

Guro Holte Igesund

## 'It takes a village...'

The school as a promotive environment:  
How a sense of belonging and social awareness  
promotes resilience in rural Peruvian youth  
A moderated mediation approach

Hovedoppgave i Profesjonsstudiet i psykologi

Veileder: Odin Hjemdal

Medveileder: Roxanna Morote & Frederick Anyan

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Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet  
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Kunnskap for en bedre verden



## **Abstract**

This thesis examines whether a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture and social awareness is associated with adolescent resilience in Andean and coastal regions of rural Peru and whether this effect can be strengthened by school resilience. The hypotheses are tested using a quantitative moderated mediation approach with cross-sectional data. The results support a social ecologic and decentered view of resilience and identify diverse effects of social awareness in the two cities, where social awareness is stronger associated with resilience outcomes in the coastal city Piura than in the Andean city Ayacucho. A sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture is found to be associated with enhanced adolescent resilience, an association strengthened through school resilience in both cities. The results nuance the impact of social stigma and marginalization of Indigenous populations of Peru and recommend investment in promoting a sense of belonging and identity with community and culture among Indigenous Peruvian adolescents. Supported by previous research, such measures are suggested to also enhance the positive effect of social awareness among Indigenous adolescents (Adams, Fryberg, Garcia, & Delgado-Torres, 2006; Brannon, Markus, & Taylor, 2015; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). This thesis finds support for the importance of sociocultural and school adaptive systems in adolescent resilience in a rural Latin-American context and contributes to describing the effects of culture and marginalization on the development of Indigenous and rural adolescents in Peru.

*Key words:* resilience, early to middle adolescence, sociocultural factors of development, developmental systems theory, sense of belonging, social awareness, Indigenous youth

## Sammendrag

Denne hovedoppgaven undersøker om en følelse av tilhørighet og identitet med sitt lokalsamfunn og sin kultur, og sosial bevissthet, kan fremme ungdommers resiliens i Andes- og kyst-regioner i rurale Peru, og om denne effekten kan styrkes av skoleresiens. Hypotesene testes ved bruk av kvantitativ modererende medieringsanalyse med kryss-seksjonelle data. Resultatene støtter et sosioøkologisk og desentrert syn på resiliens, og identifiserer varierte effekter av sosial bevissthet i de to byene, der sosial bevissthet er sterkere assosiert med resiliens i kystbyen Piura enn i fjellbyen Ayacucho. En følelse av tilhørighet og identitet med sitt lokalsamfunn og sin kultur er assosiert med resiliens, og ytterligere styrket av skoleresiens i begge byer. Resultatene nyanserer følgene av sosialt stigma og marginalisering av urbefolkningen i Peru. Basert på resultatene anbefales investering og fremming av følelse av tilhørighet og identitet med lokalsamfunn og kultur hos urfolksungdom i Peru. Støttet av tidligere forskning, foreslås slike tiltak også å kunne styrke den positive effekten av sosial bevissthet blant urfolksungdom (Adams et al., 2006; Brannon et al., 2015; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Denne oppgaven finner støtte for at sosiokulturelle og skolebaserte adaptive systemer er viktige for ungdommers utvikling i rural latinamerikansk kontekst, og bidrar til å beskrive effektene av kultur og marginalisering for utvikling hos urfolks- og rurale ungdommer i Peru.

*Nøkkelord:* resiliens, tidlig til midten av ungdomsårene, sosiokulturelle faktorer i utvikling, utviklingssystemteori, følelse av tilhørighet, sosial bevissthet og urfolksungdom

## Preface

This thesis has been traveling with me for longer than I imagined when I started working on it almost three years ago. I wish to thank the Resilience Center at NTNU for first recruiting me as a research assistant back in 2019, and later supervising me through the challenge this thesis has posed for me. I have learned more than I could imagine about the value of resilience.

This thesis is based on the analysis of a subsample of the project “Rural Education in Secondary School in Peru” in collaboration with the Resilience Center at NTNU. The study, instruments, and sampling process were designed by the UNESCO office in Lima, Peru, who are the project owners. The Resilience Center at NTNU played a role as a research consultant and contributed with the adolescent and school resilience scales. Development of the research problem, and the operationalization into testable hypotheses were done under team supervision by the Resilience Center. A review of the literature was supervised mainly by Roxanna. The preparations and execution of the analyses were supervised mainly by Frederick. The discussion and comprehensive review were supervised by Roxanna and Odin.

I wish to thank Frederick for giving me lectures on statistical methods, and for reading my many attempts at conceptualizing the analyses. I thank Odin for leading the Resilience group, facilitating supervision, and supporting me in navigating priorities. I thank Roxanna for believing in my ability to write about matters in her home country and giving me the opportunity to delve into this Peruvian material, and for continuously reading my transcripts and following up with the contextual knowledge needed to succeed with writing about this for me foreign context. Writing the thesis has demanded creativity, sensitivity, and stamina, and I thank you for the encouragement and discussions.

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Thank you to all my dear friends in Trondheim, Bergen, and elsewhere for being my village and community. Your support, joy, and love make the ride worthwhile. It takes a village to raise a child, and I believe it also takes a village to educate a psychologist.

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*Guro Holte Igesund*

*Bergen, July 2022*

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## Introduction

In this study, we investigated whether *developmental assets* are associated with higher *resilience* among Quechua and Mixed (Spanish-speaking) adolescents in rural Peru. A resilient school is hypothesized as a promotive environment for *adolescent development*. The question is investigated within *developmental systems theory* and resilience framework. Perspectives from cultural psychology are used to inform the review.

The School Resilience Scale (SRS) is a novel theory-based instrument that has recently been empirically validated in the frame of the Horizons 2020 project “UPRIGHT” (Universal Preventive Resilience Intervention Globally implemented in schools to improve and promote mental Health for Teenagers; Morote et al., 2020). The authors aim to measure resilience at the community level in the context of schools. Resilience is the ability of a system to adapt to change and is embedded in intrapsychic, interpersonal, and societal human adaptive systems (Windle, 2011). When a new construct such as School Resilience is proposed, researchers need to map out the nomological network of the construct to identify its relationship with other known concepts. Mapping these connections eventually builds a meaningful landscape of differentiated knowledge, saturates the construct’s meaning, and builds its theoretical validity.

A recent critique of resilience research has called the framework too person-centered, failing to describe the protective and promotive mechanisms (Van Breda, 2018). Critical reviews have called for a broadening of the understanding of *resilience as a process* (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). In order then, to broaden the scope of current resilience research, Masten and Cicchetti (2016) proposes rather to focus on the resilience processes across developmental systems of adaptation. Following this perspective, this thesis explores adolescent resilience across the central developmental systems of school and cultural belonging. The notion that these areas of functioning contribute to adolescents’ resilience is in line with the current project of describing the concept of resilience as a process and viewing it across dynamic developmental systems.

This thesis will use existing literature to suggest meaningful connections between school resilience (evaluated with the School Resilience Scale), an already established multidimensional construct of adolescent resilience (assessed with the Resilience scale for Adolescents; Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006), as well as two constructs that can be seen as developmental assets within a cultural context; social awareness and a sense of belonging and identity with one’s community and culture. The connections

between these constructs will be explored in a Peruvian sample in the rural communities of Piura and Ayacucho. Existing literature on resilience research and the revision of socio-cultural aspects of the group studied will be used for the hypotheses.

### **Context of the study: ethnic groups in Peru**

To provide an overview of the Peruvian cultural and socio-economic context, a brief review of the historical lines in the country of Peru is presented. The historical facts and perspectives are adapted from García-Godos (2019), Crabtree (2006, pp. 5-23), Thorp and Paredes (2010, pp. 89-108, 136-170), and De la Cadena (2000, pp. 1-28) if not otherwise noted.

Peru is a country of rich biodiversity that was the home of different indigenous ethnic groups and cultures before the Inca empire arose with origin in the Quechua people of Cusco in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Inca empire spread across the Andean mountains and Western coast of South America until Spanish colonizers arrived in 1532. During the colonial period, Lima functioned as the administrative center of Spanish colonies in South America, represented by the seat of the vice-king. In the first part of the colonial era, the Indigenous population was reduced dramatically due to epidemic diseases, exploitation by the Spanish, and extensive resettlements forced by the Spaniards. The colonial period in Peru lasted until the third decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, longer than many other Latin American countries, much due to the importance Lima played for the Spanish crown. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the “Indigenismo” political movement aimed at creating a national identity primarily consisting of romanticized images of the Inca legacy, representing stereotyped and wretched ideas about the Indigenous that did not achieve significant acceptance in the Peruvian population. In Mexico, a “mestizaje” (Mixed race/ethnicity) movement comparably succeeded, resulting in a more common national identity in Mexico. The nineteenth-century thinkers were more conservative in Peru and saw that the “Indigenous problem” had to be solved through socialization or integration. In the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because of the difficulty of attaining independence, the oligarchic government strengthened the exclusion line towards Indigenous people, differing from the Mexican inclusive “Mestizaje” revolutionary state. According to Crabtree (2006), this represents a general socio-economic exclusion still operating in certain forms in contemporary Peruvian society.

Until the 1980s, a large section of the Peruvian population was excluded from full citizenship through literacy requirements in the Spanish language in national elections. After a period of totalitarian, militaristic governance that failed to include the Indigenous peoples, a

return to democracy in 1980 brought a surge of political violence in Peru. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru, the mid-to-late 1980s was characterized by an emerging economic crisis and recession that disproportionately affected Indigenous peoples. 75% of the victims of violence in the period from 1980 to 2000 spoke the Indigenous language Quechua, although only 25% of the population in Peru spoke this language at the time (Heilman, 2018). According to Thorp and Paredes (2010), this economic chaos and political violence led to a sense of “lack of governability” and “demoralization” that paved the way for the dictatorial and repressive politics of Alberto Fujimori, who governed Peru from 1990 to 2000. Thorp and Paredes (2010) hold the Fujimori years as a continuation of the long line of political and economic exclusion of Indigenous and Mixed peoples.

Alejandro Toledo (governing 2001-2006) was Peru's first democratically elected Indigenous president. García (2005) characterizes Toledo's presidency as a shift in Peruvian politics with new opportunities and initiatives for Indigenous peoples. Ollanta Humala (2011-2016) was a less popular president dominated by corruption scandals and mining policies not well-regarded within Indigenous communities. Critics have continuously pervaded the much-used image of Peru as a “poor country with money,” pointing to the political system’s inability to distribute goods, an order that continues to strike the rural and Indigenous populations hardest. Preiss, Calcagni, and Grau (2015) for example report that Indigenous and Afro-descendant students in Peru in addition to other Latin American countries on average score 10% to 20% lower on national evaluations (referring to the Spanish-language source Winkler and Cueto (2004, pp. 1-32)). In another study of 29 Peruvian schools described in the chapter by Cueto and Sacada in Winkler and Cueto (2004, pp. 315–354), both rural Quechua and Aymara students experienced that their Indigenous language was not used in the classroom even in the schools with implemented bilingual programs. The instructions were scarce and with little cognitive demand and depth. When the researchers adjusted for socioeconomic and language factors, the rural disadvantage in performance evened out (Winkler & Cueto, 2004, pp. 315–354), referred in English by Preiss et al. (2015). The Indigenous marginalization proved itself again in 2020 when the government received the crisis of Covid that disproportionately affected rural and Indigenous peoples (Meneses-Navarro et al., 2020; Montag et al., 2021).

The contemporary society of Peru inherits a plurality of unresolved sociopolitical issues such as corruption, informality, significant developmental gaps between the urban and rural areas that act as a proxy for a division between ethnic groups, and the recurrent narrative

in Peruvian history that is described by Monard (2020) as the “difficulty to consolidate a social contract between citizens and State to build a whole united nation.”

## **Ethnicity in context**

### ***Defining ethnicity***

In contemporary use of the term, Bolaffi, Bracalenti, Braham, and Gindro (2002, p. 95) recommend using *ethnicity* when referring to groups sharing economic, social, cultural, and religious characteristics at a given time point. Max Weber (1922/1978) defined ethnicity as tied to the subjective belief of shared origin. The concept's central components are the search for a common identity, group membership, and a relatively coherent set of stereotypes associated with the ethnic group (Bolaffi et al., 2002, p. 95). Ethnicity is a concept that developed in the gap between the general term culture and the essentialist term race, as more specific conditions of a cultural group without reducing it to physical characteristics, but that includes the sense of shared origin and belonging. As an effect of migration and colonization, different cultural and ethnic groups need to live side by side in most parts of the world today. Bolaffi and colleagues (2002) summarize that the issue of ethnicity is universal and addressed in all fields today and that it is related to modernity where ethnic groups are rediscovering their cultural roots. They see this tendency as countering the preceding trend towards cultural hegemony<sup>1</sup>. Summed up, ethnicity can be used when talking about groups that share economic, social, cultural, and religious characteristics, which engages in a search for a common identity and origin, group membership, and a relatively coherent set of qualities and characteristics associated with the ethnic group.

### ***Indigenous peoples***

A contemporary definition of *Indigenous*, *Native*, *Autochthon*, or *Aboriginal* peoples states that these words are all used to indicate a people's origin in a country or region (Bolaffi et al, 2002, p. 146-147). The term *Native* is seen as the most neutral of these words and is acknowledged as a term used to refer to people living in a country before the colonization of Europeans. However, the authors elaborate that the terms should not be used in a generalist manner and should state which specific culture or ethnic group is in question, as a more vague and imprecise use of these words easily can be interpreted as a reference to primitive or savage cultures implying an essentialist nativist standpoint, (Bolaffi et al., 2002, pp. 202-203) attitudes originating from cultural imperialism<sup>2</sup>. As the word *Indigenous* is consequently used

in the literature on the original inhabitants of the Peruvian highland of the Ayacucho area, this is the term that will be used to describe these people in this thesis.

