

Identities in Context:
Politicized Racial Group Consciousness Among Asian American and Latino Youth

Jane Junn
Department of Political Science
Rutgers University
junn@rci.rutgers.edu

Natalie Masuoka
Department of Political Science
University of California, Irvine
nmasuoka@uci.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the contours of racial group consciousness among Asian American and Latino youth. We investigate politicized group membership by analyzing face-to-face interview data with Latino and Asian American youth in New York and California examining their responses to questions about the meaning of their race and ethnicity to politics. Next, we utilize survey data from a nationally-representative sample of Asian American and Latino youth taken during the 2004 election, and analyze the extent to which the contextual circumstances of systematic exposure to an experimental frame prompting racial and ethnic group pride influences racial group consciousness. The data help to illuminate the extent to which racial and ethnic identities of Asian American and Latino youth are manifest in their unique political contexts.

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Shuffling her feet in her Garden Grove home last weekend, Mariela Muniz stared into the carpet and suffered, as teenagers do, the silent deliberation of her parents. Soon, her father nodded and her mother uttered the words she'd been waiting to hear: "Lo puedes hacer." "You can do it."

The next morning, the 15-year-old sophomore at Garden Grove High School – with the permission of her parents, both of whom are factory workers and Mexican immigrants who became U.S. citizens after entering the country illegally – skipped school for the first time in her life.

Following in the footsteps of those who led the first of the student walkouts March 24, and the adults who organized last Saturday's massive protest against proposed immigration legislation, Muniz became one of a few dozen students in Southern California who helped spearhead a national exhibition of civil unrest, one of the largest and most boisterous since the civil rights movement four decades ago...

"Sometimes you have to stand up for what you believe in," she said. "We did. And it worked" (Gold, 2006).

In March 2006, hundreds of thousands of people across the country demonstrated in protest of the Sensenbrenner bill (H.R. 4437) which would, among other things, empower local police to enforce federal immigration law and provide funding to build an additional 700 miles of fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border. Even more impressive than the rallies themselves was the composition of the groups of people who choose to become involved. Latino youth like Mariela Muniz were typical. In Los Angeles County alone, over 40,000 high school students walked out of their classrooms in protest of the immigration bill (Cho & Gorman, 2006). These walkouts were organized by a handful of Latino high school students through their own grassroots efforts communicated by emails, instant messages and webpages (Gold, 2006). Using history as a guide, they followed many of the methods staged by the student protests of the 1960's that championed peaceful demonstrations.

What is noteworthy is that although these Latino students – many immigrants themselves but largely the second-generation children of immigrants – appear to be driven by a public policy issue as well as emboldened by a sense of ethnic group consciousness. Proud of their parents

and the contributions their ethnic communities make to the United States; these students felt the need to assert their politicized group identity. This degree of engagement and the significance of a politicized racial and ethnic identity for civic engagement go directly counter to expectations generated from current scholarship in political science. Unlike African Americans, neither Latinos nor Asian Americans are perceived to have a high enough degree of group consciousness to spur political action. Furthermore, almost nothing is known about the political identities of minority youth, and the extent to which a politicized consciousness is rooted in racial and ethnic groups.

These questions are all the more pressing given the momentous demographic changes in U.S. population over the last two decades. Since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, millions of immigrants from Asia and Latin America have entered and settled in the U.S. As a result, these “new” immigrant groups have radically transformed the country’s racial landscape.¹ Unfortunately, we still know very little about the political incorporation patterns of the two major immigrant communities, Asian Americans and Latinos, and even less about the youth in these populations. Indeed, people 30 years and younger are the future of American democracy, and a disproportionately large share are minority youth – X% Latino, X% African American, and X% Asian American. A growing number of studies focused on Latinos and Asian Americans more generally have examined areas such as naturalization rates (DeSipio, 2004; Ong & Nakanishi, 1996), immigrant political mobilization (Jones-Correa, 1998; Pantoja, Ramirez & Segura, 2001; Wong 2006) and political participation patterns (Barreto, 2005; DeSipio, 1996; Lien, Conway, & Wong, 2004; Ramakrishnan, 2005), however, very few would have been able

¹ While scholars have labeled contemporary Asian American and Latino communities as “new” immigrant groups (see Gerstle & Mollenkopf, 2001), many Asian and Latino national origin groups have long histories in the U.S. most notably, the Japanese, Chinese and Mexicans. However, studies show that approximately 90 percent of the Asian American community and 75 percent of the Latino community is made up of the first and second generations (Rumbaut, 2004).

to explain the impressive mobilization efforts we witnessed with the 2006 protests. In fact, many scholars would most likely cite the low immigrant political participation rates in past elections as a clear indicator of political disengagement for both groups.

