Ethnic Identity in Context of Ethnic Discrimination: When Does Gender and Other-Group Orientation Increase Risk for Depressive Symptoms for Immigrant-Origin Young Adults?

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Abstract:

Objectives: Ethnic discrimination increases risk for depressive symptoms, but less is known about factors that influence the impact of this cultural challenge on psychological adjustment for immigrant-origin college students. Sociocultural identity development is especially relevant during emerging adulthood. Studies examining exacerbating or buffering impacts of ethnic identity have yielded mixed results. The current study examines conditions under which one aspect of ethnic identity, affirmation/belonging, moderates the impact of perceived ethnic discrimination stress on depressive symptoms. This was expected to vary by other-group orientation and gender, in accordance with rejection sensitivity theory. Method: A multicultural sample of 290 non-White immigrant-origin emerging adults (aged 18–25) from mixed cultural backgrounds and generational statuses attending a college in the Southeastern United States completed electronic self-report questionnaires. Results: More robust support was provided for social identity theory rather than rejection sensitivity theory: stronger affirmation/belonging was inversely associated with depressive symptoms across the sample, with a notable buffering impact for women. Trend-level results indicated a protective effect for those endorsing stronger affirmation/belonging paired with greater other-group orientation. Additionally, women with weaker affirmation/belonging demonstrated greater increased depressive symptoms compared to men with weaker affirmation/belonging. Conclusions: For this sample, social identity theory was relevant to the impact of affirmation/belonging on the relation between ethnic discrimination and depressive symptoms contingent on other-group orientation and gender. This finding underscores the importance of examining ethnic identity in a nuanced manner. Implications for these results extend to college counseling centers, where inclusion of sociocultural identity in case conceptualization would be useful.

Keywords: immigrant | discrimination | depression | ethnic identity

Article:

Does strong sense of affinity to one's cultural group protect against deleterious effects of perceived ethnic discrimination stress, or is it a risk factor for greater psychopathology? Might a specific conceptual dimension of ethnic identity play a differential role for psychological adjustment depending on conditions under which it is examined? College campuses are increasingly ethnically diverse in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). First- and second-generation young adults face unique acculturation challenges as they navigate two or more cultures, and these challenges are associated with negative mental health outcomes (Berry, 2006). Depressive symptoms tend to be higher among college students than the general population (Ibrahim, Kelly, Adams, & Glazebrook, 2013). As such, it has become important to better understand psychological adjustment for immigrant-origin emerging adults on college campuses.

Although strong ethnic identity was originally thought to protect against the negative impact of cultural stressors on psychopathology, results are mixed (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Some studies have demonstrated a buffering effect, others found ethnic identity exacerbates this relation, and many studies yielded null results. Given these mixed findings, and because emerging adulthood is a relevant period in sociocultural identity development (Schwartz et al., 2014), there is a need to understand the nuanced role that ethnocultural identity plays in mental health for young adults from diverse cultural backgrounds (Hernandez, 2009). This study integrates the concept of acculturation (Berry, 2006; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010) with social as well as cultural identity theories (Phinney, 1990; Tajfel, 1974) to examine the conditions under which a certain component of ethnic identity moderates the relation between a specific cultural stressor and depressive symptoms.

Cultural Stress and Psychological Adjustment

Acculturation occurs when two or more cultures come into contact with one another, resulting in sociocultural changes within both cultures (Sam, 2006). Acculturation involves the extent to which heritage-culture practices, values, and identifications are maintained and receiving-culture practices, values, and identifications are acquired (Schwartz et al., 2010); this includes changes in social and personal identity (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). In culturally plural societies such as the United States, ethnic minority persons come into contact with both ethnic majority and minority others.

General acculturation stressors include language difficulties, daily resettlement hassles, homesickness, and pressure to acquire national culture or maintain heritage culture (Berry, 2006). Perceived ethnic discrimination, or unfair treatment attributable to one's ethnic background (Contrada et al., 2000), is a specific stressor rooted within acculturation. Greater perceived ethnic discrimination is associated with more depressive symptoms (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009) for immigrant-origin college students in the United States across generational and cultural groups (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Cheng, Lin, & Cha, 2015; Han & Lee, 2011; Lam, 2007; Miranda, Polanco-Roman, Tsypes, & Valderrama, 2013; Polanco-Roman & Miranda, 2013). Recent scholarship suggests perceived ethnic discrimination is distinct from general acculturation stressors (Caplan, 2007; Yakushko, 2010). Additionally, Caplan (2007) emphasized the importance of assessing stress appraisal, because subjective evaluations of stress

are most predictive of health outcomes. Because first- and second-generation young adults face both acculturation and discrimination stress, and because discrimination stress has sometimes been conflated with general acculturation stress, it is important to conceptually distinguish between, and statistically tease apart the effects of, general acculturation stressors and discrimination-related stressors, especially when examining the impact of these factors on psychological adjustment.

Affirmation and Belonging: A Conceptual Dimension of Ethnic Identity

While identity formation is a lifelong process (Marcia, 2010), it is most associated with psychological well-being for both adolescents and young adults aged 18–25 (Arnett, 2000; Smith & Silva, 2011), because they are still settling on identity-related beliefs and behaviors (Jensen & Arnett, 2012; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010; Syed & Azmitia, 2009). Bhatia and Ram (2001) contend that individuals make meaning of their identity through involvement in sociocultural relations. College campuses offer an optimal milieu for interpersonal interactions through peer diversity, coursework, and social groups, which create opportunities to enhance awareness of the social self and contemplate ethnic identity in new ways (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008) through identity-challenging experiences (Marcia, 2010).

