

Ethnic identification in response to perceived discrimination protects well-being and promotes activism: A longitudinal study of Latino college students

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Abstract

Using structural equation modeling and cross-lagged analyses, this longitudinal study investigates ethnic identification, a group-based coping strategy, as a mediator of the influence of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being and willingness to engage in activism on behalf of one's ethnic group among Latino students in both their first and fourth years of college. We found cross-sectional evidence for the rejection–identification model (RIM) during both years of college. Further, multiple step bootstrapping analyses of the longitudinal data showed that the relationships between perceived discrimination during Year 1 and both well-being and activism during Year 4 were sequentially mediated by activism during Year 1 predicting ethnic identification during Year 4. These data extend the RIM by including activism as an additional outcome variable that has important implications for Latino students across time.

Keywords

discrimination, group identification, activism, self-esteem, ethnic identification, group-based coping, Latinos, psychological well-being

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Latinos are the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States, now outnumbering African Americans (Alba & Nee, 2003; Bean & Stevens, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Like other American ethnic minority groups, Latinos suffer from discrimination, especially in the labor force and other institutional settings (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).

In recent years, social scientists have given greater attention to the experiences of targets of

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discrimination, and the impact these experiences have on psychological and physical well-being (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Contrada et al., 2000; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Heatherton, Kleck, Hebl, & Hull, 2000; Levin & van Laar, 2006; Swim & Stangor, 1998). Considerable evidence has accumulated showing that the more discriminatory experiences are perceived across time and contexts, the greater the impact on the psychological and physical health of stigmatized group members (see Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Perceptions of discrimination have been linked with lower psychological well-being on measures of self-directed negative affect such as depression and self-esteem among Latino Americans (Armenta & Hunt, 2009). Indeed, stressful situations associated with perceived discrimination may help explain differences between ethnic groups in health outcomes (Clark et al., 1999; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009).

Yet, little is known about how Latinos cope with discrimination, and those few studies that do explore coping strategies in response to discrimination tend to be cross-sectional (e.g., Romero & Roberts, 1998; Spencer-Rodgers & Collins, 2006). In one of the few longitudinal studies of Latino college students, Ethier and Deaux (1994) found that students with lower ethnic involvement before college showed reduced collective self-esteem at the end of their first year in college in response to perceived threat to their ethnic identity earlier in the first year.

Conceptualizing discrimination as a stressor in the lives of those who are its targets highlights the importance of understanding the ways in which stigmatized group members cope with their devalued group identity (Matheson & Anisman, 2009; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Although some devalued group members use individualistic coping strategies such as disengaging from the lower status group and attempting to gain entrance into a higher status group (Branscombe, Fernández, Gómez, & Cronin, 2011; Wright & Tropp, 2002), others favor group-level coping strategies and exhibit higher group identification, particularly when the group's subordinate position is perceived

as illegitimate (see Ellemers & van Laar, 2010, for a discussion).

The current research explores the possibility that increased ethnic identification is a group-based coping strategy that can serve as a psychological buffer to the negative effects of perceived discrimination on personal well-being among Latino students in their first and fourth years of college (the rejection-identification model, or RIM; Branscombe et al., 1999). We also propose that observing the RIM across time will largely depend on the extent to which those who perceive discrimination at an earlier point in time engage in behaviors that promote the welfare of the group. When group members respond to perceived discrimination with efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to cope with and respond constructively to discrimination (Outten, Schmitt, Garcia, & Branscombe, 2009), these efficacy beliefs may in turn encourage problem-focused coping strategies such as acting on behalf of one's group, which in the long run maintains group identification, activism, and well-being. The current study extends the RIM by longitudinally testing support for activism as an additional outcome variable to perceived discrimination that has important implications for future group identification, activism, and psychological well-being.

Because the one previous longitudinal study testing the RIM (with immigrants to Finland) did not provide evidence for the mediated pathway from discrimination to well-being through identification across time (see Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Solheim, 2009), we consider whether evidence for the RIM will be observed longitudinally when support for activism on behalf of one's ethnic group is included as an additional mediator. We propose that identification by itself may not mediate the relationship between discrimination and well-being across time. Rather, discrimination may predict activism at the first time point, which may then predict increases in identification, activism, and well-being in the future.

In this study, we test the RIM both cross-sectionally and longitudinally using data that was collected from a large sample of American Latino college students during their first and fourth

years in college. Using cross-sectional data from the first and fourth years, we first test the RIM prediction that minority group identification serves as a mediator of the relationship between discrimination and well-being during both college years. We also explore whether identification mediates the relationship between discrimination and activism during both college years. In addition, and most importantly, we use the longitudinal data to examine whether the relationships between Year 1 perceived discrimination and Year 4 well-being and activism are sequentially mediated by Year 1 activism predicting Year 4 ethnic identification (the longitudinal RIM pattern, now extended with activism in the overall model).

