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# “No, Where are You *Really* From?”

## Testing the Foreigner Objectification Scale With German Adolescents

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**Abstract:** Being perceived as a foreigner regardless of one's generational status, citizenship, or self-identification is called foreigner objectification. This is a form of identity denial and is linked to psychological distress. To test how foreigner objectification could be measured in Europe, we assessed whether the Foreigner Objectification Scale demonstrated reliability and validity with German adolescents. The sample included 806 9<sup>th</sup> graders from 17 high schools. The results showed that the scale demonstrates good reliability, scalar measurement invariance across gender and citizenship status, and partial scalar measurement invariance across family heritage, generational status, and cultural self-identification. Adolescents who scored higher on the scale also reported greater school behavioral disengagement, lower life satisfaction, and stronger ethnic identity. Our findings suggest that the scale is psychometrically sound and is linked in theoretically consistent ways to adjustment and ethnic identity. We conclude that this scale offers another way to capture subtle discrimination experiences that add to a more comprehensive understanding of discrimination and the related implications in Europe.

**Keywords:** discrimination, foreigner objectification, migration, microaggression

### „Nein, woher kommst du denn wirklich?": Testen der Foreigner Objectification Scale mit deutschen Jugendlichen

**Zusammenfassung:** Als Ausländer\_in wahrgenommen zu werden, unabhängig vom Generationsstatus, der Staatsbürgerschaft oder der Selbstidentifikation, wird „foreigner objectification“ (Ausländer\_innenobjektifizierung) genannt. Ausländer\_innenobjektifizierung ist eine Form der Identitätsverleugnung und wird mit größerem psychologischem Stress in Verbindung gebracht. Um zu testen, wie Ausländer\_innenobjektifizierung in Europa gemessen werden kann, untersuchten wir, ob die Foreigner Objectification Scale bei deutschen Jugendlichen Reliabilität und Validität aufweist. Die Stichprobe umfasste 806 Neuntklässler\_innen aus 17 Sekundarschulen. Die Ergebnisse zeigten, dass die Skala eine gute Reliabilität, skalare Messinvarianz über das Geschlecht und die Staatsbürgerschaft sowie eine partielle skalare Messinvarianz über die familiäre Herkunft, den Generationsstatus und die kulturelle Selbstidentifikation aufweist. Jugendliche, die höhere Werte auf der Skala erreichten, berichteten auch über ein größeres schulisches Disengagement, eine geringere Lebenszufriedenheit und eine stärkere ethnische Identität. Unsere Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass die Skala psychometrisch solide ist und auf theoretisch konsistente Weise mit Adaptation und ethnischer Identität verbunden ist. Wir kommen zu dem Schluss, dass diese Skala eine weitere Möglichkeit bietet, subtile Diskriminierungserfahrungen zu erfassen, die zu einem umfassenderen Verständnis von Diskriminierung und deren Auswirkungen in Europa beitragen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Diskriminierung, Ausländer\_innenobjektifizierung, Migration, Mikroaggression

Ethnic-racial discrimination, defined as unfair or negative treatment based on one's ethnicity, race, or cultural background, is hurtful. It is linked to poorer academic performance, poorer socioemotional adjustment, and risky behavior among adolescents (Benner et al., 2018). Thus, studies of discrimination are vital to understanding adolescent development and well-being globally. The current study examines how a subtle form of discrimination, foreigner objectification, is a measurable and relevant dimension of discrimination in Germany.

Experiencing ethnic-racial discrimination is common for some adolescents in Germany. Most youth of Turkish and Greek heritage, as well as children of ethnic German migrants from Russia (*Aussiedler*), are targets of a wide range of discriminatory behaviors (e.g., being treated impolitely in shops, being threatened, being verbally harassed), with Turkish-heritage youth experiencing the highest levels of such discrimination (Salentin, 2007). Turkish-heritage adolescents in Germany experience more discrimination than those in Sweden, Finland, France, and The Netherlands (Vedder et al., 2007). The

German Federal Antidiscrimination Agency found that one-fourth of students with a migration background<sup>1</sup>, defined as those who have immigrated themselves or have at least one parent born abroad, report experiencing discrimination in school, with those of Turkish or Arab heritage experiencing the most (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2013). Newly arrived adolescent immigrants face greater discrimination than those who have lived in Germany for more than 4 years (Titzmann et al., 2011).

These experiences of discrimination have negative links to adolescent academic and psychosocial adjustment. *Aussiedler* adolescents who are targets of discrimination are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors (Schmitt-Rodermund & Silbereisen, 2008) and endure greater psychological distress over a 4-year period (Sloim-Nevo et al., 2009). More discrimination is related to greater depressive symptoms, disruptive behaviors, and lower life satisfaction among Turkish German adolescents (Brenick et al., 2018). Among German adolescents of migration background more broadly, greater discrimination is related to poorer academic achievement (Schachner et al., 2018). It is also important to highlight that German adolescents of migration background are aware of and resist these experiences of discrimination (Mansel & Spaiser, 2010; Moffitt et al., 2019), and that the negative effects of discrimination are weakened for adolescents who have a strong connection to their heritage cultural<sup>2</sup> identity (Kunyu et al., 2020), experience a supportive classroom climate (Brenick et al., 2018), and have a positive relationship with their classroom teacher (Civitillo et al., 2021).

