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Abstract

This brief report examined changes in ethnic identity as a function of college type and whether any differences in ethnic identity could be explained by extracurricular activity involvement, ethnic composition of college, and residential status. Although no changes in ethnic labeling or belonging were found, there was a normative decrease in ethnic search, independent of residential status. Moreover, the decline in ethnic search was significantly greater at two- than four-year colleges and this difference was mediated by higher rates of participation in extracurricular activities at four-year colleges. Ethnic identity did not vary by ethnic composition of college. There were no ethnic or generation differences in ethnic identity change, however females were more likely to include an American term in their ethnic label than males, over time. Averaging across time, students at four-year colleges also had a greater preference for the American term in their ethnic labels. Findings illuminate the importance of context in shaping ethnic identity.

Key Words: ethnic identity, college transition, extracurricular activity

Change in Ethnic Identity Across the College Transition

For ethnic minorities in the United States, their minority status heightens the awareness of their ethnicity and contributes to the important developmental task of ethnic identity formation (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Individuals who establish a clear understanding of their ethnic group membership are likely to experience greater well-being and adjustment (Phinney, 1990). Studies on changes in ethnic identity have focused primarily on the high school years and have yielded somewhat inconsistent findings. Some studies (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006; Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, & Guimond, 2009) have observed an increase in ethnic identity, whereas Pahl and Way (2006) found that ethnic identity decreased and other research (Fuligni, Kiang, Witkow, & Baldelomar, 2008; Kiang, Witkow, Baldelomar, & Fuligni, 2010) noted no changes in ethnic identity during the high school years. Perhaps normative changes in ethnic identity may be more likely to occur when adolescents experience greater dramatic changes in their social contexts, such as those that occur during their transition out of high school and into college or the world of work (Arnett, 2000). Indeed, recent research provides evidence that college attendance facilitates students' exploration and understanding about the role ethnicity plays in their lives and adjustment to mainstream U.S. society (Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Yet, there has been little longitudinal work that has tracked how ethnic identity changes as adolescents move beyond high school. In this brief report, we extend research on ethnic identity development by examining how three components of ethnic identity – ethnic labels, search, and belonging – change across the transition from high school to college and whether changes in ethnic identity development varies as a function of the type of college attended.

Contextual Differences between Two and Four Year Colleges

Within the United States, college-bound students typically attend either two- or four- year colleges after high school. These two college types differ in key features that could conceivably shape their ethnic identity. One key distinction between two- and four-year colleges is the richness of campus social life, such that a greater amount of extracurricular activities and organized student networks can be found at four-year colleges (Davies & Casey, 1999). Given that two-year colleges are commuter schools, it is also less likely that students at two-year colleges are engaged in campus activities (Edman & Brazil, 2009).

Extracurricular activities and organizations can play an important role in identity exploration more generally, and perhaps, ethnic identity specifically. For example, participation in extracurricular activities engages individuals to reflect on their interests and develop a sense of who they are and who they want to be, thereby facilitating identity exploration (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999). Additionally, extracurricular activities involve interactions with peers which can highlight personal differences, such as ethnicity, that encourages individuals to think about how they relate to other group members. Moreover, affiliation particularly with ethnic organizations during college is positively associated with ethnic identity development (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Inkelas, 2004; Saylor & Aries, 1999; Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004). Close relations with same-ethnic peers can increase awareness of ethnic-related issues and help individuals maintain and develop a sense of connection to their ethnic heritage. Generally then, campus activities allow individuals to explore their interests and background and learn more about themselves.

Especially for ethnic minorities, engaging in extracurricular activities may be valuable opportunities to become socially integrated into the larger mainstream American college environment. Thus, involvement in extracurricular activities can influence affiliation not only

with one's ethnic group, but also with the more dominant American culture in which college students are immersed in. Given that there are more social networks at four-year colleges, students may have greater opportunities to engage in identity exploration and socially integrate into their college environment.

Another important characteristic that can shape ethnic identity is the ethnic composition of the college. Presence of the same or different ethnic groups impacts the salience of one's own ethnicity and influences one's ethnic identification (Phinney, 2006; Yip, 2005). In less diverse contexts where one's group is a minority, ethnicity becomes more salient and can lead to greater exploration of and attachment to one's cultural background (Saylor & Aries, 1999; Umaña-Taylor, 2004). On the other hand, it is also possible that one's minority status may contribute to a desire to fit in and adopt the dominant groups' cultural norms, leading to a decrease in ethnic identity. Furthermore, exposure to and contrast between many different cultural backgrounds in ethnically diverse settings may heighten the awareness of ethnicity and promote interest in one's ethnic group, thus strengthening ethnic identity (Santos, Ortiz, Morales, & Rosales, 2007). Another possibility is that ethnic diversity does not shape ethnic identity at all, as suggested in recent studies of college students from Asian and Latino background (Juang, Nguyen & Lin, 2006; Syed, Azmitia & Phinney, 2007). Given the competing hypotheses and limited research on this question, we examined how ethnic composition on campus – both total ethnic diversity and the presence of same-ethnic peers – may shape ethnic identity during the transition to college.

