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Postprint / Postprint
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Attributions to Discrimination and Self-Esteem: The Role of Group Identification and Appraisals

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This study tested the hypothesis that appraisals of discrimination (i.e. its perceived severity, global aspects, stability, and uncontrollability) mediate the relationship between attributions to discrimination and personal self-esteem. It also tested three models of how ethnic group identification is related to discrimination attributions, discrimination appraisals, and personal self-esteem. In a cross-sectional study of 160 Latino-American students, group identification was positively related to attributing ambiguous negative events to discrimination. Discrimination attributions were related to appraising discrimination as more global and severe. These latter appraisals, in turn, were related to lower self-esteem. No direct relationships were observed between self-esteem and either group identification or discrimination attributions. Results illustrate the importance of appraisals in understanding the relationship between perceived discrimination and self-esteem.

KEYWORDS   appraisals of discrimination, attributions to discrimination, self-esteem

FOR members of stigmatized groups, the threat of being a target of prejudice or discrimination is a defining feature of daily life (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002). Discrimination limits access to resources such as employment, income, housing, education, and medical care (Braddock & McPartland, 1987; Cash, Gillen, & Burns, 1977; Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991; Treiman & Hartmann, 1981), compromises physical well being (Allison, 1998; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999), excludes individuals from many domains of social life (Major & Eccleston, 2005), and often exposes targets to physical violence (Herek, 2000). Hence, stigmatization

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and its accompanying prejudice and discrimi-
nation exert a substantial, negative impact on
the quality of life of its targets.

Because self-esteem is at least partly depen-
dent on social evaluations (Cooley, 1956; Mead,
1934), inclusion (Leary, 1990), and the percep-
tion that one is valued by others (Pyszczynski,
Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997), many scholars
assume that repeatedly being the target of
prejudice and discrimination will result in
lowered self-esteem and a poor self-concept
(e.g. Allport, 1954/1979; Branscombe, Schmitt,
& Harvey, 1999; Cartwright, 1950). For example,
Cartwright argued, 'To a considerable extent,
personal feelings of worth depend on the social
evaluation of the group with which a person is
identified. Self-hatred and feelings of worthless-
ness tend to arise from membership in under-
privileged or outcast groups' (1950; p. 440).

Reviews of the empirical literature, however,
demonstrate that membership in a stigmatized
group does not necessarily result in lower self-
esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989; Twenge &
Crocker, 2002). Members of some groups that
are chronic targets of prejudice and discrimi-
nation (e.g. African-Americans) have higher
self-esteem on average compared to nonstigma-
tized groups (e.g. European Americans),
whereas members of other devalued groups
(e.g. Latino-Americans) report lower self-
esteem on average compared to more valued
groups (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). In addition,
within stigmatized groups, some individuals
have high self-esteem, whereas others do not
(Friedman & Brownell, 1995).

Because individuals who are targets of dis-
crimination sometimes may not perceive it
(Crosby, 1984), recent research has focused on
the relationship between perceptions of being
a target of discrimination (rather than stigma-
tized group membership, per se) and self-
esteem. Some scholars assert that perceiving
the self as a victim of discrimination will have
a direct, negative effect on self-esteem among
members of stigmatized groups (e.g. Schmitt &
Branscombe, 2002). Consistent with this view,
several studies found that the more members
of disadvantaged groups, such as African-
Americans, gays, and women, believe that they

or members of their group are victims of dis-
crimination, the lower their self-esteem and
psychological well-being (Diaz, Ayala, Bein,
Henne, & Marin, 2001; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, &
Ferguson, 2001).

Other scholars, in contrast, assert that
attributing outcomes to discrimination can
have a positive effect on personal self-esteem if
it allows people to discount internal, stable,
global aspects of self as causal (Crocker &
Major, 1989; Dion & Earn, 1975). Consistent
with this latter view, several experiments found
a positive relationship between perceptions of
discrimination and self-esteem, particularly
when attributing negative events to discrimi-
nation leads to reduced self-blame (e.g. Major,
Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003; Major, Quinton, &
Schmader, 2003). Still other studies report no
direct relationship between perceptions of dis-
crimination and self-esteem among African-
Americans (Branscombe et al., 1999; Brown,
2001; Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax,
1994; Mendoza-Denton, Purdie, Downey, &
Davis, 2002), and women, especially if individ-
ual differences in rejection sensitivity are con-
trolled (Eccleston & Major, 2005).

These inconsistencies illustrate that not all
individuals respond in the same way to per-
ceived discrimination. Therefore it is important
to identify personal and situational factors that
affect the tendency to attribute negative events
to discrimination, and the relationship between
perceiving the self as a victim of discrimination
and self-esteem (see Major et al., 2002; Major,
McCoy, Kaiser, & Quinton, 2003 for reviews).
This study applied a stress and coping frame-
work (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to understand
the relationship between perceptions of dis-
crimination and self-esteem among members of
a disadvantaged ethnic minority group (Latino-
Americans).

