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Perceived Discrimination and Thriving in Emerging Adults; The Role of Ethnic Identity

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PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION AND THRIVING IN EMERGING ADULTS:
THE ROLE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

A Thesis
Submitted to
The City College of New York

In Partial Fulfillment of
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Masters of Arts in General Psychology

by
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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

The relationship between thriving, perceived discrimination (PD) and ethnic identity (EI) was tested in a sample of 139 college students from an urban university on the east coast, who completed an online survey package. It was hypothesized that PD would be negatively related to thriving and spark identification and motivation (spark IDM); that EI would be positively related to thriving and spark motivation; and that EI would moderate the relationship between PD and thriving, and between PD and spark IDM. Results showed no significant relationship between PD and total thriving or PD and spark motivation. EI and total thriving were positively correlated, but EI and spark IDM were not significantly related. No interaction effect between PD and EI was found for total thriving or for spark IDM; however, EI showed a main effect on total thriving. Implications of these findings are explored in the discussion.

Keywords: perceived discrimination, thriving, ethnic identity, social development

To Kadri Faas

and

Michael Kühnholz

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Perceived Discrimination and Thriving: The Role of Ethnic Identity

One of the major tasks of psychosocial development is to thrive, which includes the articulation of a life goal and support from different sources such as friends and family, teachers, and community leaders (Benson & Scales, 2009). However, in American society, discrimination can impede certain people's ability to thrive, and may in fact impede positive development; indeed, discrimination and perceived discrimination are associated with academic, psychological, and physical harms (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009) and this is most notable among ethnic minorities (Guthrie, Young, Williams, Boyd, & Kintner, 2002). While ethnicity can be a source of negative reactions from the outside world, it can also function as a protective factor against the same harms in the form of ethnic identity, which can be described as an explored and internalized relationship to one's ethnic and cultural group (Umaña-Taylor, Yazedijan, & Bámaca-Gomez, 2004). Discrimination, ethnic identity, and thriving are thus likely inter-related as they influence a person's path through life. Still, they have never been empirically examined together. This study looks at how perceived discrimination, ethnic identity and positive development, in the form of thriving, interact.

Perceived Discrimination

In the scientific literature, perceived discrimination (PD) is most often defined as the perception of a blatant act of discrimination (Blodorn, O'Brien, & Kordys, 2012; Prelow, Mosher, & Bowman, 2006; Seaton, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). PD also occurs in the form of perceived microaggressions: Microaggressions are subtle acts of discrimination, such as a group of minority guests receiving slow service at a restaurant compared to a group of white patrons (Sue et al. 2007). Perceived discrimination is thus the resulting appraisal one has of a

behavior directed against oneself based on a particular social category (e.g. race, sexual

orientation, gender); it reflects how the individual interprets the situation, what value he or she

assigns to the perceived slight, and what emotional reaction, if any, the slight elicits. Perceived

discrimination is not necessarily bound in momentary, measurable reality; it can be informed by

past experiences or even by vicarious experiences; it is a point of view, an interpretation of the

world that shapes expectations and emotions. As such, it is a subjective experience from a

distinct point of view: the attribution of a negative situational outcome to one or several aspects

connected to one's identity. For example, if a person sitting on a train observes another person

enter and sit far away, one might appraise this situation as a personal slight. Indeed, in one study,

Asian Americans, when faced with such an ambiguous situation, were more likely to perceive

the situation as a slight and to attribute the perceived slight to their ethnic identity; white

participants were less likely to perceive the situation as a slight, but when they did, they were

more likely to attribute the perceived slight to their physical appearance, such as height or weight

(Wang, Leu, & Shoda, 2011). In addition, reports of negative emotions were significantly greater

when the slight was perceived to be related to race, while controlling for other social identities

(e.g., sex, height/weight, social class); this shows that the perception of discrimination attributed

to one's ethnic identity can have devastating effects.

     The concept of PD has not only been studied in ethnic minorities (Pieterse, & Carter,

2010; Reid, & Foels, 2010; Seaton, Neblett, Upton, Hammond, & Sellers, 2011; Sellers, &

Shelton, 2003; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003; Solórzano, Ceja, &

Yosso, 2000; Wang et al., 2011), but in other groups as well, such as LGBT individuals

(Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; Friedman & Leaper, 2010), and women

(Friedman & Leaper, 2010; Hurst & Beesley, 2013). Results across these groups reveal similar

outcomes: PD is associated negatively with features of positive youth development, such as motivation, support, and social competencies (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006). PD is associated with decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety, and higher rates of alcohol use in African American high-school students (Hurd, Varner, Caldwell, & Zimmerman, 2014), feelings of self-doubt and frustration in African American college students (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), externalizing emotions in Asian Americans (Wang, Leu, & Shoda, 2011), increased psychological distress, depression, and anxiety in African American emerging adults (Sellers et al., 2003), perceived stress in academically at-risk students (Sellers & Shelton, 2003), increased smoking in African American girls' smoking habits (Guthrie et al., 2002), as well as decreased well-being among African American youth (Seaton et al., 2011). In a study of approximately 1000 participants comprising five stigmatized groups, including HIV-positive individuals, members of different ethnic groups, and homosexual participants, Molero, Recia, Garcia-Ael, Fuster, and Sanjuan (2013) found that PD was related to decreased affect-balance, i.e. the balance between positive and negative affect, and decreased self-acceptance for all groups. Thus, PD not only increases negative emotions and decreases physical health behaviors, it reduces positive outcomes such as self-esteem, self-acceptance, and well-being for all of the traditionally stigmatized groups. Both self-esteem and well-being are factors in academic and professional success and so PD may have detrimental effects on academic achievement as well (Kotze & Kleynhans, 2013; Loose, Regner, Morin, & Dumas, 2012).