College Type and Ethnic Identification

As individuals enter college, they may face the need to figure out how they fit into their new social context and its various social groups and categories. A particular social category that is salient for individuals in the U.S. is their identification with their ethnic background. For

example, ubiquitous practices such as completing documents (e.g. college applications) that requests information about one's ethnic group membership contributes to the functionality and salience of ethnic categories in the U.S. As a result, individuals adopt ethnic labels as a way to identify themselves and understand their place in society. This process of ethnic self-labeling can reflect underlying processes of ethnic identification such as one's thoughts about and the extent of commitment to their ethnic group. In this paper, we examine how the type of college attended by students, and the associated difference in the availability of campus activities and the ethnic composition of the student body could shape ethnic identity in three key domains – ethnic labeling, ethnic search and ethnic belonging.

Ethnic labels. Selection of ethnic labels reflects one's attachment to a particular ethnic group. For example, native-born and first-generation individuals may prefer national terms (e.g., Chinese, Mexican) to represent their native country, whereas later-generation individuals may choose pan-ethnic terms (e.g., Asian, Latino) (Fuligni, et al., 2008). Lastly, the American term can be hyphenated with national (e.g., Chinese-American) or pan-ethnic terms (e.g., Latino-American), or used alone. If participation in campus activities facilitates social integration into the American college setting, preference for the American term may be found at four-year colleges and among students living away from home. It is uncertain how ethnic composition can shape ethnic labeling. For instance, if ethnicity becomes more salient in less diverse campuses, individuals may adopt the American term to fit into the mainstream context. On the other hand, heightened ethnic salience can result in closer affiliation to one's ethnic group and be reflected in national labels. And although European Americans may have a preference for pan-ethnic terms such as White or the American term alone, they may also hyphenate their labels with American (e.g., European-American, Italian-American), as do ethnic minorities (e.g., Asian-American).

Ethnic search and belonging. Further examination of underlying thoughts and feelings associated with label preferences can be understood by investigating two dimensions of ethnic identification - ethnic search and belonging. Ethnic search is the degree to which adolescents explore the meaning of their ethnic group membership, such as learning about one's family heritage and cultural practices. Ethnic belonging is the extent to which one feels a positive and strong connection to their ethnic group (Phinney, 1992). Since affiliation with social networks stimulates identity exploration, higher levels of ethnic search and belonging will likely be found at four-year colleges. Similarly, interactions with students from various backgrounds at diverse colleges may also promote search and belonging with one's ethnic group. Being a minority in a less diverse campus could motivate ethnic search and belonging or encourage individuals to adopt the majority group culture and thereby, decrease ethnic search and belonging. Furthermore, students from ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds are likely to have a stronger ethnic identity than students from European and later-generations (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Thus, it is possible that students from European American backgrounds will experience fewer changes in ethnic labels, search and belonging compared to ethnic group members.

Research suggests that females are socialized in cultural values and traditions more than males (Bowman & Howard, 1985). For example, gendered socialization in Latino families is common such that girls are expected to fulfill household responsibilities while boys have greater freedom to engage in activities outside the home (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). These types of gender based experiences make culture more salient for females and in fact, the relationship between ethnic socialization and ethnic identity is stronger for females than males (Juang & Syed 2010; Umana-Taylor & Guimond, 2010). Thus, it is likely that ethnicity will continue to remain an important aspect of women's identity across the college transition and that their ethnic

identity will strengthen over time. Similarly, females may be more likely to choose national ethnic labels rather than American and pan-ethnic labels compared to males.

Residential Status

Finally, due to the expected overlap that students at two- and four-year colleges live at or away from home, respectively, we investigated whether residential status could explain differences in ethnic identity, over and above the association between ethnic identity and college type. Given that participation in cultural traditions with the family is associated with ethnic identity during adolescence (Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2006), ethnic identities may strengthen as young adults continue living at home. It is also possible that cultural behaviors practiced at home may become so embedded in their lives that individuals no longer seek to learn more about their ethnic heritage. Thus, ethnic identity may remain stable or decrease over time. On the other hand, when students leave the familiarity of their home, they may realize that certain beliefs or behaviors they practiced are unique cultural experiences. Therefore, efforts, such as participating in campus cultural events, are made to remain connected to one's cultural background. Perhaps then, greater changes in ethnic search and belonging will occur among students living away from home. Additionally, students may feel more committed to their cultural background and select national terms in to reflect their ethnic heritage.

