National and Ethnic Identity in the Face of Discrimination: Ethnic Minority and Majority Perspectives

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Does the United States afford people of different backgrounds a sense of equal identification with the nation? Past research has documented ethnic/racial group differences on levels of national identity but there has been little research examining what psychologically moderates these disparities. The present research investigates how perceived group discrimination is associated with national and ethnic identification among ethnic majority and minority groups. Study 1 examines whether perceived group discrimination moderates subgroup differences on national and ethnic identification. Study 2 makes salient group discrimination—via an item order manipulation—and examines the effects on national and ethnic identification. In general, the 2 studies demonstrate that for most ethnic minorities higher perceptions of group discrimination are related to lower levels of national identity and higher ethnic identity. Conversely, among majority group members, higher levels of perceived discrimination predict higher levels of national identity with little influence on ethnic identification.

Keywords: nationality, ethnicity, race, discrimination, diversity

“E Pluribus Unum” (Out of Many, One) is a national motto of the United States of America and captures the challenge of creating unity amid diversity. Some argue that creating a sense of national identity among immigrants and ethnic/racial minorities is problematic because of loyalty to “old” ethnic heritages (e.g., see Huntington, 2004; Schlesinger, 1998). Such a perspective implies the problem resides in individual identification with the country from which she/he emigrates or a particular racial group consciousness that prohibits allegiance to the nation. However, U.S.-born White majority group members are privileged in that their racial identity is not suspected to work against U.S. national identity. For minority and immigrant groups in the United States, there is an assumption of a zero-sum relationship between ethnic/racial and national identification. There are numerous cultural artifacts congruent with this zero-sum view. One example is the U.S. Oath of Allegiance, recited by all immigrants during naturalization ceremonies:

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, state, sover-

eignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America... [emphasis added]

An alternative framework proposes that national identification is tied to perceptions of how one’s subgroup is treated within the broader society (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000a, 2000b; Huo, Molina, Binning, & Funge, 2010; Taylor, 1994). The social institution’s treatment of its citizenry (e.g., sociohistorically, via public policy) may have implications for individual identification with the nation. For example, perceiving that one’s racial/ethnic subgroup is recognized and treated well by other Americans has implications for feeling positive toward the superordinate group (Huo & Molina, 2006). The first perspective places the onus of engendering national identity on the individual by suggesting that he or she needs to diminish ties to old ethnicities. Conversely, the second perspective highlights the responsibility of the social institution to create an environment conducive to stimulating national unity. The current paper considers the latter by examining how perceptions of group discrimination influence national and ethnic identification and how this varies for racial majority and minority members.

At present, research has failed to consider how national and ethnic identification is influenced by perceived group discrimination for majority and minority subgroups. We elaborate on this point in a short while, but for now we suggest that contemporary American society is an ideal venue in which to address these questions. The United States is beset by systemic inequality between ethnic groups (e.g., see Alexander, 2010; Fredrickson, 2002; Jackman, 1994; Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2006; Mays, Cochran, & Barnes, 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), creating a dilemma in which national unity needs to be fashioned in a context...
of inequity (see Sidanius, Feshbach, Levin, & Pratto, 1997). A member of a subordinate group may find it challenging to identify with a nation that has a record of marginalizing her group. Conversely, a member of a dominant group may find it unproblematic identifying with a nation that affords her certain privileges (e.g., higher social status, less discrimination) denied to other groups. Indeed, research indicates that White Americans on average report significantly higher levels of American identification than ethnic minority groups (Sidanius & Petrocik, 2001).

National Unity via Assimilation or Multiculturalism?

Social psychological research examining national unity among a variety of racial/ethnic groups has emphasized the utility of several models for managing diversity (see Deaux, 2006; Fredrickson, 1999; Molina, Wittig, & Giang, 2004; Plaut, 2002; Sears, 2008; Sears, Citrin, Cheleden, & van Laar, 1999; Tropp & Molina, 2012). One such model is assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2003), which emphasizes a common group identity (e.g., America) that may reduce subgroup conflict and create a sense of unity across people of diverse backgrounds (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner, Dovidio, Nier, Ward, & Banker, 1999). A common group identity model, however, may inadvertently promote discord. Specifically, an exclusive focus on a subordinate identity that fails to recognize valued subgroup identities may increase prejudice toward minority groups (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000b; Kessler & Mummendey, 2001). In addition, national identity may be defined in exclusive rather than inclusive terms (Pehrson & Green, 2010; Mukherjee, Molina, & Adams, 2012) and may be representative of the dominant subgroup (see Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Staerklé, Sidanius, Green, & Molina, 2010). There is evidence, for example, that American national identity is implicitly associated with what it means to be White (Devos & Banaji, 2005).

National identity as outlined above exacts certain costs to minority groups and affords certain benefits to majority groups. Exclusive definitions of national identity, for example, arguably set the stage for the continued oppression of and discrimination against certain Americans (e.g., racial minorities and immigrants) while protecting the privilege afforded to other Americans (e.g., White majority; see exclusionary patriotism by Sidanius & Petrocik, 2001). National identity may naturalize the cultural values, social norms, and traditions associated with being White (Mills, 1999). This racialization of American identity is likely to privilege White “ways of being” and devalue the experiences of racial minorities.

