

Stability and Change in Ethnic Labeling Among Adolescents From Asian and Latin American Immigrant Families

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An important question for the acculturation of adolescents from immigrant families is whether they retain ethnic labels that refer to their national origin (e.g., Mexican, Chinese) or adopt labels that are dominant in American society (e.g., Latino, Asian American, American). Approximately 380 adolescents from Asian and Latin American immigrant families selected ethnic labels during each of the 4 years of high school (age span = 14.87–17.82 years). Results indicated no normative trend either toward or away from identifying most closely with pan-ethnic or American ethnic labels. Significant numbers of adolescents changed their ethnic labels from year to year, however and these changes were associated with fluctuations in adolescents' ethnic affirmation and exploration and proficiency in their heritage languages.

Given the social importance and functional significance of ethnicity in American society, children are virtually required to figure out the ethnic and social categories into which they are placed. This task can be particularly challenging for children and adolescents from immigrant families who are less familiar with the ethnic categories and labels that are used in the United States. An important question for the acculturation of adolescents from immigrant families, therefore, is whether they retain ethnic labels that refer to their national origin (e.g., Mexican, Chinese) or move toward the adoption of labels that are dominant in American society (e.g., Latino, Asian American, American). Given that immigrant families comprise the large majority of those with Asian and Latin American backgrounds and that these are the two fastest rising ethnic groups in the United States, the answer to this question will have implications for the nature of ethnic categories and the development of ethnic identity in the broader society.

Ethnic Labeling Among Immigrants

An important aspect of identity development during the adolescent years is the process by which

teenagers explore how they fit into existing social categories and groups (Ruble et al., 2004). Ethnicity is a meaningful and salient social category within the United States, differentiating people across an array of social, economic, and behavioral indicators. The process of ethnic identity development is particularly significant for those from ethnic minority and immigrant groups because their minority and immigrant status make their ethnicity more salient in the eyes of American society. A large body of research has documented the significance of ethnic identity for critical aspects of development among ethnic minority and immigrant adolescents, such as self-esteem, academic motivation, and behavioral adjustment (Phinney, 1990). Much of this work has focused on how adolescents explore or value their ethnic group membership, however, and much less is known about how teenagers come to adopt the specific ethnic labels that they use to describe themselves. Yet, the limited work on ethnic labeling has suggested that it can be consequential for adolescent development. For example, both Waters (1999) and Matute-Bianchi (1991) noted how ethnic labeling can channel adolescents from immigrant families into different peer groups, with those who identify as "Mexican" or "Jamaican" having very different social worlds than those who identify as "Chicano" or "African American." In addition, some studies have noted how these labels

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also can be associated with achievement orientations and school success, with immigrant adolescents who identify with national origin labels such as "Mexican" evidencing higher levels of school success (Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Rumbaut, 1994).

Although recent research has demonstrated how adolescents can employ multiple ethnic labels to describe themselves in different contexts and settings (Harris & Sim, 2002; Moje & Martinez, 2007), an important question for adolescents from immigrant families is the extent to which they will identify with ethnic labels and categories that are distinctive to the United States and about which they may be less familiar. For example, "Latino" and "Hispanic" are pan-ethnic labels that are commonly used to refer to individuals of Latin American origin in the United States but that are absent in Latin American societies (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Similarly, although the terms "Asian" and "White" may not be entirely new to immigrants, their social significance is particularly American because they place adolescents within the major ethnic and racial categories used by the government and most social institutions (i.e., Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American). Another convention unique to the United States is to use the term "American" by itself or to pair national or pan-ethnic labels with the term "American" to create hyphenated labels such as "Mexican-American" and "Asian-American."

A few cross-sectional studies have indicated that adolescents from immigrant families, particularly adolescents who were born outside of the United States themselves, are somewhat resistant to adopt pan-ethnic and American ethnic labels. A survey of eighth- and ninth-grade students in Florida and Southern California reported a greater tendency to choose national origin labels such as "Mexican" and "Chinese" among the first-generation (i.e., foreign born) adolescents as compared to their second-generation (i.e., American born) peers, who were more likely to use pan-ethnic and American or hyphenated-American labels (Rumbaut, 1994). Ethnographic studies have suggested that some foreign-born adolescents, such as Black immigrants from the West Indies and immigrants from Mexico, seek to retain their national origin labels as a way to avoid the negative stereotypes associated with labels such as Black, Hispanic, or Latino (Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Waters, 1999). The pattern of first-generation adolescents preferring national origin labels and second-generation adolescents choosing pan-ethnic, American, and hyphenated-American labels has been observed in other samples (Buriel & Cardoza, 1993; Doan & Stephan, 2006), including ninth-grade students who

participated in the first wave of the longitudinal study that is reported in the present article (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005).

Generational differences such as these are often mistakenly interpreted as meaning that spending more time in the United States will produce changes within immigrants themselves. But generational differences may not translate into changes within individuals across time and development due to the numerous confounding factors associated with generational status such as birthplace and the unique historical context within which each generation entered the country (Fuligni, 2001). It is important to determine whether ethnic labels become more Americanized within children from immigrant families across time and development to determine whether indeed more time in the United States leads to an assimilation of the society's dominant ethnic categories. As a key time of ethnic identity formation, the adolescent years are an important developmental period to study this process.

