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Perceiving Discrimination Against One's Gender Group has Different Implications  
for Well-Being in Women and Men

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Abstract

Using structural equation modeling, we tested theoretical predictions concerning the effects of perceived discrimination against one's gender on psychological well-being in women and men. Results were highly supportive of the rejection-identification model, with perceptions of discrimination harming psychological well-being among women, but not among men. Our results also support the rejection-identification model's prediction that women partially cope with the negative well-being consequences of perceived discrimination by increasing identification with women as a group. In contrast, perceived discrimination was unrelated to group identification among men. We found no support for the hypothesis that perceptions of discrimination have self-protective properties among the disadvantaged. Results are consistent with our contention that the differential effects of perceived discrimination among women and men are due to differences in the groups' relative positions within the social structure.

Perceiving Discrimination Against One's Gender Group has Different Implications  
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What are the psychological consequences of perceiving prejudice and discrimination against one's gender group? Because perceptions of discrimination can differ in meaning, there is no one answer to this question. One of the most important influences on the subjective meaning of perceptions of discrimination is the position of the targeted group within the social structure. In other words, the meaning and consequences of perceiving prejudice and discrimination against an ingroup will depend on whether the ingroup is privileged or disadvantaged within the existing social structure. We define privilege and disadvantage in relative terms. Compared to disadvantaged groups, privileged groups tend to receive more positive outcomes as a function of their group membership and hold more positions of power within the social structure. Based on the rejection-identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999) we argue that perceptions of prejudice and discrimination will be more harmful for disadvantaged groups than for privileged groups. The model also predicts that disadvantaged groups counter some of the psychological costs of perceiving discrimination by increasing their identification with their disadvantaged group. We test these hypotheses about the effects of perceived discrimination among women and men—two groups that differ in their structural position.

The Psychological Consequences of Perceiving Pervasive Discrimination

Although there is little disagreement among social psychologists that prejudice and discrimination are harmful to disadvantaged groups, there is less consensus about the psychological well-being consequences of perceiving oneself or one's group as a victim of discrimination. One perspective suggests that perceiving prejudice can be beneficial because it helps members of disadvantaged groups to discount the causal role of the self in bringing about negative outcomes (Crocker & Major, 1989). Another perspective suggests that perceiving discrimination is harmful to the psychological well-being of members of disadvantaged groups because it represents the realization that one's ingroup is rejected by the majority, and that the ingroup's life opportunities are limited in a way that others' are not (Schmitt & Branscombe, in press-a).

The Discounting Perspective. The “discounting perspective” suggests that perceiving prejudice and discrimination against one’s group might have positive consequences for the psychological well-being of disadvantaged groups. Crocker and Major (1989) argued that attributions to prejudice for negative outcomes can protect self-esteem and positive affect because they discount the role of one’s own behavior or performance as a cause of that outcome. By explaining the event in terms of another person’s prejudice, one can avoid blaming the self for the negative outcome. In support of this view, Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, and Major (1991) found that women reported less depressed affect when they could attribute negative feedback to the evaluator’s sexism, compared to when an attribution to sexism was implausible. As stated by Crocker and Quinn (1998), “For people who are targets of prejudice and discrimination, knowing that one possible cause of negative outcomes is the prejudice of other people, rather than one’s own faults or shortcomings, may protect self-esteem” (p. 172). According to this perspective, perceptions of discrimination against one’s group are self-protective because they encourage individuals to explain their negative outcomes as being due to the prejudice of others. Crocker et al. (1991) write that “members of stigmatized groups who generally believe that they are discriminated against or that others are racist should be more likely to attribute negative feedback to prejudice and therefore may be higher in self-esteem” (p. 226; see also Crocker & Major, 1989, p. 621).

The discounting hypothesis was originally framed in terms of making a single attribution to prejudice for a specific negative outcome. However, as the above quotes indicate, this perspective has also been applied to more general beliefs about the extent of discrimination. We argue that if perceptions of prejudice do have self-protective properties, they would be most likely to occur in the conditions originally outlined by the discounting hypothesis, and least likely to apply to the extension of the hypothesis to general perceptions of prejudice and discrimination. If prejudice is seen as an isolated occurrence, it may be psychologically beneficial in the way that the discounting hypothesis suggests. Once perceptions of discrimination are generalized across situations, prejudice will be seen as more pervasive and stable. As we describe more fully below, perceiving discrimination generally is unlikely to be self-protective, and is likely to be harmful to well-being among disadvantaged groups.

Perceptions of discrimination in privileged and disadvantage groups. Understanding the

potential psychological costs or benefits of perceived discrimination first requires an exploration of how these perceptions differ for groups who are relatively privileged or disadvantaged in the social structure (Schmitt & Branscombe, in press-a). Empirical research has found that both privileged and disadvantaged groups alike are aware that some groups are treated less well than others, and agree that society imputes men and Whites higher status than women and ethnic minorities (Crocker & Major, 1989; Eagly, 1987; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Stewart, Vassar, Sanchez, & David, 2000). Because they occupy different positions in the social structure, disadvantaged and privileged groups' perceptions of being the target of prejudice and discrimination are likely to differ in a number of ways. First, the kinds of events that privileged and disadvantaged groups attribute to prejudice are likely to differ in terms of their severity. Empirical research (Branscombe, 1998; Kappen, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Schmitt, 2000; Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998) has demonstrated that the kinds of events women label as discriminatory (e.g. unequal pay, fear of sexual assault) are more severe than the kinds of events men label as discriminatory (e.g. having to pay when on dates, being more likely to get a speeding ticket). In addition, disadvantaged groups are likely to perceive prejudice against them as occurring across a wider variety of contexts than do privileged groups. Disadvantaged groups report encountering prejudice and discrimination across a wider variety of life contexts than do members of privileged groups, who report discrimination experiences that are relatively circumscribed (Branscombe, 1998). These studies suggest that for the disadvantaged, discrimination experiences are likely to be seen as relatively severe and stable occurrences rather than isolated or unusual events. Stable perceptions of prejudice and discrimination can create a sense of hopelessness and depression in disadvantaged groups (Brown, & Siegel, 1988; Golin, Sweeney, & Shaeffer, 1981; Robins, 1988; Weiner, 1985). As Snyder (1994, p. 146) writes, perceiving prejudice against one's group membership is "antithetical to the furtherance of hopeful thinking." These are relatively less likely consequences of perceiving discrimination among privileged groups, because they are less likely to see prejudice against their group as a pervasive phenomenon. Such differential perceptions of the pervasiveness of discrimination will also lead privileged group members to see prejudice as relatively controllable; they are aware that the contexts where they might face discrimination are relatively infrequent and more easily avoided. In contrast, perceptions of

prejudice and discrimination among the disadvantaged are more likely to reduce feelings of control precisely because they discount one's own role in controlling outcomes across a wider variety of situations (Major & Crocker, 1993).