Ethnic identity is the cultural component of social identity and refers to the cultural self in relation to cultural others, as well as the sense of identification with others in the same ethnic group (Liebkind, 2006; Phinney, Jacoby, & Silva, 2007). While some dimensions of ethnic identity vary by ethnic group and generation status, others such as such as positive ethnic-racial affect tend to be experienced similarly across ethnic groups (Rivas-Drake, Syed, et al., 2014; Smith & Silva, 2011). Positive ethnic-racial affect involves optimistic feelings about one's ethnocultural group; this broad theoretical dimension encompasses specific constructs such as affirmation and belonging (referred to as *affirmation/belonging*), or one's sense of attachment to their ethnic group (Phinney, 1992; Rivas-Drake, Seaton, et al., 2014; Rivas-Drake, Syed, et al., 2014). Positive ethnic-racial affect, and more specifically, affirmation/ belonging have been typically associated with fewer depressive symptoms (Rivas-Drake, Seaton, et al., 2014; Rivas-Drake, Syed, et al., 2014). Affirmation/belonging is pertinent for examination of the impact of identity on depressive symptoms in multiethnic and multigenerational samples.

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding the Role of Sociocultural Identity in Psychological Adjustment

Social identity theory posits that social identity is the component of one's self-concept derived from membership within a social group, and positive affective significance is often associated with sense of belonging to this group (Tajfel, 1974; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). One application of social identity theory is that strong ethnic identity will buffer the impact of everyday stressors on psychological adjustment because stronger ethnic identity is related to greater sense of intergroup connectedness in the form of, for example, social support or pride for one's group (Cheryan & Tsai, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Similarly, culture-related stressful experiences

might prompt one to engage in cognitive coping strategies such as thinking about positive and unique aspects of the cultural group with which one has a strong sense of belonging (see Lee, Lee, Hu, & Kim, 2014; Yoo & Lee, 2009).

Self-categorization theory provides an alternative foundation for understanding psychological implications of ingroup membership (Fiske, 2010). Social identities are derived from socially construed categories, which provide a basis for constructing ingroups and outgroups and understanding intergroup conflict (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987, cited in Smith & Silva, 2011). As such, individuals are sensitive to contextual factors—such as intergroup relations—that are relevant to ethnic identity and group membership. A more specific model for understanding the impact of intergroup conflict on psychological adjustment involves rejection sensitivity theory (Downey & Feldman, 1996), which purports that strong ethnic identity will exacerbate or worsen the impact of perceived ethnic discrimination on mental health outcomes, since rejection can leave one feeling psychologically taxed, apprehensive about future rejections, and disconnected from their group (Donovan et al., 2013; Downey & Feldman, 1996; Yoo & Lee, 2009). Because intergroup conflict such as perceived ethnic discrimination may pose a threat to one's ethnic identity (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014), strong ethnic identity may heighten awareness to perceived ethnic discrimination (Padilla & Perez, 2003), which in turn may intensify the impact of perceived ethnic discrimination on mental health (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Syed & Azmitia, 2010). Overall, two competing hypotheses exist: the potential buffering impact of ethnic identity reflected in social identity theory, and the potential exacerbating effect of ethnic identity suggested by rejection sensitivity theory (Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008).

Specifying the Conceptual Dimension and Role of Ethnic Identity: Use of Third-Variable Moderators

In a meta-analysis examining perceived ethnic discrimination and health, Pascoe and Smart Richman (2009) found that, of the total number of studies (k = 68) examining the moderating role of ethnic identity on the relation between perceived ethnic discrimination and mental health, 18% reported a buffering effect, 12% reported an exacerbating effect, and 71% reported no effect. This analysis examined studies that tended to treat ethnic identity as an aggregate factor. Another meta-analysis examined differences between studies inspecting the relation between ethnic identity and psychological well-being among non-White individuals in North America (Smith & Silva, 2011). They discovered stronger effects sizes in relatively younger samples (under age 40), and variation in effect sizes by acculturation level (larger effect for more acculturated individuals), design type (cross-sectional designs yielded larger effect sizes compared with longitudinal designs), and mental health outcomes (depressive symptoms demonstrated larger effects compared with anxious symptoms). No differences in effect sizes were found for socioeconomic status, years of education, or race. Differences by gender were just outside the standard cutoff for statistical significance (Smith & Silva, 2011).

These meta-analyses examining the moderating role of ethnic identity may have detected mixed or null results because they inadequately examined nuanced components of ethnic identity, or the statistical designs did not allow for third-variable factors to freely vary. A number of studies

have examined cultural stress and psychological adjustment using three-way interactions with immigrant-origin college students, supporting the utility of third-variable moderators (e.g., Donovan et al., 2013; Iturbide, Raffaelli, & Carlo, 2009; Wei, Yeh, Chao, Carrera, & Su, 2013; Yoo & Lee, 2005). Given these data, the current study focuses on two socio-culturally relevant third-variable moderators that may impact how affirmation/belonging influences the relation between ethnic discrimination and depressive symptoms: other-group orientation (a less well-studied component of acculturation) and gender.

Other-Group Orientation

Other-group orientation involves one's attitudinal orientation toward, and extent to which one interacts with, individuals from ethnic outgroups (Phinney, 1992). It accounts for an inclination to develop relationships with individuals from ethnic outgroups, and actual behaviors and interactions with outgroup members. This is similar to the host culture dimension of Berry's acculturation model (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006), which addresses how much one engages in practices, values, and identification of the receiving culture (Berry & Sabatier, 2011); however, it broadens this host culture notion to include multiethnic and minority individuals living in the host society. A better understanding of the impact of other-group orientation on affirmation/belonging and perceived ethnic discrimination is needed (Lee, 2003, 2005).

