Previous analyses of U.S. civics textbooks documented an overwhelming emphasis on citizen rights to the relative exclusion of citizen obligations and participation. Despite evidence of this uneven coverage, scholars have not yet investigated the psychological and behavioral consequences of this asymmetry, which may be especially consequential in the U.S., a predominantly individualistic culture. The present research does just this by analyzing survey data collected from high school students in civics courses. As expected, and in accordance with the content of civics curricula, students show greater endorsement of rights than of obligations. Moreover, higher support for obligations increases students’ intention to vote and to participate in civic and extracurricular activities, whereas endorsement of rights is negatively associated with political participation.

During the last few decades, scholars have documented both the predominance of individualism in American popular and political culture, and the potential impact this might have on democratic citizenship. Several disciplines have been engaged in research surrounding these issues. However, the methods with which and perspectives from which individualism and related constructs have been studied vary widely across disciplines.

Studies in social psychology focus on documenting the overwhelming individualistic culture in the United States, compared to non-Western cultures (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Hui, 1988; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis & Trafimow, 2001). Social education research also demonstrates the predominance of individualism; for example, civics textbooks disproportionately focus on rights, to the relative exclusion of obligations and participation (e.g., Riedel, Gonzales, Avery, & Sullivan, 2001; Gonzales et al., 2004). Within political science, scholars have examined the impact of individualism and collectivism on conceptions of citizenship (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996; Gans, 1988; Lipset, 1996) and the impact of indi-
Individualism on policy attitudes and outcomes (Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Gilens, 1995, 1999). The purpose of our research is to synthesize work in these three social science domains to arrive at a set of predictions about how high school students' sense of individualism and collectivism influences their political attitudes about civic rights and obligations, and about how these political attitudes affect actual and intended political behavior.

American Youth and Political Participation

The present study is especially relevant, given recent evidence of declining citizen participation in the United States and the more notable declines in levels of engagement among American youth. Numerous studies have characterized the citizenry as generally disengaged and alienated from the political sphere. Scholars have noted this decline by examining multiple measures: declines in volunteer activity and decreased charitable contributions (Knack, 1992; Putnam, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Uslaner, 1998), lower levels of public awareness, decreased interpersonal trust, and reduced levels of support and trust for government (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Rahn & Transue, 1998).

Declines in political participation are most marked among young Americans. Evidence abounds that today’s young Americans have retreated from participation in public life (Cohn, 1992; Galston, 2003; Quigley, 1999; Rahn & Transue, 1998), and lack general knowledge about government and public affairs (Cohn, 1992; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2003; Quigley, 1999; Rahn & Transue, 1998). Further, surveys reveal unprecedented low levels of political interest, political efficacy, political engagement, and political involvement among the younger population (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1997; Galston, 1999; Gamson, 1992; Quigley, 1999). Easterlin and Crimmins (1991) suggested that young people generally have retreated from the idea of active political involvement, and Galston (2003) argued that youth currently demonstrate unprecedented high levels of civic detachment.²

Avery and Simmons (2000–2001) suggested that the ideal outcome of civics instruction should be to inform students of their broader roles as citizens, including both rights and responsibilities that accompany demo-

²Of course, we acknowledge the myriad of personal and situational contributions to the disengagement of youth from the civic and political sphere. Although Putnam (1995b, 2000) found that “too little time” has only limited explanatory value in accounting for disengagement, according to a report released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005), nearly one quarter of high school freshmen and nearly three quarters of high school seniors work at some point during the academic year. Moreover, nearly 25% of working freshmen averaged over 21 hours of work per week, and over 50% of working seniors averaged over 21 hours per week. Thus, employment, sports participation, and other activities might, in addition to personal attitudes about civic engagement, contribute to low rates of civic participation among young people.
ocratic citizenship. However, research has demonstrated that current approaches to American civics education fail in this respect, and largely emphasize freedoms, to the exclusion of citizen obligations (Gonzales et al., 2004; Riedel et al., 2001). Other research further suggests that this reinforcement of individual rights and the accompanying neglect of collective dimensions of American politics may contribute to the general decline in citizen participation in the United States (Bricker, 1989; Garman, 1995). Funk (1998) supplied evidence that a focus on individualism encourages citizens to value individual over collective benefits, and she suggested that a more collective orientation is necessary to curb declining civic engagement.