Left mostly unexamined thus far in the immigrant political incorporation literature is the role of racial group consciousness. Racial group consciousness has been used primarily to explain African American political participation but has yet to be extensively applied to immigrant groups such as Asian Americans and Latinos (Chong & Rogers, 2005; Dawson, 1994; Tate, 1994). As scholars on African American politics suggest, racial group attachment helps individuals see that the problems they face may not simply be an individual problem but rather collective in nature with institutional solutions. Racial and ethnic group consciousness could be an important explanatory factor for the 2006 protests and for civic and political engagement more generally.

In this paper we explore the contours racial and ethnic group identity among Asian American and Latino youth.² We begin with an analysis of face-to-face interview data with Latino and Asian American youth in New York and California, capturing two sides of the immigrant experience: the political identities of immigrants themselves and the political identities of the native born children of immigrants. In these interviews, young people were asked about how they understood their ethnic and racial identity, in political, cultural or other terms. In addition, we utilize a unique nationally representative survey conducted during the 2004 election in order to ascertain how contextual circumstances – in this case, systematic

² The terms “race” and “ethnicity” will be used interchangeably when used with the term “group consciousness” throughout this paper. However, we would like to acknowledge that these two terms do not necessarily carry the same meaning. “Race” normally refers to a socially constructed concept that is defined largely using phenotype. “Ethnicity” is linked with cultural ancestry and is also used synonymously with national origin. As of 2000, official government definitions classify Latinos as an ethnic group, thus Latinos can be of any race. Asian Americans are officially classified as a racial group.

exposure to an experimental frame designed to elicit racial and ethnic group pride, would influence the extent to which research subjects claim group consciousness. With these data we hope to illuminate the contours of racial or ethnic group identity for Asian Americans and Latinos, emphasizing the contextual circumstances under which a politicized racial consciousness can be elicited.

Group Consciousness, Political Participation and Immigration

The literature on racial identities and political participation has identified three factors that are believed to be intrinsically linked: racial identity, group consciousness and political behavior (Junn, forthcoming). It is generally assumed that the three are connected in a linear fashion, a position that belies the notion that a minority perceives herself as having a racial identity. That racial identity becomes the basis of a group-based consciousness that is then translated into political interests, and leads to political activity. In practice, however, the process is neither simple nor clear, nor is it uniform within and across racial and ethnic groups. To help clarify where scholarship in political science currently stands, we briefly describe how racial identity, group consciousness and political participation are portrayed to be connected.

In politics, scholars are most interested in how a racial identity is perceived as a group identity. Racial group consciousness is understood as the key psychological variable that converts individual concerns into political action. According to Miller et. al. (1981), as an individual adopts a sense of group consciousness, that individual begins to realize that her individual life chances are interrelated with those of her group. This consciousness becomes politicized when a racial minority begins to attach the social and political problems of the group

to systemic causes that require political action in order to be resolved.³ For African Americans, racial group consciousness has been found to be a powerful factor that predicts political participation. Verba and Nie (1972) identified racial group consciousness among African Americans to be critical in encouraging political participation despite their relatively low standing in terms of socioeconomic resources.

At the same time, objective group membership or even simple group identification does not automatically lead to a politicized group consciousness (Conover, 1984; Miller, Gurin, Gurin, & Malanchuk; 1981). Individuals must attach the problems they face with structural conditions, and identify the state as a mechanism for dismantling those inequalities. Verba and Nie (1972) posited that African Americans form racial group consciousness on the basis of their shared status as a deprived group. Dawson (1994) elaborated on this idea by identifying what he calls the “black utility heuristic.” According to Dawson, African American collective unity has resulted as a response to the historical aspects of racism, where they understand that their life chances are overdetermined by their race. In this view, history has shown African Americans that their race defines their social and political opportunities, and by following group cues, African Americans look out for their own individual interests when they engage in collective identification.

