The American Identity Measure: Development and Validation across Ethnic Group and Immigrant Generation

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Two studies were designed to validate a measure of American identity for use with diverse ethnic groups. The American Identity Measure (AIM) was created by adapting the Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to refer to exploration and affirmation of individuals' identification with the United States. In Study 1, students from nine U.S. universities (N = 1,773) completed the AIM and the MEIM. Confirmatory factor analyses indicated that the AIM fit the data well and that the factor structures of ethnic and American identity were equivalent. In Study 2 students from 30 U.S. universities (N = 10,573) completed the AIM, a comparison measure of American identity drawn from recent qualitative work, and measures of American cultural practices and individualist values. The factor structure of scores generated by the AIM was equivalent across ethnicity and immigrant generation, and latent mean scores on the AIM were only modestly different across ethnicity and immigrant generation. Whites and later-generation immigrants scored higher on American identity affirmation; Asians and first-generation immigrants scored lowest. The AIM was strongly correlated with the comparison measure of American identity (suggesting convergent validity) and with American cultural behaviors (suggesting construct validity). American identity was only weakly associated with individualist values, perhaps implying that American identification may not be as closely intertwined with rugged individualism as previously thought. These results are discussed in light of the availability of American identity for individuals from various ethnic backgrounds as well as the implications of national identity for intergroup relations.
The increasing ethnic and racial diversity within the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004) has led to questions regarding what it means to be American\textsuperscript{1} as well as how strongly immigrants and members of various ethnic groups identify with this superordinate national category (Schildkraut, 2005, 2007). On the one hand, despite the United States’ long history of successfully incorporating immigrants, some political commentators (e.g., Buchanan, 2006; Huntington, 2004) have expressed concerns that the current (post-1965) wave of immigrants—who are predominantly of non-European heritage—may be less attached to the United States compared to previous waves of immigrants. These commentators have argued that contemporary immigrants’ retention of their religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage is eroding the cultural and national fabric of the United States—most notably the country’s Anglo-Protestant heritage, with its emphasis on individual responsibility and use of the English language. On the other hand, multiculturalism has been gaining in popularity since the civil rights movement of the 1960s and, from this perspective, subgroup differences should be recognized, celebrated, and incorporated into the larger American society (Citrin, Haas, Muste, & Reingold, 1994).

The concerns expressed by Huntington (2004), Buchanan (2006), and other conservative commentators critical of recent immigrants have centered on at least three specific themes. The first theme is a concern that immigrants remain identified with their countries of origin and do not consider themselves American (Huntington, 2004). This concern presumes that individuals can only identify either with their ethnic group or with the superordinate group. The second theme is a belief that the new cohort of Hispanics, most notably, is not interested in learning English (Barker et al., 2001). Political scientists have documented that many Americans perceive English as integral to national cohesion (Schildkraut, 2005), and that many Americans view Spanish and other immigrant languages as a threat to American national unity (Cornelius, 2002). The third theme is a concern that the culture of individualism and self-sufficiency that has characterized the country since its inception is under attack (Buchanan, 2006). These concerns are based on a fear that the United States is becoming less “American” over time and that the country is being “invaded” by foreigners who have little interest in becoming part of the existing American national fabric. To the extent that identifying as American is tied in with engaging in American practices such as speaking English, eating traditional American foods, observing American customs, and listening to American music, studying American identity may help to shed empirical light on the validity

\textsuperscript{1}Although the term American could be used to refer to individuals from anywhere in North, Central, or South America, we use it here to refer specifically to the United States.
of these concerns. Studying American identity and exploring these questions, however, requires a psychometrically sound instrument that captures the construct across a diverse populace. The studies that we present here were designed to develop and examine a measure of American identity with these goals in mind.

The Current Cultural and Historical Context for Studying American Identity

Interest in American identification, and whether or not immigrants and ethnic and racial minority groups share in that identification, has heightened since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and western Pennsylvania. Indeed, the empirical study of American identity has gained considerable momentum in the years following the attacks. For example, a search of the PsycInfo literature database in May 2011, using “American identity” in the title, yielded 18 articles related to American national identity—all of which were published in 2002 or later. Schildkraut (2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2011) has also published a number of books and chapters on American identity, all of which appeared after the attacks. Scholars and laypersons alike have been pondering exactly what American identity is, how attached U.S. residents are to that identity, and how endorsement of American identity may differ across ethnic and racial groups and immigrant generations. Collectively, the scholarly and public discourse around American identity is concerned not only with citizenship and other demographic indicators, but also with psychological dimensions of how individuals make meaning of their membership in U.S. society.

A number of studies (e.g., Citrin, Lerman, Murakami, & Pearson, 2007; Hart, Richardson, & Wilkenfeld, 2011; Schildkraut, 2007; Stepick, Dutton Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008) have empirically tested some of the assumptions voiced by conservative political commentators and opinion polls. These studies have suggested that heritage-culture retention and multiculturalism do not appear to interfere with becoming American. Specifically, immigrants are embracing American culture (Schildkraut, 2010), they are learning English (Citrin et al., 2007), retention of heritage languages is not interfering with learning English (Tran, 2010), and immigrants are blending American individualism with the values from their heritage cultures (Stepick et al., 2008; Stepick, Dutton Stepick, & Vanderkooy, 2011). Moreover, Stepick et al. (2011) found that immigrant youth who identified with their cultural heritage were more likely than other immigrant youth to be civically involved in the United States. Nonetheless, research by Devos and colleagues (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Heng, 2009; Devos & Ma, 2008;
Rydell, Hamilton, & Devos, 2010) suggests that implicit biases are at play in determining who many people do and do not consider to be American, meaning that, although some individuals consider themselves to be American, they remain aware that they are likely not perceived to be American by others. Thus, it is important to measure, in a psychometrically rigorous way, the extent to which individuals from various ethnic groups and immigrant generations identify as American.

Although other markers of being American have been successfully used in the national identity literature, psychometrically sound and widely applicable measures of American identity have not been available. Studies in this literature have generally used data from the U.S. Census (e.g., Citrin et al., 2007), measures of prototypical American beliefs (e.g., universal rights, civic participation, and valuing of diversity; Devos & Banaji, 2005; Schildkraut, 2003), indices of differentiation between those who participants believe are and are not American (e.g., Citrin et al., 1994; Skitka, 2005; Weisskirch, 2005), single-item scales asking participants how American they consider themselves (Gong, 2007), or questions about the extent to which participants engage in American civic behaviors such as voting in elections and serving on juries when called (e.g., Stepick et al., 2008). Other studies have used ethnographic methods to gauge participants’ opinions about what it means to be American (Bush, 2005; Park-Taylor et al., 2008). Still others have measured constructs similar to American identity such as nationalism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), patriotism (Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 2003), and national glorification (Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006). However, Huddy and Khatib (2007) demonstrated that, compared to these other indices of national attachment, national identity is more likely to measure investment in the nation independent of political affiliation and ideology, and it is more likely to increase (as would be expected) across immigrant generations. To our knowledge, however, no published studies have used multiple-item measures of American identity, examined the psychometric properties of scores generated by these measures, and ensured that the measures are appropriate for use across ethnic groups and across immigrant generations. Indeed, the psychometric literature suggests that, in the absence of clear evidence that a measure performs similarly across groups, mean differences between or among groups may represent some unknown combination of differences in measurement structure and differences in levels of the underlying construct (Chen, 2007; Dimitrov, 2010; Knight, Roosa, & Umaña-Taylor, 2009).