Overall, current approaches and content in civics courses are compatible with traditions that focus on individual autonomy and rights (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Our research empirically explores whether civic-education approaches that focus on rights reinforce individualistic concerns and, thereafter, reduce levels of youth political participation.

Research in Social Psychology

Social psychological research has provided evidence for two distinct images of the self as independent and interdependent (Hui, 1988; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988). Singelis (1994) theoretically and empirically developed a scale to measure the strength of an individual’s interdependent (connected) and independent (separate and unique) self-construals. In his work, two orthogonal dimensions of the individualism–collectivism scale were supported in confirmatory factor analyses, thus suggesting that the two images of self can (and do) coexist in individuals, and that they can be measured with satisfactory reliability and validity.

Individualism–collectivism constructs have been well documented in social psychology. Levels of individualism have been demonstrated to be much higher in the United States, especially compared to non-Western cultures (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hofstede (1980) defined individualism as emotional independence from “groups, organizations, or other collectivities” (p. 221). Individualists, then, give priority to personal goals over in-group goals (Triandis et al., 1988), and emphasize values that promote these individual goals (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), the self-conceptions of citizens in Western cultures are more individualistic because of their focus on separateness and uniqueness.

In contrast to individualistic cultures, collective cultures place an emphasis on subordinating personal goals to those of the in-group (Triandis et al., 1988) and are characterized by an identity derived from a social system, rather than
from individual attributes (Hofstede, 1980). Collectivists emphasize values that promote the welfare of their in-group (Triandis et al., 1990) and tend to think of the group, rather than the individual, as the unit of analysis (Nakane, 1970). The image of self held by members of collectivistic cultures is an interdependent image that stresses connectedness, social contexts, and relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In the United States, as compared to non-Western cultures, socialization of individualism is apparent. In comparative studies of childrearing, for example, Adamopoulos and Bontempo (1984) argued that childrearing patterns around the world can be described using two dimensions: acceptance–rejection and independence–dependence. Individualistic cultures focus on acceptance and independence in childrearing that tends to promote children’s self-confidence. In contrast, collectivistic cultures promote acceptance and dependence in childrearing practices, leading to conformity. Collectivistic upbringing focuses on obedience above other childrearing values (Guthrie, 1961); whereas in the United States, parents often focus on self-fulfillment and happiness (Setiadi, 1984). Doumanis (1983) also noted that collectivism emphasizes social relationships, whereas individualism emphasizes achievement.

Educational institutions that were compared across Western and Eastern cultures differed in socializing independent versus interdependent self-construals. Children in Western cultures are grouped and tracked according to individual ability, whereas children in Eastern schools are not tracked by ability and rarely are singled out for separate instruction (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). A study by Iyengar and Lepper (1999) challenged the basic idea that increased personal choice results in increased intrinsic motivation, performance, and personal satisfaction. They suggested that children from some Eastern cultures, as compared to children from more Western cultures, actually prefer that their choices be made by significant others who are valued in-group members; whereas intrinsic motivation of American children in the study was increased by individual choice.

Although it is clear that elements of independence and interdependence are evident in every person (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Oerter, Oerter, Agostiani, Kim, & Wibowo, 1996; Spiro, 1993; Triandis, 1994, 1995; Triandis et al., 1990), some scholars have suggested that children first learn the dominant pattern of culture and learn other patterns later only to a limited degree (Rosenthal & Bornholt, 1988). For example, they suggested that young people in predominantly individualistic cultures learn independence and self-reliance first; they then may or may not learn to be good team players. Alternatively, those growing up in a collectivistic environment will first demonstrate good in-group membership, and they may develop a marginal amount of self-reliance or achievement orientation. Again, this suggests that
although individuals can hold both collectivistic and individualistic values, the dominant patterns are more likely to be adopted.

Research in Social Education

Several social education studies note that high school civics curricula, an important source of formal democratic socialization for students, generally concentrate attention on rights related to democratic citizenship at the expense of covering obligations to society. The *National Standards for Civics and Government* (Center for Civic Education, 1997) is a document that outlines what knowledge and skills students should gain from their formal civics instruction. This document—in many ways the model for civics curricula—was shown to present citizens disproportionately as passive individual rights bearers, while providing fewer examples of citizen obligations to the collective good (Riedel et al., 2001).