### **Theoretical framework**

This section will introduce three theoretical outlines that offer a framework for understanding the research problem. First, resilience theory and the way it has been influenced by developmental psychopathology and developmental systems theory are presented. Then, how a systemic take on resilience brings culture to the spotlight, followed by ideas about how a sense of cultural belonging and identification, and social awareness impacts adolescents' development is presented. Lastly, the developmental assets framework is presented, centering around the promotive effect of the socioemotional skill of social awareness and a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture.

#### **Resilience theory**

Resilience research is the study of positive development and adaptation in the face of risk. According to Masten and Cicchetti (2016), the idea of resilience within psychology originates in three different schools of thought. In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the ego plays an adaptive role in facilitating conflicting needs of the individual and society's expectations, where successful mitigation is termed "ego-resiliency" or "ego control." The second school of thought is clinical psychology, which finds the idea of coping and adaptation in response to stress the central axioms of treatment success. Third, developmental theory posits adaptation and competence as the successful outcomes of developmental tasks. A common source of all these theories is an awareness of the ability of many humans to adjust and adapt even when facing threats to their health and safety.

In this thesis, the developmental theory of adaptation is the basis for proposing that two developmental assets are associated with adolescent resilience. However, a central point in this thesis is how this is mediated by school resilience and moderated by culture. This will be elaborated by presenting developmental systems theory below.

#### ***Developmental psychopathology and developmental processes of adaptation***

The study of resilience within psychology has evolved in close relation to the field of developmental psychopathology. Developmental psychopathology is known for viewing mental disorders as *evolving processes* (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). Normality is seen as

informative to understanding pathology, and vice versa (Cicchetti, 1993). The field has had an increasing interest in understanding mechanisms that contribute to effective coping with developmental challenges and how the absence of these coping mechanisms can act as predictors of later dysfunction (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2016). The resulting research has identified symptoms at age- and development-specific times that describe common pathways leading to specific disorders (Sroufe, 2013b), varying according to the contexts and consequences in question (Rutter, 1985). This perspective points toward developmental processes in the study of mental disorders' etiology and the process of adaptation across developmental periods, which is the goal of resilience research. Essential for these contextual frameworks is temporality (Fonagy, 2003), meaning that the mental health and adaptation of an individual is seen as constantly unfolding through time, always arriving at a developmental stage that in some way builds upon the previous step. In this framework, the timing and context of the appearance of a symptom or a protective factor in a person's life will determine its function and direction. One asset can imply different pathways in different developmental settings (Masten, 2001). For example, the effect of enhanced social awareness on an adolescent's development could rely on their position in the social hierarchy.

### ***Resilience defined***

As defined in the literature today, a key element of resilience is its transferability between contexts and cases, a construct existing at a more basal level than specific problems (Luthar et al., 2000). In a systematic review of over 270 research articles, the definition of resilience was derived as follows. *“Resilience is the process of negotiating, managing, and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life, and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and ‘bouncing back’ in the face of adversity. Across the life course, the experience of resilience will vary”* (Windle, 2011). Ann S. Masten and Dante Cicchetti (2016) define human resilience as *“the potential or manifested capacity of an individual to adapt successfully through multiple processes to challenges that threaten their function, survival or positive development.”* Both definitions have their foundation in dynamic systems of adaptation, where systems on different levels of analysis are influenced by each other and can protect the individual from threats. Following these definitions, an adolescent's resilience can be affected, among others, by their school milieu, their internal stress response, their ability to connect with others, the cultural context they grow up in, and the relative importance of each system existing in a dynamic and adaptive relationship.

## **Social ecologic understanding of resilience: The importance of cultural systems**

### ***Developmental systems theory***

According to Masten and Cicchetti (2016), the central question of the first wave of resilience research was “what makes a difference?”. The goal was to identify resilience and the promotive and protective factors. The next wave asked, “how can we promote resilience?”. This entailed the ambition to create programs and interventions that facilitated resilience. The third wave includes epigenetics and more advanced statistical analyses to handle complex multivariate data. In the fourth wave, developmental systems theory has emerged as the leading model of human development. Lerner (2006) points out that scholars as early as James Mark Baldwin (1897/1906) were preoccupied with context, multilevel integration, and interdisciplinarity when studying development. What is today named *developmental systems theory* applies to cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social aspects of development. Hence, it occupies a high level in the hierarchy of theories (Overton, 2007). Developmental systems theory has been found helpful in a broad field of sciences, including psychology. Following the application of this theory to resilience research, the definition of resilience has become more dynamic and multilevel (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). It has absorbed many of the principles of the socioecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979).

To illustrate what developmental systems are described as in resilience research, the “shortlist” created by Masten, Herbers, Cutuli, and Lafavor (2008) of commonly observed predictors of resilience in young people is valuable. The list is based on research into what contributes to resilience at different systems levels in young people. Masten et al. (2008) report that the results were surprisingly consistent. Eleven promotive or protective factors are categorized into nine implicated “adaptive systems.” Relevant to this thesis, we find both cultural, attachment, and education systems among the adaptive systems. The shortlist among others shows that positive relationships with parents, friends, and partners contribute to the attachment systems. Furthermore, that hope, faith, and beliefs about meaning are formed within cultural and religious systems, and aspects of teaching are part of education systems.

Lerner (2006) sums up the defining features of developmental systems theories of human development as the following. First, they are relational between levels of an organization. Second, the systems are embedded in history and exist within a temporality. Third, the systems possess relative plasticity, and they are malleable. Lastly, diversity is expected. In the present study, the school as a promotive environment is seen as a central developmental system in adolescents’ life. The way the school enables positive relations and



inclusion, creating belonging and participation among the adolescents, is thought to be related to each adolescent's resilience, illustrating Lerner's (2006) multi-level relational principle. According to the temporality and malleability principles, the level of school and adolescent resilience at any given time point continuously develops and can change gradually at both levels. For example, resilience levels are believed to be enhanced by promotive factors such as socio-emotional skills and a sense of belonging and identity with one's culture. Lastly, the way the school includes adolescents who are different or who are suffering mentally, and by valuing relationships between individuals, is thought to bring forth the desired diversity that characterizes a well-functioning ecology of developmental systems.

### ***What is culture, and how is it relevant?***

The term *culture* includes the patterns of practices that human beings implicitly and explicitly, through learned and transmitted ideas with their attached values, apply in their day-to-day life, constituting the distinctive achievements of a social group (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). The word commonly refers to practices, discourses, and expressions that contain the social meaning of a life held in common (James, 2014, pp. 42-68). Applied to the context of social groups, Desmet, Ortuño-Ortín, and Wacziarg (2017) define culture as the set of values, norms, and attitudes shared within a social group. Bolaffi et al. (2002, p. 62) argue that culture is passed down from generation to generation through collective and individual processes of translating needs and drives into customs and values fitting with historical and environmental pressures that the group meets. The culture in social groups can be summed up as a set of values, norms, and attitudes passed down in the group to overcome the environmental pressures they meet over time.

An individual's implicit and explicit way of negotiating their inherited and the mainstream culture is an essential point of tension that gives direction to identity development and a sense of belonging. Cultural systems can be considered products of action, but also contain conditional elements of future action (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). These streams of cultural opportunities that run through an individual's life, constituted by both inherited and acquired cultural content, contribute to creating a framework or narrative of meaning (Hill, 2006). Acculturation theory suggests that youth tend to evaluate aspects of the cultures they are exposed to, and by choosing values and strengths resonating with themselves from their own gradually emerging cultural pool, an individual cultivates identification with that culture (Barker, 2015). Just as important, cultural systems often provide a context, a community, to express and further develop cultural identity. The success of the identification process and the

presence of a community or a safe environment for expressing one's culture can pave the way for a sense of belonging and identity with one's culture and community. A sense of belonging to a cultural group and shared community seems to fill a basic human need for connection and understanding, and contribute to subjective well-being and meaning of life (Lambert et al., 2013). Due to structural changes in the brain during puberty, the susceptibility to culture and social environments is found to increase, making adolescence a period of particular importance to sociocultural development (Blakemore & Mills, 2014).

### ***Culture and resilience***

The influence of cultural factors on resilience has received more attention as resilience research has turned more systems oriented. The importance of cultural systems for development harmonizes with Masten and Cicchetti's (2016) enhancement of the consequences of viewing resilience from a developmental systems angle. In this perspective, cultural processes have emerged as an essential resilience feature. In the book *Resilience and Culture*, Ungar (2015) pinpoints that adding a cultural lens helps us decenter our understanding of resilience away from the individual and over to their context.

As a social-ecological concept, Ungar (2011) claims resilience to be an ability to navigate culturally relevant resources, either individual, relational or collective, and transform these resources into means with meaning in their context. By proposing a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture, and social awareness as associated with resilience, these assets' usefulness in navigating one's culture for attaining meaningful outcomes is in this thesis examined within two different cultural contexts in Peru. Ungar (2015) connects the severity of individual or systemic barriers to a child's development to the potential of the environment to enhance and promote. Accordingly, the more threatening a context is, the more valuable each promotive factor, such as a sense of belonging to one's culture, becomes to the adolescent. The systemic barriers to resilience development for Indigenous adolescents in Peru are in this thesis set up against the positive effect of the developmental assets (i.e., sense of belonging and social awareness) and a promotive environment at school (i.e., school resilience).

Research on African Americans and Native Americans has contributed to shaping the understanding of the relationship between resilience and culture. Research by McCubbin and his colleagues has uncovered different coping patterns in the Native American culture, emphasizing a relational worldview (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998). The relations between people and between people and nature are more in focus than an

individual's success in these communities. However, research on many cultures is made difficult by contextual factors such as poverty, violence, and outside influences, which weakens the ecological validity of the cultural assessment (Ungar, 2015). For example, the idea of success in development is different between cultures. So as Western researchers value education, there might be cultural groups and situations where other solutions are more adaptive or valued. Whether such tendencies can be called a representation of a cultural value, or the behavior of a marginalized social group, can be hard to distinguish.

The project of including culture as a factor in resilience theory calls for an understanding of the core mechanisms of culture, which can only be done through examining a diverse set of cultures. If this science is to move forward, we need to diversify the research subjects away from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) populations, and over to what Kağıtçıbaşı (1995) calls the “majority world”, or the remaining 90% of the non-WEIRD world's population. Between 2003 and 2007, 96% of the research subjects in the top psychology journals, were WEIRD (Arnett, 2016). Consequently, we do not fully know how generalizable findings that, e.g., peer pressure in adolescence is a universal trait or something that is occurring more within a Western cultural context (Berger, Lisboa, Cuadros, & de Tezanos-Pinto, 2016). Findings from Latin America suggest that macrosystem pressures such as economic difficulties strengthen microsystem social pressure from the family on adolescents, delineating an ecology that differs from the typical Western middle-class (Barcelata Eguiarte, 2021).

### **Developmental tasks and assets: a sense of belonging and a social awareness**

Developmental psychologists state that adolescents' central developmental tasks are psychological autonomy, forming close relationships within and across gender, and creating a sense of self-identity (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). According to them, acquiring psychological independence, a sense of identity and healthy relatedness to others in the transition from childhood to adulthood unfolds through several years of renegotiations with parents and social institutions such as the school and one's local community on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive domains. This adjustment holds the potential for increased conflict, but at the same time, the realization of new abilities for the youth (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002). As we see, psychological research has found that an adolescent must communicate and negotiate with hosts of social figures and institutions in the process of growing up, and at the same time manage their own dawning self-identity and autonomy. In other words, the adolescent must solve tasks along the autonomy-relatedness axis. Both autonomy and

relatedness are basic human needs that all cultures to some degree fill, and that are important independent from each other (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005).

A group of American researchers studying youth development have proposed a framework of *developmental assets*, a selection of positive developmental “nutrients” found in a variety of research fields to promote youth development. The principles guiding the building of this framework were assets preventing high-risk behavior, strengthening resilience, and presenting with large social generalizability in the populations studied. Further, when selecting the assets the researchers emphasized a balance between ecological and individual level factors, and that they should be beneficial and possible to improve by both the youth and communities (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma Jr, 2006). The developmental assets are systematized into external and internal areas. Among the internal assets, one of the areas of functioning that is highlighted is social competencies, and within this category, interpersonal skills are one of the assets. Another area of functioning is positive identity, where a sense of purpose is one of the assets. In this thesis, social awareness, and a sense of belonging and identity with one’s community and culture, are presented as developmental assets that can help adolescents manage two of their important areas of functioning. These two developmental assets can be placed along the autonomy-relatedness axis. *A sense of belonging and identity with one’s community and culture* is an asset that can be helpful on the road toward defining oneself and finding one’s place and can be a useful tool when finding one’s role as an autonomous and active participant in society, drawing on the relatedness to one’s community and culture (Doolittle & Faul, 2013). *Social awareness* is an asset that helps the adolescent interact with, understand, and relate to others in a fruitful manner. Social awareness involves skills that are needed to juggle opposing considerations within a social landscape and involves a consciousness of the thoughts, needs, and feelings of both oneself and others, and the ability to take this information into account in social interactions (Chacón & Peña, 2017). Social awareness is thus an ability to see the needs of others and a larger social context (relatedness), but without compromising one’s own needs (autonomy) and placing oneself within this socio-cultural context (identity).

