the student body. The demographic data for the surrounding area are similar, although there is a greater percentage of Latinos than at the university. According to the 2000 US Census, 80% of the area is Latino and about 7% is European American, and the median household income of the area was \$33,445.

### Measures

#### *Ethnic identity.*

Ethnic identity was measured using the revised 12-item version of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al. 1999). This scale has been used extensively in ethnic identity research and has shown strong reliability and validity (Roberts et al., 1999). The scale contains a 3-item subscale assessing ethnic identity exploration and a 6-item subscale assessing

level of commitment to an ethnic identity. Participants in the UC sample responded on a 4-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Participants in the CSU sample responded on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To equate the measures for comparison, the scales were converted to a standardized score that could range from 0 to 1 (Malczewski, 1999)<sup>4</sup>. Items were averaged for each subscale so that higher values represent greater exploration or commitment. A sample item from the exploration subscale is "To learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group." A sample item from the commitment subscale is, "I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group." For the UC sample Cronbach's alpha for exploration was .69 at Times 1 and 2, and for commitment was .90 at Time 1 and .79 at Time 2. For the CSU sample Cronbach's alpha for exploration was .68 at Time 1 and .70 at Time 2, and for commitment was .90 at Time 1 and .89 at Time 2. Ethnic identity statuses were derived from the exploration and commitment scores using cluster analysis, as described in the Results section.

## Procedure

For the UC sample, participants completed a survey and interview individually during the first five weeks of each quarter of their first year of college. The ethnic identity measure was included in the fall and spring surveys. Participants completed the survey by themselves at their own pace in a campus laboratory. A researcher was available to answer questions.

For the CSU sample, participants completed the survey individually in the fall of their first quarter at the university. Participants were given information for accessing the survey on a website. After completing a consent form agreeing to allow access to their academic records, they completed the survey. Participating students were contacted again in spring to complete the follow-up survey in the same manner.

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analyses

The correlations between all variables can be seen in Table 2. Ethnic identity exploration and commitment were significantly associated with one another at each time point. The correlations were significantly larger for the CSU students than for

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<sup>4</sup>This was computed using the following formula:  $X_i^1 = (X_i - X_{\min}) / (X_{\max} - X_{\min})$ , where  $X_{\min}$  equals the minimum value in the range and  $X_{\max}$  equals the maximum value in the range.

TABLE 2  
Bivariate Correlations for Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Fall EI Exploration		.68***	.59***	.48***	-.11
2 Fall EI Commitment	.33*		.52***	.65***	-.13
3 Spring EI Exploration	.46**	.24		.69***	-.22*
4 Spring EI Commitment	.21	.75***	.47**		-.16
5 SES	-.14	-.19	-.25	-.21	

*Note.* Values above the diagonal are for the CSU sample, values below the diagonal are for the UC sample.  $N_s = 37$  for all below the diagonal, 90–91 for all above the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the UC students in the fall ( $z_D = 2.41, p = 0.02$ ), and only marginally significantly different in the spring ( $z_D = 1.69, p = 0.09$ ). As shown in Table 2, ethnic identity exploration and commitment were weakly and negatively associated with SES in both samples. Although these correlations are small, to be consistent with past research SES was retained as a control variable in the primary analyses.

Significant differences on the ethnic identity exploration subscale were found for immigrant generational status (born in the US versus born outside the US) at both Time 1 ( $F(1,120) = 5.90, p = .02, \eta^2 = .05$ ) and Time 2 ( $F(1,120) = 5.43, p = .02, \eta^2 = .04$ ). Participants born in the US reported significantly less ethnic identity exploration ( $M = 0.59, SD = 0.23$  at Time 1;  $M = 0.55, SD = 0.22$  at Time 2) than participants born outside the US ( $M = 0.70, SD = 0.17$  at Time 1;  $M = 0.65, SD = 0.18$  at Time 2). There were no differences for ethnic identity commitment and no immigrant generational status by context interactions. Due to the differences on exploration, immigrant generational status was used as a control variable in the primary analyses.

### Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) Analyses for Developmental Change in Ethnic Identity Exploration and Commitment

To explore differences in ethnic identity between fall and spring and across contexts, a 2 (Context)  $\times$  2 (Gender)  $\times$  2 (Time) mixed analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) controlling for SES and place of birth (US versus other) was run for each of the two ethnic identity components (exploration and commitment). Context and gender were between-subjects factors and time was a within-subjects factor. No significant main effects or interactions emerged, indicating that there were no differences in the mean levels of exploration or commitment over time or between the two contexts.

