Jean Phinney’s Model of Ethnic Identity Development

Erica Garnett
What is ethnic identity?
“There is no universal definition of the concept of ethnic identity in literature”

(Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 272).
Ethnic identity is the culture, religion, geography, language, and practices shared by individuals connected by loyalty and kinship. (Evans et al., 2010)
2 Ways of Understanding

External Ethnic Identity:
Recognizable social and cultural behaviors
- Language
- Traditions
- Friendship with other members
- Involvement in group activities

Internal Ethnic Identity:
- **Cognitive**: view of self, the group, and traditions.
- **Moral**: obligation to heritage and values
- **Affective dimensions**: attachment feelings and an affinity to seek out similar members and cultural patterns.
Factors Affecting Ethnic Identity Participation

- Ethnic language proficiency
- Parental cultural influence
- Peer interactions
- Socioeconomic Status
- Ethnic Identity = Racial Identity
- “Code Switching”
Acculturation

The extent to which an individual absorbs the dominant culture.

*John Berry’s Model of Acculturation:*

- **Assimilate:** Individuals solely identify with the dominant culture and sever ties with their own culture.
- **Marginalize:** Individuals reject their own group and the host culture.
- **Separate:** Individuals identify solely with their culture and reject host culture.
- **Integrate:** Individuals become bicultural by maintaining aspects of their own group and selectively acquire some of the host culture.
Jean S. Phinney

Professor of Psychology
California State University,
Los Angeles (CUSLA) – 1977

Received B.A. in Foreign Language
Wellsey College – Wellsey,
Massachusetts

Received PhD in Psychology
UCLA in Los Angeles – 1973
Research

**Influences**

- William E. Cross (study of black identification)
- Jean Kim (study of Asian American women identity development)
- Erik Erikson (theory of development)
- James Marcia (identity development)

**Study**

- Survey of 196 Asian American, Black, Hispanic, and White, college students
- Phinney studied the importance of ethnicity to minority group members’ identity development.
- A similar survey was also done with junior high and high school students.
Phinney’s Model of Ethnic Identity Development
Stage 1: Unexamined Ethnic Identity

- Individuals have not explored their own ethnicity and may be disinterested in doing so.
- Some minority students may initially accept attitudes of the dominant culture.
- Attitudes toward exploring an ethnic identity are influenced by several factors.
- For several individuals in this stage, ethnicity is a nonissue which can lead to diffusion or foreclosure.
- Some individuals may relay strong views of ethnic identity and appear to be in stage 3.
Stage 2: Ethnic Identity Search/Moratorium

- Individuals may remain in Stage 1 until they encounter a situation that causes them to explore.
- The situation may be harsh (overt racism) or gradual (less traumatic).
- This is a time of experimentation where individuals talk with friends and family, read literature, take courses, learn cultural customs, and attend cultural events.
- May be an emotionally intense stage (anger, guilt, or embarrassment).
- Individuals can remain in this stage for a very long period of time.
Stage 3: Ethnic Identity Achievement

- Individuals resolve their ethnic identity conflicts, accept membership in minority culture, and are open to other cultures.

- The best outcome would be for an individual to have a secure ethnic identity and a positive orientation toward the mainstream culture.

- Individuals are confident and calm.
Limitations

- Little research has been done to explore how ethnic identity changes during adolescence and early adulthood.
- More studies are needed that include longitudinal data.
- Larger samples are needed to account for variables (family, gender, etc.)
- Need for research across wider range of ages and groups.
- Investigate relationship of ethnic identity and self-esteem.
How can we apply Phinney’s model to our work in student affairs?
GROUP ACTIVITY!
Group Activity

- Each group will take on the role of a different university office/department
- Act as an advisor to a student who has experienced an event that is causing him to explore his ethnic identity.
- Designate 1 spokesperson to present your solutions, on behalf of your group.

**TASK:**
Create 2 ways your office can promote/support ethnic identity development, specifically for minority students.

Keep in mind what ethnic identity achievement looks like.
References