Rejection–identification hypothesis

According to the rejection–identification hypothesis, perceiving negative events as stemming from discrimination is threatening to psychological well-being, and devalued group members cope with this by identifying with their ingroup (Branscombe et al., 1999). Consistent with social identity theory, because people define themselves and derive self-esteem partly from the groups to which they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), when discrimination occurs based on one's group membership, group members' resulting perceptions of a devalued group status is harmful to their psychological well-being. Individuals can respond to such devaluation, particularly when they suspect that acceptance by the higher status outgroup is unlikely, by increasing their investment in the ingroup.

Branscombe et al. (1999) found that attributing negative events to discrimination had a direct, negative effect on psychological well-being, but an indirect positive relationship with well-being through enhanced minority group identification. Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, and Spears (2001, Study 2) experimentally tested the RIM in a study of people with body piercings. Participants in a negative-feedback condition (who were told that the mainstream discriminates against individuals with body piercings) reported significantly higher

levels of group identification than those in a positive-feedback or a no-feedback condition. Other research has tested whether increased group identification can occur when no previous, long-term group membership is shared (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). In that research, international students' perceptions of discrimination on campus were positively related to their levels of group identification as international students. Although perceptions of discrimination on campus negatively affected international students' self-esteem, the negative effect of perceived discrimination on well-being was buffered by formation of this new "international student" group identity. Such findings are in line with self-categorization theory, which suggests that group identities can arise as a consequence of group members perceiving shared experiences based on category membership (Simon, 1997; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). The rejection–identification model has also been supported among women (Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002), African Americans (Branscombe et al., 1999), and older adults (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004). Relevant to the current population, one recent cross-sectional study of Latinos found that group attachment, importance, and regard attenuated the negative relationship between perceived discrimination and self-esteem (Spencer-Rodgers & Collins, 2006). We expect to replicate the basic pattern of the rejection–identification model among Latino college students at two different points in time: the beginning and end of their college careers.

Perceptions of discrimination in college

Other work using the dataset employed in the current study has examined reciprocal relationships between perceiving more ethnic discrimination on campus and having more college friends of one's own ethnicity (Levin, van Laar, & Foote, 2006; Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003) or another ethnicity (Tropp, Hawi, van Laar, & Levin, 2011). For example, Levin et al.

(2003) found that ethnic minority students developed more ingroup friendships later in college in response to earlier perceived ethnic discrimination on campus. They reasoned that members of ethnic minority groups may turn to ingroup friendships as a source of peer support in the face of perceived discrimination against their group. However, they did not examine the protective effect that such group attachment may serve in buffering the negative effect of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being.

As Latino students' perceptions of discrimination accumulate over time, such perceptions may have more negative implications for psychological well-being. Specifically, Latino students who encounter discrimination early in college may not attribute it to pervasive, stable causes. It may take repeated exposure to discrimination on the college campus for students to perceive the discrimination as pervasive and for it to have harmful effects on well-being (Branscombe et al., 1999; Contrada et al., 2000; Schmitt, Branscombe, & Postmes, 2003). Examining the detrimental effects of perceived discrimination later in college, Levin et al. (2006) found that Latino students' sense of belonging to the larger campus community at the end of college suffered in response to earlier perceived discrimination. One way in which Latino students may cope with the negative effects of repeated experiences with discrimination over time is by strengthening their identification with other Latinos. Such group identification may then buffer the negative effect of perceived discrimination on well-being. Consistent with much of the existing literature on coping with stigma, we chose to focus on self-esteem as the primary indicator of well-being (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991). There have been other studies that have included more general depression measures in addition to self-esteem; however, these measures tend to be highly correlated and load on a single well-being factor (Branscombe et al., 1999; Garstka et al., 2004; Schmitt et al., 2002).

Identification mediates the relationship between perceived discrimination and activism

Although perceiving discrimination is stressful and can lead to negative psychological and physical health outcomes, members of stigmatized groups must recognize events as unfair before attempting to engage in strategies that may help change the status quo (Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997). Although group members may be motivated to avoid perceiving unfair events to be the result of discrimination (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002), when perceptions of discrimination do occur they are associated with increased activism (Simon et al., 1998; Wright & Tropp, 2002). Additionally, although perceiving discrimination has a direct negative effect on psychological well-being, perceptions of discrimination may also be a necessary condition for efforts to improve the group's status through activism. Several studies have shown that perceptions of discrimination, or perceptions of relative group disadvantage, are positively related to minority group members' willingness to undertake social change efforts on behalf of their group (Dion, 1986; Simon et al., 1998; Walker & Smith, 2002).

