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## BRIEF REPORT

## Racial Discrimination, Multiple Group Identities, and Civic Beliefs Among Immigrant Adolescents

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The present study tested the independent and interactive effects of multiple group identities (i.e., American and ethnic) and racial discrimination on civic beliefs among immigrant adolescents. Seventy-seven participants completed a questionnaire during after-school programs. Ethnic identity was positively associated with civic beliefs whereas racial discrimination was negatively related to civic beliefs, and racial discrimination moderated the relationships between multiple group identities and civic beliefs. Our findings highlight the importance of studying structural and individual factors jointly in the investigation of civic beliefs among immigrant adolescents.

*Keywords:* civic beliefs, immigrant adolescents, multiple identities, racial discrimination

Research on immigrant adolescent adaptation has neglected a critical aspect of positive youth development: civic contribution (i.e., giving back to community and society; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Civic contribution is related to healthy developmental outcomes among racial/ethnic minority adolescents (e.g., Chan, Ou, & Reynolds, 2014). As such, examinations of correlates of civic contribution among immigrant adolescents are critical toward promoting successful adaptation. Civic beliefs such as beliefs in the responsiveness of government, America as a just society, and social justice are associated with immigrant adolescent civic contribution (Bedolla, 2000; Jensen, 2008). Additionally, group identity and racial discrimination influence immigrant adolescents' civic beliefs (e.g., Jensen, 2008). However, research has not yet examined the effects of multiple group identities or the interaction between group identities and racial discrimination on immigrant adolescents' civic beliefs.

Social group membership is important to understanding immigrant adolescents' civic contribution (Chan, 2011). As the intergroup theory of civic contribution suggests, racial/ethnic minority adolescents, including immigrants, who perceive that their groups have been historically excluded are less likely to participate in mainstream activities because individuals perceive such participation as supportive of an unjust system (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2002). Instead, they are more likely to participate in activities that focus on addressing the needs of their fellow group members (Bedolla, 2000). As such, the degree to which immigrant adolescents identify with their racial/ethnic group and the level of racial exclusion experienced are important to understanding their civic contribution.

**Group Identity and Civic Beliefs**

Research on the influence of group identity on immigrant youth civic contribution has mostly focused on ethnic identity. Asian and Latino immigrant adolescents consider their attachment to their ethnic group as a motivation for their civic contribution, choosing to participate in nonconventional civic activities (e.g., protest) instead of conventional civic activities (e.g., voting) as a result of a belief that the government would not work to protect their interests (Bedolla, 2000; Jensen, 2008). Similarly, Stepick and colleagues (2008) found that Latino immigrant adolescents cited ethnic group solidarity as a motive for joining political demonstrations. Taken together, these qualitative studies suggest the extent to which immigrant adolescents identify with their ethnic group is related to their civic beliefs.

Research on the association between group identity and civic beliefs has not thoroughly addressed the national identity of immigrant adolescents: American identity. Immigrant adolescents and college students in the United States have been found to identify with both their ethnic group and as American (e.g., Birman, Persky, & Chan, 2010) and to actively explore what it means to be American (Schwartz et al., 2012). When asked about characteristics that define "American," the most frequent responses are ideological principles including freedom and equality (Rodriguez, Schwartz, & Whitbourne, 2010). Thus, those who identify strongly as Americans are likely to endorse these principles, and beliefs in these principles may lead to greater level of civic contribution. The current study, therefore, examined both American identity and ethnic identity as correlates of civic beliefs.

**Racial Discrimination and Civic Beliefs**

In contrast, racial discrimination is negatively associated with immigrant adolescent civic beliefs. For example, Wray-Lake and colleagues (2008) found that Arab immigrant adolescents who endorse the belief that most Americans view Arabs as enemies reported lower levels of trust in U.S. government than those who do not endorse such view. Similarly, racial minority and immigrant

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participants experiencing racial prejudice are less likely to believe that America is a just society (Flanagan et al., 2009). One limitation in these studies is that racial discrimination was assessed using a 1-item question. Assessing the frequency of racial discrimination is important because it affects the relationship between racial discrimination and outcomes (e.g., Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Further, research has not examined racial microaggression, a more subtle form of racial discrimination that is more prevalent than overt racism (Sue et al., 2007). The present study addresses these limitations by using a validated measure of racial microaggression.