Most of the literature in political science on racial group consciousness and political participation, however, is directed solely at the African American community. Under theorized is the connection between racial group consciousness and political participation of today’s new immigrant communities. In order to explain the political incorporation of the Asian American and Latino communities, scholars have largely focused on individual vote behavior models and attempt to identify the distinct individual level characteristics which may discourage immigrants

³ See also Conover (1988) for a discussion of how schemas influence political participation and attitudes.

from participating in politics. For example, Wendy Tam Cho (1999) emphasizes the role of political socialization as a key explanatory variable for immigrant participation. Instead of age, which is normally used to measure political socialization among the native born, Cho contends that for immigrants, scholars must pay attention to the length of time an immigrant has lived in the U.S. Likewise, a large proportion of works on the new immigrant communities have emphasized other key individual level characteristics which uniquely challenge immigrant participation such as citizenship, voter registration, generation and language (DeSipio, 1996; Lien, Conway, & Wong, 2004; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001; Ramakrishnan, 2005; Wong, 2000; 2006).

When racial group consciousness is considered among new immigrant groups, theories are largely couched in the early ethnic politics literature written to describe the political identities of the southern and eastern European immigrants who arrived in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century. This set of literature emphasized the role of salient ethnic identities among newly arrived immigrants and how those identities were integrated into politics (Dahl, 1961; Parenti, 1967; Wolfinger, 1965). Ethnic identity was found to play a role in determining an immigrant's partisanship, vote choice and the mobilization strategies directed at immigrant voter turnout. However, ethnic politics during the early half of the twentieth century was understood to be a temporary phenomenon. Promoting a clear straight-line model of cultural assimilation, Dahl's (1961) analysis of ethnic politics in New Haven finds that within three generations, ethnic identities are largely replaced by class identities. Immigrants' entrance into the middle and upper classes results in a loss, and even embarrassment of their ethnic identity, in which political interests became largely determined by socioeconomic positions.

There are a number of reasons why the literature has not addressed the role of racial group consciousness among Asian Americans and Latinos. One reason is that the existing empirical evidence which has sought to make connections between racial group consciousness and political participation for these two communities has been inconsistent at best (Jones-Correa & Leal, 1996; Lien, Conway, & Wong 2004; Stokes, 2003). These null findings have led some to conclude that African Americans are the exceptional case because they have a history of enslavement in the U.S. (Sears, Citrin, Cheleden, & van Laar, 1999). The national origin-panethnic debate, which dominates the discussion on Asian American and Latino identities, also serves to distract scholars from considering alternative theories of group consciousness that may be relevant to political participation (DeSipio, 1996; Lien, 2001). Finally, it is unclear how each of the two groups will be racialized over time. As primarily immigrant populations, Asian Americans and Latinos are, relatively speaking unaware of the racial hierarchies that structure American society. This makes it more difficult to explain how these two groups may develop racial identities over time. As the literature on African American politics suggests, it is when a racial identity is attached to a grievance that it becomes relevant to politics. Questionable is whether these two new immigrant groups will perceive their identities to be stigmatized. Asian Americans, in particular, may not be least likely to form a politicized racial group consciousness. They demonstrate relatively high levels of economic, residential, and social integration, and may not feel the stigma attached to their racial identity (Lai & Arguelles, 2003). As a result, Asian Americans may be less prone to feel connected with others in their racial group, making it a factor of little importance to their political behavior.

In contrast, we agree with Wong (2006) that both Asian Americans and Latinos are clearly racialized as non-white minority groups and that the ways in which they are racialized

today will most likely be with us far into the future. Unlike their southern and eastern European counterparts, the non-white minority status of Asian Americans and Latino prohibits them from fully assimilating into mainstream white American society. Moreover, we contend studies that attempt to apply the models used to describe African American racial group consciousness cannot fully capture the contours of Asian American and Latino collective identities. It is clear that racial identities resonate differently among Americans in various racial groups, and relying on the explanation of perceived shared experience with slavery and discrimination is too simplistic to apply across the board for other racial minority groups in the United States. What remains unclear, rather, is the process by which group identities are contextualized and activated. One must go beyond the simple assumption that racial group consciousness exists, and instead, investigate the circumstances under which group identity influences political behavior.

