Hispanics are one of the largest and fastest growing populations in the U.S (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The word “Hispanic” refers to individuals of Latin American descent (including Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, as well as other ethnic groups originating from Central and South America) and has been used interchangeably with the term “Latino.” In 2003, Hispanics represented approximately 13% of the total U.S. population and are projected to double in percentage by the year 2050. The dramatic growth of the Hispanic population between the years 1990 to 2000 has resulted in sociodemographic changes and yielded much attention from researchers and policy makers. Studies examining these changes have highlighted the composition of the Latino population, underscoring that Mexican Americans constitute the largest Hispanic subgroup (58%) and that Hispanics in general, are younger compared to the rest of the U.S. population (Marotta & Garcia, 2003). Changes in this population have also included shifts in the trend of ethnic self-identification, with a significant growth of individuals identifying with pan-ethnic labels (e.g., Hispanic/Latino) than with national labels (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban; Guzmán and McConnell, 2002). Ethnic identity plays an important role in the development of self-concept among adolescents and emerging adults. Given that ethnic labels are considered to be one aspect of ethnic identity, it is important to better understand the relevance of ethnic labels among Mexican origin youth in the U.S.

By definition, ethnic identity entails an individual’s sense of self as a member of an ethnic group (Liebkind, 2001), and it encompasses three dimensions. The first is ethnic self-identification and this encompasses the group affiliation label that one adopts. The second consists of feelings of affirmation and belonging that entails having shared values and attitudes with fellow ethnic group members as well as feelings of pride and commitment toward an ethnic group.

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Acculturation Status and Related Psychological Processes: What Do Ethnic Labels Reveal for Mexican Origin College Students?

Ethnic self-labels have been overlooked as an important dimension of ethnic identity. Knowledge on how people ethnically self-identify can help shed light on their unique cultural experiences. We examined differences in acculturation status and related psychological processes across ethnic self-labels among Mexican origin college students (N = 160). Across three ethnic label typologies (national, “Mexican”; pan-ethnic, “Hispanic”; compound, “Mexican American”), differences emerged in linguistic acculturation and acculturative stress, but not self-esteem or ethnic identity. Such findings highlight the importance and utility of ethnic self-identification in our understanding of acculturation status and related psychological processes.
The third aspect involves exploration of issues related to ethnicity and ethnic identity development (e.g., seeking out customs and traditions that are specific to an ethnic group; Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, & Roberts, 1999). Together, affirmation and exploration constitute the subjective dimensions of ethnic identity and are considered to be distinct from ethnic self-identification, which has been characterized separately as a demographic marker of ethnic identity (Phinney, 2003).

Ethnic identity has been conceptualized through several theoretical frameworks (e.g., Umana-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002). In particular, two central perspectives have been critical in the conceptualization of ethnic identity. Social identity (SIT) and ego identity theories serve as the foundation for affirmation and exploration, respectively. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity theory (SIT) posits that by being a member of a group, individuals gain a sense of belongingness that contributes to a positive and healthy self-concept. Specifically, SIT encompasses an individual’s perception of being a member of a social group as well as the emotional attachment and value placed on being part of that group. In the case of group membership, belongingness to an ethnic group constitutes one form of group identity (Tajfel, 1978). Particularly for ethnic minority youth, understanding and learning about one’s ethnicity is particularly relevant during the adolescent years (Phinney, 1989). In turn, they will evaluate the significance and legitimacy of their group either by having positive feelings of belongingness or experiencing negative feelings of insecurity or resentment towards their group (Brown, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Ethnic identity is therefore an extension of the conceptual framework of SIT, because feelings of affirmation are central to one’s endorsement of a specific ethnic group.