The Need for Measures of American Identity

The development of a valid and reliable measure of American identity—identification with the United States—therefore is essential for at least three
reasons. First, if we wish to understand the psychological consequences (e.g., well-being or distress) of identifying with the United States, we must have valid and reliable measures of American identity. Second, given that ethnic identity and national identity are collective and cultural dimensions of identity (Spinner-Halev & Theiss-Morse, 2003), it is important to ascertain that these two types of identifications are parallel in structure. Such parallel measurement could be used to investigate the extent to which individuals are bicultural; that is, they are identified simultaneously with the ethnic group and with the superordinate "American" category (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). In the absence of such parallel measurement, one could argue that the constructs differ structurally and are not comparable. Further, given the well-established association between ethnic identity and positive psychosocial adjustment (e.g., Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umaña-Taylor, Vargas-Chanes, Garcia, & Gonzales-Backen, 2008), one might expect a similar finding for American identity. Third, if we wish to compare endorsement of American identity across ethnic groups or across immigrant generations, and therefore to examine the extent to which immigrant and minority individuals are identifying as American, we must have a measure of American identity for which the factor structure has been demonstrated to be equivalent across the subgroups being compared (cf. Knight et al., 2009).

American Identity as a Collective Identity

Like ethnic identity, American identity is both an individual construction and a collective identification (individuals identifying with a social group; Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Spinner-Halev & Theiss-Morse, 2003; Theiss-Morse, 2009). The theoretical model on which most ethnic identity measures are based is a blend of Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory, which states that individuals consider various ideas or alternatives before committing to one or more of these, and social identity theory (Spears, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which focuses on the attachments that people form to their social groups and on the group-related consequences (e.g., discrimination or xenophobia) of these attachments for interactions with other people and groups (for recent reviews, see Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umaña-Taylor, 2011). Accordingly, Phinney’s (1990; see also Phinney & Ong, 2007) model of ethnic identity posits that ethnic identification consists of two components: exploration of a sense of what the person’s ethnicity means to her or him, and commitment to and affirmation of a sense of what it means to belong to one’s ethnic group. Indeed, rigorous empirical analyses have supported this two-factor solution (Ong, Fuller-Rowell, & Phinney, 2010).
Because national identification has been shown to operate according to social identity principles (such as attachment to, and drawing self-esteem from, the group; Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Licata, Sanchez-Mazas, & Green, 2011) and to emerge through a process of exploration of and commitment to a view of oneself in relation to the country (Rodriguez, Schwartz, & Whitbourne, 2010), we sought to utilize this same blend of Eriksonian and social identity principles in developing and validating a measure of American identity. Such a strategy has been used to measure national identification in other countries (e.g., France; Sabatier, 2008), where ethnic identity items and measures have been adapted so that they refer to the nation in which participants live.

Phinney (1990) and her colleagues (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Roberts et al., 1999) developed the Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to assess ethnic identity. The MEIM was explicitly designed for use with various ethnic groups and across multiple national contexts (cf. Berry et al., 2006). The MEIM assesses the extent to which one (a) has considered the meaning of one’s ethnicity and (b) is positively attached to one’s ethnic group. We reworded the MEIM to refer to being American and to the United States, and we labeled this new instrument as the American Identity Measure (AIM). The adapted items appear sufficiently general such that, regardless of how a participant conceives of American identity, the items will tap into the extent to which the person has considered her or his relationship to the United States and how strongly the person is attached to the national identity and in-group. Indeed, there is precedence in the literature for adapting items or measures designed for a given construct to refer to other similar constructs (e.g., Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997).

Although the affirmation/commitment subscale is most consistent with the concept of group identity, the exploration subscale is especially important with regard to national identity. As several studies have found (e.g., Pehrson, Vignoles, & Brown, 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2010; Schildkraut, 2011), attachment to a nation can carry a number of different meanings. Individuals must consider what identification with the nation signifies to them before they can commit to and internalize a specific identification with the nation. As a result, the two-factor structure, including exploration as well as affirmation/commitment, is important to retain as long as it remains empirically viable.

**American Identity and Other Dimensions of American Cultural Orientation**

Recent perspectives on acculturation have included cultural identifications as a component of the larger construct of cultural orientations (in addition
to practices and values; e.g., Costigan, 2010). In addition to identification with the United States, American cultural orientations consist of those practices and values that mark one as American, such as eating American food and, to some extent, holding individualist values (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). To the extent that this conceptualization of American orientation is accurate, measures of American identity should be correlated with indices of American cultural practices and, to some degree, with individualist values so as to be consistent with established perspectives on what is means to be an American.

Moreover, a measure of American identity that focuses on attachments to the United States should be associated with more subjective statements about how American one feels or how closely one’s behaviors, values, and attitudes reflect the “typical American.” That is, feeling attached to the United States should be associated with a perception that one behaves and thinks “like an American” such as holding values and engaging in behaviors consistent with the American mainstream. Indeed, previous qualitative work (Rodriguez et al., 2010; Weisskirch, 2005) and large-scale surveys (Schildkraut, 2007, 2011) have identified these dimensions as elements of American identification.

The Present Studies

The present studies were guided by five primary objectives. The first objective was to ascertain the factor structure of scores generated by a measure of American identity and to ensure that this factor structure adequately represented the data. The second objective was to examine the extent to which the factor structures of ethnic identity and American identity are equivalent—and therefore that the MEIM and the AIM can be used to make direct comparisons regarding levels of endorsement of ethnic and American identity and to identify individuals who are bicultural—i.e., high endorsements of ethnic and American identities. The third objective was to ensure that the latent construct underlying scores generated by the AIM was consistent across ethnicity and immigrant generation, so that mean comparisons could be conducted across these groupings. The fourth objective was to examine mean levels of endorsement of American identity across ethnic group and immigrant generation. The fifth objective was to ascertain the convergent validity of AIM scores with a comparison measure of American identity as well as with theoretically expected correlates of American identity such as engagement in American cultural practices and endorsement of individualist values. We designed these objectives to facilitate the development and validation of a psychometrically sound measure that can be used to advance the growing field of American identity research and perhaps the field of
national identity research in general. In turn, the measure might be used to help investigate the extent to which minority and majority group members identify as American as the country becomes increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse.

We pursued the first two objectives as part of Study 1 and the final three objectives as part of Study 2. In our two studies, we used two independent samples of students from colleges and universities around the United States. Although college-aged individuals have been generally apathetic about national and political issues in the past (Kaplan & Venezky, 1994), this age group has been noted as having a rejuvenated interest in national issues, which helped to propel Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 (Gallup Poll, 2008). Moreover, a number of recent presidential and primary debates have been held on college campuses, suggesting that college-aged individuals are an important target for political candidates. Given that today’s college students will likely be tomorrow’s professional and political leaders, the meanings and valence that they assign to American identity are apt to shape the sociopolitical landscape and context of the next generation.

Given that the AIM was adapted from the MEIM, we hypothesized that it would be characterized by the same two-factor structure (exploration and affirmation/commitment) that characterizes the MEIM and that the factor structures of the two measures would be equivalent. We hypothesized that the factor structure of the AIM would be equivalent across ethnicity and across immigrant generation, but that mean differences in AIM scores would emerge. Specifically, we anticipated that Whites would score highest on both dimensions of American identity (cf. Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Heng, 2009; Theiss-Morse, 2009) and that third- and later-generation immigrants would score higher than first- or second-generation immigrants (cf. Huddy & Khatib, 2007).

