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Remembering Our Roots and Forming Chicanx Identity

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Abstract

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank my parents, Rosina and Felipe Hernandez, for always pushing me to do more. Their support and belief in me have always been a constant motivation for my work. This paper, especially, is about my identity which was partially formed by them so my interest, work and motivation is all due to them. I know they have sacrificed a lot and I will be forever grateful to them. I hope I make you proud *amá y apá!*

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Introduction

Chicano identity is an ethnic identity that has developed over the years. It was used in activism and is still strongly acclaimed in universities. But who exactly are Chicanos? And why is there Aztec cultural aspects linked to it? By studying the history of the term Chicana, we will find the definition, requirements, and justification for integrating Indigenous culture into the term. We will discuss the formation of identity and best practices in creating surveys on ethnic identity. This is done by using a survey that explores the intersections of Chicana and Indigenous identities. Then I will take my own experiences and respond to this survey for a better understanding of my own identity.

Throughout this paper I will be writing in the first person. Some will say that this type of writing destroys the objectivity a researcher requires. I say that I am simply being completely transparent on where I stand on this subject and this will, ultimately, not affect how I analyze my research. In the end, researchers analyze their bias even though they pretend there was none throughout the study. Instead, I will show you my bias completely and my analysis will make more sense and be clearer because of it.

Chicana identity is an important topic to me. “Who counts as Chicana, who can claim this identity, and what does it mean to claim it?” are the questions that I have had throughout most of my adolescent years. My parents both immigrated from Mexico to the US in order to obtain higher pay, since the rumor was that California jobs were abundant and well-paid. They met, fell in love, and had me in their late twenties. I was born in an Orange County hospital and learned English first. My mother then tried to teach me a little bit of Spanish while I was still in pre-school. It was from this memory that I try to classify myself as a native speaker even though I know I don’t speak well and can barely read or write. It was not until my third year at college

that I attempted to take a Spanish course because I was afraid that if I failed it would shatter my own perception of myself as Chicana. But I took the course and barely passed, realizing that struggling in Spanish did not make me less Mexican, it made me a normal Chicana. Thus, my experiences brought me back to the same questions as before but more explicitly and urgently as I continue looking for authenticity.

Definitions: Important Terms and How They are Used

According to Merriam-Webster, the term “Chicano” is defined as an American of Mexican descent (Retrieved: Feb 12, 2020). There is much debate as to whether Mexican immigrants are considered Chicana and as can be seen, in many technical definitions they are not. However, for the purposes of this paper, Chicana is defined as someone who is Mexican-American, either because they were born in the US but are of Mexican descent OR because they were born in Mexico but later moved to the US. This definition is more inclusive and decides that the most important aspect is that one has Mexican ancestry. For example, Comas-Díaz (2001) points out that there are Mexican immigrants who visit and work in the US but intend to go home once financially stable. These migrants are called “Mexican” because of citizenship and emotional ties but there are some migrants who transition into a Chicana identity either because they decide to stay in the US or simply cannot return home. Chicana is intentionally used to include all genders and as an alternative to Chicana/o/s. Citizenship, as mentioned earlier, is not a factor when considering if someone is Mexican-American. One can have citizenship in Mexico, the United States, or both and be considered Chicana. Historically, this term is used by activists but has become more widely used in recent years (Vigil & Hanley, 2002; Alberto, 2016; Hansen & Tlapoyawa, 2018). In addition, some argue that the term Chicana claims Indigenous identity because it uses the Indigenous pronunciation of “Mexican”. For this study, the survey makes a

distinction between American, Mexican, and Indigenous identity, and is treated as not part of the definition. It is up to participants to claim Indigeneity along with being Chicax, not assumed. This will reveal how important current Chicax find claiming Indigeneity is with having a Chicax identity.

