

## **Perceived group and personal discrimination: Differential effects on personal self-esteem**

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### *Abstract*

*In two studies, we investigate the differential influence of perceived group and personal discrimination on self-esteem in the context of the Rejection–Identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). We first polled a group of African immigrants and found that whereas personal discrimination was negatively related to personal self-esteem, group discrimination was positively associated with it. As expected, identification served as a buffer between personal discrimination and self-esteem. We replicated these effects in a second study using women as our respondents. These results suggest that perceiving group discrimination may be positively related to self-esteem because people feel less alone in their plight, thereby alleviating the ill-effects of exclusion. We discuss these results in relation to both the Rejection–Identification model and the discounting hypothesis (Crocker & Major, 1989). Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Human beings are prone to create hierarchies that relegate some groups to the bottom of the social ladder. Being part of a so-called low status group is not a pleasant experience because it is associated with prejudice and discrimination in all aspects of daily life. For some years now, social psychology has taken an interest in the phenomenology of members of stigmatized group. Although a negative impact of discrimination would seem inevitable, research not only revealed the high degree of resilience manifested by stigmatized people but also the numerous strategies they are able to utilize, consciously or unconsciously, in order to deal with the abusive behavior of dominant outgroups (Allport, 1954; Goffman, 1963). The present paper examines the role played by two dimensions of perceived discrimination, namely the personal and the group one, on self-esteem. In line with the Rejection–Identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), we also explore group identification insofar it provides a means to protect self-esteem against the deleterious effect of discrimination.

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A dispassionate analysis of discrimination reveals that members of subordinate groups lag behind dominants on many societal indicators. They earn less money, are more often unemployed, and have lower diplomas and poorer health than high status group members (Belle & Doucet, 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). All these aspects should logically impact on their psychological well-being and, indeed, studies generally show that stigmatized group members have a higher prevalence of psychiatric disorders than their dominant counterparts (Chakraborty & McKenzie, 2002; Klonoff, Landrine, & Campbell, 2000). Moreover, research shows that perceived discrimination itself adds to the plight of stigmatized group members over and above their objective standing (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Schulz et al., 2000).

The impact of perceived discrimination on well-being has mainly been studied in relation to subjective well-being and self-esteem. Several theories suggest that perceived discrimination should deteriorate well-being (for a review, see Crocker & Major, 1989) and lead to a negative perception of the self. This assumption was questioned by Crocker and Major (1989) who proposed that perceiving discrimination may in fact be a self-serving cognition, deflecting responsibility from the self in the face of negative events. In other words, when confronted with failure, people who can blame another person's prejudice or even the system as a whole should be able to protect their self-esteem by discounting themselves as a cause of their plight.

Elegant as this discounting hypothesis may be, empirical support has been weak so far, appearing only under highly specific experimental conditions (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; Major, McCoy, Kaiser, & Quinton, 2003). Field studies consistently failed to find support for the discounting hypothesis (Bat-Chava, 1994; Hughes & Demo, 1989). The finding that prompted the discounting hypothesis, namely that African Americans have higher self-esteem than White Americans, also seems limited to this particular social group (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999; Meyer, 2003a; Twenge & Crocker, 2002).

Even though the empirical evidence does not support the discounting hypothesis (Crocker & Major, 1989), the available data do not indicate that stigmatized group members suffer huge losses of self-esteem either. As pointed out by Allport (1954) half a century ago, discriminated people have resources to cope with their plight and seem to use various strategies to face the negative events encountered in their life. In other words, confronted with threatening situations, stigmatized group members would be in a position to rely on a variety of conscious or unconscious stratagems in order to protect their self-esteem (Clark et al., 1999; Meyer, 2003b; Miller & Kaiser, 2001).

Although insisting on the prevalence of discrimination could be one of these strategies (Major et al., 2003), Schmitt and Branscombe (2002b) argued that this is unlikely to be the case. Because stigmatized group members encounter numerous occurrences of discrimination, blaming other people's prejudice for one's failure may turn out to be very costly and some form of minimization may be expected instead. One reason is that instances of discrimination offer a constant reminder of one's inability to lead one's life. Considering that perception of control is an important cognition linked to positive well-being (Brown & Siegel, 1988; Taylor & Brown, 1988), it is thus likely that low-status individuals will minimize their encounters with discrimination rather than rely on their discounting skills (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, 1997). In contrast, people who are rarely confronted with discrimination (dominant group members) may well use discrimination as an excuse, in contexts that make such attributions plausible. Presumably, this is because discrimination does not carry any specific meaning about their subsequent life experiences (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b).

Another reason for discriminated group members to be tempted to minimize discrimination, Schmitt and Branscombe (2002a) argued, is that the perception of discrimination involves people's group membership, a characteristic that is highly associated with the self. This means that attribution to discrimination as an explanation for failure does not truly reject the cause to external factors but

may be seen as calling into question unmistakable internal factors. Attributing a negative event to discrimination would therefore be more damaging for self-esteem than what was initially proposed by the discounting model (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002a).

