

THE SHADY SPECTRUM

by

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Abstract

The current study examined the relationship between identification and perceptions of rejection among multiracial individuals. Following the Rejection Identification Model (RIM; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), it was hypothesized that multiracial individuals with lighter skin tones will perceive less rejection than multiracial individuals with darker skin tones. It was also hypothesized that perceptions of rejection from one racial ingroup will be associated with identification with their other racial group. A total of 41 multiracial individuals took an online survey assessing group-based rejection, identification, and perceived skin tone. The results were not supportive of the hypotheses. In contrast to what was hypothesized, the more participants perceived rejection with one of their racial groups, the less they identified from their other racial group. Moreover, there were no significant differences on perceptions of rejection based on skin tone. Implication for research on multiracial identity and the rejection identification model is discussed.

The Shady Spectrum

Throughout history, humans have recognized that there is strength in numbers. There are many benefits to being able to fit in with a group. When belonging to a group, individuals gain a sense of belonging and support from other members of that group. In some cases, when a person perceives discrimination from an outgroup, they tend to identify more strongly with their ingroup. These ideas roughly describe a social psychological theory known as the rejection-identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). The rejection-identification model suggests that when members of non-dominant groups perceive rejection from the dominant in-group because of their group membership, identification with that group can increase (Branscombe, et al., 1999).

One of the first empirical studies to examine the rejection identification model was conducted by Branscombe, et al., (1999). They theorized that among racial minority groups, attributions of prejudice from the dominant majority group is associated with minority group identification. Branscombe et al. (1999) define attributions to prejudice as the extent to which an individual assumes an experience is caused by racial prejudice. In an analysis of these ideas, African American participants were presented with 10 theoretical scenarios like, *“Suppose you go into a “fancy” restaurant. Your server seems to be taking care of all the other customers except you. You are the last person whose order is taken.”* Participants were asked to rate how much they attributed each scenario to prejudice. Participants also reported their level of

identification with their minority group. The results were supported by the model; higher attributions to prejudice was positively correlated with minority group identification. This suggests that attributions of prejudice from a dominant racial group may influence minority individual's identification with their ingroup.

Other work has examined the relationship between rejection and multiple types of group identification (Ramos, Cassidy, Reicher, & Haslam, 2011). Like previous studies, the experimenters hypothesized that perceiving rejection will be positively associated with multiple types of group identification. In this study, African American participants responded to three measures of identity: centrality, ingroup affect, and ingroup ties. Centrality is the amount of importance that belonging to a group has on oneself. Ingroup affect is an evaluation of group membership. Ingroup ties is the perception of belonging to the group. Participants also completed several measures of rejection including experiences with discrimination, day to day discrimination, outgroup privilege, and attributions to prejudice. Somewhat in line with the rejection identification model, perceptions of discrimination were positively related to ingroup ties and centrality. Perceptions of discrimination, however, was negatively associated with ingroup affect. Together, this study provides some support of the rejection identification model.

The rejection identification model has also been explored among other ethnic minorities, immigrant groups, and across different cultural contexts. A recent study, for example, examined the rejection-identification model among Latinos college students in their first and last year of college (Cronin, Levin, Branscombe, Laar, & Tropp, 2012). Participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to perceived discrimination, ethnic identification, and psychological

well-being. In line with the rejection identification model, they found that those who perceived more discrimination identified more strongly with their ethnic group during both years of college. These results extend the rejection identification model across time and suggests that ethnic identification may be a group based coping strategy.

Similarly, Wiley, Lawrence, Figueroa & Percontinos (2013), explored the relationship between perceptions of rejection from the host culture (e.g., U.S. Americans) and in-group identification among first-generation immigrants. In an examination of these ideas, Latino immigrants answered questions that assessed their ethnic and American identification, as well as group-based rejection from U.S. Americans. Contrary to the rejection identification model, they found that rejection from the host culture was not associated with identification with the in-group (e.g., Latino). However, rejection from the host culture was negatively associated with identification as American (Wiley et al., 2013).

When immigrants move to a new country, they are also faced with the possibility of experiencing rejection from members of the host culture and their heritage culture. Considering these ideas, Wiley (2013) explored the relationship between identity and group-based rejection from Americans and from members of one's own heritage culture. First-generation Latino immigrants completed questions that measured their American and Latino identification, perception of rejection from Americans (outgroup), and perception of rejection from Latinos (in-group). Wiley found some support for the rejection identification model. In particular, perceptions of rejection from other Latinos was positively associated with American identification, and negatively associated with Latino identification.

