

Psychology and Social Psychology of Leisure

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The Relationship of Participation in Ethnic Leisure Activity and Strength of Ethnic Identity: Preliminary Findings

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INTRODUCTION

The literature on ethnic identity clearly supports the notion that when members of an ethnic group individually accept their identity, they are more likely to have less personal or psychological conflict, higher self-esteem or self-concept, and are more likely to succeed in their individual pursuits (Baca-Zinn, 1980; Cross, 1978; Grossman, Wirt and Davids, 1985; Levine, 1976; Parham and Helms, 1985; Phinney, 1989). Consequently, it is argued that when a member of a given ethnic group (especially one which is subjected to oppression and discrimination) denies his or her affiliation with the group, he or she is likely to feel isolated or torn between cultures. Ethnic identity has been defined as "one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership" (Rotheram and Phinney, 1987, p. 13).

Recent research by psychologists on ethnic identity has emerged from a cognitive framework with an emphasis on the formation of ethnic identity (Bernal, Knight, Garza, Ocampo, and Cota, 1990; Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla, 1974; Markstrom-Adams, 1989; Phinney, 1989; Phinney, Lochner and Murphy, in press). Particular attention has been given to ego identity, self-concept, and self-esteem as each is linked to ethnic identity. From a sociological perspective, Singh (1977) associated the use of a second language, preparation of ethnic foods, listening to ethnic music, having ethnic friends, and reading ethnic literature with ethnic identity. Clearly these cultural activities exemplify leisure pursuits and are heretofore referred to as ethnic leisure activities. While leisure has been acknowledged as a means to perpetuate culture (Kelly, 1982; Pieper, 1963), ethnic leisure is expected to be associated with ethnic or cultural identity.

A basic, yet complex issue related to ethnic identity is that of self-labelling. In some cases, an ethnic group may have several labels which are used to identify members of that group. This is particularly true for latino groups. Frequently, in latino research, the target groups are identified as one of the three major hispanic groups in the United States: Cubans, Puerto Ricans, or Mexicans. However, looking *within* these groups, there are often numerous labels with which individuals may identify. For example, a person of Mexican descent may choose one of the following labels: chicano, latino, Mexican-American, hispanic, and so on. A non-Mexican might ask, which is "right?" The response is, whatever he or she *chooses*. The various labels carry different meanings, both for the individual and for his or her social environment. It is not simple. There are often political, social, or emotional reasons for adopting or refusing specific ethnic labels. Essentially, then, ethnic identity is a matter of personal choice, often influenced by one's social climate or conditions. Furthermore, not everyone chooses to identify with an ethnic group, though he or she may be ascribed an ethnic label. Specifically, a person may be labelled by others as belonging to a particular ethnic group because of some physical feature, name, or accent. This same person, however, may not have adopted an identify with the ethnic group, and simply considers him

or herself as being "American".

A fundamental argument in this study is that there are different degrees of ethnic identity. For example, one can be more "Mexican" than another person with the same ancestry, and this may be reflected in the choice of ethnic label (Aguilar, 1990). This discrepancy is addressed in the current study through a proposed categorization of labels. Besides acknowledging degrees of ethnic identity, it is important to ascertain the use of a bicultural paradigm for this study. Much of the existing research on ethnicity has adopted an assimilation or acculturation model. Such a model realistically calls for the rejection of one's ethnicity (Hallowell, 1954), and therefore seems contradictory to the study of ethnic identity. A bicultural approach, however, allows a person to recognize pragmatic values of a given culture while allowing the retention of selected ethnic traditions (Melville, 1980). Consequently, a bicultural paradigm allows ethnicity to be considered a viable social category to which one may choose to belong.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between ethnic leisure participation and ethnic identity among members of a non-dominant ethnic group in the United States. The guiding hypotheses was that individuals who participated frequently in ethnic leisure pursuits also exhibited stronger ethnic identities than those less involved in ethnic leisure pursuits. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the investigator refrained from predicting a causal model (i.e. that ethnic identity affects or increases leisure participation or that greater leisure participation directly affects one's ethnic identity). To test the guiding hypothesis that a relationship exists between identity and participation, secondary analysis of a national data set of persons of Mexican descent residing in the United States (Arce, 1985) was completed.