### Interaction Between Group Identities and Racial Discrimination

Ethnic identity and racial discrimination independently influence civic beliefs among immigrant adolescents (e.g., Jensen, 2008; Flanagan et al., 2009). However, the way in which the association between group identity and civic beliefs varies as a function of racial discrimination has not been examined. Sánchez-Jankowski (2002) suggests that racial/ethnic minority group members in the United States collectively share a history of exclusion (i.e., racial discrimination) and this shared history affects individual civic contribution. Individuals who identify more closely with their racial/ethnic group are more likely to be influenced by the shared group history. As such, the degree to which one identifies with his or her ethnic group (i.e., ethnic identity) and racial discrimination need to be examined jointly in the investigation of immigrant civic beliefs.

### Current Study

The current study investigated correlates of three civic beliefs: (a) belief in social justice, (b) responsiveness of government, and (c) belief in America as a just society. Given previous findings that immigrant adolescents who strongly identify with their ethnic group often express a general mistrust toward the government and are interested in activities that aim toward addressing injustice (e.g., Bedolla, 2000; Jensen, 2008), we hypothesized that ethnic identity would be negatively associated with responsiveness of government and belief in America as a just society and positively associated with belief in social justice. In contrast, American identity was hypothesized to be positively associated with all three civic beliefs because qualitative research suggests that these civic beliefs define being American (Rodriguez et al., 2010). Finally, racial discrimination was hypothesized to be negatively related to all three civic beliefs (Flanagan et al., 2009; Wray-Lake et al., 2008). We did not advance specific hypotheses regarding the interactions as no research on this topic exists.

### Method

#### Sample and Procedure

Eighty-one immigrant adolescents from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds living in an urban Southeastern city participated in the study; however, the final sample included only 77 adolescents ( $M_{\text{age}} = 15.73 \pm 1.94$ ; 55% female) because participants with more than 10% missing data were excluded from data analysis (see Table 1 for participant description). Both parents of participants

Table 1  
*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Age ( <i>M</i> ± <i>SD</i> )	15.73 ± 1.94	
Gender (female)	43	55
Ethnicity <sup>a</sup>		
Nepali	11	14
Latino	7	9
Vietnamese	5	7
Bhutanese	5	7
Asian American	4	5
Chinese	4	5
Ethiopian	4	5
Generational status <sup>b</sup>		
U.S. born	30	39
Foreign born	44	57

Note. *n* = 77.

<sup>a</sup> Participants were asked to write in their ethnicity. As a result 14 distinct race/ethnicities were reported. The seven categories listed were the largest ones. <sup>b</sup> Three participants did not answer the question regarding their generational status.

and participants provided consent and participants completed all study materials during afterschool programs.

### Measures

Racial Discrimination was assessed by the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS; Nadal, 2011). REMS includes 45-items aggregated into a total score. Items, such as *I was ignored at school/work because of my race*, are rated on 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *I did not experience this event* to 5 = *I experienced this event 10 or more times in the past six months*). Among racially and ethnically diverse participants, REMS was significantly correlated with the Racism and Life Experiences Scale-Brief Version (Nadal, 2011).

American Identity and Ethnic Identity were assessed with the Language, Identity, and Behavioral Acculturation (LIB) Scale (Birman & Trickett, 2001). In this study, we used the two identity subscales: American identity and ethnic identity. Similar to Phinney's (1992) measure of ethnic identity, LIB assesses one's commitment to his or her American and ethnic identities. All items (e.g., *I am proud of being American/a member of my ethnic group*) are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very much*). The identity subscales have been used with immigrant adolescents in previous studies and show excellent reliability and validity (e.g., Birman et al., 2010).

Civic Beliefs were measured by three scales that have been used previously with immigrant adolescents (Flanagan et al., 2009). The first 4-item scale measures one's belief in equality and social justice (i.e., *Social Justice*). A sample item is *I get mad when I hear about people being treated unjustly*. The second 4-item scale, *Responsiveness of American Government* measures the extent to which one believes that the government is responsive to her group's needs. Sample item includes *the government doesn't care about us ordinary people*. The last 3-item scale assesses one's belief in the idea that America is a just society (i.e., *Just Society*). It includes item such as *basically people get fair treatment in America, no matter who they are*. All three scales use a 5-point

Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

## Data Analysis

Missing data were imputed at the item level using the EM Estimation provided by SPSS 20 (IBM, 2011). A post hoc power analysis estimated that the current sample ( $n = 77$ ) has 80% power to detect a medium sized effect with an alpha level of .05 and seven predictors (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Bivariate correlations and hierarchical linear regression analyses were used. All continuous variables were standardized. Gender and age were entered first as covariates because female and older adolescents hold more positive civic beliefs (Torney-Purta, Barber, & Wilkenfeld, 2007). American identity and ethnic identity were entered in the second step, and racial discrimination was entered in the third step. Interaction terms between group identities and discrimination were entered in the final step. If the interactions were significant, simple slope analyses were then conducted to examine the association between group identity and civic beliefs at either high or low level of racial discrimination (i.e.,  $\pm 1$  SD above/below the mean; Aiken & West, 1991).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, internal consistency indices, and correlations for all study variables. American identity was not associated with civic beliefs. Ethnic identity was positively related to Social Justice,  $r = .28$ ,  $p < .05$ , and Just Society,  $r = .24$ ,  $p < .05$ . Racial discrimination was negatively associated with Responsiveness of American Government,  $r = -.42$ ,  $p < .01$ . Participants also scored higher on ethnic identity than American identity,  $t(76) = 3.70$ ,  $p < .01$ . The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) ranges from 1.04 to 1.14, which suggests multicollinearity among the predictors and interaction terms is not an issue (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

### Social Justice

American identity was not a significant predictor of Social Justice; however, ethnic identity ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and racial discrimination ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p = .05$ ) were positively associated with Social Justice. Finally, neither interaction was significant. In addition, racial discrimination became nonsignificant in the final step ( $\beta = .22$ , *ns*). The model accounted for 15.0% of the variance in Social Justice,  $R^2 = .15$ ,  $F(7, 69) = 1.74$ ,  $p = ns$ ,  $f^2 = .18$  (see Table 3).

### Responsiveness of American Government

Racial Discrimination was the only significant predictor in the third step ( $\beta = -.49$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, it did not moderate the effects of group identities. Together, the model accounted for 26% of the variance in Responsiveness of American Government,  $R^2 = .26$ ,  $F(7, 69) = 3.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $f^2 = .35$ .

### Just Society

Only Ethnic Identity was marginally associated with Just Society ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .06$ ). The interaction between American Identity

and Racial Discrimination ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the interaction between Ethnic Identity and Racial Discrimination ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significant. The interactions explain additional 16% variance in Just Society ( $\Delta R^2 = .16$ ,  $F(2, 69) = 7.65$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Further, Ethnic Identity emerged to be a significant predictor in the final step ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Together, the model accounted for 26% of the variance in Just Society,  $R^2 = .26$ ,  $F(7, 69) = 3.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $f^2 = .35$ .

Simple slope analyses revealed that American Identity was positively associated with Just Society when racial discrimination was high ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $p < .01$ ). American Identity was not significant correlate when racial discrimination was low ( $\beta = -.21$ , *ns*; see Figure 1). Figure 2 shows that ethnic identity was not associated with Just Society when Racial Discrimination was high ( $\beta = -.03$ , *ns*); however, it was positively related to Just Society when Racial Discrimination was low ( $\beta = .51$ ,  $p < .01$ ).<sup>1</sup>

## Discussion

The present study examined the correlates of civic beliefs among immigrant adolescents. The study found that ethnic identity was positively associated with Just Society and Social Justice; Racial Discrimination was negatively related to Responsiveness of American Government; and finally, Racial Discrimination moderated the associations between group identities and Just Society.

### Group Identities

The present study found that immigrant adolescents who are more committed to their ethnic group believed in social justice at a greater level than their counterparts. Similarly, Flanagan and colleagues (2009) found that more committed adolescents expressed greater levels of willingness to “stop prejudice” than those who are less committed. Our findings confirm the association between commitment to one’s ethnic group and one’s belief in promoting social justice.

Further, we found a main effect of ethnic identity on Just Society; however, racial discrimination moderated this main effect. Perceiving less discrimination enhances the positive association between ethnic identity and beliefs in America as a just society, whereas perceiving more discrimination buffers such association. Similar results were found in a group of Asian American college students; strong ethnic identity in combination with use of approach-type coping were only significantly associated with better mental health outcomes when reported racial discrimination was low (Yoo & Lee, 2005). Future studies need to address *why* the effects of ethnic identity become nonsignificant when racial discrimination is more frequent.

Although the main effects of American identity on civic beliefs were not significant, the interaction between American identity and racial discrimination on Just Society was significant. Perceiving more racial discrimination enhances the positive association between American identity and beliefs in

<sup>1</sup> Three additional regression analyses were conducted to regress the interaction between American identity and ethnic identity on the three civic outcomes, and none of the interactions was significant.