Appraisals of discrimination

According to a stress and coping framework,
perceiving oneself as a target of prejudice
and/or discrimination is a potentially stressful
life event (e.g. Clark et al., 1999; Major et al.,
2002; Miller & Major, 2000). Individuals'

emotional responses to this event are a function of how they cognitively appraise the act or event and the coping strategies they use to deal with the event if it is appraised as stressful (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). An event is appraised as stressful to the extent that internal or external demands posed by the event are perceived as taxing the adaptive resources of the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, an underlying premise of theories of stress and coping is that exposure to potentially stressful events does not necessarily lead to reduced well-being. The cognitive appraisal process gives meaning to events, and determines responses to those events. Cognitive appraisals are affected by characteristics of the individual (e.g. optimism, group identification), characteristics of the situation (e.g. presence or absence of social support), and characteristics of the stressor (e.g. controllability, proximity, predictability, severity) (Kaiser, Major, & McCoy, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; McCoy & Major, 2003).

Research derived from learned helplessness theory (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) suggests that several cognitive appraisals are particularly important predictors of psychological well-being in response to a negative life event. These include the extent to which the cause of a negative event is appraised as stable vs. unstable (i.e. likely to change or not), global vs. specific (i.e. likely to affect many or only a few aspects of one's life), severe vs. minor, and controllable or uncontrollable. Individuals who appraise the cause of negative events as more stable, global, severe, and uncontrollable are more likely to be depressed and have low self-esteem relative to those who appraise the cause as more unstable, specific, minor, and controllable (Abramson et al., 1978; Seligman, Abramson, Semmel, & von Baeyer, 1979; Taylor, Lichtman, & Wood, 1984). If the cause of a negative event is limited to a specific situation, for example, individuals may avoid the situation or focus on aspects of his or her life not affected by the event, whereas when the cause of the negative event is widespread, it is more difficult to escape its influence (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002).

Drawing upon the above literatures, we hypothesized that individuals vary in the extent to which they would regard discrimination as likely to affect many areas of their life (global), to have a severe impact on their lives (severe), as unlikely to change (stable), and as something they could personally control (controllable). Although researchers have speculated that appraisals of discrimination may be an important determinant of its affective consequences (e.g. Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002), to our knowledge, no research has directly assessed how individuals appraise discrimination or the implications of these appraisals for self-esteem.

Determinants of discrimination appraisals

A variety of factors are likely to influence the extent to which discrimination is appraised as stable, severe, global, or uncontrollable. Certainly, objective features of the discriminatory event influence these appraisals, as do past experiences with discrimination (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Characteristics of the specific situation (e.g. the presence or absence of other ingroup members) and of the individual (e.g. optimism) may also affect the extent to which discrimination is appraised as harmful. For example, Kaiser, Major, and McCoy (2004) found that compared to women low in dispositional optimism, highly optimistic women who read about pervasive sexism appraised it as less personally threatening, and had higher self-esteem. Furthermore, these threat appraisals mediated the interaction between optimism and experimental condition.

In this study we examined two factors as predictors of discrimination appraisals. First, we tested the hypothesis that people who tend to attribute ambiguous negative events to discrimination would also be more likely to appraise discrimination as global, harmful, severe, and uncontrollable. This hypothesis is based on evidence that members of stigmatized groups differ in the extent to which they expect to be targets of negative stereotypes and discrimination (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pinel, 1999). Individuals who expect to be rejected

based on a stigmatized social identity pay more attention to subliminally presented information that is threatening to their social identity, are more distrustful of outgroup members, are more anxious in intergroup settings, and are more depressed compared to those lower in expectations of prejudice (Kaiser, Vick, & Major, in press; Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pinel, 1999). Consistent with a stress and coping perspective, we hypothesized that individuals who tend to attribute ambiguous events to discrimination are vulnerable to lower self-esteem, to the extent that they also tend to appraise discrimination in more harmful ways. We did not predict a direct relationship between discrimination attributions and self-esteem.

Second, we examined group identification as a predictor of discrimination appraisals. In the current study we defined group identification in terms of the importance or centrality of the group to the self (e.g. Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003). Group identification plays a complex role in how members of stigmatized groups construe and cope with the predicament of being targets of prejudice. Group identification has been shown experimentally to increase the likelihood that individuals will attribute negative, attributionally ambiguous events to discrimination (Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003; Operario & Fiske, 2001). Experimentally induced perceptions of prejudice have also been shown to increase group identification, especially among those who are initially highly identified (Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001; McCoy & Major, 2003). Finally, group identification has been shown to moderate the effects of experimentally induced perceptions of prejudice on self-esteem. McCoy and Major (2003) demonstrated that women low in gender identification had higher self-esteem if they received a negative evaluation from a sexist male than from a nonsexist male, whereas women high in group identification did not differ between conditions. In short, research has shown that group identification is an antecedent to and a consequence of perceived discrimination, and also moderates the relationship between perceived

discrimination and self-esteem. In addition, a direct positive relationship between group identification and self-esteem has frequently been observed (e.g. Branscombe et al., 1999; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998).

Given these differing ways in which group identification may affect perceived discrimination and self-esteem, we tested three different models of the relationships among group identification, discrimination attributions, appraisals, and self-esteem. The first *Group Identity Lens* model (see Figure 1) hypothesizes that group identification is positively associated with the tendency to attribute ambiguous negative events to discrimination. This model is based on evidence that people who are highly identified with their group are more likely to interpret ambiguous information through a group lens than are those less identified (e.g. Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003). Discrimination attributions, in turn, are predicted to be positively related to appraising discrimination as harmful (global, severe, stable, and uncontrollable). Harm appraisals, in turn, are hypothesized to be negatively related to self-esteem. No direct relationship between discrimination attributions and self-esteem is predicted, whereas a positive direct relationship between group identification and self-esteem is predicted.