Contextualizing Racial Group Identity: Responses from California and New York

The meaning of racial and ethnic group identity is an unknown quantity for new Latino and Asian American immigrants to the United States, and even much more uncertain youth in these categories of the population. We posit that a more complete vision of racial and ethnic group identity must account for the significance of context – the notion that race, as an identity, is driven by largely by the social context in which a person resides (Lopez & Espiritu, 1990; Omi & Winant, 1994). The racial makeup, ideologies of one's environment, in addition to the personal experiences one encounters up to any point in one's lifetime all play a role in how an individual chooses to identify with her racial group. In particular, the social context in which racial identities are situated may be particularly important for young adults who are just beginning to assert and understand the consequences of a racial group consciousness.

We conducted in-depth interviews with Latino and Asian American young adults in the two cities which are home to the country's largest immigrant populations: New York and Los Angeles. In total, we conducted 33 interviews (14 in Los Angeles and 19 in New York), each lasting approximately one hour in length.⁴ The questions were semi-structured with the purpose of allowing the respondent to describe their identities in their own words and to make connections with their surrounding environment. Since these interviews were not drawn at random, we do not attempt to universalize the patterns found here to the entire Asian American and Latino young adult populations, but rather to provide additional detail to the patterns we find in the 2004 Ethnic Politics Survey analyzed in the next section of the paper.

From our qualitative interviews, we found three striking patterns of how our respondents chose to describe a racial group consciousness. First, the Asian American and Latino young adults we interviewed for this study understand that their identities are largely structured by their surrounding social environment. So although our respondents may have preferred to identify in some specific way, perhaps not even with their racial group, they understood that the way others classify them structures their choices in racial identification:

I think it depends on who I'm talking to. If I was talking to a white person and they ask me what I am, I guess I would say I'm Vietnamese-Chinese. But I think they label me as Asian. But I think of myself as Vietnamese-Chinese (Tiffany, second generation).

As this respondent notes, her choice to describe her racial identity is largely dependent on who she is speaking with—choosing to identify with the general racial category if speaking with a

⁴ All interviews were conducted in person between August and November of 2004. For the Los Angeles interviews, interviews were selected using a snowball sampling methodology through contacts in the Political Science department at UC Irvine and the Dean's office in the Pharmacy School at the University of Pacific. The Los Angeles sample ranged between the ages of 19-26 and the generation of the respondents varied between first and fourth. All were fluent in English. In New York City, contacts for respondents were made with various immigrant and civic organizations, and a snowball sampling methodology was used to contact additional subjects. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 35, and the generation of respondents varied between immigrant to third generation. Most were fluent in English, and a Spanish-language interpreter was used in several instances.

non-Asian American. This decision-making calculus was also found among the Latino respondents who opted to identify with the panethnic Latino category rather than national origin. Thus, our respondents demonstrated clear awareness of racial hierarchies and consciously made attempts to situate themselves within the social structures created by race.

Racial group lumping was a primary explanation for the respondent's choice of identification. Interestingly, explanations of racial group lumping were persistent and unsolicited by the interviewer as in this response to a question on linked fate:

Yes, because people in California--because I don't know about other states--but people in California label anyone who looks Asian as Asian and nothing else. You're not considered Japanese, you're considered Asian, so when things happen to one specific Asian everyone just automatically assumes it's going to happen to you too (Erin, fourth generation, Japanese).

Eighty percent of the California sample and slightly less than half of the New York sample provided unsolicited references such as the example above to racial group lumping. However, we found that although our respondents understood they were lumped into certain racial categories, they themselves understood the clear differences among national origin groups. Thus, although most of our respondents felt linked due to racial group lumping, they also felt that this sense of common fate would not likely happen if racial hierarchies did not structure the ways in which they are labeled.