Individuals must have a vested interest in the groups to which they belong before attempting to engage in strategies that might elevate their group's status. Group identification helps explain why individuals act in terms of their group membership to improve their groups' status rather than as individuals to improve personal status. Several studies have shown that when group identification is low, individuals prefer individualistic coping strategies in response to disadvantage, such as attempting to disengage from the stigmatized group in order to gain entrance into the higher status group (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Wright & Tropp, 2002). In contrast, when group identification is high, individuals prefer to engage in behaviors that would help raise the status of the group as a whole. Moreover, highly identified group members may be more likely to report that collective behaviors such as activism enhance how they feel about themselves,

suggesting a self-enhancement motivation behind activism (Tropp & Brown, 2004).

Group identification may also mediate the relationship between perceptions of discrimination (a group-based threat) and activism. The relationship between perceived group-based threat, group identification, and activism was examined in one experimental study with gay men for whom common fate as a threatened minority (high vs. low) was varied (Simon et al., 1998, Study 2). The results revealed a positive relationship between common fate and willingness to participate in collective action that was substantially enhanced indirectly through identification with the gay movement. In other words, perceptions of common fate alone increased participants' willingness to act on behalf of the gay movement, but when participants' levels of identification increased in the high common-fate condition, they reported even more willingness to engage in collective effort.

We expect to find the rejection–identification pattern using activism as an additional outcome variable. Specifically, among Latino students at the beginning and end of their college careers, we expect to find a mediated relationship between perceived discrimination and ethnic activism through enhanced ethnic group identification.

Activism as a sequential mediator between perceived discrimination and ethnic identification across time

We also test the rejection–identification model longitudinally. However, based on the longitudinal findings by Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (2009), we do not expect perceived discrimination to directly influence ethnic group identification across time. Rather, we expect perceived discrimination to indirectly influence identification across time through its effect on levels of activism. Recent evidence suggests that ethnic minority groups who expect group-based rejection increase their levels of identification with their ethnic group, and this increased identification predicts increased

support for political actions that would benefit their group (Barlow, Sibley, & Hornsey, 2011). Perceived discrimination should encourage efficacy among minority group members regarding their ability to effectively cope with group-based threat by engaging in activism (Outten et al., 2009). Activism at Year 1 should then influence group identification during Year 4 (Barlow et al., 2011), resulting in enhanced psychological well-being and activism during Year 4.

Study overview and hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

We test three main hypotheses. First, consistent with previous findings (Branscombe et al., 1999), we expect to replicate the rejection–identification model during Latino students' first and fourth years in college. When we test the model in the fourth year, influences of the same variables measured in the first year are controlled for so that we may test for the RIM pattern at Year 4 while accounting for the same pattern at Year 1. The relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being should be mediated by ethnic group identification during the first and fourth years. Specifically, there should be a positive relationship between perceived discrimination and ethnic identification, and a positive relationship between ethnic identification and well-being during participants' first year in college. These same relationships should be observed in Year 4, even when controlling for the effects of the same variables assessed during students' first year.

Further, during both Year 1 and Year 4, we expect a negative, direct relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being to emerge when the positive relationship between group identification and well-being is taken into account, as ethnic identification should serve as a suppressor variable to the relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being (see Branscombe et al., 1999).¹ Specifically, because the direct effect of perceived discrimination on well-being is expected to be

negative and its indirect effect through group identification is expected to be positive, the negative direct effect of discrimination on well-being is expected to become stronger (than the product-moment correlation between the two variables) once identification is accounted for as a mediator (see Branscombe et al., 1999).

Hypothesis 2

Similar to the pattern of relationships described in Hypothesis 1 with well-being as the outcome variable, the relationship between perceived discrimination and activism should be mediated by ethnic group identification during the first and fourth years. Unlike the case for well-being, however, we expect the direct relationship between perceived discrimination and activism to be positive rather than negative.

Hypothesis 3

Year 1 activism and Year 4 ethnic identification should sequentially mediate the relationships between Year 1 perceived discrimination and both Year 4 activism and Year 4 well-being (see Hayes, Preacher, & Myer, 2010, for a discussion on assessing multiple-step mediation).

Consistent with these hypotheses, we expect a mediation model to fit the data well. In this model, Year 1 ethnic identification is specified as mediating the relationship between Year 1 perceived discrimination and Year 1 well-being, and Year 4 ethnic identification is specified as mediating the relationship between Year 4 perceived discrimination and Year 4 well-being (Hypothesis 1). Year 1 ethnic identification is also specified as mediating the relationship between Year 1 perceived discrimination and Year 1 activism, and Year 4 ethnic identification is specified as mediating the relationship between Year 4 perceived discrimination and Year 4 activism (Hypothesis 2). Finally, both Year 1 activism and Year 4 ethnic identification are specified as mediating variables between Year 1 perceived discrimination on the one side and both Year 4 activism and well-being

on the other (Hypothesis 3). This mediation model should fit the data better compared to an alternative model in which none of these mediated relationships are specified.