Minority individuals with strong ethnic identity who also desire to connect with outgroups may be more negatively impacted by perceived ethnic discrimination compared with those who lack the desire or effort to connect with culturally different others (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007). For migrant-origin individuals, increased involvement in majority group relations may be related to psychological distress when majority group members treat minority group members unfairly (Schaafsma, 2011). Consistent with rejection sensitivity theory, it might be that those with strong affirmation/belonging who are also oriented toward other groups are impacted more negatively by perceived ethnic discrimination since they are met with unfair treatment by the individuals with whom they endeavor to connect: ethnic discrimination may be a personal threat to one's heritage group and to connecting with members of outgroups. However, immigrant-origin college students with no preference toward developing relationships with outgroup members might be less impacted by ethnic discrimination if they do not strive for a sense of connectedness with outgroups (Derlan et al., 2014).

Gender

Although ethnic discrimination tends to be related to poorer mental health outcomes for both men and women, the impact of positive ethnic-racial affect on this relation may vary by gender (Castillo et al., 2015; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Smith & Silva, 2011). Gender differences in the experience of stress and stress reactivity (Kiang et al., 2006) as well as perceived ethnic discrimination have been detected early in development for minority and immigrant-origin youth (Brown, Alabi, Huynh, & Masten, 2011). While men tend to endorse externalizing problems and drug, alcohol (Ornelas & Hong, 2012), and tobacco use (Wiehe, Aalsma, Liu, & Fortenberry, 2010), perceived ethnic discrimination may have a stronger impact on psychological distress such as internalizing symptoms for women (Dambrun, 2007; D'Anna, Ponce, & Siegel, 2010;

Rosenthal & Schreiner, 2000; Takeuchi et al., 2007). Although there are various perspectives on the greater prevalence of depressive disorders in women compared with men (beginning in mid-adolescence; Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994), components of ethnic identity (including affirmation/belonging) seem to differentially impact the relation between cultural stressors and depressive symptoms for male and female minority college students (Cheng, Hitter, Adams, & Williams, 2016), making depressive symptoms an especially relevant dependent variable.

Additionally, socialized gender roles may be more salient for women (Berry, 2007), as family cultural socialization tends to be more pronounced for women across cultures (Juang & Syed, 2010). Men are encouraged to strive for autonomy and independence, whereas women are often encouraged to develop ingroup social relatedness (Padilla, 2006; Robinson & Biringen, 1995). Women tend to endorse ethnic identity more strongly than men (Dion & Dion, 2004), and women in more collectivist cultures than the United States (Hofstede, 2014)—such as Latina and Asian women—often experience pressure to maintain cultural heritage, remain close to family members, and turn to family for support (Castillo et al., 2015; Fu, Shen, & Marquez, 2014; Iturbide et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2013). Given the salience of affirmation/belonging and the importance of perceived ethnic discrimination for social identity and sense of group relatedness for women, and consistent with rejection sensitivity theory, it may be that strong affirmation/belonging exacerbates the impact of perceived ethnic discrimination on depressive symptoms for women but not men.

Current Study and Hypotheses

Consistent with rejection sensitivity theory rather than social identity theory, affirmation/belonging will increase risk for depressive symptoms under the following conditions for a multicultural sample of first- and second-generation college students (see Figure 1):
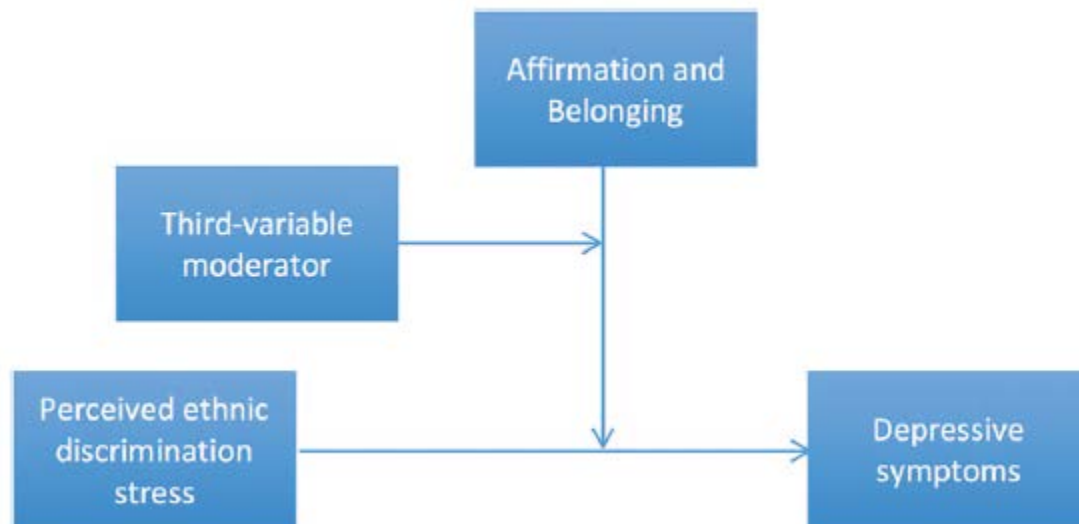

Figure 1. General conceptual model hypothesizing the moderating impact of affirmation/belonging on the relation between perceived ethnic discrimination strass and

depressive symptoms with vary by third-variable moderators (i.e., other-group orientation and gender). See the online article for the color version of this figure.

> *Hypothesis 1a:* For emerging adults endorsing stronger affirmation/belonging, the relation between perceived ethnic discrimination stress and depressive symptoms will be exacerbated by greater other-group orientation.

> *Hypothesis 1b:* For those with weaker other-group orientation, greater perceived ethnic discrimination stress will be related to more depressive symptoms regardless of affirmation/ belonging strength.

