EXPLORATION THROUGH VISUAL ART: EGO-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

AMONG HISPANIC AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Hyeyong Bang, Advisor

Community-based art practices connect the artist with the community, promoting an awakened society of people, capable of creating aesthetically pleasing artwork as well as positive social change (Congdon, 2004). The purpose of this case study was to explore how the environment and identity-themed visual art projects influence the ego-identity development of Hispanic American adolescents. Nine adolescents (between 12-14 years old) who were enrolled in a community-based art program participated in this study. The findings of this study indicate that this community-based art program and identity-themed projects provided the Hispanic American youth in this study with artistic competencies, which lead to the ability to express their uniqueness and to develop coping mechanisms through art. Along with this, the Hispanic American youth in this study articulated an increase in self-esteem, due in large part to the afforded recognition felt within the community. In addition, a sense of affiliation and support, coming mostly from their peers and the staff and volunteers at the program, enriched the creative growth and provided the necessary encouragement for positive youth development.
DEDICATION

To all youth involved in this study:

Continue to creatively express and share your story.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest appreciation goes to the staff, volunteers and youth involved in the Youth Art Community. I am grateful for the internship experience and the opportunity to use YAC as a site for data collection. Your support made this possible.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical and Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Thesis</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Key Terms</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualizing Identity Formation</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American Identity</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualizing Identity Formation Among Hispanic Americans</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-Based Art</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying Identity Formation through Community-Based Art</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions of the Study</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Research Perspective</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Case Study Approach</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Process</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Validity.......................................................................................................................... 48
Limitations of Study............................................................................................................. 49
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS & DISCUSSION.............................................................................. 51
Visual Art and Ego-Identity Development.......................................................................... 57
   Exploration of Competencies......................................................................................... 57
      Obtaining a Sense of Uniqueness............................................................................... 58
      Art as Soothing “Storm and Stress”........................................................................... 61
      Development of Self-esteem & Self-image................................................................. 64
      Afforded accomplishment & recognition .................................................................. 69
      Vocational Inspiration............................................................................................... 71
The Environment and Ego-Identity Development.............................................................. 73
   Exploration of Commitments......................................................................................... 74
      Family responsibilities and support.......................................................................... 74
      Peers as sources of inspiration, support, and growth............................................... 77
      Compassionate staff and volunteers.......................................................................... 81
Fostering a Community..................................................................................................... 84
   Access leads to opportunity........................................................................................... 85
   The “Americano Dream” through education................................................................... 87
   Developing a sense of affiliation.................................................................................... 89
Discussion on the Identity Status Model......................................................................... 93
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION............................................................................................... 97
Visual Art and Ego-Identity Development......................................................................... 98
The Environment and Ego-Identity Development............................................................. 99
Implications and Limitations for Future Research.................................100

REFERENCES.................................................................................................................103

APPENDIX A. PARENTAL CONSENT FORM (English and Spanish)

APPENDIX B. ADOLESCENT ASSENT FORM

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

APPENDIX D. HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

Table 1. Marcia’s Identity Status Model
Table 2. Male and Female Participant Information
Table 3. Codes Arranged by Themes
Table 4. Themes and Subthemes
Table 5. Male Participant Summary
Table 6. Female Participant Summary
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Figure 2. Identity Map by Ruth
Figure 3. Identity Project created by Javier
Figure 4. Identity Bench created by Karmen
Figure 5. Identity Bench created by Daniela
Figure 6. Identity Map created by Lesli
Figure 7. Identity Mask created by Dario
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

According to the US census (2010), between 2000 and 2010 the Hispanic community grew by 43 percent, making the Hispanic Americans the largest growing minority population in the United States (Ramirez and De La Cruz, 2003). Hispanic American adolescents developing in the ethnically diverse environment of the U.S. straddle two cultures and thus, face the challenge of incorporating their family background and the dominant U.S. culture into their personal identity (Fraga, Garcia, Hero, Jones-Correa, Martinez-Ebers, Segura, 2010). A variety of traditions exist within any given heritage, yet there are many similarities between Latino populations that span geographic region and economic levels. Aspects influencing identity, such as ethnicity, language, socioeconomic standing, cultural traditions and practices are particularly salient when discussing the identity formation of this minority population.

The purpose of studying identity formation among Hispanic American adolescents who are involved in a community-based visual art program is related to the significance of visual culture within the United States and that artwork can be a channel for an individual to express various aspects of their identity. This group of adolescents is representative of a small community within the United States. The specific backgrounds of the involved adolescents remain outside the scope of this research, so the label of “Hispanic American” should be thought of as a framework to provide context. Therefore the objective of this case study is to gain an understanding of how visual art and the environment influence the psychosocial development of these individuals by employing ethnographic techniques.

In order to gain a more profound understanding of how visual art can affect the Latino population in the United States, this study will be combining the Eriksonian model for psychosocial development and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory. This conceptual
framework situates ego-identity development within the environmental context, recognizing the necessity of acknowledging the “big picture” of societal influences on development. Moreover, this framework considers the presence of a variety of cultural, social, and emotional components, as well as the essential relationships within the adolescent’s daily life. This study examines the following overarching question: how do Hispanic American adolescents involved in a community-based art program express their identity through visual art? Specifically, I am interested in uncovering answers to the following sub-questions:

**Sub-question 1:** What role do visual art projects play in guiding the development of a positive and achieved sense of ego-identity among Hispanic American youth?

**Sub-question 2:** How is the environment and practice of community-based art facilitating Hispanic American youth to understand their identity?

**Background of the Study**

The psychosocial development of ego-identity is influenced by the concept of time and the presence of cultural beliefs and ideologies (Rogoff, 2003). This study attends to Hispanic American adolescents during a great transition period in their lives. The growth in cognitive development from concrete operations to formal operations (Piaget, 1967) coincides with the movement from industry/inferiority and into identity/confusion crises (Erikson, 1959/1968). This increase of cognitive ability allows the individual to view oneself as a separate entity (Arnett, 2010). The window of early adolescence marks a crucial time for reinforcing basic competencies in order for a solid foundation of self-esteem to develop.

The Latino community, the largest ethnic minority group in the United States embodies thousands of years of rich cultural history (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). Research illustrates how members of this community deal with a variety of issues as they attempt to acculturate, or at times assimilate, into dominant U.S. culture (Fraga et al., 2010). Historically, the artistic medium
has allowed the Hispanic American population to gain a voice over discrimination and political hardships (Serviddio, 2006). Their collective voice is highly influenced by the expressive history with the arts and community-based art practices within the United States.

From the 18th century up until the turn of the 20th century arts in the U.S. were characterized by interest in modern, particularly European art (Pearse, 2006). For the longest time art was seen as an isolated task with strict guidelines and rules. American citizens often held the elitist belief that the only people doing art should be those who were trained to do so (Pearse, 2006). Income levels of Latino adults are less than those of White adults who have similar levels of experiences and education (Portes, 2002). Latino students may not be afforded the same type of opportunities, stemming from the educational attainment and economic level of their parents and/or family. This ultimately results in a disparity of artistic opportunities for minority and low socioeconomic classes across the United States (Mishook and Kornhaber, 2009). With that being said, there is a growing respect for folk art and untrained artists.

Many low-income and low-achieving schools are often the first to eliminate or change art programs. Principals in high-minority schools have reported a 36% decrease in art instructional time (Ersing, 2009; Heligis et al., 2010). Focus on the tested subjects jeopardizes the existence of art programs within low-income and low-achieving schools. Latino students may struggle both culturally and academically in U.S. schools, which suggests the continuation of the cycle of disparity of opportunity (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

After World War I, the United States saw a push to define American art and culture (Freedman & Hernandez, 1998). The industrial revolution marked a changing worldview on the arts and technology. At the turn of the 20th century, many countries were responding the rapid expansion of the industrial world as a reaction to the Age of Enlightenment (Pearse, 2006). Industrialization had a huge impact on the view of art within the United States. As cheap labor
lead to an increase in population into large cities, vulnerable and ethnic minority populations were often forced to work, thus forgoing their opportunity for artistic expression (Pearse, 2006).

A great influence in promoting national culture was seen after the depression by European refuges and immigrant groups as well as native peoples. These groups became known for using art to gain social mobility (Freedman & Hernandez, 1998). Latin American art began to appear in the United States during the twentieth century (Serviddio, 2006). During the 1930’s murals became the cultural canvas of many Latino American artists and much political turmoil was caused by the introduction of this wave of expression (Serviddio, 2006). Some artists, like Diego Rivera, José Orozco, and David Siqueiros, introduced authentic representations of Mexican American culture, bringing forth historical issues and cultural dialogue into the public sphere (Serviddio, 2006). According to Serviddio (2006), “Many Americans reacted with anger to the fact that foreigners were given commissions to paint murals in the U.S., and that many of those murals overtly criticized the American way of life and traditions” (p. 483). Instead of the previous reliance on traditional European art, American citizens began developing a new artistic identity as a result of which a growing desire for freethinking and self-expressive art was born (Pearse, 2006).

As immigration of Hispanic/Latinos increased during the 1960’s and 1970’s, the notion of Latino art experienced bouts of negativity and under appreciation. The Chicano muralist movement, which began during the 1960’s, remains woven into the fabric of Hispanic American expression and is very much alive today (Serviddio, 2006). Likewise, community-based art programs began to find their place in American society during the 1960’s and 1970’s and were targeted at Latino communities and other marginalized populations (Chew, 2009). Consequently, the historical relationship between White Americans and Hispanic Americans only begins to reveal the current ramifications on the identity formation of today’s Hispanic American youth.
According to Phinney (2008) barriers that minority adolescents face during crucial identity formation years make their identity construction a challenge. A value of American society reveals the idea that each individual has strengths, or intelligences, and that art can be an avenue for learning (Smith, 2006). However, Hispanic youth become a vulnerable population when they are forced to deal with socioeconomic impediments and may also have trouble integrating into their community (Romanowski, 2001). When artistic practices are condoned and lack respect in a community setting, the Hispanic American adolescent is highly unlikely to place value in a community-based art program. Moreover, family pressure within the Latino community asserts the desire to put effort into a more financially rewarding practice than the arts (Fraga et al., 2010), there is a growing field of evidence supporting the presence of the community-based art world. Amid the United State’s diverse cultural landscape, impoverished neighborhoods are pursuing a new, fresh identity by inspiring the youth (Chew, 2009). In terms of the Latino culture, community-based art programs focus on the nuances that bind the Hispanic community with the broader United States culture. Hispanic American youth are then afforded a space to develop a competent and well-adjusted sense of ego-identity.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Erik Erikson is recognized for his research on ego-identity. His theory of psychosocial stages of development outlined seven “crises” that the individual encounters over the course of a lifetime (Erikson, 1950/1959). Furthermore, it is during adolescence that the individual begins to recognize their personal, ego-identity. Formation of the ego-identity is a dynamic, evolving experience. According to Hoover (2004), “identity resides on the middle ground between what we bring from inner resources, and what society offers through its institutions, customs, and policies” (p. 5). The community-based art initiative in the United States empowers young and old to take an active role in their community by learning about themselves and others; thus
influencing the psychosocial development of the individual (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Congdon, 2004). Bianchi’s (2008) empirical research on the role of community art found an “art-trained group” of adolescents exhibited higher confidence, awareness of role models, and an understanding of the significance of appearance in creating their identity. Visual art ultimately acts as a coping mechanism and an avenue to develop a deeper understanding of the self and the influence of social attitudes (Knight & Schwarzman, 2005). Additionally, visual art conveys meaning about one’s personal or group affiliations (Bianchi, 2008).

Providing a contextual background for the discourse on identity development of Hispanic American youth will be understood with the help of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory. The justification for using Bronfenbrenner’s theory lies in the claim that through the interaction of a person’s environment in relation to the broader cultural environment adds different levels to development (Arnett, 2010). In a study on how community-based arts provides opportunity for youth (ages 13-17), Aguilar, Bedau & Anthony (2009) concluded that safe environments where strong connections between peers and adults are crucial to the psychosocial and emotional development of the adolescent. Furthermore, mentorship and culturally grounded programs such as: Mujer artes, Espejos, and Fulana provide the Latino community with space to navigate their identity (Knight & Schwarzman, 2005; Chew, 2009). Bronfenbrenner’s theory recognizes that cultural beliefs and values are the foundation for development (Arnett, 2010; Rogoff, 2003). Using Bronfenbrenner’s theory to complement Erikson’s framework provides greater depth to the understanding of identity formation throughout this study.

**Importance of the Study**

This study addresses a lacuna in literature. The formation of ego-identity of Hispanic American and other minorities in America is largely under-studied from a psychological standpoint and deserves more attention. Most studies on ego-identity in the U.S. focus on White
Americans (Schwartz, Adamson, Ferrer-Wreder, Dillion & Berman, 2006). Further research on the ethnic minority populations within the United States will contribute to understanding the diverse American landscape. This will offer those who work with this population, such as scholars, officials, and teachers, a greater insight into how to positively shape the lives of Hispanic American teenagers.

Secondly, the arts remain a subject on the periphery of current educational demands, such as reading, math and science, especially for students attending public school in a lower socio-economic setting. Mishook and Kornhaber (2009) found that socioeconomic status, which is related to urban and predominantly minority schools, is additionally associated with a lack of artistic opportunity. Art education across the United States has dropped by 16% whereas; high-minority school principals have reported a 36% decrease in art instructional time (Ersing, 2009; Heligis et al., 2010). By exploring how art programs can assist in meeting the unique needs of diverse populations we can begin to provide a rationale for implementing a wider variety of community-based art programs across the United States to offset the missing presence of art within the scholastic environment. The significance of studying how art influences the identity formation of adolescents is the recognition of the potential art has to create a positive, productive society (Congdon, 2004).

Finally, bringing attention to ethnic minorities or marginalized populations in the United States who take active roles within the field of the arts has allowed this study to honor the efforts of these individuals. The youth participants had the opportunity to share their story and further reflect upon the concepts of identity and self-growth. Their stories suggest that individuals, young and old, can collaborate on art projects in order to help themselves and their communities.
Organization of the Thesis

This manuscript is divided into 5 chapters. Chapter II provides an extensive literature review that outlines pertinent information about ego-identity as a psychological construct, environmental influences on identity development and role of community-based art in United States society. More specifically, the literature review will focus on impacts felt among the Latino community. Chapter III explains the case study framework in which this study is situated and describes the methodology used for participant selection and data collection and analysis. Chapter VI discusses the results of the research in conjunction with the literature review. Finally, Chapter V summarizes the findings, determines implications of the study, and offers suggestions for future research in this area.

Definition of Key Terms

• **Ego-Identity**: A natural human construction based on the combination of the personal view of the self and the perception of the view of others. Key commitment areas are love, work, and ideology. Failure to make commitments results in identity confusion (Erikson, 1950/1968). Ethnicity or race, social class, gender, religion, sexual preference, and age are considered major aspects of identity.

• **Identity statues**: Classified by levels of commitment and exploration (Marcia, 1966).
  - **Identity diffusion**: No rational commitment or exploration, the person is making no effort to sort through potential choices and commitments (Arnett, 2010; Marcia, 1966).
  - **Identity Foreclosure**: Defined by an individual who has made commitments but has done little to no exploration of possibilities (Arnett, 2010; Marcia, 1966).
  - **Identity Moratorium**: Involves exploration but no commitment on behalf of the individual (Arnett, 2010; Marcia, 1966).
- **Identity Achievement**: When a young person clearly makes choices following a period of exploration of possible alternatives (Arnett, 2010; Marcia, 1966).

- **Cultural Identity**: Cultural identity refers to the individual’s decision to associate with widely accepted modes of behavior and beliefs of a particular culture.

- **Ethnic Identity**: Ethnic identity refers to membership to a specific social group, wherein the individual appreciates and understands his or her ancestral heritage and background (Phinney, 2005).

- **Adolescence**: Typically denoted as the period of time between childhood and adulthood. In the United States culture, adolescence is prescribed to range from ages 10-18. For the purposes of this study, early adolescent development usually lasts from age 10 to about age 14. (Arnett, 2010).

- **Hispanic/Latino**: These terms are used interchangeably throughout the text and were created in an attempt to provide a common denominator for a large, but diverse, population with a connection various Spanish-speaking cultures. Hispanic or Latino can refer to Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish cultures. (U.S. Census, 2010).

- **Community**: An interwoven network of people and their relationships characterizes community. According to Congdon (2004), community is based on three things: a location or site, share personal or group identification, and/or a common purpose or set of beliefs.

- **Environment**: As defined by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), the environment is made up of nested, complex layers of internal and external factors that influence the growth and development of an individual.
• **Art(s):** Interpretation of life through visual expression, dance, music, theater, and other cultural specific forms. For the purposes of this study, visual art and expression includes drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, film, photography and other applied arts.

• **Community-Based Art:** “Any form or work of art that emerges from a community and consciously seeks to increase the social, economic and political power of that community” (Knight & Schwarzman, 2005).
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews previous research about identity development among adolescents, predominant influences of Latino culture, and community-based art. First, I explore existing literature about identity development among adolescents (with particular emphasis on Hispanic/Latino American, early adolescents). Then, in order to contextualize the concept of identity formation, this study appreciates the relevance of environmental and cultural influences on personal development by organizing unique characteristics of the Latino community using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model. Finally, and most importantly, artistic expression is addressed as cultural tool that has the potential to produce a greater understanding the self in relation to identity formation and the environment.

Identity

The transition from childhood to adulthood, commonly referred to as adolescence, marks a significant stage of growth and discovery. During this period, the adolescent explores various aspects of his or her identity while attempting to create a “sense of self” in relation to the world around them (Erikson, 1959). They experience autonomous milestones (e.g., receiving a driver’s license) and receive more independence in the decisions that will affect their future (e.g., what classes they will take in high school, and what social group they will fit into). This increased cognitive maturity encourages exploration, which leads to commitment to a particular set of beliefs. However, identity formation does not begin and end with adolescence; identity comes into play even before a child first recognizes their existence is separate from others (Arnett, 2010; Erikson, 1959). Identity formation will continue to evolve and change throughout the rest of the individual’s life. The emerging sense of ego identity is bridged when the information learned during the early years of development encounters the variety of new social roles, which an adolescent must reconcile (Erikson, 1959). According to Erikson (1959):
[identity] is a lifelong development largely unconscious to the individual and to his society. Its roots go back all the way to the first self-recognition: in the baby’s earliest exchange of smiles there is something of a self-realization coupled with a mutual recognition (p.122).

Theories on adolescent identity formation have roots in the Freudian ideas about the ego in relation to society. Additionally, Erikson, known for his theory of psychosocial stages of development, outlined seven “crises” that the individual encounters over the course of a lifetime. According to Erikson (1997), the ego-identity is a subjective and dynamic experience; each stage is dependent on and affected by development in the previous stage. Moreover, identity formation should never be thought of as a completely autonomous or individual practice (Erikson, 1950).

The concept of identity as a human construction is based on the combination of the personal and social perspectives of the self. The personal view is determined by biological factors, self-esteem, motivation, and personality. The social construction of the “self” develops as a result of the individual’s from interaction with various social groups, environmental/cultural beliefs and practices, as well as broader political ideologies (Erikson, 1959). This phenomenon occurs because the adolescent is attempting to form a “sense of uniqueness” while maintaining a “sense of affiliation” with a group (Erikson, 1959).