Method

Participants and procedure The data examined here are part of a larger longitudinal study conducted by Sidanius, Levin, van Laar, and Sears (2008). The full dataset was collected from an ethnically diverse sample of over 2,000 students at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) over a period of 5 years. In the current study, we examine data from Latino students in their first and fourth years of college.

Students attending the summer orientation program before their first year at UCLA were asked to complete a precollege survey. Students who participated in this precollege survey were asked to complete a telephone interview at the end of their first and fourth years in college. The overall response rate for all students was 82% at the end of the first year and 59% at the end of the fourth year. There were 430 Latinos in the first-year sample and 252 in the fourth-year sample. Only those who responded during both their first and fourth years were examined in the current study.

Measures

Perceptions of discrimination One question assessed perceptions of discrimination on campus, using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*): "I experience discrimination at UCLA because of my ethnicity."

Ethnic identification Three questions measured level of ethnic identification: "How important is your ethnicity to your identity?" (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very important*), "How often do you think of yourself as a member of your ethnic group?" (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very often*), and "How close do you feel to other members of your ethnic group?" (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very close*).

Activism Three questions measured willingness to act on behalf of one's ethnic group: "How seriously have you considered participating in the following activities on behalf of your ethnic group?" These items included: "Voting in terms of what is good for your particular ethnic group," "Participating in demonstrations," and "Signing petitions." All items were measured on the same 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all seriously*, 7 = *very seriously—have done so*).

Well-being Four questions from Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Inventory (1961) were used to measure psychological well-being (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*): "I feel that I have a number of good qualities," "I take a positive attitude toward myself," "I certainly feel useless at times" (reverse-coded), and "At times I think I am no good at all" (reverse-coded).

Analytic procedures

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using a cross-lagged design was utilized to first test the cross-sectional predictions that when all Year 1 and Year 4 variables are included in the model, Year 1 identification will indirectly carry the relationship between Year 1 perceived discrimination and Year 1 well-being. Year 4 identification is also expected to reliably carry the positive indirect relationship between Year 4 perceived discrimination and Year 4 well-being even while controlling for the Year 1 predictor and outcome variables. For both Year 1 and Year 4, we also expect to find a direct negative relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being when the positive relationship between ethnic identification and well-being is accounted for (Hypothesis 1 cross-sectional RIM patterns at both time points). Consistent with Hypothesis 2, ethnic identification should also positively mediate the relationship between perceived discrimination and activism during both Year 1 and Year 4; and perceived discrimination, consistent with previous literature, should positively predict activism (see Barlow et al., 2011).

Cross-lags are included in the model to assess the indirect effects of perceived discrimination

during Year 1 on activism and well-being during Year 4, carried through activism during Year 1 and ethnic identification during Year 4 (sequential mediation, Hypothesis 3). In addition to this model testing for indirect effects, an alternative model was tested in which identification was not specified to carry the indirect relationships between perceived discrimination and both activism and well-being; that is, only discrimination was specified to predict activism and well-being at both Year 1 and Year 4, and the paths associated with identification at both times were set to equal zero.

Models were tested using LISREL 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2007). The advantage of using SEM is that it allows for examination of direct and indirect relationships in a complete model, as well as differences in the relationships between observed and latent variables across time, while accounting for measurement error (Brown, 2006). A model of the relationships observed during participants' fourth year can also be tested while simultaneously accounting for the same variables measured during participants' first year (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). It is also possible to test for the cross-lagged effects of the first-year variables on the fourth-year variables, thus utilizing the benefits of the longitudinal research design. After establishing the measurement model with perceived discrimination and the three latent constructs in both time periods, we move to analyses that test the predicted cross-lagged model including identification as a mediating variable during Years 1 and 4 and activism as a sequential mediator across time. We utilize bootstrap tests for indirect effects, as well as for multiple-step models to statistically clarify the mediational relationships we test—particularly for the sequential mediation (Hayes et al., 2010). As Little, Preacher, Selig, and Card (2007) suggest, resampling methods testing for mediation are preferable because they involve no distributional assumptions and produce more accurate Type I error rates as well as high statistical power, as they employ ordinary nonparametric casewise bootstrapping (K. J. Preacher, September 5, 2011, personal communication).