> *Hypothesis 2a:* For women, the relation between perceived ethnic discrimination stress and depressive symptoms will be exacerbated by stronger affirmation/belonging.

> *Hypothesis 2b:* For men, affirmation/belonging strength will have no moderating impact on the positive relation between perceived ethnic discrimination stress and depressive symptoms.

Method

Procedure

Similar to other studies with multicultural samples of college students (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2011), immigrant-origin first- and second-generation ethnic minority college students ($n = 290$) enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a large public university in the Southeastern United States received course credit for completing self-report questionnaires as part of a mass screening mechanism. Either the student and/or one of the students' parents must have been born outside the United States. Students who met this inclusion criterion were routed to questionnaires, organized in the same order for all participants: informed consent; demographics; Beck Depression Inventory; Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; and the Societal, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Acculturative Stress Scale. Data were collected across five semesters from 2012–2014 using Qualtrics, an electronic research software. Students independently completed questionnaires online from any accessible computer before the end of the semester. This study was approved by the local Institutional Review Board.

Participants

The relation between cultural stressors, ethnic identity, and adjustment outcomes may operate differently for ethnic minority and majority individuals (Schwartz et al., 2006; Smith & Silva, 2011). Ethnic minority immigrant-origin college students may have different acculturation experiences compared with immigrant-origin White students (Cokley, Hall-Clark, & Hicks, 2011; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). For example, ethnicity may not be as salient for White U.S. Americans (Phinney, 1996; Smith & Silva, 2011). As such, and consistent with prior research (Smith & Silva, 2011), this study surveyed non-White immigrant-origin college students. Participants from White/European backgrounds were removed before analyses.

No single response item was disproportionately unanswered. Mass screening utilized 13 infrequency items (e.g., *I cannot remember a time when I talked with someone who wore glasses* and *There have been times when I have dialed a telephone number only to find that the line was busy*); respondent data endorsing three or more infrequency items in an unusual direction were removed. Participant data were removed if students did not answer sufficient items to determine ethnic identity, gender, age, or nativity status, or if they were older than age 25. Data for four participants were removed because of excessive unanswered items. Data were collected from a total of 410 participants; for these aforementioned reasons (including White/European ethnic background), data for 120 participants were removed.

Consistent with Arnett (2000), emerging adult participants ($n = 290$) ranged in age from 18–25 ($M = 18.87$, $SD = 1.32$) and included freshmen (69%), sophomores (22%), juniors (6%), and seniors (3%). Two students did not report their grade level. Approximately 71% were female, and 64% were born in the United States. An ordinal variable was used for length of time lived in the United States: more than 10 years or entire life (75%), between 5 and 10 years (10%), 3–5 years (2%), 1–3 years (7%), and less than 1 year (7%). Ethnic identity included Asian (36%), Latino (24%), Black (15%), Middle Eastern (5%), and Multiethnic (20%) backgrounds. Demographics of the campus-wide student population include the following: 19,000 students total (84% undergraduate); 52% White, 28% Black, 8% Hispanic; 5% Asian, 4% Multiracial, 3% nonresident, 2% unknown, <1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, <1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (percentages rounded; data obtained from the university's website reporting on academic year 2015).

Measures

Perceived ethnic discrimination stress. Subjective impact of perceived ethnic discrimination was measured using items from the Societal, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Acculturative Stress Scale (SAFE; Chavez, Moran, Reid, & Lopez, 1997; Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Numerous versions of the SAFE have been adapted and used to examine acculturation stress in youth and adults from culturally diverse backgrounds. This particular version was used in the current study because it was intended for use with youth within an academic context. The items measure stress attribution rather than mere presence of stressors, and item phrasing had previously been slightly modified from the original version to make it clearer and more linguistically accessible (Chavez et al., 1997) while maintaining identical subject matter as the original questionnaire. This version has been used with youth and young adults up to age 20 (e.g., Alvarado & Ricard, 2013). Participants are instructed to identify their ethnic group, then respond to self-report items (e.g., *I feel bad when others make jokes about people who are in the same group as me*; *Many people believe certain things about the way people in my group act, think, or are, and they treat me as if those things are true*) using a Likert scale to measure the extent to which a particular ethnic discrimination stressor is bothersome on a scale from 1 (*doesn't bother me*) to 5 (*bothers me a lot*). Because this measure's factor structure is not well established with young adults, theoretically driven (i.e., face validity) and empirically derived (i.e., confirmatory factor analysis) approaches were used in the current study to identify which items loaded onto the ethnic discrimination latent factor, and to distinguish this

from a general acculturative stress factor which served as a control variable (see Results, Preliminary Analyses, Confirmatory Factor Analysis). Cronbach's α for the six perceived ethnic discrimination stress items in the current study was .68.

Acculturative stress. Subjective impact of acculturative stress was also measured using items from the SAFE (Chavez et al., 1997; Mena et al., 1987). Self-report items (e.g., *I do not feel at home here in the United States*, and *It's hard to be away from the country I used to live in*) used a Likert scale to measure the extent to which a particular acculturative stressor is bothersome. This control variable served to examine the impact of discrimination-related stressors above and beyond general acculturative stress. The same theoretically driven and empirically derived aforementioned processes were used for this variable. Cronbach's α for the current study's final six items was .80.

Affirmation and belonging. The 5-item Affirmation and Belonging subscale of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) assessed for affirmation/belonging using a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). This subscale assesses for the extent to which one endorses feelings of belonging and attachment toward one's ethnic group, as well as a sense of ethnic pride and being happy about ethnic group membership (Phinney, 1992). The MEIM is the most widely used measure of ethnic identity in studies using ethnoculturally and generationally diverse samples of youth and adults (Smith & Silva, 2011), and it is especially useful in measuring positive ethnic-racial affect (Rivas-Drake, Syed, et al., 2014). It is also grounded in the notion of ethnic identity as it pertains to social identity theory (Phinney, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Sample items include: *I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group*, and *I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments*. Cronbach's α for the current study was .84.