The second *Group Identity Resource* model (see Figure 2) reverses the presumed causal order of the relationship between attributions to discrimination and group identification. This model is based on the theoretical perspective that perceiving discrimination leads individuals to identify more strongly with their group. Group identification, in turn, is predicted to be directly and positively related to self-esteem (Allport, 1954/1979; Branscombe et al., 1999). Discrimination attributions, in contrast, are predicted to be directly and negatively related to self-esteem (Branscombe et al., 1999). The model shown in Figure 2 also tests the hypothesis that group identification is directly related to how discrimination is appraised. High group identification is hypothesized to be a resource that helps individuals cope in the face of discrimination (Major et al., 2002; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).
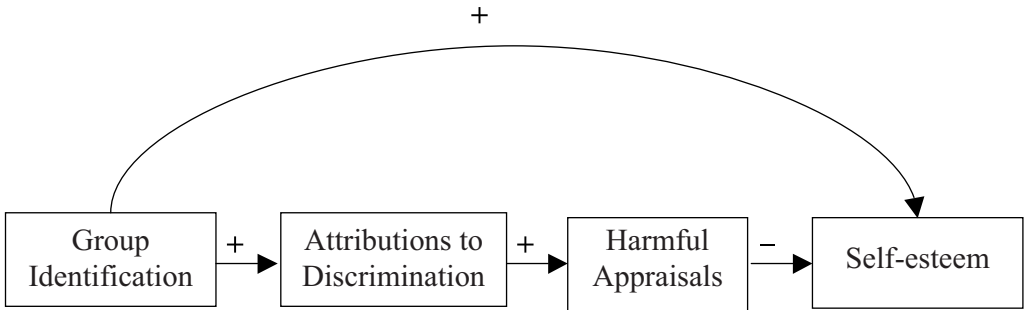
Figure 1. Path model demonstrating the hypothesized *Group Identity Lens* model.

For example, if highly identified individuals feel that other members of their group can be counted on for support, this may lead them to appraise discrimination as having a less severe impact on their lives. In this case group identification would be negatively related to appraising discrimination as harmful.

The third *Group Identity Moderator* model (see Figure 3) does not make assumptions about whether group identification is an antecedent or consequence of discrimination attributions. Because experiments reveal that it can be both, this model assumes a bidirectional relationship. In addition, this model tests the interaction between group identification and discrimination attributions, as well as their main effects, as predictors of discrimination appraisals. This model is based on evidence that group identification moderates the effect of an experimental induction of perceived prejudice on self-esteem, and does so via its impact on appraisals

of prejudice as threatening to the self (McCoy & Major, 2003, Experiment 2). The Group Identity Moderator model further predicts that group identification, discrimination attributions, and their interaction are directly and negatively related to discrimination appraisals, which in turn are directly related to self-esteem. Thus discrimination appraisals are predicted to mediate the relationships between group identification, discrimination attributions, and their interaction and self-esteem. As in the prior models, the more individuals appraise discrimination as global, severe, stable, and uncontrollable, the lower their self-esteem is predicted to be.

Overview of current study

Latino-American students were asked to consider five attributionally ambiguous events and to indicate the probability that each event,
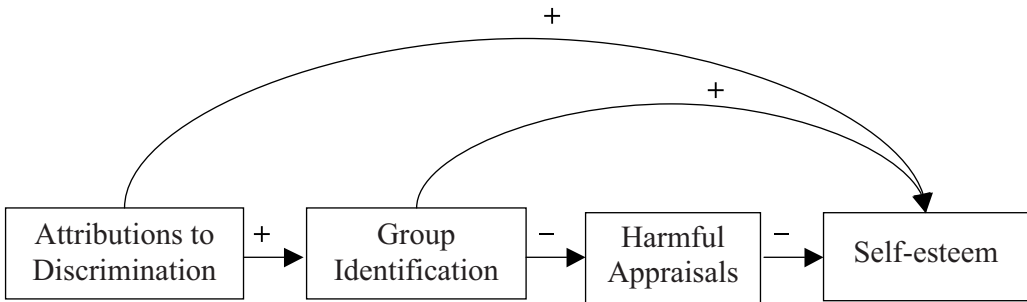

Figure 2. Path model demonstrating the hypothesized *Group Identity Resource* model.
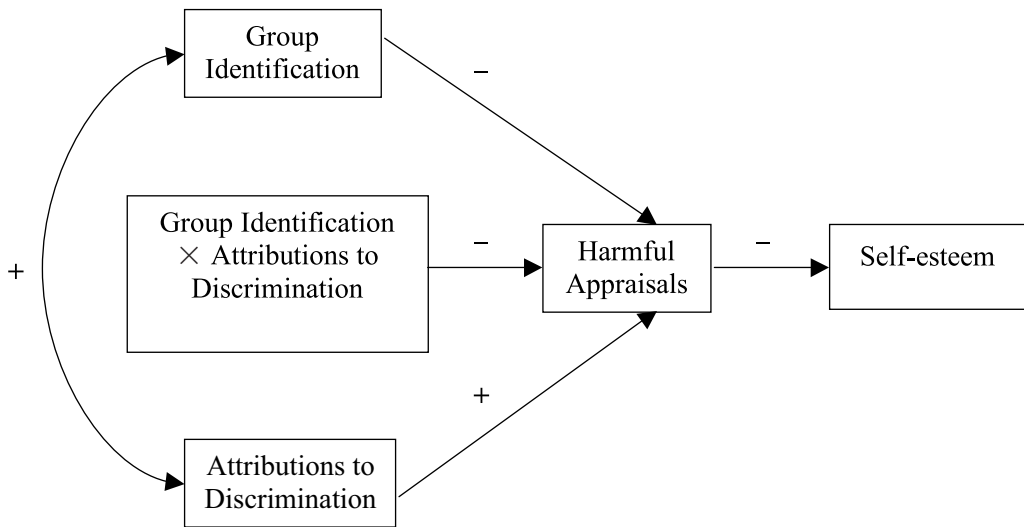
Figure 3. Path model demonstrating the hypothesized *Group Identity Moderator* model.