Erikson’s theoretical model provides little consideration of external influences “majority” and “minority” cultures must reconcile with, such as political and cultural issues, ethnic and racial identity, and the impact of economics, language and religion on psychosocial development. Since the creation of the Eriksonian model for psychosocial development, many scholars have extrapolated on his theory, developing stages and making Erikson’s model particularly relevant to America’s increasingly diverse society (Berry, 1980, Côté, 1996, Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1992). As Erikson (1959), himself admitted, that his description of identity has
not been very specific: thus, Marcia, inspired by the relativity of Erikson’s theory, elaborated upon his fifth stage of psychosocial development, identity versus role confusion. Marcia (1966) delineated four distinct statuses: identity achievement; moratorium; foreclosure; and diffusion (See Table 1). Furthermore, Marcia contended that competencies (what one does), communities (where one is from), and commitments (who one is with or what relationships they are in) define identity statuses (Hoover, 2004). Marcia’s different forms of ego-identity provided support for Erikson’s theory that adolescents who resolve identity crisis successfully will be those capable of successfully resolving crises in adulthood.

Table 1:

Marcia’s Identity Status Model

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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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Among Marcia’s four statuses of ego-identity, identity achievement refers to individuals who have both actively engaged in finding their path in life and who are following this path (Marcia, 1966). Such individuals have explored identity alternatives and have made independent decisions with respect to choosing their occupation, relationships, religion, or politics. Adolescents who are in the moratorium status are actively soul searching but remain in the exploratory process, are still confused, and attempting to find a compromise between social demands, parents’ wishes, and their own abilities (Marcia, 1966). Foreclosure status refers to individuals who define themselves in light of someone who is influential in their lives (Marcia, 1966). Generally, those that are categorized as foreclosed have not begun exploring, as a result of
which, their parents’ wishes or goals become their own. Finally, those in the identity diffusion status have not explored identity alternatives. These individuals are not willing to commit to a particular identity meaning, often have no desire to make such commitments, and are easily swayed by social trends and ideologies (Marcia, 1966).

Identity Formation Among Early Adolescents

Arnett (2010) pointed out that adolescent development occurs in stages: early adolescence (10-14), late adolescence (15-18) and emerging adulthood (19-25). These stages are related to the cognitive development of the individual. The Piagetian model of cognitive development, wherein the individual moves from concrete operations to formal operations, has been evaluated and determined to be a lengthy and dynamic process rather than a single jump between stages (Fischer & Lamborn, 1989). Fischer and Lamborn (1989) proposed four developmental stages beginning in early adolescence that must be traveled through in order to move into the formal operation stage. Moreover, the changes in cognitive development that take place from middle childhood to adolescence occur because the child is slowly leaving behind the egocentrism that defines youth (Livesley & Bromley, 1973). Though Livesley and Bromley (1973) observe that egocentrism is never outgrown, there is a relevant shift away from egocentric thought as the individual’s social cognition develops. Consequently, the ability of an early adolescent to define their identity is vastly different from an individual in middle adolescence, and thus different from the relationship between contending identities and psychosocial functioning among emerging adults (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, Wang, 2010).

As discussed by Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, and Whitesell, (1997), a developmental task of adolescence is to construct multiple social identities in different roles and relationships. Early adolescents may not possess the cognitive ability to differentiate between contending self-identities (Harter, et al., 1997). Often, it is not until middle adolescence that they possess the
cognitive skills necessary to reflect on these dichotomies. Older adolescents, “emerging adults,” begin to recognize that it would be unnatural to act similar across relational contexts (Harter, et al., 1997). For example, the adolescent may be defiant around parents, self-conscious and shy around teachers in a school setting, and caring and outgoing around friends. Adolescents, as they progress into formal operations, are able to relate a person’s behavior to historical, biological, and social factors (Harter et al., 1997).

**Contextualizing Identity formation**

In order to contextualize identity formation among adolescents, one must develop a greater understanding of the role of the environment and relationships within that environment. Critics have questioned the cross-cultural relevance and applicability of Erikson’s theory claiming that it is androcentric and ethnocentric in nature (Ochse & Plug, 1986; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). Ochse and Plug (1986) consider sex and race to be factors in determining the timing of identity resolution among individuals. And though Erikson confronts the issue of gender and identity in *Identity: Youth Crisis* (1968), authors such as Sorell and Montgomery (2001) criticize the overly male-centered perspective of his work. Conversely, Erikson (and his wife Joan) made multiple attempts to transcend the psychologically based theory into real life situations. An example of an attempt to account for various cultures is found in *Childhood and Society (1950)*, where he dedicates a chapter to adolescent identity development among Native American tribes (Arnett, 2010). Furthermore in his book *Identity and the Life Cycle*, Erikson (1959) notes that an increasing sense of identity is a dynamic process; identity is constantly gained, lost, and then recaptured as the individual evolves in relation to his or her environment.

In order to frame the significance of the environmental impact on the individual and gain a richer understanding of cultural impacts on the identity development of the individual, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory will be considered. According to this theory,
influences that contribute to human development can be broken down into five systems: the microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; macrosystem; and chronosystem (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). Bronfenbrenner’s model illustrates the various actors, institutions and ideologies that reside in the environmental context and therefore affect the individual in natural ways.

According to Rogoff (2003), “Bronfenbrenner stressed the interactions of a changing organism in a changing environment” (p. 44). Individuals are affected on many levels; making the dynamic nature of human development an ongoing and multifaceted process. Although all systems will be discussed, this research will primarily focus on the microsystem; the initial and most influential level, which contains family, friendship, and community relationships; and the mesosystem, which consists of the relations among the microsystems.

**Discussion of the Microsystem**

The microsystem, consists of individuals who reside in the individuals immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Rogoff (2003), the basic dyadic relationship (such as mother-child) is related to and dependent on, larger groups, often creating a three-person system (such as mother-father-child). The most important relationship within an adolescent’s microsystem is that of the family, more specifically, the parents or immediate caregivers. An adolescent takes on many psychological characteristics from their parents, including beliefs, attitudes and habits. Erikson (1959) proposes advice and examples of how a healthy personality advances through the stages of psychosocial development. He concludes, essentially, that: children are a manifestation of their parents; that the people and the environment affect the child from birth; and that in order for the child to develop a healthy personality democracy must safely promote the “healthy child” (Erikson, 1959).

The relationship between parent and child is readily acknowledged as one of the most important factors to a child’s overall development, however, during adolescence relationships
with peers and members from a similar age group also plays a crucial role in the development of the individual. Way and Chen (2000) address the influence of parental relationships with their child’s overall experience, including their ability to initiate and maintain positive friendships. Peer relationships are a predominant part of the adolescent’s daily life, and can impact their development in both positive and negative ways. Research on adolescent friendships has continually found intimate and dependable friendships to be positively associated with high self-esteem (Way & Chen, 2000). The emotional support offered by peers leads to positive well-being, resulting in a sense of identity achievement, whereas association with deviant or irrational behavior leads to undesirable adjustment of the teenager (Barre, Prelow, Dumka, Gonzales, Knight, Michaels, 2001; Updegraff, Kim, Killoren, Thayer, 2010). Furthermore, it is recognized that an adolescent who is over reliant on “following the crowd” may experience identity diffusion. (Hoover, 2004). Identity diffusions remain uncommitted to any particular direction in life and are easily swayed by the thoughts and actions of others, which often times entails their surrounding peer group (Hoover, 2004).

Lastly, corresponding relationships with the community affect the development of the individual by providing examples of roles that the individual can fulfill throughout their lifetime. As the adolescent interacts with individuals in their family, school, and neighborhood they will begin to understand expectations about roles they interested in filling as they age (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents encounter the views of the community and compare them to the view they hold of themselves, while simultaneously attempting to connect the roles they have donned during early childhood with the idealistic societal roles, which are deemed important to uphold.

**Discussion of the Mesosystem**

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) next system, the mesosystem describes the relationship between microsystems. The mesosystem can be broken down into relationships in the home setting and in
the community setting. This includes interactions between parents and peer groups, peer groups and the community, as well as the relationship witnessed between parents and the broader community. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized how the ideas and information presented by various settings overlap in both conflicting and complementary patterns. The family, neighborhood, and school interact thereby allowing the adolescent to consciously and unconsciously sift through ideas upheld by these systems in order to orient themselves into their environment (Erikson, 1997).

**Discussion of the Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem**

The third nested system, the exosystem, involves links between social settings in which the individual does not have an active role (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Though the influences residing in this system may not directly influence the individual, Bronfenbrenner argued that these forces are equally challenging and influential (Rogoff, 2003). An example is the workplace of the primary caregiver. In particular, the workplace affects the socioeconomic standing of the family and the mental well-being of the caregiver, both of which, indirectly affect the individual child.

The cultural context that an individual develops within is what Bronfenbrenner refers to as the macrosystem. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This system proposes that societal beliefs and ideologies will influence interactions on an individual level. Here, the individual deals with a number of social, geographical, historical and political ideologies based on their traditional culture and the culture in which they currently reside in. Finally, there is a fifth system, not widely discussed, that describes the evolution of these systems over time, the chronosystem. (Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). The added factor of time reinforces the constant and ever-evolving development of the society and the individual.
Hispanic American Identity

As much of the research on ego-identity development is geared toward the perceptions of White individuals there is, undoubtedly, little research on ego-identity achievement and positive psychosocial outcomes for the ethnic minority youth. Areas viewed as important to American society—occupation, education, religious and political domains—function to secure an individual’s ego-identity while they reside within the United States. Historically, the Hispanic/Latino American population has had their cultural background viewed negatively, which leads to negative views of the self; this is where the challenges for developing a positive ego-identity begin for adolescents who identify as Hispanic/Latino American.

Discussion of Cultural and Ethnic Identity

Human beings are social entities and do not exist in isolation. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), social identity "consists of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (p. 16). The individual’s willingness to be defined by social categories is essential to the developmental process; Erikson (1959) refers to this as a desire for a “sense of affiliation.” Phinney, Cantu, and Kurtz (1997), comment on how identification as a member of a group is essential to the development of global self-esteem, which is related to identity achievement. Furthermore, as a result of globalization and the increase of multiculturalism, Schwartz, Zamboagna, Weisskkirch, and Wang (2010) advocate connecting the research of personal identity and cultural identity among “majority” and “minority” individuals. It is therefore necessary to address cultural and ethnic identity among the Hispanic Americans, as these social identity concepts are intertwined and cannot be separated from the personal identity of this population. To ignore the cultural background of Hispanic/Latinos creates an unclear snapshot of the individual.
Cultural identity refers to the individual’s decision to associate with widely accepted modes of behavior and beliefs of a particular culture (Schwartz et al., 2010) Miville, Koonce, Darlington, and Whitlock (2000), examined the relationship between collective identity (cultural) and personal identity (ego-identity) among Mexican American students by using the Ego Identity Status (EIS) model. This model focuses on crises and commitment; two basic processes to the formation of ego-identity. Results found that Mexican American cultural identity is significantly related to the construction of their ego-identity (Miville et al., 2000). That is, viewing oneself as a cultural being may predict positive ego-identity formation. Similarly, after studying how identity is related to psychosocial functioning, Schwartz et al., (2010) determined that “understanding who one is at both the personal and sociocultural levels is of critical importance for successful transition into adulthood (p. 25).

Ethnic identity is viewed as a construct that falls under the cultural identity umbrella and proves to be pertinent in the discussion about the identity of Hispanic Americans (Schwartz et al., 2010; Phinney, 2002; Louis & Liem, 2005) Ethnicity is one of the connections that can fulfill the desire for affiliation or group belonging (McHatton et al., 2001). According to Phinney (2002) ethnic identity cannot be separated from the personal identity of the Hispanic/Latino population in the United States. The decision to associate with a particular ethnicity permits the individual to acquire a reference group that will validate their sense of self, leading to positive personal identity patterns. Louis and Liem (2005), report that an ethnic minority individual must integrate both ego and ethnic identity in order to orient a positive self-concept towards the larger society, hence development of positive ego-identity formation is dependent upon a strong sense of ethnic affiliation and identification.

Ethnic identity formation involves sorting out conflicting positive and negative feelings in order to come to a resolve about one’s own ethnic group, as well as other groups. Phinney’s
(1992) three-stage model of ethnic identity formation follows a similar continuum to Marcia’s (1966) model and Erikson’s (1959) theoretical work; each clearly recognizes the process of exploration and commitment as critical to the individual’s identity formation. Phinney’s model includes: unexamined ethnic identity; ethnic identity search/moratorium; and ethnic identity achievement. Ethnic identity achievement is defined as the most well adjusted stage, wherein the adolescent appreciates and understands his or her ethnic background (Phinney, 1992). Adolescents categorized as ethnic identity search/moratorium are unsure of what ethnicity means to them and thus are unable to make a commitment to a specific ethnicity (Phinney, 1992). Unexamined ethnic identity refers to individuals who have not begun to explore their ethnicity (Phinney, 1992). In many cases, White adolescents would fall into this category, as they often associate ethnic identity with minority cultures.

The implications of social identifications come when a particular cultural or ethnic group is marginalized by society. This can create an inferiority complex among members who define themselves in these groups; according to Tajfel (1981), when a group is negatively viewed by society, the individual may view himself or herself negatively. However, the view of the self is more reliant on individual commitments and attitudes about the cultural or ethnic group, rather than the evaluations of others (Phinney et al., 1997).

**Contextualizing Identity Formation Among Hispanic Americans**

To continue contextualizing the experience among Hispanic American adolescents, I will use Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model that recognizes the interaction and influence of the environment. Erikson (1997) admits that in order to gain an understanding of the individual’s emerging sense of self, a relation between the individual and the broader, cultural world must be made and maintained. This next section will provide insight into the cultural and ethnic values of the Hispanic/Latino American community and how they may be influencing their ego-identity.
Influences in the Microsystem

As previously mentioned, influences on the microsystem are acknowledged as direct, dyadic or triadic relationships. Among Latinos, family responsibilities and commitment to parental obligations are strongly emphasized (Arnett, 2010). This concept is recognized as familism; and acts as a construct of cultural identity (Schwartz et al., 2010). Kuhlberg, Pena, and Zayas (2010), wrote that familism is recognized as close kinship with both immediate and extended family. This suggests that development of the Hispanic American individual within this environment occurs through collaborative efforts and harmonious relationships. Family relationships provide a structure for Hispanic American youth when attempting to understand their identity. This proves to be especially important as Hispanic American adolescents are attempting to incorporate more than one culture into their identity. Kuhlberg et al., (2010) conducted a study on suicide attempts among Latina adolescents. This study found that familism has encouraged family relationships, which has lead to a corresponding decrease in suicidal attempts by this population. Consequently, the concept of having a strong and supportive family system is associated with positive identity formation among the Hispanic American adolescent population. Additionally, the act of accepting parental values and desires; suggests that identifying with this important cultural value (which may lead to the “foreclosure” status) may be of high regard among Hispanic Americans (Miville et al., 2000).

Interaction with peers determines how the adolescent will identify him or herself. Growing up in American society, Hispanic American adolescents strive for a sense of belonging and affiliation during their high school careers. Ethnic identity may increase over time, but only in settings where this is particularly salient (i.e., a predominantly European American populated school). Some adolescents will identify with mainstream U.S. culture, whereas others will forge a new identity, combining aspects from their own culture and U.S. culture. This is widely
dependent on the individual’s peer group and the multifaceted nature of ethnic identity development. Quintana, Segura-Herrera, Nelson (2010), state that “Mexican American youth receive ethnic socialization from their interactions with peers, learning about ethnic differences and what it means to be Mexican American” (p. 18). Being surrounded by peers from a similar ethnic group may influence ethnic identity and ego-identity development (Phinney, 1992).

In addition to the family system and influential peer groups, the adolescent defines him or herself through relationships with the community. Ersing (2009) remarks, “such connections are particularly pertinent for youths living in impoverished environments where persistent social and emotional stressors contribute to feelings of depression and isolation”(p. 34). Scholars studying Hispanic American communities note that there is little descriptive information about families who are not experiencing some type of disadvantage or barrier to positive development. According to Fraga, Garcia, Hero, Jones-Correa, Matinez-Ebers, Segura (2010), Latino communities appear to be in search of the “American dream.” As a result, the aspirations of the Latino community often include, financial stability, home ownership in a comfortable neighborhood, quality education, and treatment of equality (Fraga et al., 2010). By gaining an understanding of the inner issues of their community, Hispanic American adolescents are better equipped to navigate their identity in relation to the group-oriented and collectivist nature of the Hispanic/Latino community (Rinderle & Montoya, 2008).

**Interactions in the Mesosystem**

The intricacies and discontinuities between home and school cultures reside in the mesosystem of a Hispanic American adolescent and exist as critical challenges. The collectivistic values of this minority population might conflict with the culture of broader community or schools that often value individual achievement and competitive activities. Negative experiences within the educational system effects school achievement and self-esteem consequently
impacting the maintenance of Hispanic ego-identity development (Cavazos-Rehg & De-Lucia-Waack, 2009; Chi Chan, Lam & Covault, 2009). The importance of receiving an education is undeniable within American society. However, few would argue that the American public education system has provided equal opportunities for minority individuals (Fraga et al., 2010). The Latino population has historically championed for Latino youth to be successful and respectful in school in hopes of realizing the quintessential American dream. The Pew Hispanic Center (2004) reports that education received the highest ranking among registered Latino/a voters. Additionally, Fraga et al., (2010) demonstrates that education is viewed as “a potential key to strategies to address many of the challenges currently faced by Latinos in the United States” (p.59).

**Influences in the Exosystem**

The exosystem is made up of indirect influences; workplace and education of parent or primary caregiver, and resources available in the community. Demographic challenges such as economics and social status are shaped by the family system and introduce another dimension that the adolescent must sort through and understand in order to develop a positive sense of self. Fraga et al., (2010) identified limited English proficiency and lack of citizenship or documentation as significant barriers experienced by the Latino community.

Immigrant and migrant status of many Hispanic American parents/families may lead to their current economic standing and is correlated with the workplace. This is not to assume that all ethnic minorities reside in a low socio-economic status, rather, it merely illustrates that ethnic minorities are influenced by the historical relationship between themselves and the dominant White culture present within the United States. Authors Rinderle and Montoya (2008) studied the connection between demographics and ethnic identity formation in four economically diverse subpopulations of Hispanic Americans. They found that identity labels are related to earned
income and language, suggesting that future research on this population should pay special attention to these factors and how they influence identity formation within the Hispanic culture.

**Influences in the Macrosystem**

Various cultural aspects of the Latino culture influence the development of the individual on a macro-level. The Latino community shares a common language, religion, and is affected by cultural assets. A central barrier to the identity formation of the Hispanic/Latino population within the United States lies in their ability to communicate. According to Phinney (2002) language is fundamental for navigation of identity among Hispanic American adolescents. Kenny and McEachern, (2009) found that minority students often suffer from difficulties due to language barriers. Phinney (1992) discusses the salience of language to ethnic minorities and their (ethnic) identity development. Language is used by to describe individual characteristics; the ability to use heritage languages to communicate and to define oneself has a positive impact on the ethnic identity, and thus the personal identity.