TABLE 3  
 Mean Standardized Scores (With Standard Deviations in Parentheses)  
 for Ethnic Identity Exploration and Commitment Subscales by Cluster  
 for Each Time Point

	<i>Achieved</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>Moratorium</i> <sup>b</sup>	<i>Unexamined</i> <sup>c</sup>
Fall			
Exploration	0.84 (0.11)	0.55 (0.15)	0.44 (0.22)
Commitment	0.91 (0.09)	0.75 (0.10)	0.43 (0.15)
Spring			
Exploration	0.73 (0.15)	0.47 (0.12)	0.24 (0.17)
Commitment	0.88 (0.12)	0.67 (0.10)	0.29 (0.17)

<sup>a</sup>*n* for fall = 39, spring = 62. <sup>b</sup>*n* for fall = 59, spring = 55. <sup>c</sup>*n* for fall = 30, spring = 11.

### Cluster Analyses for Developmental Change in Ethnic Identity Statuses

Because no significant differences emerged in the ANCOVAs, the two samples were combined and hierarchical cluster analyses were conducted to identify patterns of ethnic identity status change over time. The ethnic identity exploration and commitment subscales were submitted to a cluster analysis separately by time point<sup>5</sup> using Ward's clustering method and squared Euclidean distances for estimation. Four solutions were requested, providing two-, three-, four-, and five-cluster solutions for analysis. Based on the dendrogram and cluster distances, a three group solution appeared most appropriate in both analyses. Subscale means were then assessed by cluster to determine the conceptual adequacy of the three-cluster solution. The three clusters were clearly interpretable, yielding an achieved group, a moratorium group, and an unexamined group at both time points. Means and standard deviations for each cluster at both time points are presented in Table 3. These results are consistent with theory and past research (e.g., Phinney & Chavira, 1992).

The distributions of cluster membership did not differ by context (Figures 1 and 2). For both contexts, the bulk of participants in the fall were in the moratorium cluster (49% for UC and 45% for CSU). About one-quarter of the participants was in the unexamined cluster (22 and 24%, respectively) and about one-third were in the achieved cluster (30 and 31%, respectively). The cluster membership breakdown was different in the spring, although there were still no differences by con-

<sup>5</sup>The analyses were conducted separately by time point to determine whether there were parallel clusters in the fall and spring. Using this method allowed for theoretically meaningful clusters rather than purely data-driven clusters capitalizing on unique change. The concern in this analysis was with change in theoretical ethnic identity statuses, rather than individual-level change. Individual patterns of change were then mapped following the cluster analysis.

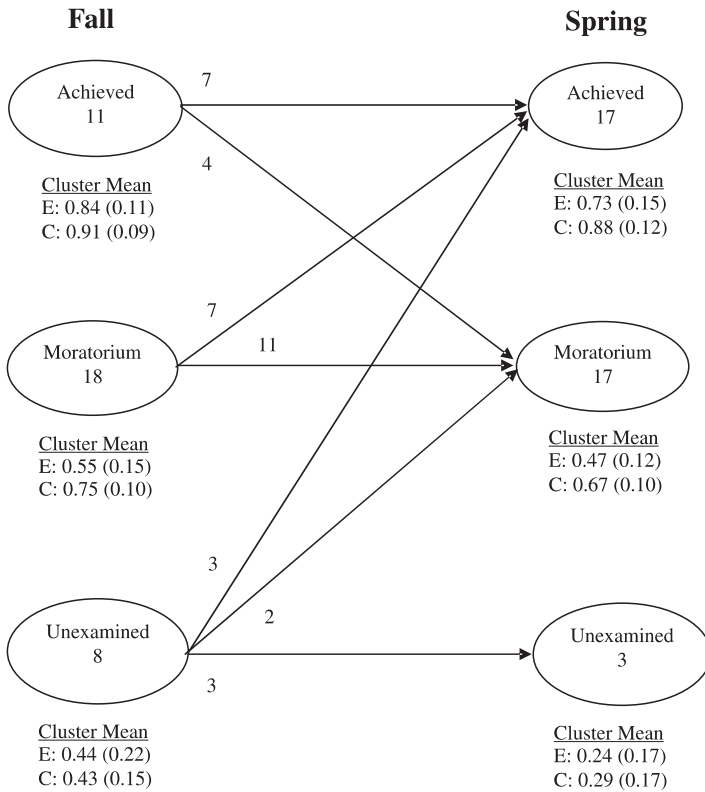


FIGURE 1 Shifts in cluster membership from fall to spring for the UC sample. Numbers inside circles represent *n* for the clusters. Numbers on lines represent number of participants that shifted from one cluster to another. E = Exploration; C = Commitment.