What alternatives are there for broader and more diverse constructions of (American) national identity? Multicultural models propose that recognition of subgroup identities encourage unifying effects such as identification with the common group (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000a, 2000b; Hsu & Molina, 2006; Hsu et al., 2010; Taylor, 1994). The recognition of valued subgroup identities creates an atmosphere in which people of diverse backgrounds feel that their cultural groups are acknowledged (Huo & Molina, 2006). This perceived recognition by the national community—suggesting that their group is seen as equal to others—may set the stage for racial minorities and immigrants to identify with the nation (Tyler, Degoey, & Smith, 1996). Unlike assimilation, there is no assumption that subgroup identities work against national identification. On the contrary, there is evidence that individuals can identify with both subgroup and superordinate identities and that this is related to lower ingroup favoritism (e.g., Hornsey & Hogg, 2000b). Multiculturalism, however, is not a panacea for group relations because of historical, economic, and political inequities. For example, of what use is the recognition of valued subgroup identities if it occurs in the context of group-based inequality?

Predictors of Ethnic and National Identification: Ethnic Minority Group Perspective

Variability exists in how strongly ethnic minority group members identify with their ethnic group, as well as their nation. Factors contributing to differences in identification may be both acute (i.e., a particularly positive or negative interaction) and/or chronic (i.e., systemic oppression). In the current section we examine two factors that influence identification: subgroup respect and discrimination.

Perceived Group Respect

With regard to national identification, we propose that what allows people of diverse backgrounds to feel American stems in part from their interactions and experiences with social institutions. Research on procedural justice and the group value model, for example, argues that perceptions of fair treatment and respect are important factors in enhancing group pride (see Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Perceiving that one is treated fairly and respected within an institution by other members (e.g., authorities, peers) signals to the individual that she is a valued member of the group and this engenders pride in the group (Tyler et al., 1996). Huo and Molina (2006) found a similar effect in an intergroup context such that racial minorities who perceived that their subgroup was treated with respect also felt greater positive affect toward the subordinate group (e.g., America) and lower ingroup favoritism. This set of findings was later replicated in a racially diverse high school setting (Huo et al., 2010).

A theme within this line of work is that recognition of valued cultural identities is critical to integrating minorities and immigrants into the nation. However, as demonstrated by the previous passage from the U.S. Oath of Allegiance, this recognition is deemed divisive and antithetical to appropriate and acceptable negotiations of citizenship. To this end, in the present research we provide evidence that racial group differences in national identity are explained in part by perceptions of how one’s ethnic group is treated.

Perceived Group Discrimination

We argue that perceived group discrimination is likely to have negative implications for national identification (at least for racial minorities). Evidence from previous work on perceptions of subgroup respect supports this prediction (see Huo & Molina, 2006; Hsu et al., 2010). Findings across these studies indicate that ethnic/racial minority participants with lower perceptions of subgroup respect have lower positive affect toward the superordinate group. While perceived lower subgroup respect is not synonymous
with perceived discrimination, we think this provides suggestive
evidence for the link between perceived ethnic group discrimina-
tion and lower levels of national identification.

In addition, the rejection-identification model (RIM) by
Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) argues that discrimina-
tion experienced by ethnic/racial minorities has implications for
individual well-being and intergroup evaluations. The latter point
is most germane to the present work. In particular, Branscombe et
al. (1999) propose that perceiving group discrimination is related
to increased identification with one’s ethnic/racial group and hos-
tility toward the dominant group (the perceived agent of discrim-
ination). Increased racial identification buffers individuals from
the harmful effects of perceived discrimination toward said sub-
group. We suggest further that the RIM’s tenet of “hostility toward
the dominant group” may manifest in lower national identification
for racial minorities.

The RIM focuses on understanding the minority group experience
in the context of pervasive discrimination. Based on this
model and work on subgroup respect (Huo & Molina, 2006), we
predict that for racial minority group members, perceived discrimi-
nation will be associated with increased subgroup identification
and decreased national identification. However, while research on
subgroup respect and the RIM provides a meaningful framework
for understanding ethnic minority group members’ experience, this
work cannot account for majority groups’ ethnic and national
identification.

National and Ethnic Identification: Ethnic Majority
Group Perspective

Ethnic group differences on national identification have been
well documented (Molina, Mukherjee, & Goode, 2014). While
scholars have provided a number of explanations for these differ-
ences, the research examining moderating factors of this relation-
ship, in particular those that may operate differently across ethnic
group, remains relatively unexamined. In the present research, the
inclusion of multiple ethnic groups and multiple cites of identifica-
tion allows for an important extension of the existing literature.

While research on discrimination has overwhelmingly focused
on ethnic minorities, there is compelling empirical evidence that
Whites perceive anti-White bias or discrimination as a more press-
ing problem than even anti-Black bias in contemporary U.S. so-
ciety (Norton & Sommers, 2011). How do Whites react, if at all,
to such perceived discrimination? It is likely that the effects of
group discrimination will differ for members of ethnic minority
groups as compared to Whites, given their relative positions of
power in American society (Harding, 1993; Hartstock, 1983). Racial
identity, for example, is arguably not salient for many
White majority group members (Waters, 1990) and so may not be
used as a resource to “buffer” against perceived discrimination
from others. However, because “American” is closely aligned with
meanings of “White-ness” (see Devos & Banaji, 2005; Nagel,
1998), perceived discrimination may result in higher levels of
national identification for White majority group members. That is,
racial majorities may increase national identification—which is con-
flated with White racial identity—to buffer themselves from the
harmful effects of perceived discrimination toward said group.
Similar to ethnic minorities who may employ ethnic identification
as a buffer against perceived discrimination, White Americans
may utilize national identification as a buffer against discrimina-
tion because it acts as a social resource much in the same as ethnic
identity does for minority group members. Because of the “Amer-
ica = White” effect we predict that perceived discrimination will
increase national identification and to some extent ethnic identifi-
cation among White majority group members.