To add to the literature on the impact communication and language barriers have on the Hispanic American population, Kenny and McEachern, (2009) found that minority students often suffer from difficulties due to language barriers. Negative experiences within the educational system impacted their school achievement and self-esteem. McHatton et al., (2007) discussed how the communication style of Hispanic Americans are often times misinterpreted by teachers of the dominant culture, leading to further alienation and feelings of discrimination. Foundational differences in language and communication style among Hispanic Americans may be frequently misinterpreted by teachers of the dominant culture, leading to alienation and feelings of discrimination within the school setting (McHatton, Shaunessy, Hughes, Brice, & Ratliff, 2007).
To discuss ego-identity formation among Hispanic Americans it is necessary to attend to cultural and social factors, but also to be familiar with the impact of religious ideologies as related to the psychosocial development of the individual. Tweed (2000) recognizes religious identity as an important component through a case study of a Chicana painter. He concludes that religious identity transcends into the artistic identity of many Latinos, stating that 9 in 10 Latinos are Catholic (Tweed, 2000).

Another cultural asset, in addition to familism, that influences Hispanic American adolescent navigation of their identity formation is the concept of Machisimo. Machisimo refers to an exaggerated masculinity, wherein Latino males feel the need to exert physical and mental strength and stability. Latino males are cited as possessing a higher level of masculine ideology than European and African Americans (Saez, Casado, & Wade, 2009). In a study on Latino men residing in the United States, Saez et al., (2009) found that high endorsement of masculine ideology results in a stronger ethnic identity. In a longitudinal study of Latino adolescents, Umana-Taylor, Gonzalez-Backen, Guimond (2009), found that patterns of ethnic growth vary by sex. Latina females have higher expectations to carry on their cultural background, whereas boys may not have the resources or the encouragement to properly understand this aspect of their identity.

**Influences in the Chronosystem**

The historical and sociopolitical past provides an insight into the development of the Hispanic American population. The chronosystem involves the timing of immigration to the United States and the current status of racial and ethnic discrimination and stereotypes. Discrimination and alienation can be further catapulted by the socioeconomic status associated with the Hispanic/Latino population. In a study comparing Hispanic gifted and general education learners, McHatton, Shaunessy, Hughes, Brice, and Ratliff (2007) found that the gifted
individuals were more likely to assimilate into mainstream culture and thus, feel less racial discrimination. In another study, Cavazos-Rehg and DeLucis-Waack (2009) found no significant difference of ethnic identity achievement between two groups of Latino adolescents: the first group enrolled in a bilingual education program and the latter in a traditional education program. These results suggest that ethnic identity is not relative to the environmental context in which the adolescents are growing up in and the opportunities that are presented to them in an educational setting.

In summary, the literature findings analyze two areas that are vital to this study of identity formation among Hispanic American teenagers. First, the salience of identity/role confusion to the adolescent population is outlined. More specifically, as this study is focused on early adolescents, cognitive development becomes a factor in the ability to contest the multiple social identities that make up their overall personal identity. Second, the literature reflects the influences Hispanic Americans are experiencing; spanning from the immediate family beliefs and way of life (microsystem, mesosystem) to the historical and sociopolitical past that effects the current status of this population (exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem).

**Community-Based Art**

Community-based art programs have generally sought out ethnic minorities in urban areas. Many programs take place after school hours; for this reason they have a great impact on individuals living in low socio-economic areas where various forms of capital and resources are limited (Chew, 2009). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 5.8 million children regularly care for themselves after-school hours (quoted in Ersing, 2009). By offering an outlet to those with limited guidance, the youth involved in these art programs become more committed as they begin to find their place within the local community and understand their cultural, ethnic and racial identity through their art.
Laosa stated that ethnic identity became of extreme importance during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960’s (quoted in Phinney, 1982). Likewise, community-based art programs began to find their place in American society during the 1960’s and 1970’s (Chew, 2008). These programs were constructed to offer a foundation for social justice. Community-based art programs in the United States aim to empower individuals to take an active role in their community by learning about themselves and others (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Congdon, 2004). According to Dewey, an individual expresses him or herself within a cultural context and has the ability to experience another individual’s culture by way of imagination, “being in their shoes” (Nakamura, 2009). Imagination is conscious activity in the mind that occurs when an individual is interacting with the surrounding environment. Through this critical process the individual develops self-awareness and “recognizes the other.” This results in the formation of a relationship, or a deep communal bond that is viewed important to the foundation of community-based art world.

In terms of adolescent development, art programs in the United States have sought to cultivate agents of social change. An example is an organization located in New Orleans, Louisiana; Young Aspirations/Young Artists, which has a mission “to provide experiences and opportunities that empower talented inner-city youth to be professionally self-sufficient through creative expression (Knight & Schwarzman, 2005). Ersing (2009) conducted a study on the role of community-based art programs. In particular, she focuses on Positive Youth Development (PYD), which has been in practice since the 1990s. PYD is an empowering approach that focuses on the youth as “tomorrow’s leaders and an integral piece of today’s community” (Ersing, 2009). As a proactive model, PYD is producing results previously unheard of in the community-based art realm and has provided a structure for the new programs to rely on as it continues to proves its worth and effectiveness.
**Art and Identity Formation.** Art is premised upon notions of self-expression and individuality. Similar to ego-identity, an artistic identity cannot be separated from the cultural and environmental influences surrounding the individual. Congdon (2004) emphasizes that the arts are also associated with ethnic and cultural identity. This acknowledgment of cultural identity, by transmitting ideas of past generations, leads to the development of individual self-belonging by providing an outlet for self-expression. Expression through visual art provides an understanding of how individuals define themselves and the world around them. This is witnessed through a muralist transmitting a political idea on a city wall, a composer interrelating musical elements to communicate a racial tragedy through textual features and details, and the dancer who, through movement and rhythm, conveys elements of the passion and emotion of being a woman. The artistic process allows people (whether they are aware of it or not) to explore various identity issues, such as gender, race, ethnicity, culture and religion. As a concrete practice, visual art provides a tangible outlet for the internal issues one may be experiencing.

Artistic expression has been recognized as a way of universal communication and can provide entertainment, social change, and is often used for healing purposes. Psychoanalytic approaches to art affirm that individuals express their identity consciously and unconsciously through their art (Naumburg, 1966; Kramer, 1971). Participation in artistic activities has been noted to alleviate these problems and inspire positive identity formation. Much of this participation involves the concept that learning art is a social and cultural experience and is correlated with contextual scaffolding. Scaffolding, as defined by Vygotsky, encompasses the process of the individual interacting socially to test their abilities with the support of others before independence (Rogoff, 2003). Consequently, scaffolding promotes learning about the self
and of others as art creates a dialogue about the artist and the viewers’ reactions to the art. Furthermore, Vygotsky would emphasize that art can be used as a cultural tool for expression.

**Impacts of Community-Based Art Programs**

Viewing art as a cultural practice is essential to understanding how an individual’s identity can be expressed through artwork. Artistic expression indicates what is culturally, ethnically, and personally relevant and important to the individual; thus, it is important to note the significance of visual culture within the United States and indisputable reality that artwork can be a channel for an individual to express who they are. This is observed in even the most passive child who finds a voice through their artistic expression. There are numerous goals and outcomes that have been defined through research on the effectiveness of community-based art programs. The most prominent matters dealt with are self-esteem, social and emotional growth, mental health issues, intellectual gains and opportunity (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2010; Chung, Jones, Jones, Corbett, Booker, Wells, Collins, 2009; Congdon, 2004; Rapp-Paglicci, Stewart, Rowe, 2009).

**Increase of self-esteem, social and emotional growth.** These issues are repeatedly addressed in research findings, as art programs are claimed to reduce mental health disorders and increase levels of self-esteem and cooperation. (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2010; Chung, Jones, Jones, Corbett, Booker, Wells, Collins, 2009; Congdon, 2004; Rapp-Paglicci, Stewart, Rowe, 2009). For underserved minority groups, community-based art programs offer an outlet for their struggles and frustrations. *More than a body’s work*, an initiative to connect adolescents’ visual body appearance to their artwork, shows that attention is being paid to how art can enhance the investigation and construction process of identity formation of youth (Bianchi, 2008). This event introduced greater access to disabled, ethnic minority cultures and economically disadvantaged populations that previously had limited exposure to artistic outlets. It also focused on the
importance of visual representation of identity and self-esteem issues through guided projects (Bianchi, 2008). Community-based art initiatives such as *More than a body’s work*, provide an avenue to get youth involved with the community, and the broader society, in a positive light. In turn, this encourages positive development of the adolescent.

A community is built on trusting communication and the development of relationships; respectively community-based art programs acquire a similar foundation. To take part in a community-based art project, individuals must communicate. It is this dialogue between project coordinators and members and that leads to the increase of social skills (Coutts & Jokela, 2008). For this reason, improved social skills are often cited as a positive effect community-based art programs have on the youth. Performing arts, recognized as drama and music, rely heavily on language and communication between actors. Individuals must have insight into their own personal vision and have faith in cooperation as a means to achieve the collective group vision to communicate. As with any group project, a level of trust is involved. Working together cooperatively becomes a major part of the process. Community- based arts settings are a natural fit to learn how to collaborate and discover emotional competency. Emotions are a window into the soul of an individual and it is through this window relationships develop between people. These relationships are of vast importance to the development of community. Often, such organizations are targeted towards a specific population of struggling youth that can potentially benefit from the positive adult role models they would meet. Programs such as Will Power to Youth, is a training session for artists working in community-based art programs to ensure that these at-risk or adjunct youth are receiving proper advice and benefiting from the relationship forming between youth and adult (Aguilar et al., 2009). WPY program connects youth with adults to create constructive relationships and encourage social growth.
Decrease in mental health issues. It is important to note the impact art programs have on ethnic minority mental health patients (Rapp-Pagglici, 2009; Chung et al., 2009). Underserved minority groups do not have the same access to medical care, especially to mental health often resulting from the lack of knowledge about resources. In low socio-economic situations depression and isolation can increase the chances of low quality of life, added stress situations, inadequate funds, and feelings of hopelessness. Chung et al., (2009) completed a study that used a creative avenue of artistic expression to act as the catalyst for imparting knowledge within the community. The African American minority group responded to this expressive way, resulting in an increase in their self-esteem and ability to address the issue of depression. Additionally, Stickley (2010) claims that ego-identity develops from social identity. The formation of ego-identity relies in large part to self-identification with others. In a longitudinal study of art’s affect on mental health patients, Stickley (2010) found that a stronger, achieved identity resulted from a sense of belonging fostered by the Lost Artists program.

Intellectual gains, delinquency problems, and language. Experience in the arts can also increase critical thinking and problem solving skills, which potentially raises test scores. Community-based art programs are said to reduce negative behaviors such as delinquency and alcohol/drug use by encouraging healthy outlets and habits rather than reverting to the use of drugs or alcohol. Through evaluations of various art programs, Rapp-Paglietti, Ersing, and Rowe (2006) found a Youth Arts program, directed towards 14-16 year old probationers was noted to improve school attitudes, reduce in delinquency, and increase resistance to peer pressure. Additionally, they observed an Urban Smarts program based in San Antonio, Texas to produce the following outcomes: increase task completion, improve school attitudes, reduce delinquency, increase positive peer and adult relationships. (Rapp-Paglietti et al., 2006).
The current devaluation of art as an “extra” subject throughout the public school system in the United States is mirrored in the devaluation of the native languages of ESL students (for the purposes of this study, Spanish). Art and the diversity of languages can, and should, be capitalized on as an alternate form of communication that may lead to the advancement of academic abilities and achievement. Students that have trouble with written or oral language may benefit from artistic expression in way of facilitating organized thinking patterns (Hoyt, 1992). A logical assumption then, is that students of a diverse background who are learning English as a second language would greatly benefit from the opportunity of artistic expression.

**Providing Experience/Opportunities for the Latino community**

In relation to the socioeconomic status of many of the individuals impacted by community-based art programs, youth are provided with hands-on experience and opportunities that they would not otherwise be afforded. One example of a community-based initiative that provides resources to the Hispanic community is Arte Público Press. Arte Público, an independent publisher, has thwarted itself into the technological realm but offering a web-based portal that encapsulates the lost history of the Latino community (Chew, 2009). Other examples provided for Hispanic Americans to create and express aspects of their culture and community are: Mujer Artes, a group of women who collaboratively create pottery to share the stories of their ancestors; Espejos, a mentorship program for Latino/a artists; and Fulana a video collective that explores the nuances that unite the Latino community (Knight & Schwarzman, 2005; Chew, 2009).

**Art as a language of expression.** Dewey (1934) reflects that the attitude of the democratic individual, living in the North American culture, is similar to that of a creative artist. Independence and egalitarian traits are characteristics of both actors. Dewey’s commentary on aesthetics and art promotes an understanding of the individual through social contexts. He asserts that every artist leaves a cultural imprint on the art that is produced (Dewey, 1934). Additionally,
he advocates the connection between language and art. Based on Dewey’s aesthetics, Nakamura (2009) defines three objectives when educating children in the study of art: be true to child’s immediate experience and local culture; take into account the historical context and the life of the artist; and develop a type of communication through art. (Through Nakamura, an association is made between Dewey and Bronfenbrenner: the first objective aligns with the micro- and mesosystem; the second objective speaks to the exo-, macro-, and chronosystems).

What is now important to emphasize is the connection between language and art.

Language is closely tied to personal identity (Bartolome, 1994), and is viewed a means of expression that exists among all cultural groups. Furthermore, language has allowed humans to symbolically label the world around them; it is this connection between humans and the world around them that has suggested aesthetics are based on an equally symbolic relationship. Artistic expression allows the individual to translate a feeling or emotion that cannot otherwise be described in words. To address this idea, Susan Langer (1960) states:

Discursive thought gives rise to science, and a theory of knowledge restricted to its products culminates in the critique of science; but the recognition of non-discursive thought makes it just as possible to construct a theory of understanding that naturally culminates in a critique of art (p.143).

Artistic expression is broadly the same in all of the arts—there remains something that is verbally ineffable, that may only be described through various artistic media (Langer, 1960). Should the content of a piece of artwork be emotive, not only has the artist experienced and embodied the emotion before, during, and after completion of the work, but through the process of creating has allowed the audience to sympathetically feel the conveyed emotional message (Langer, 1960). Because the arts offer an alternative way for individual expression, art is less reliant on linguistic ability (Spina, 2006). This becomes important to Hispanic American
adolescents who struggle with expressing themselves in English and may bridge the gap when such a language barrier is present.

**Studying Identity Formation through Community-Based Art**

The literature consulted for this study has summarized identity development issues among the Hispanic American population, and has discussed the idea that adolescent identity development is influenced by the intersection of environmental contexts. Further, the review of literature on community-based art suggests that these programs have a positive impact on ethnic minority populations within the United States, significantly on the Hispanic/Latino population.

The individualization of Western cultures has situated the adolescent in the driver’s seat for navigating their personal identity. According to Erikson’s theory, “personal identity consolidation refers to having developed a sense of self that is internally consistent and coherent” (Schwartz et al., 2010). Failure to achieve identity can lead to psychological, emotional, social maladjustment, low self-esteem, depression, academic failure, and poor psychosocial skills (Louis & Liem, 2005). By contending with various challenges faced by Hispanic American adolescents as they are attempting to understand their identity, these issues have been continually recognized as benefits of community-based art programs. Though valuable research has been conducted on the value of these programs, more attention should be directed at understanding how a positive artistic outlet can shape identity. There is a need to evaluate how early adolescents are perceiving their experience in a community-based art setting, how this experience is preparing them as they enter the next stage of adolescent development, and how the interaction of the Microsystems (family, friends, school, community-based art program, and community) influences their ability to achieve their identity within this environmental setting.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Questions of the Study

In order to gain a more profound understanding of how visual art can affect the Latino population in the United States, this study will be addressing the following overarching question, how do Hispanic American adolescents involved in a community-based art program express their identity through visual art? Specifically, I am interested in uncovering answers to the following sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: What role do visual art projects play in guiding the development of a positive and achieved sense of ego-identity among Hispanic American youth?

Sub-question 2: How is the environment and practice of community-based art facilitating Hispanic American youth to understand their identity?

With respect to sub-question one, I sought to gain an understanding of how visual creativity is impacting the identity development of Hispanic American youth. This question encouraged reflection of both the participant and researcher, providing an avenue to explore the differences of identity development among the participants.

In regards to sub-question two, I aim to uncover and understand the interactions of the various microsystems; including, family involvement, peer impact, and staff/community influence. Since the Hispanic/Latino culture is recognized to elicit high levels of family involvement and a strong sense of community, the influence of this environmental setting offers an interesting venue for evaluating the adolescent “sense of self” in relation to their surroundings.

The purpose of the qualitative case study design for this study is based on two fundamental concepts: (1) I am interested in understanding a central phenomenon and (2) My research questions are exploratory and open-ended. According to Creswell (2007), the central
ph

enomenon is the one central concept that is studied in qualitative research. The phenomenon that this study addresses is identity formation through visual art. Moreover, the scope of my questions seeks to understand this single phenomenon through the authentic responses from semi-structured open-ended interviews with the participants. Additionally, through the use of ethnographic techniques, this case study attends to the knowledge and experiences of a particular cultural group.

According to Kroger (1992), qualitative-based research proves to be more successful when attempting to define the ego development of adolescents. The opportunity for probing during an interview session allows the researcher to gain valuable insight into where the participants’ decisions are coming from. Without this it would be easy to misidentify the status of the individual. Through Kroger’s research on ego-development she states that Marcia would choose to rely on the “clinical judgment of the rater” rather than quantitative results (p. 126). For this reason, I have decided to conduct semi-structure, open-ended interviews with the adolescents in my study. Additional methods of data collection employed in this study were observation/field notes, photos of artwork, informal conversations with youth/staff, and researcher’s diary/reflections.

Statement of Researcher Perspective

My life experiences provide a valuable understanding into how I reflect and interpret everything from the literature and research to the data analysis. Maxwell (2005) discusses the different I’s that come into play when conducting a research study. He suggests identifying the values, goals, and possible implications in order to maintain an intimate and thoughtful relationship between the researcher, the topic of study, and the participants. Through identification of the different I’s that effect my study; I have gained insight into potential
implications and validity threats to my conclusions. I have defined three different lenses through which I will be conducting and interpreting my study: educator-I, researcher-I, and artist-I.

**The educator-I.** Upon completion of my bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education, I was offered a second grade ESL (English as a Second Language) teaching position at an urban, bilingual campus in Houston, Texas. My first year of teaching provided a social and cultural environment that was vastly different from my Midwest upbringing. As I integrated myself into the Latino community at my school, I found that I had a deep interest in the Hispanic American culture. Simultaneously I noticed the lack of importance placed on arts in the school setting and curriculum. In my own classroom I integrated artistic projects on a daily basis and noticed a great response from many of the ESL students in my classroom. Consequently, bringing attention to the significance of the arts is a personal reason for conducting this research and has guided this study.

**The researcher-I.** I am a White American woman from the Northwest region of Ohio. My interest in understanding how artistic expression is a catalyst for positive identity formation stems from my experience as an educator, an artist, and now, researcher. My purpose for conducting this study is directly related to my current enrollment in a graduate school at Bowling Green State University. Here, I am enrolled in the Masters of Arts in Cross-cultural and International Education (MACIE) program. The core classes of this program combined with interactions with MACIE students and faculty have inspired me to awaken my passion and research artistic expression among the Hispanic/Latino American community.