### ***Cultural values in cross-cultural psychology: applying Western research to the Latin American context***

What are the cultural values in the Western culture that is the origin of developmental psychology and resilience research? Western cultures are broadly characterized as individualistic, valuing autonomy, agency, and individuation (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). Latin

America has been widely influenced by Western thought but has also distinct and regionally varying influences from Indigenous and afro-populations, which often is characterized as more relational or collectivistic (Seidl-de-Moura, de Carvalho, & Vieira, 2013), but which are also described as a combination of collectivistic and individualistic, and that this dualistic view on cultures is outdated and simplistic (Krys, Vignoles, de Almeida, & Uchida, 2022).

In the process of implementing Western theories in a Latin American context, there is a need for a reflection on how to interpret the results, and as Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) pinpoints, question assumptions from psychology used to describe “human nature”, when there might be cultural homogeneity in the empirical studies supporting these theories. One example is the wording of the definition of resilience described as an individual’s ability to “bounce back” in the face of adversity. There is reason to question whether this formulation is sufficiently culturally sensitive and descriptive of the complex coping processes involved in building and maintaining resilience. For example, socioemotional skills are thought to promote adolescents’ resolution of their developmental tasks and can be seen as promotive factors contributing to enhancing development. However, the growth of this research field has brought into daylight the ambiguity of this broad concept, and its universality has been questioned in critical cultural analyses (Hoffman, 2009). Berger et al. (2016) highlight that this assumed generality across cultures has not been sufficiently validated in a Latin-American context, despite the extensive implementation of Western programs aimed at enhancing socio-emotional skills in Latin-American countries. Investigating adolescent peer relationships in Latin America, Berger et al. (2016) highlight social inequalities, differences in educational opportunities, and different roles and values associated with emotions as important influences on Latin American youths’ normative socioemotional development. The same researchers raise a similar vocation in the case of identity development, and both are relevant in this study. They state that identity theory was developed mainly in Western cultures, and highlight developmental milestones, educational and social opportunities, migration patterns, and idiosyncrasies as issues that have been raised by researchers when applying Western identity theory to other ethnic and cultural contexts (Berger et al., 2016). A similar critical standpoint drives the conceptualization, variable selection, hypotheses, and analysis in this study so that the Western research base is critically evaluated as a standard for development in the Peruvian context.

### **Previous research**

The following section sums up relevant research on resilience processes in and around adolescents. The review focuses on social and cultural aspects of protection that work at school and through cultural attachment. This study proposes that an adolescent's developmental assets such as a sense of belonging and social awareness have a positive association with their overall resilience and that this relationship is further enhanced and explained by the inclusive, relational, and promotive conditions experienced by the adolescent at school. The review uses literature from Peru, alternatively from countries with similar developmental status or Latin America. There is also an extra focus on literature that describes rural, Indigenous, and minority populations.

### **Adolescents and protective and promotive factors of resilience**

In this study, adolescents' protective factors are investigated as markers of positive development. Resilience related to individual characteristics, family, and social environment is conceptualized as the outcome variable, whereas school resilience is proposed as a mediating variable that enhances positive development as a promotive environment. The literature review in this section will first present the outcome variable of adolescent resilience. Then, research investigating the proposed connection between each of the two independent variables (the developmental assets) and the outcome variable of adolescent resilience is presented. The first independent variable reviewed is a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture. The second independent variable, social awareness, is reviewed considering neurocognitive development during adolescence. Following the review of these variables, research on the grouping variable of the study in association with resilience, and the specific role Indigenous and minority status can play in the resilience processes of adolescents is presented. The grouping variable of this study divides the adolescents according to their city of residence, representing two ethnically different areas in Peru.

### ***Adolescent resilience: intra- and interpersonal protective factors***

Several researchers find support systems at psychological, familial, social, and cultural levels to be relevant for adaptation (Waller, 2001; Werner, 1993). Based on insights in resilience research, Friberg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, and Martinussen (2003); Hjemdal, Friberg, Martinussen, and Rosenvinge (2001) developed the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA). The authors' work resulted in a scale for adult resilience with five factors through a

deductive approach. Later, the same research group developed an adolescent version of the instrument with the same five factors, called the Resilience Scale for Adolescents (READ).

The factors of the Resilience Scale for Adolescents represent concepts that are well-established as protective resilience in adolescents' lives and range across a broad set of intrapersonal and interpersonal adaptive systems. Personal Competence comprises utterances related to self-confidence, ego strength, self-efficacy, and a positive and realistic outlook on the future. Social Competence is built up of utterances related to ability, skills, and security in interpersonal relations and contexts and the ability to take social initiative. Social Support regards the individual's social support experience from family, and friends and one's own ability to provide social support for friends and family. Family Cohesion refers to a sense of unity and stability and common value grounds within the family. A Structured Style represents utterances related to order and habits in daily life (Hjemdal et al., 2006).

The resilience scale for adolescents (READ) was chosen as the outcome variable in this study because it functions as a broad indicator of adolescent resilience, giving an indication of the robustness of the adolescents. There are systems and levels that are not included in a generic measure of resilience like the READ which may also be of importance. Adding more systems and levels to our understanding has driven this thesis to suggest other social and cultural systems as promoting resilience, proposed connections that will be elaborated below.

### ***A sense of belonging to community and culture and adolescents' resilience outcomes***

There has been an increasing interest in the importance of culture in promoting resilient outcomes (Theron, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015). In a large mixed methods 11-country study, seven protective processes were found to occur to a varying degree in all the included cultures (Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, & Othman, 2007). One of these processes regards searching for a sense of belonging to a school or a community, and this belonging was associated with a sense of meaning in life. Individuals who fostered a sense of belonging and purpose coped better. A sense of belonging was associated with meaningfulness in life in undergraduate students in the United States and India (Lambert et al., 2013). Ungar (2015) highlights that any of the protective processes can also pose a barrier to an individual's development if they manifest in a manner that threatens long-term success. International research has shown in a study of psychological well-being and resilience in 224 Italian middle and late adolescents, that the ability to adjust oneself to one's contexts predicted resilience as

measured by the Resilience Scale (Sagone & Caroli, 2014). Through contextual adjustment and cultural sensitivity, these adolescents increased their well-being and robustness.

### ***Social awareness and adolescents' resilience outcomes***

Social awareness in this study is conceptualized as an ability to see things from the perspective of others (mentalization), to be aware of complex social hierarchies, and to respect others who are different socially and culturally (Chacón & Peña, 2017). Neurocognitive studies on mentalizing have found that social cognition is still undergoing development in mid-adolescence, and that adolescence may be a sensitive period for developing socio-emotional skills (Dumontheil, 2016). The social context is found to have a strong salience during this age period, leading to the development of mentalizing abilities (Blakemore, 2008) which continues to develop throughout adolescence (Blakemore, 2012). The social context is also found to influence adolescent decision-making compared to childhood (Dumontheil, 2016), and adolescents are found to be more sociable and form more complex and hierarchical peer relationships than younger children (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). These changes during adolescence indicate that this is an age where a new array of social skills develop. An awareness of the more complex social interactions that the adolescent brain allows can be crucial for adapting to a new social reality. Some researchers connect the sensitive brain development and detrimental effects of social isolation during adolescence to the onset of mental illness, highlighting the importance of social aspects of adolescent development (Fuhrmann, Knoll, & Blakemore, 2015). The ability to maintain high-quality friendships during adolescence has been associated with less conflict and a positive self-concept, and promoting moral development and well-being in a Latin American context (Berger et al., 2016).

### ***Resilience processes in ethnic minority and Indigenous groups***

When you are part of an ethnic minority or an Indigenous group, a sense of belonging to and identification with your culture and your community has been shown in the literature to indicate a positive developmental pathway. In one study, self-esteem enhanced the positive effects of enculturation (i.e., connection to traditional culture) for predicting less adolescent alcohol use among Native American youths (Zimmerman, Ramirez, Washienko, Walter, & Dyer, 1998). In another study, perceived bicultural competence functioned as a buffer against depressive symptoms for students of bicultural heredity experiencing minority stress in the United States (Wei et al., 2010). On the other hand, some researchers argue that there is a



higher risk among ethnic minority youth not succeeding in the developmental task of identity development, as their culture is subordinate to the majority culture in the society they live in (Viladrich & Loue, 2010). In the mentioned study, a strong connection with their family and their local community was thought to promote a positive integration of their cultural ancestry into their identity.

The literature provides evidence that an ethnic minority position and accompanying cultural minority stress and racial discrimination can lead to a heightened likelihood of several adverse outcomes for youth. A meta-analysis including 105 studies found with a medium effect size that racial discrimination hurt both psychological and physical health (Carter, Lau, Johnson, & Kirkinis, 2017). The authors report that this is in line with previous studies. Other studies have shown that adverse outcomes of racial discrimination among adolescents include depression (Cano et al., 2015; Cheng, Hitter, Adams, & Williams, 2016; Wei et al., 2010), high-risk drinking (Cano et al., 2015; Pittman, Cho Kim, Hunter, & Obasi, 2017), psychotic symptoms (Leaune et al., 2019), school absenteeism (Gee, 2018), low birth weight in offspring (Mullings et al., 2001), low self-esteem (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002) and poor mental health (Carter et al., 2017). Most of the literature compares Caucasian populations with minority groups, predominantly in the United States.

Investigating the aspiration-attainment gap of children of Mexican immigrants to the USA, Paat (2015) finds support for a cultural theory that emphasizes family relations and successful integration where family-related capital, knowledge, and skills that are unique to the minority community are embraced and enhanced as a communal cultural wealth. At the same time, an understanding of the majority culture is essential. The authors advise that parents can get counseling on reinterpreting marital, familial, and gender roles, focusing on conservancy of integrity and collectivistic values. For resilient outcomes, the youth should also be encouraged to combine majority culture with respect for their parents, family cohesiveness building, and cultural pride (Paat, 2015). A Chinese study on contributing factors to obsessive-compulsive traits, however, found a negligible explained variance of 1% by family cohesion, as opposed to the 40% explanation by personal dispositions such as achievement motivation, flexibility, and independence (Sun, Li, Buys, Storch, & Wang, 2014).

Some literature points to the challenging task of creating a healthy identity when your picture of the social reality is singling out aspects of yourself that you did not choose to focus on but that society is stigmatizing (Lorde, 1984). From a social identity theory perspective, studies have found that identification with an ethnic group of low status has resulted in low

self-regard (Hogg, Abrams, & Patel, 1987). Illustrating the negative connotations an ethnic minority identity may bring with it, a study on the Mexican American minority in the United States found that adopting a Mexican American non-Hispanic ethnic identification was associated with more positive perceptions of school and a higher enrolment rate than adopting a Hispanic ethnic identity (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999). Other studies have found that the awareness of discrimination sensitivity that comes with ethnic identity development enhances vulnerability (Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

At the same time, there are examples in the literature that one's ethnic identity and belonging is an essential developmental asset for minority youth that builds their mental well-being and resilience. A study investigating whether ethnic identity development increased resilience depicted as self-esteem and low depression in minority youth found that ethnic affirmation had a protective effect on depressive symptoms and a protective-enhancing effect on self-esteem in the United States (Romero, Edwards, Fryberg, & Orduña, 2014). In the same context, a study of 124 Indigenous youth focuses on the degree, content, and context of engagement with ethnic identity and how it affects individuals' ability to handle oppression (Adams et al., 2006). Their findings indicate that engagement with Indigenous identity is associated with personal well-being, collective action, and community efficacy. The authors interpret their findings as indicating that identity is grounded in culture and, interestingly, that being able to perceive racism contributed to building this identification. Further, in the work of Adams et al. (2006), the development of cultural identity was more robust in youth who had spent time at reservation sites where they were exposed to their ancestral culture.

These studies highlight the collective nature of ethnic identity formation and the importance of support during the identity developmental period. Integrating the ethnic aspects of one's self-understanding into a positive identity can be an indicator of resilience building. Still, there are indications that this is not always the most available and adaptive way to build resilience for Indigenous and minority youth, particularly in contexts where social stigmatization and socio-economic life conditions marginalize these groups.

### **School protective and promotive factors of adolescents**

The school is an essential arena for development in adolescents' lives. Functioning at school affects many parts of youth's lives, such as their mental health, family relations, friendships, and hopes and prospects for the future. In this section, research on the school as a promotive environment for adolescents' development will be presented. The literature review in this section will give an overview of knowledge of the role the school as an environment

plays to enhance the positive connection between the developmental assets (social awareness and sense of belonging to one's community and culture) and resilience outcomes for adolescents. There is a focus on literature from Latin America, developing countries, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, and Indigenous and minority groups.

### ***Social awareness of ethnic minorities and marginalized groups in the school setting***

A cultural analysis of the social awareness concept included in this study finds potential opportunities for this socioemotional skill in the classroom to include a recognition of the importance of different types of diversity such as race and class (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski, 2018). Their concern is that minority populations are put at risk in the classroom which can affect their academic performance. This study refers to the research of Brannon et al. (2015) that proposes that African American minority students often tend to hold a double self-schema and that their academic performance profited from engagement with African American cultural ideas and practices in school that enhances their interdependent African American self-schema. A longitudinal study on African American students from age 11 to 14 found that adolescents during this age period went from an awareness of racial bias in disciplinary decisions in school to developing lower trust in school that was significant by age 11 and predicted college enrolment (Yeager, Purdie-Vaughns, Hooper, & Cohen, 2017). A study found that a similar effect of teachers' education practice on students is evident in Latin American countries. The poverty of students in public schools in Chile and Brazil was connected to less challenging lecturing content compared to a Cuban context (Carnoy, Gove, & Marshall, 2007). Jagers et al. (2018) communicate a hope that a heightened awareness of the power dynamics that one is a part of disadvantaging others that comes with social awareness, would enable adolescents to contribute to creating a safe and constructive learning environment in school.

