

# Ethnic Identity and Psychosocial Functioning in Navajo Adolescents

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The current study assessed associations among theoretically driven measures of ethnic identity and psychosocial adjustment among 137 Navajo adolescents. For both sexes, measures of students' sense of affirmation and belonging to their ethnic heritage emerged as a strong predictor of positive psychosocial functioning. Less-consistent patterns of association emerged between other measures of ethnic identity and psychosocial adjustment. Students with achieved ethnic identity status, characterized by high levels of exploration of their ethnic heritage and high levels of affirmation or commitment to their Navajo culture, reported the most positive functioning on several measures. Interesting interactions with biological sex suggested that ethnic identity may function differently for male and female Navajo adolescents. Implications of results for educators, parents, and policy makers are discussed.

For minority youth, as with majority youth, the exploration and integration of identity emerges as a primary developmental task of adolescence (Phinney, 1992; Spencer, Icard, Harachi, Catalano, & Oxford, 2000). Identity development for minority children, however, may be complicated by the additional task of incorporating ethnic or racial identity into one's overall sense of self. With the advent of formal operational thinking, minority children are likely to become more cognizant of social and economic disparities based on race (Lutz & Sternberg, 1999) and recognition of both institutionalized and personal racism and prejudice may complicate even more a pivotal time in adolescent development. American Indian youth may be in a particularly difficult position with regard to the development

of ethnic or cultural identity. Forced assimilation via policies such as mandatory boarding school attendance and forced relocation may have resulted in the loss of many protective elements of traditional culture in some families over the generations (Choney, Berryhill-Paapke, & Robbins, 1995). In one recent study, American Indian adolescents reported the lowest ethnic identity scores when compared with African American, Hispanic, and Asian adolescents (Martinez & Dukes, 1997).

Ethnic identity has been theoretically and empirically linked to psychosocial adjustment. Indicators of adolescent functioning for this study encompassed a wide range of psychosocial behaviors in three domains that are theoretically important or have been shown to be related to ethnic identity: school functioning, psychological and behavioral functioning, and social functioning. Among American Indian and other ethnic or racial minority samples, a stronger, more coherent sense of ethnic identity has been associated with better school adjustment (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990–1991), higher levels of academic achievement (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harplani, 2001), greater adherence to anti-drug norms (Kulis, Napoli, & Marsiglia, 2002), and higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and purpose in life (Martinez & Dukes, 1997). Other studies, however, have yielded negative or more mixed findings regarding the association between ethnic identity and substance use (James, Kim, & Armijo, 2000; Strunin & Demissie, 2001; Zimmerman, Ramirez, Washienko, Walter, & Dyer, 1998), and associations between ethnic identity and general social and relational functioning have been virtually unexplored in the published literature.

One difficulty for ethnic identity researchers is that there is not one prominent definition of ethnic identity (Moran, Fleming, Somervell, & Manson, 1999). In the current study, ethnic identity was assessed via two widely used measures that capture different aspects of involvement and identification with both majority and ethnic culture. The Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale (OCIS; Oetting & Beauvais, 1990–1991) was developed to assess immersion in and feelings of success in majority culture and American Indian culture, assuming that identification with one culture does not preclude identification with another culture. The OCIS captures respondents' experiences of involvement in and knowledge of cultural values, traditions, and activities, as well as their subjective capacity to be successful in each culture. In contrast to the OCIS, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) captures Phinney's (1992) notion that an individual's subjective sense of ethnic pride and belonging to his or her culture, as well as the extent to which the individual has explored the meaning that his or her ethnic heritage holds, are central aspects of ethnic identity development. Thus, the current study expands previous literature

by using multiple, theoretically grounded measures of ethnic identity to capture various aspects of cultural immersion, subjective success, ethnic pride or belonging, and exploration of ethnicity. It was hypothesized that measures of cultural identity would be associated with adolescents' reports of psychosocial adaptation in three important domains: school functioning, psychological and behavioral functioning, and social functioning. Including a range of prosocial and problematic indicators allowed us to specify patterns of risk and protection for Navajo youth.