Subsequently, I have spent a considerable amount of time researching the history of art education and art programs within the United States, more specifically, the presence of community-based art programs. I have also spent many hours researching identity and its’
various forms. Through this, I have found research that reinforces the idea that the arts are beneficial for society; that involvement can lead increased social and emotional skills, intellectual gains, self-confidence, and provide an outlet to combat delinquency problems and mental health issues (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2010; Congdon, 2004; Rapp-Paglicci, Ersing & Rowe, 2006). More specifically, artistic expression provides the Hispanic American population with a valuable outlet for socioeconomic and political struggles (Knight & Schwarzman, 2005; Chew, 2009)

**Artist-I.** In addition to being a graduate student in the MACIE program, I am currently studying art and have been a practicing artist for the past seven years. My interest in social change through empowerment of the community comes out in my volunteer work as well. Currently, I am the program coordinator for a local art and creativity program. This program has provided an opportunity for greater reflection on how youth are navigating their identity through artistic expression. As a result of art being such a deeply rooted passion of mine, I think a limitation is that I will be drawn to looking at the more positive effects of art programs. It will be crucial for me to step back and observe the situation from a non-objective, outsider perspective.

**The Case Study Approach**

In order to enhance my research, this study employs a case study approach by utilizing ethnographic techniques. Creswell (2007) defines an ethnographic case study as, “a case analysis of a person, event, activity, or process set within a cultural perspective (p. 475). What sets ethnographic studies apart from other qualitative approaches is the intent to examine *individuals* rather than *groups of people*. Though using ethnic labels can cause problems in ethnographic research, these problems were forgone because all participants chose to label themselves as Hispanic (See Appendix D). Additionally, this case study is bound by the YAC program but will delve into the individual cases of the nine adolescents involved in the study and can be defined
as a collective case study because I have explored multiple cases in an attempt to describe, compare, and provide insight into identity development through artistic expression. All nine participants are involved in the same program at Youth Art Community and were working on themed identity projects. Thusly, this study looked at nine bounded systems—specific individuals—and compares their experience as Hispanic American adolescents attending a community-based art program. According to Creswell (2007) “bounded means the “case is separated out of research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries” (p.476).

The Case

In order to protect the confidentiality of the organization and the participants, the organization is not named or described in detail. Throughout the manuscript the organization will be referred to as Youth Art Community (YAC). This non-profit, community-based art program is located in a suburb of Colorado, United States. Although this city is recognized as one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, it still remains in the shadow of the metropolitan areas surrounding it. This results in a lower economic condition in some parts of the city. The area surrounding the Youth Art Community center is made up of middle to lower class families. Participants attending the programs at YAC are largely Hispanic American but overall extremely diverse. Other ethnicities present are African American, European American, Native American and Asian American. There is also a large refugee community located nearby the organization. Some children from this community attend the program. As a result of the free services offered at YAC, a subpopulation of wealthier families drive to the program to allow their children to attend classes.

Overall, the mission of YAC is to provide artistic opportunities for youth living in the surrounding community who may not have the artistic resources available. The role of the executive director and staff were to support the students attending the programs YAC offered. A
huge component that I witnessed of this program was the collaboration between students, staff and other volunteer members. Looking at the educational issue of access and opportunity, many schools in the area have limited resources when it comes to teaching and providing artistic experiences. YAC offsets these limited resources by providing a free and open opportunity to anyone (between ages 7-17) interested in participating. This program will be referred to as Studio Time. Another program offered by YAC pays the "student workers" to make and sell their art. This program, which will be referred to as Collaboration Station, is where I obtained the participants for this study. The ethnographic makeup of the youth attending the Collaboration Station is reflective of the diverse surrounding community. The majority of the students identify as Latino/Hispanic/Mexican; other predominant ethnicities are White and Black/African American.

I spent 21 days in Colorado, arriving on July 10th, 2011 and leaving on July 30th, 2011. My day started at 9:00 a.m. and ended at 5 p.m. On some of the days I spent more time at YAC for the following: an opening exhibition, field trip, and interviewing students. The routine at YAC consisted of involvement in a variety of programs throughout the day. For purposes of this study, I will only describe the Collaboration Station in full detail because all of the study’s participants were involved in this program. Collaboration Station consisted of four classes of students. The number of students in each class averaged at 10. Each class met twice a week; so, there were two classes that attended the program on Monday and Wednesday, and two classes that attended the program on Tuesday and Thursday. Two staff members/teachers taught the classes, each teacher was in charge of two classes. Some students were so eager about the program that they showed up 30 minutes to an hour early to begin working or to socialize with their peers.
Upon my arrival as a researcher/volunteer, I shaped critical relationships with staff and the youth. I did not want to establish myself as someone in a role of authority with intention of making the interviewing process a comfortable and open experience. My goal was to gain their trust by engaging in casual conversations and offering help while they were working on their art projects. I refrained from carrying around a notebook and recording field notes on sight because I had an inclination that this would make them uncomfortable and/or change their interactions. I also took reflective notes during the interview process but did not become inundated with recording their every response. This allowed me to have a more relaxed conversation and I feel, also allowed the participant to open up to me. I gained their trust throughout my weeks at the research site and negotiated a relationship that was positive and meaningful.

Setting

As I was searching a community-based art program with an attendance of a large Hispanic American population, YAC was found by what Creswell (2007) refers to as criterion case sampling. The YAC community was then ultimately selected as a research site for this project because they were recognized for fostering the creative growth of youth and encouraging self-expression. Entry into the site took several weeks of communication via email and telephone with the program coordinator and executive director. After signing a letter of intent to ensure interest in on-site research and willingness to share results with the program, I was granted permission to begin data collection. As an act of reciprocity for access to this site, I volunteered as a summer intern for a total of 125 hours over the course of three weeks. During this time, I managed to work with each staff member and was introduced to all the programs the organization offered. Additionally, I established rapport with the participants and solidified my role as participant observer.
Participants

Participants were involved in the Collaboration Station program at the Youth Art Community and were selected using purposeful sampling approach with the underlying attempt to interview Hispanic American youth. In regards to this attempt, any interested youth was interviewed, regardless of ethnic background. In addition, this sampling method proved to be the most logical, considering time constraints and the population available. Myself and another staff member introduced the research project to the students. A group of interested students were given parent consent forms (See Appendix A) and were asked to set up an interview time upon returning the consent form; an additional letter was formulated by the staff at the Youth Art Community in order to ensure parental trust. Prior to participation in the interview process, the participant was asked to sign the adolescent assent form (See Appendix B). The information on this assent form was verbally explained to each participant; participants were allotted time to ask questions about the study and have those questions answered before the interview began. The youth participants in this study understood that a primary goal of this research project was to understand their unique experience and involvement in a community-based art program. The also understood that their participation could potentially offer other adolescents a similar opportunity in the future. At the end of the data collection process, participants were given a gift (a gift bag of sweets) as an expression of gratitude for their willingness to openly share their experiences.

The group of participants includes 3 male (see Table 1) and 6 female (see Table 1) adolescents aged 12-14. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, all names used in this manuscript are pseudonyms. Before data collection began, approval was obtained from Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). Additional approval was obtained from the staff at the Youth Art Community organization.
Table 2:

Male and Female Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Hispanic/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dario</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesli</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Hispanic/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karmen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The names of all participants have been replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Data Collection Process

Data collection began in July of 2011 and was thoroughly reviewed and analyzed until the spring of 2012. An important aspect of a case study design resides in its holistic applicability. DeVaus (2001) concludes “a full picture of the [case] in all of its complexity would only be obtained if we collected information from a wide range of the constituent elements (embedded units) of the larger unit” (p.221). In order to achieve a holistic view of the adolescent’s experience at YAC, multiple data sources were collected: semi-structured interviews, observation/field notes, photos of artwork, informal conversations with youth/staff, and researcher’s diary/reflections.
After consenting to be part of the study, participants engaged in a semi-structured, one-on-one interview. The interviews were audio recorded; participants were aware of the audio recording as the recording device was placed on a table in front of the researcher and participant. Furthermore, I did not begin audio recording until the participant communicated their readiness. Audio files of interviews were transcribed verbatim within 2 weeks of the data collection. Interviews were conducted in an agreed upon location, the gallery space, and lasted between 30-40 minutes. To add depth to the interview process, additional reflective notes describing body language and facial expressions were recorded with the transcriptions. To ensure accuracy, a colleague from the MACIE program reviewed all transcriptions. Furthermore, interviews began and ended with casual, social conversations in order to create a relaxed and comfortable environment. Although the interviews were semi-structured (See Appendix C), questions were altered as the adolescent revealed their experience with the organization.

The observation method employed by this study is referred to as Participant-as-Observer, a fieldwork method wherein the researcher interacts with the people being observed, not fully integrated into the routine but involved in a casual and impactful manner (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The goal of this strategy is to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals in their natural environment while making them aware of the investigative intent of the researcher (Lindlof & Taylor). As the sole researcher on this project, I participated in the community at YAC by interacting with the youth and staff in a creative setting. During my observations, I was actively engaged in helping the youth in their artistic endeavors and communicated informally about the topic of identity. Reflective field notes were recorded immediately after the observation to ensure an accurate account of the experience.

Additional participant-observations were taken during a field trip to an art museum. Extensive field notes were recorded throughout the experience. Additionally, subsequent
observations were taken over the course of installation/opening of an identity exhibition, in which some artwork of the participants were showcased. I will refer to all observations as overt because the assented participants and informal involved subjects were aware of my research purpose. The overt nature of my observations suggests that individuals may have changed their behavior or speech in my presence. To combat this, I attempted to record field notes privately, after youth had left, in an adjacent office.

Photos of artwork also proved to be a major part of this study, consent to take photos of artwork was received from staff members or youth. Some of the photos will be included in the results/discussion section to provide a contextual understanding of how Hispanic American adolescents are expressing themselves through art at this particular program.

Though I had received HSRB approval to interview adults (staff/faculty/parents and family members), my limited time at the organization did not allow for formally conducted interviews. Informal conversations with YAC staff occurred daily. Ongoing notes of these informal conversations were recorded in a word document. These reflections focused on the main themes that were discussed on a daily basis among staff and youth. Additionally, a researcher’s reflective diary (also written in a word document) and audio recordings were maintained throughout the three-week experience at YAC. Generally, these additional forms of data collection were used to complement the analysis of the interviews. They became an important part of the reflection process while analyzing the data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began with non-objectively reading over transcriptions to develop an authentic relationship with data, which outlined the experiences of the participants. I used an audio recorder to document my initial thoughts on the thematic development of a preliminary set of codes. Themes that immediately emerged were: opportunity/resources (free of
cost), friendships, involvement of the mother/absence of father, art as therapy, importance of the gallery space for offering recognition/accomplishment.

To delve further into the data analysis process, I used NVIVO software to develop an organization system for viewing the data transcriptions. The data was labeled (coded) and examined for overlap or redundancy. According to DeVaus (2001), multiple case studies can achieve valuable comparisons between cases. The NVIVO system helped sort comparisons between cases and codes; consequently, this facilitated the collapse of these codes into themes (See Table 3). After this process I reviewed all transcriptions and selected viable quotes that would be used in my thesis. The quotes of the participants were then organized by themes.

Table 3:

*Codes Arranged by Themes*

---

**Visual Art and Ego-Identity Development**

*Obtaining a Sense of Uniqueness*

- *Art as therapy*
- *Self-esteem*
- *Self-image*

*Accomplishment*

- *Recognition*
- *Ambition*

*Vocational Inspiration*

**The Environment and Ego-Identity Development**

*Family and Parental Involvement*

- *Peer Influence*
Validity

In this study, the main instrument was a semi-structured interview. It has been noted that “interviews allow in-depth exploration and open-ended expression of identity themes; they generally result in assignment of subjects to distinct identity statuses” (Marcia, 1980, quoted in Phinney, 1982, p. 160). Conversely, questionnaire responses allow no opportunity for probing, the open-ended approach justifies the ability for the instrument to become tailored to the specific individual being interviewed. Additionally, the interview attends to the challenge of conversing in English. Some participants struggled with expressing themselves in English. In response, I reframed the questions in order to ensure comprehension on behalf of the participant. Furthermore, triangulation of data was used to maximize the understanding of each participant.

As this case study also utilizes ethnographic methods, it is important to discuss reflexivity in ethnography. Described by Creswell (2007), reflexivity in ethnography “means that the researcher is aware of and openly discusses his or her role in a study in a way that honors and respects the situation and the people being studied” (p.645). Reflexivity was handled by establishing rapport with the participants, youth, and staff at YAC. My rapport with the students and staff allowed an easy exchange between researcher and participant allowing them to feel
comfortable and open. I also conducted the interviews in the gallery setting, a place where they were able to feel reflective and proud.

Additionally, Maxwell (2005) most importantly identifies “reactivity” as a specific threat to validity; this refers to the researcher’s overall influence on the participants in the study and on the environment at YAC. My daily presence in the classroom elicited a noticeable and positive change in some of the students. This was discussed with the staff at YAC.

**Limitations of Study**

Working with the adolescent Latino population resulted in a number of limitations for this qualitative study. One of the most significant was ethical consideration that had to be accounted for. This included the age of the participants and the scope of questions asked during the interviewing process. Even though research on identity formation has expanded its usefulness to early adolescents and adults, typically greater results have been produced with late adolescents. This is directly related to the adolescents’ maturity. According to Kroger (1992), the identity status model should only be used with late adolescents. She states, “in studies of early adolescence, a diffusion rating does not hold the implication of structural arrest that are present in late adolescence; lack of interest in commitment among early adolescence may, in fact, be a particularly appropriate mode of dealing with psychosocial issues that are not yet salient” (p.126). As I list this as a limitation, I also would like to comment of the maturity of the interviewees at the Youth Art Community and the gap in the literature for understanding the identity development among early adolescents.

As a result of the family background and economic position of the population studied, some interview questions were eliminated by request of the director; these questions had to do with country of origin and educational attainment of parents. There was a possibility that adolescents involved in the Collaboration Station were in a tenuous situation because of the legal
status of themselves or their parents and family. The request of eliminating sensitive questions speaks to the respectful and protective nature of the director and staff at YAC. Consequently, withholding information about the community family background may take away from the clarity of the situation these children are in. However, it was necessary because of the fragile state of the adolescent participants.

Furthermore, the limited length of time, three weeks, spent at the research site poses an additional limitation to this study. Though the three weeks allowed me time to develop relationships with the participants, I was only offered a glimpse into the lives of these participants and what the environment at YAC has truly provided them. And though I have had extensive exposure to working with the Hispanic American population, I will never be viewed as a member of the Hispanic community. Consequently, I can never fully understand the challenges encountered by Hispanic American youth. To combat this issue and minimize possible researcher biases, an educator and psychologist reviewed my data and agreed my interpretations of the data.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The primary focus of this research endeavor was to explore how Hispanic American adolescents express and discuss their identity and the role an artistic environment plays in shaping the formation of this identity. More specifically, the results showcase the influence of visual art and the environment on ego-identity development, which is also effected by the cultural background and age of the involved participants (See Figure 1). Qualitative analysis of interviews and other forms of data (observation, field notes, researcher’s diary, photos of artwork and informal conversations) will be viewed through the following conceptual frameworks: “Visual Art and Ego-Identity Development” and “The Environment and Ego-Identity Development.” This chapter will attend to the guiding research questions by situating the results within the context of the literature.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The results are further categorized into three reoccurring themes present in Erikson’s work: “Exploration of Competencies”, “Exploration of Commitments”, and “Fostering a
“Community” (Hoover, 2004). Further, these areas (competencies, commitments, and communities) have been used to understand one’s status of identity (achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, or diffusion) (Marcia, 1980). “Competencies” explain what one does and is capable of doing (Hoover, 2004). “Commitments” refer to conscious decisions about values, worldview, and relationships (Hoover, 2004; Marcia, 1980). “Communities” denote the groups to which one belongs; these can be based on social status, ethnicity, nationality and gender (Hoover, 2004).

Subthemes revealed during the data analysis process are further organized (See Table 5). The “Exploration of Competencies” attends to influence of visual art on the ego-identity, whereas “Exploration of Commitments” and “Fostering a Community” is analyzed in regards to the environment and ego-identity, using the framework of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory. The cultural heritage and age of this group of adolescents will be referred back to at various points in this discussion.

Table 4.

*Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploration of Competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing a Sense of Uniqueness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art as Soothing “Storm and Stress”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Self-esteem &amp; Self-image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afforded Recognition &amp; Accomplishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Inspiration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploration of Commitments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family responsibilities and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers as sources of inspiration, support, and growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compassionate Staff and Volunteers

Fostering a Community

Access Leads to Opportunity

The “Americano Dream” through Education

Developing a Sense of Affiliation

A more in-depth summary of participants; including, family background, reason(s) for involvement and a field note observation can be used as a reference point to gain a holistic view of each adolescent (See Table 6). All participants involved in this study have been enrolled in the Collaboration Station for one or two years. Four out of nine participants (Javier, Dario, Veronica and Karmen) have attended other programs offered by the Youth Art Community. Two male adolescents live with only their mother (Omar and Dario), whereas only one female adolescent does not live with either of her parents (Karmen). All other participants live with both mother and father.

By use of a demographic survey given prior to the interview, all participants identify as Hispanic American. Though data on their family’s country of origin was not questioned during the interview, due to ethical reasons, some participants referred to being Mexican (Leslie, Karmen, Javier) and one divulged that she was born in Guatemala (Veronica). A discussion on reasons for involvement will occur through the second and third theme. Furthermore, the field note observation is included to provide a snapshot of the involved adolescent. This personal insight should illuminate my perspective during the data collection process.
Table 5.

**Male Participant Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>(1) Family Background</th>
<th>(2) Reason(s) for Involvement</th>
<th>(3) Field note observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>(1) Omar lives with his mother, two younger sisters and his grandparents.</td>
<td>(2) Omar began coming to YAC because of a friend.</td>
<td>(3) Omar could always be found reading a book. He was introverted but surprised me during the interview with his willingness to share his life, his passions, and his struggles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>(1) Javier lives with his mom and his younger brother.</td>
<td>(2) Javier began attending programs at the YAC organization when his mom found a flyer that said “Free Art Class.” Javier’s brother has also attended the program.</td>
<td>(3) Javier was talkative from the beginning. He exhibited a contagious excitement about the art program and always wanted to be involved and helping in any way possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dario</td>
<td>(1) Dario lives with his mom and his younger brother.</td>
<td>(2) Dario learned about YAC by word of mouth; his cousin told his brother and his brother told him. Dario’s cousin and brother sometimes attend YAC programs.</td>
<td>(3) Dario was the most difficult to get information out of. He often answered with one-word responses and many times my questions had to be clarified or rephrased. He opened up more during field trips and as our relationship strengthened.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: The names of all participants have been replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Table 6:

*Female Participant Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>(1) Family Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>(1) Ruth lives with her mother, father, older brother, older sister (Lesli), one younger brother, and two younger twin brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Ruth began attending YAC because of a friend that used to be enrolled in the Collaboration Station and because of her sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Ruth was reserved during the interview process. She often gave short, to-the-point answers. During class time and fieldtrips, Ruth was always found working or standing next to her sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesli</td>
<td>(1) Lesli lives with her mother, father, older brother, younger sister (Ruth), one younger brother, and two younger twin brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Lesli enrolled in YAC because of a friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Lesli was eager to answer questions. She was outspoken and friendly. Again, her and Ruth were always side-by-side, except on one bus ride she was sitting next to another boy in the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelina</td>
<td>(1) Adelina lives with her mother, father, and one younger sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Adelina began coming to the programs offered by YAC because a friend suggested it. Her friend is also currently enrolled in the program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(3) Adelina is quiet and reserved. She speaks with great maturity and I witness her interacting with adults at the program more than her peers. She seems to have deep respect and appreciation for the arts, this is apparent in her diligence and hardworking nature.