### ***Sense of belonging to community and school among rural Latin American adolescents***

A longitudinal Peruvian study investigated the sense of belonging to their school in transition from primary to secondary school. The study included adolescents from four Peruvian regions classified as either rural or urban, among them the Ayacucho and Piura areas included in this study. Seventeen percent of the rural, as opposed to none of the urban students, was Quechua. The study found that rural students had a higher sense of belonging with their peers and teachers at school than urban students (Cueto, Guerrero, Sugimaru, & Zevallos, 2010). The authors attribute the higher sense of belonging to a positive change in

school quality from primary to secondary school and more extracurricular social activities, such as traveling to the school together with peers or knowing each other from the local community (Cueto et al., 2010). In this study, rural youth felt a higher sense of belonging and consequently experienced academic engagement and adapted to the secondary school setting. There is apart from this study little research on different ethnic groups and differences between adolescents according to this variable in Peru. A study of the classroom situation in an Indigenous Aymara-speaking village in the Bolivian highlands found that after a reform in 1994 making bilingual education compulsory, the observed Aymaran-speaking teachers were still not positive role models for the students, as the teachers did not identify with the communities and local culture (Canessa, 2004).

### ***School resilience and positive outcomes in relevant contexts***

Grounded on a review of international literature, Morote et al. (2020) found *social relations, belonging, participation, inclusion, and awareness of mental health* to shape the degree to which the school is an arena that builds resilience in a European cross-country study. Further, there exists some research from Latin America, developing countries, and Indigenous and ethnic minorities that suggest that school resilience is promotive for adolescent resilience and well-being also in these contexts and cases. Berger et al. (2016) review research on school climate in Latin America and highlight positive peer *relations* and teacher-student relations as universal. The ways bullying and cyber-bullying work in the Latin-American context is however found to differ from Western research findings (Bear et al., 2015). Teachers were found to play important parts as role models and promote educational engagement for at-risk students in New Zealand (Sanders & Munford, 2016). A stronger *sense of school belonging* lead to later initiation and lower lifetime use of drugs in Native American young adolescents (Napoli, Marsiglia, & Kulis, 2003). Mikami, Boucher, and Humphreys (2005) found that *inclusion* can be promoted through teaching strategies by pairing socially rejected peers with more popular peers. *Participation* in after-school activities was shown in a Hispanic minority sample in the United States to markedly decrease the likelihood of dropout (Davalos et al., 1999). At-risk adolescents in Australia who had a stronger *sense of belonging to their school community* were found to be more resilient (Martin et al., 2015). Fried and Chapman (2012) found that a goal-directed motivational strategy and emotion regulation that focuses on detecting emotions early rather than relieving them afterward correlated with higher personal and social competence in an Australian population. These students' ability to detect their own emotions, in school environments where *mental*

*health awareness* is promoted, seemed to make them able to perform better both socially and academically.

### ***The school as an arena for development***

The school can be described as a more general arena for positive development and facilitating other processes. Preiss et al. (2015) describe the classroom setting as playing an essential role in processes related to peer relations, identity formation, and socioemotional development for Latin American youth. Based on qualitative interviews with youth in Canada, McMahon (2007) argues that protective processes contributing to resilience are multisystemic existing within interpersonal dynamics. Student resilience is, in her opinion, fostered by family, peer, and educator support, as well as social and community organizations, environments of positive and high expectations, and finally, opportunities for meaningful participation. Qualitative interviews with an ecologic approach found that low-income urban Latino youth perceived school, peer, and family factors to contribute to their behavioral, emotional, and cognitive school engagement (Roundfield, Sánchez, & McMahon, 2018). Highlighting that inclusive education focuses on human capabilities rather than a student's current capital, brings forth a consciousness that current variations in talents and results are secondary to each person's value and potential and that everyone's perspective is valuable in itself (Graham & Harwood, 2011; Harwood, 2010). Taking part in activities at school engages pupils and provides experiences that can nourish internal motivation for the curriculum (Morrison & Allen, 2007). On the interpersonal level, a culture of openness towards legitimate emotional expressions will give acceptance to healthy expression of emotion, and guide those with socio-emotional limitations towards self-regulation, which again can enhance their academic performance (Aviles, Anderson, & Davila, 2006). These examples of central developmental processes that take place within the school context, highlight the essential role of the school in adolescent development.

### **Research problem**

When conducting resilience research, one often aims at conceptualizing a risk factor that can activate the resilience process (Rutter, 2012). In Peru, ethnicity has historically played a significant role in predicting several welfare outcomes (Thorp & Paredes, 2010). However, accessible methods for measuring ethnicity are not always accurate. For example, ethnicity defined by mother tongue is termed ethnolinguistic identity, which has been a

common practice in research on ethnic groups in many countries (Giles & Johnson, 1987). However, empirical population research indicates that even though there are distinct ethnolinguistic groups in Peru, ethnolinguistic identity to a low degree predict answers to questions about norms, values, and preferences in the Peruvian population (Desmet et al., 2017). Thorp and Paredes (2010) find that measuring ethnicity through language or self-identification suffers from a hierarchical tendency, or prestigious bias, that makes people to a higher degree identify with the hegemonic cultural norm and that this is especially true for indigenous people in rural areas such as Ayacucho (pp 18-19). They find that most people in the Andean region who identify as Mixed have cultural bonds to the Indigenous heritage, but for pragmatic or social reasons identify as Mixed. The population in Piura, however, generally identifies Spanish as their first language and does not live in such close connection to Indigenous heritage. Thorp and Paredes (2006) conclude that place of birth and upbringing is the most accurate simple way of categorizing ethnic groups in Peru today (pp 46-48). Therefore, the city of residence will be used as an indicator of ethnicity in this study.

Does the resilience process of adolescents living in a rural city in the Peruvian highlands differ from that of adolescents living in the coastal city of Piura? Further, it is interesting to investigate what a resilience process consists of. Seeing adolescents' protective factors of resilience as an outcome factor, this thesis suggests that strong social awareness and a sense of belonging is associated with adolescent resilience and that this is contingent upon resilience factors at the community level in the form of school promotive factors. Strong and positive relations in the school community as measured by the School Resilience Scale, are hypothesized to contribute to resilience among adolescents. The results may give an indication of the role cultural (through city), and community (through school resilience) systems play in promoting adolescents' development in a rural Peruvian context. This thesis will use the socio-emotional skill of *social awareness*, as well as a broad indicator of *a sense of belonging to one's community and culture* as important assets for adolescents' development. The thesis suggests that school resilience strengthens the positive effect of social awareness and a sense of belonging and consequently is associated with adolescents' protective factors of resilience. The assets are suggested to differ between the adolescents in the two rural cities in Peru: Ayacucho in the Andean highlands with an Indigenous Quechua heritage, and the coastal lowland city of Piura with a Mixed (Spanish-speaking) population. Exploring this relationship will shed light on aspects of promotive factors of adolescents in their school contexts, with an added interest in whether promotive factors differ between two cities with different ethnic groups and social contexts.

### **Theoretical hypothesis**

The rationale for the hypotheses is that resilience work on the individual (intrapersonal and interpersonal protective factors) and community (school) levels and that higher levels of social awareness and a sense of belonging relate to these factors. Some literature suggests that a sense of belonging and identity with their community and culture brings positive developmental outcomes for Indigenous youth (Adams et al., 2006; Romero et al., 2014). However, the literature on the prejudice against Indigenous groups also describes the compromising effects of belonging to an Indigenous group on outcomes such as identity development, (Hogg et al., 1987) school presence (Davalos et al., 1999), and vulnerability (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Seen together with the low regard and high prejudice Indigenous peoples have been found to experience in Peruvian society (Thorp & Paredes, 2010, pp. 22-35), a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture is found to be important but in some senses may be a less available and adaptive developmental asset for Indigenous groups in Peru. A sense of belonging to the majority culture for minority peoples is found in the literature to be less complicated and bring a less compromised cultural identity with it (Davalos et al., 1999; Viladrich & Loue, 2010). This thesis suggests that the availability of positive identification that a strong sense of belonging brings enables the promotive factor of school resilience. Based on the different ethnolinguistic statuses of the cultures in the two cities, this effect is thought to be more enhancing in the Mixed population of Piura than in the largely Quechua population of Ayacucho. Further, the socio-emotional skill of social awareness in the youth is hypothesized to enable the promotive factor of school resilience for all adolescents. However, because of the relatively riskier developmental setting of growing up as part of a largely Indigenous (Quechua-speaking) minority community in Ayacucho as opposed to a Mixed (Spanish-speaking) majority community in Piura, the development of the socio-emotional skill of social awareness is hypothesized to be relatively less enhanced by the promotive environment for Ayacucho than for Piura adolescents.

The effect of developmental assets (sense of belonging and social awareness) is in sum hypothesized to affect resilience through school resilience for all adolescents but relatively compromised in rural highland areas of Ayacucho compared to the coastally located Piura youth because they meet the socio-economic challenges related to the exclusion that comes with belonging to a non-hegemonic sector of Peruvian society.

### **Choice of analysis**

This study investigates the mediating role of school resilience measured by the School Resilience Scale (SRS) in the relation between two types of developmental assets ((1) *The socio-emotional skill social awareness* and (2) *A sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture*), and adolescent resilience (READ) from Indigenous Quechua and Mixed (Spanish-speaking) ethnic areas in Peru. Mediation is chosen because school resilience is thought of as a promotive (contrary to a protective) environment for the development of cultural identity and belonging and social awareness as conceptualized by Zimmerman et al. (2013). In mediation analysis, the degree to which the mediator can explain the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is tested (Hayes, 2013). The assumption that is tested is that “the presence of school resilience explains that social awareness/sense of belonging is associated with higher adolescent resilience”. The contextual factor of school resilience is assumed to contribute to the effect social awareness/sense of belonging has on adolescent resilience. Further, a grouping variable of city allows us to see whether this process is more evident in the largely Indigenous population of Ayacucho than in the Mixed population of Piura. This is also called a multigroup mediation model (Hayes, 2013). Figure 1 presents the associations that will be tested.

### **Research hypotheses**

#### ***Mediation***

- H1.** *School Resilience* mediates the relationship between *Sense of Belonging and Identity with One's Community and Culture* and *Adolescent Resilience*
- H2.** *School Resilience* mediates the relationship between *Social awareness* and *Adolescent Resilience*

#### ***Moderated mediation***

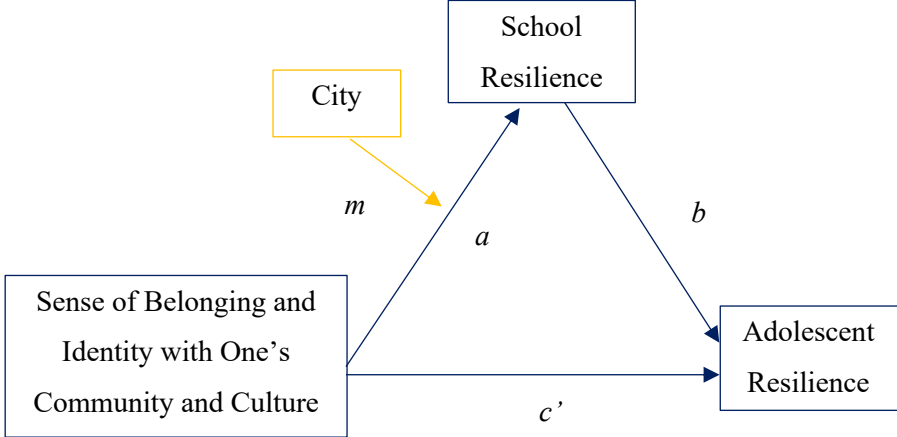
- H3.** *City* moderates the relationship between *Sense of Belonging and Identity to One's Community and Culture*, *School Resilience*, and *Adolescent Resilience*
- H4.** *City* moderates the relationship between *Social awareness*, *School Resilience*, and *Adolescent Resilience*



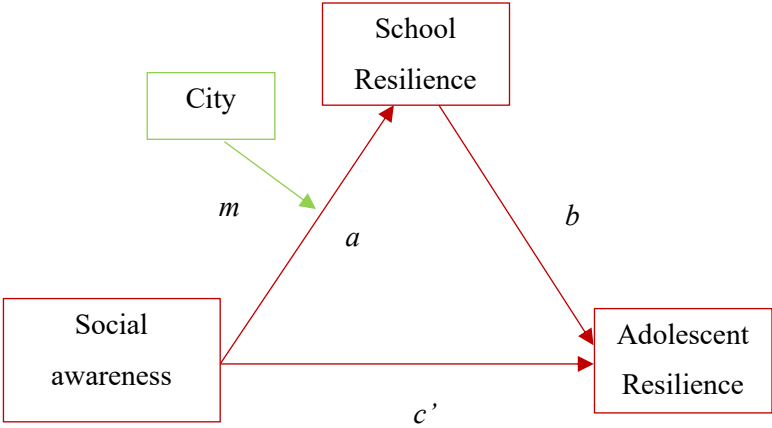
**Figure 1**

*An illustration of the final models that will be tested.*

H1 and H3



H2 and H4



## Method

### Participants and procedure

Exploration of the hypotheses was based on data collected in schools from adolescents in rural Peru ( $N = 2\,485$ ) aged 12-20 (a few cases also reported ages 10 and 11). Adolescents following the school norm in Peru will be aged 12-16, which means that some of the participants have retaken years or postponed finishing their basic education. The pupil data contains similar amounts of female (48,9%) and male (51,1%) participants. The data was collected in 30 middle schools in the cities of Piura (52,6%) and Ayacucho (47,4%). The average number of respondents per school was 87 in Piura and 79 in Ayacucho, which means that the schools were smaller on average in Ayacucho than in Piura if all pupils in each school participated.

