

Rejection- Identification and Acculturation Attitudes  
Among Second Generation Asian Americans

by

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## Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine the rejection identification model among second-generation Asian Americans. In particular, the current study examined the relationship between identification and perceptions of rejection from members of one's ethnic/racial group, as well as two different outgroups: White Americans and other minority groups. The study also explored the relationship between rejection and acculturation attitudes. A total of 40 second-generation Asian Americans took an online survey assessing group-based rejection, identification, and preferred acculturation attitudes. It was hypothesized that perceptions of rejection from other Asians will be positively associated with identification with White Americans and rejection from White Americans and minorities will be positively associated with higher Asian identification. It was also hypothesized that for those that perceive rejection from other Asians will be positively associated with assimilation strategies. In contrast, rejection from White Americans and other minority groups will be positively associated with a separation acculturation strategy. Overall, there was no support for the proposed hypotheses. Implications for research on the rejection identification model are discussed.

The United States of America is home to a wide variety of cultures. Historically, the United States of America has been portrayed as the “land of opportunity” or a “Dream Land.” According to U.S. Census data from 2016, 30% of the population is made up of minorities, with 13% of this portion also being foreign-born immigrants. While America still stands as a dreamland for immigrants, there are many downfalls. Throughout history, immigrants and minorities often experience devaluation in the form of racism, discrimination and prejudice. For example, a recent study by Frankovic (2014) reported that over 50% of minorities reported experiencing discrimination on a weekly basis. Some studies have also argued that internalization of these negative views can lower self-esteem and overall life satisfaction (Cozzarelli & Karafa, 1998; Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995).

However, minorities and other members of devalued groups may combat this negative devaluation from the larger public by looking to their social groups. Social identity theory, for example, suggests that a person’s self-concept comes from the social groups they belong to and that identification with one’s social groups may buffer some of these negative effects (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Similarly, as an extension of this work, 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, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). For example, if an African American person perceives rejection from White Americans (outgroup), then he/she will be more likely to identify with other African Americans. The rejection-identification model has been explored across a number of non-dominant groups,

including: African Americans (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), Latinos/Latinas (Wiley, 2013), women (Redersdorff, Martinot, & Branscombe, 2004), and disabled people (Jahoda, Wilson, Stalker, & Cairney, 2010). One of the first empirical research studies exploring the rejection-identification model was conducted by Branscombe, et al., (1999). African American participants were asked to describe 10 negative situations and whether those situations were related to racial prejudice, past racism experience, hostility towards White people, minority group identification and personal well-being. In line with the rejection identification model, results showed that attributions of prejudice from White people was associated with higher group identification.

More recently, Wiley, Lawrence, Figueroa & Percontinos (2013) explored the relationship between perceptions of rejection from the dominant in-group and ethnic identity among first-generation Latino immigrants. In particular, they examined the relationship between perceptions of rejection from the host culture and in-group identification. Latino immigrants answered questions that assessed ethnic and American identification; as well as group-based rejection from both Latinos and Americans. Contrary to the rejection identification model, they found that rejection from the host culture was not associated with higher identification with the in-group. However, Latino immigrants who perceived rejection from the host culture were less likely to identify 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 their heritage culture. Considering these ideas, Wiley (2013) explored the relationship between identity and group-based rejection from Americans and group-based rejection from members of one's own heritage culture. Latino immigrants

completed questions that measured their American and Latino identification, rejection from Americans (outgroup), and perception of rejection from Latinos/a (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.

The rejection identification model has been explored in other cultural contexts including Romanian and Moroccan immigrants in France (Badea, Jetten, Iyer & Er-Rafiy, 2011). In one study, Romanian immigrants in France were asked questions based on ethnic-based rejection from native-born French residents and ethnic identification. Results indicated that rejection from the host culture (e.g., native-born French residents) was negatively associated with identification as French. In a second study, similar results were found among Moroccan immigrants in France. In particular, they found that perceptions of rejection from ethnic culture was negatively related to Moroccan identification (2011).