STUDY 1

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

The sample for Study 1 consisted of 1,773 students (76% women; mean age 20.06 years, SD 3.45 years) from nine colleges and universities around the United States. In terms of ethnicity, 53% of the sample identified as White, 25% as Hispanic, 9% as Black, 7% as East/South Asian, 1% as Middle Eastern, and 5% as Other. Eighty-four percent of participants were born in the United States, including 97% of Whites, 79% of Blacks, 66% of
Hispanics, 64% of Middle Easterners, 63% of Asians, and 88% of those identifying as Other. Data for Study 1 were collected between September and December 2007 as part of Phase 1 of the Multi-Site University Study of Identity and Culture (MUSIC), a collaborative research project carried out by a group of investigators at various U.S. colleges and universities. Ninety-three percent of students who logged into the MUSIC study Web site completed all five pages of the online survey.

In terms of sites, two were in the Northeast, two in the Southeast, one in the Midwest, one in the Southwest, and three in the West. Four of the sites were large state universities, three were smaller state universities, and two were private colleges. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained at each site prior to recruiting participants. At each site, participants were invited to participate through printed or e-mailed announcements. Participants were asked to read a consent Web page and check a box indicating agreement to participate before they were taken to the study Web site. Participants received course credit in exchange for their participation.

Measures

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity exploration and affirmation/commitment were assessed using the MEIM (Roberts et al., 1999), which is among the most commonly used ethnic identity instruments (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The MEIM consists of 12 items tapping into the extent to which one (a) has considered what it means to be a member of one’s ethnic group and (b) feels attached to that group. Sample items include “I think a lot about how my life will be affected by being a member of my ethnic group” and “I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group,” respectively. Accordingly, Roberts et al. (1999; see also Ong et al., 2010) found that the MEIM yields a two-factor structure: one factor for exploration and a second factor for affirmation/commitment. We used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In this sample, Cronbach’s alpha estimates were .78 for ethnic identity exploration/commitment and .92 for ethnic identity affirmation/commitment.

American Identity

American identity was measured using the AIM, which we developed by adapting the MEIM so that “the United States” or “American” was inserted in place of “my ethnic group.” Sample items include “I think a lot about how my life will be affected by being American” and “I have a lot of pride in the United States.” The same 5-point Likert scale from the
MEIM was used with the AIM. Psychometric information on the AIM is reported in the Results section and the items are listed in Table 1.

### RESULTS

#### Plan of Analyses

Analyses were conducted in four steps. First, we estimated intraclass correlations for ethnic and American identity to determine whether multilevel modeling would be needed to test the study hypotheses. Second, we

#### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>American Identity Affirmation (Eigenvalue 5.78)</th>
<th>American Identity Exploration (Eigenvalue 1.66)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have spent time trying to find out more about the United States, such as its history, traditions, and customs.</td>
<td>.87 (.61), .53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly Americans.</td>
<td>.54 (.50), .54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have a clear sense of the United States and what being American means for me.</td>
<td>.50 (.66), .68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by being American.</td>
<td>.66 (.60), .57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am happy that I am an American.</td>
<td>.90 (.81), .82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I have a strong sense of belonging to the United States.</td>
<td>.91 (.86), .89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I understand pretty well what being American means to me.</td>
<td>.76 (.79), .82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. In order to learn more about being American, I have often talked to other people about the United States.</td>
<td>.79 (.73), .61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I have a lot of pride in the United States.</td>
<td>.86 (.82), .82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I participate in cultural practices of the United States, such as special food, music, or customs.</td>
<td>.48 (.63), .68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel a strong attachment towards the United States.</td>
<td>.78 (.83), .82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I feel good about being American.</td>
<td>.93 (.85), .83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. EFA = exploratory factor analysis; CFA = confirmatory factor analysis. In each cell the EFA coefficient for Study 1 is presented first, followed by the CFA coefficient for Study 1 in parentheses, and the CFA coefficient for Study 2.*
randomly split the sample in half and conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using principal axis factoring and promax rotation (Thompson, 2004), on the American identity items in the first half-sample and then we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the second half-sample to confirm the results of the EFA. Third, we conducted another CFA to ascertain the extent to which the factor structures of the AIM and MEIM were parallel. Fourth, we estimated the internal consistency reliability of scores generated by the AIM.

Calculation of Intraclass Correlations

We used the TYPE = TWOLEVEL command in Mplus to determine whether we would need to control for multilevel nesting (participants within data collection sites) in the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses for Study 1. The need for controls for multilevel nesting is ascertained using the intraclass correlation (ICC; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), which represents the proportion of variability in a given indicator that is attributable to between-site, rather than between-person, differences. If the intraclass correlation is nontrivial (greater than about .05), then using ordinary least squares analyses can cause the standard errors for model parameters to be overly small—which in turn can lead to Type I errors in interpreting path coefficients (Bliese & Hanges, 2004). In the Study 1 data, the ICC values were .010 for American identity and .003 for ethnic identity. As a result, we did not account for multilevel nesting in the Study 1 analyses.

Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses of the American Identity Items

We next conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the AIM items. We used promax rotation (Thompson, 2004), given the finding in the ethnic identity literature that exploration and affirmation/commitment are correlated (Roberts et al., 1999). We utilized multiple criteria to decide how many factors to extract. First, each factor must be associated with an eigenvalue above 1.0, where the eigenvalue for a given factor represents the product of the percentage of variability explained by that factor and the number of indicator variables entered into the analysis. Second, we examined the scree plot and extracted factors prior to the inflection point; that is, those factors that appeared to perform above chance levels. Third, to ensure that the factors we extracted would be robust and reliable, the majority of pattern coefficients for each factor had to be above .60 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).
Based on these criteria, the EFA produced a two-factor solution. Factor 1 (rotated eigenvalue 5.72) was associated with items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12. Factor 2 (rotated eigenvalue 3.77) was associated with items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10. Items and pattern coefficients are presented in Table 1. Six of the seven pattern coefficients for affirmation/commitment, and three of the five pattern coefficients for exploration, were above .60. The partitioning of the two factors is identical to the scoring algorithm for the MEIM; as a result, Factor 1 was named American Identity Affirmation/Commitment and Factor 2 was named American Identity Exploration.

Using the second half-sample, we then estimated a CFA using the factor structure extracted from the EFA. CFA models are evaluated using standard structural equation modeling fit indices. For this study, we used the comparative fit index (CFI) and non-normed fit index (NNFI) as incremental fit indices, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) as absolute fit indices. Incremental fit indices compare the specified model to a null model with no paths or latent variables, whereas absolute fit indices compare the covariance structure implied by the model to the covariance structure observed in the data (Kline, 2006). Full-information maximum likelihood estimation was used so that cases with missing item responses could be included in analysis.

Generally, good fit is represented by CFI ≥ .95, NNFI ≥ .95, RMSEA ≤ .05, and SRMR ≤ .06 whereas adequate fit is represented by CFI ≥ .90, NNFI ≥ .90, RMSEA ≤ .08, and SRMR ≤ .10 (Kline, 2006). The RMSEA index also provides a 90% confidence interval (Hancock & Freeman, 2001). The chi-square value tests the null hypothesis of perfect fit to the data, which is rarely plausible in large samples or complex models (Davey & Savla, 2010). As a result the chi-square is reported, but not used to evaluate the fit of a single model to the data.