Other-group orientation (OGO). The six-item Other-Group Orientation subscale of the MEIM (Phinney, 1992) assesses orientation and attitude toward ethnocultural outgroups (Phinney, 1992) using the same Likert-scale response items as above: 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Studies have demonstrated this subscale is distinct from other components of ethnic identity (e.g., Avery, Tonidandel, Thomas, Johnson, & Mack, 2007; Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Stracuzzi, & Saya, 2003; Worrell, 2000). Sample items include: *I like meeting and getting to know people from ethnic groups other than my own*, and *I enjoy being around people from ethnic groups other than my own*. Cronbach's α for the current study was .71.

Depressive symptoms. A total score using the 21-item Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) was used to assess for depressive symptoms using a Likert scale from 0 to 3 (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). The BDI is a commonly used measure of depressive symptoms with diverse college samples, and it has been used with adults from a variety of cultural backgrounds (e.g., Ibrahim et al., 2013; Reyes-Rodríguez, Rivera-Medina, Cámara-Fuentes, Suárez-Torres, & Bernal, 2013). This measure has demonstrated sound psychometric properties with respect to reliability, validity, and cultural equivalence (e.g., Contreras, Fernandez, Malcarne, Ingram, & Vaccarino, 2004). Cronbach's α was .90.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Missing data. For the 290 participants, 5 had missing data for the BDI (one or two unanswered items), 6 with the Affirmation and Belonging subscale (one unanswered item), and 5 for the Other-Group Orientation subscale (4 with one unanswered item, 1 with two unanswered items). For these participants, their average score was determined by dividing their item total by the total number of items they answered. There were 0–3 unanswered items sporadically across participants for the ethnic discrimination and acculturative stress variables, with no particular pattern of missing data. Multiple imputation was used for these items.

Confirmatory factor analysis. This analysis was used to extricate the ethnic discrimination and acculturative stress variables in the SAFE. First, the author of the original article (i.e., Chavez et al., 1997) provided scoring instructions for this measure, including specific items that comprised the discrimination and acculturative stress domains (D. Chavez, personal communication, February 21, 2011). Next, face valid items for ethnic discrimination and acculturative stress for young adults were identified. Finally, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, and adequate fit statistics were demonstrated for the final items: standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .072; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .089 (LB = .074, UB = .100; confidence interval [CI] = 90%); comparative fit index [CFI] = .930; χ^2 = 173.90 ($p <$ .001; df = 53). An interesting find was that items that loaded onto ethnic discrimination and acculturative stress factors were nearly identical to the results of an exploratory factor analysis using the same measure with minority youth, suggesting possible item stability from youth through young adulthood (Suarez-Morales, Dillon, & Szapocznik, 2007).

Diagnostics. According to a Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality (Goodman, 1954), the dependent variable— depressive symptoms—was nonnormally distributed; therefore, a log base 10 transformation of this variable was used to reduce right skewness (Baum, Connolly, & O'Connor, 2014; Box & Cox, 1964). Oneway analysis of variances (ANOVAs) with Tukey post hoc analyses and an independent samples t test tested for within-group mean differences of depressive symptoms by ethnic identity, year in college, length of time in the United States, semester during which data were collected, and nativity status, and no statistically significant differences were found. Accordingly, these variables were not included as covariates. No notable outliers were present for any of the independent variables, and no quadratic relations appeared in a matrix scatter.

Pearson correlations. There was a weak, positive linear relation between depressive symptoms and age (r = .16, $p <$ .01; Table 1). Depressive symptoms were positively associated with perceived ethnic discrimination stress (r = .29, $p <$ .001) and acculturative stress (r = .15, $p <$ .01), suggesting increases in culture-related stressors were associated with increased depressive symptoms. Depressive symptoms were inversely related to affirmation/belonging (r = -.22, $p <$ .001): stronger affirmation/belonging was associated with less depressive symptoms. Other-group orientation was positively associated with affirmation/belonging (r = .22, $p <$ .001) and length of time in the United States (r = .13, $p <$ .05), suggesting those who spend more time in the United States may have a greater sense of connectedness with members of ethnic outgroups. Additionally, being female was slightly more associated with greater affirmation/belonging (r = -

.12, $p < .05$), consistent with literature suggesting ethnic identity may be more salient for young adult women (Brodish et al., 2011; Castillo et al., 2015).

Table 1. Pearson Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variables and Descriptives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Depressive symptoms									
2. Age	.16**								
3. Gender[a]	-.10	.00							
4. Length of time in United States	.02	-.18**	-.01						
5. Nativity[b]	.03	-.20***	.01	.56***					
6. Affirmation and belonging	-.22***	.02	-.12*	.03	-.02				
7. Other-group orientation	-.05	-.02	.02	.13*	.09	.22***			
8. Discrimination stress	.29***	.06	-.10†	-.06	-.04	.08	-.10†		
9. Acculturative stress	.15**	.19***	.03	-.49***	-.42***	.07	-.25***	.46***	
Mean (SD)	.40 (.38)	18.87 (1.32)				3.22 (.60)	3.22 (.60)	2.47 (.71)	1.81 (.79)
Sample range	.00-2.10	18-24 years				1.20-4.00	1.20-4.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00
Questionnaire range	.00-3.00					1.00-4.00	1.00-4.00	.00-5.00	.00-5.00

