

**Quién Soy Yo? Measuring Student Ethnic Identity**

**Ms. Leslie Dominguez, Texas Agrilife**

**leslie.dominguez@ag.tamu.edu**

**Dr. Steven Boot Chumbley, Texas A&M University-Kingsville**

**steven.chumbley@tamuk.edu**

## Quién Soy Yo? Measuring Student Ethnic Identity

### Introduction/ Theoretical Framework

Understanding ethnic identity and helping students develop an appreciation for their own and other's ethnic identity is of utmost importance. Ethnic identity has been linked to college students' psychological adjustment among ethnic minorities (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). Ethnic identity is a dynamic and complex construct involving exploration and commitment that develops over time (Phinney, 1998). This can be influenced by their daily experiences, and interpersonal interactions (Gaylord-Harden, et. al., 2007). Multiple theories suggest adolescents begin to formulate their ethnic or racial identity by exploring and learning about their own group (Helms, 1990). Research suggests that ethnic identity is a central aspect of personality development for ethnic minority group members (Phinney, 2003). Recent work has found that ethnic identity continues to develop during emerging adulthood, with most of this research focused on college students (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). The study was guided by the social identity theory which concentrations on a person's sense of who they are based upon their membership to a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Tajfel's theory of social identity suggests people's sense of belonging influences of their self-esteem and pride. Ethnic identity is a type of group identity which is centered on the self-concept of members in ethnic minority groups. It is assumed those who can achieve ethnic identity lead to positive attitudes regarding their sense of belonging (Phinney, 1998).

### Methods

This non-experimental, descriptive study focused on post-secondary students enrolled in four introductory level agriculture courses at Texas A&M University- Kingsville. All participants completed an online version of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). The MEIM (Phinney, 1992) was designed to measure an individual's underlying sense of ethnic identity. The instrument assesses the way people think, feel, and behave with respect to their ethnic origin. It is comprised of two factors: a developmental-cognitive component (*ethnic identity search*) and an affective component (*affirmation, belonging and commitment*) (Phinney, 1992). The first factor involves discovering personal meanings of ethnic identity through active participation, searching, and exploration. The second factor relates to feelings of belonging to and identifying with one's ethnic background. The MEIM allows students to rate their sense of ethnic identity by selecting how much they agree or disagree with each statement using a 4-point Likert scale, with lower scores indicating more agreement and a higher ethnic identity. A total of 105 students participated in this study resulting in a response rate of 79%. Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 26 on measures of central tendency. To follow IRB guidelines, a limitation to the results was that findings could not be distributed based on what the class the student was enrolled in. The MEIM has been used in dozens of studies and has consistently shown good reliability, typically with alphas above .80 across a wide range of ethnic groups and ages. Reliability scores were measured using Cronbach's Alpha with .79 for Ethnic Identity Search and .84 for Affirmation Belonging & Commitment.

This study sought to determine student ethnic identity based upon two constructs, *ethnic identity search* (EIS) and *affirmation belonging commitment* (ABC). The participants of the study were undergraduate students within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The sample was made up of 51 students who identified as females and 53 who identified as males. The

majority of the participants identified as Hispanic ( $n = 62$ ), 33 identified as White, and 10 identified as Mixed.

### Findings

These findings were reported using reverse coding (1 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Strongly Disagree). The objective sought to determine student ethnic identity based upon *ethnic identity search* and *affirmation belonging commitment* within online Agriculture courses at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. The highest levels of agreement were found related to “*I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group*” ( $M = 2.11, SD = 1.13$ ) and “*I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group*” ( $M = 2.13, SD = 1.08$ ). These findings suggest that students feel an attachment towards their own ethnic group, and they have pride in their ethnic group. The lowest levels of agreement were found related to “*I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership*” ( $M = 2.59, SD = 0.96$ ) and “*I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group*” ( $M = 2.70, SD = 0.88$ ). These findings suggest students agreed and disagreed they are active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of their own ethnic group, and they think about how their lives will be affected by their ethnic group membership. It was also found the participants had a higher level of *Affirmation Belonging Commitment* ( $M = 2.17, SD = 0.66$ ). This finding suggests the participants agreed they have a sense of group membership towards their ethnic group. This finding suggests the participants agreed and disagreed they spent time searching for their ethnic identity. It was also found the participants had a lower level of *Ethnic Identity Search* ( $M = 2.50, SD = 1.01$ ).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Of the specific questions asked in the study, the higher level of agreement was found related to, “*I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.*” This finding suggests students agreed they have pride in their ethnic group. Previous research states a strong ethnic identity is based on discovery of traditions and culture that is portrayed by pride (Phinney, 1992; Whitehead et al., 2009). The lower level of agreement was found related to, “*I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.*” This finding suggests that students agreed and disagreed they were active in organizations or social groups that include members of their ethnic group. Previous research states college students are more likely to seek out ethnic student organizations as a source of feeling supported and belonging (Museus, 2008). Research suggests involvement in organizations is positively related to the college experiences and outcomes of students (Bowman et al., 2015).

When looking at the constructs, we found students had a higher level of agreement related to *affirmation belonging commitment* compared to *ethnic identity search*. The researchers found students agreed they have a sense of membership within their ethnic group. These findings suggest students agreed they spent time searching and developing their ethnic identity. Previous studies have stated ethnic identity is seen as the part of the self-concept related to individuals’ sense of belonging to a social group (Worrell & Gardner-Kitt, 2006). In Phinney’s (1989) stage model she defined ethnic identity development as the passage from foreclosed ethnic identity through the exploration phase to an achieved ethnic identity status. According to Nora et al. (2005), students’ sense of belonging to their ethnic group is an important factor in their persistence and success.

## References

- Bowman, N. A., Park, J. J., & Denson, N. (2015). Student involvement in ethnic student organizations: Examining civic outcomes 6 years after graduation. *Research in Higher Education, 56*, 127-145. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-014-9353-8>
- Gaylord-Harden, N. K., Ragsdale B. L., Mander, J., Richards, M. H., & Petersen, A. C. (2007). Perceived support and internalizing symptoms in African American adolescents: Self-esteem and ethnic identity as mediators. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 36*, 77–88. doi:10.1007/s10964-006-9115-9
- Museus, S. D. (2008). The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African American and Asian American students' cultural adjustment and membership at predominantly White institutions. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*, 568–586. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0039>
- Phinney, J. S. (1992). The multigroup ethnic identity measure: A new scale for use with diverse groups. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 7*, 156-176.
- Phinney, J. (1998, December). Ethnic identity and acculturation. Paper presented at the Conference on Acculturation, University of San Francisco
- Phinney, J. (2003). Ethnic identity and acculturation. In K. Chun, P. Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research* (pp. 63-82). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson–Hall.
- Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Quintana, S. M., Lee, R. M., Cross, W. E., Rivas-Drake, D., Schwartz, S. J. Study Group on Ethnic and Racial Identity in the 21st Century. (2014). Ethnic and racial identity during adolescence and into young adulthood: An integrated conceptualization. *Child Development, 85*, 21–39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12196>
- Whitehead, K. A., Ainsworth, A. T., Wittig, M. A., & Gadino, B. (2009). Implications of ethnic identity exploration and ethnic identity affirmation and belonging for intergroup attitudes among adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 19*, 123–135. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2009.00585.x>
- Worrell, F. C. & Gardner-Kitt, D. L. (2006). The relationship between racial and ethnic identity in black adolescents: The cross racial identity scale and the multigroup ethnic identity measure. *Identity, 6*(4), 293-315. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532706xid0604\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532706xid0604_1)