While focusing on individual- and institutional-level discrimination among German youth is not a new area of study, especially in the field of education (El-Mafaalani et al., 2017; Gomolla, 2006; Mecheril, 2004; Söhn & Özcan, 2006), there are presently few quantitative measures available that capture different forms of discrimination. Current measures in Germany assess discrimination based on ethnicity or heritage culture with items such as, “Other students were mean to me because of my ethnicity or heritage culture” (Titzmann et al. 2011), “Have you ever been teased because you are from your other country?” (Berry et al., 2006; Schachner et al., 2018), or “How often did you have to face disadvantages in the following situations (at school, in shops) during the last 12

months because you are an immigrant?” (Steinbach & Nauck, 2000). However, in addition to these important general assessments, measures that tap into other types of discrimination are necessary to build a more detailed and comprehensive picture, including examining experiences that are less overt. Moreover, the language used in some of these scales specifically positions youth from immigrant families as “immigrants” themselves, which may promote subtle discrimination (Moffitt & Juang, 2019).

## Microaggressions and Subtle Discrimination

Subtler types of discrimination are as important to measure and assess as blatant discrimination (Sue et al., 2007). In contrast to overt displays of prejudice and hostility, subtle or unconscious acts of discrimination, denigration, or exclusion are referred to as *microaggressions* (Sue et al., 2007; Williams, 2020). One type of microaggression relevant in Germany is *foreigner objectification* (Armenta et al., 2013; Huynh et al., 2011). Being perceived as a foreigner, especially for those in the country in which one was born and raised or where one’s family has been for generations, is a “perpetual foreigner” stereotype that signals one does not and perhaps never will belong (Tuan, 1998). Qualitative studies of youths of migrant background in Germany show examples of this stereotype in action, for example, youth born and raised in Germany – even those with German citizenship (Faas, 2007) – recount having been considered “foreigners” by classmates (Scharathow, 2017). Others recalled being excluded (e.g., by not receiving an invitation to a gathering) but were unsure whether this was because of their “foreigner” status (Scharathow, 2017). This ambiguity is what makes these experiences so easily dismissed or denied – and therefore stressful for the target (Williams, 2020).

When teachers perpetrate such microaggressions, they negatively affect the classroom climate (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), and young people experiencing them report greater depressive and somatic symptoms (Huynh, 2012), as well as more intense negative emotions (Wang et al., 2011). In the German context, where strict school tracking can impact lifelong academic and career trajectories, in a qualitative study, multiple Turkish German youths recalled teachers explicitly telling them they received lower-

<sup>1</sup> The Federal Government Expert Commission (2021) recommended no longer using the term “migration background” as previously defined but rather “immigrants and their direct descendants.” In this paper we use the term “migration background” when it was used in the original publication.

<sup>2</sup> We use the term “heritage culture” because the terms “ethnicity” and “race” were not used in data collection. Nonetheless, we sometimes prefer “ethnic identity” in this paper when the scale is labeled as such. We acknowledge the challenges in finding the most appropriate terminology when constructs such as “ethnicity” and “race” are not easily transportable across all contexts and countries (Juang et al., 2021).

track school recommendations despite having good grades because they were “foreigners” (Moffitt et al., 2019). Thus, it is important to understand subtle forms of othering and exclusion, both for students’ psychological well-being and their academic well-being (Hascher, 2008).

## Applying and Examining the Foreigner Objectification Scale

The Foreigner Objectification Scale (FOBS; Armenta et al., 2013; Pituc et al., 2009) has demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .71$ ), convergent validity (with general discrimination), divergent validity (with emotion regulation), and predicted self-esteem, life satisfaction, and depressive symptoms among samples of Latinx and Asian American youth in the United States (Armenta et al., 2013; Kiang et al., 2018). In a sample of Latinx adolescents, the FOBS ( $\alpha = .85$ ) also was linked to greater dissatisfaction with one’s own skin color, which in turn predicted lower self-esteem (Kiang et al., 2020). The FOBS also demonstrated scalar measurement invariance for foreign-born Latinx vs. Asian American youth and U.S.-born Latino vs. Asian American youth (Armenta et al., 2013). As the concept of foreigner objectification is relevant in Germany and the psychometric evidence from previous studies is solid, we expect that the FOBS will also demonstrate good measurement properties regarding reliability and validity (convergent and discriminant) in a sample of German adolescents.

To go beyond testing measurement properties and provide evidence for substantive relations, we also test whether foreigner objectification is related to life satisfaction and various aspects of school well-being. Based on studies in Germany showing a link between perceived discrimination and poorer psychological and academic well-being (Kunyu et al., 2020; Brenick et al., 2018; Civitillo et al., 2021; Schachner et al., 2018), we expect that the FOBS will relate negatively to subjective school values, school competence beliefs, and life satisfaction, and positively to behavioral school disengagement. Further, previous studies found that adolescents experiencing greater discrimination tend to adopt a stronger ethnic identity based on the rejection-identification hypothesis (Branscombe et al., 1999; Yip, 2018), which suggests that experiencing rejection from the broader society or others of different ethnic heritage leads to people turning toward

their own group to reinforce their self-esteem. Thus, we also expect that adolescents experiencing more foreigner objectification will report stronger ethnic identities.