Drawing from the bicultural identity integration literature (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos,

2005), Badea, et al. (2011) theorized that experiences of rejection from the host country or the country of origin would be associated with different acculturation strategies. In an examination of these ideas, Romanian and Moroccan immigrants living in France responded to questions regarding their perceptions of rejection from the host country (France) and their country of origin (Romania or Morocco). Participants' acculturation strategies were also measured: assimilation (low interaction with country of origin, high interaction with host country), separation (maintaining interaction with culture of country of origin, low interaction with host country), integration (equal interaction with both groups), and marginalization (not maintaining cultural interactions with either group). As predicted, rejection from the host country was associated with a separation acculturation strategy, rejection from their country of origin was positively related to assimilation acculturation strategies. This suggests that immigrants who experience rejection from either group (host or origin country) will orient their identity toward the group they experience less rejection from, similar to the ideas noted in the Rejection Identification Model.

While past studies have examined the rejection identification model among ethnic and immigrant groups, few studies have directly examined the relationship between group-based rejection and identification among multiracial individuals. One notable exception is Giamo, Schmitt, & Outten's recent study (2012). Multiracial people were chosen for this study because they could potentially have different experiences than people who only fit in within one race. Multiracial people also can identify with more than one race which could also have some impact their experiences of rejection and identification on their lives. Multiracial participants responded to a series of questions related to group identification, including group solidarity, centrality, and

individual self-stereotyping. They also answered questions regarding their perceptions of discrimination. Part of the results were in support of the rejection-identification model. Specifically, solidarity and self-stereotyping were both significantly positively correlated with perceived discrimination. That is, perceptions of discrimination were related to participant's sense of commitment to their ingroup and the extent to which they saw themselves to be similar to the average ingroup member. In contrast, centrality and perceived discrimination were not significantly correlated. This study suggests that feelings of rejection can play a role in multiracial individual's perception of themselves.

These developments provide new opportunities to investigate other factors that may shape the rejection identification process. For example, skin tone may play a role in the way one perceives rejection. If a society tends to prefer lighter skin tones over darker skin tones, people with darker skin tones might feel rejection more strongly and perhaps identify in a different way than a person with lighter skin. Norwood (2015), for example, examined colorism in across different societies all around the world. She explained that even in Ghana "in a world of black and shades of brown" there are still effects of colorism. Lighter skin tones are considered better than darker skin tones. This is most evident in the fact that there is a widespread practice of using skin lightening creams. Norwood also found that colorism also exists in China noting that in many forms of advertisement, lighter skinned Chinese people are used over darker ones. Finally, Norwood traces the origin of colorism in the United States arguing that colonialism of the New World and the slave trade were two events that sparked preoccupation with skin tone where preference of lighter skin over darker skin was weaved into the fabric of this country.

Furthermore, neuropsychological studies have demonstrated skin tone bias (Ronquillo,

Denson, Lickel, Lu, Nandy, & Maddox, 2007). Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), eleven White male participants viewed photos of Black and White faces with both light and dark skin tones. It was found that the participants showed a stronger response in the amygdala when viewing a darker face than when they were viewing a lighter face. This further supports the idea that the people view others who have darker skin as more of a threat than a person who has lighter skin.

Other research examined how people perceive intelligence based on skin tone (Hannon, 2015). Hannon examined how colorism impacts what people think about someone's intelligence. In this study, White participants were asked to interview and later rate the intelligence of another research participants. The research participants being interviewed were either African American or Hispanic of varying skin tones. The researcher hypothesized that the darker skinned individuals will be rated lower in intelligence than the lighter skinned individuals. The results showed that lighter skinned people received significantly higher intelligence ratings than medium skinned individuals. Moreover, they found that darker skinned individuals were rated as having the lowest intelligence. This study shows how people form impressions based on their skin tone. This skin tone bias may also impact how people with darker skin tones feel about themselves.