Note. $N = 290$. [a] Gender = 0 female, 1 male. [b] Nativity = 0 foreign born, 1 U.S. born. † $p < .10$. *$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Primary Analyses

Linear regression analyses using three-way interactions were used to examine whether the relation between ethnic discrimination and depressive symptoms was moderated by affirmation/belonging, contingent on other-group orientation and gender. Separate analyses for third-variable moderators (i.e., other-group orientation and gender) were conducted using PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013b) Model 3 (Hayes, 2013a) in SPSS version 20, resulting in a total of two distinct analyses. Age and general acculturative stress were included as covariates in each analysis since they were linearly associated with depressive symptoms, and to detect the impact of perceived ethnic discrimination above and beyond the effects of general acculturative stress. Affirmation/belonging was included as a moderator in each analysis. All independent variables were mean-centered except gender (Hayes, 2013b) and the dependent variable (depressive symptoms), which was $\log_{10}$ transformed.

The below results describe the outcomes of each analysis with respect to (a) simple slopes, and (b) slope differences. Simple slopes tested for whether a given slope differs significantly from zero (Sibley, 2008). Slope difference tests determined whether slopes differ between groups; when a three-way interaction is statistically significant, slope difference tests examine whether and/or which specific slopes differ (Sibley, 2008; Figure 2). Unstandardized coefficients (Hayes, 2013b) for the final models of the regression analyses are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Models 1 and 2 correspond to Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Model 1: Perceived ethnic discrimination stress × Affirmation/belonging × Other-group orientation. This model accounted for 20% of the variance in depressive symptoms ($p < .001$). The three-way interaction was statistically significant (unstandardized coefficient = -.05, $p < .05$), and accounted for 2% of the variance in depressive symptoms above and beyond the independent variables and two-way interactions (see Table 2).

Simple slope tests revealed all slopes differed significantly from zero: depressive symptoms increased as ethnic discrimination increased across all levels of affirmation/belonging and other-group orientation (see Figure 2). Ethnic discrimination was deleterious for this sample regardless of strength of other-group orientation or affirmation/belonging. These results support Hypothesis 1b.

Although the three-way interaction was statistically significant, Johnson-Neyman (Hayes, 2013b) significance regions indicate that differential effect sizes for the three-way interaction only occurred at extreme levels of other-group orientation and outside of the region of -1 *SD* to 1 *SD* from the mean, which explains the presence of a statistically significant interaction yet near-statistically significant slope differences (see Figure 2). The near-statistically significant slope difference is contrary to Hypothesis 1a. In fact, this group endorsed comparatively lower levels of depressive symptoms as discrimination stress increased.
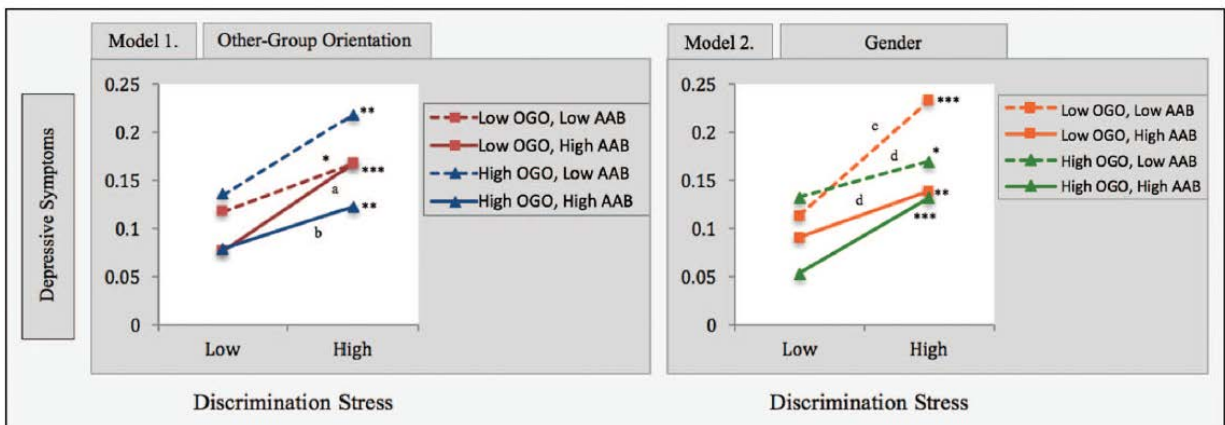

Figure 2. Simple slope (asterisks) and slope difference (superscripts) text results. $N = 290$. OGO = other-group orientation; AAB = affirmation/belonging. For a and b, $p = .08$. For c and d, $p < .05$. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

The statistically significant two-way interaction between affirmation/belonging and other-group orientation demonstrates that stronger levels of affirmation/belonging may be protective against depressive symptoms when young adults in this sample are faced with ethnic discrimination (see Figure 2). This is further corroborated by the inverse relation between affirmation/belonging and depressive symptoms in the final model. Contrary to hypotheses, these results are more consistent with social identity theory than rejection sensitivity theory.

Model 2: Perceived ethnic discrimination stress × Affirmation/belonging × Gender. This model accounted for 20% of the variance in depressive symptoms ($p < .001$). The three-way interaction was statistically significant (unstandardized coefficient = .07, $p < .01$), and accounted for 2% of the variance in depressive symptoms above and beyond the independent variables and two-way interactions in the model (see Table 3).

Simple slope tests revealed all slopes differed significantly from zero: depressive symptoms increased as ethnic discrimination increased across all levels of affirmation/belonging and gender (see Figure 2). These results support Hypothesis 2b. The effect sizes for women were significantly different across levels of affirmation/belonging. There was a significantly stronger positive association (i.e., significant slope difference) between ethnic discrimination and depressive symptoms for women with weaker affirmation/belonging compared with women with stronger affirmation/belonging ($p < .05$; Figure 2). Women with weaker affirmation/belonging demonstrated a stronger positive association between ethnic discrimination and depressive symptoms compared with men with weaker affirmation/belonging ($p < .01$; Figure 2).