In their Rejection–Identification model, Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey (1999) pointed to yet another strategy namely that identification may in fact serve as a buffer between discrimination and self-esteem. According to this model (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b), perceiving discrimination is equivalent to being excluded and, as such, has a negative impact on self-esteem. At the same time, social identity theorists (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), have proposed that discriminated people react to unjust behavior by increasing their feelings of identification with their ingroup and that this identification should have positive impact on self-esteem. Taken together, these ideas suggest that the impact of discrimination is likely buffered by increased identification, counteracting the ill effects of discrimination on self-esteem. Branscombe, Schmitt and colleagues found an impressive amount of evidence in support of their model with different stigmatized groups, namely African Americans (Branscombe et al., 1999), women (Redersdorff, Martinot, & Branscombe, 2004; Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002c), people with piercings (Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001), international students (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003) and old people (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004).

## THE PRESENT STUDIES

The Rejection–Identification model mainly deals with perceived *personal* discrimination. It posits that the *individual* level of rejection leads to higher levels of identification with the group, through feelings of exclusion by dominant group members. At the empirical level, however, research based on the Rejection–Identification model oscillates between a strict use of personal discrimination indexes (Branscombe et al., 1999) and a mixture of group and personal items (Gartska et al., 2004; Jetten et al., 2001; Schmitt et al., 2003). It is our opinion that the differentiation between the two levels of discrimination is in fact of high relevance. Indeed, numerous authors have underlined the importance of making a distinction between group and personal levels of discrimination (Crosby, 1982).

As a case in point, researchers working on the personal group discrimination discrepancy have repeatedly shown that people perceived lower levels of personal discrimination than group discrimination (Crosby, 1982; Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1994). Both motivational and cognitive explanations have been advanced to account for this discrepancy. The most popular explanation is motivational in tone and holds that individuals deny, or at least minimize, personal experiences of discrimination in order to maintain some positive illusions about themselves, among which a perception of personal control over events or their vision in a just world (Dupont & Leyens, 2003; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995; 1997). According to Crosby (1984), minimizing personal discrimination allows victims to avoid having to identify and react to the perpetrator of unjust behavior, as reacting might have negative social consequences for the discriminated individual.

At the cognitive level, different explanations have been offered suggesting that the discrepancy arises from unconscious and unintended biases in information processing. A first explanation is that people are thought to use additive and availability heuristics when evaluating discrimination levels (Moghaddam, Stolkin, & Hutcheson, 1997; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). As a matter of fact, the number of personal discrimination cases is always inferior to the episodes of group discrimination. In addition, instances of group discrimination generally seem to be more accessible. In an experiment by Ruggiero and Taylor (1994), half of the participants (women) were unable to recall a

case of personal discrimination whereas almost all could think of an example of group discrimination. Another explanation was suggested by Crosby, Clayton, Alksnis, and Hemker (1986). For these authors, the discrepancy originates in the difference between the processing of information presented in a case-by-case versus aggregated form. Indeed, in a given case of discrimination, people may be able to find multiple explanations accounting for the outcome. In contrast, a global and aggregated picture would lead participants to make an explicit link between the events and discrimination.

Finally, some authors recently argued that group and personal levels of perceived discrimination are not comparable because such judgments rely on different standards of comparison (Dumont, Seron, Yzerbyt, & Postmes, 2005; Kessler, Mummendey, & Leisse, 2000; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, & Young 1999; Quinn, Roese, Pennington, & Olson, 1999). Evidence shows that people make interpersonal or intragroup comparisons when evaluating personal discrimination but engage in intergroup comparisons when they evaluate group discrimination. By comparing themselves to other ingroup members, individuals feel relatively protected from discrimination, hence their low level of personal discrimination. As judgments of group discrimination call for a group referent, individuals compare the plight of their group to the dominant outgroup, hence their high level of group discrimination.

The distinction between personal and group discrimination is also popular among relative deprivation theorists who show that personal deprivation and group deprivation have quite a different impact: Whereas personal (or egoistic) deprivation impacts well-being, group (or fraternal) deprivation influences collective responses, among which identification (Hafer & Olson, 1993; Smith & Ortiz, 2002; Walker & Mann, 1987).

In light of these arguments, we think that research on the Rejection–Identification model would benefit from a clarification regarding the specific impact of the two different levels of discrimination. Indeed, the confusion between the two aspects of discrimination makes it difficult to distinguish the unique influence that perceptions of group and personal discrimination exert on identification and self-esteem. This is important because the literature on discrimination and relative deprivation evidences a number of distinctive findings concerning the relationships of perceptions of personal discrimination on the one hand and group discrimination on the other with identification and self-esteem. Turning to personal discrimination first, a large number of studies reveal the existence of a positive link between personal discrimination and identification (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Smith & Ortiz, 2001). In contrast, personal discrimination has been found to be negatively related with self-esteem (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997; Postmes & Branscombe, 2002; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Smith & Ortiz, 2001; Walker & Mann, 1987) although this link is sometimes occulted by group identification, as posited by the Rejection–Identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b). Indeed, as personal discrimination evaluation arises from intragroup comparisons it is directly related to evaluations of the self, in our case, self-esteem (Postmes et al., 1999). In view of these results, we hypothesize that personal discrimination should be positively related to group identification but negatively related to personal self-esteem.

