

Ethnic self-identification of second-generation youth of Mexican origin in California

Autoidentificaciones étnicas de jóvenes de segunda generación de origen mexicano en California

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the ethnic self-identifications of second-generation young people of Mexican origin. To do so, three elements are taken from the American socio-political context that is related to their self-identifications: the identity model of the American, the social imaginary of the Mexican and the census categories of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and race. The biographical approach, specifically Daniel Bertaux's ethno-sociological perspective through life stories, has been the technique used. The research was carried out during 2016, in Southern California where 51 young people were interviewed. The accounts show that some of the institutional categories end up being part of the self-identifications of the informants, or the informants attribute to themselves many of the phenotypical and/or racial characteristics that are attributed to those categories. The limitation is that it is not possible to include other stories.

Keywords: self-identification, second generation, life stories, migrant.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es explorar las autoidentificaciones étnicas de los jóvenes de segunda generación de origen mexicano. Para ello se toman tres elementos del contexto sociopolítico estadounidense que se encuentra en relación con sus autoidentificaciones, estas son: el propio modelo identitario estadounidense, el imaginario social sobre el mexicano y las categorías censales sobre la etnicidad hispana/latina y la raza. El enfoque biográfico, concretamente la perspectiva etnosociológica de Daniel Bertaux a través de los relatos de vida, ha sido la técnica empleada. La investigación se llevó a cabo durante 2016, en el sur de California donde se entrevistó a 51 jóvenes. Los relatos constatan que algunas de las categorías institucionales llevan a que sean parte de las autoidentificaciones de los informantes, o estos se adjudican

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muchas de las características fenotípicas y/o raciales que se les atribuyen a dichas categorías. Como limitación se encuentra la imposibilidad de incluir otros relatos.

Palabras clave: autoidentificaciones, segunda generación, relatos de vida, migrantes.

Introduction

The objective of this article is to explore ethnic self-identification among second-generation young people of Mexican origin. For this, three elements of the American sociopolitical context that are related to self-identification are taken into account: the American identity model itself, the social imaginary concerning Mexicans and the census categories regarding Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and race. The stories confirm that some of institutional categories are taken as part of self-identification among the informants and that the informants identify with many of the phenotypic and/or racial characteristics attributed to these categories.

This work will begin with a brief approach to the treatment of the second generation from the theory of assimilation and its variants, as well as the criticisms that were made later, highlighting the important contribution of segmented assimilation theory. We will continue with a theoretical-methodological approach, the biographical approach, from the ethnosociological perspective of Daniel Bertaux (1999, 2005), using the life story as the technique. Next, the general characteristics of the fieldwork and the sample with which we worked will be presented.

The second part of this work contains a theoretical discussion on the concept of ethnic identification and its relationship with the emergence of the modern nation-state. To put the particular problem into context, the imaginary regarding Mexicans in the United States (us), the census categorization of different generations, the delimitation of Mexicans as an ethnic group and the question about race will be addressed. All this will be accompanied by excerpts from some of the informants that will help to exemplify the theoretical issues.

Second Generation and Assimilation Theory

The first time I heard it was when my cousins (in Mexico) told me I was *pocha* (a term used to describe those who have left Mexico), and I didn't know what that was. Later, I asked, and they told me it was when a fruit spoils. However, you can use it as something nice, with something that you identify with. But, well, the word *Chicano*, from what I've learned, I no longer identify with that... or just being Mexican or American [USA]. Right now, I don't know what I identify with [...] from a class I took this summer, I also learned that there are a lot of Hispanics or Latinos (Alicia, interview, June 2, 2016).

The leading country in research on international migration has been the US; hence, the first works on the subject of the second generation, or of children of immigrants, emerged in this country in the 1930s, under assimilation theory. Among the literature mentioning the beginning of the second generation is *The Marginal Man*, by E. V. Stonequist (1937), which takes as a reference the children of immigrants immersed in the conflict arising from living between two cultures and is where the term “second generation” appears for the first time. In 1938, M. L. Hansen’s *The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant* focuses on the generational process as a means of progressive assimilation. It is not until 1943 when the monograph *Italian or American?* by I. L. Child is published; this monograph refers to a specific group (children of Italian immigrants) and in whom the question of identity begins to come to the foreground, a new identity model different from the country of origin of the parents and different from that of the place of arrival (García Borrego, 2008). Later, in 1945, Warner and Srole’s Theory of Assimilation appeared in *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (García Borrego, 2008).

However, starting in the 1950s, the situation changed, social mobility began to become difficult, or, simply, its outlook was grim for certain groups, such as African Americans (Aparicio, 2007). From then on, the first criticisms of the assimilationist model emerged. Gordon’s work *Assimilation in American Life* (1964) provides a more complex model based on acculturation, structural assimilation, and the shaping of a common identity, while Gans (1979) compared the differences between the two assimilation models, *Linear Assimilation* and *Irregular Assimilation* (García Borrego, 2008). Contemporary authors (Alba & Nee, 1997, 2003; Perlman & Waldinger, 1997) criticize the classical assimilationist model and include variations but continue falling back to the assimilation model. It is important to highlight the proposal of Portes and Zhou (1993), with the *Theory of Segmented Assimilation*, which is based on a model represented by a typology that differentiates between 1) dissonant acculturation, 2) consonant acculturation and 3) selective acculturation.