Generally consistent with Hypothesis 2, gender moderated the impact of affirmation/belonging on the relation between ethnic discrimination and depressive symptoms, with significant effects shown for women but not men. Inconsistent with Hypothesis 2a and the rejection-sensitivity theory, women with strong affirmation/belonging did not demonstrate an exacerbating effect; instead, consistent with social identity theory, an exacerbating effect was found for women with weaker affirmation/belonging.

Table 2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Depressive Symptoms From Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Stress, Affirmation and Belonging, and Other-Group Orientation

	Depressive symptoms					
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
Variable	Unstandardized coefficient (SE)		Unstandardized coefficient (SE)		Unstandardized coefficient (SE)	
Constant	.13***(.01)		.14***(.01)		.14***(.01)	
Age	.01* (.00)		.01* (.00)		.01* (.00)	
Acculturative stress	.00 (.01)		.00 (.01)		.00 (.01)	
Ethnic discrimination stress	.05*** (.01)		.04***(.01)		.05***(.01)	

Affirmation and belonging (AAB)	-.05***(.01)		-.04***(.01)		-.04***(.01)	
Other-group orientation (OGO)	.01 (.01)		.00(.01)		.01(.01)	
Ethnic discrimination stress × AAB	-.01 (.01)		.00(.01)		.00(.01)	
Ethnic discrimination stress × OGO			.00(.02)		-.01(.02)	
AAB × OGO			-.04*(.02)		-.05*(.02)	
Ethnic discrimination × AAB × OGO					-.05*(.02)	
R^2 (SEE)		.17***(.10)		.18***(.10)		.20***(.10)
ΔR^2				.01		.02*

Note. SEE = standard error of the estimate. All data are rounded to nearest hundredth. *p < .05.
***p < .001.

Table 3. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Depressive Symptoms From Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Stress, Affirmation and Belonging, and Gender

	Depressive symptoms					
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
Variable	Unstandardized coefficient (SE)		Unstandardized coefficient (SE)		Unstandardized coefficient (SE)	
Constant	.14***(.01)		.14***(.01)		.14***(.01)	
Age	.01*(.00)		.01*(.00)		.01*(.00)	
Acculturative stress	.00(.01)		.00(.01)		.00(.01)	
Ethnic discrimination stress	.04***(.01)		.05***(.01)		.06***(.01)	
Affirmation and belonging (AAB)	-.05***(.01)		-.05***(.01)		-.05***(.01)	
Gender	-.02(.01)		-.02(.01)		-.02(.01)	
Ethnic discrimination stress × AAB	-.01(.01)		-.01(.01)		-.03*(.02)	
Ethnic discrimination stress × Gender			-.03(.02)		-.02(.02)	
AAB × Gender			.01(.02)		.00(.02)	
Ethnic discrimination × AAB × Gender					.07*(.03)	

R² (SEE)		.17***(.10)		.18***(.10)		.20***(.10)
ΔR²				.01		.02*

Note. Female = 0, male = 1. SEE = standard error of the estimate. All data are rounded to nearest hundredth. *$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$.

Discussion

Immigrant-origin young adult students on college campuses in the United States face unique acculturation difficulties resulting from navigating multicultural milieus. These challenges are often associated with negative mental health outcomes (Berry, 2006) such as depressive symptoms, which have been shown to be higher among college students compared with the general population (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Perceived ethnic discrimination stress is one notable challenge related to living in culturally plural environments. Additionally, social identity formation is particularly salient for emerging adults, and interfacing with ethnic outgroups prompts one to think more deeply about their own sociocultural identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Studies have generally shown mixed results with respect to the impact of ethnic identity on the relation between discrimination stressors and psychological adjustment.

This study integrated acculturation as well as social and cultural identity theories to investigate socio-culturally relevant conditions (i.e., gender and other-group orientation) under which a specific conceptual dimension of ethnic identity—affirmation/belonging (Phinney, 1992; Rivas-Drake, Seaton, et al., 2014)—served as a risk or protective factor for immigrant-origin emerging adult students (aged 18 –25) at a college campus in the Southeastern United States. Results generally demonstrated more robust support for social identity theory. Stronger affirmation/ belonging was associated with less depressive symptoms across the sample. Three-way interactions demonstrated a notable buffering impact of strong affirmation/belonging on the relation between ethnic discrimination and depressive symptoms for women, above and beyond the impact of general acculturative stress; in fact, acculturative stress no longer accounted for unique variance in depressive symptoms after taking into account ethnic discrimination stress, underscoring the importance of teasing apart these two factors when examining psychological adjustment. For this group, discrimination may be predominantly deleterious, a finding that could guide practitioners' client conceptualization on college campuses.

Additionally, trend-level results indicated a protective effect when stronger affirmation/belonging was paired with greater other-group orientation. Women endorsing weaker affirmation/belonging demonstrated greater increased depressive symptoms compared with men endorsing weaker affirmation/belonging. Overall, this study exhibited the utility of (a) specification of cultural constructs, and (b) examination of relevant, complex conditions under which cultural constructs may differentially manifest.