On occasion, methodological issues, such as similarly worded items, can induce residual correlations between or among indicator items (Kline, 2006). We included three residual correlations because of extremely similar item wording: (a) “I have a clear sense of the United States and what being American means for me” with “I understand pretty well what being American means to me”; (b) “I am happy that I am an American” with “I feel good about being American”; and (c) “I have a lot of pride in the United States” with “I feel good about being American.” These same residual correlations that we included in the CFA were included in all of the subsequent models estimated for Studies 1 and 2. Residual correlations are problematic when used to correct for the effects of unmeasured third variables (Landis, Edwards, & Cortina, 2009), but they may not be problematic when used to account for similar item wording.

The two-factor CFA model fit the data adequately, $\chi^2 (50) = 351.79$, $p < .001$; CFI = .92; NNFI = .90; RMSEA = .084 (95% CI = .076 to .092);
SRMR = .062. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .50 to .73 for the exploration factor and from .66 to .86 for the affirmation/commitment factor (see Table 1). Cronbach’s alpha estimates in the full Study 1 sample were .74 for American identity exploration and .83 for American identity affirmation/commitment.

To ensure that two factors were necessary to represent the data, we compared the two-factor solution obtained in our EFA with a one-factor solution where all of the AIM items were forced to load on a single factor. Specifically, the fit of the one-factor and two-factor models was compared using differences in the chi-square, CFI, and NNFI values. The null hypothesis of equivalence in fit between the one-factor and two-factor solutions would be statistically rejected if at least two of the following three criteria were met: Δχ² significant at p < .05 (Byrne, 2009), ΔCFI > .01 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), and ΔNNFI > .02 (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Results indicated that the two-factor solution provided a significantly better fit to the data, Δχ² (1) = 218.98, p < .001; ΔCFI = .055; ΔNNFI = .070.

Invariance across the Structure of the Ethnic and American Identity Items

Using the full Study 1 sample, we then estimated a confirmatory factor analysis model including both ethnic and American identity, including two-factor structures for both the MEIM and the AIM. To evaluate the extent to which the factor loadings would be equivalent across ethnic identity and American identity, we used metric invariance testing procedures (examining equivalence of factor loadings). Specifically, the fit of a model with factor loadings free to vary across the two latent constructs was compared to the fit of a model where each respective factor loading was constrained to be equal between the ethnic identity and American identity factors. Results indicated that the factor loadings were consistent between the ethnic identity and American identity constructs, Δχ² (12) = 62.47, p < .001; ΔCFI = .005; ΔNNFI < .001. Interestingly, the correlation between ethnic identity exploration and American identity exploration was .53 whereas the correlation between ethnic identity affirmation/commitment and American identity affirmation/commitment was .21. These two correlations were significantly different from one another, z = 11.21, p < .001.

STUDY 1 DISCUSSION

Results of Study 1 suggest that American identity is indeed a measurable construct, at least in terms of considering one’s relationship to the United
States and feeling attached to the country and to the national group. Moreover, we found that the structure of scores on the AIM was statistically similar to the structure of the MEIM—suggesting that group identification may operate similarly for ethnic and national dimensions. However, the parallel factor structure may be, at least to some extent, a result of using the same item stems for both measures.

As a result, the present results suggest that it is possible to reliably index the extent to which individuals regard themselves as American. Similar to ethnic identity, American identity involves (a) thoughtful consideration of what being part of the United States means to the person and (b) pride in, and attachment to, the country and the national group. The question remains, however, whether American identity would be endorsed similarly across ethnic groups and across immigrant generations—as well as the extent to which it would cluster together with other American-cultural indices, such as practices and values.

Although the sample for Study 1 was somewhat large, the various ethnic groups were not equally represented and some were characterized by small sample sizes. As a result, estimating means or comparing factor structures across groups might have led to unstable results. We therefore conducted Study 2 with a much larger sample to accomplish these goals as well as to examine the construct and convergent validity of the AIM.

STUDY 2

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

The sample for Study 2 consisted of 10,573 undergraduate students ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.3$ years, $SD = 3.37$ years; 73% were women) from 30 colleges and universities around the United States. In terms of ethnicity, 58% of the sample identified as White, 14% as Hispanic, 13% as East/South Asian, 8% as Black, and 1% as Middle Eastern. Eight participants identified as Other, and 442 participants did not indicate their ethnicity. The majority of participants (88%) indicated that they were born in the United States—including 96% of Whites, 85% of Blacks, 77% of Hispanics, 73% of Middle Easterners, 66% of East Asians, and 58% of South Asians. Data for the Study 2 sample were collected between September 2008 and October 2009 as part of the second phase of the MUSIC collaborative. The sample from Study 2 was independent from the Study 1 sample.

In Study 2, one of our objectives was to evaluate the measurement algorithm for the AIM across immigrant generations. Following Portes and
Rumbaut (2001), participants were coded as first generation if they were born outside the United States, second generation if they were born in the United States but both of their parents were born abroad, 2.5 generation if the participant and one of his or her parents were born in the United States, or third or later generation if the participant and both parents were born in the United States. According to these definitions, 12.7% of participants were first generation, 16.3% were second generation, 7.8% were 2.5 generation, and 63.2% were third or later generation. Not surprisingly, the six ethnic groups were unevenly distributed across immigrant generations, $\chi^2 (15) = 5909.00$, $p < .001$, Cramér’s $V = .44$ (see Table 2). The majorities of Whites (89.0%) and Blacks (57.0%) were third or later generation, compared to only 5.3% of East Asians, 2.2% of South Asians, and 6.0% of Middle Easterners.

Data collection procedures at each site for Study 2 were identical to those used in Study 1. Six sites were located in the Northeast, seven in the Southeast, six in the Midwest, three in the Southwest, and eight in the West. Fifteen of the sites were major public universities, eight were smaller or commuter state universities, four were major private universities, and three were private colleges. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards at all participating sites prior to the start of data collection. Participants were recruited from courses in psychology, family or consumer sciences, education, and business, and were directed to the study Web site using printed or e-mailed announcements. Informed consent was obtained online before participants were taken to the study Web site. Again, participants provided their university names and student ID numbers for credit purposes, and each of these pieces of information was replaced with code numbers for confidentiality purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>2.5</th>
<th>3rd or Greater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>236 (3.9%)</td>
<td>85 (1.4%)</td>
<td>347 (5.7%)</td>
<td>5,425 (89.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>136 (15.5%)</td>
<td>184 (21.0%)</td>
<td>57 (6.5%)</td>
<td>499 (57.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>356 (23.7%)</td>
<td>560 (37.2%)</td>
<td>269 (17.9%)</td>
<td>320 (21.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asian</td>
<td>364 (34.8%)</td>
<td>568 (54.3%)</td>
<td>60 (5.7%)</td>
<td>55 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>131 (41.1%)</td>
<td>169 (53.0%)</td>
<td>12 (3.8%)</td>
<td>7 (2.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>36 (27.1%)</td>
<td>65 (48.9%)</td>
<td>24 (18.0%)</td>
<td>8 (6.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages refer to the proportion of individuals within each ethnic group who are classified into each of the four immigrant generation categories.
Measures

American Identity

We used the AIM, as developed in Study 1, again in Study 2. Cronbach’s alpha estimates in Study 2 were .74 for American identity exploration and .93 for American identity affirmation/commitment.