Taken together, among immigrants and members of non-dominant groups more broadly, perceptions of rejection from various groups (in-group and outgroup) appear to play a key role in identification. Some research also suggests that immigrants' experiences and perceptions of the host culture plays a key role in their acculturation attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, when an immigrant enters a new country, they often bring with them aspects of their heritage culture including set of values, attitudes, socialization techniques, and behavioral norms. As they settle, their consistent interaction with the host society can change these values and attitudes. This process is known as acculturation (Berry, 1991; Redfield, Lincoln, & Herskovits, 1938). Most research on acculturation follows two theoretical perspectives: (a) unidimensionally,

identification is primarily with either the culture of origin, or with the host culture; or (b) acculturation could be modeled as bidimensional, where identification with both the host and origin culture is continuous (Abe-Kim, Okazaki, & Groto, 2001; Liu, Pope-Davis, Nevitt, & Toporek, 1999). One of the most cited models of acculturation comes from John Berry (1984). Berry's model proposes four possible acculturative attitudes. The first attitude is assimilation, which occurs when an acculturating individual focuses on developing an identity with the host society and does not wish to maintain his/ her ethnic identity. Secondly, not actively seeking relationships or interactions with the host culture, but making efforts to maintain one's own ethnic culture is the attitude known as separation. These two attitudes emulate the unidimensional acculturation theory. Integration is another attitude that embodies the bidimensional theory, and occurs when there is a strong urge to participate in both the larger society and their ethnic culture. Finally, marginalization is an attitude where an individual forgoes any willingness to interact and maintain cultures from either side. Acculturation attitudes have been assessed among various cultural groups. (Berry, Kim, Power Young & Bujaki, 1989). It has been found that integration was the most frequent strategy used among French-Canadians (Power, 1984), Portuguese-Canadians (Young, 1984), Korean-Canadians (Kim, 1984), and Hungarian- Canadians (Bujaki, 1985). After integration, there is also an endorsement pattern of assimilation, followed by separation.

Some studies have also shown a generational difference in acculturation attitudes. Parents experienced more difficulty in accepting and adjusting to change in their lives, compared to children who are more flexible and tolerant of it (Wakil et. al. 1981). Similarly, Aycan and Kanungo (1998) studied the acculturation process and generational differences among Indo-

Canadian parents and their second-generation children. Across both generations, integration was still the overall preferred acculturation strategy. However, for adults, integration and separation were the top acculturation strategies; whereas for their children, integration and assimilation were the two predominant strategies. One explanation for this difference among second-generation children and their immigrant parents could be attributed to perceived discrimination (Aycan & Kanungo, 1998). Parents who have migrated into a new country are potentially exposed to various levels of discrimination and this may explain the desire to separate themselves from the larger society (Henry, 1983; Jain, 1984; Verma, 1986). In contrast, the second-generation is likely to experience significantly less discrimination, therefore feeling more at ease interacting with the host society. There have also been studies that suggest that parents' acculturation attitudes are related to the attitudes of their offspring. For example, parents who adopted an integration strategy often have children who prefer the same. Additionally, some studies have found that immigrants who preferred marginalization, had high rates of children who adopted separation as an acculturative method (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001).

Scarce attention, however, has been paid to the relationship between perceptions of rejection and acculturation strategies. One exception comes from Badea et al.'s (2011) study. Moroccan immigrants were measured on rejection and identity by country of origin, and by the French. Then, they were measured on the four acculturation attitudes to see if rejection and acculturation had a significant relationship. They found support of the integration attitude among participants who identified with both their ethnic and host culture. There was also a positive relationship with separation attitudes and higher identification with Romanians, but not with

French identification. Results also suggested that the perceptions of rejection from Moroccans or Romanians (the in-group) would be associated with higher French identification.

In contrast to what the rejection-identification model suggests, there was not a significant association found. Similarly, perceptions of the outgroup (French) was not associated with higher in-group identification in Moroccan or Romanian identification.