Longitudinal examinations of changes in ethnic labeling are rare and there are competing predictions about what might be observed. On the one hand, the adolescent period could be a period of significant change in ethnic labeling among those from immigrant families as they become more aware of the existence and the social significance of the ethnic categories used in American society (Doan & Stephan, 2006). The continual need in secondary school to complete official forms that require identification with a pan-ethnic group, such as Asian or Hispanic, a general desire to belong to and fit in with normative groups and social categories, and an increasing awareness of the ethnic landscape of American society could lead those from immigrant families to adopt pan-ethnic, American, or hyphenated-American ethnic labels as they progress through high school. Like most adolescents in the United States, children from immigrant families engage in the normative process of emotionally distancing themselves somewhat from their parents during adolescence (Fuligni, 1998), and this process could weaken adolescents' connection to their families' national origin and result in a movement toward other ethnic labels.

On the other hand, there may be stability in the ethnic labels chosen by adolescents from immigrant families over the high school years. Some observers have suggested that birthplace is a primary criterion by which individuals may determine their ethnic categories (Rumbaut, 1994). First-generation, foreign-born adolescents may therefore retain the national origin labels that they have been shown to prefer in previous cross-sectional studies because they believe

that they will always be primarily “Mexican” or “Chinese” because of their birth in Mexico or China. Similarly, second-generation adolescents may feel unable to adopt such a national origin label because they were not born in those countries. Instead, those of the second generation may identify with labels such as Latino or Asian American throughout the adolescent years because they were born in the United States. Another possibility is that adolescents from immigrant families move toward the incorporation of national origin labels even more, as their process of identity development leads them to explore their family’s national and cultural origins more closely.

The Current Study

We sought to test these competing hypotheses in a longitudinal study of adolescents from Asian and Latin American immigrant families who were followed yearly during the 4 years of high school. First, we examined whether there was a normative change toward the inclusion of pan-ethnic and American (either hyphenated or alone) terms in ethnic labels as adolescents progressed through the high school years. Second, we assessed whether changes in the use of pan-ethnic and American terms varied according to the adolescents’ ethnic background, generation, and gender. It is possible that adolescents from Asian immigrant families would be more likely to move in the direction of the adoption of pan-ethnic or American terms. Because of the greater economic integration of their parents and their own academic success at school, adolescents from Asian immigrant families may identify with American society more quickly than those from Latin American immigrant families (Portes & Zhou, 1993). In addition, individual Asian immigrant groups are relatively smaller in size than those from Latin America, which may lead toward greater aggregation across specific ethnic groups into a larger pan-ethnic identification. Indeed, in perhaps the only longitudinal examination of changes in ethnic labeling, Portes and Rumbaut (2000) reported that adolescents from Chinese immigrant families were more likely to move toward the adoption of a pan-ethnic label between middle school and the end of high school, whereas those from Mexican immigrant families moved away from pan-ethnic labels and toward the national origin label of “Mexican.”

In terms of generational status, it is possible that there would be greater change among the foreign-born adolescents, particularly among those who come to the United States at older ages, because they start out with the endorsement of the national origin label, thereby giving them more room to move toward the

inclusion of pan-ethnic and American terms as they spend more time in the United States. Second-generation adolescents, by virtue of being born in the United States, may feel that they have fewer ethnic options available to them and must conform to the ethnic categories that are dominant in American society. Finally, it is difficult to predict whether there would be gender differences in the changes in adolescents’ choice of ethnic labels. Our earlier analyses of ninth-grade students who participated in the longitudinal study reported in the present article revealed no gender differences in adolescents’ choice of their most descriptive ethnic labels, and gender differences were inconsistent in the Portes and Rumbaut (2001) study discussed earlier. Nevertheless, we explored potential gender differences given some previous evidence suggesting that girls in ethnic minority families were more likely to be socialized by their parents in their ethnic and cultural background (Bowman & Howard, 1985), which could lead to a lower likelihood of girls moving toward the inclusion of pan-ethnic and American terms in their ethnic labels.

In addition to examining variations in changes *between* adolescents, we analyzed changes *within* adolescents over time as a function of simultaneous changes in their family cohesion, ethnic exploration and affirmation, and proficiency in their families’ heritage languages (e.g., Chinese, Spanish). Such analyses allowed us to get closer to the processes by which changes in ethnic labeling take place within adolescents by looking at how these changes are associated with changes in other significant aspects of their social and psychological development. We selected these factors because research on adolescents from immigrant families suggests that ethnic labeling may be part of a larger acculturation process that involves changes in family relationships, ethnic exploration and attachment, and language use (Phinney, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). These factors often are associated with one another on an individual differences basis, suggesting that they are part of a general process by which adolescents from immigrant families negotiate the potential differences between their cultural background and American society. As such, we believed that they might be candidates for predictors of changes in ethnic labeling *within* individual adolescents over the high school years.

In terms of family cohesion, adolescence is a period of fluctuation in parent–child relationships, and these relationships are thought to be critical factors in the retention of traditional cultural orientations in immigrant families (Gonzales, Deardorff, Formoso,

Barr, & Barrera, 2006). Several observers have suggested that acculturation stress may occur between immigrant parents and their children because of the different rates at which they adapt to American society (Zhou, 1997). Therefore, it is possible that as adolescents become more emotionally distant from their parents over the high school years, their ties to their families' national and cultural origins may weaken. As a result, the adolescents may move away from ethnic labels that incorporate their national origin and toward labels that include pan-ethnic or American terms.

The strength of adolescents' ethnic identity refers to the extent to which adolescents identify with and feel attached to their ethnic group (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Phinney, 1990). Two predictions could be made about the links between the strength of adolescents' ethnic identity and their choice of ethnic labels. On the one hand, stronger ethnic identity could be associated with a greater adoption of pan-ethnic and American ethnic terms. This is because a stronger ethnic identity would reflect a greater exploration of ethnic identity in the context of an American society that uses these terms to demarcate the dominant ethnic categories. In addition, stronger ethnic identity could result in a perception of common fate among members of different Asian or Latin American ethnicities, resulting in greater pan-ethnic identification (Lien, Conway, & Wong, 2003).