In fact, studies suggest that PD creates a multitude of negative outcomes in academic settings such as decreased achievement motivation and school engagement. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso's (2000) investigated campus racial climate and found that African American students frequently experience discrimination and microaggressions in interactions with faculty, which

led to feelings of being unwanted, self-doubt, frustration and the perception that relatively greater effort was needed to maintain academic achievements. These findings are further supported by Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, and Jackson (2009), who found that perceived teacher discrimination was related to lower grades. These studies suggest that not only are experiences of ethnic and racial discrimination still common, but they negatively affect performance and feeling comfortable at school in general.

Furthermore, PD among secondary school LGBTQ youth is associated with lower GPA and more hours of missed classes (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). PD in academic settings is also related to lower job satisfaction in women working in collegiate science (Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006), and to psychological distress and self-silencing in female college students (Hurst & Besley, 2013). Thus, the negative impact of PD on positive development and well-being is well-documented across different populations and may ultimately inhibit thriving.

Thriving

Thriving is the positive trajectory towards, and active-pursuit of, a self-defined goal that is nurtured by and sought out in the individual's community (Benson & Scales, 2009). It is an important part of healthy development especially in adolescence (Geldhof, Bowers, & Lerner, 2013). While in the past it has often been defined as "doing well", specifically in terms of academic and educational success such as GPA, (e.g. Campa, Bradshaw, Eckenrode, & Zielinski, 2008), and skills and confidence (Carver, 1998), recent conceptualizations of thriving are nuanced, multi-dimensional, and inclusive. They take into account several concepts developed out of the field of positive psychology within multiple domains of life, from environmental factors, such as adult support, to personal and motivational factors, such as purpose, positive

emotionality, and spirituality (Benson & Scales, 2009). In this way, thriving gives insight into the interaction between different factors of development and presents a more global measure of positive development than subjective well-being, happiness, coping, or academic success; thus, it functions as an inventory of positive factors and influences in a person's life, rather than a simple outcome measure. In addition, thriving might have trajectory implications, namely that the thriving adolescent is expected to develop positively and deal more adaptively with setbacks in life, overcome them and build resilience based on nurturing support systems. Given that thriving functions adaptively in relation to a person's context, exists even in the face of adversity, and is an indicator of the person's current situation as well as an "upward developmental trajectory," it has multidimensional implications for a person's lifepath.

The concept of thriving developed out of research on positive assets (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). These assets can be divided into four internal factors: (1) commitment to learning, (2) positive values, (3) social competencies, and (4) positive identity, and four external factors: (1) support, (2) empowerment, (3) boundaries/expectations, and (4) constructive use of time. The internal factors all represent strengths that are self-developed and shape a person's motivations, approach to the world and interactions with others. The external factors are presented by the outside world, specifically adults and peers; they function to facilitate academic learning, act as sources from which to seek out and receive help, and to learn societal rules. Together they represent key relationships, opportunities, values, skills, and self-perceptions and can limit risk behaviors and foster resilience. Therefore, positive assets contribute to thriving. Positive assets have been related to prosocial values, leadership, and civic engagement (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011), health behaviors (Smith & Barker, 2009), school success,

physical health, delay of gratification, valuing diversity, and overcoming adversity (Scales et al., 2000).

Another influence in thriving research has been the concept of the "5 Cs" of youth development: (1) competence: a positive self-view and cognitive abilities such as decision making and academic pursuit and success, (2) confidence: positive self-worth, (3) connection: positive relationships with people within different domains, (4) character: morality and respect for others, and (5) caring: empathy for others (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittian, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). These 5 Cs are the predecessors of thriving and have been adapted and included in the development of the *Thriving Orientation Survey (TOS)* by Benson and Scales (2009).

Assets, as well as these 5 Cs, have additive effects; that is, the more of these that are present within an individual, the better the developmental outcomes (Bowers et al., 2010; Scales et al., 2011). This additive effect also takes place with the "five promises of youth" developed by America's Promise Alliance (http://www.americaspromise.org/promises). This government-funded organization, which was founded in 1997, includes political, economic, and scientific leaders focused on studying, funding, and creating programs that facilitate the healthy development of children and adolescents. The "Five Promises" are believed to contribute to the positive development of an individual: (1) caring adults, (2) safe places, (3) a healthy start, (4) effective education, and (5) opportunities to make a difference (Scales, Benson, Moore, Lippman, Brown, & Zaff, 2009). In a sample of more than 4000 teenagers and their parents, Scales et al. found that experiencing four to five of these promises significantly increased positive effects like social competence, good grades, and absence of depression; this held true even in the presence of negative factors, such as less family income and lower level of education in parents.

One component of thriving that has recently been included in its study is sparks, which is defined as "passion for a self-identified interest, skill, or capacity that metaphorically lights a fire in an adolescent's life, providing energy, joy, purpose, and direction" (Benson & Scales, 2009). Thus, sparks can be described as a vehicle that can drive an individual to seek out a specific type of support or environment or that allows one to pursue one's individual passion. Conversely support systems of friends, family, and other adults can provide a safe environment which can in turn 'ignite' a spark and help to pursue or explore it. Part of identifying a spark is having opportunities and exposure to new things, as well as the confidence to try new things. In addition, a feeling that passions can lead to worthwhile future outcomes contributes to a "thriving orientation" (Benson & Scales, 2009**).** Consequently, a bi-directional effect could be at play, i.e. in a person who does not have the "right" environmental conditions in the first place, spark identification and pursuit might be inhibited; on the other hand, in a person who has the right environmental conditions, these factors might support discovery and exploration of a spark by seeking out the right influences. A study of sparks was conducted by Scales et al (2011), in a sample of almost 2000 youth; they examined the relationship between racial respect (i.e., a feeling of being treated respectfully and fair as a member of their racial group), ethnic identity, and elements of thriving which was conceptualized as including including purpose, GPA, and "strengths", which consisted of (1) relational opportunities, or support systems within and outside of the adolescent (i.e., caring adults and education), (2) sparks (a strong passion or motivator in everyday life), and (3) empowerment. They found that the combination of the three strengths was strongly related to better academic, social, psychological and prosocial outcomes. Sparks was not analyzed separately from the other strengths, and so it's unique impact on

outcomes was not identified. Research should examine the unique contribution of sparks and spark motivation to assess if it is associated with positive developmental outcomes.