Compared to privileged groups, members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to experience perceptions of discrimination as reflective of systematic devaluation and rejection by the dominant culture (Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999). Many theoretical approaches predict that feeling devalued in this way will harm self-esteem (Cooley, 1956; Mead, 1934; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and empirical research has supported the contention that such exclusion is harmful to psychological well-being (Cozzarelli & Karafa, 1998; Frable, 1993; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Because privileged groups have the structural power to define who is and who is not accepted and valued in society, rejection by privileged groups implies that one's group is devalued in society as a whole. In contrast, when privileged group members are rejected by the disadvantaged, the immediate experience might be unpleasant, but it carries fewer implications for the ingroup's value and status within the culture as a whole. Thus, because it is less likely to reflect devaluation of one's social identity in the dominant culture, perceptions of discrimination among privileged group members are less likely to harm psychological well-being than perceptions of discrimination among disadvantaged groups. To summarize, because perceived discrimination among disadvantaged groups reflects more pervasive discrimination and devaluation, we predict that they cause more harm to psychological well-being than in privileged groups.

#### Empirical Evidence that Perceiving Prejudice is Harmful Among Disadvantaged Groups

A growing body of empirical work supports the idea that perceptions of discrimination are harmful to the psychological well-being of members of disadvantaged groups. The recognition that one's group is disadvantaged is negatively related to psychological well-being among women (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997; Klonoff, Landrine, & Campbell, 2000), Jews (Dion & Earn, 1975), African-Americans (Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999; Cross & Strauss, 1998; Klonoff & Landrine, 1999; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997), and gay men and lesbians (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999). In a recent review, Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams (1999) concluded that perceived racism

among African Americans can even result in a number of long-term negative physical health effects. Perhaps in an attempt to avoid the psychological costs of perceiving discrimination, members of disadvantaged groups are reluctant to perceive the discrimination that confronts them, and tend to avoid attributing failure to discrimination unless provided with very strong evidence of discrimination (Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O'Connell, & Whalen, 1989; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, 1997).

Recent empirical evidence is consistent with the prediction that perceiving discrimination has different consequences for privileged and disadvantaged groups. Schmitt and Branscombe (in press-b) asked female and male undergraduates to consider a situation in which they were treated negatively by a professor, and manipulated whether the treatment was attributable to discrimination against their gender, or to the professor's negative disposition toward everyone. Although women and men did not differ in affect when the professor treated everyone negatively, when the treatment was attributable to discrimination women felt reliably more negative affect than men.

If perceptions of discrimination harm psychological well-being in disadvantaged groups, but not privileged groups, one would expect that disadvantaged groups, but not privileged groups, would minimize the likelihood of discrimination against them. When Ruggiero and Major (1998) tested this hypothesis, it was confirmed. In their studies, members of both privileged and disadvantaged groups received negative feedback and were presented with different base-rates for the probability that their evaluator was biased against their group. Replicating the findings of Ruggiero and Taylor (1995, 1997), women and Blacks attributed their failure to prejudice more than to their own performance only when they were told that 100% of the raters were biased and discrimination was a virtual certainty. In all other conditions, women and Blacks attributed their failure to their own performance more than the prejudice of the raters. In contrast, men and Whites attributed their failure to prejudice more than to their own performance in all conditions except the condition where they were told explicitly that none of the raters were biased against them.

#### Coping with the Harm of Perceiving Pervasive Prejudice

If recognizing discrimination and prejudice does harm psychological well-being in members of disadvantaged groups, how then do the disadvantaged cope with this harm? According to social identity

theory, recognizing that the powerful majority is prejudiced and discriminates against one's ingroup will lead to an increase in identification with the minority ingroup (Tajfel, 1978). Building on this social identity framework, the rejection-identification model argues that experiencing rejection from the dominant culture in the form of pervasive prejudice leads disadvantaged groups to increase their identification with their minority group, which in turn alleviates some of the harm to psychological well-being. When acceptance and fair treatment by a more powerful group appears unlikely, psychologically investing more in one's minority group is likely to have positive consequences for well-being. In other words, when one experiences rejection from the dominant majority, one might increasingly turn toward the minority ingroup, which will in turn alleviate some of the harm to well-being. Branscombe, Schmitt, et al.'s (1999) test of this model among African-Americans obtained strong support. Perceiving anti-Black prejudice across contexts was associated with increased African-American identification, and this countered some of the direct negative effect of perceiving prejudice on well-being.

A number of empirical investigations support our claim that minority group identification is psychologically beneficial. Correlational research has found that minority group identification is associated with measures of psychological adjustment (Bat-Chava, 1994; Grossman, Wirt, & Davids, 1985; Munford, 1994; Phinney, 1990; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous & Smith, 1998). Experimental work has confirmed that an awareness of one's minority group membership can cause positive psychological outcomes. The mere presence of similarly stigmatized others raises self-esteem and lowers depression and anxiety (Frible, Pratt, & Hoey, 1998; McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Even more impressive is the finding that in a context in which they were likely to see themselves as disadvantaged, Black Americans who were reminded of their racial identity felt better than those who were not reminded (Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998). The link between group identification and well-being is not, however, limited to minority groups. Empirical research suggests that identification with ingroup social categories is associated with positive well-being, regardless of the ingroup's status (Branscombe & Wann, 1991).

In addition, research supports the prediction that perceiving discrimination encourages group



identification. Recognizing prejudice and minority group identification are correlated among Jews (Rollins, 1973), women (Gurin & Townsend, 1986), African-Americans (Gurin, Gurin, Lao, & Beattie, 1969), lesbians (Crosby et al., 1989), and non-mainstream college groups (e.g., punks, hippies, nerds; Cozzarelli & Karafa, 1998). Using minimal groups, Ellemers (1993) found that when low status group members were led to believe that there is very little possibility they could achieve higher status as individuals, group identification was higher compared to when participants were led to believe that their group membership was less of a barrier to future success. Similarly, Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, and Spears (2001) found that people with body piercings who were told that they could expect prejudice and discrimination from the mainstream had higher levels of identification with other people with body piercings than those who were told that they could expect positive treatment. More generally, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, and Smith (1984) found that failure that threatens the status of the ingroup can increase ingroup cohesion and group identification.