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlations between all variables. We evaluated model fit using

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among all variables for Latinos during their first and fourth college years

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
First year									
1. Discrimination	2.61	1.67	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Identification	5.38	1.41	.20**	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Activism	4.91	1.68	.34**	.63**	—	—	—	—	—
4. Well-being	5.71	.94	-.01	.15*	.14*	—	—	—	—
Fourth year									
5. Discrimination	2.69	1.61	.47**	.20**	.26**	.04	—	—	—
6. Identification	5.21	1.44	.15*	.66**	.59**	.17**	.24**	—	—
7. Activism	4.81	1.63	.17*	.40**	.63**	.16*	.29**	.57**	—
8. Well-being	5.97	.88	-.03	.16*	.20**	.56**	-.17**	.25**	.17**

Note: All variables were measured on Likert scales (1–7), with higher values indicating greater levels of the constructs.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

the nonnormed fit index (NNFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI), for which values greater than .90 are deemed acceptable (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), for which values equal to or less than .08 are deemed acceptable (Brown, 2006). Only Latino students who participated in the study during both their first and fourth years were included in the analyses ($N = 252$). Data points that were missing at random for these students in the final data set were treated utilizing multiple imputation in LISREL 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2007) (nine additional participants would have been excluded from the analyses using listwise deletion).

Results

Mediation model

In all of the models, the errors of the Year 1 indicators were allowed to covary with their Year 4 counterparts (except for perceived discrimination because it is a one-item variable; its loadings at both Year 1 and Year 4 were thus set to one, and the errors were specified to equal zero). The hypothesized mediation model yielded a significant chi square, $\chi^2(173, n = 252) = 430.60, p < .001$. However, chi square is extremely sensitive to sample size—in fact, Kenny (2010) asserts that models with even a modest sample size (anything over 200) will nearly always produce a significant

chi square. Thus, we also include the chi square to degrees of freedom ratio, which can demonstrate acceptable model fit if the value is less than or equal to 3 (chi square/ $df = 2.49$). All of the other fit indices were above .90, and RMSEA was less than the desired value of .08 (RMSEA = .077; NNFI = .94; CFI = .95). The standardized factor loadings confirmed that each of the six latent factors were well defined by their respective items. For the three ethnic identification items, loadings ranged from .73 to .90 during Year 1 and .73 to .91 for Year 4; for the three activism items, loadings ranged from .78 to .89 for Year 1 and .75 to .84 for Year 4, and for the four well-being items, loadings ranged from .45 to .79 for Year 1 and .47 to .73 for Year 4. The standardized factor loadings are shown in the mediation model in Figure 1. To establish measurement invariance of the model across Year 1 and Year 4, factor item loadings were equated across time. This test of invariance yielded a non-significant chi-square difference compared to the configural model in which no equality constraints were specified ($\chi^2(184, n = 252) = 433.18, p < .001$; $\chi^2_{\text{difference}(11)} = 2.58, p = .99$).

Rejection–identification across time

Year 1 As shown in Figure 1, perceived discrimination at Year 1 significantly predicted first-year ethnic group identification ($\beta = .20, p = .002$), and first-year ethnic identification predicted first-year