In their definition and preliminary measure of thriving, Benson and Scales (2009) noted that while well-being is a part of thriving, thriving does not depend on favorable influences in a person's environment, i.e. some adversity or challenge might strengthen the individual and lead to thriving. In this way, thriving could be seen as a form of resilience. It might be expected to reduce negative outcomes associated with stressors, such as PD. Indeed, two factors that can also be found on the TOS, school bonding and school self-esteem, have been found to be negatively related to PD in a sample of 86 African American families (Dotterer et al., 2009). Unfortunately, the direction of the effect is not clear given the cross-sectional nature of the study design; thus, while it is plausible that thriving could lead to less PD, it is equally plausible and more likely that PD negatively affects thriving, leading to decreased school engagement and motivation. Longitudinal studies are needed to determine the relationship over time and the direction of the relationship.

Given that PD is often connected with issues of ethnic identity (EI), and a big part of thriving is made up of the guidance and support of adults within the individual's family and community (Benson & Scales, 2009), it is expected that thriving would be associated with EI. Moreover, EI has repeatedly been shown to moderate the negative relationship between PD and positive developmental outcomes (e.g. psychological distress and well-being; Sellers et al., 2003; Prelow, Mosher, & Bowman, 2006, Seaton et al., 2011). This makes it worthwhile to investigate whether ethnic identity could also moderate a relationship between PD and thriving.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity refers to the inquiry into one's ethnicity and the ultimate acceptance and embrace of said ethnicity, and integrating it into one's personality. Identity development has historically been located within the developmental phase of adolescence. According to Vygotsky (1978) identity develops out of an inner motivation within the adolescent to make sense of and interpret the world, in relation and always close to his or her parents and their views, taking into account peer perspectives. Erikson (1959) proposed that identity formation was the main task of adolescence, growing out of social conflicts and demands that are unknown up to this particular life phase. Marcia (1966) expanded on the theory of identity formation by specifying four distinguished categories on the axes of exploration and commitment, ranging from diffusion (no search and no commitment) to achievement (search and commitment). The study of ethnic identity grew out of the field of identity research providing a closer look at a single factor of identity and identity development.

Different models of ethnic identity development exist, focusing on different aspects of group identification. Phinney (1992) proposed a model based on Erikson's theory of identity development, whereas Cross (1978) proposed that ethnic identity exploration develops out of a negative experience in the person's life (see Table 1 for a detailed overview of the models). Both models require an active role on the part of the individual, that is, a committed exploration of what it means to be a member of a specific group with all its facets, positive and negative. In addition, both suggest a linear progression through the stages of ethnic identity development. The significant difference between the two models exists with regard to the time period in which this development is thought to take place. In line with Erikson's theory (1959), Phinney situates ethnic identity within the general search for personal identity, which occurs in adolescence.

However, Cross (1978) theorizes that a significant negative event needs to take place in order for the individual to explore ethnic identity; this can happen at any life stage although he argues that this exploration takes place primarily in adulthood and may be due to greater awareness, or may be due to confrontation with less structured settings like school and the parental home. Umaña-Taylor, Yazedijan, and Bamaca-Gomes, (2004) take a different approach to assessing EI, closer to Marcia's (1966) theory of ego identity statuses. It works on the understanding that the stages are not successive but rather that an individual can be at different stages in the different subscales at the same time. These three subscales are (1) exploration, the active involvement with and inquiry of one's identity, (2) resolution, the acceptance and identification of one's belongingness in a particular ethnic group, and (3) affirmation, taking pride in one's ethnic group. These subscales show how much a person has investigated their EI, knows what being a member of his or her ethnic group means to them, and has embraced their ethnicity. From these subscales the aspects of ethnic identity that influence or are influenced by factors such as discrimination and thriving can be determined, in addition to the impact of overall ethnic identity.

EI has often been assessed as a moderator of the negative impact of discrimination and racism. Research suggests that EI buffers the effects of discrimination on health outcomes such as perceived stress and psychological well-being in samples of ethnic minorities (Huynh, Devos, & Goldberg, 2014; Prelow, Mosher, & Bowman, 2006, Seaton et al., 2011, Sellers et al., 2003). Brittian et al. (2014), in a sample of more than 2000 non-white college students, found that EI was negatively related to depressive symptoms. Sellers and Shelton (2003) observed that the more central racial identity was to African American college students, the more often they reported discrimination, but the lower their depression scores compared to participants for whom racial identity was less central, suggesting that racial identity might act as a moderator.

Interestingly, Pieterse and Carter (2010) corroborated these findings in a sample of African American adults, but they also found that it depended on the stage within ethnic identity development; specifically, people who had not yet entered or just entered into the exploration of their ethnic identity experienced more distress from perceived discrimination than participants further into their ethnic identity development. In addition, people with an internalized ethnic identity showed considerably less life stress in general, hinting at the far-reaching effects of having a strong connection to one's ethnicity and its possible relationship to the construct of thriving when considering thriving as a trajectory variable built on strong supportive relationships and an individual's inner conviction and motivation to pursue his or her goals. In a study of close to 10,000 college students, Yap et al. (2014) investigated the invariance of Ethnic Identity using the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure* (MEIM, Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999). They tested invariance by conducting a factor analysis of the scale across East Asian, South Asian, White, African-American, and Hispanic groups. They found similar factor loading for the scale across these groups, suggesting that EI is reliable across diverse ethnic groups. Despite testing the reliability of the scale in multiple ethnic groups, this study did not examine it's validity for predicting positive outcomes across the groups. Research should investigate the relationship of EI and other variables such as PD, psychological and health outcomes in diverse samples.