Although the rejection-identification model specifically applies to disadvantaged groups, the theoretical perspective on which the model is based offers straightforward predictions about the effects of perceived discrimination in privileged groups. Because perceptions of discrimination among privileged groups are relatively less likely to reflect perceptions of pervasive discrimination, they are also less likely to have a harmful effect on psychological well-being. In addition, the rejection-identification perspective suggests that perceived discrimination in privileged groups is less likely to lead to increased identification with the privileged group membership. Because members of privileged groups who perceive discrimination are less likely to experience it as pervasive devaluation, they are less likely to respond to it by turning to the ingroup. In addition, members of privileged groups are not likely to see discrimination against them as a threat to their group as a whole, or more generally as an intergroup phenomenon. Thus, one important cause of increased ingroup identification—perceived threat to the group—is likely to be absent in privileged group's perceptions of discrimination (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). In short, the rejection-identification perspective predicts that because prejudice against privileged groups does not reflect widespread rejection—as it is likely to be among the disadvantaged—perceiving discrimination is relatively unlikely to harm the well-being of privileged

groups, or increase their group identification.

### Overview of the Current Study

We test predictions made by the rejection-identification model for both disadvantaged and privileged groups by examining the effects of perceiving gender discrimination among women and men. Although Branscombe, Schmitt, et al. (1999) found support for the rejection-identification model with African-Americans, the model's differential predictions for disadvantaged and privileged groups have not been tested in prior research. Because the logic of the rejection-identification model is that the consequences of perceived discrimination depend on the social structural position of the ingroup, it is important to empirically test the model's differing predictions for privileged and disadvantaged groups. We chose men and women as our comparison groups for two reasons. First, there is clear evidence that women are disadvantaged relative to men on virtually every known economic indicator (Peterson & Runyan, 1993). In the United States specifically, women are disadvantaged relative to men in terms of education (Orenstein, 1994; Sadker, 1994), income (Kemp, 1994; Olson & Frieze, 1987; Reskin & Padavic, 1994), and job promotion (Gupta, Jenkins, & Beehr, 1983; Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992). Secondly, while women are disadvantaged, they do not represent a numerical minority, allowing our test of the model with this group to rule out size as the source of the effects. We also expanded on prior research by including a number of well-validated measures of psychological adjustment in order to consider psychological well-being more broadly.

We tested the following predictions derived from the rejection-identification model using structural equation modeling. Among women, we expected that perceiving discrimination against their gender group would exert a direct negative effect on psychological well-being, while simultaneously inducing coping via gender group identification. Among men, perceiving discrimination should not significantly affect well-being or gender group identification, although gender group identification should be related to well-being.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Undergraduates (220 females, 203 males) completed a questionnaire for course credit in an

introductory psychology course. The average age of participants was 18.82 years ( $SD = 2.25$ ); however, the men in the sample ( $M = 19.27$ ,  $SD = 2.96$ ) were significantly older than the women ( $M = 18.40$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ),  $F(1,421) = 16.39$ ,  $p < .001$ . Participants completed the questionnaire booklets in mixed-gender groups of 10-30 people. The order of the measures was randomized across participants. The data from 21 ethnic minority participants were excluded from the analysis.

### Measures of Perceptions of Discrimination

Ingroup disadvantage. We measured perceptions of the disadvantages faced by one's gender group by averaging responses to four items ("Women [men] as a group have been victimized by society," "Women [men] as a group regularly encounter sexism," "Prejudice and discrimination against women [men] exists," and "Women [men] as a group have been victimized because of their gender"). Participants indicated their agreement with each statement using a 1-8 ("Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree") response scale. The measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .83$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .77$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .69$ ). For this and other measures of perceptions of inequality, higher numbers indicate more discrimination against one's gender group.

Outgroup privilege. We created a measure of perceptions of one's gender group's privileges by averaging responses to five items ("Men [women] in general have had opportunities that they wouldn't have gotten if they were women [men]," "There are privileges that men [women] have had that they would not have received if they weren't men [women]," "Men [women] have received some kinds of advantages due to their gender," "Good things have happened to men [women] because of their gender," and "Men [women] have received preferential treatment because of their gender"). Participants indicated their agreement with each statement using a 1-8 ("Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree") response scale. The measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .83$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

Past experience with gender discrimination. We measured attributions to prejudice for past negative outcomes with six items ("I have personally been a victim of sexual discrimination," "I consider myself a person who has been deprived of opportunities because of my gender," "I feel like I am personally a victim of society because of my gender," "I have personally been the victim of sexual

harassment,” “I regularly encounter sexism against my gender,” and “Prejudice against my gender group has affected me personally”). Participants reported their level of agreement with each item on a 1-8 scale (“Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”). This measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .82$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

Prejudice across contexts. This measure assesses the extent to which participants believe that negative outcomes, across a number of contexts, might be due to prejudice against their gender. We constructed a scale describing six negative outcomes that were attributionally ambiguous but that could be plausibly interpreted as situations where gender prejudice might operate: 1) Suppose you apply for a job that you believe you are qualified for. After the interview you learn that you didn’t get the job; 2) Suppose you want to join an organization whose members are mostly of the other gender. You are told that they are not taking any new members at this time; 3) After class you approach the professor to ask a question about the lecture, but the professor abruptly ends your conversation and begins talking with a student of the other gender; 4) You are assigned to a group of six students in order to complete a project. You are the only member of your gender in the group. The other members of the group are not very friendly and don’t pay much attention to what you have to contribute to the project; 5) You are having a conversation with a group of individuals, all members of the other gender. They laugh at everything you say, even though you are not trying to be funny; 6) You repeatedly ask your teaching assistant to help you prepare for the upcoming test. This teaching assistant seems to be more helpful to students of the other gender. Participants were asked to indicate how likely they would be to attribute each outcome to gender prejudice or to other causes, if that event happened to them. Participants responded to each event by circling a probability from 0% to 100%, with 5% increments. The measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .83$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

### Gender Group Identification

We assessed gender group identification with four items measuring emotional attachment to one’s gender group (“I value being a member of my gender group,” “I am proud to be a member of my gender group,” “I like being a member of my gender group,” and “I believe that being a member of my gender group is a positive experience”). Participants responded on a 1-8 scale (“Strongly Disagree” to

“Strongly Agree”), with higher scores indicating greater identification with one’s gender group. This measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .85$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

### Psychological Well-being

Self-esteem. We assessed self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (1979), a well-validated measure of global self-esteem. Participants responded to the items on a 1-7 scale (“Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”). Responses were reverse-scored where appropriate such that higher scores indicate higher personal self-esteem. The measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .77$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .80$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .74$ ).