The Theory of Segmented Assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2010) is based on an open incorporation process, which includes government policies regarding the group of origin, the attitudes of the receiving society and co-ethnic community resources, where the receiving context plays an important role. These are the aspects that lead Portes and Rumbaut (2010) to declare the situation of Mexican immigrants and their children as the most worrisome. They refer to “the Mexican case” as the second generation of Mexican origin, whose characteristics “make them unique”. Mexicans constitute the largest and oldest group of foreigners; hence, their second generation is also large, and there even is a third generation. This is a consequence of the geographical contiguity between the two countries that has allowed a continuous flow of labor. The relative ease of these movements explains the lower human capital compared to other groups of immigrants from even poorer countries. This has made it so that their number, their poverty and their visibility have become targets of policies directed, specifically, at hindering their entry into the country and to repatriate those who were already there; this has led to a context of hostility that has influenced job insecurity and negative modes of incorporation. Therefore, the consequences that can be expected under these circumstances are not encouraging, as demonstrated by the results of their research.

Biographical Focus: Life Stories

The biographical approach, specifically life stories from Daniel Bertaux's (2005) ethnosociological perspective, has been the framework from which the analysis and interpretation of the data have been carried out. Bertaux (1999) starts by differentiating the terms *life story* and *life history*. He takes as reference the proposal by Norman K. Denzin (1970), who, based on this distinction, understands each of these terms as follows: *life story* refers to "the story of a life as told by the person who has lived it", and *life history* consists of "case studies about a person", "including not only their own life story but also other types of documents", such as "medical history, court records", "the testimonies of relatives, etc." (Bertaux, 1999, p. 3). Denzin is in favor of the biographical approach because in this way, "the adoption of a new technique" is assumed, in addition to "the gradual construction of a new sociological process" (Bertaux, 1999, p. 3), "of a new approach", where "observation and reflection" are reconciled (Bertaux, 1999, p. 4).

From an ethnosociological perspective, life stories are understood as one of the forms of expression of human experience (Bertaux, 2005). The "interlocutor is considered as an informant" (Bertaux, 1999, p. 10), and the narrative is the narration provided by a person of his or her own life experience. It is an autobiography because the person narrates his or her life. Thus, the story takes place through the dialog that occurs between the subject and the researcher; therefore, it is produced at the request of the researcher, who will have some particular knowledge interests about this experience, which is limited to one or several areas of the whole life experience.

The central objective of a life story is to reflect the diachronic structure of the life experience through the narration of the lived experience. In this way, the interview focused on the very course of life with the purpose of knowing how the life experience of the young person has developed, from childhood, which encompasses the beginning of youth and its evolution during this stage, until today. Therefore, although the ethnosociological perspective is inspired by the ethnographic tradition, its objectives are constructed based on sociological nuance, that is, "a type of empirical research based on fieldwork, inspired by the ethnographic tradition for its observational techniques, but which constructs its objectives by reference to certain sociological problems" (Bertaux, 2005, p. 15). Additionally, ethnography will be understood as a way of interpreting what others say and the researcher's own observations. Ethnographies will be interpretations of interpretations, that is, interpretations "of the second and third order" (Geertz, 1973, p. 28) and conceived as fiction because they reflect something that has already occurred; however, they should not be confused with the fictitious.

When following the procedure of the ethnosociological perspective, analysis and internal interpretation of the stories have been used, as well as a comparison of various cases, with the aim of generalizing and of making a transition from the specific to the general, a characteristic procedure of the inductive model. The procedure consisted of comparing various life stories to develop concepts and categories as a result of the interpretation process. Thus, each story has been interpreted as part of a set of life stories of second-generation native Mexican young people in southern California. In this way, the resulting concepts and categories have helped to develop "plausible hypotheses".

This way of proceeding is far from the hypothetical-deductive research model, which is characterized by starting from the general and narrowing to specifics and which is developed through hypothesis testing and whose objective is an explanation. This, in turn, affects how the sample is formed because it is not a statistically representative sample but, rather, is built progressively, along with the collection of data and the search for similarities and differences between the different cases that are compared. This is the procedure used by Glasser and Strauss in their development of Grounded Theory, whose proposal resides in the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling as well as in obtaining data that come from observed and recorded reality.

Fieldwork and Characteristics of the Sample

To delimit the second-generation population, Rubén G. Rumbaut's proposal (Rumbaut, 2006) was taken as a reference, differentiating the "first generation", which includes those born abroad and is subdivided into generations 1.75, 1.5 and 1.25, depending on arrival age in the new country) from the "second generation", which includes those born in the US and is subdivided into generations 2.5 and 2.0. In this study, young people born in the US and those born abroad are considered members of the second generation because many of the latter, due to the early age at which they arrived in the US, have had a process of socialization similar to that of US natives.