Comparison Measure of American Identity

To assess convergent validity of the AIM, we generated four items based on prior qualitative research with a sample of White, Black, and Hispanic emerging adults (Rodriguez et al., 2010). These items were: (a) “How American do you feel?” (b) “How American do others perceive you to be?” (c) “How reflective of the American mainstream are your values and attitudes?” and (d) “How reflective of the American mainstream are your behaviors and actions?” For Study 2, participants rated each of these items using a 5-point Likert scale. For the first three items, the scale endpoints were 1 (not at all American) and 5 (extremely American). For the fourth item, the scale endpoints were 1 (not at all reflective) and 5 (extremely reflective). Cronbach’s alpha for responses to these items was .91.

American Cultural Practices

We used the American Practices subscale from the Stephenson (2000) Multigroup Acculturation Scale to assess use of English, association with American friends and romantic partners, and affinity for American media and customs. This subscale consists of 15 items (α = .88 in Study 2), including “I think in English” and “I am familiar with important people in American history.” A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Individualist Values

Given that the American “collective identity” (i.e., the image of a “typical American”) is often taken to be associated with rugged individualism (Hofstede, 2001), we used individualistic beliefs as an index of American cultural values. Triandis and Gelfand (1998) have subdivided individualism into “horizontal” (the ways in which one regards others at one’s social stratum, such as friends and coworkers) and “vertical” (the ways in which one regards others who are above oneself in the social hierarchy such as parents, employers, and teachers) variants. In Study 2, we used a version of the Triandis and Gelfand measure indexing each variant of individualism using four items apiece. Horizontal individualism was assessed using items such as
“I’d rather depend on myself than on others,” and vertical individualism was assessed using items such as “Winning is everything.” A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used for both sets of individualism items. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients in the Study 2 sample were .78 for horizontal individualism and .79 for vertical individualism.

RESULTS

Plan of Analysis
We present the results for Study 2 in five steps. First, we examined the ICCs for all study variables. If the ICC was above .05 for any of the study variables, we used the sandwich covariance estimator (Kauermann & Carroll, 2001), which adjusts the standard errors of model parameters to account for multi-level nesting but does not explicitly model level 2 (site) effects. Second, we estimated the CFA for American identity on the Sample 2 data and tested it for metric (factor loadings) and scalar (item intercepts) invariance across ethnic groups and across immigrant generations. Third, we conducted latent mean comparisons on American identity by ethnicity and by immigrant generation. Fourth, we estimated the correlations of scores from the AIM with scores from the comparison measure of American identity and with American cultural practices and values. Finally, we examined the consistency of these correlations across ethnicity and immigrant generation.

Calculation of Intraclass Correlations
ICCs were as follows: American identity exploration, .030; American identity affirmation/commitment, .033; American cultural practices, .073; horizontal individualism, .019; vertical individualism, .029; and comparison American identity scale, .048. Because the intraclass correlation for American cultural practices was above .05, we used the sandwich estimator for analyses involving this variable (i.e., correlations between American identity and other indices of American cultural orientation).

Comparing the Factor Structure of American Identity across Ethnicity and Immigrant Generation
Prior to comparing the factor structure of American identity scores across ethnic groups and across immigrant generation, we first estimated the two-factor structure on the Study 2 data. This CFA model fit the data well, $\chi^2 (50) = 3450.81$, $p < .001$; CFI = .95; NNFI = .94; RMSEA = .085 (95%
CI = .082 to .087); SRMR = .064. Standardized factor loadings are presented in Table 1.

We then compared this factor structure across the six ethnic groups, and across immigrant generations, using multigroup metric and scalar invariance testing (for a recent review of invariance testing methods, see Dimitrov, 2010). Multigroup invariance testing is conducted by estimating two models: an unconstrained model, in which all factor loadings or item intercepts are free to vary across groups; and a constrained model, in which each factor loading or item intercept is set equal across groups. The two models are then compared in terms of their fit to the data, using the same fit index comparisons used in Study 1. Metric invariance is tested first, followed by scalar invariance (provided that the assumption of metric invariance is tenable; Knight et al., 2009). Metric invariance tests indicated that the factor loadings were consistent across ethnicity, $\Delta \chi^2 (60) = 392.043$, $p < .001$; $\Delta CFI = .005$; $\Delta NNFI < .001$; and across immigrant generation, $\Delta \chi^2 (12) = 349.246$, $p < .001$; $\Delta CFI = .003$; $\Delta NNFI < .001$.

We next examined scalar invariance across ethnicity and immigrant generation. Scalar invariance ensures that mean comparisons are not confounded by differences in item intercepts across groups (Dimitrov, 2010). Establishing scalar invariance requires comparing a metric invariance model (where factor loadings are constrained to be equal across groups) to a model where loadings and intercepts are constrained to be equal across groups (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Results indicated that the assumption of full scalar invariance was statistically rejected across ethnicity, $\Delta \chi^2 (100) = 915.24$, $p < .001$; $\Delta CFI = .016$; $\Delta NNFI < .001$, and across immigrant generation, $\Delta \chi^2 (33) = 962.065$, $p < .001$; $\Delta CFI = .017$; $\Delta NNFI = .003$.

To identify the items that violated the assumption of scalar invariance across ethnicity and across immigrant generation, we followed a procedure outlined by Byrne (2009). We began with the fully constrained model and freed one intercept at a time. Following each step, we examined the change in the chi-square, CFI, and NNFI indices. Intercepts for which the assumption of invariance could be statistically rejected were considered nonequivalent. However, none of the individual item intercepts appeared to violate the assumption of scalar invariance. We therefore concluded that the assumption of partial scalar invariance could be retained (cf. Knight et al., 2009; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

We followed the same procedure across immigrant generation. No individual items met criteria for noninvariance, and only item 1 approached these criteria, $\Delta \chi^2 (3) = 264.533$, $p < .001$; $\Delta CFI = .006$; $\Delta NNFI = .003$. Again, we reached a conclusion of partial scalar invariance across immigrant generation. Latent means can be compared under conditions of partial scalar invariance (Hancock, 2004).
Comparisons of American Identity across Ethnic Groups and across Immigrant Generations

Building from the scalar invariance model, we then estimated a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis model to compare latent means for American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment across ethnicity and across immigrant generation. In latent means modeling, the mean for a reference group is constrained to zero and the mean for each of the other groups is compared to the reference group mean (Hancock, 2004).

Results of these latent mean comparisons are displayed in Table 2. Differences by ethnicity and by immigrant generation appeared to be stronger for American identity affirmation/commitment than for American identity exploration. For exploration, Whites and Middle Easterners scored significantly higher than Blacks, Hispanics, and the two Asian groups; and 2.5-generation and third- or later-generation individuals scored significantly higher than first- or second-generation immigrants. For American identity affirmation/commitment, the pattern of differences was more complex. Whites and Middle Easterners scored highest, Blacks and Hispanics intermediately, and the two Asian groups lowest; and affirmation/commitment scores were lowest in first-generation immigrants, intermediate in second-generation immigrants, and highest in 2.5- and third- or later-generation individuals.