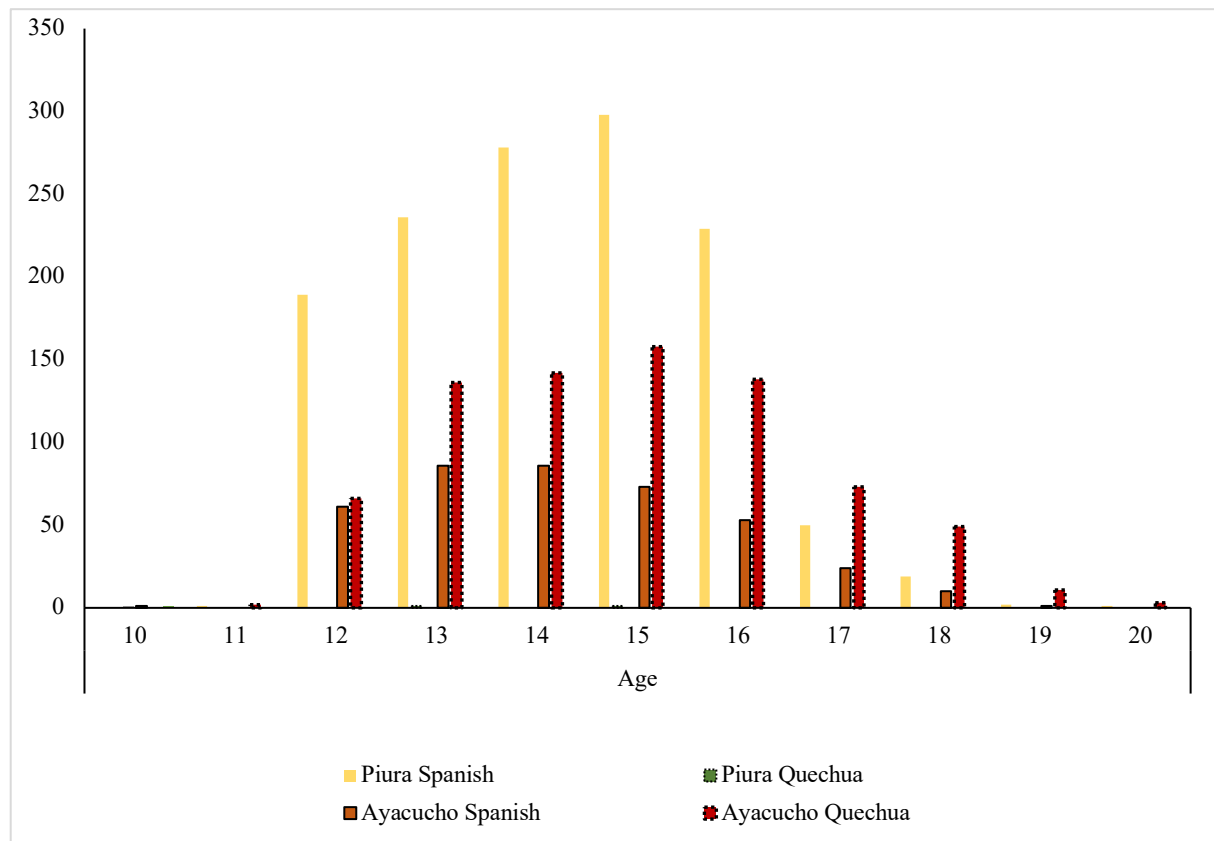
Nearly all adolescents in Piura had Spanish as their first language (1 303 out of 1 307, 99,7%). Of the adolescents in Ayacucho, 778 (66,0%) reported Quechua as their first language, and 393 (33,3%) reported Spanish as their first language. According to the website City Population (2021), 83,2% of the population in the Ayacucho region is Quechua. (City Population, 2021). This indicates one city with a homogenous Mixed Spanish-speaking linguistic population (Piura) and one city with a larger amount of Indigenous Quechua-speaking participants (Ayacucho). As suggested by Thorp and Paredes (2010), this study will use the city of residence as an indicator of ethnic belonging. See Figure 2 for graphic presentation of reported first language in the cities in each age group.

The Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP) approved the research protocol and ethics procedures. All participants received a written explanation of the study before providing consent. During the data collection, the participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage of the process.

### Instruments

#### *The Resilience scale for Adolescents*

The Resilience scale for Adolescents (READ) is a five-factor scale developed for assessing protective factors thought to contribute to resilience in adolescents (Hjemdal et al., 2006). The five factors are named Personal competence, Social competence, Structured style, Social resources, and Family cohesion. The scale has been validated in a representative Irish population of 12-18 year-old adolescents (Kelly, Fitzgerald, & Dooley, 2017) and the Spanish

**Figure 2***City and reported first language by age group*

version was validated in 840 Mexican adolescents between ages 12 and 17 (Ruvalcaba-Romero, Gallegos-Guajardo, & Villegas-Guinea, 2014). A review that followed Windle and colleagues' meta-analysis gave READ credit for examining resilience across levels beyond personal agency. The authors conclude that READ is the best available resilience measure for adolescents (Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011). READ is based on the adult scale Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) (Friborg et al., 2003; Hjemdal et al., 2001). The instrument exhibited high reliability in this study ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

### ***The School Resilience Scale – short version***

The School Resilience Scale (SRS; Morote et al., 2020) is a theoretically derived multidimensional instrument and construct containing five interrelated sub-constructs, Positive Relationships, Belonging, Inclusion, Participation, and Mental Health Awareness. The construct measures a collective resilience factor based on the quality of the relations of the members of the school community: school staff, adolescents, and their families. The version for family members, school staff, and relatives of teenagers was tested in four European countries through the UPRIGHT project and exhibited satisfactory statistical

validity (Morote et al., 2020). The short version of the School Resilience Scale was designed for children and adolescents, that includes one item for each sub-construct (five in total). This adolescent variety of the School Resilience Scale was distributed to the adolescents in the current study. The instrument showed satisfactory reliability ( $\alpha = .69$ ) for a short scale.

### ***Social awareness***

Social awareness is defined by the Peruvian research team as the ability to see things from different viewpoints, understand and empathize with others, and respect their experiences, norms, and behaviors regardless of the context or the person's culture. Chacón and Peña (2017) elaborate that it involves understanding social norms for behavior in diverse settings and recognizing family, school, and community resources and support. The definition is based on the work of the American Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The item selection follows the work of the California school network CORE Districts, which uses CASEL's framework in their work to improve student performance. The Social awareness construct used in this study is part of a larger questionnaire on socio-emotional skills that was validated in the assessment of the Teaching for Mexico Program (Alderete, 2020; Chacón & Peña, 2017). The Social awareness scale has eight items, and its reliability is satisfactory ( $\alpha = .69$ ).

### ***Sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture***

This construct is conceptualized as a broad indicator capturing the adolescents' investment in their local community and culture. The construct includes questions regarding attachment to one's local community, pride, sense of continuity in identification with one's culture, and a sense of responsibility for own community. The instrument consists of nine items. The first three items were retrieved from the Civic Engagement Scale (CES) used in the Teaching for Mexico program, validated by (Doolittle & Faul, 2013). The remaining six items were proposed by the Horizons group, which performed the data collection. The reliability of the nine-item instrument in this data set is satisfactory ( $\alpha = .75$ ). In some places in the thesis, this instrument is referred to as a "Sense of belonging" for reasons of space.

### **Design and procedure**

The first part of the study consisted of a review of the literature on resilience, socioemotional skills, culture, and ethnicity, and the grounding of a set of hypotheses in the

literature. The next step was to choose analyses, to familiarize the data set received from the Peruvian researchers and conduct the analyses on the data. The final part of the study consists of interpreting the results and effects. The results will shed light on the relationship between the resilience in adolescents and the developmental assets of socioemotional skills and a sense of belonging in two different Peruvian cities. The study has a cross-sectional survey design. Surveys were administered simultaneously in the two regions of Peru in 2019. The administration was performed in person by paper in the schools by a team from the UNESCO program.

### **Statistical analyses**

Analyses were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics v26.0 with Andrew Hayes' PROCESS software v4.0. Mediation analysis (PROCESS model 4) was performed to determine the influence of school resilience on the relationship between social awareness/sense of belonging respectively, and adolescent resilience to test hypotheses 1 and 2. Moderated mediation (PROCESS model 7) was performed to determine the differences in the influence of school resilience on the relationship between social awareness/sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture respectively, and adolescent resilience in the two cities to test hypotheses 3 and 4.

## Results

Descriptive statistics and covariance matrix of the included instruments are presented in Table 1. An independent samples *t*-test of the difference between the developmental assets in Piura and Ayacucho with equal variances assumed is presented in Table 2. Figure 3 shows a scatterplot of the scores on adolescent resilience and social awareness and a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture in the two cities.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Covariance Matrix for Variables in the Study (N = 2 485)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>a</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1 Social awareness	3.39	.62	.69	-	.42**	.51**	.40**	-.16**
2 Sense of belonging	3.87	.60	.75		-	.53**	.42**	-.44*
3 Adolescent resilience	3.92	.52	.91			-	.66**	-.06*
4 School resilience	3.84	.68	.69				-	-.11**
5 City	1.47	.50	-					-

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

*Note.* Social awareness is rated from 1 to 4 where 1 means Very seldom and 4 means A lot. The remaining scales are rated from 1 to 5 where 1 means Totally disagree and 5 means Totally agree. Cities are Piura (coded 1) and Ayacucho (coded 2).

**Table 2**

*Independent samples t-test that compares the level of Sense of Belonging and Social Awareness for Adolescents in Piura and Ayacucho (N = 2 485)*

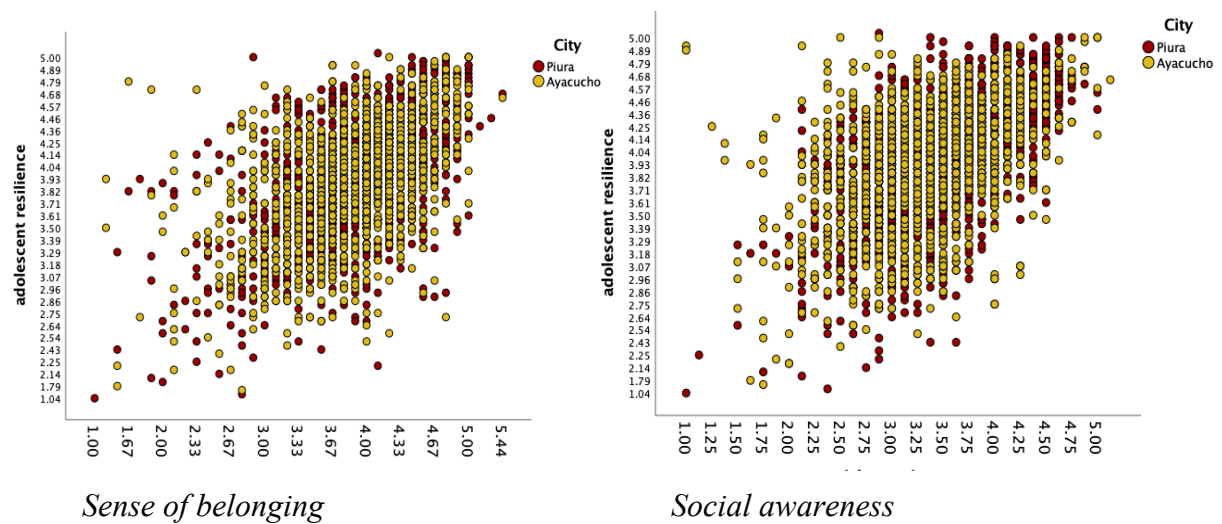
Developmental asset	Piura		Ayacucho		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Social awareness	3.48	.60	3.29	.64	7.77	<.001
Sense of belonging	3.89	.59	3.84	.60	2.18	.03

The results provide support for the hypotheses that school resilience is partly mediating the association between the developmental assets (social awareness and a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture) and the outcome variable of adolescent resilience. The scatterplot in figure 3 shows the association between the two independent variables (the developmental assets) and the dependent variable of adolescent resilience in the coastal region

of Piura (red) and the Andean region of Ayacucho (yellow). The results show a difference in the association of social awareness and the resilience factors for the adolescents between these two rural regions, where social awareness is less associated with resilience in Ayacucho than in Piura. There is not found any difference between the regions in the association of a sense of belonging with the resilience factors. The results are elaborated further below.