Given the focus on rights in the *National Standards for Civics and Government*, studies have investigated whether civics curricula mirror their emphasis on citizen rights. One such study found that civics textbooks generally reflect the content outlined in the *National Standards for Civics and Government*. A recent content analysis of widely adopted high school civics textbooks suggested that concepts associated with citizens’ rights and freedoms far outnumber concepts associated with citizen obligations (Gonzales et al., 2004). Further, Gonzales et al. suggested that the concept of political participation, outside of voting, also receives less attention than do rights in civics texts.

In another study, three civics and three United States history textbooks that are commonly used in junior high schools were examined. The results suggested that rights—at both individual and group levels—play a central role in textbooks’ “language of democracy” (Avery & Simmons, 2001–2001, p. 114). Similar to the findings of Gonzales et al. (2004), civics text references to citizen rights outnumbered mentions of duties or obligations by a ratio of almost 4 to 1. In their analysis, the authors further point to First Amendment rights or the right to freedom of expression and the right to vote as the rights most frequently mentioned. Other rights, such as the rights of change or revolution, the right to privacy, the right to bear arms, and human rights in general receive less attention. Thus, it appears that the rights that are discussed in these texts focus more on expressive, individualistic rights.

Overwhelmingly, these studies illustrate that both the *National Standards for Civics and Government* and the most widely adopted textbooks present a narrow view of citizenship, largely focusing on rights, to the relative exclusion of obligations. Thus, they present a limited, individualistic view of democratic citizenship.
Research in Political Science

Research on individualism and collectivism within political science focuses on how the predominance of individualism in American political culture influences individuals’ conceptions of citizenship. One of the leading examinations has suggested that individualism dominates contemporary moral discourse in such a way that it has become a prominent “first language” (Bellah et al., 1996, pp. 20–21) that actually works to limit political dialogue. Surprisingly, the authors noted further that individualism dominates the language of even more seemingly communal citizens. In summary, Bellah et al. suggested that individualistic notions largely rendered Americans incapable of expressing collective visions for political community.

Conover and colleagues (Conover, Crewe, & Searing, 1991; Conover, Leonard, & Searing, 1993) argued that although Americans tend to see some civic activities as duties (e.g., voting, paying taxes), they are reluctant to see more communal activities (e.g., participating in community service) as anything more than things “good citizens” do. Thus, citizens appeared to view ordinary citizenship markedly less in terms of collective pursuits than in terms of individual actions. In fact, a recent study suggested that high school students are significantly more willing to endorse civic actions when described as “important,” compared to when they are described as “duties” (Williamson et al., 2003). Interestingly, students scoring higher on a collectivistic scale were more likely to endorse citizenship actions as important than were those lower in collectivism, but there was no difference between the groups when those same actions were described as duties. The authors suggested that this result “supports the notion that in the United States, a highly individualistic culture, students are more willing to endorse civic actions as arising from personal values than from normative social imperatives” (p. 203).

Several empirical investigations within political science have explored the role of individualism—as a political culture value—in Americans’ political attitudes and, more specifically, citizens’ attitudes toward welfare policies (e.g., Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Gilens, 1995, 1999). These studies illustrated how individualism extends to and can impact political attitudes broadly, and also more specifically, in the policy domain.

Although many political scientists have examined individualism empirically as a political value, the measures are quite different from those utilized in social psychological research. These political science studies operationally define individualism as a global political culture value—often conceptually defined as economic individualism—whereas social psychological research views individualism as a global view of the self in relation to others. For example, Gilens (1995) measured individualism using one measure: “Government should not guarantee jobs; each should get ahead on their own.”
Within political science, then, scholars have suggested that individualistic notions restrict views of citizenship and deny citizens the ability to express more collective concerns (e.g., Bellah et al., 1996). Furthermore, individualism and collectivism are suggested to be unidimensional and in tension with one another. This is at odds with how collectivism and individualism are portrayed as orthogonal self-construals in social psychological research. Our study, which relies on social psychological definitions and measures of individualism, is quite different from previous empirical examinations of individualism in political science.