It must also be pointed out that Chicax is used intentionally. It is distinguished from other terms that may be erroneously used on Mexican-Americans such as: Hispanic, Latinx, “Spanish people,” Americana/o, Mexican, Xicana/o, Boricua, Rican and others (Comas-Díaz, 2001). Hispanic refers to those who are of Spanish descent. This does not include those Chicax who do not claim any Spanish ancestry but may instead claim Indigenous ancestry. Latinx refers to anyone from Latin America. For this study, the focus is on Mexico so Latinx would not be accurate. “Spanish people” or Spanish speakers refer to anyone who speaks Spanish. This would exclude those Chicax that do not speak Spanish either because it was lost in-between generations or whose native language is an Indigenous one, not Spanish. This term would also include the rest of Latin America and some European nations who also speak Spanish. Americana/o refers to Americans that are not Latinx (Comas-Díaz, 2001). In the same way, the term Mexican refers to Mexican citizens that are not American (or at least that is implied in pragmatics by scalar implication). Therefore, the best term for this study is “Chicax.”

History

The term “Chicano” was coined in the 1960s. This was during the time of the Chicano Movement where Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and many others combatted unfair wages and labor exploitation (Vigil & Hanley, 2002; Alberto, 2016; Hansen & Tlapoyawa, 2018). The term was used to unite Mexican-American farm laborers and create a strong community. Chicano is derived from the word “Mexicano” but with the Indigenous pronunciation of the word which

changes the Spanish 'x' sound to 'sh.' During the Chicano Movement, many artists took it upon themselves to solidify the ethnic identity by placing Indigenous roots at the center and glorifying them. Nahuatl became a popular language of the Chicanos, Aztec art was replicated and modernized, and important Indigenous names were thrown around. For example, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez was responsible for the popular poem "Yo Soy Joaquin" ('I am Joaquin') which is about a Mexican-American man and plight of being unwanted by society but unable to change his status (Alberto, 2016). The poem resonated with many and romanticized the imagery of a Chicano being Indigenous. Because of artistic expressions like this poem, indigeneity quickly became an ethnic symbol for Chicanos.

Unfortunately, this idolization of the Native roots also led to their neglect. Aztec culture was one of the main Indigenous groups that were "fetishized" with this movement (Hansen & Tlapoyawa, 2018). Currently it is estimated that 1.5 million people in Central America speak Nahuatl, which is the language the Aztecs used. Despite the large number of Nahuas (people who speak Nahuatl), their idolization solidified their place in history and kept them there. This was not new. Mexico passed through an Indigenism phase earlier in the 1920s. A group of intellectuals were given the job of rebuilding Mexico with the goal to distinguish itself from the Spanish colony it once was (Alberto, 2016). They also decided to create unity by clinging onto Indigenous roots. They also used the Indigenous people as an ethnic symbol, romanticizing the Aztec warriors to build patriotism against foreign powers. In a similar way as seen in the Chicano Movement, this immobilized them from gaining autonomy and were harassed to assimilate in order to create the perfect Mexican: un mestizo (Alberto, 2016). Mestizaje is a mixed identity of Spanish and Indigenous blood. It became the narrative that Mexicans were

powerful because of this mix, which had the best traits from the two identities. It was also used to justify taking Indigenous lands and creating racist policies as Mexico rebuilt itself.

Appropriation of Indigenous cultures continued from that point on in Mexican culture. It is seen time and time again in art, practices, and other areas that take credit while Indigenous peoples themselves are continuously overlooked, neglected, and disadvantaged. Indigenous peoples are often talked about as extinct or people from the past even though there are plenty of Indigenous communities alive today.



Figure 1. A tlahualil parading up my grandmother's street.

One of the main reasons I was interested in the intersection between Mexicans, Americans, and Indigenous peoples is because of a famous festival in my dad's hometown: "*El festival de Santiago*" (The festival of St. James). During this festival, the whole town of Sahuayo, Michoacan, decorates its streets in honor of the Christian apostle James. The story goes that the Spaniards were struggling with a particular group of Indigenous peoples and could not seem to win in any battles. They prayed to St. James for his help and soon after, they defeated the Indigenous peoples and took their land. The mighty warriors that were