Overview of Present Studies

Study 1 is correlational and examines whether group discrimi-
nation moderates subgroup differences in national and ethnic/
racial identity. Study 2 makes salient group discrimination—via an
item order manipulation—and examines the impact on levels of
national and ethnic/racial identity for multiple subgroups. In par-
ticular, half of the participants are randomly assigned to answer
group discrimination items before responding to national identity
items (i.e., making salient group discrimination) while the other
half answered the same items in the reverse order (i.e., no salience
of group discrimination). We predict that for racial minorities
perceived group discrimination is related to lower levels of na-
tional identity and higher levels of ethnic identity. For racial
majorities, on the other hand, we predict that perceived group
discrimination is related to higher levels of national identity and
somewhat higher levels of ethnic identity. We suggest part of what
is driving this asymmetric effect between subgroups is a sense of
“ownership” over national identity by the racial majority group
e.g., America = White; Devos & Banaji, 2005). Including mem-
bers of both racial minority and majority groups in our research,
we are able to offer a nuanced view of how ethnic and national
identities are negotiated across subgroups in diverse settings where
discrimination occurs.

Study 1

Method

Participants. Eight hundred twenty-three undergraduate stu-
dents from a large Southern California university participated in the
study in exchange for being entered into a lottery. Because of the
nature of the research question, the sample was comprised only
of U.S.-born Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians. Thus, the total
sample employed for the data analyses was 437. The majority of
participants were female (58%). Participants included freshmen
(14%), sophomores (8%), juniors (40%), and seniors (38%). The
mean age of participants was 20 years old. The ethnic composition
of the data analyzed included White American (35%), African
American (26%), Latino/Chicano (22%), and Asian American
(17%) college students.

Design and procedure. Participants were asked to complete a
questionnaire, which included the following measures, in order:
demographics, ethnic identification, national identification, and
perceptions of (ethnic) group discrimination. Participants were
instructed to not put any identifying piece of information on the
survey as individual responses would be anonymous. The survey
took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Measures.

Demographics. Self-report items included demographics to
assess participant gender, family income level, and party identifi-
cation. Gender was coded from 1 (Male) to 2 (Female). Family
income level ranged from 1 (below $25,000) to 3 (above $50,000). Party identification was coded from 1 (Strong Democrat) to 7 (Strong Republican).

**Ethnic identification.** Four items assessed an individual’s relation to their ethnic group as demonstrated by strength of identification, importance of the social identity, salience of the social identity, and feelings of closeness to other group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Items included: “How strongly do you identify with other members of your ethnic group?”; “How important is your ethnicity to your identity?”; “How often do you think of yourself as a member of your ethnic group?”; and “How close do you feel to other members of your ethnic group?” Each of the four items was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale where higher numbers indicated stronger levels of ethnic identification.

**National identification.** National identification or an individual’s love for her/his nation was measured by three items that averaged to form a single index. Items were taken from the Kosterman and Feshbach’s (1989) measure of patriotism. Items include: “The American flag should not be treated as a sacred object” (reverse scored); “The symbols of the United States (e.g., the flag, Washington monument) do not move me one way or another” (reversed); and “I have great love for my country.” Each of the three items was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale where higher numbers indicated stronger national identity.

**Perceived group discrimination.** Perception of discrimination against one’s ethnic/racial group was assessed by a single item: “I experience discrimination because of my ethnicity.” The item was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale where higher numbers indicated increased perceptions of group discrimination.

**Results and Discussion**

**Ethnic group differences on key variables.** We first performed a series of one-way ANCOVAs controlling for gender, family income, and party identification examining ethnic/racial group differences on a variety of measures.1 Findings for group discrimination indicated that there was an overall ethnic/racial group difference, $F(3, 398) = 25.28, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$. Bonferroni post hoc tests showed that Black respondents had significantly higher perceptions of group discrimination ($M = 5.78, SD = 1.60$) than White ($M = 3.64, SD = 2.16; p < .001$), Latino ($M = 4.40, SD = 2.00; p = .001$) and Asian ($M = 4.99, SD = 1.62; p < .05$) respondents. Latino and Asian respondents were both significantly higher than White respondents on perceptions of group discrimination ($p < .05$ and $p < .001$, respectively). There was no significant difference between Latino and Asian respondents ($p > .05$).

There was a significant overall difference between ethnic/racial groups on national identification, $F(3, 403) = 12.84, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$. Bonferroni post hoc tests indicated that Black respondents ($M = 3.56, SD = 1.61$) had significantly lower levels of national identity compared to White ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.47; p < .001$), Latino ($M = 4.61, SD = 1.40; p < .001$) and Asian ($M = 4.80, SD = 1.30; p < .001$) respondents. None of the remaining ethnic/racial group comparisons were significantly different from one another (all $p$s > .05).