if it had happened to them, could have been due to prejudice based on their ethnicity. Responses were averaged across events to yield a measure of discrimination attributions. Participants then were asked to assume that each of the negative events was indeed caused by discrimination, and to indicate the uncontrollability, stability, globality, and severity of that cause. These were summed across scenarios to yield four types of discrimination appraisals. Measures of ethnic group identity and global self-esteem were also assessed. Three different models of the relationships among discrimination attributions, discrimination appraisals, group identification, and self-esteem were tested.

Method

Participants
Participants were 41 male and 119 female undergraduates at the University of California, Santa Barbara who participated in partial fulfillment of a requirement for the introductory psychology course. All students who completed all the primary measures of interest and who categorized themselves as Latino/Hispanic were

included in this study ($N = 160$). Approximately 17% of Latino students were immigrants who had lived in the United States for between 6 and 20 years ($M = 13.42$). Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 22 ($M = 18.65$).

Procedures and measures
Study measures were included in a larger packet of questionnaires given to students at the beginning of the academic quarter. The order of measures was randomized within each packet, except that all participants completed the demographic questionnaire before all other questionnaires.

Discrimination attributions To measure individual differences in the tendency to attribute ambiguous events to discrimination, participants read five ambiguous scenarios, each of which could reasonably have been caused by ethnic prejudice (see Table 1). These items were taken from a 10-item scale constructed by Branscombe et al. (1999). Due to time and space constraints, the five items most relevant to a college sample were selected. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which each situation was due to ethnic prejudice on a scale

ranging from 0 (due to factors other than prejudice) to 100 (completely due to prejudice). Responses were averaged across the five scenarios to yield a measure of discrimination attribution style (alpha = .89).

Discrimination appraisals In order to assess appraisals of the harmfulness of discrimination, we next asked participants to imagine that each of the five scenarios about which they had made judgments concerning prejudice was definitely caused by discrimination based on their ethnicity. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which the cause, discrimination, 'is something that I can personally control' (controllability appraisal), 'is unlikely to change' (stability appraisal), 'will affect many areas of my life' (globality appraisal), and 'will have a severe impact on my life' (severity appraisal). Each judgment was made on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 6 (very much). We computed a score for each type of appraisal by averaging across participants' appraisals of discrimination for each of the five scenarios. We reverse-scored the controllability appraisal items so that high scores reflected the extent to which discrimination was *un*controllable. The coefficient alpha for the uncontrollability appraisal was .81, the stability appraisal .80, the globality appraisal .87, and the severity appraisal .89.

Group identification We assessed the extent to which participants viewed their ethnic group as an important aspect of the self, using Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) four-item Identity scale. Participants rated the extent to which four statements were true of them on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 6 (very much). For example, 'The ethnic group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am'. The alpha was .81.

Personal self-esteem We assessed self-esteem with the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1979). Participants rated the extent to which each of 10 statements (e.g. 'I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others') was true of them on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 6 (very much). The alpha was .85.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among measured variables are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Averaged across situations and participants, participants rated the probability that the events in the scenarios were due to discrimination as 36.01%. Participants varied greatly, however, in their estimates that

Table 1. Attribution to discrimination items

	Mean	SD	Observed range
Suppose you go into a fancy restaurant. Your server seems to be taking care of all the other customers except you. You are the last person whose order is taken.	44.28	32.38	0–100
Suppose you apply for a job that you believed you are qualified for. After the interview you learn that you didn't get the job.	34.28	28.57	0–100
Suppose you go to look at an apartment for rent. The manager of the building refuses to show it to you saying that it has already been rented.	32.95	31.42	0–100
Suppose you are attracted to a particular man/woman of a different ethnicity. You ask that person out for a date and you are turned down.	31.13	28.41	0–100
Suppose you are driving a few miles over the speed limit and the police pull you over. You receive a ticket for the maximum amount allowable.	37.41	32.26	0–100

discrimination was the cause of the events described (observed range = 0–100). On average, participants saw the discrimination encountered in the scenarios as uncontrollable ($M = 3.82$), moderately stable ($M = 3.14$), restricted rather than global ($M = 2.31$), and as not very severe ($M = 1.99$).

Correlations among measures

Inspection of the zero-order correlations in Table 2 reveals that as expected, discrimination attributions were unrelated to self-esteem ($r = .01$). Ethnic group identification also was unrelated to self-esteem ($r = .10$). Discrimination attributions and group identification were positively and significantly correlated ($r = .33$).