Current Research

The current study extends research on ethnic identity by examining ethnic identity changes across the developmental transition to college. Particularly, we focused on whether ethnic labeling, search, and belonging change as a function of attending a two- or four-year college. We expect there to be a stronger preference for American labels and higher ethnic search and belonging at four- than two-year colleges. We believe these ethnic identity differences across

college type could be explained by greater extracurricular activity involvement at four-year colleges and other additional factors such as ethnic composition of school and residential status. Given different cultural socialization practices between males and females, changes in ethnic identity are likely to differ between men and women. Lastly, as ethnicity is more salient for ethnic minorities than European Americans, it is possible that ethnic identity processes are more stable for the latter group.

Method

Participants

As part of a larger longitudinal study, we recruited students from three public high schools in the Los Angeles area. The student bodies of these schools differed somewhat in terms of ethnic composition and socioeconomic status (California Department of Education, 2006). The first school primarily served students from Latin American and Asian families with lower-middle to middle-class educational and occupation statuses, the second school enrolled mostly students from Latin American and European families who were lower-middle to middle class, and the third school included students primarily from Asian and European backgrounds whose families are middle to upper-middle class. No school, however, was dominated by a single ethnic group; the largest ethnic groups of each school composed 30% - 50% of the total population.

In all three schools, the entire twelfth grade was recruited and 744 students participated, representing 65% of the students enrolled in that grade level. Of the original sample of 744 twelfth-grade students, 525 (71%) students participated again two years after high school. Our present analyses included 458 students ($M = 20.16$ years, $SD = .36$) who participated in both waves of the study and were enrolled in either a two-year college (161; 35%) or a four-year college (297; 65%) at the time of the follow up questionnaire. Sixty-seven participants (13%)

who were not enrolled in college were excluded from our analyses because the sample size was too small to examine variations by ethnicity, gender, and generation.

As shown in Table 1, students were from Asian, Latin American, European, and other ethnic backgrounds. Two-thirds of the Asian students were from Chinese backgrounds (67%), and three-quarters of the Latin American students were from Mexican backgrounds (76%). Those from European backgrounds came from a mix of backgrounds including Irish, Italian and German. Students included in the other group included students from Middle Eastern and other backgrounds not classifiable as Asian, Latino, or European American. The majority of the participants from Latino and Asian backgrounds were of the first (i.e., students were foreign-born) or second (i.e., students were born in the U.S. and at least one parent was born outside of the U.S.) generation. Most of the participants from European backgrounds were of the third generation (i.e., students and parents both were born in the U.S.). The sample included somewhat more females (56%) than males.

Retention across the two-year period was higher among students from Asian (80%), European (69%) and other backgrounds (70%) than those of Latin American (59%) origin, $X^2(3, N = 744) = 28.04, p < .001$. The majority of students with Latin American backgrounds attended two-year colleges (63%), whereas most students from Asian (76%), European (79%), and other (56%) backgrounds attended four-year colleges, $X^2(3, N = 458) = 53.47, p < .001$. Given the potential confound between college type and place of residence, students were asked if they lived at home with their parents during the school year. The majority of students attending a two-year college lived at home (88%) and most students attending a four-year college lived away from home (77%), $X^2(1, N = 456) = 183.85, p < .001$ (2 missing).

Lastly, participants reported how far their mothers and fathers went to school by selecting one of the following categories: *elementary/junior high school, some high school, graduated from high school, some college, graduated from college, or law medical, or graduate school*. We averaged the level of education from both parents. Parents of participants from European and other backgrounds were more likely to have a college degree than Asian parents, who, in turn, were more likely to have graduated from high school and attended some college than Latin American parents, $F(3, 423) = 36.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .21$.

Procedure

In the 12th grade, students completed questionnaires during school that assessed various domains including identity, academic achievement, and well-being. Participants also provided their contact information, including their home address, phone number, email, and contact information of two people who would likely know their whereabouts. Two years later, we invited participants via email, telephone, and mail and to complete a similar questionnaire using a commercial, web-based survey service. At both waves, the survey took approximately one hour to complete.

Measures

Ethnic identification. Participants were presented with an alphabetical list of ethnic labels that has been used successfully in prior research examining the type of labels that adolescents from different ethnic and generational backgrounds use to describe themselves (e.g., Fuligni et al., 2008). Participants checked all the labels that they felt described them and to add any labels that applied to them that were not on the list. Students then indicated a single ethnic label that described them best, and analyses in the current paper were based on this single best descriptive label. As done in previous research (Fuligni, et al., 2008), labels were coded as to

whether they included a pan-ethnic term (0 = no, 1 = yes) and whether they included an American term (0 = no, 1 = yes), either hyphenated or by itself. Examples of labels incorporating pan-ethnic terms include Asian, Latino, or White. Those coded as including an American term include Asian-American, Mexican-American, and simply American. The 67 participants who provided labels that could not be coded (e.g. All, Human Race) or did not indicate an ethnic label at all were not included in the analyses involving ethnic labels.