A one-way ANCOVA demonstrated there was a significant difference among ethnic/racial groups on ethnic identification, $F(3, 403) = 23.88, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .15$. Bonferroni post hoc tests indicated that Black respondents ($M = 5.64, SD = 1.28$) had significantly higher levels of ethnic identification than White ($M = 4.02, SD = 1.31; p < .001$), Latino ($M = 4.74, SD = 1.59; p < .001$) and Asian ($M = 4.86, SD = 1.39; p = .002$) respondents. In addition, both Latino and Asian respondents had significantly higher levels of ethnic identification than White respondents ($p = .002$ and $p < .001$, respectively). However, there was no significant difference between Latino and Asian respondents ($p > .05$).

**Interitem correlations of key variables.** Interitem correlations and alphas for each of the constructs by ethnic group are presented in Table 1. The correlation between ethnic and national identification was positive for Whites, $r = .31, p < .001$, but negative for Blacks, $r = −.39, p < .001$, Latinos, $r = −.28, p < .01$, and Asians, $r = −.21, p < .05$. Statistical analyses indicated a significant difference in correlations between: Whites and Blacks ($z = 5.62, p < .0001$); Whites and Latinos ($z = 4.39, p < .0001$); and Whites and Asians ($z = 3.61, p < .001$). None of the remaining ethnic/racial group comparisons was significant ($p > .05$). The bivariate correlations and analyses suggest that national identity is closely aligned with White racial identity.

There are ethnic/racial group differences on the correlation between group discrimination and national identity. White respondents had a significant positive relationship between perceived group discrimination and national identity, $r = .16, p = .027$ while for ethnic/racial minorities the relationship was significantly negative (Latinos: $r = −.26, p < .01$; Blacks: $r = −.16, p < .05$; and Asians: $r = −.22, p < .05$). Statistical analyses indicated that there was a significant difference in correlations between: Whites and Blacks ($z = 2.48, p = .007$); Whites and Latinos ($z = 3.09, p = .001$); and Whites and Asians ($z = 2.6, p = .005$). None of the remaining ethnic/racial group comparisons for this correlation was significant ($p > .05$). In summary, as White Americans perceived they were discriminated against because of their racial group they expressed significantly higher levels of national identity than ethnic minority groups.

We next examined the association between group discrimination and ethnic identification. This relationship was significantly positive for two of the ethnic/racial minority groups (e.g., Blacks: $r = .33, p < .001$; and Latinos: $r = .44, p < .001$) providing initial support for a rejection identification model account, but nonsignificant for White and Asian Americans ($r = .03, p > .05$; and $r = −.04, p > .05$, respectively). Statistical analyses indicated that there was a significant difference in correlations between: Whites and Blacks ($z = −2.4, p = .008$); and Whites and Latinos ($z = −3.19, p = .0007$). There was no significant difference between Whites and Asians ($z = 0.47, p > .05$). Further analyses indicated there was a significant difference between Blacks and Asians ($z = 2.42, p = .008$), and Latinos and Asians ($z = 3.11, .001$).
on national identification (respondent (White vs. Latino) and perceived group discrimination were moderated by group discrimination. A similar analytic approach was employed for ethnic identification. Regression analyses indicated there was a significant two-way interaction between race of respondent (White vs. Latino) and perceived group discrimination on national identification ($\beta = -0.26, p < .001$). As shown in Figure 1, the interaction indicated that for White respondents higher perceived discrimination was associated with lower levels of national identity. The comparable two-way interaction involving the White–Black comparison was also significant ($\beta = -0.17, p < .05$). The interaction indicated that for Black respondents (similar to Latinos) perceiving discrimination was related to lower levels of national identity compared to White respondents for whom this relationship was positive (see Figure 1). There was also a significant difference between White and Asian respondents ($\beta = -0.19, p < .05$). As shown in Figure 1, the interaction indicated that for Asian respondents

\[ p = .0009, \] and a marginal difference between Blacks and Latinos ($z = -0.87, p > .05$).

**Moderation of group differences on national and ethnic identification.** The different patterns of correlation suggest that perceived discrimination has differential associations with national identity and ethnic identity, depending on one’s racial group membership. To systematically examine this difference, we used procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991) and conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses to test the interaction between race of respondent and group discrimination on level of national identity and ethnic identity. At Step 1, respondent demographic variables were entered including gender, family income, and party identification. At Step 2, the main effects of dummy coded race (e.g., White vs. Black, White vs. Latino) and centered perceived group discrimination were included. At Step 3, the 2-way interaction term of race (dummy coded) by group discrimination (centered) were entered. The last step of the regression equation asks—after controlling for demographics and main effects—whether ethnic group differences on levels of national identity are moderated by group discrimination. A similar analytic approach was employed for ethnic identification.