Veronica

(1) Veronica lives with her mother, father, two sisters, and two brothers

(2) Veronica began coming to the YAC organization because her mother suggested it. She began going to Studio Time before entering the Collaboration Station.

(3) Though she lives a considerable walking distance from YAC, she travels with friends and sometimes alone across one of the busiest streets in the city. Veronica is talkative and very expressive.

Karmen

(1) Karmen lives with her grandmother, her sister (who is also enrolled in the program), her little brother, and sometimes her uncle.

(2) Karmen began attending the program because her grandma suggested it. When she saw it was free, she started attending daily.

(3) Karmen is shy at first, she answers, “I don’t know” to a lot of initial questions. Eventually, she warmed up and shared very intimate details about her life.

Outside of the interview she is more boisterous. She seems to exhibit a lack of confidence surrounding her practice of creating art.

Daniela

(1) Daniela lives with her mother, father, and younger brother. She has an older brother, but he lives in Mexico.

(2) Daniela began coming to YAC after reading a brochure that her and her mom found at the library.
(3) Daniela seems to exhibit the most artistic confidence among all the participants interviewed. In social settings she appears shy but during the interview, she spoke very openly. She is very self-aware and expressive, in her artwork and her speech.

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*Note: The names of all participants have been replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.*

**Visual Art and Ego-Identity Development**

In many cultures, art is viewed as a deeply engrossing process in which the artist invests a piece of himself or herself (emotionally, physically, and cognitively) in order to convey meaning to the viewer (Danto, 1988). During the interview process, nine artistic adolescents were asked to describe their experience in the Youth Art Community and to further explain how visual art projects have allowed them to convey meaning, as many of the projects were guided towards communicating about their identity. When this group of adolescents was asked about their experiences creating art at YAC, all adolescents consciously noted that art and the program has had a positive impact in their lives. Throughout this section I have attempted to answer my first research question: What role do visual art projects play in guiding the development of ego-identity among Hispanic American youth?

**Exploration of Competencies**

This section will discuss how this community-based art program (Youth Art Community) allows an exploration of the self through exposure to artistic projects and techniques, thus, broadening the individual’s skills as they attempt to accurately and visually express their identity. When students discussed visual arts common topics that emerged were: Obtaining a
sense of uniqueness; Art as soothing “storm and stress”; Development of self-esteem & self-image; Afforded accomplishment and recognition; and Vocational inspiration.

**Obtaining a sense of uniqueness.** Multiple participants remarked on how art allowed them to develop a style that sets them apart from the crowd. When questioned on about her artwork, Adelina explained, “I wanted to add some different things that most people wouldn't put on there. So just try to make it, like um.. diverse, I guess. From other people's. Yeah.” Adelina expressed her desire to distinguish herself as a unique and independent entity when discussing her current identity piece:

> It’s about our life from the past, present, and future. [The staff member] wanted us to draw what we thought was important in our lives. The first thing was when I was born, that’s important. And some things like the bookshelf and when my sisters were born and when we got our first house, our second house, and our third house. I put a little graduation hat that yes, I want to go to college and graduate. I also put a little dog with a stethoscope to show that I want to become a vet.

Ruth was working on the same project as Adelina. She explains her identification model (See Figure 2): “In the future how I want to go to school and become a pediatrician. And in the past about when I was born and where I was born in Mexico. Also, how they [my sister and my cousins] cut my hair.” This engaging identity project illustrates how art urges the adolescent to reflect upon what makes them unique by sharing intimate details of their life history and dreams for the future. To both of these girls, this project allows them to differentiate themselves from the rest of their peers by sharing what makes them unique.
Young Hispanic Americans are faced with the challenge of understanding how their cultural and ethnic identity fit into their ego-identity (Miville et al., 2000; Phinney, 2002). However, among this group of adolescents having a Latino identity makes them unique among their peers. As stated by Javier when discussing school, “I’m going to get help and stuff. Especially since I’m Mexican.” Likewise, as Lesli described aspects of her life that she included in her identification model, “It’s also important that I was born in Mexico.” Discussion of their ethnic background allows the youth to distinguish themselves from others. Results found by Miville et al., (2000) agreed with this finding. Their research found that cultural identity is significantly related to the construction of ego-identity, adolescents that exhibited a higher sense of cultural identity scored higher on the Ego Identity Status (EIS) model (Miville et al., 2000). This dialogue suggests that participants who articulated the importance of their ethnic background, such as Lesli and Javier, may have a stronger sense of ego-identity. Other participants expressed their ego-identity, by drawing a variety of cultural representations, illustrating a unique hairstyle, or choosing a certain color. Such as Karmen who discussed how she, “like[s] to draw the Mexican flag.” When asked, “What do you want to express in your artwork?” Lesli and Omar explained that they thrive on expressing their personality and family
background. Lesli stated that she feels creative when she is making art. “I express my personality and how we [my family] acts, like we don’t cuss or anything like that.” Omar disclosed that he mostly tries to express his personality in his artwork. He describes himself as creative and strange. Omar illuminated a past identity project where the adolescents combined sculpture and photography:

    It was like my own head but it was just, cement was on it, but I forgot what it was called. We put... it felt like dry cement on our faces and once we took it off it was all hard. We created the back with a balloon and mine had spikes! I had Mohawk back then, so I just used spikes, like liberty spikes.

This group of adolescents connected additional forms of artistic “competencies” by recreating them visually. Through other interviewees, a representation of their identity reflects acknowledgment of distinctive facets and interests about themselves. Some adolescents conveyed their interest in music, dance, and sports. Javier, who expressed a deep passion for music, said, “Well, my last project before this one was actually to tell people about ourselves. And I listen to a lot of music. I always have to do something with music. I used to play the baritone and now I play the trombone” (See Figure 3). When asked to elaborate he wanted to make sure that I understood that he is the music. “I try to represent myself in a music form and basically what I did was to make a sculpture and about...music clefs and a little person trying to hang on it.” Karmen explained how her ability to dance was worked into her current identity piece, “[It’s] a picture of ourselves doing something that we do all the time... Mine is a picture of me shuffling, it’s a dance. And I did it because most of my cousins dance. And usually we dance stuff a lot and it kind tells what we do. We also bachata.” Erikson (1959) remarks that obtaining a “sense of uniqueness” is a crucial phenomenon that occurs during the process of
psychosocial development. This is witnessed through the various identity projects created by the youth involved in the Collaboration Station program.

*Figure 3. Identity project created by Javier*

In the United States, more than in other societies, individuals are viewed as separate entities with special talents (Arnett, 2010). Therefore Hispanic adolescents growing up in an American context, where individuality and independence is encouraged, must gain an understanding of what makes them unique in order to arrive at an “achieved identity” (Erikson, 1959). The visual art projects at the Youth Art Community challenged the adolescents in this study to take an active role in discovering what makes them unique, this is recognizing through the planning and implementation of the art projects. The conversations with the Latino adolescents in this study demonstrate the importance of discovering one’s unique “competencies” and interests as they relate to the individual’s development.

**Art as soothing “storm and stress”**. The interviewed adolescents discussed how the artistic process allowed them to deal with the pressure and/or stress from their surrounding environment. Though some participants did not embellish much on how the arts impacted their mental health, others spoke openly about how it drastically helped them through troubled times and/or relieved
anxiety. Javier and Daniela commented on how art techniques have allowed them to relax.

Daniela stated:

“I feel relaxed [when I make art]. Sometimes I feel like there’s nothing else that’s going on. I just go into my drawing and that’s the only thing I concentrate on. Sometimes I feel like I have to finish it. Sometimes I start something and it’s just like, haunting me. Its right there and my homework is right here and I’m starring at it.”

Also, Javier commented, “It has been positive since it’s something to take my mind off of school. Because after awhile it’s just, you better do this, you better do that. At one point I couldn’t even sleep anymore. Art relaxes me. I don’t worry that much about [school] anymore.” These examples align with discourse on how involvement in community-based art programs lead to lower school anxiety and improvement of school attitudes (Chew, 2009; Rapp-Paglicci, Ersing, and Rowe, 2006). Rapp-Paglicci et al., (2006) affirm in a study of over 400 youth involved in a community-based art program, that a vast majority experienced a significant decrease in both anger and anxiety.

For other participants, the practice of creating visual art is a coping mechanism. Karmen, more than any other participant I interviewed articulates how this program has been a beneficial form of therapy. Karmen opened up during the interview process, “I like coming here. It distracts me from doing bad things.” Her mother was recently deported to Mexico and her Grandmother is now her primary caregiver. Karmen shared her story:

*It helps me when I'm sad. It really helps me, like when my mom left because they deported her to Mexico and I did cry a lot. Drawing it helped me forget about everything so I don't get mad and start screaming at everybody because I used to be like that. So that's why art helps me a lot and why I like art.*
The participation in the artistic projects allowed some participants to express through positive alternatives. According to Veronica, “I think that without art that I think that when I felt mad and couldn't express my feelings, like somehow um...with my fist or something or bad language, that I would just draw or paint or something to express my feelings that I have.”

Likewise, Ruth, the youngest participant, states that she feels happy when she is being creative. “I don’t feel frustrated, just happy. I try to express my feelings; happy, sad, mad.” When asked how she would express sadness, Ruth responded, “with a sad face, maybe clouds raining.”

Again, Veronica agreed with Ruth. She disclosed that art allows her to cope with painful situations. “Cause like sometimes I have to draw, like at school this teacher that we knew from a long time died and um, I drew a picture of a girl crying to express my feelings.”

The creative process has permitted individuals dealing with emotional problems and situations to experience healing (Wright, 2007). After the data analysis process, all six of the female participants in this study discussed artistic “competencies” as a coping mechanism, whereas the male participants were more reticent to consider art as a form of therapy.

Art provides a means to discover unconscious and conscious thoughts about oneself and the world (Naumburg, 1966; Kramer, 1971). When asked what she enjoyed drawing Adelina responded, “I really like to, I don’t know why, I really like to draw dogs so that is like, almost always present in almost everything that I do.” Later in the interview, Adelina voiced her desire to be a veterinarian. Adelina exhibited how unconscious desires can lead one to long-term commitments. When asked how she represents her culture, Lesli was hesitant to make any claims; however, artistic expression has allowed her to unconsciously represent an aspect of her cultural heritage through use of the Spanish language; including the words, “pasado, presente, futuro” in her identification model. Psychoanalytic approaches to art therapy place value in uncovering the unconscious influences on identity through art, therefore conscious and
unconscious representations in art allow an individual to create and recreate their identity, wherein art can be viewed as one of the strongest and easiest ways to access and express subconscious thoughts (Rubin, 2001).

Viewed as a form of therapy, visual art has helped individuals in this study to use creativity to construct their reality; that is, what they envision themselves and their life to be. This is exemplified through discussions with Javier and Daniela who rely on art as a form of relaxation. Additionally, art is recognized to decrease mental health issues and help an individual through a traumatic or tragic event (Stickley, 2010). This is witnessed through Karmen’s story of how art has helped her cope with the deportation of her mother. By gaining “coping competencies” these adolescents may be better equipped to deal with daily anxiety and/or external, painful influences.

**Development of self-esteem & self-image.** Visual art challenges self-esteem and self-image issues. Overall, this group of adolescents claimed a noticeable rise in self-esteem and self-image connected to involvement in the art program. Veronica, Dario, and Ruth remained neutral to these concepts, whereas Javier, Karmen, Adelina, and Daniela complexly discussed their self-esteem and self-image. Dario asserts that though art has positively impacted his life; he says that it hasn’t changed his level of confidence or impacted his self-esteem. “I’m the same,” He divulges when asked how the arts have impacted his life. Veronica and Ruth both agreed that involvement in YAC has made them more confident, but neither could define why.

**Self-esteem.** The decline in self-esteem and confidence, which occurs when the adolescent becomes aware that others are looking at and possibly judging them (Harter et al., 1997), is only faintly noticed through interviews with this group of participants. However, participant observation of the youth in creative and public settings showcased the bigger picture surrounding self-esteem, self-image and artistic practices
It was evident through observations that some adolescents experienced self-confidence when creating art, while others remained frustrated and in need of greater support while exploring artistic “competencies.” Daniela and Karmen provide of dichotomous example of this spectrum. Both Daniela and Karmen, though involved in a similar situation are having deeply different experiences due to many environmental factors; including, family life, temperament, and previously developed skills. Karmen describes that though she usually feels happy and excited while she is creating art, she also has the tendency to be hard on herself, “Sometimes I feel frustrated because I don’t get done and it don’t come out.” During participant observation, I witnessed the frustration she was experiencing. Below is an excerpt from field notes taken after observing and working with the participants in a creative setting:

Karmen is exhibiting low self-efficacy when attempting to paint her identification model. She is constantly asking for help and guidance. A staff member helps to sketch the outline of the girl. She says, “I can’t work when my partner isn’t here.” She paints only using the colors straight from the bottle and does not experiment with mixing or shading her work. She says, “I can’t.” A boy makes fun of her work for drawing it horizontally on the bench rather than vertically. She gets defensive and yells at him, “get away” and “be quiet.

The consequence of Karmen’s low self-efficacy potentially leads to the development of barometric self-esteem, defined as a fluctuating sense of self-worth (Arnett, 2010). Karmen’s disbelief in her ability as an artist causes her to view herself, at times, quite negatively. Over the three-week course of my data collection, this was witnessed on more than one occasion. On the contrary, Daniela exhibited a profoundly different and more confident and independent experience through an artistic outlet, “All the things that I draw have to have meaning in my artwork. I usually use a lot of different colors and it’s not always simple, I always add this and
that. When I do art I would have to have been thinking about it for a few days before I actually
do the artwork because if not, it really doesn’t come out right.” Again, below is an excerpt from field notes:

Staff asks Daniela to complete a solo project: a mural idea for the children’s hospital. The staff prints off ideas/photos of the last mural that YAC completed. She works diligently alone finishing an entire sketch in an hour. It’s an impressive composition; a skyline with kids playing in the foreground. She smiles when questioned about how she feels doing a solo project. “It makes me feel good to be asked to draw like this.”

From the interviews I learned that both Daniela and Karmen had limited resources and only had experience drawing before coming to YAC. Daniela commented on how she always drew alone and expressed an awareness of her low self-esteem. She shared, “So usually my self-esteem is pretty low. But that’s, I guess my mom. My mom’s self-esteem is low and I think I got it from her but here since I have these friends that are always going to be there… I feel more confident about myself... and my art.” According to Marcia (1980), sophisticated self-reflectiveness, as exhibited by Daniela, results in a higher placement on the continuum of identity development. Karmen stated, “Yeah, this art program really has helped me [become more confident] because I used to be really negative, really negative. Because, like, here they [the staff and volunteers] help you a lot with your artwork. I used to say I would never finish it and then I finished it and that's how it started to help me.” Negative experiences effect school achievement and self-esteem consequently impacting the maintenance of Hispanic ego-identity development (Cavazos-Rehg & De-Lucia-Waack, 2009; Chi Chan, Lam & Covault, 2009). This shows how continued support and positive reinforcement may result in the development of artistic “competencies” and thus, a more positive evaluation of the self.
By facing inner issues through a hands-on technique for expression, this Hispanic American population felt growth in the area of self-esteem. Javier’s confidence has grown since he has started coming to the YAC program and taught him valuable life lessons. He stated, “It has brought a new respect for me. Because before this I wouldn't do any art stuff and right now it has taught me that it's not hard to do art, you just have to be patient.” Adelina said that she loved coming to the art program, “I think I've become more confident about things. I want to do more things, like volunteering.” When asked to clarify what she meant by things, she discussed having new experiences. These new experiences led to growth and confidence in various artistic skills. Ersing (2009) also noted that offering an outlet to those involved in community-based art programs results in the self-confidence and ability to assert oneself into a group. Her work with the Positive Youth Development model suggests that the arts nurture social and emotional issues, allowing youth to overcome barriers and gain outlets for support and empowerment. (Ersing, 2009).

**Self-image.** Self-image, how one portrays their appearance, indicates the inner image of the self. *More Than a Body’s Work,* and other art programs geared towards adolescents, showcase the desire for minority and marginalized populations to realize the full potential of themselves and their identity by focusing on the expression of body image (Bianchi, 2008; Rapp-Pagglici et al., 2009; Chung et al., 2009). When the adolescents were working in the studio conversation was constantly flowing. Though much of the discussion was about the artwork at hand, other topics such as music, relationships, and anxiety about social pressure filtered in the conversations. A group of girls discussed the struggle to adhere to a specific body image. There was a definite distinction between females who identified with this struggle and those who did not. Veronica, one of the adolescents interviewed did not. Veronica explained the current film her group is working on:
It’s called Be Yourself and it’s about a girl that wants to, like, get a, to…um… make a boy attractive to her. And there’s another girl named Annabelle and she hangs a lot with him. And then Jasmine, she’s trying to get away from her. So she... every time the girl Annabelle wears clothes, she tried to wear more, like prettier... she tries to be prettier than the other girl.

This group of adolescents expresses through visual representations of self-image as well as through their outward physical appearance. When asked why he ended up cutting his hair, Omar responded, “I wanted to do something different and I haven’t done this [had short hair] in a really long time. Cause, the last two years I’ve had a Mohawk and when I finally shaved it, when I put my hair like this, it was to right here [shoulder length]. Yeah, we colored it. We bleached it blond and then when I let my hair grow out, my hair was green and then purple. So green Mohawk and purple sides.” It is apparent through our conversation that Omar not only expresses his personality in his artwork, but also through his appearance. This was echoed by Daniela, “It’s [the art program] really affected the way I act because I’m always trying to use new words and trying to dress differently because art is always different, inspiring.” Artistic and social forms of expression can promote self-acceptance and resilience, leading to an increased level of self-esteem (Diamond & Mullen, 1999).

Self-esteem, evaluation of the self, is highly valued among American culture and is connected to the idea of individualism (Arnett, 2010; Cavazos-Rehg and DeLucia-Waack, 2009). Though issues surrounding self-esteem and self-image are outside of the scope of this research, this theme emerged as particularly salient to this group of adolescents. From a cultural perspective, self-esteem is said to decline in early adolescence, with Latinos, Asian, and Native Americans noted as exhibiting a lower self-esteem than White and Black Americans (Twenge and Crocker, 2000). Participants in this study discussed a variety of self-esteem and self-image
domains. Through participant-observations and interviews, this study has found that being involved in the production of visual art contributes to the adolescents’ sense of worth and well-being. At times, the YAC program has provided individuals, such as Daniela, Omar and Javier, with confidence in creative expression. Conversely, through all participants commented on the positive influenced of the YAC program, alternative cases of apathy and frustration/doubt emerged though the discussions of Dario and Karmen.

**Afforded accomplishment & recognition.** A consistent theme throughout the interview process was the sense of accomplishment that is attached to completion of an artistic endeavor. They receive valuable recognition by having their artwork displayed in the galley attached to the studio, and in traveling shows exhibited in local schools, libraries, and other public community spaces. Karmen stated, “I used to say I would never finish it [an artistic project] and then I finished it and that's how it started to help me.” Accomplishment with continual support from three driving forces present in the microsystem of an adolescent (family, friends, and community) the adolescents involved in this program are achieving things they never before thought were possible.