We expected that the four types of appraisals would be positively related to each other. However, the uncontrollability appraisal was unrelated to any of the other appraisals (see Table 2). Furthermore, although the stability appraisal was significantly positively related to the globality and severity appraisals, the correlations were modest ($r = .36$ and $.30$ respectively). The severity and globality appraisals, in contrast, were very strongly related ($r = .89$). Based on these correlations, we combined the globality and severity appraisals to form a composite globality/severity appraisal measure. We examined the implications of the controllability and stability appraisals independently of this composite globality/severity appraisal.

Model testing

We tested models using path analyses techniques. Path analyses were conducted using Amos software (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) and maximum likelihood estimation. This sample size ($N = 160$) was adequate for testing our proposed models. Model fit was assessed with a joint consideration of the chi-square statistic, comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The chi-square statistic tests the hypothesis that the covariance matrix implied by the model is equal to the observed covariance matrix. Adequate model fit is evidenced by a nonsignificant chi-square. However, the chi-square test is strongly influenced by sample size. Therefore, we included two additional fit indices. CFI measures the degree to which the hypothesized model fits the data better than the independence model. Values range from 0 to 1, with values greater than .90 considered adequate fit, and greater than .95 good fit. RMSEA assesses how the hypothesized model, with optimally chosen parameters would approximate the population covariance matrix. Smaller values indicate better fit, with values less than .08 indicating adequate fit, and less than .05 good fit.

We first tested the Group Identity Lens model shown in Figure 1.[1] This model predicts that individuals who are highly identified with their ethnic group will be more likely to attribute ambiguous situations to discrimination. In turn,

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among measured variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Attributions to discrimination	–						
2. Globality of discrimination	.35*	–					
3. Severity of discrimination	.36*	.89*	–				
4. Stability of discrimination	.19*	.36*	.30*	–			
5. Uncontrollablity of discrimination	.00	–.01	–.04		–		
6. Self-esteem	.01	–.10	–.15*	.04	.09	–	
7. Group identity	.33*	.23*	.14+	.12	–.07	.10	–
Means	36.01	2.31	1.99	3.14	3.81	4.67	3.76
Standard deviations	25.59	1.34	1.41	1.28	1.39	0.90	1.45

+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$.
Note: Scale values range from 0 to 6, with the exception of the attributions to prejudice scale, which ranges from 0 to 100.

a discrimination attribution style is positively related to appraising these events as harmful (uncontrollable stable, and global/severe).[2] Appraising discriminatory events as harmful, in turn, is negatively related to self-esteem. In addition, identification with one's ethnic group is predicted to be directly and positively related to self-esteem. The model is shown in Figure 4 with standardized parameter estimates. The model fits the data well ($\chi^2(6, 160) = 2.24$, *ns*; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00). As predicted, Latinos who were highly identified with their ethnic group were more likely to attribute ambiguous negative events as due to prejudice ($\beta = .33$, $p <$. 01). In turn, attributing these events to discrimination was positively related to appraising discrimination as more global/severe ($\beta = .36$, $p < .01$), and more stable ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$), but not more uncontrollable ($\beta = .00$). Appraising discrimination as more global/severe was negatively related to self-esteem ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$), but neither appraising discrimination as uncontrollable ($\beta = .10$) nor stable ($\beta = .08$) was significantly related to self-esteem. There was a marginally significant positive relationship between group identification and self-esteem ($\beta = .13$, $p < .10$).

Next, we tested the Group Identity Resource model shown in Figure 2. According to this model, discrimination attributions are positively related to group identification. Higher group identification, in turn, is negatively related to appraising discrimination as harmful. In turn, harm appraisals are negatively related to self-esteem. The model also predicts that group identification is directly positively related to self-esteem, and that discrimination attributions are directly negatively related to self-esteem. The model is shown in Figure 5 with standardized parameter estimates. The model did not fit the data well ($\chi^2(5, 160) = 18.62$, $p < .01$; CFI = .76, RMSEA = .13). There was a positive and significant path from attributions to discrimination to group identification ($\beta = .33$, $p < .01$). However, contrary to the hypothesized model, there was no direct relationship between attributions to discrimination and self-esteem ($\beta = .02$). In addition, the only significant path from group identification to appraisals (global/severe appraisals) was positive rather than negative ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$). That is, identifying highly with the group was related to viewing discrimination as more, rather than less harmful. Neither the path from
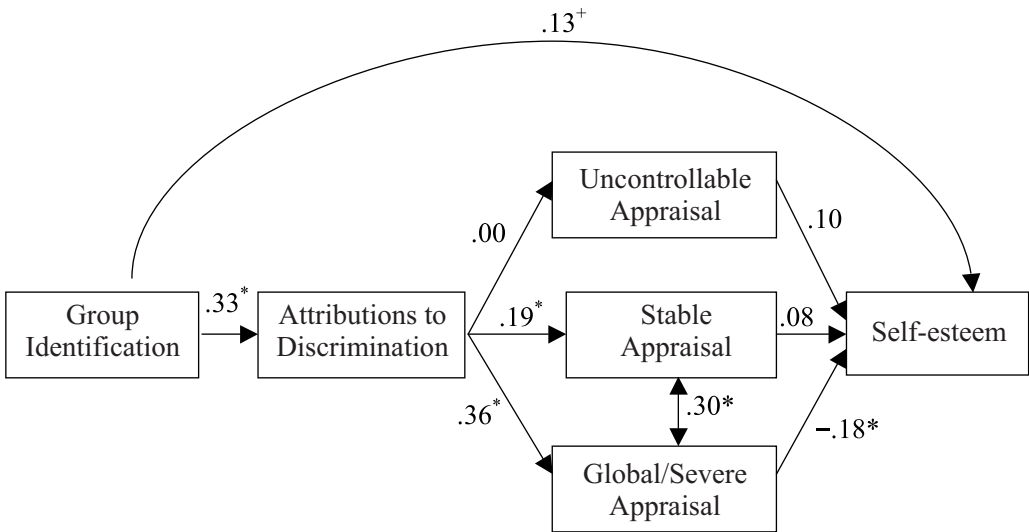