**National identification.** Hierarchical regression analyses indicated there was a significant two-way interaction between race of respondent (White vs. Latino) and perceived group discrimination on national identification ($\beta = -0.26, p < .001$). As shown in Figure 1, the interaction indicated that for White respondents higher perceived discrimination was associated with higher levels of national identity whereas for Latinos higher perceived discrimination was associated with lower levels of national identity. The comparable two-way interaction involving the White–Black comparison was also significant ($\beta = -0.17, p < .05$). The interaction indicated that for Black respondents (similar to Latinos) perceiving discrimination was related to lower levels of national identity compared to White respondents for whom this relationship was positive (see Figure 1). There was also a significant difference between White and Asian respondents ($\beta = -0.19, p < .05$). As shown in Figure 1, the interaction indicated that for Asian respondents

**Figure 1.** Mean levels of national identification as a function of ethnic group membership and perceptions of group discrimination.

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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>4. National identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Group discrimination</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-07</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. 

This table shows the interitem correlations of key variables by ethnic/racial group for Study 1.
dents (similar to Latino and Black respondents) perceiving discrimination was related to lower levels of national identity compared to White respondents for whom this relationship was positive. All other two-way interactions between race of respondent (i.e., Black vs. Latino, Black vs. Asian, and Latino vs. Asian) and group discrimination were not significant ($p > .05$).

**Ethnic identification.** Next, a similar series of hierarchical regressions was performed on ethnic identification. There was a significant two-way interaction between race of respondent (White vs. Latino) and perceived group discrimination on ethnic identification ($β = .29, p < .001$). As shown in Figure 2, the interaction indicated that for Latinos higher perceived discrimination was associated with higher levels of ethnic identification whereas for Whites higher perceived discrimination was unrelated to ethnic identification. The comparable interaction for the ‘White versus Black’ comparison was also significant ($β = .21, p < .01$). The interaction indicated that for Black respondents (similar to Latinos) perceiving discrimination was related to increased racial identification compared to White respondents. There was no significant interaction between White versus Asian respondents and group discrimination on ethnic identification ($β = -.02, p > .05$), or between Black versus Latino respondents and group discrimination on ethnic identification ($β = .09, p > .05$). The Asian versus Black comparison did indicate a significant two-way interaction ($β = -.23, p < .05$), as did the Asian versus Latino comparison ($β = -.28, p < .01$).

**Summary**

A goal of Study 1 was to examine how perceived group discrimination is related to levels of national and ethnic identity for both majority and minority groups. Our findings suggest that minority group members—in particular, Latinos and Blacks—appear to attenuate levels of national identity and increase levels of ethnic/racial identity in the face of discrimination. The present findings add to the rejection identification model by highlighting the implications of perceived discrimination for racial minorities’ level of national identification. Conversely, for White participants, perceived group discrimination was related to increased national identity. A potential explanation for this finding is the previous work demonstrating the conflation of White racial identity and U.S. national identity (see Devos & Banaji, 2005; Sidanius et al., 1997). This identity conflation may lead to the perception (by White group members) that racial group discrimination is synonymous with discrimination targeting American identity, which fosters increased national identification. Our argument is that White majority group members may employ national identification in a similar fashion (to how racial identification is utilized by racial minorities) in the face of discrimination.

The findings for ethnic identification are in line with a rejection identification model account for most racial minorities—that is, Latinos and Blacks—such that increased perceptions of group discrimination are related to higher levels of ethnic/racial identification. For Asian respondents, like White respondents, increased perceptions of group discrimination were not related to levels of ethnic/racial identification. Before speculating in detail about the findings for Asian minority respondents we will attempt to replicate these findings in Study 2 and then provide remarks about this particular minority group. In order to understand the findings for White respondents regarding racial identification, a potentially illuminating piece of evidence is the relatively low level of racial identification for Whites (compared to racial minorities), indicating the lack of importance and salience assigned to this construct by majority group members (see Waters, 1990).

**Study 2**

Study 2 incorporated an item order manipulation to make group discrimination salient (or not salient). Half of the participants were randomly assigned to answer items assessing group discrimination prior to national and ethnic identification items. The remaining participants answered national identification and ethnic identification items prior to questions about group discrimination. The item order manipulation focuses on how levels of national (and ethnic) identity are affected by perceptions that one’s ethnic/racial group is the target of discrimination, and whether this pattern differs depending on race/ethnic group membership. To our knowledge, there has been little, empirical work examining how the salience of group discrimination affects national and ethnic identities for different racial groups. Study 2 also included additional items comprising group discrimination and several new items for na-

![Figure 2. Mean levels of ethnic identification as a function of ethnic group membership and perceptions of group discrimination.](image-url)
tional identification to strengthen reliability of each of these constructs.

Method

Participants. Four hundred eleven undergraduate students from a southern California university were recruited for participation. Subjects participated in exchange for experimental credit toward their psychology course requirement or were entered into a lottery where $30 cash prizes would be awarded to 10 students. A lottery was implemented to increase the ethnic diversity (e.g., Latinos) among the sample derived from the psychology subject pool. Participants were predominantly female (65%). The average age of participants was 19 years old. The sample included 126 Whites, 124 Asian Americans, 134 Latinos, and 27 African Americans. The analyses focused on U.S.-born White, Asian, and Latino students ($N = 271$). Because of the small sample size of African Americans, reliable analyses could not be performed for this racial group so findings for African Americans will not be presented.

Design and procedure. Eligible participants signed up online to participate in the study or replied to a mass recruitment email informing them about the study. All interested participants were sent an email with a link to the online survey. The first page of the online survey was an information sheet that provided a description of the study, participant rights, and a statement of confidentiality. Participants agreed to participate in the study by clicking on the “Next” button, which acted as an electronic signature.