Fieldwork was carried out in southern California, specifically in Orange and Los Angeles counties, two of the most populated counties with a significant number of people of Mexican origin, during a period of six months between March and August 2016. There were 51 young people interviewed¹, of whom 24 were women and 27 were men, aged between 16 and 36 years. Of these, 32 belong to generation 2.0, that is, they were born in the US, mostly in the state of California; the remaining 19 are migrants, of whom 10 belong to generation 1.75, five belong to generation 1.5 and four belong to generation 1.25. Regarding legal status, 11 had permanent residence or citizenship, while of the other 13, seven were protected under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), and six were undocumented.

Ethnic Self-Identification

Identification is "the process of subjection to discursive practices and the policy of exclusion that all these subjections seem to entail" (Hall, 1996, p. 15). Among its qualities are its continuous construction, its strategic and "positional" nature, and its concern for demarcating the "difference", "symbolic limits" and "production of

¹ The stories were transcribed literally to capture, in the most realistic way possible, the way the people spoke; the names of the informants have been changed to maintain anonymity.

boundaries” (Hall, 1996, p. 16). Additionally, identification processes require the recognition of the subjects with whom they interact. In this sense, Hall (1996) alludes to the relationship of otherness as the main component of identities, where it should be not only the established differences but also the inequalities that they imply and their consequences, such as discrimination and exclusion.

In the case of second-generation native Mexican young people interviewed for this work, the ethnic component is a constant in their stories. In their self-identification, references to the categories of Latino, Mexican-American or Chicano, among others, are present. These are categories institutionalized by the US government, referring to the Mexican population and/or persons of Mexican origin with whom second-generation youth identify, either because they have migrated from Mexico or because their parents or ancestors did. Therefore, their arguments coincide with other characteristics of identification, such as the questions related to “the use of the resources of history, language and culture” (Hall, 1996, p. 17), as a function of the future and the multiple possibilities that this can offer, that is, “how they have represented us and how this relates to how we represent ourselves” (Hall, 1996, p. 18). In this way, the main aspect that characterizes self-identification among the informants is their definition based on the relationships of otherness with “Anglo”. This process of construction on who they are, understood as “us” versus the “other”, can be understood as follows:

Ethnic identification begins with applying a certain label to oneself within a cognitive process of self-categorization that entails not only the claim of belonging to a group or category but also a differentiated contrast between the category or one’s own group and other groups and categories (Portes & Rumbaut, 2010, p. 189).

This is importance for the following reason:

The way in which these young people define themselves is significant because it reveals a lot about their social affiliations and how and where they think they fit into a society of which they are its most recent members (Portes & Rumbaut, 2010, p. 191).

In this way, ethnicity integrates the question of “us” and “them”, that is, the separation and, at the same time, the gathering of the population in relation to these two categories. It is “a matter of classification”, of “separation and assembly of the population into a series of categories defined in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Epstein, 2006, p. 91). Likewise, the Comaroffs (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992) argue that ethnicity as an ascription also starts from an oppositional relationship, a relationship of otherness, whose importance lies in the relationship that is established and is based on the principle of otherness. These categorizations are usually based on the creation of “cultural differences” that function as arguments with which inequalities are justified; additionally, they become the basis for establishing asymmetric relationships and the origin of ethnic consciousness. From there, what Epstein (2006) emphasizes regarding ethnic identity is that ethnicity is one of the multiple factors that make up identity; however, ethnicity groups the status and the other roles that an individual has, and it is precisely this integration that generates a “final identity”. Therefore, its importance resides in its function as a structuring axis of social relations, which ends

up determining the other the roles and status, as well as the categorizations of “us” and “them”, as an effect of otherness relationships. All this will result in the establishment of social categories that constitute the origin of ethnic identities.

Mauricio, 26 years old, generation 2.0:

- How do you feel now, from the point of view of identity?
- How would you classify me? Mm... those are also a *genery* (foreigner), they are long road because before, when I was young, I was “American”; and then, when I was in high school, I was “Mexican-American”. And when I went to college I was “Chicano”, but with a ch, CHICANO. When I graduated it was with an x, Xicano, to recognize the group of..., indigenous. And now, I think, I like “pocho” more, first because before they called me pocho in Mexico, and they didn’t understand me. They called me pocho here and didn’t understand me, and... for a while, they said, people from here, who are not from here or there, are not very Mexican, and they go there doing American things. And... since I knew of the name Chicano, I began to realize that pocho was the same thing, that it was like an insult that someone was throwing at me. But really, pocho, what is it? It’s more like how I identify myself right now (Mauricio, interview, May 23, 2016).

The case that has just been presented reflects a complex and changing process of self-identification. This evolves from assimilationist categories, such as “American”, with which he identified at the beginning of his youth, to ethnic categories, such as those of Chicano or Pocho. Resignification is the element that sets the tone of the story, as reflected in the example of the term “pocho”, which originates as a pejorative concept, but Mauricio explains why and how he resignifies it and how he ends up appropriating it. However, in addition, the term pocho marks a double exclusion because, as it states, it is usually a term attributed to someone who is not “from here or there”. In this way, his story refers to the relationship that many identities have with a place, with a socially and politically demarcated territory, such as that of the nation-state, that is associated with a cultural community and/or ethnic group that defines an identity, as will be seen below.