**Figure 3**

*Scatterplots of variance in respondents' answers on Social Awareness and a Sense of Belonging and Identity with one's Community and Culture, and Adolescent Resilience in Piura and Ayacucho (N = 2 485)*

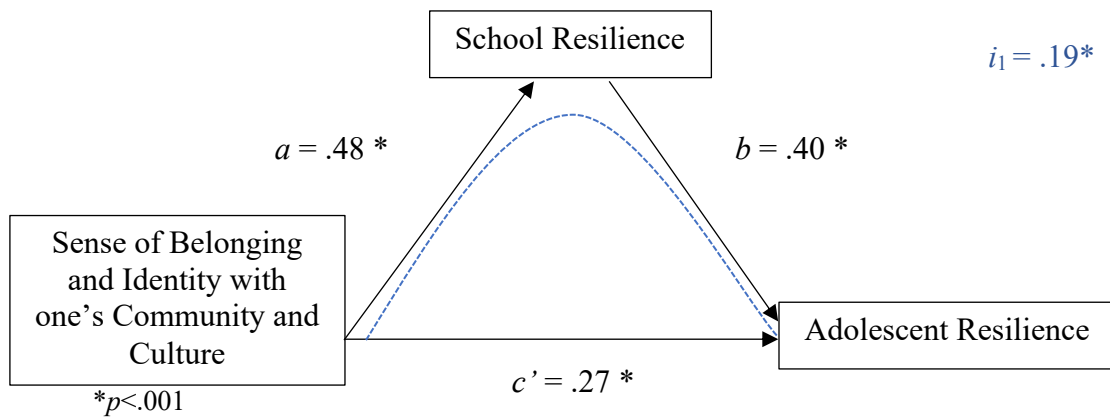


### Hypothesis 1

The hypothesis that the effect of a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture on adolescent resilience worked partially through school resilience was tested using mediation analysis. The mediation was significant. All the coefficients were significant for the mediation. The results can be found in Figure 6 and Table 4. The direct effect between a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture, and resilience was positive as was the direct effect between a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture, and school resilience. A sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture was also indirectly related to resilience through school resilience. The results support hypothesis 1.

**Figure 6**

*Mediation of School Resilience on the interaction between Sense of Belonging and Identity with one's Community and Culture, and Adolescent Resilience*



**Table 4**

*Mediation analyses with adolescent resilience as the outcome variable (N = 2 485)*

Antecedent	Consequent							
	M (School resilience)			Y (Adolescent resilience)				
	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p		
X (Sense of belonging and identity w. one's community and culture)	a	.48	.02	< .001	c'	.27	.01	< .001
M (School resilience)	---	---	---	b	.40	.01	< .001	
Constant	---	---	---	i <sub>1</sub>	.19	.01	< .001	
				i <sub>2</sub>	.22	.01*	< .001	
	$R^2 = 0.18$			$R^2 = 0.51$				
	$F(1, 2483) = 529.07, p < .001$			$F(2, 2482) = 1310.27, p < .001$				
X (Social awareness)	a	.44	.02	< .001	c'	.24	.01	< .001
M (School resilience)	---	---	---	b	.41	.01	< .001	
Constant	---	---	---	i <sub>3</sub>	.29	.02	< .001	
				i <sub>4</sub>	.54	.01*	< .001	
	$R^2 = 0.16$			$R^2 = 0.50$				
	$F(1, 2483) = 480.63, p < .001$			$F(2, 2482) = 1255.24, p < .001$				

i<sub>1</sub> = total indirect effect of sense of belonging → school resilience → adolescent resilience  
 i<sub>2</sub> = standardized indirect effect of sense of belonging → school resilience → adolescent resilience  
 i<sub>3</sub> = total indirect effect of social awareness → school resilience → adolescent resilience  
 i<sub>4</sub> = standardized indirect effect of social awareness → school resilience → adolescent resilience  
 \*Bootstrapped SE

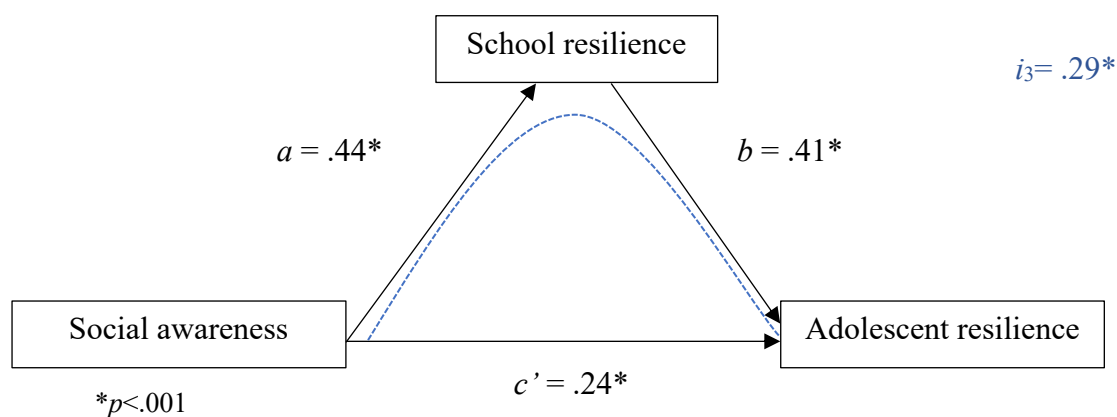


## Hypothesis 2

The hypothesis that the effect of social awareness on adolescent resilience worked partially through school resilience was tested using mediation analysis. The mediation and all the coefficients were significant. The results can be found in Figure 7 and Table 4. The direct effect between social awareness and resilience was positive as was the direct effect between social awareness and school resilience. Social awareness was also indirectly related to adolescent resilience through school resilience. The results support hypothesis 2.

### Figure 7

*Mediation of School Resilience on the interaction between Social awareness and Adolescent Resilience*

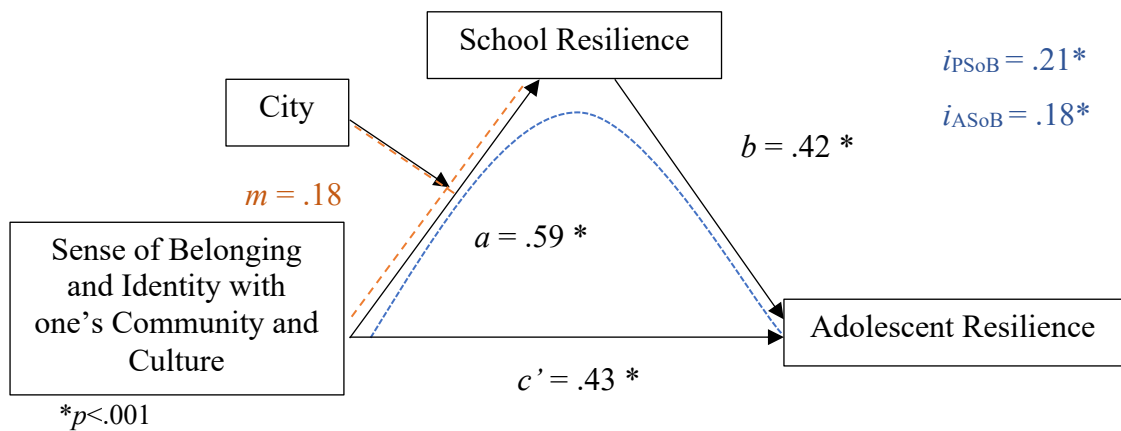


## Hypothesis 3

Adding city as a grouping variable to the model in hypothesis 1 gives a model of moderated mediation. This model tests whether the indirect effect of a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture on adolescent resilience varies as a function of city through school resilience, where city is moderating the path from a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture to school resilience. The results show that the indirect effect of a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture through school resilience on adolescent resilience was not moderated by city as the index of moderated mediation was not significant in the analysis. This means that the indirect effect of sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture through school resilience on adolescent resilience is independent of living in Ayacucho or Piura. See Figure 8, and Table 5 for the results and graphic presentation of the moderated mediation analysis.

**Figure 8**

*Model of the moderation of city on the mediation of School Resilience on a Sense of Belonging and Identity with one's Community and Culture on Adolescent resilience*



**Table 5**

*Moderated mediation analyses with adolescent resilience as outcome variable (N = 2 485)*

Antecedent	Consequent							
	M (School resilience)			Y (Adolescent resilience)				
	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p		
X (Sense of belonging and identity w. one's community and culture)	a	.59	.06	< .001	c'	.43	.02	< .001
M (School resilience)	---	---	---	b	.42	.01	< .001	
W (City)	m	.18	.16	.27	$i_{PSoB}$	.21	.02*	< .001
Constant	$i_1$	-.08	.04	.06	$i_{ASoB}$	.18	.02*	< .001
	$R^2 = 0.18$			$R^2 = 0.51$				
	$F(3,2481) = 144.39, p < .001$			$F(2, 2482) = 1310.27, p < .001$				
X (Social awareness)	a	.61	.06	< .001	c'	.24	.01	< .001
M (school resilience)	---	---	---	b	.41	.01	< .001	
W (City)	m	.34	.14	.02	$i_{PSA}$	.20	.02*	< .001
Constant	$i_2$	-.12	.04	< .001	$i_{ASA}$	.16	.01*	< .001
	$R^2 = 0.17$			$R^2 = 0.50$				
	$F(3,2481) = 165.93, p < .001$			$F(2, 2482) = 1255.24, p < .001$				

$i_1$ =moderating effect of city on sense of belonging→school resilience

$i_{PSoB}$  = indirect effect of sense of belonging → school resilience → adolescent resilience in Piura

$i_{ASoB}$  = indirect effect of sense of belonging → school resilience → adolescent resilience in Ayacucho

$i_2$ =moderating effect of city on social awareness→school resilience

$i_{PSC}$  = indirect effect of social awareness → school resilience → adolescent resilience in Piura

$i_{ASA}$  = indirect effect of social awareness → school resilience → adolescent resilience in Ayacucho

$i_{mmSA} = -.05; [-.09: -.01]$

$i_{mmSoB} = -.03 [-.07: .01]$

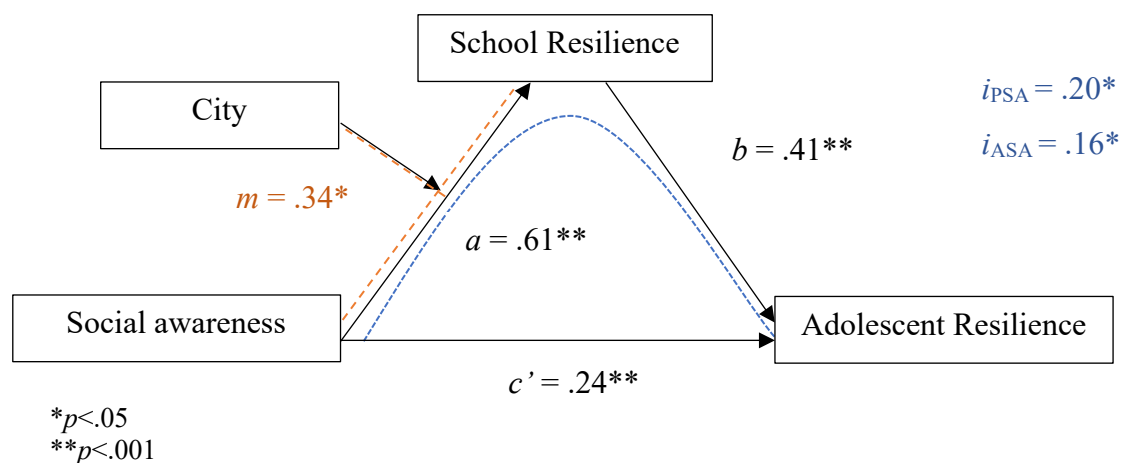
\* Bootstrapped SE

#### Hypothesis 4

With city as a grouping variable added to the model from hypothesis 2, we get a model of moderated mediation with social awareness as the independent variable. This model tests whether the indirect effect of social awareness on adolescent resilience varies as a function of city through school resilience, where city is moderating the path from social awareness to school resilience. The results show that the indirect effect of social awareness through school resilience on adolescent resilience was moderated by city as the index of moderated mediation was significant. As Piura is coded 1, and Ayacucho is coded 2, the negative interaction means that the indirect effect of social awareness through school resilience on adolescent resilience is higher for adolescents living in Piura than Ayacucho. See Figure 9 and Table 5 for the results and graphic presentation of the moderated mediation analysis.

**Figure 9**

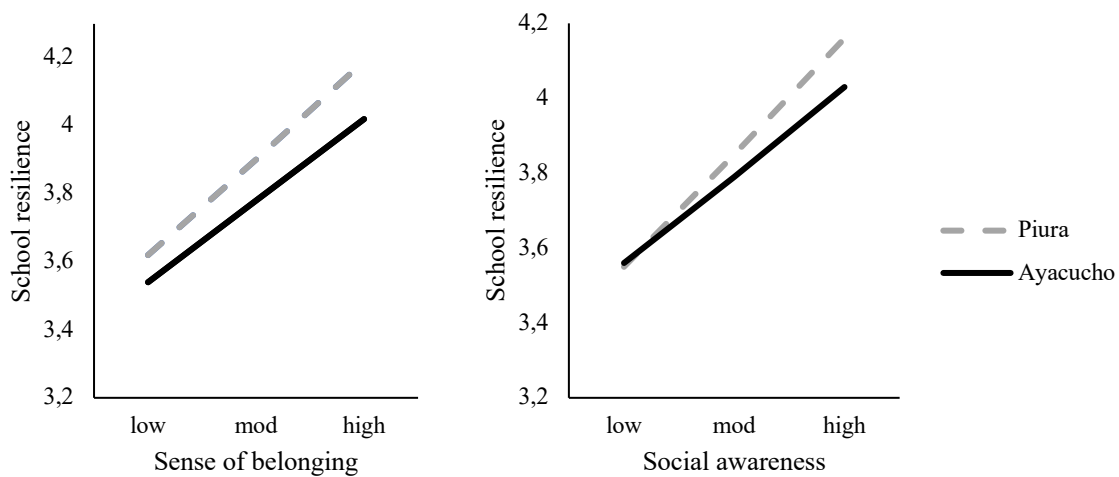
*Model of the moderation of city on the mediation of School Resilience on Social Awareness on Adolescent resilience*



Finally, an exploration of the association between school resilience and the developmental assets of a sense of belonging and social awareness (Figure 10) shows that for social awareness, the slopes differ significantly between Piura and Ayacucho, indicating that social awareness is stronger associated with school resilience in Piura than in Ayacucho. For sense of belonging, there is not found a significant difference in the trajectory of the slopes, but as we can see, the overall level of a sense of belonging is lower for Ayacucho adolescents than for Piura adolescents.