Taken together, the purpose of this study is to explore the rejection identification model among biracial individuals. Rejection has been shown to influence the group that a person chooses to identify with. Biracial people may experience discrimination on two fronts. For example, if a biracial person is Black and White, they might perceive rejection from both of their races. They could feel rejected by White people as well as being rejected by Black people. As

such, it was hypothesized that perceptions of rejection from one racial group will be associated with identification with their other racial group. Additionally, the current study will examine if perceptions of rejection are associated with skin tone. Based on previous work, it is hypothesized that darker skin biracial individuals will perceive more rejection from either of their racial groups compared to lighter skin biracial individuals.

Method

Participants

The study included 41 multiracial/biracial participants. Their ages ranged from 18 to 40. Most participants were 24. There were 22 males and 18 female participants. While all participants identified as multiracial/biracial, 21 participants self-described themselves as African American, 8 identified as White, 6 identified as Hispanic and 6 identified as other. Participants were recruited through forms of social media including Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter.

Materials

Demographics. A short demographics questionnaire was created for this study to capture important demographic information about each participant such as age, gender, self-identified race, skin tone (Black, dark brown, medium brown, light brown, yellow, tan, olive, and White) among other things.

Identity. Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions related to their

level of identification each of their racial groups. These questions were adapted Leach et al. 2008. One example question is, *“I am glad to be a member of my racial group”*. A high score on this measure means they have strong identification with their group.

Rejection/Perceived Discrimination Questions. Rejection questions were developed by Badea et al. (2011) & Schmitt, et al., (2003) and were modified for a biracial sample.

In particular, participants were presented with a questionnaire measuring their perceptions of prejudice from both of their racial groups. One example question is, *“People of my racial group won’t accept me”*. A high score means they feel more rejected by their group.

Skin Tone and Prototypicality. Participants were asked questions related to their perceptions about their own skin tone, and the way in which they believe other’s view their skin tone and race. A high score means they strongly view themselves as a typical member of one of their racial groups. See Appendix A for a description of all measures.

Procedure

After participants consented to the study, they first answered demographic questions followed by measures of identity, group-based rejection, and skin tone/prototypicality questions. In particular, participants were asked to respond to these questions twice, first with specific reference to one of their racial groups (however they define) and the second time with specific reference to their other racial group, however they choose to define themselves. The order of these variables was counterbalanced to minimize order effects. Once participants completed the survey, they were debriefed and told the true purpose of the study.

Results

It was hypothesized that people who perceived discrimination from one racial group will more strongly identify with their other racial group. To test this hypothesis, a bivariate correlation between participant's identification with their first racial group and perceived discrimination from their second racial group was calculated. In contrast to what was hypothesized, marginal negative correlation was found between identity and perceived discrimination, of ($r(41) = -.27, p = .10$). A second bivariate correlation between participant's identification toward their second racial group and perceived discrimination from their first racial group was calculated. Again, in contrast to what was hypothesized, there was a significant negative correlation between identity and perceptions of discrimination of ($r(41) = -.45, p = .007$).

The second hypothesis was that darker skinned individuals will perceive more rejection than lighter skinned individuals. Since there were eight different ways participants could select to describe their skin tone, the skin tone variable was recoded into two variables, light skin and dark skin. To test this hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was conducted comparing dark skin participants and light skin participants' perceptions of rejection from their first racial group. In contrast to what was hypothesized, there were no significant differences between dark skin ($M = 1.92, SD = 1.2$) and light skin participants ($M = 2.2, SD = 1.13$) on perceived rejection from their first racial group, $p = .38$. A second t-test was conducted comparing dark skin participants' perception of rejection from their second racial group. There was no significant differences between dark skin ($M = 2.64, SD = 1.68$) and light skin participants ($M = 2.16, SD = 1.19$) on

perceived rejection from their second racial group, $p=.31$. This was supportive of the hypothesis, although the finding was not significant.

Discussion

The current study had two goals. First, this study examined the relationship between rejection and identification among a sample of multiracial individuals. This phenomenon is known as the rejection identification model. Secondly, this study examined differences on perceptions of rejection based on skin tone. A total of 41 multiracial individuals second-generation Asian Americans took an online survey assessing group-based rejection, identification, and perceived skin tone. The results were not supportive of the hypotheses. In contrast to what was hypothesized, the more participants identified with one of their racial groups, the less they perceived discrimination from their other. Moreover, there were no significant differences on perceptions of rejection based on skin tone.