Modern Nation-States and the Origin of Ethnicity

For the theory of modernity, the emergence of the modern nation-state² brings with it the idea of nationalism and ethnicity (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). The idea of a nation that arises from this new form of political organization is that of a group of people who share a common historical origin based on cultural, linguistic and identity aspects. The concept of state refers to a system of government that governs within a defined territory. Therefore, the emergence of the nation-state

² Although from Hanna Arendt’s (Hanna Arendt, 2009) point of view the USA cannot be considered a nation-state, the objectives of its assimilationist policies act in accordance with those of a nation-state. They seek equating “citizenship” with “nationality”, understood as a community consisting of common elements such as ethnicity, race or language, among other aspects.

appears to be associated with territorial limits that demarcate its borders while at the same time serving as containers for society. The societies that arise as a result of the modern project will do so under a set of cultural and linguistic traits that will define their identity.

In this way, imaginary nationalism is established, in reference to the imagined community of Benedict Anderson, and is delimited by physical borders, real limits that separate insiders from outsiders, nationals from foreigners. Thus, immigrants and ethnic minorities become the threat of states because they are considered the opposite of the idea of nation, which is why they must be assimilated by the state. Therefore, the modern national project brings together a set of elements referring to aspects as diverse as culture, economy or security, among others, that involves ethnicity being understood from the cultural aspects, in relation to the idea of nation and the inclusion and/or exclusion that this implies, as well as from the sociostructural aspects due to the consequences that such inclusion and/or exclusion entail (Epstein, 2006; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992).

In the case presented below, the young woman has no doubts about how to identify herself; she considers herself Mexican because she was born in Mexico.

Sara, 22 years old, generation 1.5 (arrived with her mother when she was 8 years old):

I always put [...] Latino or Hispanic. Aha! [...] Although my friends tell me, “but you don’t look Mexican” [...] but I am. In other words, I was born in Mexico (Sara, interview, May 25, 2016).

The Imaginary about the “Mexican” and Some of its Consequences

The stereotypical and negative view of the Latino population in general and of the Mexican population in particular is present in the stories of young people. This imaginary was a banner of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, but it is a discourse that has been present for years; it has even been at the forefront in some of the controversies of certain American intellectuals, such as Samuel Huntington, in his work *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*. The controversial author of *The Clash of Civilizations* shows his concern about the increase in the Hispanic population in the US, which he sees as the greatest enemy of American society within its borders. Their concern is whether the US will continue to be a country with a single national language and a basic Anglo-Protestant culture or if, on the contrary, its worst nightmare will be fulfilled: a country with two “cultures”, Anglo and Hispanic, and two languages, English and Spanish (Durand, 2017). The arguments of Huntington³ contribute to clarifying American nationalism as well as the ideology on which the assimilationist policies developed throughout its history are based. He does not hesitate to affirm that the US was created by “fundamentally white, British and Protestant settlers” who,

³ “The Hispanic Challenge” (Huntington, 2004) is an excerpt from chapter 9 of the book *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*.

with their culture and institutions, formed the basis of what is today this country, in addition to the fact that race, ethnicity, culture and religion, and later also ideology, were the elements that defined it (Huntington, 2004, p. 1).

Therefore, the white, Anglo-Saxon and protestant (WASP), the basis of national identity, is increasingly “threatened” by diversity and ethnically based identities. However, without a doubt, the greatest threat is that posed by its southern neighbors: immigrants from Latin America and, in particular, by Mexicans and their descendants, the second generation.

Ramón, 30 years old, generation 2.0:

— That’s where I met the first American and Armenian, and Russian [referring to the new high school]. What’s going on? I don’t know any Russians! I didn’t even know who was here [...] (Because before in school you used to hang around more with Latinos?) [...] they were all Latinos and Filipinos, and *morenos*. So, not any more. And when I went to *high school*, oh yeah, there it was [...] I started to feel discriminated against, because I just knew [...] dark skin [...] and said wow, it so different! That’s where I felt alone (Ramón, interview, June 05, 2016).

For Ramón, the identity aspect is evident in the color of his skin and implies a question of difference, which was made more explicit when it evolved into discrimination. This experience began after switching to a new high school, which also produced a change in social context. From this event, he was aware that his origin and that of his family implied not only difference but also discrimination and inequality. His high school friends belonged to different ethnicities and a higher socioeconomic status. His family belonging to a much lower socioeconomic status translated into the inequality he perceived with respect to his new classmates. Therefore, the changes triggered after his change in schools translated into a cluster of new experiences, which he referred to elsewhere as “an identity crisis”.