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants for this study were 137 Navajo high school students from a small reservation border town. The high school is near the Navajo reservation; roughly 70% of the student body is Navajo with a large proportion of the Navajo students residing on the reservation. Participant age ranged from 14 to 19 years (mean = 15.24;  $SD = .990$ ) and 47.4% of the sample was male. Of the participants, 61.3% reported being Navajo, 22.6% reported their ethnicity to be Navajo and another American Indian group, and 14.6% reported Navajo and another race (e.g., White, Mexican American, or African American). Two students (1.5%) did not report race/ethnicity. The majority of the students were in the 9th grade (62.0%), with 28.5% in 10th, 5.1% in 11th, 2.9% in 12th, and two students (1.5%) did not report a grade. The majority of the sample reported living with both parents (58.0%). Home communities were off reservation (27.7%), in established reservation towns (49.7%), on the reservation outside of town areas (19.0%), and no response (3.6%).

### Measures

*Demographic information.* The demographic information questionnaire assessed race, age, gender, grade point average, educational goals, religious beliefs, geographic location (on/off reservation), and household structure.

*Revised (12-item) MEIM.* The revised MEIM (Phinney, 1992) is a global measure of ethnic identity in the form of two scales. The seven-item affirmation/belonging subscale assesses commitment to one's ethnic identity (e.g., "I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments"). The five-item exploration scale measures exploration of one's ethnic heritage (e.g., "To learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group"). All questions are answered on a

4-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree). Averaging responses for items for each scale yields continuous scores for affirmation/belonging and exploration. In addition, by creating dichotomous categories for each scale (high = score above the median; low = score below the median), respondents can be categorized using the four-quadrant system outlined by Phinney: achieved (high on both scales), moratorium (low on affirmation—high on exploration), foreclosed (high on affirmation—low on exploration), and diffused (low on both scales). For this sample, Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's were .80 for affirmation/belonging and .63 for exploration.

**OCIS.** The OCIS (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990–1991) posits that an individual can identify with multiple cultures, and identification with one does not result in loss of identification of the other. Each of the six items is rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 4 (1 = not at all; 4 = a lot). Sample items include “Does your family live by or follow a White American or Anglo way of life? An American Indian way of life? A Mexican American way of life?” with respondents rating their affiliation with each of the three cultures. An average identification score for each culture is then calculated across the six items. Crossing the orthogonal dimensions for American Indian and White cultures categorizes individuals as traditional (high on American Indian scale, low on White), bicultural (high on both scales), marginal (low on both scales), or acculturated (high on White scale, low on American Indian scale). For this sample, reliability  $\alpha$ 's were .90 for the American Indian culture and .91 for the White culture. Identification with Mexican American culture was not relevant to the current study and was not used.

**RSES.** The RSES (Rosenberg, 1965) is a global measure of self-esteem designed to be used with adolescents. It is a 10-item self-report measure including both negatively and positively worded items. A Likert-type scale from 1 to 4 is used; negatively worded items are reverse scored so that higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. Sample questions include “I feel that I have a number of good qualities” and “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.” Rosenberg reported a test–retest reliability of .85 and demonstrated good validity. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this sample was .81.

**Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale (CASAFS).** The CASAFS (Price, Spence, Sheffield, & Donovan, 2002) is a 24-item self-report scale yielding four intercorrelated six-item scales (school performance, peer relationships, family relationships, and home duties/self-care) and a global total social functioning scale. Sample items include “I go out places with my friends” and “I get on well with my relatives.” Items are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often,

and 4 = always). Family relationship items have a fifth category ("does not apply to me") for instances when the adolescent does not have a mother, siblings, or other family member about whom to report. A higher total score indicates higher general social functioning. As the original CASAFS was developed for use in Australia, minor wording changes were necessary to make the measure consistent with contemporary United States English. For example, the word "marks" was changed to "grades." The global social functioning scale yielded a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this sample of .79.

*Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSMS; Goodenow, 1993).* The 18-item PSSMS is a measure of students' feelings of belonging within their school environment and included an ethnically diverse sample in the development and validation process. Sample questions include "I can really be myself at this school" and "Sometimes I feel as if I do not belong here" (reverse scored). Items are answered with a 5-point Likert scale and are averaged for a final score (possible range from 1 to 5). This scale yielded an  $\alpha$  for this sample of .88.

*Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D).* The 20-item CES-D (Radloff, 1977) is a self-report form that was designed to measure depressive symptoms in the general population. Items ask how often in the last week the respondent has experienced different depressive symptoms (e.g., "I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor" and "I felt that people disliked me") and are answered on a 4-point scale (1 = Never, 2 = 1–2 days, 3 = 3–4 days, and 4 = 5–7 days). Radloff reported sound psychometric properties for the CES-D, with good measures of internal consistency (.85–.90) and moderate association with other measures of depression. This scale yielded an  $\alpha$  for this sample of .88.

*Youth Self-Report: Delinquent Behavior Scale (YSR-DBS).* The YSR-DBS is one scale in a larger, widely used multiscale global assessment of adolescent psychosocial functioning. Eleven items assess the frequency of delinquent behaviors (e.g., "I lie or cheat" and "I cut classes or skip school." Respondents mark 0 (not true), 1 (somewhat or sometimes true), or 2 (very true or often true). While raw summed scores are transformed to *t*-scores for clinical use, Achenbach (1991) recommended that researchers use the raw score to capture the full variability of the scale. Achenbach reported adequate psychometric properties, with a test–retest reliability of .72 and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .76. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this sample was .80.

*Substance use.* Alcohol and marijuana use frequency were both assessed using a 5-point scale with 1 indicating no use and 5 indicating more than 15 times in the past month. Scores on the two items were summed to yield a total frequency of alcohol and marijuana use over the past month, with a potential range from 2 (no use) to 10 (frequent use of

both alcohol and marijuana). The two substance-use frequency items were significantly correlated ( $r = .53$ ). Drug use problems were assessed with four yes/no questions asking students things such as, "have you ever been in a physical fight while under the influence of alcohol or drugs?" Total drug use problem scores were calculated as the total number of problems endorsed, yielding a possible range from 0 to 4 ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

### *Procedure*

Data for the current study were taken from the first wave of a longitudinal study aimed at assessing the development of ethnic identity and its correlates over the course of high school. The school counselor and other school personnel collaborated in the development of project aims and measures, and permission for the project was obtained by the school district and the local American Indian education advisory board. Results were presented and discussed with school personnel and the school district governing board and this manuscript has been approved by the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board.

At time 1, freshman and sophomore students were recruited from classes that contained the majority of students in these grades. All students were notified of the study via signs posted in the school and school announcements. Interested students were provided with parental consent forms during class or contacted the school counselor outside of class time. Approximately 30% of the freshman class and 15% of the sophomore class volunteered for participation. At times agreed upon by the teacher, students were sent to the library in small groups for survey administration. Survey completion generally took 45 minutes. As incentives, all students who returned their consent form signed by their parents or indicated that their parents did not want them to participate were given a candy bar. All students who returned a signed consent form and completed the survey were given a gift certificate to the local movie theater.

## RESULTS

Correlations among study variables and means and standard deviations for all ethnic identity and adjustment variables for both male and female participants are in Table 1. In order to assess the need to include demographic variables in primary analyses, preliminary analyses tested associations among demographic variables, ethnic identity, and psychosocial adjustment variables. Significant differences between males and females emerged only for self-esteem ( $t[133] = -1.98, p = .049$ ), with males reporting higher self-esteem than females. Participant age was not

TABLE 1  
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Ethnic Identity Measures and Psychosocial Outcomes for Males and Females