Omar articulated how the support system at the Youth Art Community has paved the road to achievement, “YAC has helped me be more creative in my life and also helped me finish stuff.” Omar tells about how he feels glad and relieved to finish an art project. When asked why he feels relieved, Omar responded, “Getting it over with. I feel really proud and just, cause I never finish stuff and I was really close to finishing so I felt just really, really proud.” In the Youth Art Community, these adolescents are provided with a tangible outlet, gallery exhibitions that display their artwork, that provide them with a sense of accomplishment. Dario stated, “I feel proud of myself. It’s exciting that people can come see my work.” This sense of accomplishment allows the youth to see what they are capable of, adding to their belief in their “competencies.”
At the gallery openings, there was a high energy among the staff, youth and the viewers. Members of the community, local artists and board members were constantly flowing in and out of the gallery to witness the show. The youth that had artwork on display were excited to show their friends and family what they had been working so hard on. When Adelina finished her artwork and it was shown in the gallery she said, “I feel like I’ve accomplished something really great that other people can look at and appreciate.” Javier agreed with the consensus among this group of adolescents. He articulated how honored he felt to have his artwork on display, “I feel like I’ve got something done. And like, um, I feel like I did something really good. I feel proud [to have a piece in the gallery] because it means that I worked hard and it's being shown here because I can work hard at it.”

Following accomplishment is a feeling of recognition and acknowledgement for the patience and persistence that went into finishing the artistic endeavor. It is evident that the artistic process is inspiring this group of adolescents. What Javier most tries to express in his artwork is persistence, “it may seem easy but it’s not so easy. Once you try it you have to get involved more. It takes a lot of time and patience.” The youth involved in this study were provided recognition in the broader community through traveling exhibitions. The staff at the YAC program take it upon themselves to find venues where the youth artwork can be displayed. During my time volunteering at YAC, we took a field trip to view murals, created by YAC youth, on display at a public venue. Here the youth artists discussed their work in front of a small group. Two participants in this study were involved artists. Below is an excerpt from my field notes that day:

Javier becomes serious when he’s asked to speak. He is proud. He stands tall. There is a noticeable shift in his demeanor. He’s only 14? He acts older and wiser, more confident. He explains the meaning of the mural to the group of adults and students.
Changes in self-esteem can begin with the completion of an artistic endeavor. Visual art affords accomplishment and recognition. Community-based art programs are no longer found on the periphery of the arts field, rather they are the forerunners that provide a foundation for this newly unfolding understanding of community and respectful, cultural responsibility. In response to the changing diversity, the mission of these community institutions is to recognize the nuanced American landscape (Chew, 2009). Erikson (1959) claims, “what I call their [adolescents] accruing ego identity gains real strength only from wholehearted and consistent recognition of real accomplishment, that is, achievement that has meaning in their culture” (p.95). The sense of accomplishment and gratitude they have gained in the program has helped this group of Hispanic American adolescents positively explore their ego-identity by overcoming their “storms and stress” in adolescence. The gallery space and traveling exhibitions provide the youth in this study with an opportunity to be recognized. This afforded sense of accomplishment adds to the participants believe in their artistic competencies. When asked how it feels to see their artwork on display, the participants in this study overwhelming responded with positive feedback.

**Vocational Inspiration.** Areas viewed important to American society, occupation, education, religious & political domains, act to secure an individual’s ego-identity. Failure to achieve identity can lead to psychological, emotional, social maladjustment, low self-esteem, depression, academic failure, and poor psychosocial skills (Louis & Liem, 2005). Storr (1972) asserts that the motivation to be creative in the workforce is the need to assert one’s identity. An example is portrayed in the identity-mapping project, which encouraged youth to make decisions about how their future would look. This project has expanded Lesli’s view of the arts. She brings forth the idea that art can translate into other potential career choices, “It’s taught me a lot of things like how to see art differently, not how they teach us in school, how to be inside the lines
but outside of the lines too, makes it more creative.” Lesli shares that she wants to be a pastry chef, “To decorate the cakes would be arts.” Heath et al., (1998) concluded a similar finding stating that young people involved in the art develop organizational skills, talents, and social commitments, which lead to future aspirations.

Daniela discusses this passion for art but feels she has to choose another career in front of her dream to be an interior designer. Daniela said, “I’ve always wanted to be a uh, what’s it called... uh... I don’t know the word for it. It’s like a room remodeler or whatever. I think that’s what I will do as maybe a hobby or something. I haven’t thought of what I really want to do in front of that but that’s something I wanna do.” Daniela also comments on her mother’s dream for her future, “My mom wants me to be a doctor but it’s like really difficult. Because she’s always wanted to be one.” However, when asked where she sees herself in the future, Daniela responded, “Well, maybe I’ll be working at a restaurant but I’ll probably be studying to get a really good job. I guess.” Veronica, though she commented on how people have encouraged her to be artist, eagerly discussed her alternative plans for the future, “I want to be a vet. I’ll be the first person to help a goldfish! Or maybe I’ll get famous from acting and singing.” None of the participants directly stated that they wanted to be an artist when they grew up. However, though Dario didn’t experiment with art much before coming to YAC, he has found that he really enjoys working with clay. Dario expressed, “I like clay because you get to transform it into any shape.” Dario’s exposure to this medium has opened up a new career/life path. Additionally, Daniela expressed an interest in attending an art-focused high school. She said:

For high school there’s this [City] School of Arts, I think. It’s kind of far away but uh, they teach a lot of stuff about that and just like, different classes for art and that’s kind of what I wanted. I don’t want to be learning one thing after another, just facts because I really don’t memorize that. And it’s like, a class, a high school that’s dedicated to art.
Finally, through other participants we can pick up on the noticeable influence of the family on the adolescent’s future career ambition. Ruth discussed how her dream of becoming a pediatrician was inspired by a sibling, “I want to be a pediatrician. My baby brother, he goes to the hospital a lot and I like to work with kids and stuff.” On the other hand, Omar stated that his Grandfather was in the army, “Well, I have two dreams. One is to join the army. And then the other one is to be like, not a professional, but BMX.” The creative process involved in making visual art encourages youth to think about their future career goals.

Though early adolescents may not be ready to make life-long commitments, it remains crucial to begin discussing issues surrounding identity, in particular vocational inspiration, during this time. Sullivan and McCarthy (2007) contend, that action correlates with sorting out one’s identity. They illuminate two case studies conducted with artists and provide an understanding of how the act of making art is essentially an act of creating your identity. The vocational direction discussed by each of the participants in this case study provides insight into what they believe they are capable of and where their commitments lie.

The Environment and Ego-Identity Development

The formation of the ego-identity is a dynamic process; identity is constantly gained, lost, and then recaptured as the individual evolves in relation to his or her environment (Erikson, 1959). This theme helps to answer the latter of my two sub-research questions: How is the environment and practice of community-based art facilitating Hispanic American youth to understand their identity? Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) framework recognizes that cultural beliefs and values are the foundation for an individual’s development. For modern adolescents growing up in the United States, identity development is influenced by industrialization and the increase of completion in the global market (Arnett, 2010). This results in a complex process of “finding oneself” amongst the vast range of choices for exploration. Moreover, the Hispanic American
population is attempting to reconcile the values of their ethnic group with the dominant beliefs and ideologies held by American culture.

**Exploration of Commitments**

The method of defining Marcia’s identity statuses is contingent on the exploration of commitments. In the previous section, I have outlined how exploration of “competencies” leads the adolescent into deciding where their commitments will reside. Aguilar et al., (2009) states, that the youth particularly targeted for community-based art have a need to develop healthy interpersonal relationships. For this reason, the interviews were focused on three relationship structures (between family, peers and staff/volunteers at the YAC program) and to what level they support or discourage the participant’s involvement in the program. The findings of this research illuminate the importance of the interaction between relationships.

*Family responsibilities and support.* From birth parents and the primary caregiver(s) are the most influential role models to an individual. As Erikson(1959) concludes children are, essentially, a manifestation of their parents. The relationship between the primary caregiver and the adolescent is a defining characteristic of their personal development. Karmen illustrated (See Figure 4) how the identity of her family was tied into her own representation of herself, “*It’s* a picture of ourselves doing something that we do all the time and that your family usually does, if it’s a part of your family.” Family relationships provide a structure for Hispanic American youth when attempting to understand their identity.
When discussing the collectivist culture of Hispanic Americans, familism is a significant determinant in the navigation of the ego-identity of youth within this subculture in the United States and is found to lessen mental health problems, strengthening the ability to form a positive ego-identity among this subgroup (Schwartz et al., 2010). As Kuhlberg et al., (2010) remarks on a study on suicide attempts among Latina adolescents; familism encouraged family relationships, which has lead to a corresponding decrease in suicidal attempts by this population. Dialogue about family commitments emerged in two of the interviews. Lesli said, “*We don't really get to do a lot of stuff because we have like a big family and we have to be helping around the house.*” Lesli and Ruth communicated that this is the only “activity” they are involved in outside of school. Omar also has commitments that concern the well-being of his family, such as taking care of his grandmother and his sisters. However, he expresses that his mom places value in the YAC program “*If I need to, [my mom] lets me stay after and sometimes she shows up to shows but I know that sometimes she can't because she's taking care of my grandma.*” These comments reflect the collectivist worldview held among the Latino population. In turn, these findings confirm the importance of responsibility to the family system. Lesli, Ruth and Omar exemplify how involvement in the Collaboration Station is a thoughtful and conscious decision.
Apparent through conversations with this group of adolescents is also a lack of involvement from the father figure in their life. Three students are missing a father figure altogether, Omar, Dario, and Karmen. However, Karmen has auxiliary support from a close Uncle. Other participants (Adelina, Veronica, Ruth and Lesli) comment on how their father is not an active supporter of their involvement in the YAC program. Veronica discusses parental support saying that mostly her mom is involved and comes to show openings because her dad works a lot. Dario, who never mentions a father figure, said, “[My mom] only expects getting good grades in school and a good job.” He also says that she tries to make it to show openings when she has the time. Research on parental involvement among the Hispanic community aligns with the findings of this case study; illustrating that Hispanic/Latina mothers tend to be more involved in the lives of their children than fathers (Azmitia & Brown, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999).

To add to the discussion about family involvement Karmen stated, “My grandma is supportive. Cause my Uncle he doesn't come as much. Like, he don't live with us but he does, he can't come as much cause he lives with his girlfriend. So he comes and visits us and he came today.” Her main support comes from her Grandma. “Well, my grandma she always makes sure that before I come here that I eat, that I don’t come hungry. And she always tells me to hurry up and to not come here late, like work. So she wakes me up ready to take a shower, she don’t want me to come late...” And finally, Daniela shared,

My dad he doesn’t really care. He doesn’t really know what I do here so he doesn’t look into it. But my mom, yeah, she’s really supportive. She’s always asking me questions after I get out of class and yeah. She’s always trying to get me into new classes so I can learn new stuff. Usually only my mom comes to my shows, not really my dad.

A healthy parent-child relationship is characterized as being open, respectful and supportive (Mouttapa et al., 2009). This is reinforced by what Javier adds to the discussion. He felt that his
family is supportive of his involvement in the art program. He states, “They sometimes come to the show cause most of the time my dad’s working and my mom’s busy but we have so much time for them to look over here [at the gallery].” Heath et al., (1998) stated that parents and family play an important role in involvement. When parents and/or family participate in activities or are actively engaged in the Youth Art Community, the adolescent may perceive value in the role of the art program. The findings suggest that family support does not solely come from mother and father for this group of adolescents, but that it is important to have a family member who takes interest in the YAC program.

**Peers as sources of inspiration, support, and growth.** Relationships among similar aged peers become of particular importance to the early adolescent; relationships are growing beyond the family and entering into the realm outside the family center (Arnett, 2010). This group of adolescents widely discussed how they made a lot of friends since they’ve been attending YAC programs, opportunities for collaboration and how peers have been a source of inspiration. Yet another interesting dialogue lies in the insight gained through the interview process about how the individual participants view the self and others. Daniela stated:

“I make more friends here and I feel like people like me…but here since, I have these friends that are always going to be there... well, not always going to be there but they’re there to help me out. I feel more confident about myself and since people, and my art, and they think I’m a good artist then I feel better about myself in that way because I’m stronger in that place.”

Omar’s friends would say that he is fun to hang around with, supportive and smart. He states, “Smart, like I’m smart but I just don’t show it. I know everything that the schools are teaching but I just don’t put myself out there.” Omar continued, “I used to be a little shy and the first couple months here I started to come out of my shell and now I'm completely out of my shell.”
After being asked to explain how he would be different without the program Omar stated, “Probably more still in my shell, more quiet and wouldn't have as many friends as I have now.” Related to self-esteem and self-image, peer acceptance is most strongly related to maintenance of a stable sense of well-being (Harter, 2003). Omar’s discussion on peer acceptance highlights a noticeable change that he has felt since attending the YAC program.

Analysis of the interactions in the mesosystem gives insight as to whether the adolescent has advanced knowledge about the new setting before they enter (Rogoff, 2003). Four out of the nine participants interviewed stated that their reason for becoming involved in the YAC program was because a friend suggested it. Omar discussed how he initially became involved in programs at the Youth Art Community, “My friend said that it was, he’d been working here for three years and so like, he told me about it and how much fun he’s had here. And so I wanted to try and I just walked in and I asked ‘em questions and yeah.” Furthermore, Adelina commented that the reason she began coming to the program was because of a friend. Her friend is also currently enrolled in the program, “She thought I would like it, so I thought I should try it.” Here, the communication between peers about the Youth Art Community inspired them to begin attending the program. The participation of other adolescents in the program results from family influence, emphasizing the overlap between settings.

When discussing collaboration with peers Omar said, “Well, depends on who I'm with. Last year, it was me and a couple friends and somebody I did not really like, so I just went along with what everybody else did.” He continued to comment on how group dynamics shape his involvement and excitement in his most recent artistic endeavor “Everybody is working together. Right now we're doing, like, I'm a scientist and I create this outfit that actually puts me inside of the computer. And then I get trapped in the computer.” As he elaborated further on the film project he states, “it gets me to be more than one person. And I like life, but I just don’t like
being in one situation a whole bunch. I like learning about other people.” The occasion for social exchange has exposed Omar the chance to learn about taking on the perspective of others, including his peers. Collaboration between peers should not only be recognized as a great opportunity for socialization, but also a time for growth of artistic production. Social skills are cited as a positive effect that community-based art programs have on the youth (Coutts & Jokela, 2008). An excerpt from field note observation in the studio:

Daniela and [her partner] have an idea for the top of the identity bench and begin painting yellow flowers. The flowers are sloppy and they decide to paint the entire top yellow. If Daniela is not present, her partner complains, does not complete any work.

I also witnessed peer influence in the studio setting. An excerpt from observational field notes: “Unsure of who was the first to represent their identity as an eyeball figure, but many students were employing a similar technique. This style then became the main theme for a mural idea.” This illustrates a salient point made by Cox (1993). She discusses peer influence on drawing and suggests that children are influenced more by the visual representations of similar aged peers than by adults. As students worked in partners they attempted to make their artwork cohesive, styles merged to combine two separate identity images into one.

As Javier works in the studio he readily helps his peers. An excerpt taken from participant-observation during studio time: “Javier; painting/glazing cultural mask. He helps others get the colors they need before starting on his own work.” Furthermore, Javier explained, “Most of my friends, some of my friends say I’m fun and interactive... and some say that I’m pretty respectful.” Like Javier, Karmen described herself as respectful and supportive because “if I finish something and my friends are not finished and I know they’re not finished, I just support them and help them finish.” Conversations about social and emotional gains emerged throughout the interview process. Javier, Karmen, Daniela and Omar notably related the
formation of positive friendships to the increase in socialization and respect among their peers at the YAC program.

By pairing like-minded adolescents, this project encouraged the youth to understand the self and others by discovering commonalities and differences amongst themselves. Karmen said, “My and my cousin, we do like the same colors. I wanted my bench purple and she wanted her bench purple so I like to stick with someone that would like to do a color that I would like to do.” Daniela also commented on the significance behind the color choice of her identity bench (See Figure 5), “Oh, and the color red because we’re very bold; my partner and me.” It may also be worth noting that the pairs were either all male or all female.

Figure 5. Identity bench created by Daniela

According to the stages of cognitive development as discussed by Piaget, this group of adolescents has just entered into the formal operations stage (Arnett, 2010). Two of the participants exhibit an inability to discuss other’s views of themselves. When asked to describe herself, Adelina quickly stated that she was smart, artistic, quiet, and focused. However, when asked about how her friends would describe her she didn’t know what to say. A similar reaction was found in Dario’s interview. In response to describe himself, Dario said “Happy, funny, hard worker” but when asked how his friends would describe him responded, “I don’t know.” After
probing he eventually said that they would say the same kinds of things. This aligns with research on early adolescents that they have not yet begun to feel a separation between their self-view and other-view (Arnett, 2010). Harter et al., (1997) claims, that early adolescents may not posses the cognitive ability to differentiate between contending self-identities. Perhaps Adelina and Dario’s ability to view themselves as a separate entity is not fully developed.

**Compassionate staff and volunteers.** The staff at the YAC organization prides themselves on the level of mutual respect between themselves and the youth. They hold the adolescents involved in the Collaboration Station to high standards and position themselves as positive role models. Through observations, I often saw staff and volunteers communicating with youth on a very intimate level, especially when a concern was present. The relationship between adults and the youth at YAC was reminiscent of a mentoring relationship where social and emotional support, as well as motivation for intellectual growth was accentuated. Javier shared, “They’re [staff] really open and really helpful. The advice that [the staff] gives us are to help us and our art evolve a bit more. My experience has been pretty great. I’ve met a lot of nice and friendly people and some of my artwork has grown. I’m still working on growing things that I’m not so good at.” Likewise, Adelina conveyed, “well, there are lots of really nice people around so you can feel comfortable…there’s lots of really good people.” The response from these two participants illustrates the importance of relationships between the youth and adults. A similar finding was determined by Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2001) who studied the influence of teachers had on the lives of migrant students. They claimed that an encouraging teacher with a perceptive cultural awareness and high expectations of academic performance had a life-changing influence in a migrant student’s life (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

As the adolescent interacts with individuals within their neighborhood and the YAC community, they gain a valuable understanding about expectations that are supposed to fulfill,
such as being on time to work and calling the staff directly, if they know they’re going to be absent or late. Additionally, the environment at YAC introduces influential volunteers and visiting artists to the impressionable adolescents. Upon meeting these role models, the adolescent becomes more aware of possible adult roles they may be interested in filling. Another community-based art program that provides a similar relationship foundation between youth and adult is the WPY program. This program connects youth with adults to create constructive relationships and encourage social growth (Aguilar et al., 2009).

Furthermore, there is the added component of freedom to express without judgment from the staff or volunteers at the YAC program. Daniela stated, “Also, [the art program] keeps me off of always being serious and always having to do work and just to relax and have fun. It’s like a hobby but it’s also the other part of my life. Like one side is serious and the other side is not serious.” Daniela’s explanation of the art program as “fun” and “not serious,” illustrates how this space allows adolescents to relax and feel comfortable experimenting with their individuality. Lesli stated “It’s taught me a lot of things like how to see art differently, not how they teach us in school, how to be inside the lines but outside of the lines too, makes it more creative.” Javier said, “I feel the freedom to express myself a little bit more. When I got into my art class at my old school we had to do what the teacher said, how the teacher said it. Here we got freedom to do it a bit how we want.” Rapp-Paglicci et al., (2006) recognized that an increase in positive peer and adult relationships produced outcomes such as, an increase in task completion, improvement of school attitudes and reduction in delinquency.