Although these findings did not support the hypotheses, these topics should be looked into further to better understand these results. In particular, the more a person identified with a certain racial group, the less discrimination they perceived from their other racial group. Although the results were not consistent with the rejection identification model, the results showed the impact that identifying with a race can have on a person. As a biracial person, being able to protect oneself from perceiving rejection by identifying with their other racial group be beneficial to the person. Evolutionarily we have the urge to fit in with the group because there is strength in numbers. When a person is rejected by one group it can help to be able to identify with another group to protect their well-being. For example, if a biracial person gets rejected by

one of their races and they strongly identify with the other racial group they belong to, the rejection will not be as detrimental to the person.

The study is limited in several ways. First, a snowball effect could have played a role in this study. Since most of the participants knew the experimenter, there could be a similarity within the people who know the experimenter versus people who don't know the experimenter. These participants could come from the same race or culture that the experimenter is from which can have an effect on the results. People who are within the same culture tend to have a lot in common and can share similar feelings as other people within that group. Examining people who have a lot in common could be one reason that significant results were not found. Randomly selecting participants could diminish the effect of the snowball effect. In other instances participants are asked to identify their race from a list of given races. However, in this study participants were allowed to type in the racial group they identify with. This created some confusion when categorizing the races of the participants. This could have muddied the data which could have prevented the experimenter from finding an effect that could have been prevalent within the participants. The interest of the experimenter was to examine the experiences of multiracial people, regardless of the way they chose to identify. The participants were also not told to list the race that they identify with more strongly with first. They were asked to fill out the first questionnaire with their first racial group and then their second. We assumed they would put the race they more strongly identified with first, however, that was not stated clearly in the directions. Using a self-report can also have inaccurate data. People tend to not like telling the truth about themselves, especially when asked about potentially undesirable traits. Therefore people might lie or exaggerate the truth in order to be viewed as more desirable.

These results can show the importance of being able to belong to more than one group. If a person gets rejected from one group and they don't have another group to identify with, the effects of that rejection feel much stronger. However, if a person has multiple groups that they can identify with then the rejection doesn't hit as hard as it does in the person who only has one group to relate to. Although the skin tone hypothesis didn't generate significant results, the question whether darker skinned perceive more rejection more rejection that lighter skinned individuals needs to be looked into further. There are probably certain groups that darker skinned people perceive more discrimination from that lighter skinned people and visa verse. For example, darker skinned individuals might perceive more rejection from White people that lighter skinned individuals do. On the other hand, lighter skinned individuals might perceive more rejection from darker skinned people for being lighter. Although the hypotheses were not supported, this study needs to be looked further into and expanded upon to get a true understanding of how perceived rejection and identification works, as well as understanding how skin tone is perceived by others.

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Appendix A: Measures

Demographics:

Age:

Gender:

Race:

Please answer the following questions with specific reference to **one of your racial groups'**, however you choose to identify on a scale of 1 to 7; 1 represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree:

Identity

1. I am glad to be a member of my racial group.
2. Being part of my racial group is an important part of how I see myself.
3. I feel that I relate better to other people in my racial group.

Rejection/Perceptions of Discrimination

4. People of my racial group won't accept me.
5. People of my racial will never accept me.
6. I experience discrimination from members of my racial group.
7. People from my racial group would be likely to reject me.

Prototypicality

8. I speak like a typical person from my racial group.
9. I look like a typical person from my racial group.
10. I act like a typical person from my racial group.

Please answer the following questions with specific reference to your **other racial group**, however you choose to identify, on a scale of 1 to 7; 1 represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree:

Identity

11. I am glad to be a member of my racial group.
12. Being part of my racial group is an important part of how I see myself.
13. I feel that I relate better to other people in my racial group.

Rejection/Perceptions of Discrimination.

14. People of my racial group won't accept me.
15. People of my racial will never accept me.
16. I experience discrimination from members of my racial group
17. People from my racial group would be likely to reject me.

Prototypicality

18. I speak like a typical person from my racial group.
19. I look like a typical person from my racial group.
20. I act like a typical person from my racial group.

Skin Tone Questions

What terms would you use to describe your skin tone?

- Black
- Dark brown
- Medium Brown
- Light Brown
- Yellow
- Tan
- Olive
- White

Which of the following statements best describes your physical appearance on a scale of 1 to 7; 1 represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree:

1. I think my skin tone affects the way people feel about me?
2. I feel discriminated because of my skin tone?
3. I would change my current skin tone if given the opportunity?