Expectations

In this paper, we investigate whether current approaches to civic education may contribute to declining civic engagement by affecting students’ conceptions of citizenship and, thereafter, their intentions to participate in politics. The contribution of this research is to bridge several strands of research across disciplines to develop a more thorough understanding of the negative consequences of primarily rights-focused curricula on students’ intentions to engage in participatory politics.

We suggest that the streams of research across the disciplines of social psychology, social education, and political science all offer something substantial to our understanding of individualism, collectivism, and related political attitudes and behaviors. Social psychologists have contributed greatly by demonstrating the important role that independent versus interdependent self-construals play in guiding individual goals, priorities, and conceptions of relationships to groups. However, throughout their inquiry, scholars have maintained a neutral stance with regard to the impact of interdependent or independent worldviews or self-conceptions on such individual outcomes as political behaviors. They also have failed to explore the potentially negative consequences of these self-construals on the collective good.

Our specific expectations are that students’ levels of individualism will be related to their endorsements of rights and obligations, which reflect individualism and collectivism in the civics domain. Furthermore, because civics textbooks seem to largely reflect a bias toward mentions of rights over obligations, we expect students to endorse rights more strongly than obligations (Gonzales et al., 2004; Riedel et al., 2001). Finally, we hypothesize, consistent with the political science literature, that political attitudes with respect to rights and obligations will have effects on students’ intended and actual political behaviors. Consistent with prominent political science research and theory (e.g., Bellah et al., 1996; Conover et al., 1991, 1993),
strong endorsement of rights is expected to have a negative effect on civic behavior, such that rights-entitled students will be less inclined to participate in extracurricular activities associated with citizenship. In addition, endorsement of obligations—because it reflects a more responsible, collective conception of citizenship—will encourage civic-related participation and voting intentions in high school students.

Overview

The present study is part of an ongoing research program examining adolescent and teacher values and conceptions of citizenship. Researchers administered surveys in intact civics and government classes at seven different public high schools. Measures of individualism, collectivism, rights, obligations, civics-related extracurricular participation, and voting intentions were administered. From these questionnaire data, we constructed a structural equation model to test our predictions regarding the impact of rights-focused civics curricula and students’ reported civic-related participation and intentions to vote.

Method

Participants

Participants for the present study were recruited from 12th-grade American government and 9th-grade civics classes in several urban, suburban, and exurban public schools in a large city in the upper Midwest. The total sample size was 551. Racial and ethnic demographics were as follows: 88 Asian American/Pacific Islanders (16.0%), 272 White/Caucasians (49.4%), 129 Black/African Americans (23.4%), 7 Latinos (1.3%), 18 American Indians (3.3%), and 37 who did not specify group membership (6.7%). Within the sample, 300 students were female (54.4%), 232 students were male (42.1%), and 19 students (3.4%) did not report their gender. Of the sample, 239 (43.4%) were drawn from 9th-grade civics students, while the remainder were drawn from students enrolled in 12th-grade American government courses.

3There were 233 students (42.3%) from urban schools and 314 students (57.0%) from suburban or exurban school settings (4 students were missing information, 0.7%).
Measures

Collectivism. A 10-item scale was constructed from three measures of collectivism in the literature (Deaux & Reid, 2000; Hui, 1988; Singelis, 1994). These items measured more general collective orientations (e.g., “You should return a favor if a classmate lends a helping hand”), as well as deference to either group opinions or to authority (e.g., “It’s important for me to respect decisions made by a group I belong to”). Students rated agreement with each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability for this scale was adequate (α = .79).

Individualism. An eight-item individualism scale, composed of items developed by Singelis (1994), was utilized. Individualism items measure importance of independence (e.g., “Being independent of others is very important to me”) and individual comfort in a group (e.g., “I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards”). Each item was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability for this scale also was adequate (α = .73).