On the other hand, higher levels of ethnic identity could be associated with the retention of national labels because the identity exploration of adolescents from immigrant families would require them to consider their national heritage. In addition, it could simply be harder to maintain a national label in American society, thereby requiring the identity work that would be reflected in higher levels of ethnic identity. In support of the latter hypothesis, earlier analyses of ninth-grade students who participated in the first wave of the longitudinal study that is reported in the present article suggested that ethnic identity was stronger among adolescents who primarily chose a national origin label (Fuligni et al., 2005).

Our expectation for the links between changes in adolescents' proficiency in their heritage language and their ethnic labels was straightforward. Given the meaning of language use and proficiency for ethnic and cultural identity that has been observed previously among immigrant families and adolescents (e.g., Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001), lower levels of adolescents' heritage language proficiency across the high school years were expected to be

associated with a less use of the national origin label and more use of pan-ethnic and American terms.

Method

Sample

Beginning in 9th grade and continuing yearly through 12th grade, students from three public high schools in the Los Angeles area were recruited for participation in a longitudinal study. The first school was populated predominantly by students who came from families with Latin American and Asian backgrounds with lower-middle to middle-class educational and occupational statuses. This school tended to be in the lower middle to middle range of the achievement distribution of schools within the state of California (California Department of Education, 2006). The second school possessed average levels of achievement and consisted mainly of students from Latin American and European backgrounds whose families had lower-middle to middle-class backgrounds. Finally, the third school mainly consisted of students from families with Asian and European backgrounds who were middle- to upper-middle-class in terms of parental education and occupation. The third school tended to have above average achievement levels. No single ethnicity dominated any of these schools; rather, the two largest ethnic groups each comprised 30%–50% of the total population in each school (California Department of Education, 2006).

In two of the schools, the entire ninth grade was invited to participate during the 1st year of the study. At these schools, the same process continued in subsequent years, with all students in the correct grade being invited to participate. In the third school, approximately half the ninth graders were invited to participate because the large size of the school did not make it feasible to recruit all the students. In this school, only students who had participated in ninth grade were followed in subsequent years. At all three schools, students who had participated in earlier years but were no longer enrolled in the school were contacted and invited to participate by mail in subsequent years.

The sample used in the present analyses was the 384 participants from Asian and Latin American immigrant families who had completed self-report questionnaires for at least 2 of the 4 years of the study, where an immigrant family was defined as one in which at least one parent was foreign born. The mean ages of the sample ranged from 14.87 years ($SD =$

0.39) at the 9th grade to 17.82 years ($SD = 0.38$) at the 12th grade. The sample was evenly split by sex (187 male and 197 female). The majority of the 228 participants from Asian immigrant families were from Chinese backgrounds (76.8%), and the majority of the 156 participants from Latin American immigrant families had Mexican backgrounds (86.5%). Of the Asian participants, 78 were of the first generation (i.e., the students were foreign-born themselves) and 150 were of the second generation (i.e., the students were born in the United States). Of the participants from Latin American families, 35 were of the first generation and 121 were of the second generation. The average ages at which first-generation adolescents came to the United States were 7.88 and 4.07 years ($SDs = 4.15$ and 3.44) for those from Asian and Latin American backgrounds, respectively.

Adolescents from the two immigrant groups differed in terms of parental education such that the Asian immigrant parents were more likely to have graduated from high school and attended some college than the parents from Latin America, $F(1, 371) = 28.58, p < .001$. There were no differences in parental education according to the adolescents' generational status, $F(1, 371) = .89, ns$, and the relationship between ethnicity and education did not vary according to generational status, $F(1, 371) = .07, ns$.

Measures

Participants completed the following measures in self-report questionnaires during each year of the study. Questionnaires were available to students in English, Chinese, and Spanish and fewer than 8 participants chose to complete the questionnaires in a language other than English during any single year.

Ethnic labeling. Adolescents were presented with an alphabetical list of ethnic labels that is shown in Appendix. The list was developed based on discussions with ethnically diverse adolescents, discussions with Mexican and Chinese undergraduate research staff members who attended high school in the Los Angeles area, and prior research on the type of labels used by adolescents from these different groups (e.g., Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Rumbaut, 1994). Adolescents were asked to indicate all the labels that they felt applied to them and to add any others that applied to them but that were not on the list (e.g., mixed-race labels, other ethnic labels). Additionally, students were asked to indicate the ethnic label that they believed best described them. Adolescents were allowed to report more than one label for the last question about the best descriptive label if they felt

that it was most accurate for their own ethnic identity, but this was done by less than 3% of the sample during any given year.

Each year, labels were coded as to whether a pan-ethnic term (e.g., Asian, Latino) or an American term, either by itself or hyphenated (e.g., American, Mexican-American), was included in the label. In addition, labels were coded as to whether they referred to solely national origin (e.g., Mexican, Chinese). The vast majority of adolescents included pan-ethnic/American labels (98.7%) and national origin labels (89.6%) in their total list of chosen labels during at least 1 year of the study, providing support to the idea that both types of labels are used by adolescents during the high school years. Our analyses focused on the labels with which adolescents identified most strongly, which were those that adolescents reported described them best. For these analyses, the most descriptive label was coded as to whether it included a pan-ethnic or an American term, either by itself or hyphenated (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). Similar findings to those reported in the Results section were found when choice of pan-ethnic and American labels were each analyzed separately. Of the 3% of adolescents who reported multiple most descriptive labels, all but two adolescents reported labels that could both be classified into the same categories described earlier (e.g., pan-ethnic and national origin). The two participants who listed multiple most descriptive labels that fell into different categories were not included in the present analyses. The specific labels chosen by adolescents as most descriptive each year are presented in Table 1.