The Youth Art Community proves to be a safe place for ideas to flow, which correlates with the relationships between the youth and staff. Ego-identity also has a preconscious quality, in that it is often expresses itself through unconscious behaviors (Erikson, 1959). Many times the individual is unaware of various aspects of their identity, only when they are asked to bring
awareness to themselves are they able to reflect on what the true manifestation of their identity. Projects geared toward a deeper understanding of identity can help the adolescent evolve. The staff member guiding the identity-mapping project requested the involved adolescents to make commitments to where they see themselves in the future. Adelina discussed her identity map, *I put a little graduation hat that yes, I want to go to college and graduate. I also put a little dog with a stethoscope to show that I want to become a vet.*” Adelina’s level of self-awareness illustrates an acuity that she may not have grasped without the guidance of the staff and the process of completing this identity project. Staff members guide the youth away from surface level and challenge them to questions themselves, to truly understand who they are. Diversi and Mecham (2005) also noted the strong correlation between empowerment through an after-school program and a positive adult-child relationship.

Artistic expression leads to social interaction creates synergy within and between human beings (Diamond & Mullen, 1999). In general, the YAC organization guides adolescent development by way artistic experiences to encourage personal reflection and cross-cultural respect. Additionally, the staff at YAC cultivates responsibility and leadership skills among the involved youth. Staff and volunteer involvement creates the environment at YAC. This group of adolescents felt a level to trust and support between themselves and the staff.

**Interaction of Relationships in the Mesosystem.** By developing an understanding of who they are and what they are capable of, adolescents will make commitments to particular competencies, occupations and relationships (Erikson, 1968; Hoover, 2004). Hoover (2004) states that we know ourselves through others. Personal growth does not occur in isolation, commitments to relationships, whether they are reciprocated or not, are crucial to the psychosocial development of the individual (Hoover, 2004). The most influential relationships in a young adolescent’s life are between their immediate family and friends. This art program offers
a forum for discussion about topics related to identity and encourages a dedicated collaboration between family, friends, and staff. Using Bronfenbrenner’s framework (1971), this section has delved into three relationships that reside in the adolescent’s microsystem: their immediate family, their peers, and the staff and volunteers at the program and discuss how they interact with one another, which is referred to as the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1971).

The most important concept emerging from the data was the interaction of relationships within the adolescent’s immediate environment. How these relationships complement and conflict with one another governs the actions of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1971). Examples of conflicting patterns would be a lack of parental support, or non-existent communication between staff and individuals in the home environment of the adolescent. This is witnessed among a few of the participants who divulged that their fathers were not present or supportive of their involvement in the YAC program.

However, other family members, peers and staff have provided the adolescents involved in this study with the tertiary support to accomplish many artistic endeavors. Examples of complementary patterns emerged when observing the adolescents, parents and staff interact while attending the gallery opening. Yet another example came through participant observations in the Collaboration Station, watching peers encourage one another to complete their artwork. This also emerged through one-on-one interviews as the participants vocalized their interest for helping the artistic endeavors of their peers.

**Fostering a Community**

The subthemes that emerged from conversations among the Hispanic American youth involved in this program were: access leads to opportunity, “The Americano Dream” through education, and developing a sense of affiliation. These subthemes will be framed using the outer
three systems that play a part in human development: the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem.

**Access Leads to Opportunity.** Three out of the nine participants interviewed stated that their initial reasons for becoming involved in the YAC program was directly related to the free cost. Javier stated, “My mom found a flyer that said free art classes.” Omar said, “I'm just trying to get experience that I can now before it will cost money to so.” Echoing Javier and Omar, Karmen stated, “I started coming here, well I found out about this cause when my grandma passed by here. And then I saw it was free and I told my grandma if I could come when I was like, 12 or 11 and she said yeah…” It can thus be inferred that many of the adolescents could not afford to be involved. Rinderle and Montoya (2008) found social class to be the most salient influence of the Hispanic population in their study examining Hispanic/Latino identity labels. This suggests that by alleviating the monetary cost, the Youth Art Community has provided a valuable opportunity for this population. Bronfenbrenner (1971) defines the exosystem as indirect influences, such as the workplace and education of parent or primary caregiver, and resources available in the community. Demographic challenges faced by the Hispanic American participants introduce another dimension that the adolescent must sort through and understand in order to develop a positive sense of self. Cultural art programs are noted to spread resources for youth in low-income districts that may lack economic, social and cultural opportunities (Ersing, 2009).

Many of the employed participants were attracted to this program not only because of its open and holistic nature and free cost, but an added bonus became the opportunity to earn money. Karmen exuded, “I feel like I did a great job because it's in the gallery. And sometimes it's for sale! Last time in the gallery they bought my apron and a cup that I made. [The money]
goes to YAC but we get paid for coming and helping.” Not only are these adolescents gaining valuable experience, they are financially rewarded for their participation.

Yet another attractive reason was the idea of learning new skills that could lead to a better future. Art programs lead to the obtainment of capital and have a great impact in areas where capital is limited (Rapp-Pagglici et al., 2006). This theme of opportunity came up during Lesli’s interview, she said, “We don't really get to do a lot of stuff because we have like a big family and we have to be helping around the house.” For many participants, this is the only activity that they are experiencing outside of school. Only two out of the nine participants (Karmen and Javier) stated that they were involved the community in other ways. Karmen stated that she played soccer and picked up trash; whereas Javier said he used to be involved in track, but wants to try golf or lacrosse next year.

Six adolescents discussed how this program exposed them to learning new things. Dario enjoys the Collaboration Station because of the bigger projects. He states, “I just think it’s fun. Just learning.” Javier shared, “I think that it’s helped me become like, a better person, of like who I am because it helps me learn things that I’ve never learned before.” Ruth said, “I've been learning a lot and it's really fun. It taught me lots of things too... like how to mix colors and work with colors.” This excitement about being exposed to new artistic mediums was present throughout my field notes:

Adelina, working alone in the studio. Ahead of most of the people in class. Does not say much to the others. She is experimenting with a new medium (alcohol ink on transparency). A staff member holds her paper up to the class and encourages her to keep working. The staff member gives her tips for using the medium and explains her vision for how the artwork should look. Adelina listens intently and continues to experiment
with the medium. She adds too much ink to the sun portion and works on lightening the area to create a more dramatic effect. She comments on how “this is fun.”

As Karmen shared her story I learned that she began attending the Studio Time program and then in 6th grade interviewed for the Collaboration Station. She says she prefers the Collaboration Station because “it’s kinda funner, like you get to do bigger stuff. In the studio you do small projects but it’s still fun.” When asked to clarify why the bigger projects are more meaningful Karmen stated that you have to “put more effort into it.” Adelina agreed, “I like our projects because they’re challenging. They give us new stuff to do that I’ve never done before.”

Other community-based initiatives mirror the Youth Art Community, such as Arte Público Press, Mujer artes, and Fulana. These programs are noted to provide resources for Hispanic community of all ages (Knight & Schwarzman, 2005; Chew, 2009). The findings of this research align with the idea that resources are the key source to support adolescents as they transition into adulthood (Ersing, 2009). This group of adolescents vocalized throughout the interview process that they are aware of how the YAC organization has provided them with skills to build their future upon as well as monetary benefits for their involvement.

“The Americano Dream” through education. The adolescents in this study view higher education as a necessary next step and most all of their parents expect them to take this step. Karmen affirmed, “Well, I do want to go to college. And I want to help my family just like they’re helping me.” The very act of continuing education is viewed as reciprocity among this group of adolescents. Daniela shared her insight:

*They both [both parents] want me to go to college. To university. And um, well they want me to do good in school. Sometimes I’m kind of lazy or something I don’t want to do my homework, but I do really good in school because when I was little they always taught me. They showed me how to do things. And then after that I taught myself. They weren’t*
really there to teach me anymore. But they’re always there to yell at me when I get a bad grade or... like, what’s it called, they always encourage me to do better things than usual. They also encourage me to um, what’s it’s called, follow my dreams.

Veronica added to the discourse on the “Americano dream”, “They [my parents] want me to go to college. Yeah, but lots of people say that I should be an artist when I grow up, a singer or an actor, this or that... sport person. I have lots of talents.” She also expressed their desire for her to continue her education, which she responded, “I will be a vet or maybe I’ll get famous.” Dario expressed that after high school he would like to go to college, but had not idea what he would go to school for. When asked about his future, Dario remained silent. He had no idea about what he would like to do, other than, “only a good job.” When asked what that good job looked like, he again had no response. Upon further probing, I asked if he saw a future in art. He responded, “Mmm.. yeah, in clay, making pottery.” Dario has attempted to fit a newly found “competency” in art into his future aspirations.

Rinderle and Montoya (2008) found that identity labels are related to earned income and language, suggesting that future research on this population should pay special attention to these factors and how they influence identity formation within the Hispanic culture. An example emerged through Javier’s interview. Javier spoke about the high expectations his parents have for him to do well in school. He shares that he is switching schools after this summer and that he will have to put in a lot of extra effort, in part due to his language skills, which he views as connected to his ethnicity:

It’s basically the same, but since it’s farther away from my actual district and stuff I’ll, will have to work harder. Because they have the same program as my middle school. It was an IB, learner profile, and um, I’m going to get help and stuff. Especially since I’m Mexican and I don’t... I actually have trouble speaking English sometimes.
Fraga et al., (2010) identified limited English proficiency as a significant barrier experienced by the Latino community. Though this concept did not directly emerge in any other interviews, Javier’s insight has highlighted the importance of looking further into how economic and language factors are influencing the navigation of identity.

It is evident that when this group of Hispanic American adolescents discusses their family, education is a closely related subject. They spoke about how their parents expected them to do well in school and continue their education. The topic of education is particularly salient among this population because it emerged even when questions were not directly inquiring about education. All the participants expressed the ambition to continue after graduating high school into higher education. Dario, Javier, Veronica and Daniela express that their parents expect them to attend college; whereas Karmen views proceeding into higher education as a way to help her family in the future. A central dream among the Latino community is financial security (Fraga, et al., 2010), which in the United States, directly correlates with educational attainment. Fraga et al., refers to the intrinsic desire among Latino parents for a quality education for their children as the “Americano dream.”

**Developing a sense of affiliation.** The connection between the gallery and a growing sense of affiliation is apparent in the speech of all the participants. Showing their work in the gallery not only strengthens their own self-esteem but it encourages them to feel like a part of the Youth Art Community. When exploring culture and ethnicity, most all of the participants shied away from expressing aspects through their artwork. Javier stated, “I don’t try to do that that much because I haven’t been in Mexico in a long time so it’s been changing a lot.” When asked to clarify what he meant by ‘it’ Javier stated: “Um, my culture.” Louis and Liem (2005), report that an ethnic minority individual must integrate both ego and ethnic identity in order to orient a positive self-concept towards the larger society. Though this study did not find the importance of
developing a strong sense of ethnic identification, data has shown that the participants in this study desire a sense of affiliation with the multi-cultural group at the Youth Art Community.

Adolescents ascribing to a bicultural identity alternate between the ethnic group of origin and the majority culture, identifying with one or the other when they feel it is necessary (Phinney, 1997; Arnett, 2010). Through the interview and observation process it is apparent that Veronica is comfortable representing her feelings and her passions, she is rather uncomfortable with representing aspects of her cultural background. She states, “I don’t remember because I was born in Guatemala but I was mostly raised over here.” Though she has not yet begun exploring or expressing her ethnic background, I did observe her in conversations with her peers and other staff members about being Guatemalan. From my field notes, she was “shy, and resisted attention” when the topic of ethnicity was brought up. This aversion to exploration of the cultural background is also witnessed through conversations with Omar, who reveals that he is missing a piece of his cultural heritage. When discussing culture and ethnicity with Omar he shared:

“I don’t express my [culture] all the time, but I rarely do. I made a sculpture of where the face is. I left a whole right there [the middle of the face] and I put my family’s picture in it...I’m still trying to find out my background. I would like to meet my dad but I can’t until I’m 16. I don’t know where my father is, it’s nothing bad, it’s just... she [my mother] doesn’t trust his family.”

The lack of understanding among some participants leads to identity confusion, as they may not know where to place their ethnic allegiance. However, as Omar exhibited, he is attempting to represent the concept of family through his artwork. On the other hand, Veronica has a greater affinity to identify as an American because she knows very little about her Guatemalan background.
Some participants did feel that they represented their culture through their artwork, though none represented American culture. When asked how she represents parts of her Hispanic culture, Karmen responded, “I like to draw the Mexican flag and where my grandma used to live, her house and her dog. I draw those things.” Lesli explains her current identity project (See Figure 6):

_We are making our identification in art form. Like saying what happened in out past, our present, and our future; how we see ourselves. I draw how I see myself in the future and in the present, what my life is like. Like how I go to YAC and to school. It’s also important that I was born in Mexico._

*Figure 6. Identity map created by Lesli*

To the viewer of Lesli’s work, an obvious way that she is representing her Hispanic culture through her art is by use of the Spanish language. She includes the words, “pasado, presente, futuro.” Also representing her Mexican heritage, Daniela stated, “Usually sometimes since I’m Mexican I draw a lot of things that have to do with my culture and my race. And just sometimes, when I’m bored I draw things that will make me more relaxed or get my mind off of everything else, not really with a purpose I guess.” Kramer (2002) urged for a deeper reflection and higher quality from her patients. Believing in the healing ability of the art process and
creativity, she emphasized, “the way of working (on art) is largely determined by the cultural environment in which we function” (Kramer, 2002, p. 219). The style and approach that minority cultures possess when creating a work of art reflects their current economic and social status, as well as an ability to translate cultural beliefs and values, whether they are aware of it or not.

Dario also stated that he didn’t try to express his own cultural background in his artwork, but that art “changes how I think about other people and their culture.” To encourage thinking and discussion about cultural identity, some of the participants in this study are creating masks from a culture different than their own. Javier is now on his second mask, “The first one was a traditional African tribe and the second one is Hawaiian.” The adolescents express excitement and intrigue to have the opportunity to explore a new culture. When discussing his current identity piece, a cultural mask project (See Figure 7), Dario states, “I picked Africa because it has more detail and color and shape.” Ersing (2009) noted that youth involved in community-based art programs become more committed as they begin to find their place within the local community and understand their cultural, ethnic and racial identity through their art.

In addition to allowing the adolescents explore commitments by offering a forum for discussion and collaboration, the Youth Art Community organization offers a space where this community can flourish. A community is built on trusting communication and the development of relationships; respectively community-based art programs acquire a similar foundation. Overall, the Hispanic/Latino adolescents in this study rely more on the multi-cultural community present at YAC than the affiliation with his or her ethnic group. The potential identity developing from social identity is evident; a strong sense of identity is developed in a culture where one feels this sense of belonging. Hispanic Americans may also express an “oppositional culture” wherein they resist and refrain from participating in dominant cultural practices, especially within a school setting (McHatton et al., 2007). This “oppositional culture” was not found among
this group of adolescents; however, some of the participants discussed a lack of Latino cultural representation in their artwork. Furthermore, Hispanic American adolescents are perceived to achieve their identity and feel more comfortable with life in America after coming to terms with language, social, racial and ethical barriers (McHatton et al., 2007). An example of this was witnessed among the participants who felt disconnected to their cultural background, such as Javier and Veronica grew up in the United States and Omar, who is unaware of his family background.

![Image of an identity mask](image)

*Figure 7. Identity mask created by Dario*

**Discussion on Hispanic Ego-Identity Status Development**

This section will be used to discuss how an adolescent may ascribe to one particular pattern over others. By no means is the categorization of these participants a permanent label. As identity is in constant flux, it would not be beneficial to categorize the participants in this study using the identity status model because their status will change as various experiences occur within their environment. However, through recognition of patterns of the adolescents the identity statuses can be used as a guideline for understanding the current crises the individual is going through.
According to Marcia (1978, 2004) the first style, *diffused status*, is when individuals are not willing to commit to a particular identity meaning, often have no desire to make such commitments, and are easily swayed by social trends and ideologies. Hispanic Americans that fall into this status are most likely battling with past historical and political influences that have segregated or marginalized previous generations, thus placing the adolescent in an unwarrented and combative position. *Diffused* Hispanic American adolescents often struggle with cultural or ethnic and racial identity (Miville et al., 2000). In regards to the art produced by this population, a *diffused* individual may be reluctant to create art with the intention of expressing an aspect of their identity. Patterns categorized under the *diffused status* reflect an absence of exploration and commitment. Examples are witnessed through Dario’ interview; he remarked that his self-esteem was not influenced by the art program, he expressed little interest in discussing future ambition, and he did not choose to discuss or represent his cultural background.

*Foreclosed status* refers to individuals who define themselves by someone who is influential in their lives. This influential role is usually the parents, or someone else who is in the individual’s immediate microsystem. From a White American perspective *foreclosure* can be viewed as negative because the adolescent is not completely autonomous in their decision-making. However, *foreclosure* in the case many Hispanic American adolescents may represent a positive ego-identity formation (Kulhberg et al., 2010; Saez et al., 2009; Miville et al., 2000; Watson & Protinsky, 1988). This is directly related to the collectivist culture of Hispanics as well as family influences. An example of this is Daniela, who commented on her mother’s desire for her to be a doctor. She stated, “*My mom wants me to be a doctor but it’s like really difficult. Because she’s always wanted to be one.*” However, when asked where she sees herself in the future, Daniela responded, “*Well, maybe I’ll be working at a restaurant but I’ll probably be studying to get a really good job. I guess.*” The new generation of Hispanic American youth will
grapple with integrating the Hispanic value of familism and the American value of independent freedom, as they decipher between upholding their parents wishes and following their own individual passion.

Individuals in the moratorium status are actively soul searching but have not yet committed to certain beliefs or idea about relationships, ethnicity, occupation, and other salient topics. According the study conducted by Yip et al., (2006), “moratorium is the modal ethnic identity status for adolescents” (p.1513) Thus, the greatest proportion of adolescents remain in the process of exploring without making commitment into their emerging adult years (Arnett, 2010). Similarly, the decision to define oneself is noted as a struggle for many Hispanic American adolescents when it comes to labeling their identity as Hispanic, Latino/a, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Chicano (Rinderle & Montoya, 2006). The language surrounding Hispanic cultural identification is increasingly complex, which weighs on the identity of the adolescent population. An example of this is found through conversations with Omar. He stated, “I’m still trying to find out my background.”

Lastly, individuals who have both actively engaged in finding their path in life and are following this path are said to be in the achieved status of identity development (Hoover, 2004; Marcia, 1978). Taken from a Western perspective, autonomy and self-esteem are considered to be prominent factors leading to the achievement of one’s identity. Javier stated, “It has brought a new respect for me. Because before this I wouldn’t do any art stuff and right now it has taught me that it’s not hard to do art, you just have to be patient.” In regards to ethnic minorities who may be a disadvantage politically, economically, or socially and who are influenced by a number of unique factors, achieved status is a multifarious process. Positive ethnic, racial, and/or cultural identity formation leads to a sense of belonging felt between the individual and a
group. This identification and intergroup relationships signify commitment which leads to positive ego-identity formation.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This research contributes to the existing literature on adolescent ego-identity development among the Hispanic American population. By using the ecological framework provided by Bronfenbrenner (1979), I have illustrated the effect one’s sociocultural environment has on the ego-identity development of the individual. In this study, the environmental setting of the community-based art program is recognized to provide a safe and fertile foundation for development by combining psychological and societal benefits. The individual desire for personal freedom of expression is maintained while the opportunity for group affiliation can be achieved through involvement in the Youth Art Community.