Since the ethnic groups were disproportionately represented across immigration generation categories (see Table 2), an ideal strategy would have been to conduct the latent mean comparisons separately within each ethnic group. However, latent mean comparisons are conducted within a structural equation modeling framework—indicating that structural equation modeling sample size requirements should be met. Jackson (2003) found that a sample size of 200 or greater provides the most accurate and stable estimates. Hispanics were the only ethnic group that met this requirement for each immigrant generation category. We therefore reconducted the latent mean comparisons by immigrant generation using only the Hispanic subsample. As one might expect, the results were more modest (see Table 3) given that even later-generation Hispanics may be visible minorities and may experience discrimination as a result, which may lead them to identify less strongly as American. American identity exploration did not differ significantly across immigrant generation, and American identity affirmation/commitment differed significantly only between first-generation and third- or later-generation Hispanics.

Correlations Between American Identity and Other Indices of American Orientation

Next, we examined the correlations between AIM scores and scores generated by the comparison measure of American identity, scores for horizontal
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>White (n = 6,181)</th>
<th>Black (n = 896)</th>
<th>Hispanic (n = 1,527)</th>
<th>East Asian (n = 1,061)</th>
<th>South Asian (n = 322)</th>
<th>Middle Eastern (n = 136)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Identity Exploration</td>
<td>0.00 (^a) (0.58)</td>
<td>-0.22 (^b) (0.59)</td>
<td>-0.21 (^b) (0.66)</td>
<td>-0.30 (^b) (0.62)</td>
<td>-0.29 (^b) (0.69)</td>
<td>0.02 (^a) (0.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Identity Affirmation</td>
<td>0.00 (^a) (0.62)</td>
<td>-0.24 (^b) (0.66)</td>
<td>-0.14 (^b) (0.66)</td>
<td>-0.38 (^c) (0.69)</td>
<td>-0.40 (^c) (0.73)</td>
<td>-0.09 (^a) (0.67)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comparisons Across Immigrant Generation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant Generation</th>
<th>1st (n = 1,259)</th>
<th>2nd (n = 1,631)</th>
<th>2.5 (n = 769)</th>
<th>3rd or Later (n = 6,314)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Identity Exploration</td>
<td>0.00 (^a) (0.66)</td>
<td>-0.03 (^b) (0.64)</td>
<td>0.21 (^b) (0.64)</td>
<td>0.26 (^b) (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Identity Affirmation</td>
<td>0.00 (^a) (0.77)</td>
<td>0.25 (^b) (0.66)</td>
<td>0.45 (^c) (0.66)</td>
<td>0.50 (^c) (0.61)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comparisons Across Immigrant Generation (Hispanics Only)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant Generation</th>
<th>1st (n = 356)</th>
<th>2nd (n = 560)</th>
<th>2.5 (n = 269)</th>
<th>3rd or Later (n = 320)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Identity Exploration</td>
<td>0.00 (^a) (0.66)</td>
<td>-0.06 (^a) (0.73)</td>
<td>0.10 (^a) (0.74)</td>
<td>0.21 (^a) (0.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Identity Affirmation</td>
<td>0.00 (^a) (0.78)</td>
<td>0.23 (^ab) (0.60)</td>
<td>0.30 (^ab) (0.65)</td>
<td>0.37 (^b) (0.56)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Latent means for Whites (for ethnicity) and first-generation immigrants (for immigrant generation) were set to zero so that the model could be identified and estimated. Within each row, latent means with the same subscript do not differ at \(p < .05\).
and vertical individualism, and scores for American cultural practices (Table 4). We defined each of these constructs as latent variables, with the individual items used as indicators. Parceled item indicators were used for American cultural practices because this subscale consisted of 15 items. Parcelling is appropriate so long as the construct in question is unidimensional, the measure in question is not being examined psychometrically, and entering each item as an indicator variable would result in defining a latent variable using more than five indicators (Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994; Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). As noted above, we used the sandwich covariance estimator to control for multilevel nesting.

The correlations model fit the data well, $\chi^2 (332) = 13,154.96, p < .001; \text{CFI} = .97; \text{NNFI} = .96; \text{RMSEA} = .063 (90\% \text{ CI} = .062 \text{ to } .064); \text{SRMR} = .062$. As shown in Table 3, scores on American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment were strongly\(^2\) convergent with scores on the comparison measure of American identity, highly correlated with American cultural practices, and modestly correlated with indices of individualism. Affirmation/commitment was strongly correlated with the comparison American identity scale, further suggesting that affirmation/commitment is the dimension that most reflects solidarity and affinity with the United States.

Our final step of analysis was to ensure that these correlations were consistent across ethnicity and across immigrant generation. To test this, we evaluated the difference in fit between an unconstrained model, in which all correlations were free to vary across groups; and a constrained model, in which each correlation was set to be equal across groups. The same invariance testing criteria were used for this step as were used to compare the factor structure of AIM scores across ethnicity and across immigrant generation.

\(^2\)The term strongly correlated is used to refer to correlations of .50 or greater (Cohen, 1988).

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>American Identity Exploration</th>
<th>American Identity Affirmation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison American identity  scale</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>.68***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American cultural practices</td>
<td>.51***</td>
<td>.56***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal individualism</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical individualism</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(***p < .001.\)
Results indicated that the correlations between scores on the AIM and on the other American culture scales were consistent across ethnic groups, $\Delta \chi^2 (40) = 478.88; \Delta CFI = .004; \Delta NNFI = .001$; and across immigrant generations, $\Delta \chi^2 (24) = 264.96, p < .001; \Delta CFI = .001; \Delta NNFI < .001$.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

These studies were designed to provide preliminary validation evidence for a measure of American identity and to ascertain the extent to which various ethnic groups and immigrant generations identify with the United States. The measure was drawn from literature on ethnic identity (e.g., Ong et al., 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007), which in turn draws from Eriksonian (identity as resulting from a process of exploration and commitment) and social identity (attachments to social groups) principles. Two factors emerged from analysis of AIM scores, paralleling the exploration and affirmation/commitment subscales from the MEIM. This pattern suggests that, using parallel sets of items, ethnic identity and American identity may both be structurally characterized by the dimensions of exploration and affirmation/commitment. Moreover, further supporting the factorial validity of scores generated by the AIM, the factor structure was consistent across ethnic groups and immigrant generations; and the correlations between the American identity subscales and other indices of American cultural orientation were also consistent across ethnicity and immigrant generation.

Concerning mean differences, 2.5-generation and third- or later-generation individuals scored higher on the American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment subscales compared to first- and second-generation immigrants. This finding appears to provide some evidence of construct validity, as American identification would be expected to increase with successive generations in the United States. However, these generational comparisons may have been confounded with ethnicity, as Asians were most likely to be first or second generation and Whites were most likely to be third or later generation. When generational comparisons were conducted within a single ethnic group (Hispanics), few differences emerged across immigrant generation. Larger samples of other ethnic groups within each generational category may be helpful in determining whether generational differences in American identity may be larger in some ethnic groups than in others. Concerning ethnic differences in American identity subscales, Middle Easterners scored similarly to Whites on both American identity subscales; Asian descent groups scored lowest on American identity affirmation/commitment; and affirmation/commitment scores for Blacks and Hispanics were intermediate between Whites/Middle
Easterners and Asians. We discuss each of the primary findings from Study 2, and their implications for the measurement of American identity, more extensively below.