Second, unlike how political scientists like to conceptualize a politicized racial group identity, we find that racial identity is not an all-or-nothing situation; a respondent cannot accurately be described as either having a racial identity or not having one. In many cases, direct questions that solicit a racial identity may not yield accurate or even consistent measures of a racial group consciousness. For example, approximately 40 percent of both the California and New York samples who were solicited about "whitened" or "whitewashed" identities have been

called such by others. By “whitewashed” identities, respondents feel or have been described as having personalities and preferences which parallel more closely with their white peers as opposed to those from Asia or Latin America. The general acceptance these “whitewashed” racial identities may lead some scholars to claim that Asian American and Latino youth lack a racialized identity and have completely assimilated into American society. However, upon deeper examination, we found that these young adults do not necessarily equate their “whitewashed” identities with a complete loss of racial attachment. In fact, in our interviews, 80 percent of the California sample and all of the respondents in the New York sample who were identified as “whitewashed” were also those who evoked a sense of racial group linked fate. An excellent illustration of the nuances of a politicized racial group consciousness is found in this respondent’s attempt to define the term “whitewashed:”

Yes, oh my gosh, these jeans are from American Eagle, this shirt is Abercrombie. I would definitely attest to that [being whitewashed]. Me and Ben, he’s Vietnamese and completely fluent in Vietnamese. But he sports Hollister. He calls himself a twinkie, yellow on the outside, white on the inside, or a banana. I was going to say that all my Asian friends act white but my three Asian roommates don’t act white, at all.

[Interviewer: What makes them Asian?]

Superficially, where we shop alone. [I shop at] Abercrombie. But it sucks because Abercrombie does not like minorities in their image. So I’ve stopped shopping there but I’m going to use their perfume up.

[Interviewer: Did you stop shopping there?]

Yeah, I did, it didn’t seem right, they’re not being American. Being a part of the boycott seemed welcoming (Lourdes, second generation Filipino).

Within the context of defining her own lack of Asian qualities, this respondent revealed how she evoked a politicized identity in her decision to join the boycott. The clothing company she describes here had recently been sued by a former Asian American employee who had been fired, the employee maintained, due to her racial background. Interestingly, although this respondent claimed to have a “whitened” identity, she also demonstrates a willingness to act on

behalf of an Asian American cause. So although this respondent did not describe political qualities to her racial identity, she still realized that her individual life choices are linked with her racial group.

Further, we find that among our young adult samples, racial group cues are not the only schemas used when in their decision-making calculus. To develop a sense of how perceptions of racial group consciousness may influence vote choice, we included a question on descriptive representation. Over 60 percent of the California sample and nearly 80 percent of the New York sample agreed that they would use race to select a political candidate for office. However, although our respondents were willing to use race as a factor in their vote choice, many were also careful to take into consideration the candidate's other qualities. The answers to the descriptive representation question were very similar in nature and are exemplified with this respondent's careful definition of candidate qualifications:

Equally qualified and also equally on issues? Would that be equally qualified?

[Interviewer: Would there be a difference for you?]

Yeah, I wouldn't vote for a Latino just to vote for a Latino. If I didn't agree with a person on the issues, then I wouldn't vote for them. But if they were equal on issues and equally qualified, then I would probably vote for the Latino. Just because, if they're equal on the issues, then I think at least this person has a background of being a minority in this country. Who's grown up being different and who's grown up being not who you're supposed to be. And I think they'd be able to deal with things better. (Refugio, second generation, Mexican).

Our respondents were careful not to demonstrate simple, blind devotion to the ethnic group as a motive for choosing a candidate for office. Of those who agreed that they would use race as a factor in their political choices, half tempered their responses with additional explanations. Those who felt the need to qualify their responses felt it important to assert that the ethnic candidate must be equally qualified with the white candidate—either in terms of merit or in

terms of issue positions and partisanship. Thus, our respondents demonstrate that strong racial attachment is attached with caveats. Descriptive representation is only ideal *if* the candidate properly represents what is believed to be the true interests of the community. The use of racial identity in vote choice is only relevant if that racial identity is linked with group interests.

