

Ethnic Identity of Hispanic Agriculture Majors

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Introduction & Theoretical Framework

Ethnic identity is a dynamic and complex construct involving exploration and commitment that develops over time (Phinney, 1998, 2003). This identity formation is a crucial aspect of personal development and social integration, influencing various outcomes such as psychological well-being, academic performance, and social relationships (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). Specifically, those with a stronger identity have been found to have a clearer commitment and sense of belonging to their group (Roberts et al., 1999, Dominguez & Chumbley, 2022).

The social identity theory (SIT) guided this study. This theory focuses on a sense of belonging to a group and the attitudes & feelings that accompany a sense of group membership (Taejel & Turner, 1986). This categorization helps people simplify the world and navigate complex social landscapes by providing a structure to their social identity. Based on social identity theory, it would be expected that ethnic identity would include ethnic attitudes and a sense of group belonging. These concepts are important to future leaders in agriculture and to training professionals in agricultural sciences.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to identify the agreement with students' perceptions of their ethnic identity. The research questions that guided this study were to:

1. To determine student ethnic identity based upon *ethnic identity search* and *affirmation belonging commitment* within online Agriculture courses at [University].

Methods

This non-experimental, descriptive study focused on post-secondary students enrolled in agriculture courses at Texas State University. This convenience sample of participants were selected based upon the criteria that they were enrolled in a lower-level mandatory undergraduate agriculture course. After IRB approval, the researchers used the SurveyMonkey online survey tool to disrupt to all students in the Intro to Agriculture during the Fall 2023 semester. Following an agreement for student participation, all students who elected to participate completed an online version of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). This is a questionnaire to assess 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).

A total of 162 students participated in this study, resulting in a response rate of 89%. The participants were diverse, with 45% identifying as White, 38% as Hispanic, 6% identifying as Mixed Race and 9% identifying as African American. Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 26 on measures of central tendency and correlations. The MEIM has been used in dozens of studies and has consistently shown acceptable reliability, typically with alphas coefficients above .80 across a wide range of ethnic groups and ages.

Findings

This study sought to determine student ethnic identity based upon *ethnic identity search* and *affirmation belonging commitment* within Agriculture courses at [University].

Table 1
Mean Ethnic Identity Measure Scores

<i>Prompt</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mode</i>
I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.	161	2.35	0.69	2
In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.	162	2.71	0.72	3
I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs.	162	2.76	0.66	3
I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.	160	2.80	0.69	3
I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.	161	3.01	0.69	3
I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.	161	3.02	0.72	3
I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.	162	3.10	0.57	3
I have clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.	162	3.13	0.64	3
I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.	162	3.12	0.77	3
I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.	162	3.19	0.80	3
I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.	162	3.25	0.67	3
I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.	162	3.31	0.66	3
Overall Mean Score 3.15, Mode = 3				

Note. 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree

The highest levels of agreement were found related to “*I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.*” ($M = 2.35$, $Mode = 2$, $SD = .69$). That was the only individual statement that had a mode of 2 (*Agree*). All other individual statements had a mode of 3 (*Disagree*). These findings suggest that students from this sample population had a lower sense of ethnic identity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study sought to determine student ethnic identity at Texas State University. Of the specific questions asked in the study, the highest level of agreement was found related to, “*I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group*” It was found that students had a higher sense of agreement related to *ethnic identity search* as compared to *affirmation belonging & commitment*. The researchers found students disagreed that they had a sense of membership within their ethnic group. These findings suggest students did not agree that they spent time searching and developing their ethnic identity. At lower level required course, there is the potential students have not spent time searching for their ethnic identity yet, and therefore the survey should be conducted in later points in their academic careers.

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