Additionally, participants completed two subscales of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) that included five items on ethnic search (e.g., “I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions and customs”) and seven items on ethnic belonging (e.g., “I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background”). Responses were on a 5-point scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Internal consistencies were high in the twelfth grade and in college (Search: $\alpha = .75 - .82$; Belonging: $\alpha = .91 - .91$).

Ethnic composition of college. The Simpson diversity index (Simpson, 1949) for each college ($N = 106$) was calculated by taking into account both the number of different ethnic groups on campus (i.e., European American, Asian, Latino, African-American, American-Indian, and International) and the relative representation of each group. The percentages of students within each ethnic group for each college were found through the National Center for Education Statistics (2007). The diversity indices of colleges ranged from .19 to .81, with higher scores indicating greater overall ethnic diversity ($M_{diversity\ score} = .70$, $SD = .09$). Additionally, the percentage of the student body that belonged to the same ethnic background of each participant was examined and ranged from 1% - 84% ($M_{percentage} = 35\%$, $SD = .14$).

Extracurricular activities in college. Students were asked if they participated in any organized clubs, sports, or activities at school. These activities included religious organizations, honors societies, intramural sports teams, and various fraternities and sororities. More students at four-year schools (57.3%) participated in at least one extracurricular activity than students at two-year colleges (22.7%). The rates of participation in ethnic-specific activities such as the Chinese Student Association and the Latino Student Union were fairly low (two-year: 2.7%, four-year: 7.9%).

Results

Attrition Analyses

Due to our attrition rate and inclusion of only college-going students, analyses were conducted to examine possible differences between individuals who were and were not included in our final analyses. Overall, results suggest that there were no preexisting differences in ethnic identity at the 12th grade between individuals who did and did not participate in our study two years after high school or were not enrolled in college two years after high school. Results showed there were no differences in preferences for pan-ethnic or American labels, $t_s(688) = -.539 - .08$, n.s., nor in ethnic search or belonging, $t_s(619) = .83 - .97$, n.s., in the 12th grade between individuals who did and did not participate in our follow-up study. Additional analyses indicated that there were also no differences in ethnic label preferences, $t_s(688) = -1.12 - .08$, n.s., nor in ethnic search or belonging, $t_s(619) = .06 - .90$, n.s., in the 12th grade between individuals who were included in our analyses versus individuals who either (a) did participate in our follow-up study, but were not enrolled in college or (b) did not participate in our follow-up study at all.

Ethnic Identity Change across the College Transition

We conducted separate repeated measures ANOVA for each measure of ethnic identity with time as the within-subjects factor and college type (i.e., two- vs. four-year) as a between-subjects factor. The ANOVAs also included ethnicity and gender as between-subjects factors and parental education as a covariate. Follow up ANOVAs added generational status as a main effect in order to determine whether it explained any observed ethnic differences, and gender x college and ethnicity x college interactions as main effects in order to determine whether any college type differences varied according to students' gender and ethnic background.

Ethnic labels. As shown in Table 2, students' preferences for a pan-ethnic or American label did not change significantly over time and change did not vary according to college type. Change in both labels did not vary according to ethnicity and change in a pan-ethnic label did not vary according to gender, $F_s(1, 356) = .58-2.54$, n.s. Change in the preference for an American label, however, did vary by gender such that percentage of females choosing an American label increased from 48% in high school to 58% in college whereas males declined from 51% to 44%, $F(1, 356) = 6.73$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Follow up ANOVAs suggested that neither generational status nor the interactions of college with ethnicity and gender predicted change in ethnic labels over time, $F_s(1-3, 350-354) = 0.15-1.33$, n.s.

Although college type did not modify change in ethnic labels over time, there were overall differences across both time points such that four-year college students were more likely to select an American label during both high school and college, $F(1, 356) = 5.28$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$ (see Figure 1). There was no such difference for pan-ethnic labels, $F(1, 356) = 1.67$, n.s. In addition, there were overall ethnic differences across both time points such that students with European backgrounds were more likely to use a pan-ethnic label than students from Latin American, Asian, and other backgrounds, $F(3, 356) = 31.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$. Those from Latin American, Asian,

and other backgrounds, in turn, were more likely to include an American term in their ethnic label than students from European backgrounds, $F(3, 356) = 12.53, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$. Finally, third generation students were more likely to describe themselves with a pan-ethnic term than first- and second- generation students, $F(2, 354) = 6.55, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$, and second generation students were more likely than first- and third-generation students to use an American label, $F(2, 354) = 13.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$. Across both time points, labeling did not vary across parental education levels, $F_s(1, 356) = 0.08\text{--}0.18, n.s.$