Third, the liberal notion of color-blindness—that race is an irrelevant factor—was an ideological frame that made our respondents reluctant to assert a strong sense of racial attachment. We found that there is some degree of tension between the desire to rely on a racial identity and the expectation that race should not play a role in a person’s evaluation. While this tension did not prevent most of our respondents from choosing to evoke a racial or ethnic identity, the color-blind ideology was a consistent theme:

I want them to recognize my ethnicity. Well, the only reason why I would want them to recognize them my ethnicity, is when...[pause] I want things to be equal in the fact that ethnicity doesn’t matter, but I want a separation that, yeah, we’re different and we have different backgrounds and we’ve experienced different things based on our ethnicity. So that has to be noticed and recognized. But as a whole, we shouldn’t be separated by our ethnicities. (Adrian, third generation, Mexican)

In total, we had only six respondents who felt that it was not important to recognize their ethnic background—most citing the idea that their background should not be taken into account. The rest who felt their identities were important, also noted the importance of being evaluated without regard to race, but felt it was even more important to represent *positive* attributes of the ethnic group to white society. Claims of pride, identity and explicit links to success were cited as important reasons to assert an ethnic identity. Thus, direct queries regarding racial attachment may provoke Asian American and Latino respondents to discount a strong sense of racial identity for fear that it clashes with the idea of color-blindness.

The qualitative data from our in-depth interviews with Asian American and Latino youth in New York and Los Angeles cast doubt on claims made by previous studies in political science suggesting racial group consciousness is weak among new minority immigrant groups. Rather, ethnic and racial group consciousness as it is applied to these two communities must be conceptualized differently than the established models applied to African Americans. In particular, the social context in which an individual resides is important to Asian American and Latino ethnic and racial group identity, and it results in a more subtle, but potentially relevant mobilizing factor for political participation. With these distinctions in mind, we designed the survey questionnaire in the 2004 Ethnic Politics Study to attempt to capture the contours and depth of racial and ethnic identification.

Racial and Ethnic Identity Among Asian American and Latino Youth

From the qualitative data, we learned that both Asian American and Latino youth perceive a racial identity, but it is a consciousness that must be activated. We tested one hypothesis for the activation of racial and ethnic identity in terms of racial group pride. A broad reading of the scholarship in race and political behavior suggests several overlapping motivations for adopting racial group identification: group pride, racialization to in-group versus out-group status, self-interest, and group competition. Social identity theorists emphasize the importance of group affiliation to increase self-esteem, while analysts approaching the question from a rational choice perspective identify group behavior to be a function of maximizing self interest. There are numerous cuts one could take on these theoretical perspectives of motivation, but underutilized in the political science scholarship is the role of group pride.

Group pride is the notion that shared characteristics – race, language, native homeland, history, religion, culture, economic status, colonial domination, phenotypic features – invite feelings of solidarity, familiarity, and self-esteem. Described in this way, group pride sounds almost subconscious and primordial. In many ways it is, operating as a powerful heuristic in processing information about people, and leaving much to assumptions of similarity embedded in the short-cuts. The notion of descriptive or symbolic representation by legislators (or agents) in terms of racial identity is consistent with this notion. While much more intricate than the simple heuristic described above, normative arguments regarding descriptive political representation have roots in group pride.⁵ Similarly, the family of empirical claims emanating from the group pride hypothesis are among the more current and controversial issues in the study of race and politics, including research on the impact of descriptive representation in terms of race on political behavior and attitudes, with the work of Bobo and Gilliam (1990), Gay (2001; 2004), Barreto et. al. (2004), and Swain (1995), among prominent attempts to uncover the dynamics of racial group identification in participation and public opinion.

To measure racial and ethnic identification among immigrant and minority youth, we utilize data from the 2004 Ethnic Politics Pre-election survey, a new data collection of a U.S. sample of whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Surveys are self-administered *via* the Internet, and respondents are selected for the Knowledge Networks panel using standard methods of random digit dialing. Hence, the resulting interview samples are random probability samples. For all of the groups except Asian Americans (where the sample

⁵ There is a growing literature in political theory addressing these issues, but even perspectives as diverse as those articulated by Mansbridge (1999), Dovi (2002), and Williams (1998), emanate from notions of shared group identity.

size was 80), more than 100 young adults age 30 and under were interviewed during the Presidential election campaign in October 2004.⁶