Item order manipulation. The online survey incorporated an item order manipulation such that half of participants were randomly assigned to answer group discrimination items prior to answering questions about national identity and ethnic identity. The other half of the participants answered questions about national and ethnic identity prior to group discrimination. In effect, the item order manipulation made salient (or not) group discrimination concerns prior to stating feelings of national identity and ethnic identity. The number of participants was approximately equal across conditions.

Measures. The online survey had numerous measures: demographics, national identification, ethnic identification, and perceptions of (ethnic) group discrimination. For participants in the discrimination salience condition, the perceptions of group discrimination measure came after the demographics but before national and ethnic identification. For all other participants, the measures were presented in the order listed below. All items, unless otherwise noted, were on 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Demographics. Self-report items included demographics to assess participant gender, family income level, and party identification. Gender was coded from 1 (Male) to 2 (Female). Family income level ranged from 1 (below $25,000) to 3 (above $50,000). Party identification was coded from 1 (Strong Democrat) to 7 (Strong Republican).

National identification. National identification was measured by four items that were averaged to form a single index (adapted from Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). The four items included: “I have great love for my country”; “I find the sight of the American flag very moving”; “I am proud to be an American”; and “I feel very warmly toward my country.” Higher numbers indicate stronger levels of national identity ($\alpha = .90$).

Ethnic identification. Individual level of ethnic/racial identification was measured by four items which were averaged to form a single index (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The four items included: “I strongly identify with other members of my ethnic group”; “I feel a strong attachment toward my ethnic group”; “I often think of myself as a member of my ethnic group”; and “I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group.” Higher numbers indicate more ethnic/racial identification ($\alpha = .93$).

Group discrimination. Perception of discrimination toward one’s ethnic/racial group was assessed by four items that were averaged to form a single index. The items included: “I experience discrimination because of my ethnicity”; “Others like me experience discrimination because of their ethnicity”; “My ethnic group experiences discrimination”; and “Others are prejudiced against ethnic groups like mine.” Higher numbers indicate increased perceptions of group discrimination ($\alpha = .90$).

Results and Discussion

The central question of Study 2 was whether the item order manipulation affected participants’ national and ethnic identification, dependent on ethnic group membership. To address this question, a two-way ANOVA of item order (group discrimination salient or not salient) and race of respondent (Latino, Asian, White) was performed on national identification and ethnic/racial identification.

National identification. Results for the two-way ANOVA on national identification yielded a significant interaction between item order and respondent race, $F(2, 272) = 4.53, p = .012$, partial $\eta^2 = .032$. As shown in Figure 3, simple effect analyses probing the interaction indicated that in the “group discrimination not salient” condition there was no significant difference, $F(2, 272) = 1.19, p > .05$, between White ($M = 4.76, SD = 1.28$), Latino ($M = 4.99, SD = 1.17$) or Asian ($M = 4.58, SD = 1.17$) participants. Conversely, simple effect analyses indicated there was a significant difference between ethnic/racial groups in the “group discrimination salient” condition, $F(2, 272) = 5.26, p = .006$, such that Whites ($M = 5.35, SD = 1.30$) had the highest levels of national identification compared to Latinos ($M = 4.55, SD = 1.17$) and Asians ($M = 4.85, SD = 1.06$). The main effects of race and item order were nonsignificant, $p > .10$. Consistent with Study 1 findings, White participants increase their national identification in reaction to salience of group discrimination, whereas Latino participants did the converse. As mentioned previously, there is evidence to suggest that Americans = White (see Devos & Banaji, 2005) so one possible consequence of the conflation of American national and White racial identity is that White Americans employ national identity in response to perceptions of discrimination, whereas ethnic minorities do not.

2 Analyses with covariates of gender, SES, and party identification resulted in similar findings. Because participants were randomly assigned to item order condition analyses without covariates are reported.

3 One can argue that there was an item order manipulation of both national and ethnic identification on perceived group discrimination. Analyses were performed for group discrimination as an outcome variable and findings indicated a marginally significant main effect of item order, $F(1, 272) = 3.26, p = .072$. However, there was no significant interaction of respondent race by item order (of national/ethnic identification) on perceived group discrimination, $F(2, 272) = 1.68, p > .05$. 
Ethnic identification. Results for the two-way ANOVA on ethnic identification demonstrated a main effect of item order, $F(1, 271) = 3.91, p = .049$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$ (see Figure 4). Participants in the discrimination salient condition ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.29$) had significantly higher levels of ethnic identification than participants in the discrimination not salient condition ($M = 5.05, SD = 1.43$). There was also a main effect for race of respondent on ethnic identification, $F(2, 271) = 22.52, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$. Post hoc analyses indicated that White respondents ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.32$) had significantly lower ethnic identification than Asians ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.21; p < .001$) and Latinos ($M = 5.78, SD = 1.29; p < .001$). The difference between Latino and Asian respondents on ethnic identification was not significant ($p = .10$). Unlike our findings for national identification, there was no significant interaction of respondent race by item order on ethnic identification, $F(2, 271) = 0.82, p = .443$. As shown in Figure 4, there was a nonsignificant pattern indicating that both Latino and White participants had increased ethnic identification in the group discrimination salience condition (in comparison to the group discrimination no salience condition). The pattern, at least for Latinos, is in the predicted direction but is not significant. The nonsignificant interaction was unexpected but could have occurred because the item order manipulation was not robust or direct enough to influence both national and ethnic identification across ethnic groups. We elaborate on this point in the General Discussion.