In addition to these direct effects, we test for several potential moderators such as generational status, cultural self-identification label, and citizenship. Studies in the U.S. show that people who have a longer connection to and stronger identification with being U.S. American are more hurt by experiences of foreigner objectification than those who immigrated or less strongly identify as U.S. American (Armenta et al., 2013). Being perceived as a perpetual foreigner denies or challenges the validity of an important group membership (e.g., being U.S. American), and this may be less hurtful among those for whom this membership is not salient or who may expect to be treated differently because of their immigration status (Armenta et al., 2013; Bos et al., 2003; Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Williams, 2020). Thus, we hypothesize that associations will be stronger for later generations compared to the first generation, for those who self-identify as only German compared to those who self-identify as German and another heritage or only another heritage, and for those who have German citizenship compared to those who do not.

## The Current Study

The current study tests the measurement properties of the FOBS and several substantive hypotheses:

(H1) The FOBS will demonstrate psychometric robustness in terms of reliability (McDonald’s  $\omega \geq .70^3$ ) and convergent and discriminant validity.

(H2) The FOBS will relate positively to behavioral school disengagement, negatively to subjective school values, school competence beliefs, and life satisfaction, and positively to ethnic identity.

(H3) The association between the FOBS and dependent variables will be moderated by generational status, cultural self-identification label, and citizenship. Associations will be stronger for later generations than for the first generation, for those who self-identify as only German than for those who self-identify as German and another heritage or only another heritage, and for those who have German citizenship than for those who do not.

Our study hypotheses and method are preregistered: [https://osf.io/5tuas/?view\\_only=d11b1802248d4e2183971f885c88481c](https://osf.io/5tuas/?view_only=d11b1802248d4e2183971f885c88481c)

<sup>3</sup> In the preregistration process, we stated that we would use Cronbach’s  $\alpha \geq .70$  as a criterion for good reliability. The initial manuscript reported Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .75$ . Based on a reviewer’s comment that McDonald’s  $\omega$  would be more appropriate (Hayes & Coutts, 2020), we recalculated all Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ s. The McDonald’s  $\omega$  numbers were either the same or .01 higher than the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ s.

## Method

### Participants

To recruit participants, we contacted 211 secondary schools in Berlin, first by letter and then with a telephone call. If the principal agreed to participate, we met with each school to discuss the study and answer questions. There were no exclusion criteria. The sample included 1,335 9<sup>th</sup> graders, but for this study, we focused on a subset of participants with at least one parent, grandparent, or who were themselves born outside of Germany ( $N = 806$ , 50% females, 50% males, ages ranged from 13 to 19 years with a mean age of 14.75,  $SD = .77$ ). Most of the sample (79%) was born in Germany (21% first-generation immigrant, 65% second-generation, 14% third-generation). Most students attended an integrated secondary school (78%) and the rest attended *Gymnasium* (22%). Adolescents filled out questionnaires during class time. Participation was voluntary and based on permission from the Berlin Senate for Education, Youth, and Science, school authorities, and parents. There was no monetary compensation for student participation, though a small piece of candy was given as a thank you.

### Measures

For the multiple-item measures, composite scores were computed by reverse coding negatively phrased items (when necessary) and averaging across scale items. To calculate reliability, we used McDonald's  $\omega$  (Hayes & Coutts, 2020).

### Demographic Variables

Participants self-reported their age in years, gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*), birthplace, parents' and grandparents' birthplace, citizenship, language used with parents and grandparents, cultural self-identification label ("Some people consider themselves to be German, for example, others Turkish, and others German-Turkish. What about you? How do you view yourself?" followed by a list of possible options, such as German, Turkish-German, and an open response option), proficiency in German-language reading and writing (average of 2 items, "How good are you in reading/writing in German?" response scale from 1 = *poor* to 5 = *very good*), religion, the importance of religion ("How important is religion to you?" response scale 1 = *not important at all* to 5 = *very important*), and socioeconomic status (SES). To assess SES, we used the 4-item Family Affluence Scale (Boyce et al., 2006) as well as including the number of books in the household (Bos et

al., 2003). Participants were asked how many books they have at home on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *none or very few* to 4 = *more than 200 books*). Because of the different response scales of the items, we performed a principal components analysis and included factor loadings in the final model.