To test the group pride motivation for racial identification, a set of experimental stimuli were developed. The objective of the manipulation was to observe whether brief exposure to photographs of political figures of the respondent's racial group would prime racial group identification and consciousness. Split-halves of each of the racial group samples were exposed to the frames, and the other half acted as the control group. The stimulus group was exposed to a visual image of U.S. Presidential cabinet officials – Henry Cisneros and Mel Martinez for Latinos, and Norman Mineta and Elaine Chao for Asian Americans, and introduced with the text: “Both President Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have included diverse Americans in their cabinets.” Underneath the photographs was identifying information about the cabinet official, and a description of their position. For example, the caption under Elaine Chao's picture read, “Elaine Chao, the first Asian Pacific American Secretary of Labor, serves under President George W. Bush.” The images were balanced to include side-by-side headshot photographs of both a Republican and a Democratic appointee, and a follow-up question on the importance of diversity in government was asked of respondents as a manipulation check. The logic of the frame was to reinforce positive images of Latinos and Asian Americans as legitimate and powerful actors in U.S. national politics in order to stimulate group pride.

Respondents were then asked six distinctive measures of racial identification and consciousness were included in the 2004 Ethnic Politics Pre-election survey, including several previously developed questions tapping group identity, and some new instrumentation. Of the

⁶ The data were collected by Knowledge Networks of Menlo Park, California. Respondents were selected for the study on the basis of a series of racial self-classification questions collected by Knowledge Networks in a demographic profile. Table A.1 in the Appendix presents basic demographic information on the Asian American and Latino youth samples. The characteristics of the sample populations for this survey are similar to the demographic patterns found by the 2000 Census.

former, the first measure is the classic “close to” questions, most familiar from the American National Election Study. These items are the most common measures of group identity in the study of political behavior, whether as measures of racial, gender, or other group affinity. In addition, the “linked fate” question introduced in the study of African American political behavior was also included on the survey. Complementing these two standard measures was a new question asking respondents about how important their race is to their ideas about politics, and a question asking which ethnic or racial descriptor is most important to be (e.g., “Asian American,” “Mexican” or “Chinese-American”), requiring a forced choice between racial, ethnic, and hyphenated terms. In addition, a series of questions on the importance of cultural homogeneity were included on requiring children to study a language, the desirability of marrying others of the same racial group, and the importance of learning about the history and culture of one’s race.

What difference did viewing the faces of U.S. cabinet officials have on the extent to which Asian Americans and Latino youth express racial group identifications? The results are presented in Table 1, pairing the marginal distributions for the measures of racial identification for the control and treatment groups. Any differences can be attributed to the efficacy of the stimulus, and statistically significant relationships are highlighted by shaded cells in the table. The direction of the effects for all groups in the hypothesized direction, with assignment to the condition reflected in stronger racial identifications, particularly among Asian Americans. Whereas 58% of the Asian American youth control group sample says they feel close to their own racial group, 84% of youth who viewed the political officials stimulus said they felt close to other Asian Americans. Similarly, feelings of linked fate were significantly stronger among those in the primed group compared to those who saw no photographs.

Table 1 here [Racial Identification Measures with Group Pride Prime Frame]

Results for Latino youth show only one measure of racial and ethnic identification as having been influenced by the group pride frame: the desirability of identifying oneself as “American” rather than any other of the ethnic-group-specific, pan-ethnic, or hyphenated terms. Latino youth viewing the U.S. cabinet official headshot photographs are much more likely to say it is most important to be “American” than those who saw no stimulus. Unlike Asian American youth, there are no significant differences in any of the other measures of ethnic and racial consciousness as a function of systematic exposure to the group pride frame. Asian Americans show strong results from the experimental manipulation, demonstrating substantial malleability from exposure to the racial group pride stimulus. There are strong and statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups for the measures of closeness to other Asians and linked fate. While more modest, Latino youth were also more likely to say it was most important to be American when they viewed the political officials stimulus.

Identities in Context

Our analysis of Latino and Asian American youth perceptions of politicized racial identity, and the consequences of consciousness for political participation have yielded a number of interesting findings. First, there is a higher than expected degree of racial group consciousness among Asian American and Latino youth. Contrary to much of the conventional wisdom portraying minority youth as disconnected and disinterested, our study supports the notion that racial and ethnic group identity does indeed exist in the consciousness of Latino and Asian American youth.