According to ego identity theory, Erikson (1968) argued that individuals attain an achieved identity only after having explored, committed, and overcome the challenges of making decisions in various domains (e.g., ideology, occupation, and lifestyle). In line with ego identity theory, the stages of ethnic identity development progress from an unexamined phase (through a period of identity exploration regarding group membership and the meanings and implications associated with it) to an achieved identity, which is the secure feeling of being a member of an ethnic group (Phinney, 1989). This process of identity development is especially relevant for youth because adolescence is a critical time in which individuals begin to explore their sense of identity and who they are. Scholars have highlighted the significance of the transitional time period between adolescence and adulthood and have termed it “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2006). Ethnic identity development is therefore especially relevant for the college-aged population, as evident in the process of ethnic identity exploration and commitment. Altogether, the affirmation dimension of ethnic identity builds on the conceptual theory of SIT, while the exploration dimension parallels the framework of ego identity formation.

As previously discussed, ethnic labels are the group labels that individuals identify, and can shed light on one’s identification to a particular ethnic group within a host society. Due to the heterogeneity of ethnic self-labels, Phinney (2003) formulated a classification system based on three categories: (a) national labels (e.g., Mexican) which characterize the country of origin; (b) pan-ethnic labels (e.g., Hispanic/Latino), which refer to “national or ethnic groups that share a common language, a common culture, or a common regional origin into an encompassing identity” (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000, p. 226); and (c) compound labels (e.g., Mexican American), which are the labels that immigrant groups tend to use as they evolve from using a national label to one that incorporates their identification with the host country. In a review of the research on ethnic identity and acculturation, Phinney (2003) noted the relevance of ethnic self-labels in revealing cultural changes among ethnic minority populations. That is, she cited research (e.g., Berry & Sam, 1997) which showed that changes in ethnic self-identification are linked to changes in acculturation attitudes. Thus, ethnic labels may play a relevant role in revealing aspects of one’s acculturation status and related psychological processes.

The term ethnic identity has been used synonymously with the term acculturation even though both are separate constructs that are linked to the changes that ethnic minority members experience. Phinney (1990), in her review of the research on ethnic identity, noted acculturation as a concept that applies largely to group changes as opposed to individual responses. Acculturation has been defined as the process of psychological and behavioral adaptation that occurs when two cultures come into contact – as happens when immigrants arrive in a new country or one group is colonized by another (Berry, 1994). Acculturation is multidimensional and has been assessed through demographic (e.g., self-identification), behavioral (e.g., language use), and attitudinal (e.g., values toward mainstream society) indicators. Language use and generational status are two of the most frequently-used proxy measures of acculturation. Research has shown that more linguistically acculturated Mexican American college students (more English use) tended to report lower levels of ethnic
identity than their less acculturated counterparts (Cuéllar, Nyberg, Maldonado, & Roberts, 1997). Research has also found that over time, early-generation individuals tended to identify with national labels while later-generation children tended to adopt pan-ethnic (e.g., Latino/Hispanic) and compound labels (e.g., Mexican American; Rumbaut, 1994). Altogether, these two lines of research document the link between acculturation (as assessed by language use and generation status) and ethnic identity. Given that ethnic self-labels comprise one dimension of ethnic identity, it is conceivable that individuals who identify more strongly with their country of origin (“Mexican”) are likely to report lower levels of linguistic acculturation compared to their “Mexican-American” and “Latino/Hispanic” counterparts.

Although acculturation occurs at the group level, individuals experience the process in different ways, with some finding it more challenging than others. Acculturative stress is the ‘hang-over’ effect that has its source in and results from the acculturation process (Berry, 2000). Roysircar-Sodowsky and Maestas (2000) noted the protective role of ethnic identity against acculturative stress and described acculturation and ethnic identity as a “push-and-pull phenomena” such that individuals may feel the push to acculturate to the majority society and also the pull towards one’s ethnic group (p. 134). In addition, researchers have hypothesized the potential link between ethnic identification and acculturation (Sánchez & Fernández, 1993). Given what is known about acculturation, acculturative stress, and ethnic identity, it is possible that certain types of ethnic labels may reflect different levels of stress associated with the adaptation experience. Based on their strong identification with their country of origin, it is likely that individuals endorsing the “Mexican” label would experience higher levels of acculturative stress compared to their “Mexican American” and “Latino/Hispanic” counterparts who are likely to have compromised their self-identification to the host country.