Table 2  
Correlations Among Group Identities, Racial Discrimination, and Civic Beliefs

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. American Identity	<b>.86</b>					
2. Ethnic Identity	.09	<b>.88</b>				
3. Racial Discrimination	-.17	-.05	<b>.97</b>			
4. Social Justice	.02	.28*	.18	<b>.82</b>		
5. Responsiveness of Govt	-.01	-.12	-.42**	-.64**	<b>.77</b>	
6. Just Society	.21	.24*	-.10	.18	-.09	<b>.80</b>
Mean	2.79 <sup>a</sup>	3.20 <sup>a</sup>	2.18	3.47	2.87	3.12
Standard deviation	.75	.68	.59	1.03	.99	1.14

Note.  $n = 77$ ; scale reliabilities (coefficient alpha) are shown in **boldfaced italics** on the diagonal; Responsiveness of Govt = Responsiveness of Government.

<sup>a</sup> Participants scored higher on ethnic identity than American identity,  $t(76) = 3.70$ ;  $p < .01$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

America as a just country, whereas perceiving less racial discrimination buffers the association. This finding suggests that immigrant adolescents who are committed to being Americans in face of frequent discrimination believe that America is just. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), one way to cope with racial discrimination is to disassociate oneself from his or her racial/ethnic group (i.e., devalued group) and identify with the majority group (i.e., valued group) to maintain positive identity. In addition, some immigrants cope with discrimination by expressing loyalty and allegiance to the host country. For example, many U.S.-born Japanese Americans volunteered to fight in World War II on behalf of the United States despite being subjected to internment at home (Takaki, 1998).

We found Racial Discrimination moderated the effects of American Identity and Ethnic Identity on only one civic belief: Just Society. It is possible that the small sample size of the present study limits the statistical power to detect interaction effects that are relatively small. As such, studies with larger samples are needed to elucidate the complex associations among group identities, racial discrimination, and different civic beliefs.

### Racial Discrimination

The present study found that immigrant adolescents who reported experiencing racial discrimination more frequently were less likely to believe that the government is responsive to people

Table 3  
Hierarchical Regression for Multiple Group Identities and Racial Discrimination Predicting Civic Beliefs

Predictor	Social Justice				Responsiveness of American Government				Just Society			
	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Entry of Block 1			.02				.02				.002	
Gender	.13	.23			-.12	.23			.04	.23		
Age	-.10	.12			.06	.12			-.03	.12		
Entry of Block 2			.10	.03			.03	.01			.10	.10*
Gender	.12	.23			-.12	.24			.07	.23		
Age	-.09	.11			.06	.12			-.04	.11		
American Identity	.03	.12			-.04	.12			.21	.12		
Ethnic Identity	.27*	.11			-.11	.12			.22	.11		
Entry of Block 3			.15*	.05*			.25**	.22**			.10	.002
Gender	.11	.23			-.10	.21			.07	.23		
Age	-.15	.12			.20	.11			-.03	.12		
American Identity	.07	.12			-.13	.11			.20	.12		
Ethnic Identity	.27*	.11			-.12	.10			.22	.11		
Racial Discrimination	.23*	.12			-.49**	.11			-.05	.12		
Entry of Block 4			.15	.004			.26**	.01			.26**	.16**
Gender	.10	.23			-.08	.23			.13	.22		
Age	-.15	.12			.20	.11			-.01	.11		
American Identity	.09	.13			-.16	.11			.10	.11		
Ethnic Identity	.27*	.11			-.11	.11			.24*	.11		
Racial Discrimination	.22	.12			-.48**	.11			.01	.11		
Interaction: AI & REMS	-.07	.10			.12	.10			.36**	.10		
Interaction: EI & REMS	.03	.13			-.06	.12			-.24*	.12		

Note. AI = American Identity; EI = Ethnic Identity; REMS = Racial Discrimination; AI, EI, and RM were standardized scores.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .



like them. Trust in the responsiveness of government is an important indicator of civic contribution (Kelly, 2009). Thus, research should examine factors that buffer the negative impact of racial discrimination on immigrant adolescent civic beliefs. Research investigating the influence of racial discrimination on racial/ethnic minority well-being has identified racial socialization as a protective factor (e.g., Wang & Huguley, 2012). It is possible that immigrant adolescents who have a deeper understanding of race-related issues can develop more nuanced and critical analyses of the system instead of broad mistrust toward authorities. When examining the influence of racial socialization, research should include the role of siblings in addition to parents because older siblings often are the ones who model civic behaviors for immigrant adolescents (Chan, 2011).