We conclude that part of the reason why previous researchers have been unable to identify racial and ethnic consciousness among Latinos and Asian Americans is because they have not focused on the youth population, and because they have used insufficient measures. Thus, not only must more and more varied standardized measures of ethnic and racial identification be used in survey questionnaires, but it is important to recognize the contextual nature of consciousness. Scholars must continue to search for and test more nuanced measures of group identity. Racial and ethnic identities that have political consequences are driven by context, and are not as clear-cut as one might think. Direct queries soliciting racial attachment may not work for these groups since their identification is much more subtle. In particular, the young Latinos and Asian Americans we talked to do not articulate an explicit racial or ethnic group consciousness that translates directly into group-based political action. Rather, the political imperative is often hidden beneath a desire to adhere to the ideal of colorblindness.

Second, the embedded experiment attempting to elicit group pride and prime racial consciousness with a modest stimulus of paired Democratic and Republican U.S. cabinet officials matched to the respondent's racial group yielded strong findings among the Asian American youth population, and some movement among young Latinos. Respondents in the treatment group that viewed photographs of Asian American officials were more likely to claim feelings of closeness to other Asian Americans and a sense of linked fate, while young Latinos in the treatment group were more likely to claim an American identity as most important.

We believe the attempts to discount the existence of a racial group consciousness among Asian Americans and Latinos are misdirected. Instead, we suggest the key to understanding the contours and consequences of politicized racial consciousness is in pinpointing *when* and *how* racial group identity becomes politicized. While it is clear that both Asian Americans and

Latinos have mobilized as a racial group, and have the potential to exploit their identification further in politics, what we do not know is why they use racial group cues in some instances but not in others. The far-reaching and large-scale demonstrations over immigration reform provide one important context scholars can exploit in attempting to better understand the dynamics of racial and ethnic identity in a rapidly changing American democratic polity.

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Table 1. Racial Identification Measures with Group Pride Prime Frame (%), Asian American and Latino Youth

		Asian American	Asian American	Latino	Latino
	Prime: Yes or No	No	Yes	No	Yes
1	Close to Close to own racial group	58	84	77	73
2	Linked fate Strongly agree & agree	49	64	53	52
	Neither	37	25	40	39
	Strongly disagree & disagree	14	11	6	9
3	Racial political identity Very important	20	23	27	33
	Somewhat important	46	52	48	35
	Not at all important	35	25	24	31
4	Most important to be Specific ethnic group (e.g., Mexican)	8	7	5	13
	Asian / Latino or Hispanic	25	14	8	12
	Specific ethnic & American	17	16	18	13
	Asian / Latino & American	28	41	21	25
	American	19	23	45	64
5	Racial cultural identity L/A children study African/Asian language	61	66	73	66
	L/A marry other L/A	14	9	10	15
	Learn L/A history and culture	83	93	89	88
	N	36	44	62	67

Source: 2004 Ethnic Politics Pre-election Study

Statistically significant relationships are highlighted by shaded cells

Appendix

Table A.1. Characteristics of Asian American & Latino Youth Sample (%)

	Asian American	Latino
Born in U.S.	42	84
U.S. citizen	73	88
Ethnicity*		
Chinese or Taiwanese	30	
Philippines	23	
India	17	
Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Thailand, Laos, Indonesia)	11	
Korea	9	
Japan	8	
Mexican		
Other Latin American / South American		
Puerto Rican		
Dominican		
Cuban		
Education		
No high school	4	17
High school graduate	11	33
Some college	31	36
College graduate	38	10
Graduate degree	16	4
Language spoken at home		
English	45	51
Mix of English and other language	39	40
Other language	17	9
Racial makeup of neighborhood/town		
Mostly white	33	32
Mostly black	3	5
Mostly Latino	8	33
Mostly Asian	5	0
Mixed	50	31
Currently working for pay	71	69
Party affiliation		
Republican	11	15
Democrat	50	42
Independent	25	26
Something else	11	16
Gender		
Male	51	42
Female	49	58
N	80	129

* National origin information was collected only from immigrants and second-generation respondents.

Source: 2004 Ethnic Politics Pre-election Study