Further, subthemes that emerged during the data analysis process were categorized using Erikson’s three dimensions of ego-identity: competencies, commitments and communities. These dimensions glean important information about the development of the ego-identity in relation to society. Findings show that identity-themed projects allow Hispanic American youth to gain “competence” in using artistic mediums to express uniqueness, find what they are capable of, and heal themselves. Additionally, these projects allow Hispanic American youth to develop a higher self-esteem because of the recognition they are provided upon completion of their work. The study also illuminated the importance of relationship “commitments” and the effect of the larger society and the YAC “community” has on the navigation of their ego-identity. This conclusion section discusses how the findings of this study relate to the lacuna in the literature on how community-based art programs impact the ego-identity development of the Hispanic American population. This discussion is followed by implications that should be taken into consideration for further study in this field.


**Visual Art and Ego-Identity Development**

This research has concluded that the community-based art program and identity guided projects completed by young artists provided opportunity to reflect and build their identity. It is assumed that a visually artistic outlet impacts early adolescent identity development, most generally in positive ways. The results from this study illustrate how art becomes a language of expression among Hispanic American adolescents. By facing inner issues and providing hands-on techniques for expression, ethnic minority populations are afforded an alternative outlet to navigate and understand their identity. Moreover, with the decrease of art instructional time in the formal educational setting, particularly in high-minority schools (Ersing, 2009), the community-based art initiative, which honors cultural legacies and future possibilities, offsets the missing presence of art within the scholastic environment (Chew, 2009).

The adolescents interviewed at the Youth Art Community are only beginning to uncover and discuss various components of their identity. The adolescents, though not all equally affected, are participating in artistic endeavors that allow them to release their identity by discovering “competencies.” The program and the current identity projects set up a foundation for the youth to build their identity upon, allowing them to enjoy the process of creating art as a vehicle for self-expression and investigation. Further, bringing attention to this ethnic minority group by allowing the Latino youth to share their stories, has led to the conclusion that involvement of the adolescents in the community-based art program appeared to play an important role in their lives. “Competencies” outline a dimension that defines one’s identity (Hoover, 2004). Recognition of “Competency” in the arts involves both cognitive and practical skills; the individual must rationally decide how to convey meaning through a physical artistic medium (Wright, 2007). This creative process allows the individual to explore what makes them unique and what they are capable of. In the case of the adolescents who participated in this study,
uniqueness was a vital component of their expressions of identity. The creative process has also offered many of the participants a coping mechanism for factors outside of their control, such as anxiety from school, death and loss.

As more skills are obtained and discovered, the youth have discussed an increased level of confidence in their abilities inside the studio and beyond. These “competencies” are further solidified after the adolescent is afforded recognition for their patience and effort. The attached gallery and encouragement for traveling shows provides a tangible space to exhibit their accomplishments. Through conversations with the adolescents, it is apparent that developing a belief in their capabilities leads commitments when discussing future aspirations. Additionally, as a result of participation in a collaborative environment that not only encouraged, but also expected meaningful contributions and respect from all members, the experience of developing identity maps, models and representations gave the adolescents confidence when describing their identities and discussing their projects during interviews.

**The Environment and Ego-Identity Development**

The adolescents who participated in this study are experiencing the interaction between the complex layers of their environment and discussing particular “commitments” in regards to relationships, occupations, and broader societal beliefs and ideologies. The guided identity projects led the adolescents to reflexively engage in the navigation of their identity. These adolescents were able to explore their likes and dislikes, pair up with like-minded people, and share ideas and dreams. They were able to create themselves through their art and understand themselves through their commitments. Hispanic American early adolescents, participation in a community-based art program has provided a safe and fertile environment as they begin exploring their identity. Through the process of creating an identification model, they are able to
make two powerful statements, “This is who I am” and equally important, “This is how I am viewed by my peers, my family, and the world around me.”

The sociocultural context of the adolescent has been a vital component to understanding the ego-identity development of these individuals. Adolescents, who perceive unconditional support from family, peers, or staff at the Youth Art Community, showcase a deeper commitment to the program. Factors beyond the control of the adolescent, such as the socioeconomic status of their family or the influence of cultural constructs (ie: familism and the “Americano Dream”) effect the development of the individual in distinguishable ways. Adolescents recognize the Youth Art Community as an opportunity that they may not have otherwise had. Additionally, the theme of continued education emerged even when it was not directly questioned. The importance the Latino community placed on continued education manifests in the aspirations of the Latino youth. Finally, the presence of the program offers a space where the adolescents can develop a sense of affiliation and community, a crucial marker to forming an identity. The community provided by YAC cuts cultural boundaries, creating a new generation of Hispanic American artists who can find worth by upholding Latino belief in a strong community, while recognizing the American value of individual freedom of expression.

**Implications and Limitations for Future Research**

These conclusions offer valuable insight into what community-based art programs can offer the Hispanic American youth population within the United States. Though there is a growing body of research on this topic more emphasis should be placed on early adolescents. Early adolescence is a crucial time to begin thinking and discussing issues surrounding ego-identity development (Arnett, 2010). The individual is dealing with eight psychosocial phenomena at any given point in their life (Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 1980). Thus, identity should
be studied not only during late adolescence, when it is viewed as a pivotal crisis at that stage of development, but at any age.

Ego-identity among populations other than White American adolescents is a largely understudied topic (Schwartz et al., 2006). When the ego-identity is studied among ethnic minorities in the United States, there remains a large discussion about cultural or ethnic identity and how it is critical to the ego-identity development of the individual (Berry, 1980, Côté, 1996, Phinney, 1992). Ego-identity needs to be widely understood as a psychosocial phenomenon that cuts racial and cultural barriers. Furthermore, the findings of this study may not be equally relevant to all Hispanic subgroups that exist in the United States; the majority of the sample, who conveyed their country of origin, consisted of Mexican American youth.

More emphasis should be focused towards the sociocultural impacts the environment has on ego-identity development. Using a framework such as Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory has provided valuable insight into the wide number of factors that influence an individual’s psychosocial development. The adolescent is constantly adapting to various challenges and benefits of their surroundings. A limitation of this study lies in the lack of direct inquiry on the educational and economic background of the participant’s family. The findings are generalized based on information given by participants and informal conversations with staff and volunteers at the Youth Art Community.

The research findings offer significant contributions to the growing practice of community-based art in the United States, particularly for Hispanic American youth. It is important to note, however, that access to an artistic outlet is not synonymous with an achieved identity. As we continue to study identity development in a global world, we learn that there is never a “one-size fits all” recipe for an understanding of identity (Berry, 1980, Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1992). Furthermore, as identity is recognized as a complex and dynamic construction,
we come to understand that one’s identity is constantly shifting and evolving. Educators and volunteers in the field of community-based art organizations that aim to work with Hispanic Americans, or any youth population for that matter, must let go of the assumption that there is one direct path to develop a “well-adjusted” youth. Looking towards future analysis of the relationship of identity and the arts, research should examine longitudinal impacts of participation in the artistic involvement. This study was limited to a three-week investigation of the program and involved youth. More time in the YAC setting would lead to a deeper comprehensive overview of how the youth are impacted by the program.

Additionally, the role that the media and arts play on cultures and individuals is as complex as identity itself. Various studies showcase the desire for minority and marginalized populations to realize the full potential of themselves and their identity through artistic expression (Bianchi, 2008; Rapp-Pagglici, 2009; Chung et al., 2009). More emphasis should be placed on how youth are interpreting messages through media and incorporating them into their global self-esteem and self-image. The idea of the body as a medium for art was outside of the scope of this research; however, the topic of self-image emerged consistently throughout the interviews and informally in the studio setting, especially among the female population.

Exploring the influence of community-based visual art projects and the environmental factors that play a role in personal development contributes to the understanding of ego-identity among Hispanic American adolescents. Overall, this study has contributed to the existing body of literature on ego-identity development among the Hispanic American population by illuminating an understanding of how to foster expression of ego-identity through visual art in a community-based art organization.
REFERENCES


Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 116, 37-49.


Portes, A. (2002). The American Prospect: Immigration's aftermath; many children of immigrant parents are not living out the American dream. Until better jobs and schools materialize, they are at risk of becoming the next underclass. Special Double Issue: The Politics of Family, 35.


APPENDIX A: Parent or Legal Guardian Consent Form

Title of the project: **IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH VISUAL ART AMONG HISPANIC AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS**

Person responsible: Researcher, Keelie Webb (Graduate student, Bowling Green State University, Cross-Cultural and International Education, Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy Studies, College of Education and Human Development, 419-706-2142, kwebb@bgsu.edu)

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine how Hispanic and African American adolescents (individuals who are between 13-19 years old) involved in the program express themselves through visual art.

Procedures: The organization has given me permission to ask adolescents to participate in the study. Your child can be a participant in a research study. The study consists of one observation, sorting statements/opinions, and thirty-minute interviews with your child. The researcher may audio record the interview and photograph your child’s art works with you and your child’s permission. Your child may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. All interviews will take place in a mutually agreed upon public location.

Risks of Participation: There are not physical or mental health risks to participating in this study. Some participants however may feel uneasy about sharing their information with someone else. The following are steps taken to minimize any discomforts:

- The research activities are conducted at location and environment that the participant feels safe comfortable in.
- If your child wishes to stop your involvement in the research, s/he may do so at anytime.
- Helpful information about support services can be provided if needed.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you or your child for participation in this study. By engaging in the study, your child will contribute to research concerning identity formation in adolescents and community-based art programs. This research may in turn be used to improve educational policy and funding for community-based art programs, as well as spread awareness about how visual art affects at-risk youth.

Confidentiality: The information provided in the study will not be linked to the participant’s name. All transcripts of audio tapes made during the study will:

- Use a number as opposed to a name for classification purposes.
- Use a pseudonym (a false name) to protect participant’s identity.
- Alter any additional information that might reveal participant’s identity.

The audio tapes and transcripts from observations and interviews will be stored in a secure location under lock and key. Access to the information will be limited to the researcher, Keelie
Webb. Recordings of interviews will be kept until the completion of the study, and then will be destroyed.

**Contacts:** Please feel free to contact the researcher or her advisor if you have any questions or concerns about this research project.

- Keelie Webb, 419-706-2142, kwebb@bgsu.edu
- Dr. Hyeyoung Bang (Assistant Professor, Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy, College of Education and Human Development, 419-372-4251, hbang@bgsu.edu)
- You may also contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu, if any problems or concerns arise during the course of this study.

**Participant Rights:** Participation in the current research activity is voluntary. You and your child are free to decline to participate and may stop or withdraw from the activity at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation.

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**Agreement**

- Your signature below indicates that you have been informed that all information your child provides is strictly confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this study.
- In addition, your signature indicates that you have been informed that your child is free to discontinue participation during data collection at any time.
- You have been given a copy of this agreement.

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| Researcher | Date |
**Forma de consentimiento de los padres o tutores legales**

**Titul del Proyecto:** FORMACION DE LA IDENTIDAD A TRAVES DEL ARTE VISUAL ENTRE LOS ADOLESCENTES HISPANOS Y AFROAMERICANOS

**Persona responsable:** Investigador, Keelie Webb (estudiante de posgrado, Bowling Green State University, Cross-Cultural and International Education, Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy Studies, College of Education and Human Development, 419-706-2142, kwebb@bgsu.edu)

**Propósito:** El propósito de este estudio es para examinar cuantos adolescentes hispanos y afroamericanos (personas entre los edades de 13-19 años) participan en este programa se expresan a través del arte.

**Procedimientos:** La organización me ha dado permiso para preguntar a los adolescentes a participar en el estudio. Su hijo/a puede ser un participante en el estudio. El estudio consiste en una observación, clasificación de las declaraciones/opiniones, y una entrevista de treinta minutos con su hijo/a. El investigador puede grabar audio de la entrevista y sacar fotos del arte de su hijo/a con el permiso de usted y su hijo/a. Su hijo/a puede ser invitado a participar en una entrevista de seguimiento. Todas las intrevistas se llevarán a cabo en un acuerdo sobre la plaza pública.

**Riesgos de la participacion:** No hay ningún riesgo física o mental para participar en este estudio. Sin embargo, algunos participantes pueden sentirse incómodos con el intercambio de información con otra persona. Siga estos pasos para minimizar cualquier molestia:

- Las actividades del estudio estan en un lugar y ambiente que el participante se sienta seguro y cómodo.
- Si su hijo/a no quiere continuar con el estudio podemos detener en cualquier momento.
- Información útil sobre servicios de apoyo se puede proporcionar si es necesario.

**Beneficios:** No hay beneficios directamente para usted o su hijo/a al participar en este estudio. Por estar en este estudio, su hijo/a estan contribuyendo en el investigacion respecto la formación de identidad en los adolescentes de los programas basados en la comunidad de arte. Este estudio puede internar la utilizan para mejorar la politica de educacion y financiación para programas basados en la comunidad de arte y así como difundir el conocimiento acerca de cómo el arte visual afecta a los jóvenes en riesgo.

**Confidencialidad:** La información proporcionada en el estudio no será el enlace con el nombre de los participantes. Todos de los transcripciones de la cinta de audio durante el estudio van a:

- Usar un **numero** en vez de un nombre para efectos de clasificación.
- Usar un **nombre falso** para proteger la identidad del participante.
• Modifica cualquier información adicional que pudiera revelar la identidad de los participantes.
Los cintas del audio y transcripciones de las observaciones y las entrevistas serán almacenados en un lugar seguro. Acceso a la información se limitará a la investigadora, Keelie Webb. Grabaciones de las entrevistas serán aprovechados hasta la finalización del estudio y luego será destruido.

Contactos: Por favor no dude en ponerse en contacto con la investigadora o asesor si usted tiene cualquier pregunta o preocupación acerca de este estudio.

• Keelie Webb, 419-706-2142, kwebb@bgsu.edu
• Dr. Hyeyoung Bang (Assistant Professor, Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy, College of Education and Human Development, 419-372-4251, hbang@bgsu.edu)
• Usted puede contactar the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu, si usted tiene problemas o preguntas durante el estudio.

Derechos de los participantes: La participación en la actividad de estudio es voluntario. Usted y su hijo/a son libres de negarse a participar y pueden retirarse de la actividad en cualquier momento. No hay penalidad para el retiro de su participación.

Contrato

• Su firma indica que usted ha sido informado de que toda la información de su hijo/a proporciona es estrictamente confidencial que solo se utilizará con el propósito de este estudio.
• Además, su firma indica que usted ha sido informado de que su hijo/a es libre de cancelar de participar en la colección de datos en cualquier momento.
• Se le ha dado una copia de este contrato.

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APPENDIX B: Adolescent Assent Form

Title of the project: IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH VISUAL ART AMONG HISPANIC AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

*Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Below is a brief outline of information you need to know about the study and the observation/interview process.*

**Purpose of study:** You are invited to be in a research study on the impact of community-based art programs. As part of my work for my master’s thesis in the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Policy at Bowling Green State University, I am conducting a research study of Hispanic and African American adolescents. The purpose of this study is to learn about how adolescents learn about themselves through visual art.

**Description of study:** Your initial participation will involve being interviewed, sharing some of your artwork, sorting statement-cards, and being observed while working on an art project. I may ask you to participate in a follow-up interview. Both the interview and sorting cards will each last approximately thirty minutes. I would also like to audio record the interviews, photograph your art works, and observation with your permission. All interviews will take place in a mutually agreed upon public location.

**Confidentiality:** The information you provide in this interview will not be linked to your name. All transcripts of audio tapes made during the interview will:

- Use a number as opposed to a name for classification purposes.
- Use a pseudonym (a false name) to protect your identity.
- Alter any additional information that might reveal your identity.

The audio tapes and transcripts from observations and interviews will be stored in a secure location under lock and key. Access to the information will be limited to the researcher, Keelie Webb. Recordings of interviews will be kept until the completion of the study, and then will be destroyed.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary and will not impact your grades/class standing or relationship with the program in any way. You may withdraw from the study at anytime. Whether or not you choose to participate will not influence your future relations with Keelie Webb, Bowling Green State University, or the cooperating agencies. Participation or withdrawal will not affect any rights to which you are entitled.

**Risks or discomforts:** There are not physical or mental health risks to participating in this study. Some participants however may feel uneasy about sharing their information with someone else. The following are steps taken to minimize any discomforts:

- The research activities are held at location and environment that you feel is safe and that you are comfortable in.
- If you wish to stop your involvement in the research, you may do so at anytime.
If you wish, helpful information about where you can get support services can be provided.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you by participating in this study. By engaging in the study, you will be contributing to research concerning identity formation in adolescents and community-based art programs. This research may in turn be used to improve educational policy and funding for community-based art programs, as well as spread awareness about how visual art program could help youth.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns you can contact Keelie Webb at 419-706-2142, kwebb@bgsu.edu You may also contact:

- The Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu, if any problems or concerns arise during the course of this study.
- Dr. Hyeyoung Bang (Assistant Professor, College of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy, 419-372-4251, hbang@bgsu.edu)

Agreement

- Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study.
- Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can withdraw your assent to participate in the study.
- You have been told that by signing this agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights
- Permission has been obtained from a parent or guardian for your participation in this study.
- You have been given a copy of this agreement.

Signature of the interviewee: _______________________________ Date: __________

Printed name of the interviewee: ________________________________

Researcher: _______________________________ Date: __________
APPENDIX C: Interview Questions

Name: ___________________________________________ Date: ____________________________

Age: ___________________________ Gender: ___________________________

Demographic Questions:
1. What three words best describe you?
2. What is your ethnicity? (Religious background, nationality?)
3. What grade are you in?
4. What is the highest level of education completed by your parents?
5. How long have you been coming to the Downtown Aurora Visual Art program?

Narrative Questions:
1. Tell me about your experience in the community-based art program.
   a. How did you get involved? Why did you get involved?
   b. What kinds of artistic activities do you like or dislike? Why?
2. Are there other ways you are involved in your community?
3. Tell me about your family.
   a. Are they supportive of your involvement in this program?
   b. What is your relationship with your parents/family?
   c. What are your parents'/guardians expectations of you?
4. How do you see yourself?
   a. What do you believe other people think of you?
5. Tell me about you and your future plan.
a. What do you want to be? Is this something that you want to do or that your parents/guardians want you to do?
b. Where do you see yourself in ten years?

6. Tell me about your art.
   a. Could you show me one of your works?
   b. Tell me about this piece. What do you want to express through this piece?
   c. How do you feel while creating art? How do you feel after you are finished?

7. What do you want to express in your artwork?
   a. What aspects of yourself are represented in your work? Why?
   b. What aspects of your culture, ethnicity, nationality or religious/political beliefs are present within your work?

8. Overall, how have the arts impacted your life?
   a. Has participation in this program impacted how you feel about yourself? How so?
   b. Has it influenced your ambition and future motivation?
June 2, 2011

TO: Keelie Webb
   Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Policy Studies /
   Education Building

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
   HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H11T214GE7

TITLE: Identity Formation Through Visual Art Among Hispanic and
   African American Adolescents

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving
human subjects. As of June 2, 2011, your project has been granted final
approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval
expires on April 6, 2012. You may proceed with subject recruitment and
data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached.
Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s)
bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version
and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining
consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to
use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project
activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this
office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their
implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 25-30 participants. If you want to enroll
additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of
assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/ Modifications:

c: Dr. Hyeyoung Bang

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7