Moreover, few studies have explored these issues among Asian Americans. It is posed that acculturation preferences can be affected by the relationship between the host country and outsider country. Dependent on history between the countries, this might shape perceptions of the certain ethnic groups. This relationship can either increase overall openness, or increase resistance of acceptance this change. The United States of America and Asian countries have a difficult history because of the constant conflict and fighting between the two powerful countries (e.g. the Opium War, the Vietnam War). As a result from that conflict, Asian people were rejected and thought of as villains, con- artists and dirty foreigners in the eyes of the Western world. Once Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian countries tried to migrate to the West in the late 1800s, there was major resistance from Americans to accept them. Restrictive laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 were put forward in order to limit and stop this immigration from happening. Over time, the strained relationship has taken different forms, however still holds some of the negative effects. More recently, “the Model Minority” stereotype has taken over and has been used to characterize Asian people as diligent, good at math, and generally successful (Lee, 1996). This paints Asian Americans to be “successful minorities” but may pit other minority groups against one another. Some suggest that the Asian model minority myth was created to ensure racial division (Sue, 1995). By acknowledging that one minority group can



attain success, then other minority groups can as well, and those who can't are looked down upon (Sue, 1995). As a result, it may cause tensions between Asian Americans and other minority groups.

### **The Present Study**

The current study examined the rejection identification model among second-generation Asian American participants. In particular, the current study examined the relationship between identification and perceptions of rejection from members of the heritage group (other members of similar race); as well as two different outgroups: White Americans and other minority groups. We were also interested in exploring the relationship between rejection and acculturation attitudes second-generation Asian Americans. Most research on the rejection identification model focuses on immigrants, and very little research has found using a participant pool of the children of those immigrants, or “second generation” and on. Social identity is developed early on in life within families and other important influences such as school and friend groups. Second-generation youth may have a different experience when it comes to developing a social identity because their parents grew up in another culture. They are presented with a challenge of not only trying to fit in with the mainstream culture, but also the challenge of maintaining the values and traditions of their cultural heritage at home and sometimes these two different cultures will be contradictory. Secondly, the current study considered the relationship between rejection and various acculturation strategies from Asian heritage into Western society.

It is expected that Asian Americans' identity will be affected by the source of the rejection. It was hypothesized that perceptions of rejection from other Asians would be positively associated with identification with the mainstream society in Western culture (e.g., White

Americans). In contrast, rejection from White Americans and minorities would be positively associated with Asian identification. The current study also considered the relationship between rejection and four different acculturation strategies. It is hypothesized that for those that perceive rejection from other Asians would be positively associated with assimilation strategies. In contrast, rejection from White Americans and other minority groups would be associated with the use of separation strategies.

## Method

### **Participants**

A total number of 40 Asian American participated in this study (N = 40). Within the sample group, 52.8% of participants were female (n = 19); 38.9% of participants were male (n = 14); and 2.8% of participants were non-binary (n = 1). Three participants did not give their age. The participant ages ranged from 18 years old to 32 years old. Participants were recruited using the Purchase College psychology participant pool, as well as the use of snowball sampling, where the primary investigator collected the emails of volunteers outside of Purchase College. The selection criteria included: being 18 years or older, identifying as Asian or Asian American, and being at least second- generation and on. All of the participants were required to consent to the terms and conditions of the study in order to participate.

### **Materials**

The materials for this study included an online survey constructed using Qualtrics. All instructions and measures were presented in English. Participants were asked to indicate their

level of agreement with a series of items, using a seven-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree).

### *Identification*

Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions related to their level of identification Asian, American, and as an ethnic minority group. These questions were adapted from Wiley (2013), Wiley, et al., (2013), and Badea, et al., (2011). An example question includes *“In general, being American group is an important part of my self-image;” “I feel accepted and connected by other minority groups;”* and *“I feel strong ties with other members of this group (Asians).”*

### *Group- based Rejection*

Participants were also asked to respond to questions about their perception rejection from their in-group, the majority outgroup, and other ethnic minorities. A total of three questions were be adapted from Wiley (2013), Wiley et al. (2013), and Badea et al. (2011). Sample questions include *“Other Americans won’t accept me because they think I’m too Asian;”* *“Because I am Asian- American, I do not think other minority groups will ever fully accept me;”* and *“I feel rejected by Asians because I am Asian- American.”*