### Foreigner Objectification

We translated and backtranslated the four-item FOBS (Armenta et al., 2013; Pituc et al., 2009) and replaced "English" with "German" and the term "ethnicity/race" with "cultural heritage/appearance." Participants were asked whether this happened in the previous year: "My German citizenship or residency was questioned" (item 1), "Someone commented on or was surprised by my German language ability" (item 2), "Because of my cultural background/appearance, I was asked 'Where are you from?'" (item 3), "Someone spoke to me in an unnecessarily slow or loud way" (item 4), and we added the item "I have been referred to as a foreigner (*Ausländer*)" (item 5). The response scale ranged from (1) *never*, (2) *one or two times*, (3) *three or four times*, (4) *five times or more*. The German version can be found in the Electronic Supplemental Material (ESM 5). McDonald's  $\omega = .76$

### Convergent Validity Measure

*General ethnic denigration* (Armenta et al., 2013). This scale has three items such as, "I was excluded by others because of my cultural heritage." The response scale ranged from (1) *never*, (2) *one or two times*, (3) *three or four times*, (4) *five times or more*. McDonald's  $\omega = .82$ .

### Discriminant Validity Measures

*Perceived friendship quality* (based on the Peer Support Scale by Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) of nominated same-heritage culture peer and different-heritage culture peer. This scale has two items, "I can trust my friend" and "My friend is always there for me when I need him/her." ( $r = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The response scale ranged from (1) *never* to (5) *always*.

*Perceived friend achievement orientation* (based on Witkow & Fuligni, 2010). The scale has four items such as, "My friend would like to study later or get a university degree." The response scale ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. For both friendship scales, we used responses based on the same-heritage peer. If there were missing data for that peer, we used responses based on the different-heritage peer. The McDonald's  $\omega$  was .73.

### Dependent Variable Measures

*Behavioral school disengagement* (based on Leffert et al., 1998). The scale has five items. An example item is, "In the last month, how often have you not done your

homework?” The response scale ranged from (1) *never* to (5) *always*. McDonald’s  $\omega$  was .71.

*School competence beliefs* (based on Eccles et al., 1983, and self-devised items). The 6-item scale included the dimensions of attainment, goals, and ability. An example item is, “I am good in school.” The response scale ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. We conducted factor analysis (CFA) and found that a 2-factor structure with correlated errors was the best fitting model. The first factor comprised 4 items, assessing the value and expectancy of reaching the desired high school degree/job qualification (McDonald’s  $\omega = .76$ ), while the second factor comprised 2 items assessing students’ general academic self-concept ( $r = .70, p < .001$ ).

*Subjective school values* (SESSW, Steinmayr & Spinath, 2010). The 9-item scale included the dimensions of the importance of school, the utility of school, and intrinsic school values. An example item is, “I find the things we learn in school interesting.” The response scale ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. McDonald’s  $\omega$  was .89.

*Life satisfaction* (Ponizovsky et al., 2013). The scale included 5 items such as, “I am satisfied with my life.” The response scale ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. McDonald’s  $\omega$  was .84.

*Ethnic identity* (Leszczensky & Santiago, 2015). The scale included 6 items to measure a positive sense of belonging to one’s heritage group. An example item is, “I feel strongly attached to people from my family’s country of origin.” The response scale ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. McDonald’s  $\omega$  was .87.

## Plan of Analyses

A small amount (4%) of data from variables used in the analyses was missing and was dealt with using the full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) approach in MPlus (Enders, 2010). We conducted CFA using MPlus (Muthén & Muthén, 2020) with the 5 items of the FOBS. We used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors and accounted for the clustered structure of the data (students in classrooms). A comparative fit index (CFI) of more than .95, a root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) of less than .06, and a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of less than .08 were considered criteria to indicate a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

We next conducted measurement invariance testing across gender, family heritage groups, generational status, cultural self-identification label, and citizenship. We first tested configural invariance (specifying the same measurement model in all groups, without constraining factor

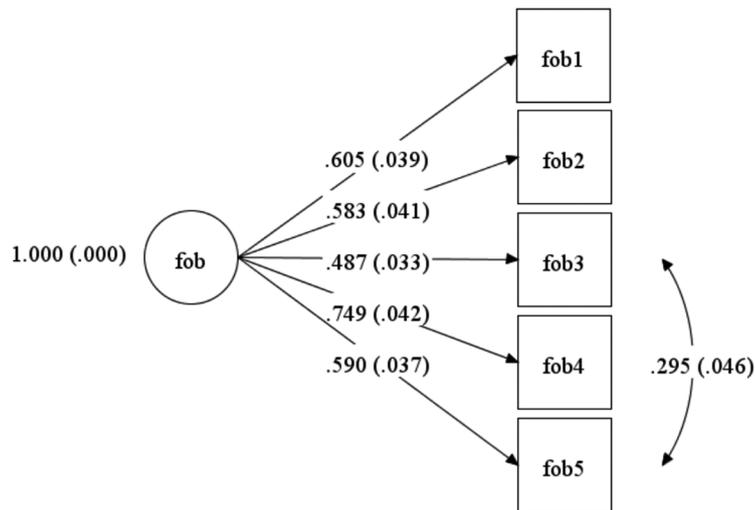
loadings or intercepts to be equal across groups), metric invariance (factor loadings were constrained to be equal across groups), and scalar invariance (intercepts were constrained to be equal across groups). Metric invariance implies that associations can be compared across groups, and scalar invariance implies that means can be compared across groups. In cases where scalar invariance could not be achieved, we tested for partial scalar invariance (individual intercepts were released based on modification indices until we reached an acceptable model fit). According to Chen (2007), when the sample size is adequate (total  $N > 300$ ), for testing loading invariance, a change of  $\geq -.010$  in CFI, supplemented by a change of  $\geq .015$  in RMSEA or a change of  $\geq .030$  in SRMR indicates noninvariance; for testing intercept invariance, a change of  $\geq -.010$  in CFI, supplemented by a change of  $\geq .015$  in RMSEA or a change of  $\geq .010$  in SRMR indicates noninvariance (Chen, 2007).