Given that EI has been shown to buffer the negative effects of PD on health outcomes such as perceived stress and psychological well-being it is likely that EI might take the same role in the association between PD and thriving. No research to date has examined the connection between EI and thriving.

The Present Study

The current study was designed to determine if ethnic identity moderates the relationship between perceived discrimination and thriving in college students. Especially in light of the academic and professional focus of thriving, it is vital to investigate this relationship within a young college population as they are in a transitional phase of life that can work as an additional stressor. Students have to make decisions about their life paths. Thus the reflection on sparks, their presence or absence, and environmental factors that nurture or interfere with them is especially salient. As EI development has been placed within the stages of adolescence and young adulthood, a sample of emerging adults is ideal. In addition, thriving has only been investigated in adolescents of high school age thus far. Young adults still face many of the same challenges as adolescents in addition to added responsibilities (such as supporting themselves, making health and other big life decisions), thus making them the optimal group to study.

Hypotheses.

I: PD and thriving and particularly the subscale of spark identification and motivation (spark IDM) will be negatively related.

Rationale: Given that PD was found to be negatively related to items included in the TOS measure (specifically achievement motivation and school engagement) and has been found to be negatively related to well-being in adolescents and adults, it is predicted that higher reports of discrimination will be associated with less endorsement of thriving.

II: EI and thriving and EI and spark IDM will be positively related.

Rationale: Since EI is closely related to identity development and the TOS puts a strong emphasis on relationships with peers and adults, it is believed that EI and thriving, as well as spark IDM, pull from the same resources within the individual and within the context of one's

social world. Therefore, EI is expected to be positively related to thriving, and to the spark IDM

subscale

III: <u>EI will moderate the relationship between PD and thriving, and between PD and spark IDM</u>.

  Rationale: Given that a negative relationship between PD and thriving is expected and

that EI has been a factor frequently shown to moderate the detrimental effects of PD on health

outcomes, EI is expected to buffer the negative effect of PD on thriving. In other words, PD is

expected to be negatively correlated with thriving, but only for those with weak EI; the negative

impact of PD on sparks is expected to be buffered for those with strong EI.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from the subject pool of the City College of New York. In order to be eligible to participate in this study, students were required to be between 18-21 years of age *or* to be freshman. This criterion was set to include older students who are entering school, as it presents a transitional phase. A total of 147 students started the survey and 136 completed the survey. Of those who took the survey, the age ranged from 18 to 36 and the mean age was 19.59 years (SD = 2.22). The majority of participants were freshman students (70.5%), female (62%), and born in the United States (69%). In terms of ethnic identity, 38% identified as Asian, 8% as Black or African American, 27% as Hispanic or Latino, 11% identified as other, 9% identified as multiracial/multiethnic, 6% identified as White/European American, and 1% as American Indian/Alaskan Native. See Table 2 for all study demographics.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via the subject pool of the psychology department at the City College of New York. All freshmen students over the age of 18 were eligible to participate in the research. In addition, all students in any year of college under the age of 21 were eligible. Parameters were specified in the set up of the subject pool, thus allowing only eligible students to participate in the study. Those participants who signed up received a link to the online survey, which was administered via Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, 2013) Participants were then able to access the study electronically via a link that allowed them to take the survey within a selected time slot of four hours. They received consent information in Qualtrics and after consenting to participate, they were allowed to open the survey. If they didn't consent, they were sent to an exit

page. Each subject who consented, entered the survey package which included a brief

demographic questionnaire as well as the *General Ethnic Discrimination Scale*, the *Ethnic*

Identity Scale and the *Thriving Orientation Scale.* The participants had to complete the surveys

in one session. After answering the items, participants were sent to an exit page where they were

thanked and awarded their course credit.

Measures

      perceived discrimination.

      Perceived Discrimination was measured using the General Ethnic Discrimination Scale

(GEDS; Landrine, Klonoff, Corral, Fernandez, & Roesch, 2006). The measure assesses 17 items

on three dimensions comprising (1) past-year discrimination, (2) lifetime discrimination, and (3)

appraised discrimination. For example "*how often have you been treated unfairly by strangers*

because of your race/ethnic identity, in the past year, in your entire life, how stressful was this

for you?" All items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1- *Never/Not at all*

stressful, to 6 – *Almost all of the time/extremely stressful.* Subscale scores were created by

summing respective items on each scale; Cronbach alpha reliabilities ranged from .93 to- 94,

which is comparable to those reported in other student samples (Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman,

2013; Landrine et al., 2006). Although other studies have not used a total scale score in their

research, the subscales are highly correlated and thus a total scale score was created for this

study. The high reliability of the full scale suggests that all of the items hang together well

(Cronbach alpha = .97). The range was 169 from 53 to 222.

      thriving.

      In order to assess thriving and spark identification and motivation (spark IDM),

participants completed the 139 item TOS - *Thriving Orientation Survey* (Benson & Scales, The

Search Institute, 2009). The measure yields scores on 15 dimensions of thriving: (1) Spark identification and motivation, (2) positive emotions, (3) openness to challenge and discoveries, (4) hopeful purpose, (5) moral and prosocial orientation, (6) spiritual development, (7) family opportunities and supports, (8) friends opportunities and supports, (9) school opportunities, (10) school supports, (11) neighborhood opportunities and supports, (12) youth organizations opportunities and supports, (13) religious congregation opportunities and supports, (14) frequency of specific adult actions to develop youth sparks, and (15) youth actions to develop sparks (see Appendix A for sample items, scaling and alphas). This study focuses on the total thriving score and the spark IDM subscale.