Positive affect. We measured positive affect by asking participants how often they experience six positive emotions (Optimistic, Enthusiastic, Good Natured, Happy, Upbeat, and Satisfied). Participants responded on a 1-7 scale (“Never or almost never true of me” to “Always or almost always true of me”). This measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

Life satisfaction. Life satisfaction was assessed by averaging responses to three items (“I am pleased with my accomplishments in life,” “Although some parts of my life could be improved, overall, I have no complaints,” and “I am satisfied with my life”). Participants responded on a 1-8 scale (“Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”), with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction with one’s life. This measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .86$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

Depression. We measured depression using the short form of the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). For twenty sets of four statements, participants indicated which one of the four best describe them. Each statement was given a value from 0 to 3, with higher numbers being more diagnostic of depression. The total score was created by summing the scores for the 20 individual items. This measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and for both women ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

Anxiety. We measured anxiety using the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Inventory (Taylor, 1953). Participants indicated whether each of 20 statements was true or false of them. The total score consisted of the sum of responses that indicated anxiety. This measure was reliable overall ( $\alpha = .82$ ),

and for both women ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and men ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

We first compared the scores of women and men on all of the measured variables. Because the men in the sample were significantly older than the women (although the difference was less than one year), we performed an analysis of covariance for each comparison, using age as a covariate. As shown in Table 1, women clearly reported experiencing more discrimination against their gender group than did men. Women reported greater ingroup disadvantage, greater outgroup privilege, more attributions to prejudice across contexts, and more past experience with gender discrimination, than did men. This difference suggests that women and men are sensitive to the social reality of women's disadvantage relative to men. Women's higher reports of past experience with discrimination and plausibility of situations across contexts reflect the reality that they do face prejudice more pervasively than men do.

Women tended to report higher levels of gender group identification compared to men, but this difference was marginally significant. On the measures of well-being, women generally reported less positive well-being than men. This difference was significant on the Beck Depression Inventory and the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Inventory measure, and marginal on the Rosenberg Personal Self-Esteem Inventory. The one reversal in the pattern of women scoring more negatively on the measures of psychological well-being occurred with the measure of frequency of experiencing positive emotions, where women reported significantly greater frequency than men. Men and women did not differ in general life satisfaction.

### Structural Equation Modeling Analyses Testing the Rejection-Identification Model

We tested the rejection-identification model among men and women using EQS for Windows Version 5.7b. For each model we tested, we report several indices of fit. We report the Non-Normative Fit Index (NNFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Chi-square goodness-of-fit index. Both the NNFI and CFI indicate the degree to which the model in question is superior to a null model, which specifies no covariances between the variables. These metrics can range from 0 to 1, with higher numbers indicating a better fit between the observed and estimated covariance matrices. Values greater

than .90 are generally considered to represent adequate fit of the model to the data (see Hu & Bentler, 1995, for a more detailed discussion of fit indices). For the chi-square goodness-of-fit index, exact fit between the model and the data is represented by a chi-square value of zero, and higher chi-square values indicate worse fit. The goodness-of-fit index is extremely useful because it can be used to test whether removing or adding paths in a model results in a significant difference in goodness-of-fit.

Although fit indices are a measure of the extent to which the observed data can be reproduced by the hypothesized model, they are not the only criteria by which the adequacy of models can be evaluated. For example, models can fit the data well even when hypothesized paths in the model do not reach statistical significance, or are in the opposite direction than what was hypothesized. Thus, for each model we also consider the significance and valence of the model's hypothesized causal relationships. Listwise deletion was used to compute the correlation matrices for men and women, as shown in Table 2.

The "Rejection-Identification Model" predicts that greater perceptions of pervasive prejudice against one's own group will exert a direct negative effect on psychological well-being, and an indirect positive effect on well-being mediated by group identification. In other words, in addition to a direct negative effect on well-being, perceptions of discrimination against one's group will increase group identification, and group identification will enhance psychological well-being. To test these hypothesized predictions, we specified a model where perceptions of ingroup disadvantage, outgroup privilege, prejudice against one's gender across situations, and past experience with prejudice loaded on a single latent factor. Gender group identification was specified as a latent factor, with the four items of the measure serving as indicators. The measures of psychological well-being all served as indicators of a single latent factor. In addition, we specified that the latent factor of group identification was a function of perceptions of gender discrimination, and that psychological well-being was a function of both perceptions of discrimination and gender group identification.

Because the rejection-identification model assumes that the effects of perceived discrimination are different for disadvantaged and privileged groups, we predicted that the model would fit differently for women and men. Thus, we first had to test whether the model fit the observed data significantly

better when the model parameters were optimized separately for women and men, compared to when the model parameters were constrained to be equal across the two gender groups. Indeed, the combined fit of the model among both men and women was significantly worse when the free parameters were constrained to be equal across both gender groups compared to when the model was optimized separately for each group,  $\Delta X^2(29) = 198.26$ ,  $p < .001$ . Consequently, all subsequent analyses were carried out separately for men and women.

Women. We began our analyses of the women's data by first testing an independence (or null) model, in which all of the parameters are set to zero. This model tests the assumption that there is no covariation among the variables in the model, and is used to establish a baseline against which to compare other models. The hypothesized model fit the data well, NNFI = .93, CFI = .94, and significantly better than the null model,  $\Delta X^2(16) = 1070.55$ ,  $p < .001$ . As shown in Figure 1, all of the estimated parameters were significant and in the direction consistent with our predictions,  $p$ 's < .05. In addition, all of the indicators significantly loaded on their respective latent factors,  $p$ 's < .05. Because the critical difference in our predictions for men and women is that perceived discrimination affects well-being and group identification in women but not in men, we examined how fixing these paths to zero would affect model fit. Among women, fixing both of these paths from perceived discrimination to zero resulted in a significant reduction in model fit,  $\Delta X^2(2) = 8.29$ ,  $p < .01$ . In sum, the rejection-identification model was supported among women. Results supported a model in which perceptions of gender discrimination exerted a significant negative effect on psychological well-being, and in which the negative effect of perceived discrimination was partially suppressed by increased ingroup identification.