Ramón’s experience reflects the negative view that American society (characterized as White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant —WASP—) has of them, Mexicans, considered as the “other”, that is, nonwhite, Hispanic/Latino and Catholic. His story reflects a feeling of being different than an American as well as the inequality that this definition of “other” entails; he is aware that the difference between his new classmates and him is not only phenotypic and/or racial but also social. None of these aspects had been previously noted because until then, it had only been related to peers of the same or similar ethnic origin, demonstrating, at the same time, the sociospatial segregation⁴ characteristic of American cities.

The importance that Ramón, as well as other informants, give to skin color is related to the relevance that phenotypic and/or racial aspects have had in shaping American society (Omi & Winant, 2015). Hence, they constitute institutionalized categories included in the country’s census. As Ramón recognized, it is not just about phenotypic and/or racial differences but also about the social inequalities that those differences entail. Hence, Omi and Winant (2015) conceive of race as a concept that

⁴ Social segregation, which, in turn, leads to “a segmentation of the education system” (Saraví, 2015).

represents conflicts and social interests of different human bodies; that is, these bodies represent different social groups.

Classification of the us Census: Generational Categories

Censuses count the members that make up the population of a state. In addition, to obtain information regarding the characteristics of the population, questions are prepared that allow classifying certain aspects of both citizens and foreigners legally residing in the country. Among the most basic are those referring to sex, age and place of birth, among many others. Due to the topic discussed here, only the basic criterion of place of birth will be considered. In this way, the us Census classifies the population according to place of birth, differentiating between “foreigners” and “natives”, the main categories from which they derive “first generation”, “second generation” and “third generation and beyond”.

Each category will be examined to understand who it refers to and who it includes or excludes. “Foreigner”⁵ is any person who is not a us citizen by birth.⁶ In contrast, “native” is anyone who was born in the us or Puerto Rico, in the territories of Guam, American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands, in the Commonwealth of the northern Mariana Islands, and abroad with at least one of the parents being a us citizen. The three remaining categories of the group (first, second and third generation and beyond) are specifications of the previous two. Thus, the concept of “first generation” includes all those born abroad; that is, it is an interchangeable concept with that of a foreigner. “Second generation” refers to natives, that is, to any person born in the us or its unincorporated territories, with at least one parent born abroad. Finally, “third generation and beyond” refers to “Americans”, i.e., any person born in the us or its unincorporated territories, with both parents native. Therefore, these last two categories differentiate natives, whose basic difference lies in the distance of their first and second direct-line foreign ancestors, with respect to the parents, in the case of the second generation and in no case for the third generation and beyond because the closest ascendants are grandparents.

As a result of census classifications, the population of Mexican origin is divided into three groups: first, “Mexican migrants”, which includes people who migrated from Mexico to the us and who are included in the category of foreigners or first generation; second, young people born in the us and with at least one parent born in Mexico (“the second generation”); and third, young people of the “third generation and beyond” are those born in the us and whose parents are also born in the us.

Through this classification, two conclusions can be drawn. The first is the basic differentiation that any state makes between citizens and foreigners; this differentiation refers to a set of political, social and cultural aspects as well as rights and obligations that establish differences and inequalities between the two statuses. Second, differentiation

⁵ Information on the different generational categories was obtained from Trevelyan and collaborators (2016).

⁶ Includes naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, temporary immigrants (as well as foreign students), humanitarian immigrants (such as refugees) and undocumented immigrants.

through generations seems to have a genetic-cultural basis that takes as a reference the distance of foreign ancestors, through which, little by little, one will become “American”. This is how the third generation and beyond is defined: “American”, native and with both parents also native.

The case presented below is a clear example of census classification because the informant refers to the generational question through family relationships, among other aspects. This case refers to the argument used by the census where a person can be considered “American” until the third generation.

Rubén, 21 years old, generation 2.0:

— In my opinion, a Chicano is a person who has parents who are from Mexico, but they came here [...] yes, I think I am a Chicano because my parents were born in Mexico and came here [...] so, I was born here, and I speak English and Spanish.

— Are American and Chicano different?

— In that Americans and Chicanos are born here, in America, in the United States. In my opinion, it is that I am not [...] a gringo, I am not white [...] my parents were not born here, here, by generation after generation like them (the gringos). I feel Mexican or Chicano. Although I was born here, I look [...] *brown*. There are so many categories here [...] it is not a good thing [...] “*you’re labeling on yourself*” (Rubén, interview, May 3, 2016).

Rubén, in addition to referring to the filiation relationship with his parents, who migrated from Mexico, introduces two other aspects, language and skin color, as aspects that differentiate Mexicans from “gringos”. The Spanish that Mexicans speak, compared to the English of the Anglos, is an aspect through which Mexicans can be easily assimilated through the learning of the new language, especially young people who have been socialized and educated in the US. Importantly, schools are one of the main institutions of socialization, especially for Americans, who use language as the main tool of assimilation. Furthermore, skin color, “brown” versus “white”, is a label that continues, even with the passing of generations. Therefore, these are two aspects that we will see below and that are also collected in the US Census through the question about Latino/Hispanic origin and directly related to race.