Measure	OCIS		MEIM		RSES	CES-D	PSSM	GPA	CASAf	YSR	Drug		Mean (SD)
	AI	Maj.	Bel.	Exp.							Frequency	Problem	
OCIS AI <sup>a</sup>	1	-.39**	.27*	.42**	-.21	.01	-.17	.01	-.15	.11	.10	.10	3.12 (.68)
OCIS Maj.	-.30*	1	.05	-.11	.33**	.12	.21	.11	.16	-.14	-.16	-.04	2.69 (.88)
MEIM—Belonging <sup>a</sup>	.40**	-.13	1	.54**	.42**	-.23	.30*	-.15	.40**	-.26*	-.26*	-.21	3.38 (.48)
MEIM—Exp. <sup>a</sup>	.24*	-.31*	.47**	1	.18	-.03	.31*	.09	.40**	-.04	.07	.15	2.88 (.51)
RSES <sup>b</sup>	.19	.23	.46**	.20	1	-.26*	.56**	-.14	.62**	-.23	-.26*	-.12	3.20 (.47)
CES-D <sup>a</sup>	-.15	-.17	-.24*	-.09	-.32**	1	-.14	.22	-.33**	.48**	.18	.45**	1.85 (.48)
PSSM <sup>b</sup>	.06	.13	.23	.19	.43**	-.11	1	-.18	.62**	-.24	-.22	.01	3.41(.54)
GPA <sup>c</sup>	-.12	.19	-.20	-.28*	-.13	-.07	-.13	1	.00	.08	.13	.04	2.90 (.78)
CASAf <sup>d</sup>	.14	.08	.33**	.26*	.49**	-.21	.51**	-.34**	1	-.41**	-.25*	-.19	74.18(9.02)
YSR <sup>e</sup>	-.08	-.05	-.11	-.09	-.26*	.54**	-.07	.22	-.16	1	.51**	.58**	1.50 (.38)
Drug use frequency <sup>f</sup>	-.10	.18	-.09	-.28*	-.11	.16	-.07	-.02	-.18	.35**	1	.47**	3.02 (1.46)
Drug use problems <sup>c</sup>	.10	.02	-.19	-.12	.01	.00	.04	-.22	.23	.06	.31*	1	.48 (.97)
Mean (SD) females	3.26	2.42	3.31	2.91	3.03	1.93	3.47	3.17	73.93	1.51	2.72	.74	
	(.66)	(.79)	(.49)	(.46)	(.50)	(.61)	(.59)	(.82)	(9.11)	(.37)	(1.25)	(1.32)	

Note. Males ( $n = 65$ ) on top of diagonal; females ( $n = 70$ ) on bottom of diagonal. OCIS, Orthogonal Cultural Identification Scale; MEIM, Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; RSES, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; CES-D, Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; PSSM, Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale; CASAf, Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale; YSR, Youth Self-Report; AI, American Indian; Maj., Majority; Bel., Belonging; Exp., Exploration; and GPA, Grade Point Average.

<sup>a</sup>Possible range = 1–4.  
<sup>b</sup>Possible range = 1–5.  
<sup>c</sup>Possible range = 0–4.  
<sup>d</sup>Possible range = 24–96.  
<sup>e</sup>Possible range = 1–3.  
<sup>f</sup>Possible range = 2–10.  
<sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ ; <sup>\*\*</sup> $p < .01$ .

significantly correlated with any of the primary study variables (all  $p$ -values  $> .05$ ), perhaps due to the restricted range of age in this sample; 92% of the sample was between the ages of 14 and 16. There were no significant differences between youth who lived on or off the reservation on any of the primary variables (all  $p$ -values  $> .05$ ). Finally, there were no significant differences on any of the study variables between youth who reported being full-blooded Navajo, those who were Navajo and another American Indian tribe, and those who were Navajo and another race/ethnicity (e.g., white, Latino, African American).

Two multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were conducted by creating categorical variables from the scales of the MEIM and OCIS. A median split was used to divide the two scales of the MEIM, affirmation/belonging and exploration, into high and low groups for each scale. These groups were then used to create the categories of foreclosed, diffused, moratorium, and achieved ethnic identities. The American Indian and Majority identification scales of the OCIS were also divided into low and high groups based on median splits. The two scales were then used to create the categories of traditional, marginal, bicultural, and acculturated. Two separate  $2 \times 4$  MANOVAs were performed with biological sex as one independent variable and the categorical ethnic identity variables as the other. The psychosocial adjustment variables RESE, CASAFS, PSSMS, GPA, CES-D, YSR-DBS, substance use frequency, and substance use problems were used as dependent variables.

The MANOVA assessing the ethnic identity statuses of diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved from the MEIM revealed significant multivariate main effects for biological sex, Wilks'  $\lambda = .828$ ;  $F(8, 107) = 2.77$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta^2 = .172$ , and for ethnic identity status, Wilks'  $\lambda = .568$ ;  $F(24, 310.93) = 2.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .172$ . The interaction between biological sex and developmental ethnic identity status was also significant, Wilks'  $\lambda = .632$ ;  $F(24, 310.93) = 2.22$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .142$ . Follow-up univariate analyses yielded significant findings for all measures of psychosocial adjustment except for depression and delinquent behavior. Table 2 lists the significant univariate effects for each dependent variable.