Obligations. Students were asked to rate 22 items according to their importance to being a good citizen. Items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (definitely not important) to 4 (definitely important). These items, which included several activities directly associated with multiple views of citizenship in the United States, were borrowed from work by Torney-Purta and colleagues (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001) in their international investigation of citizenship education more broadly. In general, the items covered a wide range of obligations to various levels of government (e.g., to show respect for government representatives), expressive obligations (e.g., to participate in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust), obligations to tolerate others unlike yourself (e.g., to accept people who are different), and obligations to keep abreast of current issues (e.g., to follow political issues in the newspaper, on the radio, on TV). Given the broad scope of these items, students were able to express support regarding several notions about citizenship. Reliability for this scale was acceptable (α = .85).

Rights. In order to measure rights, an 11-item scale (α = .85) was utilized. Students rated the items according to how much they considered each activity to be a right on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (definitely not a right) to 4 (definitely a right). These items contained expressive rights (e.g., right to express your opinions or right to vote) and more basic rights (e.g., right to own property).

Interested readers can contact the authors for copies of all survey items and scales used in this research.
Civic behaviors. Students’ time spent participating in several civic-related school activities served as one of our main measures of participation. Students rated eight activity categories on the extent to which they devoted time to the activity on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (no time at all) to 4 (a lot of time). The activities include civic organizations (e.g., political and civic service clubs), school organizations (e.g., student government), and creative activities (e.g., speech, drama, or debate).

Voting. All students were first asked “Do you plan to vote in the elections when you turn 18 years of age? Why or why not?” Then, a second question asked “If you said ‘Yes’ to the previous question, how likely do you think it is that you will vote?” Students rated their likelihood to vote on a 3-point scale from (not sure) to 2 (probably will vote) to 3 (definitely will vote). Overall, these measures were collapsed into one summary variable representing students’ likelihood to vote, with the following scale: 0 = “No” to Question 1; 1 = Not sure; 2 = Probably will vote; 3 = Definitely will vote. Zero order correlations between all variables of interest are reported in Table 1.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before drawing the parameters for our structural equation model, we conducted preliminary tests to examine gender and racial differences in the variables under study. For gender, there were small persistent differences
between boys and girls across all variables, with girls more likely to endorse all of the scales. There were also small differences across ethnicity. We examined asymmetrical endorsement of individualism as opposed to collectivism, and rights as opposed to obligations. A correlated-sample $t$ test reveals that students were no more likely to endorse individualism ($M = 4.12, SD = 0.84$) than to endorse collectivism ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.80$), $t(544) = 1.61, ns$. A second correlated-sample $t$ test also reveals that, as expected, political rights ($M = 3.62, SD = 0.44$) were endorsed more strongly than were political obligations ($M = 3.09, SD = 0.39$), $t(550) = 29.50, p < .001$. In fact, students evidenced a rare show of solidarity in their endorsement of political rights: Fully 25% of the sample (138 students) gave full support for all 11 items measuring rights, reporting them all to be definitely a right.

Proposed Model

The central intent of our paper was to examine the political and civic consequences of adolescents’ endorsement of individualism and collectivism, as well as obligations and rights. Toward that end, we developed a model that would explain how students’ individual differences in individualism would predict certain political attitudes that ultimately would lead to political intentions and behaviors. We expected that individualism would lead to students’ greater endorsement of political rights. Similarly, we predicted that increased collectivism would lead to a greater propensity to support citizenship obligations. To assess a potential relationship between individualism and collectivism, we included an unanalyzed association between these two constructs in our model.

We expected differences in political attitudes to bear on political intentions to vote, as well as on extracurricular involvement at school. Specifically, students who showed stronger support of citizenship obligations were expected to report stronger intention to vote in the future, and to be more likely to report participating in extracurricular activities. Students who were stronger in their support of rights were expected to be less likely to participate in extracurricular activities. This model was tested, and although the fit of the model was decent (goodness-of-fit index [GFI] = .94, adjusted goodness-of-fit

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5There were differences in mean levels of collectivism and individualism across ethnic groups. For collectivism measures, Whites ($M = 4.16, SD = 0.71$) and Asians ($M = 4.21, SD = 0.86$) showed greater collectivism than did Blacks ($M = 3.87, SD = 0.82$), Hispanics ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.87$), and Native Americans ($M = 3.62, SD = 1.26$). In terms of individualism, Blacks ($M = 4.33, SD = 0.89$) showed somewhat higher levels than did the other groups: Whites ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.78$), Asians ($M = 4.08, SD = 0.84$), Hispanics ($M = 3.93, SD = 0.71$), and Native Americans ($M = 3.96, SD = 1.00$).
Final Model