Figure 4. Path model demonstrating the *Group Identity Lens* model with standardized estimates.
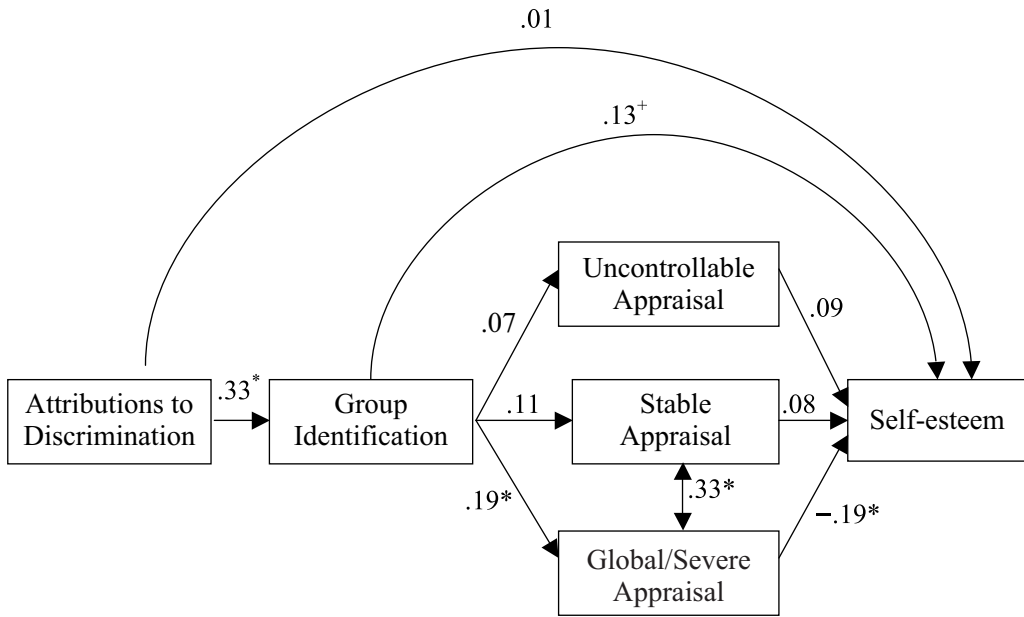
Figure 5. Path model demonstrating the *Group Identity Resource* model with standardized estimates.

group identification to uncontrollability (β = −.07) nor the path from group identification to stability appraisals (β = .11) was significant. As in the previous model, the global/severe appraisal was negatively related to self-esteem (β = −.19, *p* < .05), but the stable (β = .08) and the uncontrollable (β = .09) appraisals were not. Finally, the direct relationship from group identification to self-esteem was positive, but not significant (β = .13).

Third, we tested the Group Identity Moderator model shown in Figure 3. This model predicts that over and above the main effects of group identification and discrimination attributions on self-esteem, the interaction between these two variables predicts self-esteem via their impact on appraising discrimination as harmful. The model is depicted in Figure 6 with standardized parameter estimates. The model fits the data well ($\chi^2(7, 160) = 9.404$, *ns*; CFI = .96, RMSEA = .05). Discrimination attributions were positively and significantly related to appraising discrimination as stable (β = .16, *p* < .05), and the globality/severity appraisal (β = .35, *p* < .01), but were unrelated to appraisals of

uncontrollability (β = .03). Group identification was not significantly related to any of the appraisals. However, the interaction between attributions to discrimination and group identification was a marginally significant predictor of the globality/severity appraisals (β = −.13, *p* = .07). The nature of the interaction is such that the positive relationship between making discrimination attributions and appraising discrimination as global/severe is stronger for individuals low in group identification (β = .49, *p* = <.01) compared to those high in group identification (β = .22, *p* < .01). This interaction was unrelated to the uncontrollability (β = .02), and stability appraisals (β = .06). As in the previous models, appraising discrimination as global/severe was negatively related to self-esteem (β = −.16, *p* < .05), but appraising discrimination as uncontrollable and stable were not related to self-esteem.