difficult to overcome were called *tlahualiles* (which is Nahuatl for warrior) and now every year around the last weeks of July, many people dress up as the *tlahualiles* and parade the streets. They create elaborate masks that are anywhere from three to six feet tall and dance throughout the streets to music (see Fig. 1). On the first day of the festival, everyone congregates at a specific church where participants reenact the final battle between the *tlahualiles* and the Spanish colonizers. The Spaniards eventually win and move further up the street to show a new crowd the reenactment. As they move up, a statue of St. James wearing white and on a white horse is paraded out of the church and follows the fight. The people can then go home to await the parade to pass by or follow St. James and dance with the parade. The last summer I saw this I asked my father why we dressed up like the Indigenous warriors when we are celebrating their defeat. It seemed contradictory at best and disrespectful taunting at worst. He did not seem to have an answer. I then tried looking it up but only found one story and multiple traveler guides on the festival, neither of which critically analyzed the festivity. Vaca and Castillo (2019) claimed that people saw dressing up and dancing for long hours as a type of devotional sacrifice tied to the Catholic religion. That is just one festival that seems to perform Indigenous roots while at the same time exploiting them. There have been other popular traditions as well that I found conflicting with the dominant colonial culture such as Aztec dances for the Virgin of Guadalupe and Dia de los Muertos. In her book *Performing Piety*, Peña (2011) dedicated a chapter to the syncretism of Indigeneity and Catholicism portrayed most explicitly in the Virgin of Guadalupe. On December 12th, the people celebrate the Virgin's feast day by honoring her with Aztec dances as well. This shows that former colonies attempt to distinguish themselves from the mother country to help establish independence. This is done by exploiting local Indigeneity.

Besides abusing Indigeneity in festivities, colorism is also a prominent problem in Latin America. Colorism is when an ethnicity has prejudices against people in their own ethnicity simply because they have a darker skin tone. Unfortunately, in Mexico colorism goes hand in hand with anti-Indigenous sentiments. One will often hear the term “prieta/o” which references a Latina with darker skin who may possibly be Indigenous. The term literally means someone who is dark-skinned (a/o are gendered endings for females and males, respectively) but it is also used with a negative connotation to imply that they have Indigenous features. It is often used with a tone of disgust, even when masked as light teasing. Some common phrases are: “No andes con una prieta” or “Te gustan los prietos?” (“Don’t date someone who is dark-skinned/Indigenous” or “You like people who are dark-skinned/Indigenous?”). This comes from the colonists’ ideology of superiority that has passed down into today’s culture. When the Spanish first conquered and settled in Latin America, they created social systems that benefitted them and obstructed the Indigenous peoples from any social mobility. They based the social system not only on class but also on race. Afterward, since the Indigenous were constantly low-class, a sense of inferiority became synonymous with indigeneity and indigeneity was perceived as dark-skinned in Mexican culture (Vigil & Hanley, 2002). Therefore, Indigeneity is intersected with having dark-skinned and having dark-skin is intersected with being poor and/or inferior which creates those dehumanizing remarks. Mexicans are obsessed with whiteness in a similar (if not more severe) way as Americans. It is seen in the media, beauty standards, dating advice from uncles & aunts, and in the language as we saw earlier. This makes it even more important to distinguish why Chicana cling to Indigenous culture even though past generations may want to distance themselves from it.

The Significance of Forming Ethnic Identities

According to Erikson's theory of development, adolescents undergo a psychological conflict of identity vs role confusion (1968). This is where adolescents can either find their identity or go through confusion until an identity is found. Even if this theory is discounted, there are plenty of studies that show a positive identity alignment leads to positive outcomes. This is especially true for ethnic identities. Berk mentions that all immigrant adolescents experience "acculturative stress" (2019, p. 403). This is defined as stress from the psychological conflict between minority and majority culture. It is not until adolescents develop a secure ethnic identity that they begin to develop high self-esteem and perform better academically. Another study by Cuéllar et al. (1997) found that ethnic identity had an inverse relationship with acculturation. Acculturation, when undergone by an individual and not a group, is another word for assimilation where the individual adopts the traditions and practices of a host culture. They found that Chicax with a strong ethnic identity had low acculturation, each of which was measured using Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure and the Acculturation Rating Scale-II, respectively. The reverse was also found, high acculturation scores were seen in those with low ethnic identity scores.