Closeness to parents. Adolescents completed a subset of the Family Adaptation and Cohesion Evaluation Scales II inventory separately for each parent (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979). Questions were the same for mothers and fathers and participants responded to each on a 5-point scale (1 = *almost never*, 5 = *almost always*). The measure for each parent included 10 items such as "My mother [father] and I do things together," "My mother [father] and I are supportive of each other during difficult times," and "My mother [father] and I feel very close to each other." An average was computed for each participant across both parents. Internal consistencies were similarly high for both ethnic groups across the 4 years of the study ($\alpha s = .87 - .92$). Scores were recoded on a 0–4 scale for the analyses presented in this article.

Strength of ethnic identity. Adolescents completed two subscales of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) in reference to the most descriptive ethnic label that they chose each year.

Table 1
Frequencies of Most Descriptive Labels

Label	Latin American				Asian			
	9th	10th	11th	12th	9th	10th	11th	12th
American	1.7	3.6	1.6	3.9	1.1	2.0		2.5
Asian					7.9	5.9	11.6	4.5
Asian American					23.7	20.0	23.6	18.3
Asian Indian							0.5	
Australian					0.6			
Brazilian	1.7	1.4	0.8	1.6				
Burmese								0.5
Cantonese						0.5		
Central American		0.7	0.8					
Chicano	2.6	3.6	6.3	3.1				
Chinese					16.4	20.0	14.6	14.9
Chinese American					19.8	22.0	17.6	26.7
Filipino					3.4	3.9	3.5	3.5
Guatemalan	3.4	3.6	3.2	4.7				
Hispanic	4.3	13.7	9.5	12.4				
Hispanic American	12.8	5.0	4.8	4.7				
Honduran	0.9							
Indonesian								0.5
Japanese					1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Japanese American					3.4	3.4	2.5	2.5
Korean					2.3	2.4	2.5	2.5
Korean American					4.5	3.9	5.5	5.0
Latino	10.3	13.7	8.7	10.1				
Latino American	5.1	5.0	4.8	3.9				
Mexican	18.8	21.6	23.0	16.3				
Mexican American	33.3	25.9	31.0	35.7				
Nicaraguan American	0.9		0.8	0.8				
Pacific Islander								0.5
Peruvian		0.7	0.8					
Puerto Rican	0.9							
Salvadoran	0.9	0.7	3.2	1.6				
Salvadoran American	0.9	0.7	0.8	1.6				
Spanish	0.9							
Taiwanese					2.3	2.0	4.0	2.0
Taiwanese American					2.3	2.0	2.0	3.5
Thai					1.1	0.5	0.5	0.5
Uruguayan	0.9							
Vietnamese					3.4	5.4	3.5	3.5
Vietnamese American					6.8	5.4	7.0	7.9

Note. Figures refer to the percentage of adolescents within each ethnic group at each grade level who chose each label as their most descriptive label. Any label that included the term "American," by itself or in combination with another term, was coded as including an American term except for "Central American." Any label that included "Asian," "Chicano/a," "Latino," and "Hispanic," either alone or in combination with another term, was coded as including a pan-ethnic term.

The Affirmation and Belonging subscale consists of seven items and assesses ethnic pride, feeling good and happy about one's ethnicity, and feelings of belonging and attachment to one's ethnic group. Sample items include "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to," "I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group" and "I feel good about my cultural or

ethnic background." The Ethnic Identity Search subscale consists of five items and measures individuals' exploration of and commitment to their ethnic group. Sample items include "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs," "I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group," and "In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group." Participants responded to each item on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Internal consistencies were similarly high for both ethnic groups across the 4 years of the study for both measures (affirmation: α s = .89–.91, search: α s = .68–.78). Scores were recoded on a 0–4 scale for the analyses presented in this article.

Heritage Language Proficiency

Using a standard approach to measuring language proficiency in large-scale questionnaire studies that prohibit the direct testing of language proficiency (e.g., Phinney et al., 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), adolescents were asked to report all the languages that were spoken in their home. For any non-English language spoken in the home (e.g., Chinese, Spanish), participants were asked to rate how well they speak, understand, read, and write that language. Participants responded to each item on a 5-point scale (1 = *not very well*, 5 = *very well*), and responses to these multiple items of proficiency were averaged. Participants received a 0 on this scale if they indicated that no non-English languages are spoken in their home, resulting in a scale that ranged from 0 to 5. Internal consistencies were similarly high for both ethnic groups across the 4 years of the study (α s = .86–.89).

Results

Participation Analyses

Initial analyses were conducted to examine differences between adolescents according to the degree of their participation in the study. Although this sample could include those who participated only 2 years, most participated all 4 years of the study ($M = 3.52$ years, $SD = 0.67$). Because participants entered the study at different years, a variable was created to indicate the percentage of possible years each participant took part in the study. For example, a participant who began the study in 9th grade had four possible years, whereas a participant who began the study in

10th grade only had three possible years. On average, participants took part in the study in 94% ($SD = 0.14$) of their possible years. There were no differences in the degree of participation as a function of gender, ethnicity, or generation. To determine if there were differences in any of the time varying variables (i.e., ethnic labeling, closeness to parents, strength of ethnic identity, and heritage language proficiency) as a function of participation, hierarchical linear models (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992) were estimated using the following equations:

$$\text{Ethnic labeling, etc.}_{ij} = b_{0j} + e_{ij} \quad (1)$$

$$b_{0j} = c_{00} + c_{01}(\text{participation}) + u_{0j} \quad (2)$$

where Equation 1 represents adolescents' scores on the time varying variables (i.e., ethnic labeling, closeness to parents, etc.) across the years of their participation in the study and Equation 2 represents the prediction of the adolescents' average scores across their years of participation as a function of their degree of participation (i.e., the percentage of possible years that they took part in the study). There were no differences in any of the variables in the study based on degree of participation except for heritage language proficiency, where adolescents who participated in more years of the study had lower average levels of heritage language proficiency ($b = -1.40$, $p < .01$).