Discussion

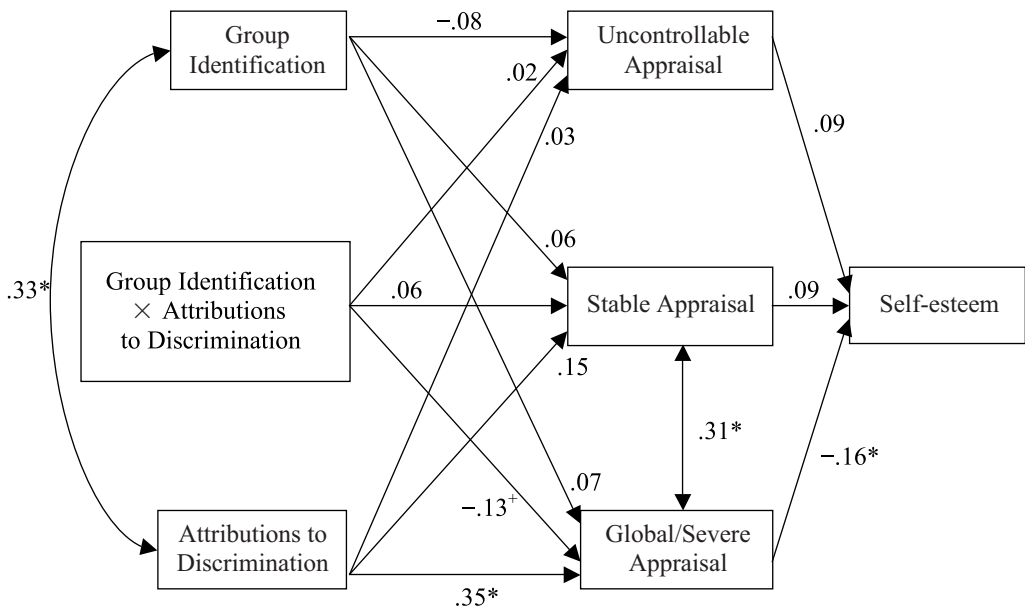This study applied a stress and coping framework to understand the relationship between

Figure 6. Path model demonstrating the *Group Identity Moderator* model with standardized estimates.

attributing ambiguous events to discrimination and personal self-esteem. According to this framework, the psychological impact of potentially stressful events such as discrimination depends in part upon how individuals cognitively appraise those events (Major et al., 2002). Cognitive appraisals vary as a function of characteristics of the person and the event. We considered four types of appraisals of discrimination: its globality, stability, controllability, and severity. In addition, we examined the tendency to attribute ambiguous events to discrimination and group identification as predictors of discrimination appraisals. Because group identification has been shown to play such a complex role in the relationship between attributions to discrimination and self-esteem (e.g. Jetten et al., 2001; Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003; McCoy & Major, 2003), we tested three different models that varied in the hypothesized role of group identification.

Two of the tested models fit our data well. The Group Identity Lens model predicts that group identification shapes how individuals explain ambiguous events, and that these

appraisals, in turn, shape self-esteem. Consistent with this model, individuals who were highly identified with their ethnic group were more likely to attribute the cause of ambiguous negative events to discrimination. In turn, a discriminatory attribution style was positively related to appraising discrimination as more stable, severe, and global. Appraising discrimination as more global and severe was negatively related to self-esteem. Neither attributions to discrimination nor group identification was directly related to self-esteem; both were only indirectly related to self-esteem via their relationship to harmful appraisals.

The Group Identity Moderator model also fits our data well. This model predicts that group identification interacts with discrimination attribution style to predict appraisals of discrimination, and through these appraisals, self-esteem. Tests of the model revealed that the interaction between group identification and attributions was marginally significant as a predictor of appraising discrimination as global and severe. Follow up analyses revealed that discrimination attribution style was a stronger

predictor of appraising discrimination as global/severe among individuals low in group identification compared to those high in group identification. Appraising discrimination as global/severe, in turn, was negatively related to self-esteem. Although we do not wish to make too much of a marginally significant interaction, this provocative pattern is consistent with one observed by Sellers and Shelton (2003). This study demonstrated that endorsement of a nationalist ideology (an aspect of African-American racial identity that emphasizes the uniqueness of being African-American) moderates the relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological distress. Specifically, individuals with lower levels of endorsement of the nationalist ideology were more distressed by discrimination than those with higher levels of endorsement, suggesting that higher levels of a nationalist ideology buffered individuals against the negative impact of perceiving discrimination. Combined with the current study, this suggests that discrimination attributions may differentially affect the self-esteem of individuals who are high and low in group identification because they differ in the extent to which they appraise discrimination as harmful to the self.

It is not possible to statistically test whether the Group Identity Lens model is a better fit to the data than the Group Identity Moderator model. These equivalent models suggest that there are multiple valid theoretical arguments concerning the role group identification plays in understanding the relationship between discrimination attributions and self-esteem.

We did not find support for a Group Identity Resource model. According to this model, attributing negative events to discrimination leads to an increase in group identification. Group identification, because it is a resource, should be associated with appraising discrimination as less harmful. This model further predicts that discrimination attributions are directly and negatively related to self-esteem, whereas group identification is directly and positively related to self-esteem. This model did not fit our data well. Although attributions to discrimination were significantly positively related

to group identification, group identification was positively, rather than negatively, related to harmful appraisals. There was no direct relationship between attributions to discrimination and self-esteem or group identification and self-esteem.

Discrimination attributions, appraisals and self-esteem

Our data are consistent with other published findings in highlighting the complexity of the relationship between attributions to discrimination and self-esteem. There was no direct relationship between attributions to discrimination and self-esteem. Rather, the relationship was indirect. Individuals who attributed ambiguous events to discrimination also believed that discrimination would have a severe negative impact on many aspects of their lives. This belief, in turn, was associated with lower personal self-esteem.