### *Acculturation Strategy*

Finally, participants were asked about their level of acculturation in the United States using a scale adapted from Berry et al. (1989) four major concepts of acculturation. In particular, participants were asked two questions about assimilation, for example: *“If people of my cultural group want to be successful, they should forget their cultural origins/ traditions.”* Integration was measured using two items, for example: *“I make active effort to maintain my Asian cultural*

*heritage and be very involved with American/ minority culture.*” Marginalization was assessed using two items, for instance: “*People of my heritage culture in America do not feel accepted by either other people of the same background nor by Americans/ minority groups.*” Lastly, separation was measured using two items, for example: “*To me, it is of value to maintain my Asian cultural heritage, and American/ minority culture is not important to me.*”

### *Demographics*

Participants were asked to record their age, gender, heritage, birthplace, as well as their parent’s birthplace. In addition, they were asked if English is their primary language, and if they know their cultural native language. We asked participants to rate: (1) how often the native language is used in their household, (2) how traditional (a) their family is (b) they are, and was (c) they felt on four different 5-point Likert scales.

### **Procedures**

After participants consented to participate in the study, the first thing they saw was a short explanation of the study. The demographic questionnaire was presented to the participant first, followed by the measures of identity, followed by group-based rejection, and lastly acculturation strategies. The survey lasted no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Participants were debriefed and thanked for their time when they have completed the study. Data was collected using Qualtrics, and then analyzed using SPSS.

## Results

### *Relationship between Rejection and Identity*

It was hypothesized that perceptions of rejection from other Asians will be positively associated with identification with the mainstream society in Western culture. In contrast,

rejection from White Americans and minorities would be positively associated with higher Asian identification. To examine these relationships, a bivariate correlation was calculated. In contrast to what was hypothesized, there was a marginally significant negative association between experiences of rejection from Asians and American identity, ( $r(32) = -.31, p = .08$ ). In other words, as rejection from Asians increased, American identification decreased. Similarly, in contrast to what was hypothesized, there was a nonsignificant positive relationship between experiences of American rejection and Asian Identity ( $r(32) = .031, p = .87$ ). Finally, there was a nonsignificant positive relationship between experiences of rejection from other minority groups and Asian identity ( $r(33) = .14, p = .454$ ).

#### *Relationship between Rejection and Acculturation*

It was also hypothesized that for those that perceive rejection from other Asians will be positively associated with assimilation strategies. In contrast, rejection from White Americans and other minority groups will be positively associated with a separation strategy. A bivariate correlation was conducted to examine these relationships. In contrast to what was predicted, results showed that there was a nonsignificant positive relationship between experiences of rejection from Asian groups and the acculturative attitude of assimilation ( $r(30) = .09, p = .608$ ). Likewise, there was a nonsignificant negative relationship between perceived rejection from White Americans and preference towards separation ( $r(30) = -.13, p = .502$ ). Lastly, in contrast to what was hypothesized, there was a positive insignificant relationship between rejection from minority groups and the separation strategy ( $r(31) = .04, p = .827$ ). While we did not hypothesize any other relationships, a significant association was found between perceptions of rejection from other minorities and the marginalization acculturation strategy ( $r(31) = .48, p = .006$ ).

## Discussion

The present study had two goals. First, it examined how we perceive rejection from others and how it can affect how we identify with various social groups, this is a phenomenon called the rejection- identification model. Secondly, it explored the relationship between rejection and different acculturation attitudes. Previous research has shown patterns that support our hypothesis among immigrants and devalued groups, but have not explored how this would affect the children of immigrants, or second- generation groups. Also, there has been little research that has considered the unique minority experience of the Asian American community. It was hypothesized that perceptions of rejection from other Asians will be positively associated with identification with the mainstream society in Western culture. In contrast, rejection from White Americans and minorities will be positively associated with Asian identification. In addition, it was hypothesized that for those that perceive rejection from other Asians will be associated with assimilation strategies; and rejection from White Americans and other minority groups will overall use the separation strategies. Participants were assessed through measures of identification, rejection and acculturation strategy using a survey.