For this analysis and all subsequent analyses described subsequently, additional hierarchical generalized linear models (HGLM) were tested because the outcome variable had only two possible values. Except in the one minor case noted subsequently, the substantive results remained unchanged. For ease of presentation and interpretation, results from the HLM are presented throughout.

Normative Changes in Ethnic Labeling

The first goal of this study was to examine change over time in adolescents' inclusion of a pan-ethnic or an American term in their most descriptive ethnic label. The statistical model that was estimated was as follows:

$$\text{Panethnic or American term}_{ij} = b_{0j} + b_{1j}(\text{year}) + e_{ij} \quad (3)$$

$$b_{0j} = c_{00} + c_{01}(\text{gender}) + c_{02}(\text{ethnicity}) + c_{03}(\text{generation}) + u_{0j} \quad (4)$$

$$b_{1j} = c_{10} + c_{11}(\text{gender}) + c_{12}(\text{ethnicity}) + c_{13}(\text{generation}) + u_{1j} \quad (5)$$

As shown in Equation 3, adolescents' inclusion of a pan-ethnic or an American term (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) on a particular year (i) for a particular individual (j) was modeled as a function of the average amount of inclusion of the term by the individual (b_{0j}) and the year of the study (b_{1j}). Year was coded such that *Year 1* = 0, *Year 2* = 1, *Year 3* = 2, and *Year 4* = 3. Equations 4 and 5 show how both the average amount of inclusion and the effect of the year of the study were modeled as a function of the adolescents' gender, ethnicity, and generational status. The Level 2 variables were effects coded such that gender was coded as *males* = -1 and *females* = 1, ethnicity was coded as *Latino* = -1 and *Chinese* = 1, and generation was coded as *first generation* = -1 and *second generation* = 1.

Results indicated no normative developmental changes in adolescents' inclusion of a pan-ethnic or an American term in their most descriptive ethnic labels. On average, second-generation adolescents were more likely to choose a pan-ethnic or an American term (Table 2). But as shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, there were no significant changes in ethnic labeling over time ($b = -.02$, *ns*). Further, there was no significant variation in the effect of time on labeling (SD of estimate = 0.05, *ns*) and the amount of change did not significantly vary across adolescents' gender, ethnicity, and generation.

An additional analysis was conducted with first-generation participants to test whether amount of change varied according to age of immigration. For

Table 2
Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Change Over Time in the Inclusion of a Pan-Ethnic or an American Term in Adolescents' Most Descriptive Ethnic Labels

	Pan-ethnic or American term, b (SE)
Intercept	.58 (0.03)***
Gender	-.01 (0.02)
Ethnicity	-.01 (0.02)
Generation	.11 (0.03)***
Year	-.02 (0.01)
Gender	.00 (0.01)
Ethnicity	.01 (0.01)
Generation	-.01 (0.01)

Note. Gender was coded as *boys* = -1, *girls* = 1; ethnicity was coded as *Latino* = -1, *Asian* = 1; and generation was coded as *first generation* = -1, *second generation* = 1. All predictors were uncentered. *** $p < .001$.

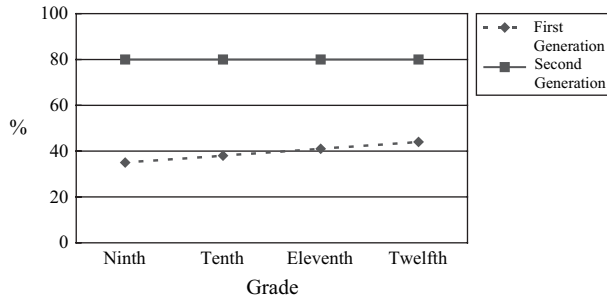


Figure 1. Change over time in likelihood of including a pan-ethnic or an American term in adolescents' ethnic label according to generation.

this analysis, generation in Equations 4 and 5 was replaced with age of immigration, which was centered at the mean of the sample. With older ages of immigration, participants were less likely to choose a pan-ethnic or an American label ($b = -.03, p < .05$). However, fluctuations in ethnic labeling over time did not significantly vary according to age of immigration.

Within-Person Changes in Ethnic Labeling

Amount of within-person change. Although there was not a normative trend regarding the inclusion of a pan-ethnic or an American term in adolescents' ethnic labels over time, there was a substantial amount of change in any direction (i.e., toward or away from inclusion of a pan-ethnic or an American term) within individuals during the 4 years of high school. Overall, 47.8% of the sample changed whether or not they included a pan-ethnic or an American term in their most descriptive label over at least one grade interval during the 4 years of high school. As shown in Figure 2, between 18.2% and 22.3% of the sample changed whether they included a pan-ethnic