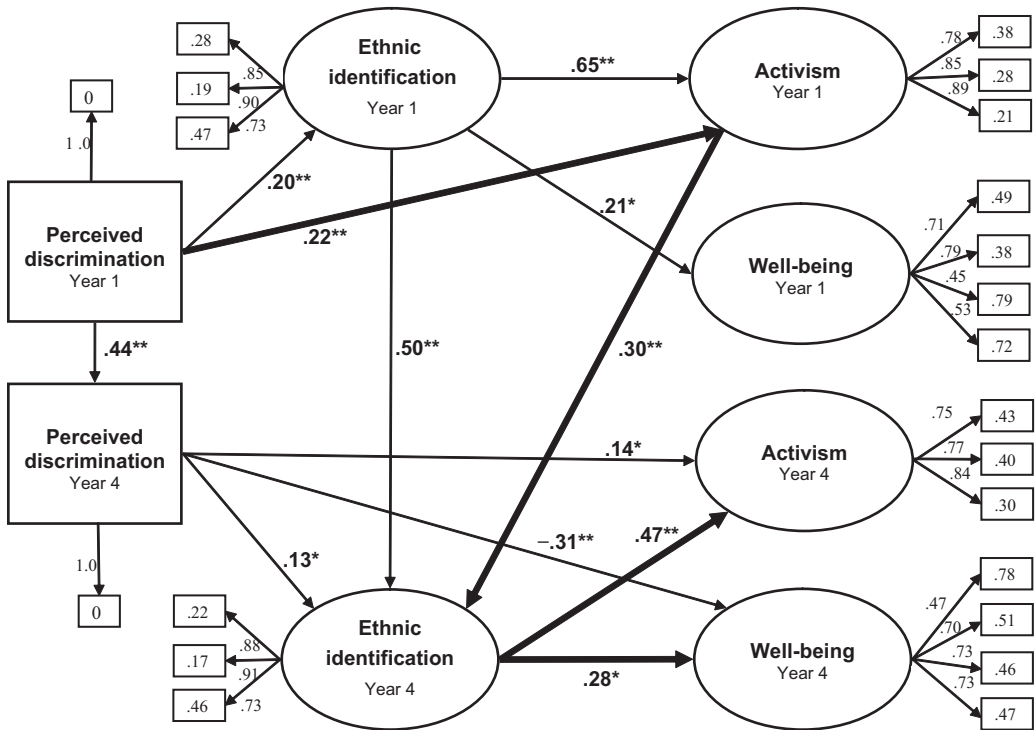


Figure 1. Cross-lagged structural analysis with ethnic identification as a mediator of the relationships between perceived discrimination and both activism and psychological well-being during Years 1 and 4. All Year 4 variables were regressed on their Year 1 counterparts. Error terms associated with Year 1 indicators were free to covary with their Year 4 counterparts. Error terms associated with Year 1 activism and Year 1 well-being were free to covary, as were error terms associated with Year 4 activism and Year 4 well-being. The nonsignificant beta paths are not shown here, but are reported in the text. Wider arrows indicate the sequentially mediated pathways in the longitudinal analyses.
 Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

activism ($\beta = .65, p < .001$) and well-being ($\beta = .21, p = .01$). Although there was a direct relationship between perceived discrimination and activism during Year 1 ($\beta = .22, p < .001$), the direct relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being (controlling for ethnic identification) was not significant during Latino students' first year in college ($\beta = -.02, p = .78$); the product-moment correlation between perceived discrimination and well-being was also not significant ($r = -.01, p = .88$; see Table 1). The confidence interval of the bootstrap test of the indirect relationship between perceived discrimination and activism through ethnic identification did not include zero, indicating a significant indirect

relationship in Year 1 (direct relationship between perceived discrimination and activism, $b = .21, p < .001$; relationship between perceived discrimination and ethnic identification, $b = .14, p = .01$; relationship between ethnic identification and activism, $b = .68, p < .001$; $CI [.034, .191]$; $SE = .04$). The confidence interval of the bootstrap test of the indirect relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being through ethnic identification also indicated a significant indirect relationship (direct relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being, $b = -.01, p = .75$; relationship between ethnic identification and well-being, $b = .10, p = .02$; $CI [.004, .043]$; $SE = .01$).

Year 4 As shown in Figure 1, during Latino students' fourth year, perceived discrimination significantly predicted ethnic identification ($\beta = .13, p = .02$) and activism ($\beta = .14, p = .02$), while ethnic identification predicted activism ($\beta = .47, p < .001$) and well-being ($\beta = .28, p = .01$). Furthermore, the direct negative relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being (controlling for ethnic identification) was significant ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$). As expected, because the direct effect of perceived discrimination on well-being was negative and its indirect effect through ethnic identification was positive, the negative direct effect (controlling for ethnic identification) was stronger than the product-moment correlation between the two variables ($r = -.17, p = .005$; see Table 1). All of these relationships were reliable, even after controlling for previous levels of the predictor and outcome variables assessed during these students' first year. The confidence interval of the bootstrap test of the indirect relationship between perceived discrimination and activism through ethnic identification did not include zero, indicating a significant indirect relationship in the fourth year (direct relationship between perceived discrimination and activism, $b = .14, p = .01$; relationship between perceived discrimination and ethnic identification, $b = .23, p < .001$; relationship between ethnic identification and activism, $b = .60, p < .001$; CI[.062; .204]; $SE = .001$). The confidence interval of the bootstrap test of the indirect relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being through ethnic identification also indicated a significant indirect relationship (direct relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being, $b = -.13, p < .001$; relationship between ethnic identification and well-being, $b = .20, p < .001$; CI[.013; .073]; $SE = .001$).

Paths across time All paths across time were assessed while controlling for the cross-sectional relationships simultaneously. Perceived discrimination at Year 1 marginally predicted ethnic identification at Year 4 ($\beta = -.11, Z = 1.95, p = .05$). Perceived discrimination at Year 1 did not significantly predict well-being at Year 4 ($\beta = .06,$

$p = .41$) or activism at Year 4 ($\beta = .002, p = .97$), nor did ethnic identification at Year 1 reliably predict discrimination ($\beta = .11, p = .22$), well-being ($\beta = .03, p = .76$), or activism during Year 4 ($\beta = .09, p = .30$). Further, although activism and well-being at Year 1 did not reliably predict perceived discrimination at Year 4 ($\beta = .04, p = .65$; $\beta = -.004, p = .95$, respectively), and well-being at Year 1 did not predict ethnic identification at Year 4 ($\beta = .01, p = .81$), activism at Year 1 reliably predicted ethnic identification at Year 4 ($\beta = .30, p < .001$).