Research on ethnic identity and adolescents has focused primarily on self-esteem as a marker of positive psychological well-being (e.g., Phinney, 1991). Among ethnic minority groups, research has consistently found positive associations between ethnic identity and self-esteem (e.g., Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). In a longitudinal study examining the relation between ethnic identity and self-esteem among ethnic minority youth, ethnic identity development was positively associated with self-esteem over time; furthermore, they mutually predicted one another over a three-year period (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). In another study, researchers found that self-esteem was related positively with ethnic identity, particularly for ethnic minority (Mexican American) college students who engaged in ethnic identity search and commitment (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Therefore, the association between ethnic identity and self-esteem may be particularly salient for ethnic minority youth who are highly ethnically identified. Given that self-identification with one’s country of origin may reflect a stronger connection to one’s native background, it is conceivable that individuals identifying as “Mexican” will derive higher levels of self-esteem from their ethnic minority status compared to their pan-ethnic and compound-label counterparts.

**Study Aim and Hypotheses**

The goal of the current study was to examine ethnic self-labels and their relevance to the acculturation status and related psychological processes among Mexican-origin college students. This investigation builds on prior research and addresses conceptual as well as methodological limitations. Despite the recent increase in ethnic identity research, there is limited work examining ethnic labels with acculturation. Furthermore, previous studies on ethnic identity with late adolescents/emerging adults have been limited to the subjective components of ethnic identity (affirmation and exploration) and only used ethnic self-labels as demographic markers for participant-selection. Thus, research in this field has overlooked an important aspect of ethnic identity that reflects individuals’ perceptions of themselves within the larger society. This paper contributes to the literature by acknowledging ethnic self-labels as important to our understanding of ethnic minority youth identity. Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to investigate the associations between ethnic self-labels and the acculturation status and related psychological processes of Mexican-origin young adults.

Based on the reviewed literature on ethnic identity, it was hypothesized that differences in acculturation status and related psychological processes would emerge across the three ethnic label typologies. Based on prior empirical and theoretical work on the subjective dimensions of ethnic identity, we anticipated individuals self-identifying with their country of origin (“Mexican”) to experience high levels of self-esteem. We also expected individuals endorsing the “Mexican” label to report lower levels of acculturation compared to their less Mexico-oriented compound (“Mexican-American”) and pan-ethnic (“Hispanics/Latinos”) label peers, and also experience greater levels of acculturative stress associated with the cultural adaptation.
Method

Sample Selection Procedures and Participants
Participants were part of a larger study (N= 601) on young adults' psychological and social adjustment; data were derived from three state universities (two from the West coast and one from the Southwest region of the United States). Respondents were college students enrolled in psychology courses who received course credit for their voluntary participation. Participants completed a self-report questionnaire in small groups. They received an informed consent followed by a debriefing form. The Institutional Review Board at the colleges where this study was conducted approved the procedures of this investigation.

Given the current study, we focused on participants who self-identified as “Mexican” and/or reported that at least one parent was born in Mexico. Respondents were also restricted to emerging adults between the ages of 18-30 years old (N's ranged from 153-160; M age = 23.0; 66% women).

Measures
Respondents completed a questionnaire that included demographic information and standardized scales. The demographic information included age, gender, birthplace, and parent education level.

Ethnic self-identification. Based on participants’ responses on the open-ended question, “In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be ____” on the MEIM (Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure; Roberts et al., 1999), we categorized them according to Phinney’s (2003) classification typologies: national (12%), pan-ethnic (29%), and compound (59%) label groups.