text. Membership was fairly evenly split between achieved (46% for UC and 49% for CSU) and moratorium (46 and 42%), with few participants in the unexamined group (8 and 9%).

Although the ANCOVA suggested no change in ethnic identity across time, the cluster analyses indicate that 43% of the UC sample and 51% of the CSU sample shifted in terms of cluster membership during the first year of college. The clusters were examined separately by context to assess individual participants' shifts in cluster membership from fall to spring (Figures 1 and 2). The changes in identity status membership were evaluated in terms of developmental shifts conceptualized in the identity status literature (Waterman, 1982). This is a useful method of assessing change that has recently been used with the ethnic identity statuses (Seaton

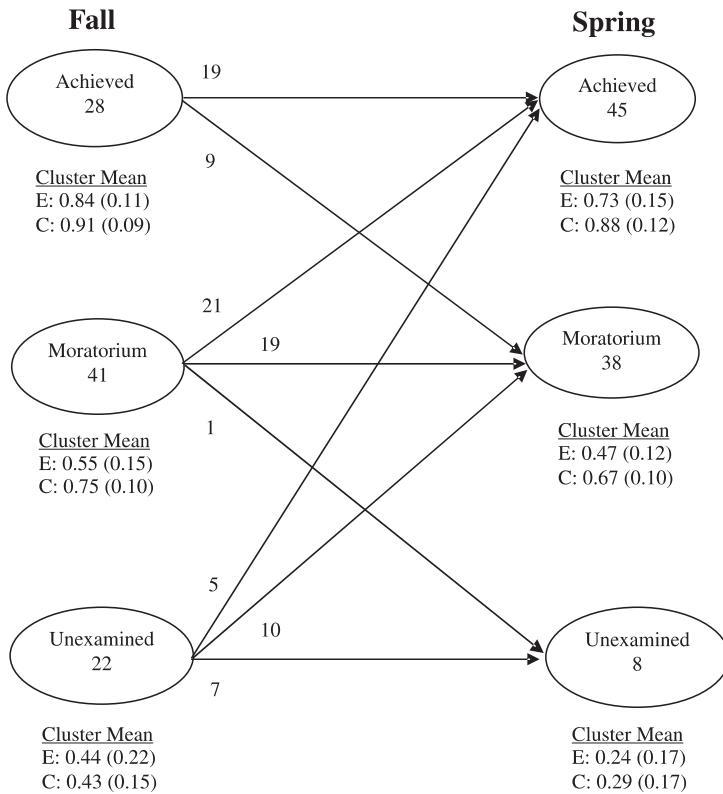


FIGURE 2 Shifts in cluster membership from fall to spring for the CSU sample. Numbers inside circles represent *n* for the clusters. Numbers on lines represent number of participants that shifted from one cluster to another. E = Exploration; C = Commitment.

et al., 2006). There are two types of shifts: progressive and regressive. Progressive shifts include moratorium to achieved, unexamined to moratorium, and unexamined to achieved ( $n = 48$ ). Regressive shifts include achieved to moratorium, achieved to unexamined, and moratorium to unexamined ( $n = 14$ ). Participants could also show stability, which is indicated by an individual being assigned to the same ethnic identity status at both points in time, whether achieved, moratorium, or unexamined ( $n = 66$ ). A Sign-test was used to test whether the probability of observing progressive change outweighed the probability of observing regressive change. As expected, progressive change occurred significantly more often than regressive change (respective ratio = 48:14,  $p < .001$ ). These results held up when examining the UC sample (12:4,  $p = .08$ ) and CSU sample (36:10,  $p < .001$ ) individually. The frequency of the three types of shifts did not vary by gender, SES, or

immigrant generational status for the sample as a whole or for each sample individually.

