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11. IDENTITY PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH IN MIDDLE AND HIGH-SCHOOL

Beyond Being Mestizo

INTRODUCTION

Mestizo is the best word to specify a combination that I do not know. (12th grade student)

An individual's identity is constructed throughout the life cycle. That construction is a permanent process and will depend on the sociocultural environment of the individual. "The space of every-day life, not abstracted from its belongings, its situations, relationships and influences, by means of processes of production and social reproduction in which the subject participates, and becomes multiple, into innumerable elements of social order that incorporate as reference points for the subject; as identity adscriptions to which the subjects adhere" (Reyes Juarez, 2008, p. 148).

This chapter presents the results of a preliminary research project about the identity perception of youth during their high school education. The results of a survey applied to upper middle and high school students[1] in Panamá indicated that they had not seriously thought about the ethnical group they belonged to until that moment. Most students identified themselves as Mestizos. The respondents believe that the information they receive in their schools regarding the different ethnic groups is vague but has reinforced their identity to a certain measure.

MULTICULTURAL IDENTITY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Identity Development Frameworks and Models

Poston (1990) explains that racial identity development is important for the following reasons: "It helps shape individuals' attitudes about themselves, attitudes about other individuals in their racial/ethnic group, attitudes about individuals in other racial/ethnic minority groups, and attitudes about individuals from the majority; and it dispels the cultural conformity myth, that is, that all individuals from a particular minority group are the same, with the same attitudes and preferences" (p. 152). Poston proposes a biracial identity development model with different levels and