The sequential indirect effects across time were tested using bootstrapping for multiple-step mediation (Hayes et al., 2010). Specifically, the total indirect effect through the sequential mediators (activism during Year 1 predicting ethnic identification during Year 4) for the relationship between perceived discrimination at Year 1 and activism during Year 4 were tested. The confidence interval of the bootstrap test of the total indirect effect of both mediators (activism at Year 1 and ethnic identification at Year 4) on the relationship between discrimination at Year 1 and activism at Year 4 did not include zero. These results indicate a significant indirect relationship (total indirect effect, $b = .17, CI[.08; .25]$; $SE = .04$). Further tests of the indirect effects through each mediator alone (first through Year 1 activism and then in another test through Year 4 ethnic identification) indicated a significant indirect relationship between Year 1 perceived discrimination and Year 4 activism through Year 1 activism alone ($b = .13, CI[.07; .20]$; $SE = .03$), but not through Year 4 ethnic identification alone ($b = -.02, CI[-.07; .02]$; $SE = .02$). This means the relationship between perceived discrimination during Year 1 and activism during Year 4 was not reliably carried through ethnic identification during Year 4 (as indicated by the confidence interval which includes zero for this mediator alone). However, consistent with Hypothesis 3, the indirect relationship between perceived discrimination during Year 1 and activism during Year 4 was reliably carried through the sequential relationship between activism at Year 1 predicting ethnic identification

during Year 4 (as indicated by the confidence interval for the total indirect effect, which does not include zero).

We next examined Year 4 well-being as the outcome variable instead of Year 4 activism. The confidence interval of the bootstrap test of the indirect effect of activism at Year 1 and ethnic identification at Year 4 on the relationship between discrimination at Year 1 and well-being at Year 4 did not include zero. This again indicates a significant indirect relationship (total indirect effect, $b = .03$, $CI[.001; .06]$; $SE = .02$). The indirect effect through Year 1 activism alone was not significant, $b = .02$, $CI(-.01; .05)$; $SE = .01$. The indirect effect through Year 4 ethnic identification alone was also not significant, $b = -.01$, $CI(-.02; .008)$; $SE = .01$. In other words, the indirect relationship between perceived discrimination during Year 1 and well-being during Year 4 (as with perceived discrimination during Year 1 and activism during Year 4) was carried through the sequential relationship between activism at Year 1 predicting ethnic identification during Year 4, but not by the mediators individually.

No-mediation alternative model

The predicted model was then compared against an alternative model in which mediation was not specified. The same model as above was tested, with the difference that now all paths associated with Year 1 and Year 4 identification were constrained to equal zero, and only direct relationships between the predictor and outcome variables were assessed in this model. The model yielded a significant chi square greater than that of the hypothesized model ($\chi^2(180, n = 252) = 528.70, p < .001$). Although most of the fit indices for this model met criteria deemed acceptable, the RMSEA was above the desired value of .08 (RMSEA = .09; NNFI = .91; CFI = .93). Crucially, a chi-square difference test indicated that the mediation model provided a significantly better fit to the data than the alternative model in which no mediation was specified ($\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(7, n = 252) = 98.10, p < .001$).

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to test the predictions of the rejection–identification model among Latino students at two important time periods: at the beginning and at the end of college. In response to the harmful effects of perceived discrimination on well-being at the end of college, we expected ethnic identification to function as a group-based coping strategy, mediating an indirect positive effect of perceived discrimination on well-being and thereby buffering the direct negative effect of perceived discrimination on well-being. An additional purpose of this study was to add to the existing literature by including activism in the model. We expected to find a positive indirect relationship between perceived discrimination and activism through ethnic group identification during both Years 1 and 4. With the sequential mediation analyses, we also expected activism at Year 1 to predict increased identification at Year 4, and expected both variables to sequentially mediate the relationships between perceived discrimination at Year 1 and activism and well-being at Year 4.

At the end of Latino students' first and fourth years in college, support for the RIM was evident: Those who perceived more ethnic discrimination identified more with their ethnic group, and those with higher ethnic identification exhibited greater well-being and activism. Both the positive indirect relationship between discrimination and well-being, as well as the positive indirect relationship between perceived discrimination and activism through ethnic identification were significant at both time points. Most of the relationships in the model were stable across time except for the relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being. Although we did expect to find a direct negative relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being at both time points, the lack of a negative direct relationship during Year 1 is consistent with findings in which this relationship is not always evident (for an example, see Postmes & Branscombe, 2002). However in these data, by Year 4, the expected direct negative effect of perceived discrimination on well-being emerged.