## Results

The CFA showed that all 5 items had high factor loadings onto one factor, but there was a nonadequate fit (CFI = .94, RMSEA = .10 [90% CI: .07–.12], SRMR = .04). We specified a correlated error between item 3 and item 5, which were conceptually similar (items 3 and 5 both assess whether the person is made to feel that they are not from here, i. e., not from Germany), and correlated highly, and this led to very good fit (CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00 [90% CI: .00–.00], SRMR = .00, see Figure 1). The mean score of these five items was used in all further analyses. The scale demonstrated adequate reliability, McDonald’s  $\omega = .76$ . See Table S1 in the ESM 1 for bivariate correlations of continuous demographics with main study variables.

The results showed that metric invariance was achieved for all groups, while scalar invariance was achieved only for gender and citizenship. Partial scalar invariance for family heritage, generational status, and cultural identification was achieved after one to three intercepts were released (see Table 1).

Based on the scalar invariant models, we compared latent mean scores across groups. Girls did not differ from boys regarding foreigner objectification ( $z = 1.027, p = .31, d = 0.10$ ). Using only German citizenship as a reference group, adolescents with dual citizenship did not differ regarding foreigner objectification ( $z = -0.16, p = .87, d = -0.01$ ), but those with only a non-German citizenship experienced more foreigner objectification ( $z = 3.28, p = .001, d = 0.45$ ).



**Figure 1.** Confirmatory factor analysis final model of the foreigner objectification scale with standardized beta coefficients (SE) of factor loadings.

**Table 1.** Measurement invariance by gender, family heritage, generation status, cultural self-identification, and citizenship

	$\chi^2(df)$	CFI	$\Delta$ CFI	RMSEA [90% CI]	$\Delta$ RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta$ SRMR
<b>Gender</b>							
Configural	3.311 (8)	1.000	-	.000 [.000, .023]	-	.011	-
Metric	7.647 (12)	1.000	.000	.000 [.000, .033]	.000	.024	.013
Scalar	<b>21.878 (16)</b>	<b>.991</b>	<b>-.009</b>	<b>.031 [.000, .060]</b>	<b>.031</b>	<b>.038</b>	<b>.014</b>
<b>Family Heritage</b>							
Configural	13.950 (20)	1.000	-	.000 [.000, .042]	-	.024	-
Metric	33.994 (36)	1.000	.000	.000 [.000, .054]	.000	.061	.037
Scalar	68.787 (52)	.965	-.035	.046 [.000, .074]	.046	.076	.015
Partial scalar invariance <sup>a</sup>	<b>50.841 (48)</b>	<b>.994</b>	<b>-.006</b>	<b>.020 [.000, .058]</b>	<b>.020</b>	<b>.068</b>	<b>.007</b>
<b>Generational status</b>							
Configural	26.717 (12)	.973	-	.069 [.033, .104]	-	.026	-
Metric	39.978** (20)	.964	-.009	.062 [.033, .099]	-.009	.057	.031
Scalar	78.062*** (28)	.909	-.055	.083 [.062, .105]	.021	.080	.026
Partial scalar invariance <sup>b</sup>	<b>52.240*** (24)</b>	<b>.949</b>	<b>-.015</b>	<b>.068 [.042, .093]</b>	<b>.006</b>	<b>.066</b>	<b>.009</b>
<b>Cultural identification</b>							
Configural	12.488 (12)	.999	-	.013 [.000, .066]	-	.021	-
Metric	19.876 (20)	1.000	.001	.000 [.000, .054]	-.013	.041	.020
Scalar	65.750*** (28)	.912	-.088	.073 [.050, .096]	.073	.076	.035
Partial scalar invariance <sup>c</sup>	<b>21.725 (22)</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>-.000</b>	<b>.000 [.000, .052]</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.042</b>	<b>.001</b>
<b>Citizenship</b>							
Configural	8.874 (12)	1.00	-	.000 [.000, .049]	-	.021	-
Metric	21.234 (20)	.998	-.002	.016 [.000, .057]	.016	.041	.020
Scalar	<b>33.808 (28)</b>	<b>.990</b>	<b>-.008</b>	<b>.029 [.000, .059]</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.049</b>	<b>.008</b>

Note. Highest level of invariance achieved is printed in **bold**. \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . <sup>a</sup>Intercept of item 5 released, <sup>b</sup>intercepts of items 2 and 3 released, <sup>c</sup>intercepts of 1, 4, 5 released.  $N = 806$ , gender (male,  $n = 401$ , vs. female,  $n = 402$ , missing,  $n = 3$ ), generation status (first,  $n = 172$ , vs. second,  $n = 517$ , vs. third,  $n = 116$ , missing,  $n = 1$ ), family heritage (Turkish,  $n = 171$ , vs. Arab,  $n = 97$  vs. Eastern European,  $n = 215$ , vs. Western European,  $n = 97$ , vs. other,  $n = 200$ , missing,  $n = 26$ ), cultural identification (only German identification,  $n = 146$ , vs. multicultural (German and non-German) identification,  $n = 404$ , vs. only non-German identification,  $n = 234$ , missing or nonnational identification provided,  $n = 22$ ), citizenship (only German citizenship,  $n = 470$ , vs. dual citizenship,  $n = 216$ , vs. only non-German citizenship,  $n = 99$ , missing,  $n = 21$ ).