**Factor Structure of American Identity**

Like ethnic identity, the construct of identification with the United States appears to be represented by the dimensions of exploration and affirmation/commitment. As discussed further below, the affirmation/commitment dimension appears to most closely represent more subjective assessments of oneself as an American. Moreover, the measure that we developed and validated in these studies might be utilized to address a number of important intergroup issues such as to compare different segments of the population (e.g., political parties or age groups) on American exploration and affirmation/commitment as well as to follow individuals over time or to assess increases or decreases in American identification following specific intergroup events (e.g., wars, terrorist attacks, or presidential elections). The measure can also be used to empirically evaluate the legitimacy of concerns expressed by political commentators (e.g., Buchanan, 2006; Huntington, 2004) and in public opinion polls (e.g., Cornelius, 2002) that the current, post-1965 wave of immigrants is not becoming American. Finally, the AIM can be used in tandem with the MEIM to explore the degree of bicultural identification of minority group members, given that they typically must navigate multiple cultural contexts and negotiate multiple identities.

**Comparable Factor Structures Between Ethnic Identity and American Identity**

The finding that the factor structures for ethnic identity and American identity were equivalent suggests that the combination of Eriksonian and social identity principles is equally applicable to identification with one’s ethnic or cultural subgroup and to identification with the larger nation or society. Individuals explore, and commit to, potential interpretations of the meaning or significance of both their ethnic group and the United States (Rodriguez et al., 2010). Our findings also suggest that, as individuals explore what their ethnicity means to them, they may also be likely to explore what it means to be American. In contrast to Huntington’s (2004) claim that ethnic identification undermines people’s commitment to the United States, Stepick et al. (2011) found that, among immigrant youth, civic involvement was highest among those who identified with their ethnic group. The pattern that emerges from our results, as well as those from past research, is similar to the construct of biculturalism, which refers to
developing an integrated sense of identity that incorporates elements from one’s ethnic group and from the United States (Berry, 1980, 1997). Although biculturalism has been studied primarily in immigrants or other individuals straddling multiple cultural contexts, this approach does not necessarily have to be the case (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Nonimmigrant Americans may also maintain some degree of identification with their ancestral heritage; for example, Rodriguez et al. (2010) found that many White Americans referred to their European heritage (e.g., Italian, Irish, or Polish) when asked about ways in which they were “something other than American.” So, some degree of dual identification (high ethnic identity and high American identity) may characterize some White Americans as well as members of some other ethnic groups.

These results indicate that the factor structures of ethnic identity and American identity are equivalent, which suggests that ethnic and American identity may share important structural characteristics such as a process by which the person considers and decides on the subjective meaning of the group membership and then develops a sense of pride in and attachment to the group. Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, and Shin (2006) found that, across several ethnic groups, cultural socialization by parents was a strong predictor of ethnic identity. American identity may be socialized by parents in some cases; for example, immigrant parents may be grateful for the opportunities provided to them by the United States and may instill such gratitude and pride in their children. American-born parents may also educate their children about the importance of identifying as American and of maintaining loyalty to the United States. Schools, peers, and media might also be important influences in the development of American identity, though little research has examined these potential determinants. In any case, knowing that ethnic and American identity are structured similarly may be important in examining biculturalism and the ways in which it manifests itself. For example, are bicultural individuals more likely to manifest their American identity as patriotism, and less likely to manifest it as nationalism and xenophobia, compared to individuals who identify only with the superordinate American category?

Consistency of American Identity Factor Structure across Ethnicity and Immigrant Generation

Our results also suggest that the factor structure of American identity is similar across ethnicity and across immigrant generations. Although studies have suggested that individuals from various ethnic backgrounds associate being American with being White (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Heng, 2009; Tsai, Mortensen, Wong, & Hess, 2002), the process of identifying with
the United States appears to be similar across ethnicity. Moreover, first- and second-generation immigrants—who were raised in foreign-born households—appeared to characterize the structure of American identity similarly to later-generation individuals. The conclusion that we draw from this pattern of results is that individuals, regardless of their birthplace or their ethnic background, may consider what being American means to them and may then develop some degree of attachment to the United States. Immigrants and individuals from non-White groups do not appear to be blocked by a more difficult process of identifying as American—although, as stated earlier, individuals from non-White groups (especially Asians) may be perceived by others as not being American (Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011; Lee, 2005). It is not known whether the modest ethnic differences that we found in American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment are due to some groups being perceived as “not American” by others.

Mean Differences in American Identity across Ethnicity and Immigrant Generation

Interestingly, and counter to the predictions of some conservative commentators (Buchanan, 2006; Huntington, 2004), ethnic and immigrant generation differences in American identity exploration/commitment and affirmation/commitment were quite modest. Whites, who represent the majority cultural group in the United States, reported the highest levels of affirmation/commitment with the United States and the second-highest degrees of exploring what it means to be American. This is not surprising, given that the country was founded on European (specifically British) ideals and values (Schildkraut, 2007), and being American is often equated with being White (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Rodriguez et al., 2010). However, the finding that Middle Eastern participants were as highly identified with the United States as White participants (and were slightly more likely to think about what being American means to them) was somewhat unexpected. Many Middle Eastern individuals in the United States are Muslim and Muslims have been considered by some as a threat to national security since the September 11 attacks (e.g., Disha, Cavendish, & King, 2011). However, as Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney (2007, p. 25) have noted, “[t]he integration of Muslims into U.S. society is of considerable importance.” This integration appears to be occurring at least among the Middle Eastern individuals in our sample (although conclusions about the Middle Eastern subgroup should be drawn cautiously, given the small sample size within this group). Further, in contrast to Buchanan’s (2006) and Huntington’s (2004) claims that Hispanics do not wish to be American, Hispanics in our sample scored intermediate among ethnic groups in terms of American
exploration and affirmation/commitment—demonstrating that they are indeed developing American identities.

Asian participants, on average, ranked lowest on American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment—about one-third standard deviation lower than the mean for Whites on exploration/commitment, and 40% of a standard deviation below Whites on affirmation/commitment. Research has indicated that, among immigrant groups, Asians are least likely to retain fluency in their heritage languages and are among the most eager to integrate themselves into the United States (Citrin et al., 2007; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). However, some research has also indicated that Asians—including those born in the United States—are acutely aware that some Whites do not regard them as American (Devos & Heng, 2009; Huynh et al., 2011; Tsai et al., 2002). Although some Hispanics are perceived as phenotypically White and cannot be distinguished physically from White Americans, most Asians are visible minorities. Physical appearance, and others’ reaction to that appearance, may therefore provide Asians with a constant reminder that they are “not American” (Lee, 2005) and may limit them from identifying fully as American.

The extremely modest mean differences in American identification across immigrant generations could serve to assuage the concerns of conservative political commentators (e.g., Buchanan, 2006; Huntington, 2004) that today’s immigrants are not interested in becoming American. Indeed, our results are in line with those of other studies (e.g., Schwartz, Pantin, Sullivan, Prado, & Szapocznik, 2006; Unger et al., 2002) suggesting that, even in the most densely concentrated immigrant enclaves (e.g., Little Havana and Chinatown), young people are attached to American culture. Moreover, also consistent with these findings, prior research has indicated that immigrant parents are strongly invested in their children learning English and succeeding in American society (Kasinitz et al., 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

When the mean comparisons across immigrant generation were conducted within a specific ethnic group—Hispanics—the differences were even more modest. Ethnic identity exploration appeared to occur to similar extents across generational time in the United States, and ethnic identity affirmation/commitment was significantly elevated only in third- or later-generation individuals. At least some of the mean differences in American identity found across immigrant generations within the full sample, then, were likely confounded by differences in migration patterns. Asians, who reported the lowest levels of American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment, were also most likely to be first or second generation and least likely to be third or later generation. Comparisons between immigrant groups from prior waves versus those from the current wave—as
social commentators have attempted to conduct (e.g., Buchanan, 2006; Huntington, 2004)—are likely exaggerated and confounded with ethnic differences.