Ethnic search and belonging. As shown in Table 3 and Figure 2, there was a normative decrease in ethnic search over time and a greater decrease in ethnic search among students at two-year versus four-year colleges. Although there was no normative change in ethnic belonging, there was a marginally significant greater decline in belonging among students at two- versus four-year colleges (Table 3, Figure 3). Change in search and belonging did not differ according to ethnicity or gender, and follow up ANOVAs indicated that neither generation nor the interactions of college with ethnicity and gender predicted change over time, $F_s(1\text{--}3, 408\text{--}414) = 0.31\text{--}0.80, n.s.$

Overall, students from Asian, Latin American, and other backgrounds reported higher levels of search and belonging than those from European backgrounds across both high school and college, $F_s(3, 414) = 5.90\text{--}8.93, p_s = .001\text{--}.000, \eta^2 = .04\text{--}.06$. There were no overall differences in search and belonging according to generation or parental education levels, $F_s(1, 412\text{--}414) = 0.44\text{--}2.09, n.s.$

Ethnic Identity Change as a Function of Residence

Given that two-year college students tend to live at home whereas four-year college students are more likely to live away from home during the school year, we further investigated how ethnic identity may vary as a function of residence over and above the association between

type of college and ethnic identity. To address this aim, we entered residence as a between-subjects factor simultaneously with college, ethnicity, and gender. Repeated measures ANOVAs revealed that residence was not associated with change in any of the measures of ethnic identification over and above the effect of college type, $F_s(1, 353-411) = 0.04-1.00$, n.s. The significant association of college type with change in ethnic search reported earlier remained significant after the inclusion of residential status, $F(1, 411) = 5.27$, $p < .05$, but the marginal significant association with ethnic belonging became non-significant, $F(1, 411) = 1.26$, n.s.

Ethnic Composition and Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Given that students at four-year colleges had a significantly smaller decline and subsequently higher levels of ethnic search after high school, we examined whether the colleges' ethnic composition and the students' participation in extracurricular activities mediated this difference. Although ethnic diversity did not differ across two- and four-year colleges, presence of same ethnic peers was significantly higher at four-year colleges, $t(376) = -3.70$, $p < .001$, $d = .42$. In addition, the rate of involvement in extracurricular activities was significantly higher at four-year (57%) versus two-year (23%) colleges, $t(425) = -7.19$, $p < .001$, $d = .74$. Yet only participation in extracurricular activities was significantly correlated with ethnic search, $r = .20$, $p < .001$; ethnic diversity and the presence of same ethnic peers were not related to search, $r_s = -.064$, $-.003$, n.s.

A two-step hierarchical regression was conducted such that ethnic search during college was regressed onto college type in the first step and participation in extracurricular activities was entered in the second step. Regressions also included ethnicity, gender, generation, and parental education as controls. Type of college was related to ethnic search before ($b = .37$, $SE = .11$, $p < .01$) and after ($b = .26$, $SE = .11$, $p < .05$) participation in extracurricular activities was entered

and effect of extracurricular activities was significant ($b = .39, SE = .10, p < .001$). In order to determine if the proportion of the college difference in ethnic search that was accounted for by participation in extracurricular activities was significant, the significance of indirect effect of college type through extracurricular activities was computed using the procedures outline by Baron and Kenny (1986). Results indicated that the indirect effect was indeed significant ($z = 3.07, p < .01$), suggesting that a significant proportion of the greater level of ethnic search among students attending four-year colleges was attributable to their greater involvement in extracurricular activities.

We further examined the relation between ethnic search and participation in ethnic organizations. Participation in ethnic organizations was higher at four-year (8%) than two-year colleges (3%), $t(425) = -2.16, p < .05, d = .24$. A similar two-step hierarchical regression as described above was conducted to investigate whether participation in ethnic organizations mediated the college differences in ethnic search. Although type of college was related to participation in ethnic organizations, ($b = .07, p < .05$), the indirect effect was not significant ($z = 1.94, n.s.$).

Discussion

Although there were no changes in ethnic labeling and ethnic belonging, a normative decrease in ethnic search was observed across the transition to college, independent of residential status. Given prior beliefs that identity exploration takes place during adolescence (Erikson, 1968), young adults may have already established a strong understanding of and commitment to their ethnic group and are simply exploring the meaning of their ethnic group membership less than before. Nevertheless, students at four-year colleges were engaged in greater levels of ethnic search and exhibited marginally higher levels of ethnic belonging than students at two-year

colleges which highlight the important role that contexts play in ethnic identity development over time.