Participants answered if they had experienced any of the subscale items and were led on different answer chains depending on a positive or negative answer to the question: "When people are really happy, energized, and passionate about their interests or talents, we say they have a "spark" in their life. This spark is more than just interesting or fun for them. They are passionate about it. It gives them joy and energy. It is a really important part of their life that gives them real purpose, direction, or focus. Do you have this kind of spark in your life?" Participants who answered "yes" were lead to the next question asking about supports (e.g., "How often does each of the following help you find or discover your talents, interests, or sparks?); participants who answered "no" or "not sure", skipped over supports and converged with the other participants where they were asked about inhibitors to having sparks e.g. "Have any of the following people actively discouraged you from pursuing your talents, interests, or hobbies?" (see Appendix A). The guideline for these skip patterns was entered into the Qualtrics software.

Summing respective items on the scales created subscale totals. Spark IDM was created by adding items that were rated on a 4 point Likert scale with 1 – *this describes me extremely well*, to 4 – *this does not describe me at all.* To create a total thriving score, scores on the subscales were first standardized because items were rated on different scales (e.g., some were on 5-point Likert Scales, some on binary scales yes/no scales, which were dummy coded as 1 and 2 respectively). The total scale reliability was $\alpha = .95$. The range of the scores was 180, from 239 to 419.

Ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity was measured using the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS; Umana-Taylor et al., 2004). The questionnaire consists of 17 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – *does not describe me at all* to 4 – *describes me very well.* The measure yields results on three subscales. The first, affirmation, captures the positive emotionality of participants towards their ethnicity, for example "*I feel negatively about my ethnicity*" (reverse coded). In this study, reliability was similar ($\alpha = .85$), to the original ($\alpha = .86$). The second subscale, exploration, assesses the extent to which participants have examined their ethnicity. For example "*I have participated in activities that have taught me about my ethnicity*". Internal consistency was a little lower in the present study ($\alpha = .85$) than in the original ($\alpha = .91$), but still considered high. The third subscale, resolution, measures the participants' acceptance of their membership in their ethnic group and the resulting feelings about it. A sample item would be "*I know what my ethnicity means to me*"; reliability was high for this subscale ($\alpha = .89$) as it was in the original ($\alpha = .92$). In addition, reliability for the total scale, created by summing all items, was very high ($\alpha = .97$). The range of scores was 35, from 33 to 68.

Demographics

The TOS (Benson & Scales, 2009) includes demographic questions such as age, and year in high-school which were adapted by the researchers to suit a college population, as well as gender, ethnicity, personal income, family income, father's and mother's highest level of schooling, living situation, average grades, and marital status. The survey was adapted to also include sexual orientation for this study.

Results

Analysis

To evaluate the data, all analyses were conducted using SPSS 22 (IBM, 2013). Unfortunately, transferring the survey into the Qualtrics software caused a mistake in the skip logic to occur, leading the system to skip over blocks of questions, leading to missing answers for a number of items on the thriving scale for a large portion of the sample. Thus, not every participant had total scale scores for several study variables, yielding a very low N on spark IDM (N = 54), and overall thriving (N= 36). Missing data were excluded pairwise in SPSS.

Descriptive statistics are presented first, including study variable means, correlations with demographics that are continuous variables, and ANOVAs or t-tests for demographics that are categorical. This is followed by the tests for the three main hypotheses. Hypothesis I and II were tested using bivariate and partial correlation analysis. To test hypothesis III, that EI moderates the relationship between PD and spark identification, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted. Because the sample size for any subgroup is too small, it is not possible to test the hypotheses on separate ethnic minority groups. In addition, including or excluding data for participants identifying as White in the analyses didn't change the study findings so their data were retained.

Descriptive Analysis

Participants reported an average total discrimination score of 93.99 (SD = 34.33), which equates to a mean report of "once in a while," suggesting that overall PD was rather low for this sample. See Table 3 for an overview of means and correlations.

Overall thriving had a mean of 336.97 (SD = 45.71), and spark IDM had a mean of 23.07 (SD = 2.46). Both means of thriving and spark IDM correspond to "describes me pretty well" on the scale and suggests moderate to high levels of thriving and spark identification and motivation.

Participants' mean total ethnic identity score was 52.84 (SD = 8.41), which corresponds to a report of "describes me very well," suggesting that ethnic identity was strong in this sample. These results are similar to the original study of EI in a university sample (Umana-Taylor et at.,2004).

Demographic Analysis

As can be seen in Table 3, there was a significant negative correlation between PD and household income. No other continuous demographic variable was associated with any of the main study variables. T-tests showed that there was a significant difference in EI between men (M = 50.19, SD = 8.61) and women (M = 54.35, SD = 8.10); $t(123) = -2.705$, $p = .008$. Using dummy coding (male = 1, female = 2), a correlation shows the same pattern for gender and EI, with women being more likely to report greater EI [$r(123) = .237$, $p < .01$]. One-way ANOVAs revealed significant mean differences in PD by sexual orientation $F(4, 106) = 4.124$, $p = .004$; planned comparisons showed that people identifying as Other had significantly higher PD scores than those identifying as Straight. However, PD was not significantly greater for those

identifying as gay or bisexual compared to those identifying as straight. There were no other

mean differences in PD for any other demographic variable.