As mentioned, a secure ethnic identity often leads to academic achievement. This is probably because with an ethnic identity that one accepts, one can more easily access their cultural capital. Cultural capital is the idea that a culture has resources that its members can use to succeed in life (Yosso, 2005). One of the many resources ethnic minorities may use is resilience capital. This is the skill to persist despite overwhelming and institutional disadvantages. This is a necessary skill for Chicax students to have, specifically, because of deficit perspectives others have of them (Bernal, 2001; Rendon & Kanagala, 2018). Schools often do not acknowledge the skills and resources Chicax students have because of the school's

deficit view. It is up to students to overcome this and having a strong ethnic identity would help with this. Another resource available to many Chicana, is linguistic capital. This is the language and communication skills many have, including being bilingual and/or able to translate. Linguistic capital helps Chicana navigate and expand their social spheres. Heritage language is also an important part in forming ethnic identity especially because 22% of the student population are heritage learners (Carreira & Kagan, 2018). One's heritage language is the language that is part of one's cultural ancestry. A heritage learner is one who is learning their heritage language either informally through their family/community or formally through immersion/revitalization courses (Olko & Sullivan, 2016; McIvor & McCarty, 2017). The main heritage language of Chicana is Spanish but it may also include Indigenous languages as well. This would affect how one may see themselves and how they identify themselves. All of these aspects and more would need to be evaluated to create a stable ethnic identity.

One way to evaluate one's ethnic identity is through surveys. The history of using surveys to understand ethnicity shows that it is difficult to pin down identity. Most studies center around the Census and their reductionist method to understand the ethnicities of people in the United States. Burton et al. (2010) found that the census did not allow for complex identities, which almost all people have. The questions were restricting ethnic identity to a single box but Burton et al. (2010) argue that ethnic identity is fluid and shaped by multiple aspects in one's life such as: national identity, race, ancestry, religion, citizenship, language, feel of belonging, and more. They proposed creating questions with a wider range of topics related to identity. They also needed to be straightforward and clear so that participants could answer accurately. Regardless of the shortcomings, a well written survey could reveal how one formed their identity and what aspects they consider important to their identity.

Process

First, the survey was created with the goal to help understand what forms Chicana identities today. Then I took the survey myself to evaluate how I formed my Chicana identity as an auto-ethnography. The questions are meant to reflect other studies on identity and ethnicity and allow for fluidity.

Participants

I was the participant. I am a 22 year old, female Mexican-American who identifies as Chicana. I was not formally taught Spanish until college but was still able to hold conversations with family members in Mexico. My family frequently visits Mexico and so familial and emotional ties to the country have been made. Both my parents are Mexican, and proudly so.

In the future, I hope to see this survey used with other Chicana. I intended for this survey to be taken by college-age participants because I believe they will best understand the questions and already be undergoing a time of self-discovery and identity.

Results

The following survey focuses on the following specific aspects of ethnic identity: language, practices/traditions, gendered duties, people with influence, and stories/legends/traditions that instill resilience. There is a total of 28 questions: most open-ended or short answers, 12 using Likert-type scales, and 2 that are optional for any extra information participants may want to add. The last few questions are specific to the University of California, Riverside (UCR) because the study was originally designed to be used on campus. These can be adapted for other campuses or excluded.

Survey Questions

1. This study is specifically for those who identify as Chicax and are at least 18 years old. Do you identify as a Chicax who is 18 years old or older?
(Chicax is, for the purposes of this survey, defined as anyone who identifies as Mexican-American because they are of Mexican descent but born in the U.S. OR born in Mexico but now living in the U.S.)

- i. Yes.
- ii. No.

(If a participant chooses “no” they will reach the end of the survey with the message, “Thank you for your time. Your answer shows that you are not eligible to continue in the survey.”)