As expected, participation in extracurricular activities explained the differences in ethnic search between two- and four-year colleges. That is, higher rates of activity involvement among four-year college students were associated with greater levels of ethnic search. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Inkelas, 2004; Sidanius et al., 2004), engagement in ethnic-related activities was associated with ethnic identity, however affiliation with ethnic organizations did not account for college differences in ethnic search. This was not surprising as rates of involvement in ethnic activities were relatively low compared to other activities. These findings suggest that engagement in campus activities, regardless of whether they are ethnically related or not, facilitate exploration about the meaning of one's ethnic group membership during college. It is possible that non-ethnically based campus organizations consists of a diverse peer network, and differences between one's own background and those of others may illuminate cultural differences and raise ethnic identity issues. Ethnicity is perhaps an important dimension of identity that is heightened in small, multicultural social settings on campus. Moreover, there were no pre-existing differences in ethnic search in the 12th grade, which further illustrates the importance of contextual factors, such as the richness in campus social life, in shaping ethnic identity over time and across different settings.

However, preference for the American term was already evident in the 12th grade among students who attended four-year colleges. Perhaps these students began orientating towards the American culture in high school, and thus were more likely to attend four-year colleges at which they could become more integrated into mainstream U.S. society. Together, preference for an American term and the less dramatic decrease in ethnic search among students at four-year

colleges may suggest that students are figuring out how they can relate to both their ethnic heritage group and the American college context. Particularly for students from ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds, learning to incorporate American values, beliefs and behaviors into their cultural framework contribute to their ethnic identity development. In one study, Chinese students who selected an American term in their labels (i.e., Chinese-American) reported greater ethnic search than those who identified solely as Chinese (Kiang, 2008). Given that a college degree provides access to economic and social mobility in the U.S., negotiating between ethnic heritage and American identities may be an integral part of the college experience.

It is possible that identity exploration and social integration into American culture occurs to a lesser extent at two-year colleges. As commuter schools, the majority of students are not involved in campus activities (Edman & Brazil, 2009). Rather, social activities that these students engage in are off campus, unrelated to college, and with friends who are not their college peers (Townsend & Wilson, 2008). Thus, limited engagement with school activities can explain the significantly larger decrease in ethnic search and indifference for American labels at two-year colleges. Furthermore, two-year college students' decline in their sense of belonging to their ethnic group was marginally greater than students at four-year colleges. Results suggest that ethnic identity exploration and belonging are likely to go hand in hand with one another. Perhaps when individuals are not actively exploring their ethnic heritage, they may not experience the same extent of reinforcement towards a strong ethnic group membership compared to others who are more engaged in ethnic identity exploration.

Consistent with recent research (e.g., Juang et al., 2006; Syed et al., 2007), ethnic composition – ethnic diversity and presence of same-ethnic peers – was not associated with changes in ethnic identity. Within larger settings such as college campuses, perhaps more

proximal measures, such as ethnic composition of close friends, are stronger predictors of ethnic identity. Friends of the same ethnicity are likely to understand one's cultural background and provide support to express their ethnic identity (Kiang & Fuligni, 2009). Furthermore, attitudes about ethnic diversity, rather than actual ethnic composition of the college, may also influence ethnic identity. In fact, ethnic identity is related to positive feelings about other ethnic groups (Phinney, Ferguson, & Tate, 1997). Thus, perceptions of campus climate can influence how one feels and thinks about their ethnic group membership, regardless of one's minority status.

Although there were more Latino students at two-year colleges and more Asian and European American students at four-year colleges, no significant ethnic identity differences were found in context by ethnicity interaction. Consistent with research (e.g., Phinney & Alipuria, 1990), ethnic minorities reported higher ethnic search and belonging than European Americans across both time points. However, the main focus of the study examined change, rather than strength, in ethnic identity and results show that the transition to college effected ethnic identity changes in European American and ethnic minorities similarly. European American students were no less sensitive to the college transition than ethnic minorities, strongly suggesting that there may be a normative trend in ethnic identity development during this period.

Contrary to prior research (e.g. Umana-Taylor et al., 2009), there were no gender differences in ethnic search and belonging. More surprisingly, we found that females were more likely to include American in their ethnic labels than males. Although girls may be socialized to carry on ethnic traditions (Bowman & Howard, 1985), female gender roles are actually more fluid and women are less likely than men to develop racialized identities (Suarez-Orozco & Qin, 2006). Perhaps women are more sensitive than men to changes in peer networks and issues regarding how they relate to others. Therefore, females may navigate cultural boundaries more

openly and develop an identity that integrates both their ethnic heritage and the American culture.

A limitation in our study is that the sample of non-college-going adults was not large enough to permit analyses on their ethnic identity development. Understanding ethnic identity trajectories of this sample would contribute to our understanding of how different social contexts (e.g. school and the workforce) that adolescents enter could provide different opportunities for individuals to explore the significance of their ethnicity. Another limitation of our study is that we did not have data on students' ethnic identity immediately after their transition to college. Rather, our study focused on long-term effects of contextual change. Future research should continue to examine changes in ethnic identity of students at two-year colleges who transfer to four-year schools. It is possible that this transition would facilitate similar changes in ethnic identity as seen among four-year college students.