### The Relationship of Gender, Social Class, and Immigrant Generational Status to Ethnic Identity Status Clusters

Ethnic identity cluster membership was explored for gender, social class (SES), and immigrant generational status differences. No gender or immigrant generational status differences were found by cluster membership at either time point. In the fall, the clusters did not differ in SES. However, significant differences were detected in the spring,  $F(2,126) = 7.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$ . Participants in the unexamined group ( $M = 2.25, SD = 0.62$ ) were of significantly higher SES than those in the moratorium ( $M = 1.54, SD = 0.57$ ) or achieved groups ( $M = 1.49, SD = 0.72$ ). This finding held up when doing the analyses separately by context.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate and compare Latino emerging adults' ethnic identity development longitudinally during the first year of college in two contexts. To this end, we had three goals: (a) to assess longitudinal change in ethnic identity during the first year of college, (b) to assess whether such changes in ethnic identity over the first year of college differed in two university contexts varying in the concentration of Latinos in the community, and (c) to explore whether gender, social class, and immigrant generational status moderated the patterns of change over time.

### Longitudinal Change in Ethnic Identity During the First Year of College

Based on Phinney's (1992) model of ethnic identity, we expected increases in both exploration and commitment. We also expected that at the end of the first year of college the emerging adults would be in more advanced statuses (i.e., those reflecting more exploration and commitment) than at the beginning of the year and their transition to a new college context. Our predictions were only partially supported. We did not find any significant change in mean levels of ethnic identity exploration or commitment over time. However, results from the cluster analysis indicated substantial individual shifts in ethnic identity statuses (unexamined, moratorium, and achievement) from fall to spring quarters. The shifts found in the cluster analysis were consistent with past work on shifts in identity statuses (e.g., Meeus et al., 1999; Waterman, 1982) and past longitudinal research on ethnic identity (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). In the fall, participants were relatively equally distributed

among the three statuses, with slightly more emerging adults falling into the moratorium status than the other two. By the spring, most emerging adults were either in the moratorium or achieved statuses, with very few people in the unexamined status. These patterns suggest that emerging adults were generally moving towards the achieved status, as predicted by Marcia's model. Many who were unexamined moved to moratorium, and many in moratorium moved to achieved. However, this interpretation, based solely on frequency of cluster membership at each time point, provides only part of the story. When individual participants' pathways are examined, it can be seen that many participants shifted from achieved to moratorium and from unexamined to achieved. A small number also shifted from moratorium to unexamined. These results provide evidence for the continuing negotiation of ethnic identity in emerging adulthood, as well as the malleability of the ethnic identity statuses during this developmental period, even for those who initially were ethnic identity achieved (Phinney, 2006). Future research should examine the possibility that, like the African Americans studied by Cross and Fhagen (2001), changes in Latino's ethnic identities are instigated, at least in part, by challenges they encounter. For our participants, the transition to university, which brings about the exposure to a new peer group and coursework relevant to ethnicity, can provide opportunities for re-examining and reconceptualizing Latino students' ethnic identities (see also Hurtado & Gurin, 2004). An additional challenge for ethnic minority participants at most US universities is that most of the faculty are European American and may thus not seem, at first glance, to be potential career models or mentors.

The large number of participants who shifted in ethnic identity status during the year highlights the importance of longitudinal work. Substantial change was observed even in the short time period between measurements, with progressive identity status shifts significantly outweighing regressive shifts (Waterman, 1982). While Figures 1 and 2 show arrows representing identity pathways from the fall to the spring, the lack of information preceding the fall data point and following the spring data point is equally important. It would be valuable to obtain pre-transition data on ethnic identity to gain a better understanding of the different pathways. For example, some of the participants who shifted from moratorium to achieved statuses may represent a steadily increasing ethnic identity from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Meanwhile, others on that same pathway (i.e., moratorium to achieved statuses) may represent undecided adolescents, those who are actively exploring their ethnicity but have not committed to an identity. If more than two time points were collected, these individuals might exhibit a fluctuating pattern in which they move back and forth from moratorium to achieved, rather than linear movement (i.e., MAMA cycles; Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992). At any time they may be categorized as achieved, but their 'achievement' may only be a temporary status. Obtaining data at multiple time points could help illuminate these differing pathways and highlight the negotiation and renegotiation of ethnic identity.