A unique aspect of our methodology is that we asked participants to consider five specific attributionally ambiguous situations and to indicate the probability that each event, if it happened to them, could have been due to discrimination. This approach to measuring attributions to discrimination differs from studies in which respondents are asked to indicate the extent (or frequency) with which they have been targets or victims of prejudice in the past, e.g. 'I consider myself a person who has been deprived of opportunities because of my gender' (Schmitt et al., 2002). Such self-reports of frequency of being a victim of discrimination reflect not only attributions for events, but also the frequency (or severity) of prior exposure to objectively discriminatory events. That is, these measures confound actual *exposure* to discrimination with *attributions* for negative events. We regard self-perceptions of past discrimination as conceptually and methodologically distinct from causal explanations provided for specific events (see Major et al., 2002 for a discussion of this issue). A recent study illustrates the importance of this distinction. Brown (2001) asked 586 Black respondents living in the Detroit metropolitan area directly if they had ever been treated badly or unfairly because of race or ethnicity; 67%

reported affirmatively. When asked whether they had ever experienced any of six different forms of unfair treatment, and if so, what the main reason for the mistreatment was, 'only' 50% of Black respondents who had experienced one or more of these events, attributed it to their race or ethnicity. The concordance between these two types of measures was moderate ($r = .47$) and the measures were differentially related to well-being. Our study addresses the relationship between self-esteem and the tendency to make attributions to discrimination rather than the relationship between self-esteem and prior exposure to discrimination.

We expected that appraisals of uncontrollability, stability, severity, and globality would be positively related to each other and that each would be negatively related to self-esteem. Surprisingly however, appraisals of the uncontrollability of discrimination were unrelated to the other appraisals. Furthermore neither appraising discrimination as uncontrollable nor appraising it as stable was related to lower self-esteem. One possible explanation for this finding is that beliefs about controllability and stability are more relevant with respect to appraisals of the *event* rather than appraisals of the *cause* of the event. Indeed, most of the participants in our study saw discrimination as quite uncontrollable and stable. In retrospect, given the history of racial discrimination in American society, the belief that racial discrimination is unlikely to change and is something over which the individual has little control is certainly reasonable. It may be the case that these beliefs are part of the collective representation of stigmatized ethnic groups, such as Latinos, and widely held. As a result, these appraisals may not explain intragroup variability in self-esteem. It is also possible that there was something about these five instances of discrimination in particular that made these appraisals irrelevant to self-esteem. More research is needed on appraisals of discrimination to explore these issues.

Group identification

As predicted, we found a positive association between group identification and attributions to prejudice. The idea that group identification is an antecedent to discrimination attributions is consistent with the claim that individuals for whom the group is an important part of the self are more likely to interpret ambiguous events through the lens of group membership, and be alert to the possibility of unfair treatment based on their group membership (Crocker & Major, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is also consistent with prior experimental evidence showing that individuals highly identified with their group are more likely to attribute ambiguous negative events to discrimination (Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003; Operario & Fiske, 2001). This positive association is also consistent, however, with the idea that group identification increases in response to discrimination attributions. That is, people may turn to the ingroup as a coping strategy to deal with perceived prejudice (e.g. Allport, 1954/1979; Branscombe et al., 1999). Experiments have shown that individuals exposed to discrimination against their group become more identified with their group, at least if they are highly identified initially (Jetten et al., 2001; McCoy & Major, 2003).

Because our data are correlational and cross-sectional, we cannot make any claims about causal sequence. However, our data provide mixed support for the idea that group identification serves as a resource for those who perceive themselves as victims of discrimination. Tests of the Group Identity Moderator revealed a trend such that high group identification attenuated the negative impact of discrimination attributions on appraising discrimination as global and severe. This finding suggests that group identification may confer some benefits to stigmatized individuals who attribute negative outcomes to discrimination. However, we did not observe a direct positive relationship between group identification and self-esteem.

These seemingly conflicting findings within the same data set highlights the complex role that group identification plays in understanding the relationship between attributions to discrimination and self-esteem. It seems likely that group identification may have both beneficial

and adverse consequences for members of groups who face discrimination. On the one hand, identifying with the group may lead individuals to be more vigilant for signs of discrimination. On the other hand, among individuals who attribute outcomes to discrimination, group identification may serve as a resource. The relationship between group identification and self-esteem in the face of prejudice may also differ across time; group identification may produce an initial, temporary increase in vulnerability in response to threat, but identifying with the group also provides emotional and tangible support, and hence resilience, as time goes on. The methodology employed in the current study did not allow us to investigate all these possibilities, but it would be useful if future studies did.

The relationship between group identification, perceptions of discrimination, and self-esteem may also differ as a function of how group identification is defined. Group identification, as we have defined it here, refers to the importance of the group to self-concept. However, group identification also includes the individual's feelings about the group, and may even extend to include ideologies (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). These components, although related, are theoretically and empirically distinct and differentially related to important outcomes (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). McCoy & Major (2003) for example, found that importance of the group was negatively related to self-esteem in the presence of discrimination against the ingroup, whereas liking for the group was unrelated to self-esteem. It would be useful if future research specifically investigates how these closely related constructs influence the relationship between perceptions of discrimination and self-esteem.

Limitations and conclusions
Conclusions that can be drawn from this study are limited by its correlational, self-report, cross-sectional design. Although we tested theoretical models that posit a causal ordering among variables, our data cannot speak to causal relationships. Nonetheless, this study illustrates that to understand the relationship

between attributions to discrimination and self-esteem, it is important to know how individuals appraise the significance of discrimination for their well-being, as well as how much they identify with the group that is a target of discrimination.

Notes

Acknowledgments

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