METHOD

Data from the Mexican Origin People in the United States: The 1979 Chicano Survey (Arce, 1985) were used for this study. The original sample included 991 persons of Mexican descent residing in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, and Illinois.

The measure of *ethnic identity* was based on responses to a single item on the original survey. On that item, subjects were asked to provide the single, best descriptor of self. Thirty-two responses were generated including some which would not be considered ethnic labels (i.e. mother, working class, farmer). Of the 32 choices, fifteen responses were clearly related to ethnic identity. These responses were then grouped according to intensity of identity with being Mexican. The bases of this preliminary classification included a review of literature on ethnic identity and informal discussions with persons of Mexican descent. Five categories were established which ranged from the absence of ethnic identity (Group 1) to a more absolute ethnic identity (Group 5). Only subjects who selected an ethnic label ($n = 220$) as their best descriptor remained in this exploratory study, and were placed in one of the five ethnic categories.

The *ethnic leisure measure* was created using a limited number of survey items which pertained to leisure activities. Each of the activities included was clearly associated with Mexican culture, including listening to Mexican music, reading Spanish language books, watching Mexican television programmes, and going to Mexican movies. Respondents were asked to indicate their preference for or actual involvement in each activity on a four-point response format. A mean score was computed for all cultural leisure activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A one-way analysis of variance was used to determine the extent of variation in ethnic leisure participation as a function of respondent's selected identity. Results indicated variability in leisure participation among the five ethnic categories ($F=2.038$; $df=4$; $p<0.09$). Mean scores for each of the categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Mean Scores of Leisure Participation by Ethnic Identity

Categories

Ethnic Identity	n	Mean	Std. dev.
Group 1 (low)	56	2.76	0.68
Group 2	28	3.06	0.63
Group 3	49	2.85	0.69
Group 4	20	3.15	0.66
Group 5 (high)	67	3.02	0.69

These results support that non-ethnics had the lowest rates of participation in ethnic leisure activity. Unexpectedly, the second group, which was labelled as "weak ethnic identity," had higher rates of participation than groups labelled as more ethnic.

In reviewing this situation in greater depth, one explanation warrants attention. First, the categories were established on the basis of measuring the degree of "Mexicanness". It is quite possible that persons in the second group prefer to identify with a Spanish identity. That is, they identify with roots to Spain rather than Mexico, yet choose to engage in ethnic (Mexican) leisure activity.

The inclusion of persons of Spanish descent may have also created a second problem in this study. Since the Spanish language is spoken by both Spanish and Mexican persons, the selected leisure activities which included language could be considered cultural or ethnic leisure for both groups. Thus, there should be a relationship between these activities and ethnic identity for both groups. Again the categorization of people who identified as being Spanish (and therefore not Mexican), could theoretically have confounded the results.

Although the results were not statistically significant, they are promising given the limitations of the measures. Weak or unsophisticated measures are a frequent limitation in the use of secondary data (Kiecolt and Nathan, 1985). Nonetheless, this data set has been useful in the exploration of a potential relationship between ethnic leisure and ethnic identity. A more in depth measure of cultural leisure could be developed which would include such activities as the celebration of ethnic holidays (i.e. Cinco de Mayo, Sixteenth of September, posadas), knowledge of traditional folk songs and folk tales, dances, foods, and similar expressions of leisure.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of ethnic identity is quite important given the social climate in the United States as evidenced by such political and social issues as bilingual education, multicultural education, English as the official language, and affirmative action. Certainly other countries also have to contend with ethnicity among their diverse peoples. This particular study offers a glimpse into the complexity of one specific aspect of a person's identity — that which is linked to one's ethnicity. Further, the current study suggests that a potential connection between ethnic identity and leisure participation exists. To the extent that leisure may influence the maintenance or enhancement of ethnic identity, then, its role in this process should continue to be investigated. Further investigation on the strength of the relationship between ethnic identity and ethnic leisure participation should be designed, controlling for variables such as opportunities, support, knowledge, environment, age, and gender.

Again, given the limitations of the measures used in the current study, it is strongly recommended that more sophisticated measures for ethnic identity and cultural or ethnic leisure participation be developed. This would lend greater confidence and credibility to leisure research with ethnic populations.

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