Following Chen (2008) and Putnick and Bornstein (2016), for models where full scalar invariance could not

be achieved (i.e., family heritage, generational status, cultural identification), we compared the results of the

**Table 2.** Results of path analyses predicting academic and socioemotional adjustment with foreigner objectification

	Competence beliefs: degree/job attainment	Competence beliefs: academic self-concept	Behavioral school disengagement	Subjective school values	Life satisfaction	Ethnic identity
Age	-.13* (.05)	-.03 (.04)	-.04 (.04)	.00 (.05)	-.09 (.04)	-.07 (.04)
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.03 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	.00 (.04)	.10** (.04)	-.14*** (.04)	.05 (.04)
SES	.09* (.04)	.00 (.04)	-.04 (.05)	.04 (.05)	.16*** (.04)	.01 (.03)
German reading	.21*** (.06)	.26*** (.04)	-.02 (.05)	.09 (.05)	.07 (.04)	.12* (.05)
Religion <sup>b</sup>	-.04 (.04)	.03 (.04)	-.07 (.04)	.09 (.05)	.16*** (.05)	.18*** (.05)
School track <sup>c</sup>	.02 (.03)	-.14** (.04)	-.01 (.05)	-.10* (.05)	.03 (.04)	.01 (.04)
Foreigner objectification	.04 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	.09* (.04)	.01 (.04)	-.10* (.04)	.17*** (.04)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.10*** (.03)	.08*** (.02)	.01 (.01)	.03** (.01)	.09*** (.02)	.09*** (.02)

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .  $N = 806$ , <sup>a</sup> (0) male vs. (1) female, <sup>b</sup> (0) non-Muslim vs. (1) Muslim, <sup>c</sup> (0) Integrated Secondary School vs. (1) Gymnasium

mean comparisons using a partially scalar invariant model to those using a fully scalar invariant model. The results were similar using both models, suggesting that non-invariance did not affect the results<sup>4</sup>. Using the Arab heritage group as the reference group, Turkish heritage adolescents did not differ regarding foreigner objectification ( $z_{p.i.} = -1.82$ ,  $p_{p.i.} = .07$ ,  $d_{p.i.} = -0.27$ ), while adolescents of Eastern European heritage ( $z_{p.i.} = -3.95$ ,  $p_{p.i.} < .001$ ,  $d_{p.i.} = -0.68$ ), of Western European heritage ( $z_{p.i.} = -5.45$ ,  $p_{p.i.} < .001$ ,  $d_{p.i.} = -1.09$ ), and of other heritage ( $z_{p.i.} = -2.22$ ,  $p_{p.i.} = .03$ ,  $d_{p.i.} = -0.34$ ) all experienced less. Using the first generation as the reference group, second-generation adolescents did not differ regarding foreigner objectification ( $z_{p.i.} = -1.37$ ,  $p_{p.i.} = .17$ ,  $d_{p.i.} = -0.15$ ), whereas third-generation adolescents experienced less ( $z_{p.i.} = -6.94$ ,  $p_{p.i.} < .001$ ,  $d_{p.i.} = -0.98$ ). Using only German identifiers as the reference group, both multicultural ( $z_{p.i.} = 5.07$ ,  $p_{p.i.} < .001$ ,  $d_{p.i.} = 0.89$ ) and only non-German identifiers ( $z_{p.i.} = 5.45$ ,  $p_{p.i.} < .001$ ,  $d_{p.i.} = 1.30$ ) experienced more foreigner objectification.

Overall, almost all adolescents (96%) had experienced at least one instance of foreigner objectification in the past year. Most (63%) had been asked by strangers “Where are you from?” because of their cultural background/appearance, 60% had been referred to as a “foreigner,” 58% reported that others had commented on or were surprised at how well they spoke German, 31% were spoken to in an unnecessarily slow or loud way, and 21% reported that their German citizenship or residence had been questioned.

We then tested whether demographic variables were related to the main study variables for consideration as covariates (see Tables S2 and S3 in ESM 2 and 3, for these results). Our final set of controls included age, reading ability, SES, gender, religion, and school track.

## Testing the Hypotheses

To test for convergent and discriminant validity (H1), we used bivariate correlations. We found a positive association between the FOBS and general ethnic denigration ( $r(775) = .59$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting evidence for convergent validity. The FOBS did not correlate with friendship quality ( $r(772) = .03$ ,  $p = .49$ ) or friendship achievement orientation ( $r(772) = -.02$ ,  $p = .54$ ), supporting evidence for discriminant validity<sup>5</sup>.