Ethnicity and Race in the US Census

The US Census also includes a question on Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and another on racial issues. The question regarding ethnicity⁷ is addressed exclusively to a particular ethnic group, the Hispanic or Latino: “*Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish*

⁷ This question has been present in the last five censuses conducted. It was first tested in 1969 and was later included in the 1970 census. But it was not until 1980 that the name “Hispanic” was introduced, replacing “Spanish”. For the 2010 census, the question was asked as follows: *Is this person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?*

origin?”⁸ The census clarifies that “Hispanic/Latino” origin⁹ is seen as an inheritance, nationality, lineage or country of birth of the person, their parents or ancestors prior to their arrival in the US and does not imply racial categorization. The answers to this question are considered self-identifications. In this way, the categorization of people as Mexican,¹⁰ Mexican-American and Chicano, among others, is based on their own identification. Therefore, the criterion that governs this classification is the identification itself as Hispanic/Latino, without distinctions between foreigners and natives or between generations.

The importance of categorizations and particularly of the question about Hispanic/Latino origin lies, as Epstein (2006) states, based on Barth, in the notion that ethnicity begins with the attribution of social categories. Hence, what is fundamental is the meaning of belonging to the “Hispanic/Latino” category. The most plausible is to understand this category as an ethnic group, as “a community that” is “biologically perpetuated”,¹¹ “shares fundamental cultural values”, “integrates a field of communication and interaction” and is composed of “members” who “identify themselves and are identified by others”, which makes them “a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order” (Barth, 1976, p. 11). This implies a clear “ethnic boundary” (Barth, 1976, p. 17) between being Hispanic or Latino.

Specifically, ethnicity based on lineage is the argument that supports the following informant in justifying his/her Mexicanness. For Selene, “being Mexican” is associated with genetics because, as she affirms, it is in her “blood”, in reference to the national origin of her parents.

Selene, 19 years old, generation 2.0:

- I put Mexican-American.
- And why do you put that down?
- Because that is how I feel. I am Mexican, I’m not going to say “I am a gringa” because I was born here [...] it’s what is in my blood, my roots [...], I am Mexican [...] of Mexican parents (Selene, interview, 16 of May 2016).

⁸ Information regarding Hispanic/Latino origin has been obtained in (Ennis et al., 2011).

⁹ The term “Hispanic or Latino” refers to persons from Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central or South America, or from another Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

¹⁰ Those who identify themselves of Mexican origin may be people born in Mexico, the USA or another country. The same applies for the other national origins.

¹¹ Although ethnic group definitions tend to refer to the cultural aspects that define a set of people, this definition has been preferred because it is understood that the categorization of Hispanics/Latinos, in addition to origin, implies an ethnic and phenotypic component.

Regarding racial issues,¹² the census¹³ also includes questions regarding the racial origin of people. Thus, question six is as follows: “*What is this person’s race?*”. As with the category of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, here, it is also clarified that the category of race¹⁴ reflects a recognized social definition in the country and does not intend to define the race from the biological, anthropological or genetic point of view. This is why the question includes the race and national origin of sociocultural groups.¹⁵ The answers are also based on self-identification and give respondents the possibility of choosing between more than one racial group. Therefore, the question about Hispanic or Latino origin does not exclude racial origin; therefore, Hispanics/Latinos, in addition to their ethnic origin, should mark the specific racial group with which they identify themselves.

The question about race, with the exception of the categories of “white” and “black”, refers more to nationalities. It includes among its options, race and national origin of sociocultural groups,¹⁶ which leads one to think that the responses end up being categorized, in addition to racial origin, by national origin. On the other hand, as previously discussed, the reference to ethnicity can be understood as a sociocultural group. Therefore, the difference between the categories of Hispanics/Latinos and those of the “sociocultural groups” listed here is that the generational issue is not taken into account with respect to the latter.¹⁷

In this way, the classifications in the US Censuses constitute a set of categories that take as a reference place of birth and filial relationships, with which generational subcategories are established. “Ethnic” and/or “racial” references establish, in turn, differences based on their own “origin” and/or ancestors as well as racial attributions.

Again, in the cases presented below, the informants refer to some of the official categories collected in the US Census. Their self-identifications coincide with categories whose main defining characteristic is the relationship of otherness established with the white “gringo” or “American” as well as with the generational question of their

¹² Information on the race issue was obtained from Rastogi and colleagues (2011) and Hixson and colleagues (2011).

¹³ According to the census, the reasons why these questions are included are to obtain information, which allows the fulfillment of certain objectives, such as compliance with certain laws and program requirements. These include the use of this information by states regarding the monitoring of local jurisdictions in relation to the right to vote and its usefulness for political decision-making. There may be benefits for individuals, families, and communities, as this information is necessary to increase and evaluate programs or enforce laws, such as the right to vote or opportunities for equal employment. Public and private organizations use the data to implement services based on special needs as well as for the planning and implementation of education, accommodation, health and other programs, in relation to the specific needs that are identified.