Recent theorizing in other domains of identity also suggests this more dynamic, lifespan approach to identity development (e.g., Côté, 1996) and is also consistent with Erikson's (1968) conceptualization of identity development.

The results of this study have important methodological implications for longitudinal ethnic identity research. When looking at change in ethnic identity using ANCOVAs, no differences were found. While there was no significant mean change, there was a great deal of variability, suggesting the possibility of subgroups that cancel each other out when only the mean is considered. A person-centered approach, such as cluster analysis, is able to address this variability by identifying the subgroups of individuals with different ethnic identity pathways. Indeed, Rutter (1988) has emphasized the importance of studying subgroups for assessing developmental change. About half of each sample shifted cluster membership across the first year of college. The changes detected were not idiosyncratic, but rather they were theoretically meaningful (Waterman, 1982). The 'mean as the best estimate' approach of the ANCOVA was unable to detect the change due to the inherent subgroups of ethnic identity. Indeed, using ANOVA is not theoretically consistent with the ethnic identity statuses model, which suggests that there will be groupings of individuals who differ on ethnic identity at any given point, and that those levels of ethnic identity can increase or decrease over time. Accordingly, the results of the present study hold important methodological implications for future ethnic identity research, namely, that using ANOVAs may not be appropriate for longitudinal work.

### Variations in Ethnic Identity Development by Social Context

Due to the conflicting past empirical findings on the relations between ethnic identity and social context (i.e., ethnic group density), we made no prediction as to the direction of difference between the two samples. Our findings did not support the view that ethnic identity development varies as a function of social context. Mean scores on both ethnic identity exploration and commitment did not differ over time or by context. Even when looking at an individual level (i.e., shifts in cluster membership); there were no apparent differences in ethnic identity by context. There are many plausible reasons for these null findings. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlighted in his ecological theory, context can have meaning beyond the school one attends (the microsystem) or the surrounding community (the exosystem) such as the predominant attitudes of the larger society (the macrosystem). Our results suggest that conceptualizing the microsystem as the ethnic concentration of a school does not account for variation in strength of ethnic identity for emerging adults (see also Juang et al., 2006).

Even when considering the multiple levels of social context, there remain competing theoretical rationales for how that context might influence ethnic identity development. Juang et al. (2006) raise an important point when discussing the lack

of difference in strength of ethnic identity between the two contexts they studied. Theoretical arguments can be made for why ethnic identity may be higher in both majority *and* minority community contexts. Following Erikson's (1968) theory, in contexts where an ethnic group is well-represented, societal resources and strength of the ethnic community allow for exploration and maintenance of the ethnic culture. According to social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986), in minority contexts ethnicity is made salient by being an underrepresented group, resulting in minorities wanting to learn more about their group and stick together to create a sense of ethnic community. In essence, the similar levels of ethnic identity in the two contexts may have been created and arrived at through different processes, which can be conceptualized as ethnic identity *pathways*. Although these pathways arrive at the same result, the processes that lead them there as well as the actual meaning ascribed to their ethnic identities may be very different, a suggestion which deserves future study.

Taken together, the results of this study suggest that neither Eriksonian theory nor social identity theory can fully account for ethnic identity development. Perhaps for some people, the principles of Eriksonian theory are at play, and for others it is social identity theory that best explains the experiences. Furthermore, it may be that the application of identity theories to ethnic identity at the group level needs to be reconsidered or at least complemented with application and analysis at the individual or subgroup level. Taken together, our findings underscore the proposal that ethnic identity and social context must be evaluated at the individual level to obtain the personal meaning component lacking in the present study and the extant literature.

### The Relationship of Gender, Social Class, and Immigrant Generational Status to Ethnic Identity

Owing to the dearth of research on how gender, social class (SES), and immigrant generational status are related to ethnic identity, we treated this research question as exploratory and did not make any specific predictions. Gender and immigrant generational status were not associated with change in ethnic identity (mean levels or status membership), nor did ethnic identity status membership itself differ along these variables. However, a consistent finding in both contexts was that those in the unexamined status were of a higher SES than the moratorium and achieved groups. However, this was only the case in the spring, at the end of the school year. Thus, it seems that emerging adults who are of a higher SES are more likely to remain in the unexamined status, while those of relatively lower SES strengthen their ethnic identification during the first year of college. The high SES students who remained in the unexamined group entered college with low identification with their ethnicity and persisted at the same levels across the year. It may be that these students,

who did not have to negotiate differences in ethnicity *and* social class during their transition, seamlessly assimilated into the new college environment. These individuals most likely would have come from higher SES hometowns, and therefore might be more accustomed to being in a primarily European American context. However, if this were the case, we would not expect to find the same results in both contexts examined in the present study because CSU is primarily composed of ethnic minorities from the surrounding largely low-income ethnic minority neighborhoods. Because the high SES students remained in the unexamined group in both contexts, it could be that ethnicity is not salient for them, suggesting that they may be more assimilated to the mainstream, middle class culture and values that typically characterize universities.