As a result, we added more paths to the model to explain the residual covariance. First, individualism was linked clearly and directly to intention to vote and to student participation, above and beyond the contribution of political attitudes. Therefore, these relationships are feasible insofar as expressive aspects of individualism may lead students to be more politically active. Thus, we added two paths from individualism to intention to vote, and to extracurricular participation. Another strong, unexplained association emerged between political obligations and the endorsement of political rights. This association might be explained by patriotic involvement. To the extent that students commit more strongly to their obligations to the nation and society, they may feel more entitled to the rights inherent in democracy and the Constitution. For this reason, a path was added from political obligations to political rights.

The fit of the final model was very good (GFI = .99, AGFI = .96, RMR = .01, RMSEA = .04, $\chi^2$/df = 3.39), with all paths significant in the predicted direction, $t_s > 2.60, ps < .01$. Figure 1 presents a diagram of the model with standardized regression weights.

Discussion

Our study provides preliminary empirical confirmation of three hypotheses that span the interdisciplinary boundaries among social psychology, civics education, and political science. First, as predicted, the social psychological constructs of individualism and collectivism were positively correlated

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6Although our final model includes a relationship between obligations and rights, we also tested other specifications of this relationship. When we specified a reciprocal relationship between the two, the path from rights to obligations was nonsignificant (GFI = .99, AGFI = .95, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .07), $\chi^2(5, N = 551) = 3.98$. Another acceptable model tested the path from rights to obligations. However, the goodness-of-fit statistics were not as strong as in the final model (GFI = .98, AGFI = .92, RMSEA = .07), $\chi^2(6, N = 551) = 6.36$.

7Although rights plausibly may cause obligations, the reverse relationship has stronger support from the models discussed in our analysis (see Footnote 6).
to the corresponding political attitudes related to rights and obligations. Second, mirroring the differential coverage favoring political rights over obligations in civics textbooks (Gonzales et al., 2004; Riedel et al., 2001), students’ own endorsement of political attitudes supported rights more than obligations. Finally, consistent with the literature in political science, there were negative political consequences to preferential support of rights (e.g., political individualism) over obligations (e.g., political collectivism). Students who thought themselves largely entitled to every political right that we posed to them were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities related to civics and no more likely than others to vote. In contrast, students who saw themselves as more obligated to their nation and community were more likely to participate in civics-related school activities, and expressed greater intention to vote. Of course, it is important to note that this evidence is preliminary. Our results in Figure 1 are based on a particular student sample in the upper Midwest, and data from a different sample might result in a somewhat different model.

Nonetheless, the current study suggests that there are negative consequences to one particular form of political individualism; namely, a rights-based individualism. Apparently, students who strongly believe that they automatically possess the many rights and freedoms that our democracy has to offer may overlook the important reciprocal relation between individual rights on the one hand, and the fulfillment of obligations so essential for a healthy civic society on the other hand. Our findings also call into question

Figure 1. Final structural equation model with standardized path coefficients. Correlations differ from 0 as follows: \( * p < .01 \), \( ** p < .001 \), \( *** p < .000 \).
the overwhelming focus of rights coverage in high school civics textbooks, as opposed to more elaborate discussion of political obligation and community involvement. If we, as a society, consider the democratic involvement of our youth as citizens as an important pedagogical goal of civics instruction, we also might consider teaching them more about political obligations and participation—and less about rights—as a more plausible method of reaching that goal.

Our study also suggests indirectly that the agenda-setting focus on rights, to the exclusion of obligations in civics texts, may diminish the democratic involvement of students. Not only do authors’ focus on rights spell less attention devoted to obligations and civic and political participation in civics textbooks (Gonzales et al., 2004), but an individual-rights focus also might directly contribute to diminished civic and political involvement among young people. Other researchers have pointed to current difficulties with realizing democracy in America. For instance, Putnam (1995a, 1995b, 2000) demonstrated that civic involvement and trust have declined substantially in the last 60 years. Within the domain of education, Marciano (1997) argued that civics education undermines democracy by one-sided presentation of history that neglects several perspectives and allows limited democratic debate within the contested domain of politics. Beyond this, students may be less encouraged to be politically active when they are reminded only of the rights they possess, and not of the civic and political obligations upon which they should act.