The next three questions will ask what languages you speak. Go ahead and include all that you are comfortable having a regular conversation in. If you speak Chicano-English (a dialect of English that is strongly impacted by Mexican Spanish), Indigenous language(s) or a particular *dialecto(s)* (dialect/s specifically from Mexico), please include those as well. If you are unsure if a language you know a little bit about should be included, go ahead and include it but explain why you’re unsure if it would count in this survey. I’m mostly interested in what is being spoken to see what Chicax students are comfortable with and therefore how it may affect how one identifies as American/Mexican/Indigenous/etc.

2. What language(s) do you speak?
a. _____
3. Which language do you speak the most at home? (Home is the place where your family/guardian(s) reside and/or where you predominantly grew up in. If there are multiple places, consider where you feel the most at home.)
a. _____
4. What language(s) is/are included in your cultural heritage? (Cultural heritage includes language(s) your grandparents and/or ancestors knew even if they were not passed down to you.)
a. _____

For the rest of the questions in this survey, I am interested in seeing which parts of your identity you claim, if you claim them strongly, what affects those claims, and why. I will be asking about many things I think affect identity formation. Please take your time, be honest, and provide anecdotes if necessary.

I will be asking about Indigeneity as well. For this survey, Indigenous peoples are those who originated in an area. I am focusing on Indigenous peoples in current day Mexico. If you identify with Indigenous people who are not from Mexico, feel free to include that information. Indigenous peoples in Mexico include but are not limited to: Mixtecos, Zapotecas, Purepechas, Nahuas, Tarahumaras, Huicholes, Otomis, Totonacas, and Mayas.

5. How strongly do you agree with the statement: I identify as American.
 - a. Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, Strongly Agree
6. How strongly do you agree with the statement: I identify as Mexican.
 - a. Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, Strongly Agree
7. How strongly do you agree with the statement: I identify as Indigenous.
 - a. Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, Strongly Agree
8. If applicable, which Indigenous group(s) are you affiliated with? Skip if you are not affiliated with any.
 - a. _____
9. Do other people in the Indigenous community(s) you mentioned in question 8 also perceive you as Indigenous? In other words, does an Indigenous community claim you either formally or informally? If they do, please name the community/tribe(s). Skip if you are not affiliated with any.
 - a. _____
10. If you would like to expand on why you identify as American/Mexican/Indigenous, please do so here:
 - a. _____
11. How frequently do you participate in American traditions? For example, celebrate the 4th of July, watch the Superbowl, participate in U.S. politics, etc.
 - a. Almost Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always
12. How frequently do you participate in Mexican traditions? For example, Mexican Independence Day, Grandparents' Day, etc.
 - a. Almost Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always
13. How frequently do you participate in Indigenous traditions? For example, dancing rituals, festivities, etc.
 - a. Almost Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always
14. How frequently do you cook and/or eat American food?
 - a. Almost Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always
15. How frequently do you cook and/or eat Mexican food?
 - a. Almost Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always
16. How frequently do you cook and/or eat Indigenous food?
 - a. Almost Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always
17. There are many activities associated with being American. What American practices or traditions do you take part in?
 - a. _____
18. There are many activities associated with being Mexican. What Mexican practices or traditions do you take part in?
 - a. _____
19. There are many activities associated with being Indigenous. What Indigenous practices or traditions do you take part in?
 - a. _____
20. If there are gendered duties, certain obligations that a specific gender is expected to accomplish, in your home, please give a brief description of them.

- a. _____
21. Who do you think played a significant role in your identity formation? Consider who impacted your identity the most. Examples of people include but are not limited to a grandparent, guardian, a specific community or even just yourself.
- a. _____
22. How did the person/people/community/etc. influence your identity formation?
- a. _____
23. Often during difficult times, people turn to traditions or cultural beliefs. This includes turning to a deity, cultural hero, or recounting an uplifting myth. Are there any stories, legends, or traditions you use personally to help you persist when things become difficult? If so please describe the story/teaching/belief/tradition/etc.
- a. _____

The following questions ask how satisfied you are with how UCR meets the needs of specific students.