Overall, our findings highlight that ethnic identity change is not a result of just the developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood, but is due to the type of contexts that young adults enter. Our study suggests that there are greater opportunities, such as extracurricular activities, at four- than two-year colleges that facilitate exploration of one's cultural background. Future work should more closely examine the nature of these activities in order to understand which features play the most significant role in adolescents' ethnic identity development.

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Table 1

Sample According to Ethnic Background and Generation

Generation	Ethnic Background				Total
	Latino	Asian	European	Other	
First	17	65	9	4	95
Second	64	125	9	36	234
Third	16	12	62	37	127
Unknown			2		
Total	97	202	82	77	458

Running head: CHANGE IN ETHNIC IDENTITY

Table 2

Percent of Students Who Include a Pan-ethnic or an American Term

Ethnic Label	12 th Grade		College		Time	Time x College
	M	95% CI	M	95% CI	F, η^2	F, η^2
Pan-ethnic term	45%	[.43, .61]	45%	[.45, .63]	2.08, $\eta^2 = .01$	0.9, $\eta^2 = .00$
2-year college	43%	[.45, .59]	38%	[.36, .51]		
4-year college	46%	[.34, .53]	43%	[.27, .46]	1.37, $\eta^2 = .00$	3.24, $\eta^2 = .01$
American term	51%	[.35, .51]	58%	[.45, .61]		

Note. *dfs* = (1, 356).

Running head: CHANGE IN ETHNIC IDENTITY

Table 3

Mean Ethnic Identification Scores Over Time and Across Type of College

Ethnic Identification	Time				F, η^2
	12 th Grade	College	Time	Time x College	
Ethnic Search	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI	95% CI	
2-year college	2.94 (.87)	2.38 (.83)	[2.77, 3.10]	[2.20, 2.54]	8.13*, $\eta^2 = .02$
4-year college	2.89 (.91)	2.70 (.99)	[2.72, 2.98]	[2.54, 2.81]	
Ethnic Belonging					1.73, $\eta^2 = .00$
2-year college	3.78 (.85)	3.51 (.94)	[3.62, 3.93]	[3.33, 3.67]	
4-year college	3.63 (.86)	3.56 (.90)	[3.53, 3.78]	[3.44, 3.70]	3.67+, $\eta^2 = .01$

Note. *dfs* = (1, 414).

+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

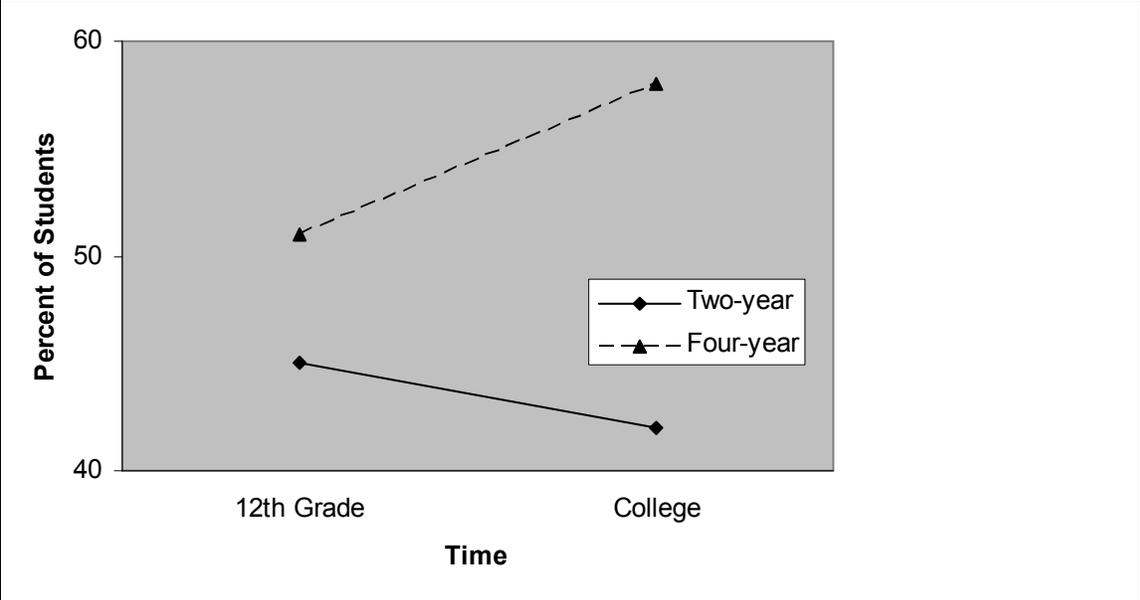


Figure 1. Greater preference for the American term in ethnic labels at four-year colleges.