In addition to our expected findings, we uncovered some surprising ones. Previous studies by Singelis (1994) have suggested that collectivism and individualism constructs are orthogonal. However, in the present study, we found a strong relationship between the two. Perhaps this is because in a high school sample, students are less likely to conceive of any tension between individualism and collectivism. It is possible that both constructs are well socialized, and both are seen by youth as socially valuable. For example, students may see individual expression and uniqueness as positive qualities, but also view helping and respecting other people as important. Perhaps adolescent students have not yet encountered situations in which they experience the tension between individualistic expression and the honoring of the larger group’s norms and directions.

We also found that individualism, though not the endorsement of political rights, was positively related to participation and voting intentions. Therefore, strong endorsement of the importance of political rights does not seem to be a politically desirable aspect of individualism, as a more general interpersonal orientation. One possible explanation is that individualism, after portioning out the entitlement reflected in the strong endorsement of political rights, indexes varying levels of expressiveness. Those who believe
that they are unique believe that they have something to offer the political community. Therefore, they are more active and participatory.

Finally, there was a strong relationship between obligations and rights, even controlling statistically for an acquiescence response bias. This relationship may have manifested because both measures reflect political attitudes and, therefore, could be explained by students’ consistent treatment of all political attitudes. Additionally, students who feel more politically obligated to their nation and community also may believe that they should receive the rights granted to members of the community, in exchange for their obligations. This view of rights and obligations as reciprocal is certainly in keeping with communitarian ideals (see Bellah et al., 1996; Etzioni, 1993; Galston, 1998; Glendon, 1991; Sandel, 1996).8

Our examination, while not offering a direct test of the relationship between civics curriculum content and political behavior, does indirectly highlight the impact of rights-focused civics curricula on students’ political participation. While we understand that other sources of socialization (e.g., peer groups, parents, culture) may also impact students’ levels of individualism and collectivism, our analysis still alludes to the negative consequences of students’ endorsement of political rights and overemphasis on these rights in civics courses. The present study illustrated that despite the overwhelming focus of civics curricula on individualism and the exclusion of more collective concerns, our culture still socializes the desirability of both constructs, and students appear to hold and express both collectivistic and individualistic attitudes. However, we found that while endorsement of obligations increases students’ intentions to vote and participate in civic and extracurricular activities, endorsement of rights negatively impacts participatory measures.

We cannot establish from this study whether civics curricula have contributed to the decline of citizen participation among young people in the

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8Recent research in cross-cultural psychology has revealed that response bias (e.g., extreme responses, acquiescence response sets) is related both to individualism and collectivism and to ethnic group membership, even in such an individualistic society as the United States (e.g., Clarke, 2000; Hui & Triandis, 1989; Marin & Marin, 1989). Therefore, to test for the possibility of response bias, we used a common structural equation modeling technique recommended as one of the best post hoc methods for dealing with multiple threats of this kind (for a review, see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). An analysis was run in which we created three item parcels or aggregate measures for each of our latent constructs: individualism, collectivism, rights, and obligations. This created a total of 12 measured variables (3 × 4). Then, we added a latent construct that represented the method variance. The 12 measured variables loaded onto both their theoretical construct (e.g., collectivism), and also onto the method factor. All of the other paths were kept the same in the analysis. All paths from the method factor to the measured variables were significant, indicating probable response bias. Nevertheless, although most path coefficients were slightly attenuated, all of the prior hypothesized paths retained their significance (|β| > .14, ps < .05), with one exception: the path from individualism to rights (β = .04, p = .60). The fit of this model was acceptable (GFI = .95, AGFI = .91, RMR = .03, RMSEA = .07). χ²(59, N = 551) = 3.48.
United States. However, civics curricula represent a socialization mechanism that could contribute to students’ sense of individualism or collectivism. Our investigation opens opportunities for future research to further explore the potentially negative consequences of collective and individual self-construals on political behaviors, conceptions of citizenship, and, ultimately, the collective good.

References