General Discussion

A key challenge facing the United States and other nations is how to integrate people of diverse backgrounds into the nation. One path is to argue that becoming part of the national community falls on the shoulders of minority groups; that they need to let go of old cultural allegiances in order to nurture an allegiance to the broader national community. An alternative path, and the focus of the present research, suggests that part of the onus of integrating
individuals into the community falls on the shoulders of our social institution(s) and its members. That is, the nation is well served by promoting an atmosphere that is less discriminatory and engenders a sense of belongingness within a variety of groups. Rather than asking someone to become committed to their nation because the process lies within her, we provide suggestive evidence that nations can foster an environment where individuals from various groups form an allegiance because of the way they are treated.

We examined how people of various racial groups manage national and ethnic identities in the face of group discrimination. In general, findings suggest that perceiving discrimination is related, for African Americans and Latinos, to segregating ethnic and national identity, strengthening the former, and attenuating the latter. These findings are generally consistent with previous work on subgroup respect and the rejection identification model. However, neither of these theoretical perspectives address, nor can they account for ethnic majority responses to discrimination and its implications for national identity. Previous research by Huo and Molina (2006), for example, found that White majority group members’ higher perceptions of subgroup respect was related to increased positive affect toward American identity. Conversely, in the present studies, White respondents’ perception of discrimination is positively associated with increased feelings of national identification and minimal impact on ethnic identification.

One way to understand the asymmetric effect of group discrimination on national identification for Whites and racial minorities is to ask which group perceives national identity as a “social resource” to move toward during threats to identity. To the extent that the racial majority group boosts their level of national identification—in the face of discrimination—suggests that they see this social identity as a resource to reestablish a sense of belonging. The same cannot be said for racial minorities (i.e., Blacks and Latinos) and their relationship to nation under similar circumstances. One possibility is that perceived discrimination poses different types of threats to minority and majority group members. For minorities, the threat of not being included and fairly treated by their nation may be the most salient consideration. This threat may result in attenuating national identification and an uptick in ethnic identification. For the majority group, the threat of having their group’s power and/or status questioned is most salient (e.g., allocating more resources to minority groups compared to majority groups). This threat may result in an uptick on national identification to express loyalty to the devalued group (see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Future research should investigate whether majority and minority groups do interpret group discrimination in these distinct ways.

American Identity = White Racial Identity

A point of this research is that ethnic majority and minority group members have different psychological experiences under similar circumstances (see Molina & Wittig, 2006; Tropp & Molina, 2012 for similar arguments) and that they utilize national identity in distinct ways because of the construction of national identity. Whites in the United States arguably have higher social status and power than other ethnic/racial groups and this affords them certain privileges and protection from certain disadvantages (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Perhaps most relevant to the present work, what it means to be “American” is equal to what it means to be “White” (Devos & Banaji, 2005). An argument can be made that national identity is primarily imbued with representations of the dominant racial subgroup (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). In addition to providing justification for why Whites typically have higher levels of national identification than other racial groups (see Sidanius & Petrocik, 2001), this Anglocentric construction of nation provides an explanation as to why racial majorities utilize national identity—when they perceive discrimination—in a similar way to racial minorities employing racial identity to buffer themselves against the ill effects of discrimination.

The histories of ethnic minorities in the United States may suggest they are not fully included in national identity project. African Americans, as an example, have been the targets of explicit discrimination and anti-Blackness as demonstrated by slavery, “Jim Crow” segregation, and modern forms of implicit racism and institutional discrimination (Alexander, 2010; Fredrickson, 1999; Sears & Savalei, 2006). Indigenous Americans have been on the receiving end of extreme belligerence in the historical record of the United States. The Indigenous population was decimated by the European colonization of the United States and expansion toward the western regions of the United States (Sears, 2008; Yellow Bird, 2004). The “new wave” of immigrants comprised primarily of Latinos and Asians are the targets of discrimination (Esses, Dovidio, Semenyia, & Jackson, 2005), are lightning rods for strong stances on immigration legislation (Mukherjee, Molina, & Adams, 2013), and, at least with respect to Latinos, are perceived as relatively low status in the United States (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

It is important to highlight that in the present work Asian participants provide a caveat to the ethnic/racial minority case. Among Asian participants, in the present studies, perceived discrimination had varying impact on how they managed national identity and, little to no impact on how they managed ethnic identity. The pattern of relationships for Asian respondents can be understood by considering the relative social positions of ethnic minority groups within the United States (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Asian Americans are more likely to have college degrees and are likely to earn more money annually than Blacks or Latinos (United States Census Bureau, 2010a, 2010b). These differences are indicative of the comparatively greater social status of Asian Americans compared to other ethnic minorities. Indeed, although the label has been challenged by academic scholars, U.S. popular culture brands Asian Americans the “model minority” (Taylor, Landreth, & Bang, 2005). It is possible that Asian participants may experience a greater sense of belonging in the United States than Blacks and Latinos and that this curbs lower levels of national identity in the context of discrimination. In addition, a possible reason for the lack of movement on ethnic identification under perceived group discrimination is that the ethnic label of “Asian” may be too broad and insensitive to capture psychological movement for a fairly heterogeneous ethnic subgroup (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, etc.) within a Southern California setting. This issue is less problematic for Black participants (in Study 1) and Latinos (in Study 1 and 2), the latter of which are most likely of Mexican origin, given the study locations.