Ethnic identity. We also used the MEIM (Roberts, et al., 1999) to assess the subjective and dimension of ethnic identity. The MEIM consists of two subjective subscales: ethnic affirmation and belonging (5 items; e.g., I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to) and ethnic exploration (7 items; I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs). Participants rated their level of agreement on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree). We averaged a combined ethnic identity score across all 12 items. Higher scores indicated higher levels of ethnic identity.

Linguistic acculturation. We used the shortened youth version of the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (Barona & Millar, 1994). Participants responded to 13 questions regarding their language use (e.g., speaking, listening, thinking, and watching TV.) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Native language only to 5 = English only). We summed and averaged across all items to derive an overall acculturation score. Higher scores indicated higher levels of linguistic acculturation.

Acculturative stress. We assessed acculturative stress using the Social, Attitudinal, Familial, and

| TABLE 1 |
| Sample Characteristics |
| Study Sample (N's range from 152 to 160) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Study Sample</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>23.02, 3.33, 18.0-30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education</td>
<td>2.66, 1.51, 1.0-8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td>2.99, 6.62, 1.0-4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic acculturation</td>
<td>3.57, 1.01, 1.0-5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturative stress</td>
<td>2.05, 0.63, 1.0-3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>3.30, 5.52, 1.8-4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Labels</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan-Ethnic</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US Born</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-US Born</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N's range from 152-160 due to missing cases.
Environmental acculturative stress scale (SAFE; Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Participants indicated the extent to which they felt bothered on 24 statements (e.g., I feel uncomfortable when others make jokes about or put down people of my ethnic background; It bothers me that I have an accent) using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not stressful to 5 = Very stressful). We calculated a mean score with higher scores indicating higher levels of acculturative stress.

Self-esteem. We used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenburg, 1965) to measure participants’ positive orientations toward themselves. Respondents indicated their responses on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree) on 10 statements (e.g., I feel that I have a number of good qualities; I take a positive attitude toward myself). We summed and averaged across all items and higher scores indicated higher levels of self-esteem.

Results
Preliminary Analyses
Means, standard deviations, and descriptives for the key study variables are shown in Table 1. Bivariate correlations and ANOVAs of the study variables are presented in Table 2. Bivariate correlations showed that self-esteem was associated positively with linguistic acculturation ($r = .23$, N=159, $p < .01$) and related negatively with acculturative stress ($r = -.27$, N= 153, $p < .01$). That is, individuals who reported high levels of self-esteem spoke English more frequently and experienced lower levels of acculturative stress. Linguistic acculturation was also associated negatively with acculturative stress ($r = -.18$, N= 153, $p < .05$). In other words, individuals who spoke English more frequently tended to report lower levels of acculturative stress. No other significant relations were found.

ANOVA of the study variables revealed differences across the ethnic label typologies. Individuals who self-identified with compound labels were more linguistically acculturated compared to those who identified with national labels, $F(2,153) = 3.85$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Significant mean differences also emerged for acculturative stress; individuals who identified with national labels reported higher levels of stress compared to those who identified with pan-ethnic and compound labels, $F(2, 147) = 5.27$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .07$. No significant differences were found in ethnic identity or self-esteem across the ethnic label typologies.

We conducted a series of follow-up analyses controlling for age, parent education, gender, and regional status on our study variables. Differences in linguistic acculturation and acculturative stress remained as a function of the ethnic label typologies even after these variables were entered as covariates in the model.

Discussion
In an increasingly heterogeneous society such as the U.S., it is important to study ethnic identity because ethnic group membership is linked to one’s self-concept and identity formation. Because ethnic self-identification may reflect acculturative changes, we designed this study to examine ethnic labels and their relevance to acculturation status and related psychological processes among Mexican origin college students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Pan-Ethnic</th>
<th>Compound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic acculturation</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturative stress</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.18a</td>
<td>2.49b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.23c</td>
<td>.27c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N’s for the bivariate correlations range from 152 to 159 due to missing cases. Correlations are significant at *p < .05, **p < .01.