The second  $2 \times 4$  MANOVA assessing the categorical scoring of the OCIS for males and females yielded a significant main effect for biological sex, Wilks'  $\lambda = .869$ ;  $F(8, 107) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .131$ . Univariate analyses indicated that males reported lower grade point averages than girls,  $F(1, 114) = 5.85$ ,  $p = .017$ . Neither the main effect for OCIS status nor the interaction between sex and OCIS status was significant at the multivariate level, Wilks'  $\lambda$ :  $F(24, 310.934) = 1.33$ ,  $p = .144$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ , and  $F(24, 310.934) = .79$ ,  $p = .750$ ,  $\eta^2 = .056$ , respectively.



TABLE 2  
Identity Status and Gender Differences in Psychosocial Outcomes: Summary of Significant Univariate Analyses

<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Partial <math>\eta^2</math></i>	<i>Pairwise Comparisons (Mean Difference)</i>	<i>p</i>
RSES (Self-esteem)	MEIM status	5.01	3, 114	.003	.117	Achieved > diffused (.38)	.007
						Achieved > moratorium (.39)	.043
CASAFS (Social function)	MEIM status	6.97	3, 114	.001	.155	Achieved > diffused (8.45)	.001
						Achieved > moratorium (7.54)	.027
PSSMS (School)	MEIM status	5.82	3, 114	.001	.133	Achieved > foreclosed (6.50)	.025
						Achieved > diffused (.45)	.006
GPA	MEIM status	5.82	3, 114	.001	.133	Achieved > foreclosed (.46)	.010
						Females > males	
Drug use—Frequency	Gender	3.93	1, 114	.05	.033	Females > males	
	Gender	13.0	1, 114	.001	.103	Males > females	
Drug problems	MEIM status	7.68	3, 114	.001	.127	No significant pairwise comparisons	
	Interaction	9.79	3, 114	.001	.205	Males in moratorium highest	
	MEIM status	5.19	3, 114	.002	.120	No significant pairwise comparisons	
	Interaction	6.61	3, 114	.001	.148	Males in moratorium highest	

*Note.* MEIM, Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; RSES, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; PSSM, Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale; CASAFS, Child and Adolescent Social and Adaptive Functioning Scale.

## DISCUSSION

The MEIM scales emerged as the most consistent correlates of psychosocial adjustment for Navajo adolescents. The affirmation/belonging scale was significantly and moderately correlated in expected directions with five of the eight psychosocial adjustment measures for male participants and three of the eight measures for female participants. This scale assesses an individual's subjective experience of connection and pride in his or her ethnic group, rather than levels of acculturation or traditionalism; in part, the de-emphasis on traditionalism and cultural immersion may be what makes this scale especially useful in predicting well-being. A strong sense of pride and comfort with one's ethnic identity may facilitate the development of a role as an American Indian in an increasingly bicultural world. As living and being successful in traditional ways of life become more difficult, feelings of commitment and belonging to one's ethnic group may be instrumental in overcoming negative effects of acculturative stress.

Higher scores on the exploration scale of the MEIM were also related to better adjustment in some areas for both males and females, although interestingly, exploration was associated with lower grade point averages for adolescent females. The exploration subscale assesses the effort the student has initiated into exploring and defining his or her ethnic heritage, history, and culture. This has been conceptualized theoretically as a prerequisite to committing to and integrating the adolescent's ethnicity into their overall sense of identity. The results of the MANOVA examining differences among the developmental categories that were constructed from the two MEIM scales reflect the developmental process and the benefits of exploring and integrating ethnic identity into overall identity. For both male and female adolescents, those who were categorized as having achieved status (i.e., reported high levels of exploration and high levels of affirmation of their ethnic heritage) were found to have higher scores on the indicators of self-esteem, social functioning, and school membership. This again reinforces Phinney's (1989) assumption that the process of developing ethnic identity is an important stage in the lives of minority adolescents. A possible drawback of being committed to ethnic identity without having explored one's ethnic heritage (foreclosed) is that one might have a relatively unsophisticated view of the culture to which he or she is committed. It is possible that one could be immersed in the culture but not truly understand or appreciate the tradition and reason behind the cultural practice or behavior. This restricted view of one's ethnic culture could limit the experiences, change, or flexibility that would be possible if that individual had gone through the exploration process.