### Limitations

The current study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design does not address causal inference. As civic beliefs, group identities, and racial discrimination change over time (e.g., Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Zaff et al., 2011), it is critical to conduct longitudinal studies that span across developmental stages to delineate the complex relationships among these variables. Second, the relatively small sample size with great heterogeneity limits the study's generalizability and statistical power. Although a post hoc power analysis supports sufficient statistical power to detect a medium-sized effect, it is possible that small effects (e.g., interactions) are not detected. In addition, potential within group differences were not tested due to small sample size. A recent national survey found that immigrant adolescents from low-income families who have not had any college education reported lower level of civic contribution when compared to more affluent peers (Foster-Bey, 2008). Thus, future studies should address these within group differences in civic beliefs. Further, the heterogeneity of the sample is limiting as different immigrant groups have different immigration history and experience. Lastly, although the present study operationalized ethnic identity as commitment to one's ethnic group, the LIB identity items assess two distinct dimensions of ethnic identity: centrality and regard (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). A recent study on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, however, has found evidence to suggest that the

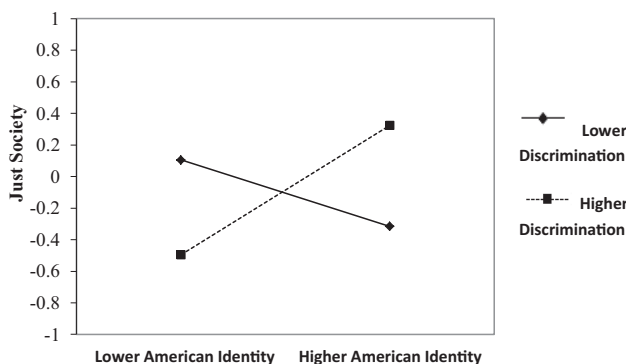


Figure 1. Interaction between American identity and racial discrimination. High and low values correspond to +1.0 and -1.0 SD from the mean, respectively. Just Society scores are standardized,  $M = 0$ ,  $SD = 1$ .

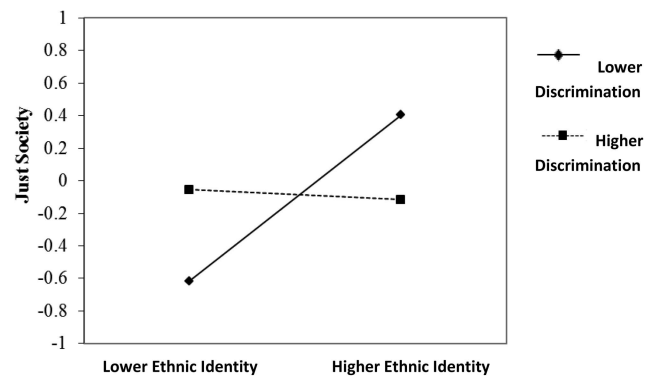


Figure 2. Interaction between American identity and racial discrimination. High and low values correspond to +1.0 and -1.0 SD from the mean, respectively. Just Society scores are standardized,  $M = 0$ ,  $SD = 1$ .

commitment subscale includes both centrality and regard (Yap et al., 2014). Future research is needed to investigate whether the LIB identity items would load together on the latent structure of commitment. Further, future research should investigate whether the content of group identity (e.g., affect, importance; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) is associated with civic beliefs in addition to commitment.

### Conclusions

This is the first study to date to investigate the interaction between multiple group identities and racial discrimination on civic beliefs among immigrant adolescents. Understanding how immigrant adolescents decide to participate in civic activities has implications to both individual and societal well-being. Civic contribution allows immigrant adolescents to develop positive developmental assets (Lerner et al., 2003). Further, civic contribution is an indicator of successful adaptation for immigrants because engagement in local and national civic affairs suggests integration (Tienda, 2002). Segmented assimilation suggests that many immigrant adolescents have limited access to resources because structural racial discrimination excludes them from participating in the mainstream society (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Civic contribution is a way for immigrant youth to break the cycle of exclusion. Finally, as the immigrant population continues to grow becoming a larger proportion of the U.S. polity, immigrant civic contribution directly affects the longevity of our democracy.

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