¹⁴ The “white” racial category includes those who respond to entries as Caucasian or white as well as Arabic, Lebanese and Palestinian and those who answer North African, such as Algerians, Moroccans and Egyptians. The “black or African-American” category refers to a person who has origins in any of Africa’s black racial groups. This category includes people who mark African-American or black as well as those who answer sub-Saharan African, Kenyan, Nigerian, Afro-Caribbean, Haitian and Jamaican. This is why Sub-Saharan Africans are classified as black or African-American, with the exception of Sudanese and Cape Verdeans because of their complex historical heritage.

¹⁵ For the 2010 census, examples were added to the options of other Asian and other Pacific island.

¹⁶ The only racial or sociocultural groups explicitly included in the options are Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Hmong, and Laotians. The latter two are the only groups that do not appear associated with any particular national origin.

¹⁷ Hispanic/Latino origin refers to the inheritance, nationality, place of lineage or country of birth of the person or his/her parents and/or ancestors (Ennis et al., 2011).

ancestors that contributes to the definition of their own ethnic origin as “Mexican” or “Latino”, even though they were born in the us. Therefore, phenotypic and/or racial issues are explicitly present in their self-identifications.

Yaretzi, 27 years old, Generation 2.0:

— I self-identify as Mexican. Ah... because there’s applications... there are no other options. They give you: “*white American, Mexican, African American*”. And I am not, I am not a gringa. I was born here, but my parents are Mexican. *So*, I have always chosen *Mexican* [...] there are applications where you can put: Latin, *Mexican-American*, and that is when I select that option.

— And why don’t you put American, if you’re from here?

— Because it says: “white American” [...] *I mean*, I am American; I was born here [...] *You know?* [...] but I’m not *White* (Yaretzi, interview, April 20, 2016).

Mauricio, 26 years old, generation 2.0:

— When you have to fill out an application [...] how do you categorize yourself?

— I think *white*, that is *güero, like, Native American* [...] the state of California, because of its history, Mexicans [...] were *güeros* [...] it’s a little complicated... Therefore, I used *white* because it’s what I had. However, right now, I say *Native American*, which is Indian.

— American Indian?

— Uh-huh. Native American (Mauricio, interview, May 23, 2016).

Regarding the use of the category “Native American”, Mauricio assumes, precisely, its literal meaning originating in the us, which is why he chooses this option on applications. However, this does become his reference category because as it was previously expressed in his story, he identifies as “pocho”, which is a derogatory term that is attributed to Mexicans who migrated to the us or to their children and is associated with a specific national origin, Mexico; however, the meaning given by Mauricio is that of “someone who is neither from here nor from there”. As he himself argued, it was the nickname with which he was referred to when he traveled to Mexico. Therefore, this shows us the discrimination and exclusion that many young people have faced during their visits to Mexico, as some of them have indicated.

In short, the incorporation of the question regarding ethnicity directed at the Latino/Hispanic community, as well as the question regarding race, constitute some of the mechanisms that nation-states use to exclude minorities and/or ethnic groups that they consider as outsiders, for being constituted as “other”, as in the case of Mexicans, and/or for representing an identity model different from the national ideal. Mercado (2013) calls these mechanisms “subtractive citizenship” because the actions set apart and separate groups that do not fall within the “American” ideal. As we have seen, the young people interviewed do not consider themselves “Americans”, although they were born in the us or spent most of their lives there.

Indigeneity as a Double Stigmatization and as a Symbolic Relationship

As reflected in the stories of young people, the stereotypical view of Mexicans has been a constant. However, the case of Sebastián is different because he has suffered double stigmatization due to his “Indian” status in Mexico and in the us. His story is an example of the “model of ethnic homogenization” promoted by Mexican “government elites” that took place in the last century and in which the mestizo constitutes the ideal “Mexican” (Mercado, 2013, p. 11). As previously stated, the emergence of modern nation-states involved a process of ethnic homogenization, which in the case of Mexico involved *mestizaje* as the identity model of the new nation; thus, the cultural diversity of its multiple indigenous peoples who were excluded was not respected (Mercado, 2013).

The case presented below is that of Sebastián, the youngest of the 11 children of a Mixtec family from Oaxaca. His parents emigrated from his hometown to different places in Mexico until they reached Ensenada, where he was born. Later, they migrated to Tijuana and, finally, when he was between seven and eight years old, to the us. He remained undocumented for five or six years but currently has permanent resident status and will soon be eligible for citizenship.

This life experience and internal migration, in Mexico, and international migration to the us has generated feelings of otherness both regarding his country of origin and regarding the country where he resided when he was a child. Regarding his experience of feeling “otherness”, he states the following:

Sebastián, 31 years old, generation 1.5:

When we were out of town, in Mexico, it was the Indians, and here, in the United States, we are also... We are not part of the main culture [...] I had to accept it. Although I cannot easily assimilate because I am very tight [...] and now that I accept it; I celebrate it [...] I feel very comfortable in my skin; I am learning to master my skin (Sebastián, interview, June 20, 2016).

