

Ethnic identity development of Serbian adolescents: role of ethnic majority/minority status, age and gender

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Serbia is a multicultural society comprising ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse groups. Although adolescence is recognized as a critical stage for ethnic identity development, limited research has been conducted in our country among this age group. Therefore, our study aimed to examine ethnic identity development in Serbian adolescents and its relation to ethnic majority/minority status, age and gender. The sample consisted of 1846 high-school students ($M_{age}=16.3$, female 52.6%) from ethnic majority (Serbian) or ethnic minority groups (Bosniak, Hungarian, Roma etc.). Socio-demographic data were collected using specifically designed questions, while ethnic identity status was assessed with the revised Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R). K-Means cluster analysis revealed the expected four clusters: achievement (22.5%), moratorium (35.8%), foreclosure (16.2%) and diffusion (25.5%). Compared to minorities, ethnic majority participants had a less developed sense of ethnic identity, with a higher likelihood of diffused status ($\chi^2 = 8.85, p < .05$). In terms of age, the correlation with MEIM-R total score was not significant ($r = 0.024, p = .310$) and no differences were found regarding identity statuses ($F = .43, p = .73$). However, male participants had a more developed sense of ethnic identity ($t = 3.34, p < .01$), more frequently reaching an achieved ethnic identity status ($\chi^2 = 13.73, p < .01$). Our findings confirm that ethnic identity is more developed in members of ethnic minorities, possibly reflecting the salience of this identity aspect. The role of age and gender will be discussed in light of the observed cross-cultural differences.

Keywords: ethnic identity, ethnicity, minorities, adolescence