Cross-lagged, longitudinal analyses and bootstrapping tests further indicated significant sequential indirect relationships between perceived discrimination at Year 1 and both activism and well-being at Year 4. Consistent with RIM findings, the relationships between perceived discrimination during Year 1 and both activism and well-being during Year 4 were positive indirectly through activism during Year 1 and ethnic group identification during Year 4 (which served as sequential mediators of the relationships). Arguably, a mediated process across time would suggest that perceived discrimination at Year 1 should positively predict ethnic identification during Year 4. However, the positive combined sequential indirect effects of activism during Year 1 and ethnic identification during Year 4 imply a more nuanced process. Respondents who reacted to perceived discrimination during Year 1 with increased ethnic activism during Year 1 displayed the RIM process across time (through increased identification during Year 4). Increased activism at Year 1 predicted increased ethnic identification at Year 4, which then positively predicted more activism and elevated well-being during Year 4. In other words, respondents who reacted to perceived discrimination by engaging in group-based coping strategies at Year 1 continued to display the RIM pattern across time. Without activism in the overall model, we would not have been able to observe this important nuance. It is also important to note that we did not observe a reliable relationship between ethnic identification at Year 1 and perceived discrimination at Year 4, as other literature has proposed (Leach, Rodriguez Mosquera, Vliek, & Hirt, 2010). For these Latino students, when controlling for perceived discrimination at Year 1, increased ethnic identification during their first year in college did not lead to increases in perceived discrimination during their fourth year in college.

These results suggest that ethnic identification is a group-based coping response that can emerge over time in response to perceptions of discrimination, and that activism can be conceptualized as an additional group-based response that leads to increases in ethnic identification, activism, and

well-being during later years. Not only does ethnic group identification protect well-being at one point in time, but activism in response to perceived discrimination also protects well-being and promotes activism in the future. However, this occurs only to the extent that people who perceive more discrimination at one point in time respond with increased ethnic activism during the same time period. To the extent that this heightened activism promotes ethnic group identification at a later time period, it facilitates the positive effects of such increased identification on well-being and activism at this later time. These findings are in line with the assertion of Outten et al. (2009) that efficacy appraisals regarding one's ability to cope with group-based disadvantage might explain the relationship between ethnic group identification and positive psychological well-being. In the current study we conceptualize activism as a coping variable; however, it would be interesting in the future to more directly test efficacy appraisals as a mediator between ethnic group identification and both willingness to engage in activism on behalf of one's ethnic group and psychological well-being.

Future research should also examine the process and conditions under which perceived discrimination harms well-being and ethnic identification protects it. Previous experimental work has highlighted conditions under which people low in group identification fare better than those high in group identification in response to evidence of discrimination against their group (McCoy & Major, 2003). This research suggests that under some conditions, greater ethnic identification may make people more vulnerable to negative effects of perceived discrimination on well-being. For example, among Latino students who read an article reporting severe and pervasive discrimination against their group, those with higher levels of ethnic identification exhibited more depressed affect than those with lower identification. Yet, other evidence shows that group identification can be psychologically self-protective rather than damaging when discrimination is experienced (Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006).

Although the longitudinal data used in the current study are correlational, the longitudinal nature of the study allows controls for previous levels of the predictor and outcome variables as well as investigation of the effects of the variables on the same measures across time. By including activism as an additional mediator in the longitudinal test of the RIM, the effects of perceived discrimination on well-being through activism and ethnic identification indeed emerge across time, contrary to findings by Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (2009). These results suggest that group-based coping strategies such as heightened activism on behalf of one's ethnic group and ethnic attachment may over time protect the psychological well-being of ethnic minority students. By the end of college, not only is perceived discrimination in itself harmful to well-being, but the results show that without ethnic identification to serve as a protective buffer, the negative effect of perceived discrimination on well-being would be even stronger. Students who responded to perceived discrimination during Year 1 with increased willingness to engage in activist behaviors on behalf of their group and subsequently increased levels of identification with their group were more likely to exhibit heightened activism and more positive well-being during Year 4. These results illuminate the process by which members of stigmatized groups protect the self in response to perceived discrimination.

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Note

1. A suppressor variable is defined as one that increases the predictive validity of another variable by its inclusion in a regression equation (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). When a suppressor variable is added as a mediator in a mediation model, the magnitude of the direct effect of the predictor on the outcome variable increases rather

than decreases (MacKinnon et al., 2000). Suppression occurs statistically because the suppressor and predictor variables are both related to the outcome variable, but the relationships differ in direction.

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