For Sebastián, his otherness lies in a cultural issue because according to him, “they have never been part of the main culture”, neither in Mexico nor in the us. He then states that the phenotype, specifically the color of his skin, is the main impediment erasing that difference. Therefore, for Sebastián and his family, exclusion and discrimination have been constant on both sides of the border. In this way, a double ethnic boundary is set up, as a Mexican native compared to the mestizo Mexican and as a Mexican with respect to the American “WASP”. In this sense, his account reflects the racism and structural discrimination suffered by indigenous groups in both national contexts. In the case of Mexico, the National Survey on Discrimination in Mexico (Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación, 2010) includes the main problems that the indigenous population identifies as their own, among which discrimination, with almost 20%, ranks first, followed by poverty and lack of government support, with 9.4% and 8.8%, respectively.

Alicia also refers to her indigeneity; she identifies herself with the Wixárika, an ethnic group that originates in her parents' place of origin, Zacatecas. However, her situation is very different from that of Sebastián because for her, the relationship with her indigenous ancestors is based on an imaginary and symbolic relationship, an aspect that has also been present in the stories of other informants.

Alicia, 23 years old, generation 2.0:

We were considered white when Mexico separated from the United States, but then there are some who look white and others black. The word I do identify with would be huichol because my roots go to the Huichol Indians, who go to Jerez, where my parents are from (Alicia, interview, June 02, 2016).

Stuart Hall (1996) said that representation is a fundamental aspect of identification. In addition, because of the reconstruction process in which it is immersed, identification encompasses both tradition and its reinvention; therefore, "the imaginary", "the symbolic" and the fantastic are intrinsic components of this process (Hall, 1996, p. 18). Thus, the fragments of the accounts of the young people presented here indicate that their self-identifications are far from unifying and give rise to processes that are constructed and reconstructed over and over again, "in multiple ways through different discourses, practices and positions, often crossed and antagonistic" (Hall, 1996, p. 17).

Conclusions

Throughout this work, the aim was to respond to the proposed objective to explore ethnic self-identification among second-generation young people of Mexican origin. Through the stories of young people, it has been found that their processes of ethnic self-identification are closely related to some of the plausible hypotheses in this work, i.e., the shared social imaginary about the Mexican, defined as "the other" versus the ideal American. In turn, the categories that these young people use to self-identify are part of some of those institutionalized by the US Census and the meanings that these categories implicitly carry.

Although the representation of young migrants has been minimal in terms of the stories presented, some differences are perceived between their stories and those of natives because there are those who to a greater extent tend to identify themselves as Mexicans, under the argument that they were born in Mexico, and those who were born in the US, belonging to generation 2.0, who present more diverse and complex self-identifications, from the most repeated identity, Mexican-American, to Latin/Hispanic, Chicano, and Native American, among others. Therefore, natives self-identify with more varied, complex and changing categories over time (Portes & Rumbaut, 2010).

However, all young people, regardless of whether they are immigrants or natives, have one aspect in common: none has self-identified with the category of "American" or with any other that refers to it. All self-identifications refer to a feeling of belonging

to a group, whether Hispanic-Latino, Mexican or Mexican-American, demonstrating “ethnic self-awareness”. Additionally, all categories have components that define them as opposed to “American”, elements that tend to coincide with racial and/or phenotypic aspects rather than with cultural aspects. The connection that is usually established with the family or the place of origin should not be ignored. Imaginary belongings of a shared origin, where the birthplace of the interviewee, their parents or some of their ancestors, becomes an element of great weight in ethnic and national self-identification (Portes & Rumbaut, 2010).

In short, the different self-identifications among the informants only corroborate some of the conclusions reached by Portes and Rumbaut (2010), who alluded to the fact that young people of Mexican origin born in the us tend, for the most part, to identify their Mexican origin through the racial question. The authors see in these statements the outcome of categories developed in the us, where each national origin has its corresponding race, with which, many young people feel uncomfortable about. In this sense, it should not be forgotten that the majority of Latinos tend to associate Latino/Hispanic origin with a specific racial category. Hence, many do not identify with the racial categories presented by the us Census. Two-thirds of Latinos identified “being Hispanic” as part of the race question. In the 2010 census, Latinos were the group who least identified with the racial groups provided in the questionnaire; hence, they answered “other racial group”, in which they described themselves as Mexican, Hispanic, or Latin American. The results of the 2010 census indicated that for the majority of Latinos, Hispanic identity is multifaceted and multidimensional. Some Latinos define it by the country of origin of their family, such as for Mexicans, Cubans and Dominicans, while others associate it with panethnicity that consists of highlighting the common elements of Latinos within their diversity (Parker et al., 2015).

In this way, the official recognition of ethnic and racial issues in the us involves a hierarchy based on the distance established with respect to Anglo-Saxons, which constitutes the basis of the “American” identity model (García Borrego, 2008). Therefore, ethnicity is not an objective reality but is objectified through the dominating relations established throughout history between the us and Mexico (García Borrego, 2008). Therefore, although us citizenship is based on *jus soli*, which results in people of different “races” and “ethnic origins” being part of the same nation-state, in the ethnic issue, *jus sanguinis* seems to rule because although citizens have the same rights and obligations, the phenotypic issue rules to the detriment of nonwhites, in this case Hispanics/Latinos.

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