ANOVAs also showed that there was a significant effect for level of education of the

father on EI, $F(6, 118) = 2.232$, $p = .045$. Using planned comparisons, it was determined that the

group showing a significant difference in mean EI was that of father's who had graduated

college (M = 53.66, SD = 9.86) and those who had graduated grade school or less (M = 47.73,

SD = 8.19) (no other comparisons of education levels were significantly different). A correlation

between EI and education of father corroborates this pattern [$r(123) = .212$, $p < .05$]. A

significant difference in means on EI was also found for self-identified ethnicity $F(6, 118) =$

2.356, $p = .035$, specifically between those students identifying as Asian (M = 51.20, SD = 9.37)

and those identifying as Other (M = 60.97, SD = 6.20). No other EI scores differed among the

other ethnic groups.

There were no mean differences in thriving or spark IDM by any demographic variable.

Hypothesis testing

It was first predicted that PD and thriving and particularly the subscale of spark

identification and motivation (spark IDM) would be negatively related. As seen in Table 3, the

bivariate correlation between PD and thriving was not significant. The correlation between PD

and spark IDM was also not significant. This was true when controlling for demographics

(gender, Asian ethnicity, father's education, sexual orientation) $r(22) = .058$, $p < .774$.

In line with hypothesis II, the association between EI and thriving was significant $r(34) =$

.481, $p < .01$. This remained true even when controlling for household income, gender, father's

education, sexual orientation, and Asian ethnicity $r(29) = .539$, $p < .01$. However, EI and spark

IDM were not significantly related in the bivariate correlations, nor in the partial correlations, controlling for the same demographic factors.

The third hypothesis was tested by conducting two hierarchical linear regression analyses: one with total thriving as the dependent variable, the other with the subscale spark IDM (see Tables 4 and 5). For the first regression analysis, the total perceived discrimination score was entered on the first step. Then ethnic identity total score was entered on the second step, then on the final step an interaction term between total discrimination and total ethnic identity was entered into the equation; the interaction term was created by centering the variables and creating a product. There was a main effect for EI on thriving. The interaction term had no significant effect on thriving. For the second regression analysis, the steps were the same, but with Spark IDM as the dependent variable. In this case neither main effects nor interaction effects were found.

Discussion

This study set out to test the associations among perceived discrimination (PD), ethnic identity (EI) and thriving. Contrary to what was hypothesized, no significant relationships were found between PD and thriving or between PD and spark IDM. This was not expected given that thriving and EI are strongly related and several of the thriving markers have been found to be negatively related to PD. However, given the small sample size used in the analysis (n = 54), there was not likely enough power to detect a reliable effect. Moreover, while the range on PD scores was large, the average and variability were low; this may explain why there was no correlation with thriving. Consequently, it is possible that the relationship between PD and thriving/spark IDM is not linear but curvilinear. As has been suggested by Benson and Scales (2009) there might be a level of challenges, in this case PD, which could lead to resilience building and the development of strengths. Thus some moderate levels of PD might be related to greater thriving while high levels of PD could inhibit thriving.

The second hypothesis was supported, showing that greater levels of ethnic identity are related to greater thriving and spark IDM. These findings make sense; as Vygotsky stated, adolescents and young adults internalize parental values and standards and consolidate them within their peer group. Ethnic identity includes an active investigation into one's ethnic group and a clear idea of what the membership in this group means. Families work as the first and primary insight into our ethnic identities, providing rituals, celebrations, and foods that are ethnically relevant. They are also the people that can offer support or lessen our self-worth. This in turn is strongly related to thriving as the *Thriving Orientation Survey* puts emphasis on opportunities and supports within the family and immediate environment of the person, stressing the importance of inspiration and sustained support within these contexts in order to thrive. In

addition research has found relationships between family influence and the development of EI as well as thriving. Consequently, it is not surprising that, since a high number of the thriving subscales include family and peers, they would be positively related. Indeed post hoc correlations show that the thriving subscales of family and friends supports are correlated to EI [family: $r(47) = .393$, $p = .005$, and friends: $r(49) = .504$, $p = .000$].

Ethnic Identity was not significantly associated with the subscale of spark IDM, as was predicted. One possibility for the lack of significant results, aside from the small sample, is the low reliability of the subscale for this sample ($\alpha = .63$), and the original sample. Another possibility is that while EI and thriving draw from a similar source (friends/family supports), spark IDM does not. Spark IDM is the identification of a passion and goal in life and ways by which the individual seeks out help to achieve this goal, and therefore might be related to specific aspects of EI, such as affirmation. This association between affirmation and spark IDM makes sense as both require investigation of and investment in a passion as well as the confidence to pursue, seek out help to follow, and assert one's life path in front of others; they both are positive commitments to a path and an identity. In fact, a post hoc examination of the subscales of EI shows that only affirmation is related to spark IDM [$r(49) = .348$, $p = .012$]. Thus, the subscales of resolution and exploration might be suppressing the relationship between total EI and spark IDM. These post hoc results suggest that examining subscales of EI and subscales of thriving might yield important information.

Finally, the third hypothesis was not supported: there was no significant interaction between PD and EI on thriving or spark IDM. This could be because the sample size was so low and the testing of interactions especially stringent requiring large sample sizes. Even though it was not significant, the interaction between PD and EI explains an additional 6% of the variance

in the PD-spark IDM relationship over and above the significant effects of EI on thriving. Experts in methods suggest interaction tests are stringent tests of moderation effects and that a 6 % contribution to the model could actually be meaningful, although not statistically significant (e.g., Aguinis & Stone-Romero, 1997; McClelland & Judd, 1993). Other tests of moderation should therefore be considered in future studies. Despite not finding a significant interaction, a main effect for ethnic identity on thriving was found in the regression analysis, which further corroborates the second hypothesis and shows how strong a relationship there is between EI and thriving.