To test the substantive hypotheses (H2 and H3), we used path models to test the association between the FOBS with the dependent variables of school adjustment, life satisfaction, and ethnic identity. Foreigner objectification related positively to behavioral school disengagement, but not to subjective positive school values or school competence beliefs. Foreigner objectification related negatively to life satisfaction and positively to ethnic identity (See Table 2). These results did not change when controls were excluded.

To address H3, we tested whether the associations between foreigner objectification and adjustment and identity were moderated by generational status, cultural self-identification label, and citizenship status using mul-

<sup>4</sup> We report partial invariance results here ( $p.i.$  = partially invariant) and the fully invariant results as comparison in ESM 6.

<sup>5</sup> We also conducted alternate tests of convergent and discriminant validity based on the average variance extracted (Hair et al., 2012). According to this method, which does not correlate constructs but analyzes the variance of the latent construct explained by the items measured, the FOBS does not reach the criteria for convergent validity, though it does demonstrate discriminant validity. Please see ESM 7.

multiple group path analysis for each of the moderator variables separately. To compare paths between different groups of adolescents, we constrained the regression paths to be equal across the groups, starting with the paths from the control variables to the outcomes, and followed by the path from foreigner objectification to the outcomes<sup>6</sup>. When the relationships were constrained to be the same across generations, cultural self-identification, or citizenship groups, the model fit did not decrease, indicating that there were no significant differences in the relationships across groups (see Table S3 in ESM 3). In the final, fully constrained models, foreigner objectification related positively to behavioral school disengagement, negatively to life satisfaction, and positively to ethnic identity across all generations, cultural identification, and citizenship groups similarly, not supporting H3.

## Discussion

For a more comprehensive understanding of how discrimination contributes to adolescent development and adjustment, it is necessary to study discrimination in its different forms. We offer evidence that foreigner objectification is an important dimension of discrimination that warrants further attention. The FOBS demonstrates a one-factor structure with good reliability. The scale also demonstrates measurement invariance across gender, family heritage, generational status, cultural self-identification, and citizenship, suggesting that it can be used to compare discrimination-adjustment patterns as well as mean levels across these groups. The substantive hypothesis testing results show some similar and some different patterns to what has been found in other studies. In a novel finding, our results reveal that the concept of foreigner objectification can be measured empirically in Germany, contributing to a more comprehensive assessment of discrimination experiences and adding to existing qualitative examinations of this phenomenon (e.g., Faas, 2007; Moffitt et al., 2019; Scharathow, 2017).

A majority (68%) of the adolescents in our sample included “German” in their self-chosen label, had German or dual citizenship (85%), or were born in Germany (79%). Despite these indicators of being German, almost all reported at least one instance of experiencing foreigner objectification in the past year, the most common being

asked “Where are you from?” because of their cultural background/appearance, and being referred to as a “foreigner.” Arab-heritage adolescents, first-generation, multicultural and non-German identifiers, as well as those without German citizenship, experienced the highest levels of foreigner objectification. These slights may accumulate to send the message that they are not unequivocally German.

To put the experiences of foreigner objectification in the broader context, this message of migration as incongruous with being German is reinforced in other ways. In psychology and education research, researchers often use the label “German” to describe participants without a migration background and “migrant” to describe those with a migration background, regardless of generation, citizenship, or self-identification (Moffitt & Juang, 2019). Doing so excludes, for instance, second-generation adolescents with German citizenship from being referred to as “German,” contradicting both legal status and lived experience. Being referred to as forever migrants in educational, political, and public contexts (El-Tayeb, 2014; Moffitt & Juang, 2019; Will, 2019) – or not being perceived as “typical German” at all (SVR-Forschungsbereich, 2018) – is a form of exclusion and discrimination.

We also acknowledge that subtle forms of discrimination are context-dependent (Sue et al., 2007). Asking “Where are you from?” by a familiar acquaintance who is genuinely interested in making a connection vs. by a stranger based on an assumption that you cannot be German because of the way you look or sound, are important contextual considerations that modify the impact of asking such a question (Williams, 2020). Both subtle and overt forms of discrimination are embedded not only in a proximal context, but also in broader societal and historical contexts that illuminate why such seemingly neutral questions can also be linked to exclusionary experiences and psychological distress.

While foreigner objectification was not related to competence beliefs or subjective school values, it was linked positively to behavioral school disengagement, negatively to life satisfaction, and positively to ethnic identity. These findings support previous studies showing that this subtle type of discrimination experience is associated with poorer well-being (Armenta et al., 2013; Kiang et al., 2018). Being perceived as a forever foreigner may be a form of identity denial, that is, being questioned or challenged when one identifies with a group, such as

<sup>6</sup> To test H3, we included the same control variables used in analyses for H2. However, we also conducted further analyses to test whether control variables differed across subgroups for the moderation variables. We found that the control variables differed by subgroups (e.g., people of different generational status had different SES). Based on Miller and Chapman’s (2001) guidelines, we re-ran analyses without controls. The findings are reported in Table 4S in ESM 4 and were very similar to the analyses with control variables.

being German or U.S. American (e.g., Cheryan & Moyan, 2005). From a social identity perspective, questioning someone's group membership signals a lack of acceptance and belonging (Branscombe et al. 1999). Because group-based identities provide a sense of belonging and a secure sense of self and well-being in general (Vignoles et al., 2011), experiencing identity denial is one way to explain why being perceived as a forever foreigner in one's own country may undermine a sense of belonging and is subsequently linked to greater psychological distress (Armenta et al., 2013; Cheryan & Moyan, 2005). Promoting a more inclusive German identity to broaden the notion of who is German, who looks German, and who is a "typical" German could reduce identity denial by dispelling the notion that a person with multiple heritages cannot be German.