N’s for the ANOVAs range from 148 to 160 due to missing cases. Higher scores indicate higher levels of ethnic identity, linguistic acculturation, acculturative stress and self-esteem. Differences are significant at *p < .05, **p < .01 in the models.

LSD pairwise analyses yielded the following:

a denotes significant mean differences compared to National label identification ($p < .05$)
b denotes significant mean differences compared to Compound and Pan-ethnic label identification ($p < .01$)
Our findings revealed differences in linguistic acculturation and acculturative stress across the three ethnic label typologies. Those who identified with their country of origin (“Mexican”) were more likely to frequently speak Spanish (which to some degree is an index of their acculturation level) and to report higher levels of acculturative stress; meanwhile, those who self-identified with the label of the host country (“Mexican American”) reported higher frequency in speaking the language of the host society (English) and less acculturative stress. This finding supports prior literature on acculturation and ethnic identification in which immigrants tended to shift from national to compound label identification over time (cf., Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001). Furthermore, studies have documented increased levels of stress among individuals who were less acculturated to the host society. Thus, it is plausible for individuals to experience high levels of acculturative stress when self-identifying with their country of origin.

Contrary to expectations, no differences emerged for self-esteem or ethnic identity across the ethnic label typologies. One possibility of this finding may be due to the conceptualization of ethnic identity. In a review of the literature on ethnic identity and self-esteem, researchers (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002) noted that ethnic identity and self-esteem are positively related only when the degree of ethnic identity is examined in conjunction with the value one places on having a Hispanic identity (in this case, Mexican identity). As such, the link between ethnic self-labels and self-esteem may be moderated by the importance in which individuals place their ethnic identity on their overall self-concept. For some populations, ethnic labels may take on political significance and be of greater importance to their identity. Another possibility of this finding may be due to the underlying complexity of ethnic identity. Although ethnic self-labels entail one dimension of ethnic identity, they may not be associated with one’s sense of self-esteem. In fact, ethnic self-labels may be a distal factor to ethnic identity because it is a demographic indicator that does not directly reflect the strength or valence of one’s affirmation, sense of belonging, or commitment to an ethnic group. As such, ethnic identity may encompass components that are related, yet distinct from one another; and subjective feelings and emotions may not necessarily extend to one’s behaviors (Yancey, Anesheneseal, & Driscoll, 2001). Future research could seek to distinguish and tease apart the various components of ethnic identity as well as whether, and to what extent individuals attribute feelings of self-worth to their ethnic self-identification.

In the current study, findings revealed that ethnic identity was unrelated to all of the variables studied, and it may be due to the role of context. Research examining the contextual effects of ethnic identity development has found less diverse contexts to promote greater ethnic awareness and a more salient sense of ethnic identity among Latinos (Umaña-Taylor, 2003). In the current investigation, the college contexts were in California and Texas, in the western region of the U.S., where the majority of Mexicans Americans reside and where most of the ethnic enclaves are formed and maintained (Marotta & Garcia, 2003). Thus, for the late adolescents/emerging adults in the current study, their college campuses and the surrounding communities are diverse environments compared to other regions of the nation. It is possible that because these individuals have always had the venues to engage in ethnic behaviors and to participate in ethnic traditions and activities, their college experience may not necessarily serve as the potent catalyst for ethnic identity affirmation, exploration, or awareness. As such, the subjective dimensions of ethnic identity may not be relevant to their acculturation status and related psychological processes.

It is important to mention the distribution of individuals who identified with pan-ethnic labels in the current study. As noted earlier, the 1990 to 2000 decade reflected an increase of Latinos identifying with pan-ethnic labels rather than national labels. Guzmán and McConnell (2002) suggested that this pan-ethnic preference may be prevalent particularly for those strategizing for political unity among the collective Hispanic/Latino group, for individuals whose parents are from different Hispanic countries, and for U.S. born Latinos who might identify more strongly with the U.S. than with their country of origin. In the current investigation, the trend of individuals identifying with pan-ethnic labels did not resemble that of the national pattern. This inconsistency is important to highlight because it underscores the uniqueness of the late adolescent Mexican origin population as well as the inherent heterogeneity of the Latino population. That is, compared to the nationwide sample of Latinos, late adolescents and Mexican origin individuals may not endorse the same preference for pan-ethnic labels. Such a discrepancy highlights the need to discriminate the differences between different Latino age groups and subgroups, in order to better understand the meanings behind individuals’ endorsement of particular ethnic labels.