**Figure 10**

*Simple slopes for the association between School Resilience and low, moderate, and high levels of Sense of Belonging and Identity with one's Community and Culture, and Social Awareness in Piura and Ayacucho.*

**Discussion****Main findings**

This thesis investigated whether developmental assets (sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture, and social awareness) are associated with protective factors of adolescent resilience and if these effects were mediated through school resilience. Further, the mediation effect was hypothesized to be stronger for Mixed adolescents in the Piura area than for the majorly Indigenous adolescents in the Ayacucho area. The analysis shows that the effect of the developmental assets of a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture, and social awareness on adolescent resilience is mediated, or to a certain extent explained, by a promotive school environment (school resilience) in rural Peruvian adolescents. The moderation effect of the area of school location was found significant just in the case of social awareness. The moderated mediation analyses showed that social awareness for adolescents living in the coastal Piura area had a significantly stronger effect on resilience factors through a promotive school environment than for adolescents living in the Andean Ayacucho area. The same was not the case for a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture, where adolescents in the two cities did not significantly differ in the role this developmental asset played for the resilience factors.

## **Interpretations**

### ***Interpretation of mediation findings***

In the mediation hypotheses (H1 and H2), school resilience mediated the relationship between respectively (1) a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture, and (2) social awareness, and the outcome variable of adolescent protective factors of resilience. These findings are in line with previous research on the promotive effect of developmental assets generally, (Benson et al., 2006) and social awareness (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013; Berger et al., 2016) and a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture (Cueto et al., 2010; Lambert et al., 2013; Romero et al., 2014; Ungar et al., 2007) specifically. The efficacy of both assets also supports research enhancing the importance of a combination of a sense of belonging to own culture and awareness of cultural and social systems (Kağitçibaşı, 2005; Paat, 2015). It is possible to understand that both the connections with one's local community and culture, and the awareness of the social and cultural context, enable students to feel and act more confident and safer in their school surroundings and that this in turn is associated with the youth's resilience. In both analyses, the mediation path through school resilience contributes to explaining a considerable amount of the variation in adolescent resilience, findings that support the positive role of the school as a promotive environment in adolescent development (McMahon, 2007; Morote et al., 2020). The findings fill in results with this age group to other studies on the importance of the school context for youth in Peru. The adolescents in the present study were rural middle school students. Accordingly, Cueto et al. (2010) explained that rural high school students had a high sense of belonging to the school, and Kirby, Tolstikov-Mast, and Walker (2020) highlighted the importance of a sense of belonging to attrition of Indigenous students in higher education.

### ***Interpretation of moderated mediation findings***

#### ***Social awareness***

In the moderated mediation hypotheses (H3 and H4), city was found to moderate the mediation of school resilience on the connection between social awareness and adolescent resilience. The positive influence of social awareness on resilience factors was stronger in the region of Piura than in Ayacucho. This result supports hypothesis 4 and shows that social awareness (understanding social norms, mentalizing, empathizing, and respecting other cultures) more frequently is associated with adolescent resilience through school resilience in the more homogenous ethnic context of Piura than in the context with a Quechua majority of Ayacucho. These findings support previous findings that awareness of social systems that

produce discrimination towards own social group enhances vulnerability for minority groups such as in Ayacucho (Lorde, 1984; Sellers & Shelton, 2003) and that such identification can result in low self-regard rather than positive development for Native/Indigenous groups (Hogg et al., 1987). These findings indicate that the awareness of sociocultural reality and the ability to respect others is useful and adaptive in terms of adolescents' intra-, interpersonal, and school resources for the Spanish-speaking adolescents of Piura. However, the results indicate that the same awareness is not as strongly associated with Ayacucho adolescents' resilience. This does not mean that the social awareness had a negative effect on resilience, it just had a less powerful positive effect in Ayacucho than in Piura adolescents.

The strong positive effect of a social awareness found among adolescents in Piura can be interpreted to mean that creating an awareness of social structures and other cultures among relatively more privileged and homogenous populations is an effective way of enhancing their resilience. The inclusive effect of a raised social awareness could possibly be beneficial also for minority populations, as this would raise tolerance for diversity within the general population and could promote the inclusion of minority groups. We know from previous research that accepted adolescents can promote inclusion of rejected peers in the classroom in middle school (Mikami et al., 2005) and that inclusion of ethnic minority students can be promoted through measures to raise diversity awareness and prosocial behaviors (Nishina, Lewis, Bellmore, & Witkow, 2019). So, as social awareness seems to be associated with resilience in rural Mixed (Spanish-speaking) adolescents of Peru, a higher level of social awareness in this group might also be of benefit to their ethnic minority peers. The research on this topic, including previous research of Peruvian immigrants to Chile, finds that such positive effects would be contingent upon intergroup contact and the existing prejudices about the other group in both the minority and majority populations (González, Sirlopú, & Kessler, 2010).

#### *A sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture*

Hypothesis 3 was not supported, as city did not act as a moderator in the mediation of school resilience on a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture, and adolescent resilience. We could see in Figure 10 that the tendency of the moderated mediation is the same for a sense of belonging as for social awareness. We also saw in the descriptive statistics that the general level of a sense of belonging is a bit lower for Ayacucho than for Piura. However, the moderated mediation was not significant, and the effect of a sense of belonging on the resilience factors is not considered moderated by living in Ayacucho or

Piura. The results indicate that despite the relatively lower level of a sense of belonging in Ayacucho than in Piura evident in Figure 10, the effect of a sense of belonging on the resilience factors included in the study does not differ between the cities.

Hypothesis 3 was based on the research that a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture is an important developmental asset for minority adolescents (Romero et al., 2014) and Indigenous and Native groups (Adams et al., 2006). In the research of Sellers and Shelton (2003), Indigenous identity development was accompanied by a potential negative developmental effect. The researchers describe this negative effect as related to discrimination awareness. Further, research on minority groups showed consistently negative effects of racial/ethnic discrimination (Carter et al., 2017). A possible explanation that this negative effect was not found in the analysis of the sense of belonging variable in this study, can be tied to the nature of the constructs. The discrimination awareness described by Sellers and Shelton (2003) that was found to initially weaken the outcomes of Indigenous groups, can be interpreted to resemble more closely the social awareness construct in this study. Further, in the research of Adams et al. (2006), such discrimination awareness might be tackled better when the adolescents have built a stronger ethnic identity through spending time within their ancestral cultural context. Hence, the results arguably support the empowering and promotive effect of a sense of belonging for Native/Indigenous adolescents that is evident in the research of Adams et al. (2006). These findings contribute to identifying that a sense of belonging is of great importance for the development of adolescents growing up within an Indigenous cultural context.

It is possible that some of the adolescents in Ayacucho identified and felt belonging within the majority culture, as the questionnaire did not ask which culture and community they felt identified with. Previous research has shown that identification with the majority culture could bring a less compromised cultural identity (Viladrich & Loue, 2010) and less attrition in school (Davalos et al., 1999) for minority groups. Ungar (2015) highlights that influence of the dominant culture on minority groups seems to be strong.

To sum up, the findings indicate that the level of a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture is connected to adolescent resilience.

#### *The moderated mediation findings seen together*

The findings indicate that a sense of belonging and social awareness are valuable developmental assets in adolescence. The results of the moderated mediations that social awareness differs between the two groups can be interpreted considering previous research

that the awareness of Indigenous ethnocultural conditions is contingent upon own experiences within the culture, and identification with it (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Findings that such identification brings with it awareness of social stigma, (Hogg et al., 1987) might also be of relevance for the lower level of social awareness in Ayacucho.

To nuance these findings, several aspects can be mentioned. Research on the role education and the school setting plays in Indigenous and minority communities can be highlighted. Canessa (2004) finds in Bolivian highlands that the school does not provide Indigenous students with a curriculum that strengthens their belonging with their ancestral culture, and rather alienates them from their cultural roots. A similar situation was found with African American students in the United States (Brannon et al., 2015). A theoretical view of the relatively lower social awareness in the Indigenous group is given by a psychological theory of oppression, which is thought to include measures to obviate the oppressed groups' awareness of their status, among others through giving education in a one-way instructive manner (Freire, 2009). Following this, an eligible explanation for the less positive effect of social awareness among the Quechua-speaking group might be the findings described by Winkler and Cueto (2004) and Arista and Pineda (2020) in the Peruvian context, and by Canessa (2004) with Aymara-speaking Indigenous groups in Bolivian highlands, where teachers lack proficiency in the local Indigenous language and in this way contribute to discrimination and alienation of these students. Winkler and Cueto (2004, pp. 315–354), describe a situation where Indigenous language students are taught curriculum in a less challenging and less communicative manner. Quality of education might have consequences on social awareness and a sense of belonging.

Further, Kirby et al. (2020) found that Peruvian Indigenous students struggle to complete higher education and that identification and belonging within the academic community is important, but not as evident in university-level Indigenous students and that this is tied to their perceived representation and belonging as Indigenous. At this level, Indigenous students to a little degree are part of a group from the same community and the scholarships are based on performance. Given the value of education within the hegemonic culture of Peru, as described by De la Cadena (2000, pp. 1-28), the hardship to attain higher education researched by Kirby and colleagues (2020) is another possible contributing factor to the somewhat less positive effect of a sense of belonging to their community and culture in the Ayacucho adolescents in the present study.

Lastly, other social developmental indicators marginalizing rural Indigenous populations of Peru as described in the introduction of this study might contribute to



weakening adolescents' sense of belonging to their Indigenous community and culture, and their social awareness. For adolescents living in the Piura area mainly without a close Indigenous background, social awareness seems to come with less complications than for the adolescents growing up within the Ayacucho context with Indigenous heritage. Heightened social awareness in the majority population might also be positive for the inclusion of minority and Indigenous groups.

### **Implications**

Considering previous theory and research, this section will describe how the results can contribute to the understanding of adolescent development. The implications of the results will first be considered within resilience research and the importance of a socio-cultural understanding in this field. Then, reflections on research in an understudied context and the implications for working towards empowering Indigenous youth are presented. Lastly, the way ethnicity and culture can be conceptualized and measured, and the implications of working with the city of residence as an indication of ethnicity are considered.

### ***The importance of contextual systems of adaptation***

This thesis is based on a framework of developmental systems of adaptation. The fourth wave of resilience research is adapting a dynamic systems approach, and the result in this study captures the importance of adolescents' systems of adaptation both in sociocultural development and at school. The results support the theory that resilience is a dynamic and multilevel construct that exists across different developmental systems (Lerner, 2006; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016; Masten et al., 2008). The results provide insight into the connection between sociocultural systems, the school environment, and how they associate with the intra- and interpersonal protective factors of adolescent resilience. The findings illustrate the importance of sociocultural and school systems for Peruvian adolescents irrespective of their ethnic belonging and nuance some differences in sociocultural developmental factors between ethnic groups in Peru. The findings of the difference in the positive effect of social awareness illustrate the contextual temporal principle in developmental psychology that the same variable is given its distinct meaning in different contexts and situations (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1985; Sroufe, 2013a). As the socio-cultural context and potential consequences of social awareness in the two areas differ, the significance of social awareness in the two groups of adolescents shows different associations.

*A vocation for a socio-cultural view of resilience*

The findings illustrate that the cultural context and school environment lie as premises for development that benefits from a decentered view of resilience as advocated by Ungar (2015). The socio-ecological definition of resilience as an ability to navigate cultural and contextual resources (Ungar, 2015) fits well with the findings in this study. The findings that the availability of social and school resources for Peruvian adolescents in their cultural context contributes to shaping the importance of different developmental assets, delineate a resilience theory that actualizes cultural and contextual aspects of development. Within this narrative of the adolescent situated within a sociocultural context, the phrasing of the individual “bouncing back” in the face of adversity (Windle, 2011) can be seen as not sufficiently culturally sensitive. This research shows that an individual’s resilience depends upon a large array of social (i.e., social awareness) and school systems (i.e., school resilience) that the adolescent navigates. Within the dynamic systems perspective, and taking non-Western cultural views into account, adolescents’ social and cultural support systems seem to be central factors bouncing the individual back on track.

*Implications of ethnicity findings*

The association of a sense of belonging to one’s culture and community with resilience factors was lower in Ayacucho compared to Piura, but the findings indicate that this difference is independent of the resilience factors. When this developmental asset is heightened, adolescent resilience is strengthened through school resilience in the same manner in both cities. The fact that the moderation was not significant, opens the possibility that resilience can be strengthened in Ayacucho youth through cultivating a sense of belonging and identity. Maybe the appreciation and connection with own culture will prove to be more effective than raising social awareness, (tolerance and respect towards other cultures), in line with the Native engagement theory of Adams et al. (2006).