Positive Ethnic-Racial Affect Is Protective for Some, But Not for All

For this sample, strong affirmation/belonging was protective for women. This may be consistent with cultural or gender role socialization and coping strategies: women with stronger affirmation/belonging tend to have stronger social capital and sense of ingroup relatedness from which to garner support during times of distress (Juang & Syed, 2010; Padilla, 2006; Robinson

& Biringen, 1995). Additionally, women endorsing weaker affirmation/belonging exhibited greater increased depressive symptoms compared with men endorsing weaker affirmation/belonging: ethnic identity may play a stronger, more positive role in the lives of women compared with men (Berry, 2007; Dion & Dion, 2004), and internalizing symptoms may be particularly relevant for women (e.g., Rosenthal & Schreiner, 2000). As such, ethnic discrimination may be more detrimental for women with weaker affirmation/belonging compared with men with weaker affirmation/belonging. Still consistent with cultural or gender role socialization, men with weak affirmation/belonging may not be as threatened by ethnic discrimination, because it may not be as central to their well-being compared with immigrant-origin women.

Trend-level results pointed toward a more deleterious impact of ethnic discrimination on depressive symptoms for those with lower levels of other-group orientation and strong affirmation/belonging compared with those with greater other-group orientation and strong affirmation/belonging. Those with a strong sense of connectedness to ethnic outgroup members may have greater social capital, a more robust repertoire of interpersonal skills, or may perceive ethnic discrimination as the exception rather than the rule during sociocultural exchange because of their already-established affiliation with outgroup others. This trend-level finding is consistent with the *integration* acculturation strategy proposed by Berry (2006) and subsequent findings that this strategy is associated with better psychological adjustment compared with *assimilation*, *marginalization*, and *separation* strategies (e.g., Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). A sense of social connectedness to both cultural ingroups and outgroups was trending toward protective in this sample.

Toward a More Nuanced Theoretical Understanding of Sociocultural Identity

Although this study does not provide information about why ethnic discrimination was more detrimental for women with weaker affirmation/belonging compared with women with stronger affirmation/belonging and men with weaker affirmation/belonging, these data illustrate that affirmation/belonging has a differential impact within and across gender. This study also demonstrated a differential impact of affirmation/belonging across levels of other-group orientation for those with stronger affirmation/belonging. This underscores the importance of (a) specifying the conceptual dimension of ethnic identity under examination, and (b) identifying other relevant sociocultural variables which ought to be simultaneously examined. In this study, affirmation/belonging and gender were factors that together explained variance in depressive symptoms (consistent with conclusions drawn by Iturbide et al., 2009). Similarly, affirmation/belonging and other-group orientation were factors that together explained variance in depressive symptoms.

Further, it would be helpful to draw out conditions under which affirmation/belonging varied. These results suggest it may not be useful to make broad, generalized conclusions about the role of affirmation/belonging. Similarly, applying social identity theory *or* rejection sensitivity theory broadly to particular groups may be inadequate. Both theories may be differentially applicable— or not applicable at all— depending on conditional factors. For example, social identity theory may be a pertinent theoretical lens from which to conceptualize part of the acculturation

experience for young adult women but not necessarily men when examining the impact of ethnic discrimination on depressive symptoms. The appropriateness of the theoretical lens may change depending on the variables in the conceptual model.

Limitations and Future Directions

Cross-culturally applicable constructs were intentionally chosen for this study to determine whether immigrant-origin young adults share acculturation experiences across ethnic groups. However, because of sample size, we were unable to test for three-way interactions within ethnic groups. Future research ought to examine these models within ethnic groups, but for different conceptual dimensions of ethnic identity (e.g., public regard).

Ethnic discrimination is aversive yet sometimes prompts one to engage in coping behaviors, which in turn results in a heightened sense of personal and collective well-being after finding solace in the protective impact of ingroup membership (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Much of the literature on this *rejection identification* theory involves longitudinal designs and mediation analyses (e.g., Giamo, Schmitt, & Outten, 2012), which ultimately show that individuals may develop a repertoire of coping skills *after* being subjected to ethnic discrimination. This study may have inadequately addressed variation related to the rejection identification process, which could be attended to in future research using mediational and longitudinal designs, especially those examining change in ethnic identity over time (e.g., Seaton, Yip, & Sellers, 2009; also see Yip & Douglass, 2013), something that would be feasible on college campuses.

Further, because the perceived ethnic discrimination measure in this study asked about broad discriminatory experiences, findings cannot be limited to experiences on college campuses. The importance of understanding the specific context and source of ethnic discrimination is gaining recognition (e.g., Benner & Graham, 2013; White, Zeiders, Knight, Roosa, & Tein, 2014). It would be useful to know *where* unfair treatment occurred on the basis of ethnic background, under *which conditions* this occurred, and by *whom*, and whether this *changed* contingent on length of residency in the United States or by ethnic group. Also, internal consistency of the discrimination variable was somewhat low. Like a trauma or life events checklist, some participants may simply not experience particular discrimination stressors, reducing internal consistency. Also, with only six items, it may be that some discrimination-related stressors are simply more bothersome than others.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated the importance of specifying cultural constructs, providing a complex context from which to examine acculturation experiences (i.e., using three-way interactions), choosing cross-culturally relevant variables to study a multicultural sample of young adults, and cautioning generalized application of social theory to sociocultural exchange experiences. Consistent with the demographics in this study, multiethnic individuals are increasingly represented in minority and migrant-origin samples (e.g., Giamo et al., 2012). If future studies find that ethnic identity plays a differential role for multiethnic versus ethnically homogeneous students, in what ways do students from multiethnic backgrounds conceptualize

affirmation/belonging? It may be beneficial to examine how constructs such as bicultural identity integration (Benet- Martínez & Haritatos, 2005) are related to psychological adjustment at different stages of migration. Understanding cultural identification of multiethnic individuals might involve mixed-methods designs that include narratives to clarify identity. In doing so, researchers could better understand sociocultural challenges associated with immigrant-origin emerging adults from diverse backgrounds.

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