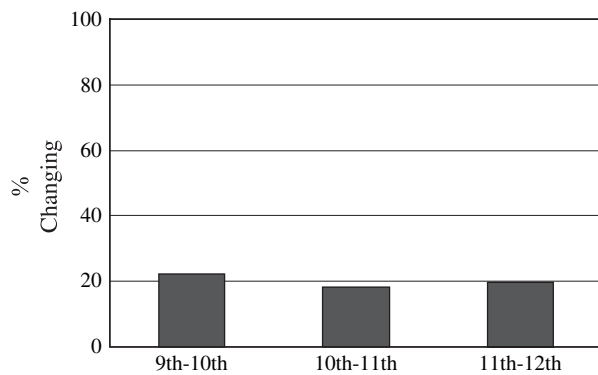


Figure 2. Percentage of adolescents changing as to whether a pan-ethnic or an American term was included in their ethnic label.

or an American term in their label at each grade interval. Likelihood of changing whether or not a pan-ethnic or an American term was included in the label varied according to generation across the final grade interval, between 11th and 12th grades, $\chi^2(1, N = 288) = 5.10, p < .05$, such that first-generation adolescents were more likely to change. There were no ethnic differences and no other generation differences in the likelihood of changing whether a pan-ethnic or an American term was included in adolescents' most descriptive label.

Given the degree of changes in ethnic labeling within adolescents across time, an additional set of HLM was estimated to determine whether changes in adolescents' inclusion of a pan-ethnic or an American term from year to year were associated with concurrent changes in their closeness with parents, strength of ethnic identity, and heritage language proficiency. Separate models were estimated for each of the predictor variables (closeness with parents, strength of identity, and heritage language proficiency). Given that there was a maximum of four time points per person and that some participants had only two or three time points, we did not have enough power and degrees of freedom to estimate all the predictors simultaneously. The general form of the model used for these analyses was as follows:

$$\text{Pan-ethnic or American term}_{ij} = b_{0j} + b_{1j}(\text{predictor}) + e_{ij} \tag{6}$$

$$b_{0j} = c_{00} + c_{01}(\text{gender}) + c_{02}(\text{ethnicity}) + c_{03}(\text{generation}) + u_{0j} \tag{7}$$

$$b_{1j} = c_{10} + c_{11}(\text{gender}) + c_{12}(\text{ethnicity}) + c_{13}(\text{generation}) + u_{1j} \tag{8}$$

Equation 6 shows how adolescents' selection of a pan-ethnic or an American term ($0 = no, 1 = yes$) on a particular year (i) for a particular individual (j) was modeled as a function of the average amount of inclusion of the term by the individual (b_{0j}) and the specific predictor variable (b_{1j} ; i.e., closeness with parents, strength of ethnic identity, or heritage language proficiency). Closeness with parents and strength of identity were coded from 0 to 4 and heritage language proficiency was coded from 0 to 5. Equations 7 and 8 show how the average amount of inclusion of the term and the effect of the predictor variable were modeled as a function of gender, ethnicity, and generational status, which were coded in the same manner as before.

As before, an additional analysis was conducted with first-generation participants, in which generation in Equations 7 and 8 was replaced with age of immigration. In no case, did the relationship between the predictor and the selection of a pan-ethnic or an American label vary according to age of immigration.

Closeness with parents. As shown in Table 3, there was no association between changes in closeness with parents and changes in the inclusion of an American or pan-ethnic term in adolescents' most descriptive ethnic label ($b = .00, ns$).

Strength of ethnic identity. Separate analyses were performed using ethnic search and ethnic affirmation. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, lower levels of search and affirmation were each associated with a greater likelihood of adolescents including a pan-ethnic or an American term in their most descriptive ethnic label each year (search: $b = -.04, p < .01$; affirmation: $b = -.08, p < .001$). However, the relationship between affirmation and label choice was moderated by generation such that the association was significant for first-generation participants ($b = -.13, p < .001$) but not for second-generation participants ($b = -.03, ns$). The analysis examining the relationship between affirmation and likelihood of including a pan-ethnic or an American label in one's most descriptive label was the one instance in which the results varied between HLM and HGLM. In the HGLM, there was a significant relationship between affirmation and label choice that was not moderated by generation.

Heritage Language Proficiency

As shown in Table 6, lower levels of heritage language proficiency were associated with a greater likelihood of including a pan-ethnic or an American

Table 3
Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Inclusion of a Pan-Ethnic or an American Term According to Closeness With Parents

	Pan-ethnic or American term, <i>b</i> (SE)
Intercept	.61 (0.06)***
Gender	-.02 (0.05)
Ethnicity	.04 (0.05)
Generation	.11 (0.06)
Closeness with parents	.00 (0.03)
Gender	.00 (0.02)
Ethnicity	-.01 (0.02)
Generation	.04 (0.03)

Note. Gender was coded as boys = -1, girls = 1; ethnicity was coded as Latino = -1, Asian = 1; generation was coded as first generation = -1, second generation = 1. All predictors were uncentered. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4
Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Inclusion of a Pan-Ethnic or an American Term According to Ethnic Identity Search

	Pan-ethnic or American term, <i>b</i> (SE)
Intercept	.70 (0.04)***
Gender	.00 (0.03)
Ethnicity	.02 (0.03)
Generation	.16 (0.04)***
Search	-.04 (0.01)**
Gender	.00 (0.01)
Ethnicity	.00 (0.01)
Generation	.02 (0.01)

Note. Gender was coded as boys = -1, girls = 1; ethnicity was coded as Latino = -1, Asian = 1; generation was coded as first generation = -1, second generation = 1. All predictors were uncentered. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

label in one's most descriptive label ($b = -.05, p < .01$) each year. However, this relationship was moderated by generation such that the association was significant for first-generation participants ($b = -.08, p < .01$) but not for second-generation participants ($b = -.01, ns$).