There are a number of limitations to consider in the current study. First, the cross-sectional nature of this investigation precludes any inference of causality regarding ethnic labels and their association with
Acculturation status and related psychological processes. That is, the findings from this study cannot be taken to explain that certain types of self-labels lead to specific outcomes or that certain ethnic labels are representative of any particular acculturation status or related psychological process. Second, acculturation status was assessed by linguistic indicators. Language use has been the most commonly used proxy measure for acculturation; however, researchers have argued that it is unidimensional and may not fully capture other proximal dimensions of acculturation (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006; cf. Zamboanga, Raffaelli, & Horton, 2006). Therefore, more proximal measures such as cultural values and attitudes can be incorporated in future studies to assess the complexity of acculturation status. Future work in this area might therefore conduct longitudinal studies with multidimensional aspects of acculturation to examine the developmental pathway of ethnic identity and to capture the holistic and dynamic nature of cultural adaptation over time. Longitudinal studies would also allow us to better understand acculturation as a process rather than a status and to tease apart the direction of the association between ethnic identity and acculturation. Third, the role of context is an important consideration in our understanding of ethnic identity and acculturation-related processes. For example, regional differences should be taken into consideration to account for demographic dissimilarities that may influence individuals’ experiences and worldviews. Also, because identity is a fluid and dynamic construct that varies across time and space, future research should consider contextual factors such as the cultural context of the data collection site, the ethnic composition of social groups in the nearby neighborhood, and the ethnic identity of peers, close friends, and family members. Finally, the findings from this study might not generalize to other Latino subgroups, Mexican nonyouth, youth who do not attend public universities (e.g., private and/or religious institutions), or even late adolescents/emerging adults in the community because the study participants were college attendees.

Despite these limitations, this investigation contributes to the research on ethnic identity in several ways. First, ethnic self-identification is a markedly unique self-concept compared to the subjective components that capture the valence of an individual’s ethnic identity. Ethnic labels provide added insight into an individual’s perception of the self; however, this specific component of ethnic identity has not been previously examined. Second, the current study utilized an open-ended question to ask for participants’ ethnic label. Scholars have cautioned against the use of standardized and government-established ethnic categories (e.g., checked boxes) to categorize subgroups that have neither been defined by nor used by the people (Clark & Hofsess, 1998). Thus, by providing participants with the opportunity to openly self-identify, we did not assume individuals’ ethnic identification, which has been criticized as a methodological problem in ethnic identity research (Phinney, 1990). Finally, the current investigation accounted for the heterogeneity of the Latino population because it was restricted to young adults of Mexican background. Research with Latinos has collapsed different subgroups and overlooked the distinctions among this population such as nationality, immigration history, language dialect and pronunciation, and so forth. (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2001). Furthermore, with approximately 80% of the Latino population under the age of 25 (Marotta & García, 2003), it was important to understand how ethnic identity operates among emerging adults—a growing population that is characterized by identity exploration (Arnett, 2006; Phinney, 2006).

In conclusion, in a world where there is growing diversity among groups and subgroups that were once considered one broad category, it is essential to differentiate and better understand the reasons for variations in individuals’ self-identification. Our findings highlight the complexity of ethnic identity and generate questions for future research. Recognition of the complexities underlying these constructs may help researchers, educators, and programmers, to better understand and conceptualize ethnic identity. Although the current study addressed some relevant gaps in the literature, there is still much to be done to further understand the mechanism that helps us make sense of our experiences, our self-identification, and ultimately, who we are.

References