Associations Between American Identity and Other Dimensions of American Orientation

We were able to provide further confidence in the convergent validity of scores generated by the AIM through correlations with a set of items derived from a qualitative examination of what it means to be American (cf. Rodriguez et al., 2010). Specifically, although the AIM subscales tap into the extent to which individuals have explored the personal significance of being American and feel attached to, and proud of, the United States, the comparison items assess the extent to which individuals feel American, are perceived as American by others, and hold values and engage in behaviors that are consistent with American culture. The AIM therefore draws on Eriksonian and social identity principles whereas the comparison measure assesses more subjective indicators of being American. The fairly high correlations between these two indicators (and operationalizations) of American identity provide some degree of convergent validity for the AIM subscales.

We also examined the associations of American identity with engagement in American cultural behaviors and holding individualist values to ascertain the extent to which scores on the AIM would be associated with behaving and thinking “like an American.” American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment were each fairly strongly linked with American cultural behaviors such as speaking English, eating American foods, associating with American friends and romantic partners, and accessing American media. However, the links between American identity and individualist values were fairly weak. There are at least two potential explanations for this smaller-than-expected association between American identity and individualist values. Methodologically speaking, the AIM items and the items on the American cultural practices subscale from the Stephenson scale specifically mention the United States by name whereas the individualist values items do not refer specifically to the United States. Explicitly referencing the country may create a response set that increases the correlation between American identity and cultural practices. Culturally speaking, it is possible that, although Hofstede (2001) characterized the United States as a highly individualist country, Americans may not perceive themselves as inherently individualistic—and high levels of individualism do not necessarily contraindicate collectivism (concern for, and interdependence with, others; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Indeed, although
individual achievements and successes have been mentioned in a number of studies as being associated with American cultural expectations (e.g., Rodriguez et al., 2010; Schildkraut, 2011), many Americans may also see themselves as being responsible for each other, for their families, and for the greater good of the country (e.g., Park-Taylor et al., 2008). Items such as “winning is everything” and “my personal identity, independent of others, is most important to me” may overestimate the extent to which Americans see themselves as individualistic and unconcerned with the welfare of others.

The “rugged” individualism that is often associated with American culture may be either overstated or contextually dependent—and again, high levels of individualism do not necessarily mean that an individual is not also collectivistically oriented. Indeed, Americans may be extremely individualistically oriented in their careers, but may be quite charitable in their personal lives. For example, a number of international aid agencies, such as the Red Cross, are based in the United States and led by Americans. As another example, the United States has traditionally welcomed large numbers of immigrants, and indeed the country was founded in part as a home for individuals who were persecuted in their countries of origin. Moreover, a number of treatises on the American Creed (e.g., Huntington, 2004; Schildkraut, 2007, 2011) have identified democracy and civic engagement—but not concern only for one’s own welfare—as fundamental components of what it means to be American. Although some individualism (e.g., personal liberties and freedom of choice) is built into the American way of life, the extreme individualism often attributed to the United States may not be. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that we sampled from areas that are less individualistic (e.g., the Deep South and Midwest) and from areas that are more individualistic (e.g., the Northeast and Mountain West; Vandello & Cohen, 1999).

Importantly, the associations of American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment with other dimensions of American orientation were consistent across ethnicity and immigrant generation. This finding of consistency carries an important implication for the study of what it means to be American. For a number of ethnic groups—not just White Americans—engaging in American cultural behaviors appears to be linked with considering the subjective meaning of being American and with feeling attached to the United States. This suggests that the option of “becoming American” is open to individuals from many ethnic groups (cf. Stepick et al., 2011). Nonetheless, there remains a demarcation between “feeling American” and “being accepted as such by others.” Some visible-minority Hispanic and Asian individuals, for example, may be asked where they are from or be complemented on their English proficiency, which represents a subtle form of discrimination and implies that these individuals are
perceived as not being American (Huynh et al., 2011; Lee, 2005; Sue et al., 2007). In accordance, on the item asking “How American do others perceive you do be?” East Asians and South Asians scored approximately 1 full Likert scale point (0.98 and 1.02, respectively) below Whites (on a scale of 1 to 5). Moreover, Blacks may be ambivalent about identifying as American, and the extent to which they are perceived as American is often ambiguous (Huynh et al., 2011; Smith, 1997). As the United States continues to become more and more ethnically diverse, it will be important to examine the extent to which visible-minority status continues to interfere with being perceived as American.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our results should be interpreted in light of at least four potential limitations. First, although there are clear advantages inherent in modeling the AIM after the MEIM, doing so does not permit examination of other relevant dimensions of American identification such as nationalism and patriotism. Individuals who identify strongly with the United States could be doing so for a number of reasons: because they are proud of the nation’s accomplishments, because they are grateful that their family was permitted to immigrate, or because they wish to defend the country against symbolic threats posed by new immigrant groups (cf. Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Schatz et al., 2003; Theiss-Morse, 2009). Indeed, Cornell and Hartmann (1998) have argued that national identity is inherently political, whereas ethnic identity is not. In that spirit, it is important for future research to ascertain the relationships of AIM scores to other dimensions of national identification as well as to examine the circumstances under which high American identity scores are associated with benevolence versus intolerance toward other national, ethnic, and immigrant groups.

Second, the inclusion only of college students in our samples did not allow us to examine the properties of the AIM in other segments of the population. It is possible that working adults, older individuals, or military veterans, for example, might have responded differently to the items. However, it should be noted that studies of American identity conducted with college samples (e.g., Bush, 2005; Park-Taylor et al., 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2010) have yielded extremely similar findings as studies conducted with random population samples (e.g., Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Schildkraut, 2007, 2011). Nonetheless, it is important to examine the psychometric properties of the AIM in samples of noncollege individuals.

Third, our studies were cross-sectional and did not permit us to examine the extent to which American identity exploration and affirmation/commitment may have preceded, or emerged in response to, American cultural
practices and individualist values. Moreover, an experimental design in which American identity is threatened (e.g., by assigning participants to read passages denigrating the United States) would provide further evidence for the validity of the AIM subscales—especially if endorsement of American identity increases when this identity is threatened. (For an example of how such studies might be conducted, see Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010.)

Fourth, although we attempted to identify, and remove from analysis, participants who were clearly international students (e.g., those for whom the reported distance between their university and where they grew up approximated the distance between the university and the student’s home country), this procedure may not have successfully identified all international students. International students from Canada and Mexico may have been especially difficult to identify, given the extensive and contiguous borders that the United States shares with these two countries. Future research should include questions asking participants whether they are living in the United States permanently or on a time-limited basis.

Despite these limitations, our studies suggest that American identity can be measured with a quantitative, psychometrically sound instrument and that scores generated by such an instrument are internally consistent, are similarly structured across ethnicity and immigrant generation, and relate to other measures of American identity and of American cultural orientations in theoretically consistent ways. The AIM can find use in studies examining the effects of specific intergroup events (e.g., wars, terrorist threats and attacks, or political campaigns) on identification with the United States, overall and within specific ethnic, political, or other groups. We hope that this pair of studies has provided an important tool for future empirical work on American identity.

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