There were only two significant interactions between gender and ethnic identity status. Males who were in moratorium status reported a much higher frequency of substance use and more problems associated with substance use than any other group. Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, and Orlofsky (1993) described adolescents in the exploration stage as striving for attention as well as rebelling against their parents' wishes. While moratorium is characterized as a time for exploring ethnicity, possible anger at the dominant society and guilt from previous acceptance of negative views of one's ethnic group can accompany this time in one's life. Challenging previously accepted beliefs may be painful at times; this pain may be part of the larger positive process of expanding one's view of the world and accepting the role one can play within that world.

That the exploration process may be associated with greater substance use behavior for males than females warrants further investigation. The Navajo have traditionally been a matriarchal society with great emphasis upon maternal clan (extended family of the mother's line) responsibilities. This society is vastly different from the patriarchal society and nuclear family system found within the dominant American culture. Maintaining self-esteem and self-worth through traditional male roles has become increasingly difficult. Thus, succeeding generations of Navajo males may feel highly tied to their American Indian heritage, but may remain uncertain about their role in American Indian society in the modern world. Questions remain related to the evolving roles for males and females in an increasingly bicultural world. In this sample, the number of males in moratorium status was small and mean scores for the sample were generally high for both the exploration and affirmation scales of the MEIM. Replication of this finding with larger, more diverse samples may provide a better understanding of the influence of gender on the ethnic identity process.

Finally, the MANOVA examining differences among the status categories of traditional, marginal, bi-cultural, and acculturated, as measured by the OCIS, yielded no significant results. This was surprising because literature has suggested that marginal status is highly related to negative psychological and social adjustment (Garrett & Pichette, 2000). It has also been suggested that bicultural and traditional statuses would be related to more positive adjustment. One possible explanation for the contradictory results obtained in this study is that students generally reported very high levels of identification with American Indian culture. The median score for identification with American Indian culture was greater than 3 on a 4-point scale, suggesting that most participants viewed themselves as quite invested in American Indian culture. Thus, the median split that was used to create high and low groups of students on the American

Indian Identification scale was of limited usefulness in examining truly marginal youth, because even the lower group reported somewhat high American Indian identification. This is particularly striking in light of recent research with Latino adolescents suggesting that higher levels of ethnic identity were found among adolescents whose school communities were predominantly non-Latino (Umaña-Taylor, 2004). Our data were collected in a predominantly Navajo school setting, and it is unclear how much this contextual factor has impacted our findings.

In summary, this study was designed to assess associations among multiple, theoretically grounded aspects of ethnic identity and a range of indicators of psychosocial adjustment. One of the primary goals of this study was to identify predictors of positive functioning, as well as risk factors for negative adjustment. Many previous studies involving American Indians have focused on the prediction of negative indicators of adolescent adjustment, such as substance abuse (Beauvais, Chavez, Oetting, Deffenbacher, & Cronell, 1996; James et al., 2000; Kulis et al., 2002; Oetting & Beauvais, 1990–1991; Oetting, Donnermeyer, Trimble, & Beauvais, 1998). In fact, our measures of ethnic identity were consistently more strongly associated with positive indicators, such as self-esteem, school belonging, and social functioning, than they were with negative measures, such as delinquent behavior. This clear association between positive psychosocial development and ethnic identity commitment and belonging, if fostered by the Navajo community, could be instrumental in improving the lives of Navajo adolescents. Of course, while the results of this study highlight associations among ethnic identity factors and positive adjustment, it is important to remember that any assumptions about causal pathways and development over time are not possibly based on correlational data. Our follow-up research with this sample will seek to clarify the development of ethnic identity over time and examine longitudinal outcomes associated with ethnic identity.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Portions of this manuscript were presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Atlanta, GA.

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