The standardized total effect (both direct and indirect) of perceptions of discrimination on psychological well-being is -.15. Although our results are consistent with the idea that gender group identification partially alleviates the negative psychological effects of attributions to prejudice, the overall relationship between perceptions of discrimination and the well-being constructs was still negative.

Men. We hypothesized that gender group identification would positively predict psychological well-being in men, but perceived discrimination against men would not have significant effects on



either gender group identification or psychological well-being. Thus, as shown in Figure 2, we examined a model in which group identification affected psychological well-being, but the paths from perceived discrimination were fixed at zero. In examining this model's fit, we again compared the hypothesized model to the null model. The hypothesized model fit the data well, NNFI = .89, CFI = .91, and significantly better than the null model,  $\Delta X^2(14) = 645.20$ ,  $p < .001$ . All of the indicators significantly loaded on their respective latent factors ( $p$ 's  $< .05$ ) with one exception. Unlike in the women's data, the latent factor of perceived gender discrimination did not significantly predict scores on the measure of expectations of discrimination across situations. This finding suggests that for men, general beliefs about discrimination are unrelated to the plausibility of encountering discrimination across contexts. As predicted, the path from group identification to psychological well-being was positive and significant,  $p < .05$ . Freeing the paths from perceived discrimination to gender group identification and psychological well-being (allowing the paths to differ from zero when optimizing the estimated model to best fit the data) did not result in a significant increase in model fit among men,  $\Delta X^2(2) = 0.58$ , *ns*. To summarize, the results of these analyses are consistent with our predicted model for men, where perceived discrimination neither harms well-being nor encourages group identification.

#### Tests of the discounting model

We tested an alternative theoretical model, based on the prediction that perceived discrimination can protect self-esteem by consistently serving as external attributions that discount one's own causal role in a broad spectrum of negative outcomes (Crocker & Major, 1989). The discounting model predicts that perceptions of discrimination will protect the self-esteem of members of stigmatized groups because they allow for consistently making attributions to prejudice for negative outcomes (see also Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). In addition, the discounting perspective suggests that those high in group identification are more likely to use attributions to prejudice as a way of protecting self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker et al., 1998).

We tested these predictions by examining a model for women in which group identification predicted perceptions of discrimination and psychological well-being, and perceptions of discrimination predicted well-being. (In testing this model for men, the only significant relationship that we found

among the latent factors was between gender group identification and psychological well-being. Thus, further reports of the analyses of the men's data do not add anything to the results reported above. We therefore present only the results for women.) While this model fit well, NNFI = .93, CFI = .94, the standardized path weight for the path from perceptions of discrimination to psychological well-being was significantly negative ( $-.18, p < .05$ ), not positive as would be predicted by the discounting model. Thus, this analysis disconfirms the hypothesis that perceiving discrimination exerts a direct positive effect on well-being. The standardized path weights for the paths from group identification to well-being (.20) and from group identification to perceptions of discrimination (.17) were both significant,  $p$ 's  $< .05$ . However, because the relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being is negative, these results fail to support the discounting model. In a further test of the discounting model, we retested the model as specified above, but removed the direct path from group identification to well-being. This second model fit well, NNFI = .93, CFI = .94. The effect of group identification on perceived discrimination (.16) was significant,  $p < .05$ ; however, the effect of perceived discrimination on well-being ( $-.13$ ) was negative and non-significant,  $p > .10$ . Thus, these results are also inconsistent with the discounting model.

### Discussion

In this study we tested the idea that the psychological consequences of perceiving prejudice and discrimination against an ingroup depends on who is doing the perceiving. More specifically, we hypothesized that while members of a disadvantaged group would suffer psychological harm from perceiving discrimination, members of a privileged group would not. Indeed, among women we found support for a model in which perceptions of discrimination were associated with harmful consequences, but among men we found support for a model in which perceptions of discrimination were not associated with harmful consequences. These findings support the idea that attributions to prejudice are especially harmful among members of disadvantaged groups, but they are not harmful to members of privileged groups. More generally, our work is consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating that recognizing that one's group membership is a target of prejudice and discrimination carries negative psychological consequences for disadvantaged groups (see Schmitt & Branscombe, in

press-a).

The rejection-identification model bases its predictions on the relatively pervasive nature of prejudice that disadvantaged groups must face. Because of their structural position, disadvantaged groups are more likely face and perceive discrimination and prejudice frequently and across contexts. In contrast, perceptions of discrimination among privileged groups are less likely to reflect perceptions of pervasive discrimination. Indeed, we found that women reported more personal experience with discrimination, and perceived more disadvantages and fewer privileges for their group than did men. Women were also more likely than men to see discrimination as a plausible explanation for future hypothetical negative events. Although a measure of attributions to prejudice for ambiguous events is not a direct measure of the stability of attributions to prejudice across time, the gender difference in the perceived plausibility of attributions to prejudice does reflect differential stability of perceptions of discrimination across contexts. In our view, prejudice is seen as a plausible explanation for ambiguous negative events precisely because prejudice and discrimination are seen as likely occurrences across contexts. Thus, the effect of perceiving prejudice will differ for disadvantaged and privileged groups because the meaning of those perceptions differ for those groups. As evidence of this, we found that among men, attributions to prejudice for hypothetical situations did not significantly load on the latent factor of perceptions of discrimination. However, this measure significantly loaded on the latent factor among women. Examination of the correlation matrix in Table 2 makes it is clear that claims of gender discrimination among men are uncorrelated with the degree to which men explained hypothetical negative events as being due to discrimination. In women, attributions for these hypothetical situations were significantly correlated with the other three measures of gender discrimination, indicating that women perceived gender discrimination as something that could explain their outcomes across a number of specific situations.