24. How well do you feel UCR meets students' needs overall?
- a. Very Poorly, Poorly, Well, Very Well
25. How well do you feel UCR meets Chicana students' needs?
- a. Very Poorly, Poorly, Well, Very Well
26. How well do you feel UCR meets Indigenous students' needs?
- a. Very Poorly, Poorly, Well, Very Well
27. What, if anything, would you like to see more of at UCR for Chicana and/or Indigenous students?
- a. _____
28. (optional) Is there anything else you would like to share, clarify, or expand on?
- a. _____

My Responses

Below are my responses to the survey questions. Above are the survey questions by themselves so that they can be available for future use. Those questions with a blank line below are questions I skipped because they do not pertain to me.

1. This study is specifically for those who identify as Chicana and are at least 18 years old. Do you identify as a Chicana who is 18 years old or older?

(Chicana is, for the purposes of this survey, defined as anyone who identifies as Mexican-American because they are of Mexican descent but born in the U.S. OR born in Mexico but now living in the U.S.)

- a. **Yes.**
2. What language(s) do you speak?
 - a. **English and some Spanish**
3. Which language do you speak the most at home? (Home is the place where your family/guardian(s) reside and/or where you predominantly grew up in. If there are multiple places, consider where you feel the most at home.)
 - a. **English**
4. What language(s) is/are included in your cultural heritage? (Cultural heritage includes language(s) your grandparents and/or ancestors knew even if they were not passed down to you.)
 - a. **Just Spanish**
5. How strongly do you agree with the statement: I identify as American.
 - a. **Strongly Agree**
6. How strongly do you agree with the statement: I identify as Mexican.
 - a. **Agree**
7. How strongly do you agree with the statement: I identify as Indigenous.
 - a. **Strongly Disagree**
8. If applicable, which Indigenous group(s) are you affiliated with? Skip if you are not affiliated with any.
 - a. _____
9. Do other people in the Indigenous community(s) you mentioned in question 8 also perceive you as Indigenous? In other words, does an Indigenous community claim you either formally or informally? If they do, please name the community/tribe(s). Skip if you are not affiliated with any.
 - a. _____
10. If you would like to expand on why you identify as American/Mexican/Indigenous, please do so here:
 - a. **I was born and raised in the U.S. Both my parents are immigrants from Mexico, so I still learn about the culture and visit Mexico often. We also carry out many traditions here.**
11. How frequently do you participate in American traditions? For example, celebrate the 4th of July, watch the Superbowl, participate in U.S. politics, etc.
 - a. **Almost Always**
12. How frequently do you participate in Mexican traditions? For example, Mexican Independence Day, Grandparents' Day, etc.
 - a. **Sometimes**
13. How frequently do you participate in Indigenous traditions? For example, dancing rituals, festivities, etc.
 - a. **Almost Never**

14. How frequently do you cook and/or eat American food?
 - a. **Almost Always**
15. How frequently do you cook and/or eat Mexican food?
 - a. **Almost Always**
16. How frequently do you cook and/or eat Indigenous food?
 - a. **Seldom**
17. There are many activities associated with being American. What American practices or traditions do you take part in?
 - a. **There's a lot that we do that can be considered American practices or traditions. We celebrate all of the major holidays. We also vote in the presidential and local elections. We eat take out now and then. We sing the national anthem and the pledge of allegiance when appropriate. I listen to American pop most often.**
18. There are many activities associated with being Mexican. What Mexican practices or traditions do you take part in?
 - a. **There are a lot of Catholic activities that I associate with being Mexican practices and traditions. For example novenas, via crucis, posadas, etc. For a time I learned about el racion, los tres reyes magos, and baby Jesus would bring us gifts instead of Santa. We only celebrate Independence Day and other national holidays if we are in Mexico, rarely if we are in the U.S. We do eat a lot of Mexican food, much more often than take out. We clean the house every Saturday, which is a Mexican Catholic tradition I'm sure. As far as I know, we do not vote but we pay attention to Mexico's politics nonetheless.**
19. There are many activities associated with being Indigenous. What Indigenous practices or traditions do you take part in?
 - a. **I don't think my family (or I) do. Once, my grandma told me a chant to ward off evil owls but that's the only non-dominant cultural practice I know of. My cousin's wife believes in el mal ojo and I've heard of curanderos and crazy remedies for things before.**
20. If there are gendered duties, certain obligations that a specific gender is expected to accomplish, in your home, please give a brief description of them.
 - a. **In my house, we are pretty equal but the boys are expected to do yardwork and handyman work more than the girls. Everyone has to clean the house, do their laundry, and learn to cook though. This may be because we are six and can't afford to not have everyone help with chores.**
21. Who do you think played a significant role in your identity formation? Consider who impacted your identity the most. Examples of people include but are not limited to a grandparent, guardian, a specific community or even just yourself.
 - a. **My parents are the ones who played the biggest role in my identity formation. They taught me all the cultural values and traditions I know today and helped me practice them. They encouraged me to not lose my heritage. They also supported me in learning English when I was little.**
22. How did the person/people/community/etc. influence your identity formation?