Parental Education

A final set of analyses was conducted using parental education as an additional predictor in Equations 4, 5, 7, and 8 to determine whether it was associated with any of the patterns reported earlier and whether it might explain any observed ethnic or generational differences. Parental education was a significant predictor in only one of the analyses: Among adolescents with more highly educated parents, the negative association between the heritage language proficiency

Table 5
Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Inclusion of a Pan-Ethnic or an American Term According to Affirmation and Belonging

	Pan-ethnic or American term, <i>b</i> (SE)
Intercept	.84 (0.05)***
Gender	-.05 (0.04)
Ethnicity	-.03 (0.04)
Generation	.06 (0.05)
Affirmation	-.08 (0.02)***
Gender	.02 (0.01)
Ethnicity	.01 (0.01)
Generation	.05 (0.02)**

Note. Gender was coded as boys = -1, girls = 1; ethnicity was coded as Latino = -1, Asian = 1; generation was coded as first generation = -1, second generation = 1. All predictors were uncentered. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 6
Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Inclusion of a Pan-Ethnic or an American Term According to Heritage Language Proficiency

Pan-ethnic or American term, <i>b</i> (SE)	
Intercept	.77 (0.06)***
Gender	-.07 (0.04)
Ethnicity	.01 (0.04)
Generation	.07 (0.06)
Heritage language proficiency	-.04 (0.02)**
Gender	.02 (0.01)
Ethnicity	-.01 (0.01)
Generation	.04 (0.02)*

Note. Gender was as coded *boys* = -1, *girls* = 1; ethnicity was coded as *Latino* = -1, *Asian* = 1; generation was coded as *first generation* = -1, *second generation* = 1. All predictors were uncentered.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

and the inclusion of an American term was reduced ($b = .02, p < .05$). In no case, however, did the inclusion of parental education change any of the results regarding ethnicity or generation reported earlier.

Discussion

Adolescents from immigrant families showed no normative trend toward the inclusion of pan-ethnic and American terms in their most important ethnic labels across the high school years. Generational changes remained stable during high school, with second-generation students being more likely to use pan-ethnic and American terms than first-generation students, testifying to the continued importance of birthplace in adolescents' choice of the ethnic labels with which they identify most closely (Rumbaut, 1994). Even after spending more years in American society, many foreign-born adolescents likely feel unwilling or unable to identify primarily with the ethnic labels common to the United States because they were born in other countries, such as Mexico or China. Second-generation adolescents, in turn, may feel unable to consider themselves primarily "Mexican" or "Chinese" because they were not born in those countries. Although first-generation adolescents who arrived in the United States at earlier ages were more likely to use pan-ethnic and American terms on average, the lack of change over time according to age of immigration suggests that it is the age at which the adolescents enter the United States that makes a difference rather than the number of years they have spent in the country. Ethnic differences also remained stable across time. The trend for adolescents from Asian immigrant families to more

likely use an American term in their most important ethnic label may be due to a greater identification with American society resulting from their higher level of academic success and their families' relatively easier economic integration as compared to those from Latin American backgrounds (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

The lack of normative change toward the inclusion of pan-ethnic and American terms in adolescents' most important label demonstrates how differences across different generations do not necessarily mean that more time in the United States will produce changes within immigrants themselves (Fuligni, 2001). At least during the high school years, adolescents from immigrant families as a whole do not show changes that would imply acculturation or assimilation to the dominant ethnic categories and labels used in American society. It is possible that the stability may be a function of the relative constancy of the social environments of the students during high school. The contexts of the adolescents' lives show little change between the 9th and 12th grades as they attend the same schools with generally the same peers and teachers. Instead, normative changes in ethnic labeling may be more likely to occur at periods of social transition, such as the move out of high school and into young adulthood. As young adults gain new experiences through work or education, they may become more deeply aware of their ethnic background (Phinney, 2003). Practically speaking, young adults often use their newly found independence and their college and work experiences to immerse themselves in diverse perspectives, student or professional organizations, and coursework to explore and learn more about their identity (Tatum, 1997). It would be important in future work to follow adolescents from immigrant families during such a significant period of developmental transition, although it is unlikely that generational differences would ever disappear completely as studies of adults have found consistent generational differences in ethnic labeling (Lien et al., 2003; Masuoka, 2006).

Although there was great stability in the overall numbers of adolescents who chose different ethnic labels during high school, there were changes within adolescents themselves from year to year. Therefore, rather than a period of great stability, the high school years are a time of fluctuation in the ethnic labels with which adolescents most closely identify. The fluctuation is not in any one direction. Rather, adolescents from immigrant families appear to be trying on different ethnic labels each year, and similar numbers of students move toward and away from the use of a pan-ethnic or an American term. Such fluctuation would be consistent with the portrayal of the

adolescent years as a key period in the developmental of ethnic identity, which usually involves a process of search and exploration of one's cultural background and place in American society (Phinney, 1990).

Rather than being random fluctuation, however, the changes in most important ethnic labels within adolescents themselves were significantly associated with changes in other significant aspects of the adolescents' psychological and social development thought to be central to the larger acculturation process of adolescents from immigrant families (Phinney, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2002, Tseng & Fuligni, 2001). Changes in the strength of adolescents' ethnic identity predicted changes in their ethnic labeling, with lower levels of ethnic search and affirmation being associated with the greater probability of including pan-ethnic and American terms. The process of ethnic identity development, although it takes place in a social context in which pan-ethnic and American terms are dominant, likely requires adolescents from immigrant families to consider their national heritage. Retaining a national origin label such as "Mexican" or "Chinese" may require more identity work and effort, which would be reflected in higher levels of ethnic search and affirmation. The inclusion of pan-ethnic and American terms, in contrast, could partially be a result of simply accepting the ethnic categories that American society places adolescents into through school forms and other official documents that allow for identification with only pan-ethnic or hyphenated-American labels. Accepting these labels, therefore, may require lower levels of ethnic search and affirmation.