At the same time, these subtle experiences of exclusion can prompt a greater connection to one's ethnic in-group (Yip, 2018), supporting the rejection-identification hypothesis (Branscombe et al., 1999). If adolescents do not feel accepted by the majority, mainstream society, they may be more likely to turn to their ethnic in-group for affirmation and support. Though a strong sense of ethnic identity can be both protective and promotive of adaptive outcomes (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014), there are other ways it can be fostered. For instance, providing space for youth to openly discuss their experiences and explore their heritage can promote not only stronger ties to heritage cultural identity, but can also link to more positive out-group attitudes (Juang et al., 2020).

In contrast to our hypothesis, adolescents who were born in Germany, included "German" in their cultural self-identification label, or had German citizenship did not show stronger associations between foreigner objectification and poorer adjustment than those who immigrated, did not include "German" in their cultural self-identification, or did not have German citizenship. These findings suggest that foreigner objectification is similarly relevant no matter the generation, cultural self-identification, or citizenship status. U.S. studies show variation, such that foreigner objectification was not linked to psychological distress for immigrants (Armenta et al., 2013). One difference in our study is that our immigrant status groups (first- vs. second- vs. third-generation) comprised very diverse countries of origin. Perhaps the heterogeneity washed out some of the generational status effects found in U.S. studies.

Studying concepts such as foreigner objectification addresses the important question of whether microaggressions – more subtle and ambiguous experiences of marginalization and exclusion – matter for adolescents' psychological and academic well-being. Some scholars dismiss the study and relevance of microaggressions in

people's lives (Lilienfeld, 2017), while others counter (with evidence) for the importance and relevance of microaggressions (Williams, 2020). Syed (2021) argues that resolving this theoretical and empirical debate hinges on our fundamental assumptions – whether we view the societies in which we live as fundamentally racist or not. Is there evidence that we live in a racist society? If the answer is yes, then we must take microaggressions seriously to understand what these experiences mean for adolescent development. One practical implication is to sensitize educators and young people, through antiracism education in teacher training (Fereidooni, 2019) and school curricula (MIDEM, 2021), to various forms of discrimination that contribute to a larger system of inequity, including subtle forms such as foreigner objectification, as they may be harder to recognize.

## Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is that the FOBS does not capture the race, ethnicity, or phenotypic characteristics of our participants. Nonetheless, by comparing levels of foreigner objectification across our selected groups, we can see which adolescents are targeted more – those who are immigrants or of Arab heritage, for instance. Another limitation is that our "other" heritage category aggregated those from Ghana, Thailand, the U.S., and numerous other nations, which erases the specific experiences of adolescents of different racial and ethnic heritages in this overly broad category. We know, for instance, that the experience of people of African heritage during Germany's colonial history and how it is linked to contemporary anti-Black racism has been largely invisible (Conrad, 2011; Roig, 2017; Zimmerer, 2013).

## Conclusion

We tested whether the FOBS is relevant for use with German adolescents. Our findings suggest that the scale is psychometrically sound, demonstrates good reliability and measurement invariance across various demographic groups, and links to adjustment and ethnic identity in theoretically consistent ways. We conclude that this scale offers a robust way to capture subtle discrimination experiences, adding to a more comprehensive understanding of discrimination and its implications in Europe.

## Electronic Supplementary Material

The electronic supplementary material is available with the online version of the article at <https://doi.org/10.1026/0049-8637/a000242>

**ESM 1.** Table S1: Bivariate correlations of continuous demographics with main study variables

**ESM 2.** Table S2: Descriptives (mean, *SD*) and testing categorical demographics and main study variables with MANOVAs

**ESM 3.** Table S3: Results of multigroup path analyses predicting academic and socioemotional adjustment with foreigner objectification

**ESM 4.** Table S4: Results of multigroup path analyses predicting academic and socioemotional adjustment with foreigner objectification without control variables

**ESM 5.** The German version of the FOBS

**ESM 6.** Supplemental analyses comparing mean scores of partially invariant models to fully scalar invariant models

**ESM 7.** Alternate tests of convergent and divergent validity using the average variance extracted

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#### Publication Ethics

We received ethics approval for the study from the Berlin Senate Committee for Education, Youth, and Science.

#### Open Data

Our study hypotheses and method are preregistered: [https://osf.io/5tuas/?view\\_only=d11b1802248d4e2183971f885c88481c](https://osf.io/5tuas/?view_only=d11b1802248d4e2183971f885c88481c)

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