- a. **They encouraged and practiced traditions with me, explaining why we did certain things. They also showed me the importance of family which is a big motivator for me to continue expanding my Spanish and understand my cultural heritage.**
23. Often during difficult times, people turn to traditions or cultural beliefs. This includes turning to a deity, cultural hero, or recounting an uplifting myth. Are there any stories, legends, or traditions you use personally to help you persist when things become difficult? If so please describe the story/teaching/belief/tradition/etc.
- a. **Like I mentioned before, my family is very Catholic. When things get tough, I turn to prayer, meditation, and the Bible. I don't necessarily turn to any specific story, just some biblical quotes and rational thoughts.**
24. How well do you feel UCR meets students' needs overall?
- a. **Very Well**
25. How well do you feel UCR meets Chicana students' needs?
- a. **Very Well**
26. How well do you feel UCR meets Indigenous students' needs?
- a. **Well**
27. What, if anything, would you like to see more of at UCR for Chicana and/or Indigenous students?
- a. **I would love to see more Latinx music. Every bonfire, solstice, spring splash always has everything but Latinx music.**
28. (optional) Is there anything else you would like to share, clarify, or expand on?
- a. _____

Analysis

First and foremost, I must acknowledge that the answers in this survey are as straightforward as I could make them since I knew exactly what kind of answers I was aiming for. This does not reflect how clear or straightforward my questions may be because of this bias. I must also acknowledge that I may not be asking the right questions as I do not identify with any Indigenous tribes or cultures so the questions that I came up with was an accumulation of what I knew about Indigenous tribes and cultures. It is worth studying how someone who is deeply affiliated with an Indigenous tribe and culture may answer these questions or if they may want to change the questions instead. Also, because of the wide variety of Mesoamerican Indigenous

cultures, the questions pertaining to them are generalized which may affect how one answers them.

From my answers, it is clear that I feel I identify as Chicana but do not claim any Indigenous roots. The factors that were most important to me were: language, religious practices, and my parents' identities.

Language is important to create my ethnic identity. I mentioned before that I felt that because I knew little Spanish I could not claim as strongly that I was Chicana. This caused me to avoid Spanish courses until I reached college. Then I confronted that idea and decided that language is important but it does not determine my Chicana-ness. I also mentioned that being Catholic was a dominating aspect of my identity. This causes me to distance myself even more from the Indigenous aspects in Mexican and Chicana culture. Lastly, my parents' identities are important and affect my ethnic identity. Because both my parents are Mexican and still have close ties with the country, I grew up learning a lot about the culture and practicing many of the traditions. Recognizing all of these aspects together in the survey helped me reaffirm my Chicana identity.

Discussion: Why were the questions in the survey included?

Surveys on ethnic identities must be ready to analyze several different aspects of a person's life that relates to their identity formation. Some of these aspects are easy and straightforward to answer such as languages spoken at home and if there are gendered duties. Other aspects are harder to gauge such as what activities are considered Mexican vs American and Indigenous and who influenced your identity formation and how? Because of this, the survey ended up being 28 questions long which would be difficult to do in one sitting. I took a little over half an hour to

answer these questions but I expect others will take at least double that time since I anticipated my answers while creating this survey and was already familiar with the questions. The survey includes definitions because of the recommendation by Burton et al. (2010) of having clear questions. I made sure that all critical words were clearly defined so that future participants could answer accurately and be on the same page as me. For example, in Question 1, the term “Chicax” had to be defined because that identity was central to this survey.