As in previous work by Branscombe, Schmitt, et al. (1999), we found no support for the discounting hypothesis. According to Crocker and Major (1989), the more members of disadvantaged groups perceive prejudice and discrimination as widespread phenomena, the more frequently they will attribute negative outcomes to prejudice, and consequently, the higher their self-esteem may be. Based

on these predictions, we tested a "discounting model" among women and found that it failed to confirm the hypotheses suggested by the discounting perspective. In fitting the model to the data, optimal fit was achieved when perceived discrimination had a negative effect on well-being. Although our results are consistent with the notion that perceiving discrimination is more likely to have negative than positive consequences when discrimination is seen as pervasive, we did not test the possibility that they might offer some self-protection when they discount one's personal deservingness as a cause of a specific negative event. In contrast to our finding that general perceptions of discrimination are associated negatively with well-being, Crocker et al. (1991) found that women who could attribute a specific negative evaluation to the evaluator's sexism reported less depressed affect than those for whom an attribution to prejudice was not plausible (but see Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997; Ruggiero & Major, 1998). If there are conditions where making an attribution to prejudice might be self-protective, it would seem to be limited to instances of discrimination that are seen as isolated or unusual. However, as a long term strategy of self-protection, attributions to prejudice are unlikely to be successful. If attributions to prejudice are made repeatedly, they are bound to increase general perceptions of discrimination, which we found to be harmful in women.

The present study advances research on perceptions of prejudice and discrimination in a number of ways. First, we measured psychological well-being using a number of well-validated measures. Previous research in this area has focused on self-esteem and affective responses to a specific event. In contrast, our study examined mental health more generally, and how it is influenced by perceptions of discrimination more generally. In addition to the measures of self-esteem and affect, we included measures of depression, anxiety and life satisfaction.

Secondly, incorporating group identification into our model adds to a growing literature on the ways in which disadvantaged groups cope with the psychological costs of perceiving discrimination against them (e.g., Clark et al., 1999; Miller & Major, 2000). Rather than simply arguing that recognizing discrimination is harmful to psychological well-being, we have identified one important strategy for coping with that harm—group identification. Among women, we found that perceptions of discrimination increased gender group identification, and that gender group identification enhanced

well-being. Although the overall effect of perceiving discrimination was negative, increased group identification helped to attenuate some of the negative effects of those perceptions. Not only have we replicated previous findings obtained with African Americans (Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999), but we simultaneously tested the rejection-identification model's predictions among privileged and disadvantaged groups. Our perspective's predictions for both groups were confirmed.

### Limitations

Although our results are highly consistent with the rejection-identification model, our data are correlational in nature, and other causal explanations for our findings cannot be disconfirmed empirically. For instance, one explanation for the relationship we observed between perceived discrimination and well-being is that people who are not fairing well psychologically are more likely to perceive prejudice against them. However, we observed the negative relationship between well-being and perceived discrimination exclusively among women. Therefore, while the maladjustment perspective might offer a plausible alternative explanation for our results for women, it cannot account for the different patterns of results among men and women. It is not clear why maladjustment would encourage perceptions of discrimination among women, but not among men. Similarly, others have argued that the relationship between perceived discrimination and gender group identification that we observed among women is due to identification encouraging perceptions of discrimination. Once again, however, it is not clear why gender group identification would lead to perceptions of discrimination among women, but not men. Only the rejection-identification model's differential predictions for privileged and disadvantaged groups offer a clear explanation for the different relationships observed for men and women.

More importantly, when researchers have manipulated perceptions of discrimination in disadvantaged groups, they have found results consistent with our model. Using experimental methods, others have found that perceptions of discrimination increase group identification (Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998; Dépret & Fiske, 1993; Dion, Earn, & Yee, 1978; Foster & Matheson, 1999; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001; Simon et al., 1998), and harm well-being (Dion & Earn, 1975; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). Although our data are correlational, we predicted and

found a different pattern of correlations among women and men. Furthermore, we tested an alternative theoretical model that specifies a different set of causal relationships, and found no support for that model. When testing the discounting model, we found that the model fit best when perceptions of discrimination negatively predicted well-being—the opposite of the effect predicted by that perspective.

Another limitation of the current findings concerns the measurement of the variables used in our tested models. For some of the measures of perceived discrimination, the reliability for men was slightly lower than that for women. However, by forming a latent factor out of these indicators, essentially comprised of the variance that the indicators have in common, we were able to reduce the influence of measurement error. In addition, our measures of perceived discrimination were not balanced scales (none of the items were reverse-scored), which could potentially introduce a response bias. However, such a response bias could not easily account for the differential findings we observed among women and men. Thus, although these measurement issues cannot offer a clear explanation for our findings, future replications using different and improved measures of the conceptual variables would strengthen the generalizability of this work.

### Future Directions

Because our perspective makes its predictions based on the ingroup's social structural position, it has interesting implications for future research on the factors that encourage or discourage social structural change. Clearly, before members of disadvantaged groups can engage in collective action aimed at reducing inequality, they must first acknowledge that discrimination exists. In that sense, recognizing discrimination against one's disadvantaged group may be positive rather than negative. Thus, a discontinuity may exist between what is good for psychological well-being at the individual level (the focus of our investigation), and what might be necessary to bring about positive social change for the group as a whole. In other words, while recognition of disadvantage is necessary for disadvantaged groups to organize for change, it is a recognition that individual members tend to avoid because it is a psychologically harmful realization. Indeed, in women's history, the suffrage movement and feminist movements were not uniformly endorsed by the women who eventually benefited from them (Faludi, 1991). In a study of antifeminist literature, Kinnard (1986) found that half of the books denouncing

women's rights were written by women. According to our perspective, at least part of the reason why women have been reluctant to join women's rights movements is that the recognition that they are disadvantaged is harmful to the individual's psychological well-being.

Because the negative well-being consequences of recognizing disadvantage are somewhat alleviated by identification with one's group, perceptions of discrimination will be most harmful when structural or contextual factors "block" the possibility of identification with one's group. According to social identity theory, when discrimination is seen as legitimate, targets of discrimination are unlikely to turn toward their ingroup (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Tajfel, 1978). Thus, ideologies that legitimize inequality are likely to make the recognition of disadvantage more harmful by discouraging group identification. Indeed, when prejudice is seen as legitimate, perceiving discrimination is especially harmful (Crocker, Cornwell, & Major, 1994; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). In the case of women, biological essentialism is likely to be a common and powerful justification for patriarchy (Bem, 1993). Our understanding of the psychological experience of disadvantaged groups could benefit from future research investigating the role of such ideologies in moderating the likelihood of group identification as a response to perceptions of disadvantage.