Change in adolescents' heritage language proficiency was associated with changes in their most important ethnic labels such that lower levels of proficiency were associated with a greater probability of including pan-ethnic and American terms. Language use and proficiency have been shown to be linked to the strength of adolescents' ethnic identity in previous research (Phinney et al., 2001). The ability to speak their families' heritage language, such as Spanish or Chinese, likely enables adolescents to explore their families' cultural and national heritage more deeply through communication with family members and consumption of non-English information sources and media. Adolescents from immigrant families also may feel that they cannot consider themselves primarily "Mexican" or "Chinese" if they cannot speak the language very well. Continued research should more thoroughly explore the meaning of language use and ability for ethnic labeling and identity through the use of qualitative methods such as in-depth personal interviews and focus groups.

Interestingly, the link between changes in heritage language ability and changes in the inclusion of a pan-ethnic or an American label varied such that it was stronger for first-generation adolescents as compared to second-generation adolescents. This may be because of the high level of heritage language ability of the first-generation adolescents, who were born outside of the United States. As a result, heritage language ability may have more meaning for these teenagers, and it may be seen as a greater indicator of identification with and connectedness to the family's country and culture of origin. For second-generation adolescents, heritage language ability appears to be less of a meaningful indicator for ethnic and cultural identity.

In contrast to the strength of ethnic identity and heritage language proficiency, changes in closeness with parents were not predictive of changes to ethnic labeling. It may be that ethnic labeling is more dependent upon social and psychological factors most closely tied to ethnicity and culture than more generic aspects family relationships. In addition, it is important to note that the associations of strength of ethnic identity and heritage language proficiency with ethnic labeling were observed *within* adolescents themselves, thereby ruling out potential confounding factors associated with traditional correlations observed between adolescents. Rather, the associations observed in this study suggest that these social processes are closely linked to one another among adolescents from immigrant families.

The results of this study highlight how adolescents from immigrant families appear to be exploring and experimenting with different ethnic labels across the high school years, and it is important in continuing work to examine how these explorations vary across different social contexts and settings. The ethnic context of adolescents' neighborhoods and schools should make a difference in the labels that they use to describe themselves. Adolescents who participated in this study all lived in contexts in which there are substantial numbers of adolescents from similar immigrant and ethnic backgrounds, thereby potentially leading toward lower rates of inclusion of pan-ethnic and American terms in their ethnic labels. The present study was unable to determine whether variation in the ethnic and immigrant concentration across schools and neighborhoods would make a difference in adolescents' ethnic labels, but it is possible that higher levels of pan-ethnic and American labeling would be observed among immigrants in contexts with few other coethnics. Given the increased dispersal of immigrants to nontraditional receiving locations in the United States, this would be an important topic for future research.

Other studies have suggested that the use of different ethnic labels may vary contemporaneously across different proximal social settings, such as school, home, and peer groups (Harris & Sim, 2002; Moje & Martinez, 2007). It would be useful in future research to combine the approach taken in this study with methods that assess multiple settings to obtain a fuller understanding of the explorations and fluctuations that take place in ethnic labeling during the adolescent years.

Additional studies also can examine the role of other psychological and social factors in adolescents' choice of ethnic labels. Experience with discrimination has been suggested to play a role in the ethnic identification of adolescents from immigrant families, yet the direction of the effect is unclear. Waters (1999) reported that adolescents who did not identify with their parents' West Indian cultural background and instead identified with labels such as Black and African American tended to report more frequent experiences with discrimination. In contrast, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found that adolescents from immigrant families who identified with their parents' national origin reported the highest levels of discrimination. A clearer understanding of the role of discrimination could be obtained by better analyzing the precise social meanings and social positioning of individual ethnic labels (e.g., Mexican vs. Latino vs. Chinese vs. Asian), as well as the ways in which adolescents from immigrant families themselves make sense of those social meanings. In addition to examining discrimination, closer analyses of adolescents' friendships, attitudes toward American society, and involvement in cultural activities and organizations would be important to examine.

In summary, although ethnic labeling showed no normative trend of acculturation or assimilation, the high school years represent a period of fluctuation in the labels that adolescents from immigrant families identify with most closely. These fluctuations appear to be tied to fluctuations in other significant aspects of their psychological and social development, and future research should expand the developmental periods, social settings, and potential predictors being assessed to better understand a process that is an important component of the acculturation and development of adolescents from immigrant families.

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Appendix

Ethnic Labels Presented to Adolescents for Selection

African-American	Indian	Salvadoran-American
American	Iranian	Samoan
Asian	Japanese	Spanish
Asian-American	Japanese-American	Spanish-American
Black	Korean	Thai
Brazilian	Korean-American	Taiwanese
Cambodian	Latino/a	Taiwanese-American
Central-American	Latino-American	Vietnamese
Chicano/a	Mexican	Vietnamese-American
Chinese	Mexican-American	White
Chinese-American	Middle Eastern	Australian ^a
European-American	Native American	Asian Indian ^a
El Salvadoran	Nicaraguan	Cantonese ^a
Filipino/a	Nicaraguan-American	Burmese ^a
Guatemalan	Pacific Islander	Peruvian ^a
Hispanic	Pakistani	Uruguayan ^a
Hispanic-American	Persian	Indonesian ^a
		Puerto Rican ^a

Note. Labels were presented to adolescents in alphabetical order, without their categorization.

^aLabels that were not given to students as options but were written in by the students from Asian and Latin American immigrant families as labels that describe them.