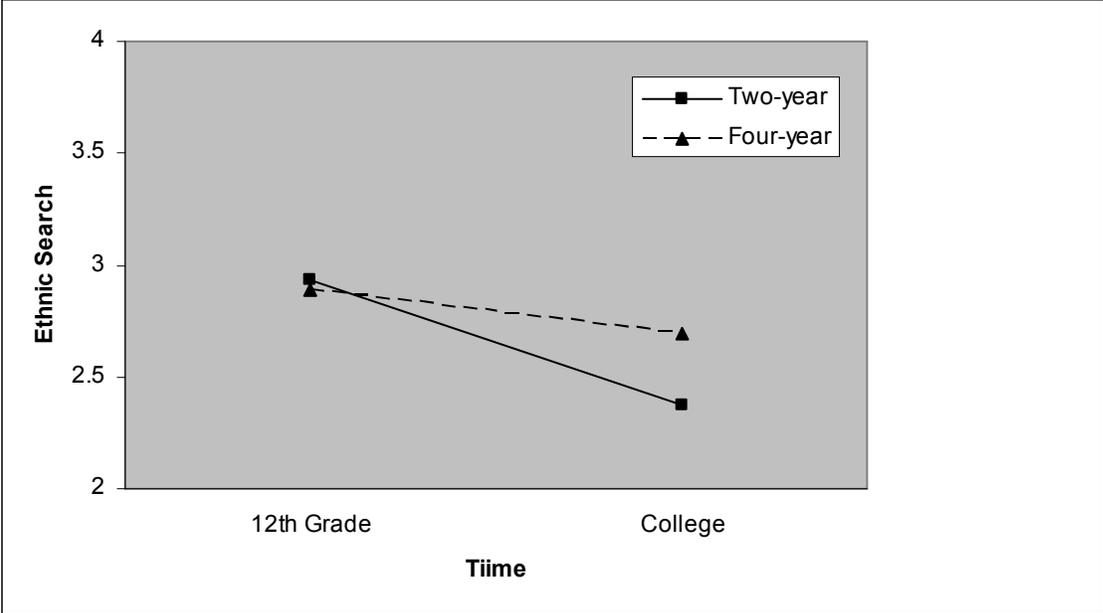


Figure 2. Greater decrease in ethnic search for students at two-year colleges.

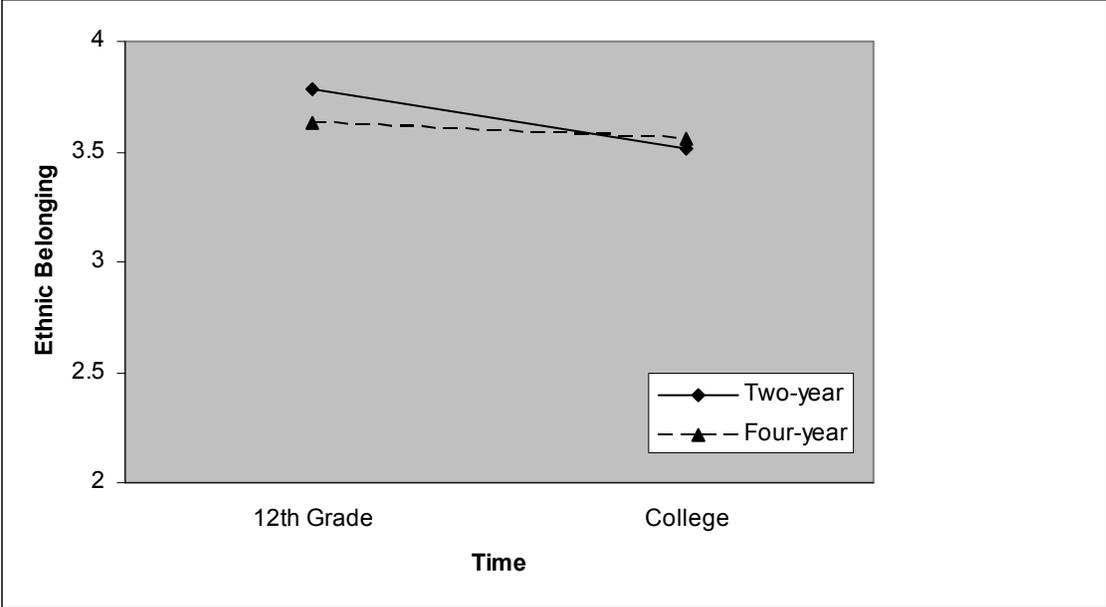


Figure 3. Marginal decrease in ethnic belonging for students at two-year colleges.