In general, there was not a strong relationship across identification and the variables of rejection from either the in-group, members of the same Asian heritage group, or members of both outgroups, White Americans and other minority groups. The results from this study were similar to those from Wiley (2013), particularly in the lack of an association between perceived rejection from outgroups and ethnic identification. There was only a marginal significant negative effect between rejection from other Asians and identification with Americans. This

could be due to a number of reasons. Second- generation Asian Americans might experience less discrimination than their parents, therefore finding it easier to feel accepted by the mainstream society. Another reason for this occurrence could be supported by the bidimensional theoretical explanation of acculturation, or simply put, Asian Americans can develop a dual- identity with both cultures. They have the ability to switch in between identities based on the circumstance. So, if Asian Americans felt rejected by their heritage group, they can turn towards their other group to find support.

The second part of the research study explored the relationship between rejection and different acculturation attitudes. Similar to the first part of the study, there was no significant relationships between perceptions of rejection overall and preferred acculturative strategy. Perceptions of rejection from other Asians was not associated with the assimilation strategy. Likewise, the preference towards the acculturative attitude of separation was not predicted by experiencing rejection from Americans and minority groups. It is a possibility that this happened due to the limitations following this study, such as sample size or participation bias. Another explanation could be that second- generation people cannot fully escape communication and relationships with members of both the mainstream and the host culture completely. This means that part of their socialization development involves at least minimal interaction with both cultures. Both predicted acculturative attitudes, separation and assimilation, follow the unidimensional theoretical view of acculturation, that calls for one- sided identity and forgoing the other. This seems unrealistic to not only Asian Americans, but any second- generation youth. There would still be a need to go to socialize with people and teachers in school, family members at home, and the need to ask for help when needed describe circumstances where contact is

needed with members of the mainstream culture and their own heritage culture, therefore rejection from either group does not predict complete abandonment of either side. A third possible explanation for the outcome of the study could be that these perceptions of rejection could not be the most influential part of second-generation's preferred acculturation attitude. A surprising finding that was not predicted in the hypothesis was a significant relationship between perceptions of rejection from minority groups and the preference of the marginalization acculturation attitude. Simply put, if Asian American experience rejection from members of other minorities groups, they have a tendency to forgo any efforts to participate in either their own ethnic groups, mainstream, or minority culture. Second-generation Asians Americans grow-up knowing they are different from the mainstream culture that is made up predominantly of White Americans. They are given the label of "minority" so it is to be assumed that they belong to that social group. Once Asian Americans experience possible rejection from other groups also labeled "minorities," there is loss of security and confusion on where they belong. This could have a number of negative effects on their well-being, like feelings of isolation, and possibly lead to not wanting to participate or identify with any social group. Other factors could include measure that were not looked at in this study, for example, parent's acculturative preference, differing cultural socialization techniques, or mental health. These are all very interesting to consider for future research.

### *Limitations and Implications*

There were a number of limitations in this study. One, the sample size was quite small. An increase in participation it might reveal support for our hypotheses. Second, a significant



portion of the surveys were made into a hardcopy and manually handed out to those who freely volunteered, where the primary investigator was in somewhat close distance (within the same room) the entire time, which might have caused participants some anxiety and skew their answers. The survey was also mainly self-reported, which could have increased the likelihood of participation bias.

Even so, there are important implications to this area of study. For example, we have taken into consideration the unique experiences of second- generation Asian Americans. They may have trouble with identity in school or social situations with different groups of people due to being met with forms of devaluation from the majority and other minority groups. Asian Americans have been characterized as the Model Minority ethnic group, which defines them with very specific aspects such as being diligent, good at math, and socioeconomically successful. This may leads to different minority groups being pitted against one another and possibly creating tension. This expectation of success and perfection places Asian Americans on a socioeconomic pedestal that other minority groups should work towards, and are ridiculed when they don't. There is little to no research taking this into consideration, and is often times overlooked as reality. One other major implication of this study could be very helpful for counseling. A knowledge and understanding of different generations of immigrant families and their cultures, including Asians, may help counselors to help clients work through issues related to rejection, identification and acculturation. Continuous development in research on these topics could also help to modify traditional techniques and theories of counselors to apply towards these groups to be the most effective.

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