Questions 2 through 4 were on language. Language is an important part to ethnic identity as Carreira & Kagan (2017) showed.

For Questions 5-7, 11-16, and 24-26, were created as Likert scale questions. This is to help shorten the survey since it is easier to choose an option rather than to write out one’s thoughts. 5 points were used because I wanted to have a middle option for those who did not lean one way or the other. I understand that these questions are very personal and I believe that having a middle option allows participants to feel at ease. Each of these sets of questions are written to mirror one another where the only variable that changes is the identity: American, Mexican, and Indigenous. This allows for easy and compact comparisons when analyzing the data. After each of these sets there are follow up questions that ask for more input as to why each question was answered the way it was. This was structured to help participants through the thought process of the open-ended questions so that they comprehended exactly what is being questioned.

Questions 8 and 9 focus on whether one is affiliated by an Indigenous group and recognizes that identity can be a two-way street. Not only does one claim a cultural group but the group also claims you. As much as I knew that this was true with Mexicans and may include a question of Mexican citizenship, I was not as aware that there would be a similar process within

Indigenous groups until my faculty mentor brought it up. Much like with Latinos, there can be an official recognition as being part of the ingroup (such as citizenship) and/or an unofficial acknowledgement (such as when one is not questioned when participating in cultural traditions).

Question 10 was included to allow participants to include as much information and thoughts over their own identity as possible. As Burton et al. (2010) mentioned, identity is multi-dimensional and participants need to be allowed to discuss exactly how they feel they identify.

One may notice that Questions 11-13 are not exactly mirrored. This is because I wanted to give the same range of associated activities, without limiting one's imagination while also avoid being wordy. The one pertaining to Indigenous activities is vague and in general because I had to keep in mind that there are multiple Indigenous groups in Mexico with different practices. In order not to exclude any, I had to be generic.

Questions 17-19 are used to follow up on Questions 11-13. I do not offer any examples in this section because I would like to see what participants come up with and identify as ethnic activities. It would be interesting to see which activities are strictly Mexican vs Indigenous and vice versa.

Question 20 focuses on gendered duties. This is important because it gives us insight into the participants' cultural beliefs and views as well as practices. Unlike what one may have experienced in America, other cultures have strictly gendered duties and how strongly one agrees with them also allows insight into the participants' identity.

Questions 21-22 ask about people around the participant that may have influenced their identity. As Burton et al. mentioned, identity is also created by affiliations and relationships with

others. These questions would reveal the strength of their identity through the strength of their relationships with those who influenced them most.

Question 23 asks about traditions or stories that help the participant persist. This question asks what kind of resilience capital a participant has. This would reveal where they find their ability to keep going and can indicate what part of their identity they feel closest to.

The last few questions are UCR specific to help gauge not only ethnic identity but how that identity interacts with the institution. This would reveal how welcoming the academic environment is to the participant and what they would like to see on campus. These kinds of questions are always useful and important to ask.

Conclusion

The term “Chicax” has a long history of romanticizing Indigeneity while at the same time neglecting them. Indigenism was used to rebuild nationalism in Mexico and then again to unite Mexican Americans against labor exploitation. Finally, the definition agreed upon for Chicax is someone who is Mexican American through some form of Mexican ancestry. Indigeneity may be a part of this identity but does not have to be, despite how it was used historically. Creating a strong ethnic identity such as Chicax is important. It can help with academic performance and opens up more cultural resources known as cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). Some aspects that are important to consider when looking at the formation of ethnic identity is the people that influence identity, language one speaks, and the practices they carry out. Identity is very complex and fluid so these aspects are not enough by themselves to understand one’s identity in totality. One way to look evaluate the multiple aspects that affect identity formation is through surveys. Surveys need to ask about a wide range of topics, be clear in their questions by defining

unknown or vague terms, and allow for participants to show what they feel is important. In the future, there should be more surveys with these aspects to effectively analyze what makes up a person's ethnic identity.

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