In addition, PD was generally low and EI high reducing variance within the sample. The relatively high levels of EI on all levels could be due to the age of the participants, suggesting ethnic identity development being located within earlier stages of development. However, there was no correlation between age and EI in this study. Another possible explanation for the high levels of EI is the nature of the sample, which is drawn from an urban university known for its diversity, which could attract those with greater EI and therefore greater thriving. Indeed, these young adults already show higher levels of thriving considering they are pursuing higher education and this is part of the thriving score. In addition, that students reported high EI, high thriving, and low PD could be due to self-presentational concerns; future research could include a control for social desirability in responding.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the strengths of this study is that it is the first to empirically examine the relationship among PD, EI and thriving. What is more, no other studies have looked at the unique impact of sparks. In addition, thriving has not been tested in a college population, as it is generally located within adolescence and investigated within high-school or middle school

populations. It is important to study thriving in young adults in college because college presents

a major transition from adolescence into adulthood. This transition brings with it new challenges

in a person's life such as making independent decisions, and living alone; however, the young

adult is not yet fully independent financially and developmentally. Another strength of this study

is that no other study in the literature to date was found that has analyzed thriving as a total

score, only subscales have been used. That is, individual markers have been investigated but not

the global measure. As has been theorized, thriving is an inventory of positive supports outside

the youth and forces within the youth that motivate and drive him/her to pursue life goals. While

it is plausible that several subscales of thriving would be more strongly related to EI and PD, it is

important to investigate the total score as it pulls from various factors in the person's life as

thriving is an ongoing bi-directional relationship between internal and external factors. The

reliability of the total scale suggests that the items fit well together and provides empirical

support for examining the scale in this manner. Furthermore, this study furthers the reliability

and generalizability of the instrument, as this is the first time it was tested in a sample college

students, a sample that is more ethnically diverse than in other studies of thriving.

Despite these strengths, there are several limits to the study that need to be

acknowledged. First, due to missing data and the procedures used to adjust for missing data in

SPSS, there were especially low sample sizes in many of the analyses, limiting the ability to

detect reliable, significant effects and limiting our ability to test differences among subgroups of

ethnic minority students. The small sample size also precluded testing effects of PD and Ethnic

Identity subscales, which has been done in other studies. What is more, the cross-sectional nature

of this study makes it impossible to make causal assumptions, leaving questions of confounding

variables not acknowledged in this research. For example, while it was predicted that PD leads to lower levels of thriving, it is equally plausible that lower thriving leads to the increased PD.

Another potential limitation is the choice of the TOS for assessing thriving. While it is strong in overall reliability and takes into account many facets of positive development, the skip patterns became confusing and there are numerous items on the measure (139 questions), which might have led a number of participants to end the survey prematurely. What is more, the answer chain of the TOS assumes an all-or-nothing perspective of spark IDM, leading participants who do not have a spark in their life at this moment to skip over a whole block of questions investigating supports of sparks. This might not entirely reflect the development of sparks, i.e. young adults might have one spark or several but have not decided on which to follow, they might be searching, they might not have searched, have supports or not, and so on.

Finally, the results may not be generalizable to the broader population of young adults. College students may already be exhibiting a degree of thriving and those attending a diverse urban university may already have high levels of ethnic identity. This in turn may have led to less variability in perceived discrimination, and thus affected the findings reported here.

Future Directions

Future research should investigate larger samples from more varied backgrounds, such as young adults without high-school diplomas, from rural areas and more homogenous communities. It would be worthwhile to repeat the study with a larger sample containing emerging adults from different regions in the country and different professions, not college students exclusively. In addition, administering the full TOS to every participant (instead of following the skip patterns) could yield more results on items determining the factors influential in thriving, i.e. an individual might have one or more influential adults and peers in her life that

provide support and guidance although no spark is identified; in this study, if a spark was not identified, they skipped over other thriving-related questions. Similarly, it might be possible to have a spark in absence of supports. This could provide a more nuanced picture of the processes present in thriving and spark IDM.

A large longitudinal study would be ideal to test for developments over time and to determine if a possible resilience model is active, that is if thriving could function as a protective factor against adversity. Changes in PD could be measured over time, and the effects of thriving on other variables, such as well-being and academic achievement. In addition, more advanced missing data techniques (e.g. maximum likelihood estimation; Johnson & Young, 2011), could be used in future research to minimize the limitations and see if the findings are replicated.

One application of this line of research is to find ways in which structural programs could be developed and implemented to increase thriving in early developmental stages because thriving enables individuals to articulate and pursue goals as well as to gather support in many areas of life.

Moreover the findings could further the ongoing debate on the importance of equality. For example, the relationship between lifetime discrimination and sexual orientation was significant, and gender and EI were related, hinting at the effect of intersectionality of identities. That is, different aspects of the person's identity, such as gender, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation, are at play when evaluating situations. Taking into account general forms of discrimination as opposed to merely ethnic discrimination, and expanding the study to see whether other groups of people for example homosexual or transgender individuals would show similar or different trends in terms of inhibition of thriving would be important.

Conclusion

The present project presents an important step in determining factors that influence personal development and thriving in particular. A significant relationship between ethnic identity and thriving was found, showing that these factors might pull from similar resources in a person's life in order to develop beneficially. The study presents a first analysis and exploration of the relationship between perceived discrimination, thriving, and ethnic identity and can function as a starting point to further investigate the factors that lead a person to develop positively.