Of the developmental assets, social awareness in Piura adolescents seems to have the most positive effect, and this is the analysis where a difference in ethnicity matters for the association with resilience (see Figure 10). It would in the future be interesting to explore if Piura adolescents would profit more than Ayacucho adolescents from improving social awareness with longitudinal data or intervention studies. The association between a sense of belonging and the resilience outcomes is more similar across city samples. Future studies

could investigate whether general measures to heighten a sense of belonging and identity would affect the different cities' adolescents' resilience in a more similar manner.

The finding that social awareness (i.e., the ability to see things from different viewpoints, understand and empathize with others, and respect their experiences, norms, and behaviors regardless of the context or the person's culture) is more related to promotive and protective resilience factors in Piura than Ayacucho youth can be linked to the literature on the negative effect of social stigma and exclusion toward minority and Indigenous groups (Adams et al., 2006; Brannon et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2016; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Further, when ethnicity and culture fractionalized in a similar manner, which means that ethnic groups are an important social categorization, some research points towards a higher likelihood of violent conflict and social antagonism (Desmet et al., 2017, p. 2501). There is a possibility that societies characterized by higher cultural diversity and less salient fractions of ethnic groups, where ethnic stereotypes will not tend to fare well, also are more peaceful and inclusive.

Social learning theory and evolutionary psychology hold that prestige and conformist biases cluster traits together, and in this process, cultural and ethnic categories are homogenized (Richerson & Boyd, 2008, pp. 86, 164). The implications of these theories will be a clear fractionalization of salient clusters of ethnic traits that exist as stereotypes within social contexts. In contexts of discrimination, such as in the majority Indigenous community, it might be difficult to develop positive attitudes towards other cultures and differences because they are not experienced to be their own, nor are they experienced mainly as inclusive or tolerant. Accepting attitudes from a hegemonic culture that has relegated one's own culture (as in Ayacucho) might be an act of subordination and will not contribute to resilience as efficiently as it seems to do for the adolescents living in the relatively more homogenous majority culture in Piura. Seen together with the findings of Adams et al. (2006) that a stronger Indigenous identity will also heighten the tolerance for social discrimination suggests that there is a need for Indigenous adolescents to focus on understanding themselves and fostering safety within their community and culture before it is as fruitful as for the adolescents living in the majority culture, to start to tolerate and accept others and their culture through social awareness. The implication of these findings is that in the process of mitigating the influence of hegemonic power dynamics expressed as discrimination and marginalization, social awareness does not seem to suffice to promote Indigenous adolescent development. Empowerment through connectedness to one's own culture and community of socio-culturally marginalized groups seems like a fairer place to start.

Further, the school is an important promotive environment, but as we see, its enhancement of resilience factors depends on the socio-cultural and economic context to be discovered by the youth, and the way these are reflected in the school environment and curriculum. As we remember from the introduction, Monard (2020) describes the Peruvian social reality with significant developmental gaps between urban and rural areas that act as a proxy for a division between ethnic groups. The findings that the promotive effect of social awareness differs between Andean and coastal adolescents, gives an indication that these divisions are still present in rural Peru.

### ***The challenge of producing precise hypotheses within new research contexts***

This research matters because the participants are not from a Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) context, and the results add to a valuable pool of research on the rural populations in Latin America. The finding of this study that identity and sense of belonging to own culture are important irrespective of ethnicity leads to valuable conclusions in terms of empowerment of Indigenous groups, and cross-cultural knowledge on this important developmental asset. We do not have much comparable research on Indigenous populations in Latin America, so it is hard to say whether the results are in line with similar populations. The literature on the effect of a sense of belonging on well-being outcomes within Indigenous populations consisted mostly of groups in North America (Adams et al., 2006; Zimmerman et al., 1998). The literature review was supplemented with research on minority groups in Western countries, i.e. Mexican immigrants (Paat, 2015) or Hispanics in the U.S. (Davalos et al., 1999). The North American majority context of the Native and minority groups in these studies differs from the Latin American Peruvian context. As elaborated in the introduction, Peru differs significantly also from Mexico according to ethnic history, so it was with a thin available context that a sense of belonging was proposed as less positive for the Indigenous Peruvian population.

### ***How can we capture the meaning of ethnicity in Peru?***

Ungar (2015) points to reasons why research on the role of culture in resilience has been challenging. He sees a large diversity within each cultural group and highlights that influence of dominant cultures, and between cultures seems to be strong. Tying ethnic belonging to language or place of origin might be too coarse for categorizing groups along the lines of ethnic diversity that are most salient and defining for the population in question. Desmet and colleagues (2017) challenged the view that ethnicity is a salient predictor of

cultural values and norms. The overlap between cultural and ethnolinguistic fractionalization was low in Peru, which indicates that even though there are distinct ethnolinguistic groups in Peru, this to a low degree predicted answers to questions about norms, values, and preferences in the Peruvian population.

An explanation for the relatively low concordance between ethnolinguistic groups and culture could be the relative meaning of language in encompassing the ethnic identity of individuals, which has been problematized by several critics. In the Peruvian context, Thorp and Paredes (2010) problematize ways of measuring ethnicity through self-identification, race, language, religion, and place of birth and origin. They find through their research that many people in rural areas where Indigenous people historically were marginalized tend to self-identify as Mixed, even though they have an Indigenous heritage. Illustrating the fluctuating report of language as a sign of group identity, the work of Padilla-Iglesias, Foley, and Shneidman (2020) on Yucatec Mayan communities in a period with increased communication with Spanish-speaking towns is interesting. They describe that the evolved predisposition to use language as a marker of group identity is used together with social information and leads to differentiated reasoning and behavioral expression among the inhabitants, both depending on their own linguistic repertoire, and varying according to context. This contextual and pragmatic attitude toward ethnolinguistic categories complicates the use of language as a salient marker of ethnic groupings.

Another interesting example that supports this contextual view of self-identification and ethnic relativity is described by Marisol De la Cadena (2000) in her qualitative account of “Adriana” from Cuzco. Adriana identifies as Mestizo, although she practices traditional Andean dance to honor her Indian heritage. However, she is clear about how she takes higher education and believes in the social value of this, and states that she does not “live like an Indian”, which to her implies a social condition of failure to achieve educational improvement, and hence, it is natural for her to identify as Mestizo. De la Cadena posits that Adriana’s way of negotiating her identities enables her to honor her heritage without having to suffer marginalization under identifying as an Indigenous. Further, De la Cadena points to Adriana’s belief in the social value of education as a way that she supports the hegemonic social order. The example of Adriana shows that ethnicity in Peru exists across social and economic dimensions in a hegemonic hierarchy in addition to the aspect of identification and belonging. As we saw from Adriana’s story, she identified as a Mestiza who simultaneously connects and separates from her cultural bonds to the Indigenous heritage.

These examples help nuance the complex concept of ethnicity, and why the quantitative operationalization of a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture in this survey study did not capture the complexity of cultural belonging and identity in Peruvian society.

### **Limitations**

This study has a cross-sectional design, which means that no causal conclusions can be drawn from the analyses. There is also a potential limitation to the analyses that some of the included constructs resemble each other, and that parts of the statistical connection between them were due to this. Where available, previous research is used to propose possible interpretations of the relations between the variables. This study only used literature written in English or Norwegian. Some relevant sources were not included as they were written in Spanish. Another limitation of this study is its generalizability to other populations. Based on the idiosyncratic history and social development of the Peruvian society, generalizing the findings in this study should be done with care. The study did not map out socioeconomic differences between Ayacucho and Piura, but we know that poverty is harder and has different characteristics in rural Andean areas than in the northwestern coastal areas of Peru. This includes lower quality in education, infrastructure, teaching resources, professional local language proficiency, and fewer career opportunities (Arista & Pineda, 2020). For decades, Andean youth have migrated to cities to pursue better education and conditions where few return (Thorp & Paredes, 2010). This situation might affect community belonging and social awareness among the remaining youth.

### **Conclusions**

Based on quantitative moderated mediation analyses of cross-sectional data gathered in secondary schools in two rural regions of Peru, it can be concluded that social awareness and a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture have a direct positive effect on adolescent resilience and an indirect positive effect through school resilience. The findings support a socio-ecological view of resilience (Ungar, 2015).

Higher social awareness is found to be more associated with promotive and protective resilience factors in Piura than in Ayacucho. This finding is interpreted as tied to the effect of social stigma and marginalization of Indigenous groups that Ayacucho adolescents experience (Thorp & Paredes, 2010), and it supports the contextual principles of developmental pathways

enhanced in developmental psychology and resilience research (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1985; Sroufe, 2013a).

The positive effect of a sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture on adolescent resilience through school resilience did not significantly differ between the two cities, although the level of the positive association of a sense of belonging with resilience factors lay lower in Ayacucho compared to Piura. These findings indicate that a sense of belonging is a developmental asset that is associated with adolescent resilience, and a heightened ability to benefit from a safe school environment. The lower level of this asset in Ayacucho is interpreted as connected to education quality, migration to urban areas, socioeconomic disadvantages and historical marginalization present in the Andean highlands (Monard, 2020; Thorp & Paredes, 2010).

The results indicate that eventual measures to enhance resilience among Indigenous Peruvian adolescents will be fairer starting with enhancing belonging and identity with the community and culture in advance of focusing on social awareness. Social awareness is found to be a valuable developmental asset, especially in the majority population, and a raised social awareness in the majority population might also have an inclusive effect on minority groups they are in contact with (Nishina et al., 2019). Supported by previous research (Adams et al., 2006; Brannon et al., 2015; Sellers & Shelton, 2003), social awareness seems to be more promotive in Indigenous populations when they have had the opportunity of building a sense of belonging and identity with their own community and culture.

The findings imply that a developmental psychological approach to sociocultural differences in resilience can be useful in the work of sorting out the differences between culture and marginalization in minority and Indigenous groups in an understudied population. Future developmental research would benefit from being longitudinal and could focus on measuring the effectiveness of initiatives aiming to strengthen a sense of belonging and identity within Indigenous Peruvian communities and measuring the effect of social awareness in the majority population on the inclusion of minority and Indigenous groups. Such intervention should be developed with a basis in, and participation of, the communities to ensure the inclusion of local knowledge and cultural practice.

## Endnotes

- 1. *Hegemony.*** The idea of hegemony stems from Marxist notions that the ruling class who controls society also controls the political and primary ideological constitution (Marx & Engels, 1845/2009). The Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci defined *hegemony* as a partly forced and partly consensual ideological assertion of the dominant class upon the subordinate people (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci highlighted hegemony's often-hidden and self-evident nature as cultural assumptions within the hegemonic ideological framework become a normal reality or common sense for the subordinate class (Mallon, 1995). By defining the reality, the dominant class is also thought to set the mental and structural limits of understanding, where subordinate classes' view of their subordination is composed in a way that sustains the ruling hierarchy (Hall, 2003). Hegemony as a process is used in this thesis to put into words the Western Spanish influence on the value and meaning of different ethnic groups in Peruvian society.
- 2. *Cultural imperialism.*** The origin of the essentialist nativist standpoint warned against when talking in general terms about native peoples, is commonly ascribed to the *cultural imperialism* of Western powers. The Western colonial culture has been interpreted by anthropologists to value societies and nations, whereas tribes and ethnicities are seen as representations of more primitive groups. The definition of non-Western ethnic groups as primitive is made from a Western viewpoint and holds presumptions of homogeneity or differences ascribed from above (Bolaffi et al., 2002, pp. 56-59). The impact of cultural imperialism in Peru is beyond the scope of this thesis. Interested readers are revised to i.e., De la Cadena (2000); Deans-Smith (2001); Thorp and Paredes (2010).



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## APPENDIX A The items for the instruments used in the study

### Social awareness

#### *General statement*

In each question choose the answer that best describes how you normally act:

- 1 Nothing
- 2 Very seldom
- 3 Somehow
- 4 Very much
- 5 A lot
- 6 I don't know

#### *Questionnaire*

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Label

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How carefully do you listen to other people's views?

How much do you care about the feelings of others?

How much do you congratulate others for their achievements?

How do you get along with colleagues who are different from you?

How well can you describe your feelings?

When others disagree with you, how much do you respect their views?

How much have you been able to defend yourself without making others feel bad?

How much have you been able to disagree with others without starting an argument?

---

### Sense of belonging and identity with one's community and culture

#### *General statement*

Please read the statements and tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of them.

- 1 Totally disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 Agree
- 5 Totally agree
- 6 I don't know

#### *Questionnaire*

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Label

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I feel responsible for my community

I think I should help to make a difference in my community

I think it is important to be aware of community problems

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I feel identified with my community

I would not like to leave my community

I would miss my community a lot if I had to leave

I think my parents feel very identified with my community

My culture is something that I will take with me wherever I go

I am proud of my culture

---

### **School Resilience Scale for Adolescents**

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#### ***General statement***

- 1      Totally disagree
- 2      Disagree
- 3      Not agree or disagree
- 4      Disagree
- 5      Totally disagree
- 6      I don't know

#### ***Questionnaire***

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Label

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At school there is at least one adult who knows me and supports me.

I feel accepted and valued by my classmates

Teachers and classmates value our different characteristics (languages, cultures, sexual diversity, disability, etc.).

My family participates in school activities

In my school we know how to seek help if we have a personal or emotional problem.

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