It is also possible that some of the participants of mixed ethnic heritage identify more strongly with being European American than Latino. However, there were no mixed heritage participants in the CSU sample, and the mixed participants in the UC sample were evenly distributed among the ethnic identity statuses, suggesting that they did not differ from the mono-ethnic Latino participants. This finding is consistent with the fact that all participants' primary ethnic group self-identification was Chicano/Latino. While not within the scope of this study, an important area of future research is to examine ethnic identity development in mixed heritage students. In-depth interviews with mixed heritage emerging adults may reveal that although they primarily define themselves as Chicano/Latinos, the degree to which they exhibit the physical, demographic, behavioral, and other characteristics associated with being a member of this ethnic group may influence the ease with which they can integrate themselves into Chicano/Latino groups and their experiences of prejudice and discrimination. As is the case for other ethnic minority groups, physical characteristics such as skin color are especially likely to play a role in how others perceive these mixed heritage students' ethnic group membership (Brunsmas & Rockquemore, 2001).

### Limitations

There are several limitations to consider when interpreting the findings of the present study. The sample sizes between the two contexts were quite different. The CSU sample size was adequate, but the UC sample was small, a fact that came into play especially when looking at the different cluster pathways. Although there were no differences in pathways by context, some of the pathways in the UC sample contained very few participants. It could be that with a larger sample more variability in pathway membership would be found by context. The geographical location of the study should also be considered. Both of the samples were drawn from universities in California, at which Latinos were the largest ethnic minority group. Although they still face many struggles, Latinos maintain a presence in California (e.g., language visibility, institutional representation) that may not be found in

many other parts of the US, which could be related to how they perceive their social context. Lastly, this study relied exclusively on a single self-report measure of ethnic identity. It would be beneficial to go beyond this methodology, perhaps through personal interviews, to get a broader sense of emerging adults' ethnic identities.

### Future Directions

Drawing on an ecological framework (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 1996), future research should continue to emphasize the social context in which one's ethnicity is explored as a social identity within multiple layers of context (e.g., school, community, nation, and history). Research that considers these multiple layers will potentially provide a greater understanding of the role of context in ethnic identity development.

It has become evident, from the conflicting findings on ethnic identity in context and the competing theoretical rationales, that qualitative methods must be incorporated to a greater degree in research to understand the particular pathways adolescents and emerging adults take to achieve a sense of ethnic identity. The work of Cooper and her colleagues (e.g., Cooper, 1999; Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, & Lopez, 1998) on adolescents' 'multiple worlds' can provide a starting point for how to conceptualize the many competing forces that ethnic minorities experience in the course of identity construction. Multi-method approaches, which take into consideration perceived resources and challenges from several influential contexts (e.g., family, peers, schools, and community), can provide a window into the actual processes of ethnic identity development while focusing on the contexts that are salient for the individual. An individual may be embedded in a particular social context, but may not perceive that context as being salient to the development of his or her ethnic identity at a particular point in time. Qualitative longitudinal studies can reveal the personal meaning of ethnicity for participants over time and similarities and differences in the relation between an emerging adult participant's personal meaning and that of other emerging adults who label themselves as being from the same ethnic group.

### Conclusion

This study investigated and compared ethnic identity development longitudinally across the first year of college in two contexts. Although there were no differences detected by context, the findings have implications for research on developmental pathways to ethnic identity. Support was found for the developmental progression through the ethnic identity statuses as previously specified (e.g., Phinney, 1989). However, there were also patterns that highlighted the dynamic revisiting of ethnic identity in emerging adulthood. The findings from the present study, in conjunc-

tion with past studies on the role of context in ethnic identity, suggest that researchers should explore the meaning of the social context to the individual to truly understand the role of context in ethnic identity development.

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