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Appendix A

The Thriving Orientation Scale

No	Subscale	# of items	Example	Scaling	α	α – of the original high school sample
1	Spark Identification & Motivation	7	*I have a talent interest or hobby that I really care about, and that I spend time on at least once a week.*	Different scaling labels were used within the subscales including:	.63	.48
2	Positive Emotionality	6	*I am energized and excited by my life right now*	4-point Likert scales from 1 – *this describes me extremely well* , to 4 – *this does not describe me at all*	.90	.90
3	Openness to challenge and opportunities	2	*I like being in situations where I am challenged*	4-point Likert scales from 1- *never*, to 4 – *often/all the time*	.57	N/A
4	Hopeful Purpose	10	*I feel a sense of purpose or meaning in my life*		.82	.87
5	Moral and Prosocial Orientation	2	*It's everybody's responsibility including mine to help those in need*	4-point Likert scales from 1 – *strongly agree*, to 4 – *strongly disagree*	.51	.59
6	Spiritual Development	12	*My faith/spirituality helps me know right from wrong*	binary questions with *yes/no*	.95	.96

Appendix A – *continued*

No	Subscale	# of items	Example	Scaling	α	α – of the original high school sample
7	Family Opportunities & Supports	12	*My family (includes parents, brothers, sister etc.) notices when I'm interested in something*	3-point Likert scales with 1 – *yes*, 2 – *not sure*, 3 - *no*	.87	.71-.93
8	Friends' Opportunities & Support	9	*My friends notice when I'm interested in something*	3-point Likert scales with 1 – *this is more like me*, 2 – *this is about the same*, 3 – *this is less like me*	.86	.71-.93
9	School Opportunities	6	*How often does each of the following help you find or discover your talents, teachers at school*		.87	.71-.93
10	School Supports	4	*I believe I am going to make a difference in the world.*	3-point Likert scales with 1 – *this is more true of me now than 12 months ago*, 2 – *this is about the same for me as 12 months ago*, 3 – *this is less true of me now than 12 months ago*	.70	.71-.93
11	Neighborhood Opportunities & Supports	7	*How often does each of the following **HELP YOU DEVELOP** your sparks by doing things like introducing you to people who can help, or by helping you overcome obstacles to pursuing your sparks? Your neighbors*	5-point Likert scales with 1 – *not at all certain*, to 5 – *extremely certain*	.85	.71-.93

Appendix A - *continued*

No	Subscale	# of items	Example	Scaling	α	α – of the original high school sample
12	Youth Organizations Opportunities & Supports	7	*How much do you agree or disagree that you have the following adults in your life who really believe in you? An adult in the youth organizations, clubs, or teams you participate in*	4-point Likert scales from 1- *never true*, to 4 – *always true*	.89	.71-.93
13	Religious Congregations Opportunities	7	*How much do you agree or disagree that you have the following adults in your life whom you trust and can go to for advice? An adult in the church, synagogue, mosque, or other spiritual organization you participate in*		.85	.71-.93
14	Youth Action to develop and pursue sparks	9	*How often is this like you? I ask adults for guidance and help on pursuing my sparks.*		.64	.82

Appendix A – *continued*

15	Frequency of specific Adult Actions	8	*Think about the adults who really know what makes you spark. How often do these adults help you develop your sparks by doing each of these? Find new opportunities to express your sparks.*	.90	.92

Table 1

Models of Ethnic Identity

	Cross 1978	Phinney 1992	Umana-Taylor et al. 2004
Model	5 consecutive stages of Black identity development: - preencounter - encounter - immersion/emersion - internalization - internalization/commitment	3 consecutive stages: - unexamined ethnic identity - ethnic identity search/exploration - achieved ethnic identity	3 stages on a continuum: - exploration - resolution - affirmation
Age	Adulthood	Adolescence	not specified
Measurement	Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS)	Multiethnic Identity Measure – Revised (MEIM-R)	Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS)
Origin	Follows significant negative events that lead to exploration	Part of identity development in adolescence (Erickson, 1959)	Identity development styles according to Marcia (1966)

Table 2

Demographics

	N	%
Gender	128	
Male	49	38.3
Female	79	61.7
Ethnicity	128	
Alaskan/Native American	2	1.6
Asian	49	38.8
Black/African American	10	7.8
Hispanic/Latino	35	27.3
White	7	5.5
Other	14	10.9
Multiethnic	11	8.6
Year in School	128	
Freshman	91	71.1
Sophomore	21	16.4
Junior	11	8.6
Senior	5	3.9
Level of Education/Father	128	
Completed Grade school/less	11	8.6
Some high school	24	18.8
Completed high school	28	21.9
Some College	15	11.7
Completed college	18	14.1
Graduate or prof school	12	9.4
Household Income	122	
$ 0 – 30,000	69	56.9
$ 30,001 – 60,000	29	23.6
$ 60,000 – 100,000	24	19.5

Table 3

Discrimination, Ethnic Identity, Thriving, and continuous Demographics

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perceived Discrimination (PD)	115	93.99	34.33	-						
2. Ethnic Identity (EI)	128	52.84	8.41	-.130	-					
3. Thriving	36	336.97	45.71	.108	.481**	-				
4. Spark IDM	54	23.07	2.46	-.204	.207	.269	-			
5. Age	79	19.59	2.22	.045	-.148	-.218	.179	-		
6. Annual Income	83	4063.54	7429.15	-.055	-.111	-.140	.205	.763**	-	
7. Annual Household Income	123	35775.59	30367.19	-.210*	-.077	-.163	-.021	.020	.195	-
8. Father's Education	129	3.86	1.82	-.099	.212*	-.159	.053	-.105	-.093	.116

*p < .05, two-tailed. **p < .01, two-tailed. ***p < .001, two-tailed.

Table 4

Hierarchical Linear Regression for Thriving

Predictor	R^2	B	Sig.	F	Sig F model
1. Perceived Discrimination	.012	.161	.571	.329	.571
2. Ethnic Identity	.279	.858	.004	5.229	.012
3. PD X EI	.281	.028	.779	3.394	.033

Table 5

Linear Regression for spark IDM

Predictor	R^2	B	Sig.	F	Sig F model
1. Perceived Discrimination	.158	-.018	.322	1.005	.322
2. Ethnic Identity	.342	.116	.054	2.516	.094
3. PD X EI	.402	.003	.171	2.370	.086