Limitations and Future Directions

The item order manipulation of group discrimination (in Study 2) does not experimentally control for the magnitude or type of
group discrimination experienced by study participants. Recall that participants were asked to answer a series of questions addressing the degree to which they experience group discrimination either before or after items on national and ethnic identification. There was undoubtedly variability within and between racial groups as to the severity and type of discrimination that came to mind as a function of the items. This would be problematic if we were trying to make a case for a specific level or type of discrimination. If anything, the lack of precision of the item order manipulation creates random noise that may mask the relationship between discrimination and group identification. Thus, the effects we do find in Study 2 are even more compelling. Future work should employ a more direct manipulation of type of group discrimination (e.g., institutional vs. personal discrimination; severe vs. trivial example of discrimination) to examine the effects on national and ethnic identification. We suspect that institutional and chronic forms of discrimination—compared to personal and trivial, respectively—would have a greater impact on how racial minorities negotiate their ethnic and national identities as these forms of discrimination would arguably be more psychologically threatening to a group’s values.

A direct manipulation of group discrimination would also afford examination of specific psychological processes (e.g., sense of belonging, perceptions of respect) that clarify the patterns we have documented across these two studies. We believe that part of the explanation that underpins the effect of ethnic minorities pushing to a group’s values. This would arguably be more psychologically threatening to a group’s values.

It should be noted that the operationalization of ethnic and national identity within these two studies, while theoretically grounded, draws upon distinct conceptual bases. Ethnic identity, as operationalized in the present study, follows the social identity tradition of identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) emphasizing cognitive belonging. National identity, as defined in this paper, is comparatively an affective measure in the tradition of patriotism emphasizing a sense of pride and love for the nation and its symbols (e.g., flag, national anthem; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Sidanius et al., 1997). A drawback of the present conceptualization is that it precludes a direct comparison of ethnic and national identity levels. For instance, we find that racial minorities (e.g., Latinos) decrease their levels of national identification and increase their racial identification—in the face of discrimination—while racial majorities (e.g., Whites) increase their level of national identification and their ethnic identification remain somewhat unchanged. An argument of the present paper is that because of the racialization of American identity, White Americans may think of national identity as synonymous with ethnic identity and utilize it in a similar way as racial minorities do with ethnic identity in the context of discrimination. This argument becomes strained when one considers that the measurement of these two identities is not exactly equivalent. Future research should operationalize ethnic and national identities in similar ways so that identification with either group identity is not reflective of specific conceptualizations (e.g., cognitive vs. affective) of each group identity.

Future work should also distinguish operationally between national and ethnic identity measures by having the latter items specify the race/ethnicity of the respondent answering the items. The present work did not specify the ethnic/racial group (e.g., White American, African American) and this may have been problematic for White respondents who may have been confused as to what group identity (i.e., national or ethnic) the questions were referring to. This may account for why the effects on ethnic identification, for White Americas, were not as strong as for minority group members.

Concluding Remarks

An important characteristic and point of the present work is the need to examine intergroup relations questions from the perspectives of both majority and minority groups. We propose that much of intergroup relations research has examined questions primarily from the vantage point of dominant group members (e.g., Whites in the United States) about subordinate group members (e.g., Blacks in the United States). In the present work, we demonstrate that incorporating multiple ethnic/racial group perspectives with regards to a particular question affords us insight into how people and groups perceive the same event in distinct ways. Ethnic minorities (e.g., Latinos) decrease their level of national identification as a function of perceived group discrimination. Alternatively, ethnic majorities (e.g., Whites) increase their level of national identification while their ethnic identification remains relatively unchanged as a function of perceived discrimination. How may we understand these disparate findings for majority and minority group members regarding the relationship between perceived group discrimination and national identification? If American identity is synonymous with what it means to be White (Devos & Banaji, 2005), then it suggests that Whites’ racial identity defines American identity (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). So American national identity because of its White racialization may serve some of the same psychological functions for White Americans as ethnic/racial identities do for Latinos and African Americans. It is telling that majority subgroups amplify their identification with nation while some minority groups attenuate their identification (in the face of discrimination).

For certain groups and individuals, national identity is fraught with challenges and questions of their sense of place within the American national project (Sears, 2008). This tension is not necessarily a result of old ethnic loyalties that impede allegiance to the nation but may instead point to how the national community treats (or has historically treated) ethnic/racial minorities and their group (e.g., see Blackmon, 2009). A sense of belonging to a nation is arrived at as a function of a variety of factors including, but not limited to, how her/his group has been treated sociohistorically and continues to be treated (Alexander, 2010; Yellow Bird, 2004), the representations of one’s social groups within a cultural space (Morrison, 1992; Sampson, 1993), the numerical representation of one’s group in political spaces (Bartels, 2008), and so forth. National communities may work against creating a sense of “home” for everyone when certain individuals and groups perceive they are discriminated as a function of their group. These disruptive narratives of national community, however, point to areas for
promoting social justice and ultimately rethinking what it means to be American.

References

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