For the men in our sample, claims of discrimination were unrelated to group identification and well-being. What then do such claims actually mean to the men who make them? Although this question cannot be fully answered by our data, other research offers a few suggestions. For instance, Kobrynowicz and Branscombe (1997) suggested that attributions to prejudice among men might be the result of intragroup comparisons with the past, rather than intergroup comparisons. In other words, they result from men comparing their current outcomes to those of men in the past, and perceiving their current position as less positive. In that sense, claims of discrimination among men might be experienced as less of an intergroup phenomenon than it is among women. Our own observation that men's perceptions of discrimination were unrelated to group identification is consistent with the idea that men perceive discrimination more in interpersonal than intergroup terms.

### Conclusions

We found that women's perceptions of discrimination were negatively related to a number of

major markers of psychological well-being. Our results were consistent with the rejection-identification model, which suggests that in women, perceptions of discrimination lead to negative psychological well-being. Our results also support the hypothesis that increased gender group identification alleviates some of the negative psychological effects. Among men, claims of discrimination did not predict well-being or group identification. These differential findings for women and men are clearly supportive of the idea that because women and men occupy different positions within the social structure, perceptions of discrimination mean something very different to women than they do to men. Future work on perceptions of discrimination, and on perceptions of the social structure more generally, should consider how the effects of such perceptions have different implications depending on the ingroup's social structural position.



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Table 1

Means and standard deviations for the measured variables among women and men

<u>Measure</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>F(1, 421)</u>
Ingroup Disadvantage	6.16 (1.39)	3.85 (1.54)	252.62, $p < .001$
Outgroup Privilege	6.33 (1.28)	5.38 (1.37)	51.91, $p < .001$
Prejudice across Contexts	62.60 (19.96)	54.03 (20.19)	18.29, $p < .001$
Past Prejudice Experience	3.70 (1.75)	2.36 (1.36)	76.00, $p < .001$
Gender Group Identification	6.97 (.98)	6.77 (1.11)	3.84, $p < .06$
Rosenberg Self-Esteem	5.24 (1.33)	5.40 (1.63)	3.47, $p < .07$
Life Satisfaction	6.49 (.91)	6.30 (.85)	1.65, <u>ns</u>
Positive Affect	5.88 (.93)	5.67 (1.00)	4.63, $p < .05$
Beck Depression	7.71 (6.90)	6.08 (7.36)	5.35, $p < .05$
Taylor Manifest Anxiety	9.35 (4.43)	8.27 (4.73)	5.70, $p < .05$

Note. Both F's and means are adjusted for age. Age was a significant covariate for the measures of outgroup privilege, past experience with prejudice, and gender group identification,  $p$ 's  $< .05$ . Age had a marginal effect on Rosenberg Self-Esteem and life satisfaction,  $p$ 's  $< .10$ .

Table 2

Correlations and Standard Deviations for the Measured Variables Among Women and Men

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Ingroup Disadvantage	—	.39*	.02	.53*	.06	-.02	-.02	.07	.11	.01	-.04	.11	-.05
2. Outgroup Privilege	.47*	—	.09	.26*	.22*	.15*	.11	.20*	.07	-.06	-.14*	.02	.06
3. Prejudice across Contexts	.20*	.27*	—	.02	.03	.03	-.03	.03	.04	-.11	.00	.09	.19*
4. Past Prejudice Experience	.47*	.36*	.29*	—	-.04	-.13	-.20*	-.10	-.08	-.19*	-.14*	.23*	.13
5. Like	.10	.17*	.07	.05	—	.66*	.66*	.45*	.22*	.10	.11	-.05	.03
6. Value	.01	.06	.03	-.08	.74*	—	.51*	.49*	.20*	.21*	.21*	-.08	-.06
7. Pride	.08	.23*	.06	.09	.72*	.63*	—	.50*	.23*	.22*	.22*	-.07	-.06
8. Positive	.16*	.27*	.04	-.01	.67*	.59*	.65*	—	.26*	.19*	.19*	-.05	-.13
9. Rosenberg Self-Esteem	-.01	-.03	-.14*	-.14*	.14*	.20*	.13*	.19*	—	.48*	.47*	-.38*	-.35*
10. Life Satisfaction	-.04	.00	-.07	-.10	.11	.13*	.12	.12	.70*	—	.46*	-.50*	-.56*
11. Positive Affect	-.06	-.06	-.11	-.18*	.09	.15*	.08	.17*	.57*	.50*	—	-.24*	-.30*
12. Beck Depression	.06	.04	.25*	.13*	.03	.08	.02	.00	-.45*	-.52*	-.36*	—	.47*
13. Taylor Manifest Anxiety	.14*	.05	.12	.15*	-.08	-.07	-.10	-.12	-.46*	-.65*	-.42*	.53*	—
Men Standard Deviation	1.54	1.37	20.2	1.36	1.41	1.13	1.53	1.50	1.63	.85	1.00	7.36	4.73
Women Standard Deviation	1.39	1.28	20.0	1.75	1.13	1.07	1.06	1.26	1.33	.91	.93	6.90	4.43

Note. The correlations for women ( $N = 220$ ) are below the diagonal of the matrix; the correlations for men ( $N = 203$ ) are above the diagonal.  
\*  $p < .05$



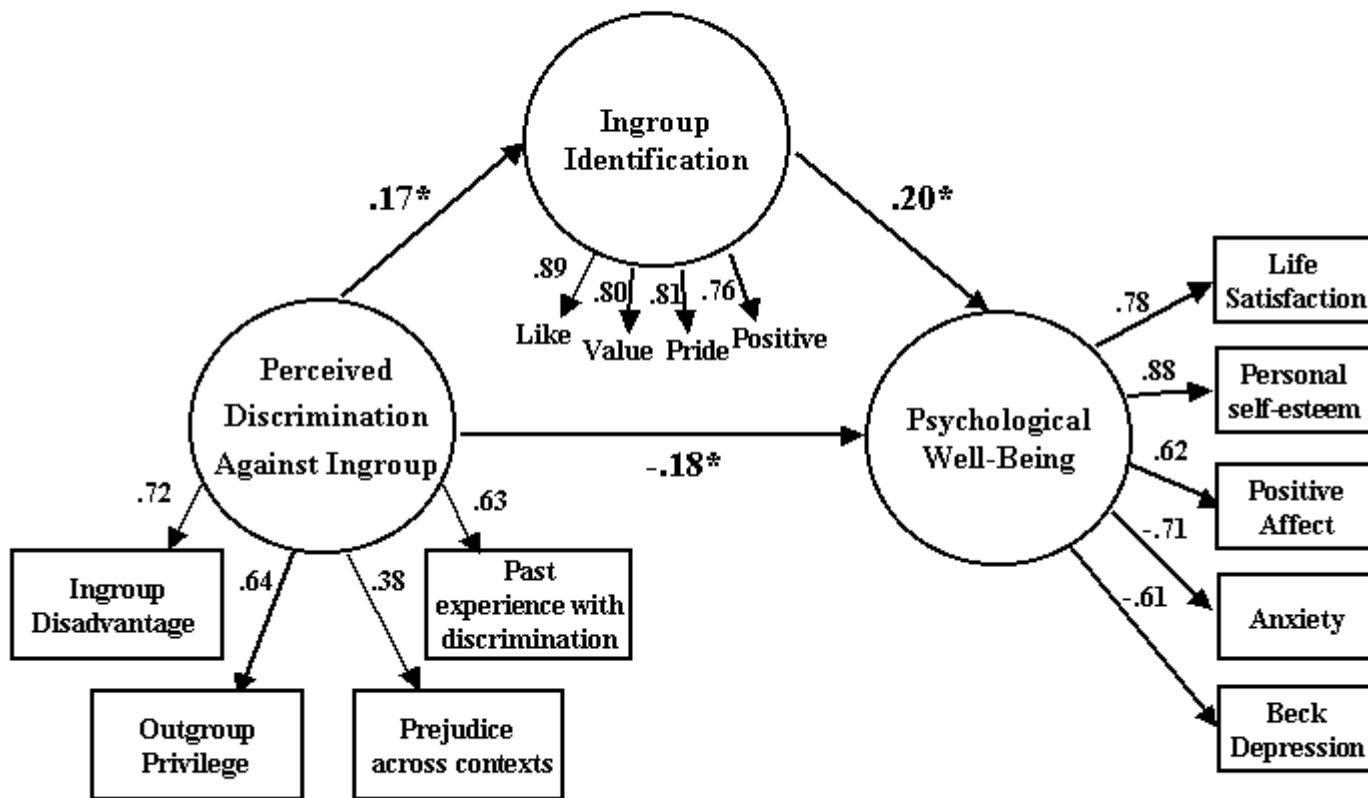


Figure 1. The Rejection-Identification Model and estimated parameters among women. All of the estimated path weights are standardized. \*  $p < .05$ .

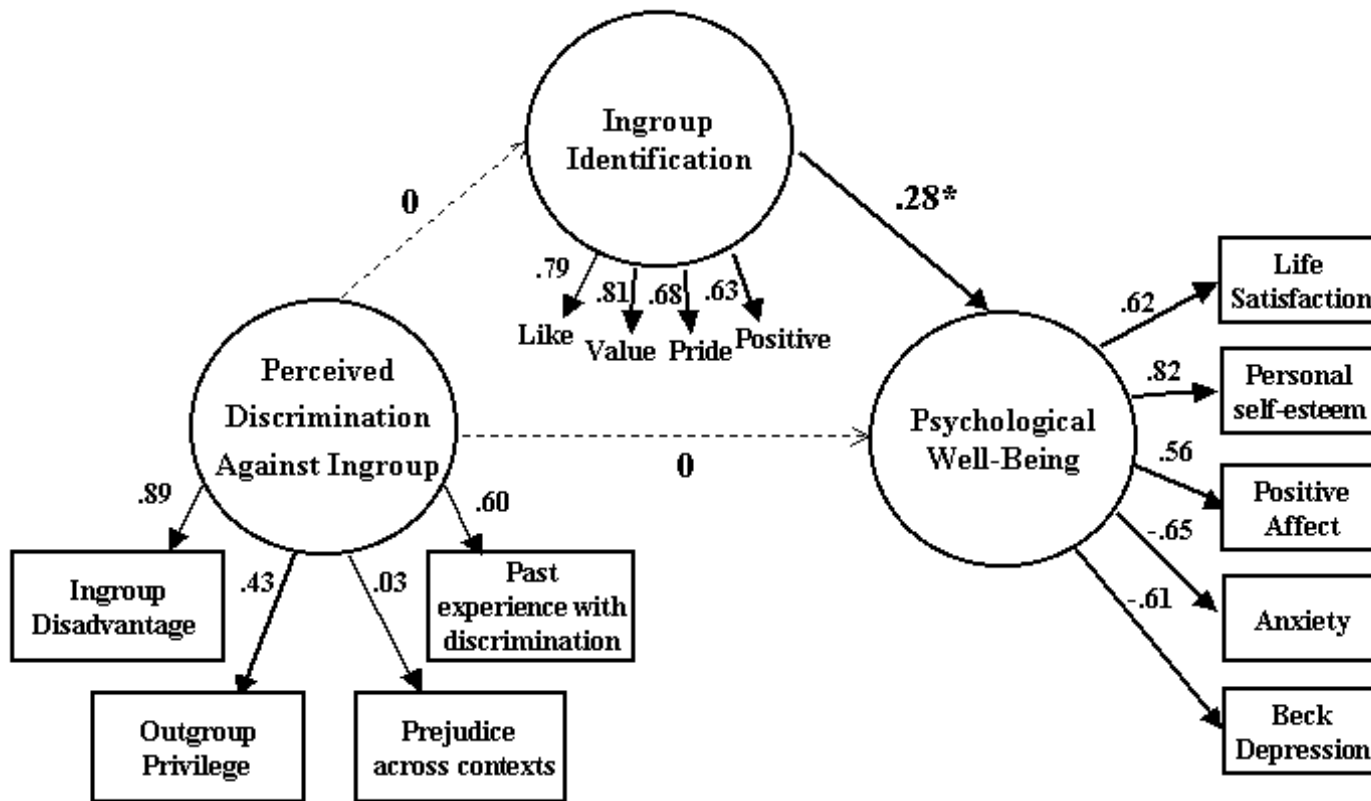


Figure 2. The Rejection-Identification Model and estimated parameters among men. All of the estimated path weights are standardized. \*  $p < .05$ .