Predictions are less clear when it comes to the relationship between perception of group discrimination with identification and self-esteem. Indeed, some data suggest that group discrimination is related to group identification (Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1983; Jetten et al., 2001; Peta & Walker, 1992), whereas other studies show that group discrimination and identification are largely independent (Bat-Chava, 1994). Along similar lines, divergent findings appear with the relationship between group discrimination and personal self-esteem. Although the tenants of the ‘discounting hypothesis’ postulate that group discrimination may benefit personal self-esteem, Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) qualified this conclusion by showing that group discrimination was positively linked with performance self-esteem but negatively related to social self-esteem. At the same time, other studies

show no link between group discrimination and well-being (Bat-Chava, 1994; Smith & Ortiz, 2002; Walker & Mann, 1987). In the specific case of self-esteem, it might even be clearer that whereas personal (self) levels of discrimination should have an impact, group level discrimination might be unrelated to self-esteem. In view of these contradictory findings, we remained agnostic with respect to the relationships of perceptions of group discrimination with identification and personal self-esteem.

As is clear from the above, it would also seem important to control for one kind of discrimination when inspecting the impact of the other. Building on the literature on relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966; Walker & Mann, 1987), we also think that the relationship between personal discrimination and self-esteem will be reinforced when group discrimination is controlled for.

For instance, controlling for perception of group discrimination will likely facilitate the emergence of the negative link between personal discrimination and self-esteem. Building on the literature on relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966; Walker & Mann, 1987), we also think that the relationship between personal discrimination and self-esteem will be reinforced when group discrimination is controlled. Once identification is also controlled for, personal discrimination should then better reveal its powerful deleterious influence on self-esteem, as predicted by the Rejection–Identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b).

## STUDY 1: AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN BELGIUM

The aim of our first study was twofold. First, we were interested in the effects of the two aspects of perceived discrimination (group and personal) on self-esteem in a group of African immigrants living in Belgium. To do so, we analyzed the effects of personal and group discrimination separately, before integrating them into a single model. Our prediction was that personal and group discrimination would be differently related to self-esteem, personal discrimination being negatively related to self-esteem. We additionally expected these relations to hold when both types of discrimination are examined in conjunction. Secondly, building upon the Rejection–Identification model and on relative deprivation theory, we hypothesized that personal discrimination would be positively related to group identification and negatively related to self-esteem when identification is included in the model. Controlling for group discrimination was not expected to alter this pattern. Concerning the link between group discrimination, group identification, and self-esteem, we had no specific hypotheses.

### Method

#### *Participants*

A total of 269 Africans living in Brussels and Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, filled in the questionnaire. Among these, 163 were males, 87 females, and 19 failed to mention their gender. The mean age of the sample was 33 years and participants were residing in Belgium for an average of 8 years (ranging from 3 months to 42 years). Also, 257 participants mentioned their nationality with 129 from Congo, 28 from Cameroon, 26 from Rwanda, 10 from Togo, and Nigeria, 9 from Benin, 8 from Guinea, 7 from Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Ivory Coast, 5 from Mali, 4 from Burundi, 3 from Angola, 2 from Mauritania, and 1 from Niger and Zambia.

### *Procedure and Materials*

Participants were approached in different locations (foreign students associations, churches) and asked to fill in the questionnaire at their own pace, wherever they wanted, and to bring it back where they had received it, for collection. The questionnaire comprised a set of measures only a portion of which were useful for our purpose. Its title was 'Study on Social Perceptions in Belgium: Opinions of African Immigrants living in Belgium.' People had to rate the items by indicating their degree of approval with each sentence on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (= I do not agree at all) to 7 (= I totally agree). The first page asked several demographic questions, i.e., age, nationality, gender, length of residence in Belgium, and whether participants were students or not.

### *Measures*

Perceptions of group and personal discrimination were measured with nine items. Following a principal components analysis, seven of the nine items saturated on the first factor, accounting for 36% of the variance. In order to distinguish between group and personal discrimination, we submitted these seven items to a second factorial analysis with an oblimin rotation. Two factors emerged. The first one comprised four items of perceived group discrimination: 'I think that Africans are undervalued in Belgian society,' 'In Belgian society, people often despise Africans,' 'Africans meet with more obstacles in their daily life than native Belgians' 'African are often confronted with discrimination.' These four items were collapsed into an index of perceived group discrimination ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ). The second factor comprised three items of perceived personal discrimination, namely 'I have personally met with difficulties because I am African,' 'I happen to be set aside because I am an African' and 'As an African, I have rarely felt personally discriminated against' (reverse coded). These three items were collapsed into an index of perceived personal discrimination ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ). In line with the personal—group discrimination discrepancy literature (Crosby, 1982; Taylor et al., 1994), perceived personal discrimination was lower ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ) than perceived group discrimination ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ),  $F(1, 267) = 21.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.075$ .

Personal self-esteem was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem inventory. This scale comprises 10 items, usually rated on a 4-point scale. We used a 7-point scale in order to homogenize the response scales of our questionnaire. Responses on the 10 items were collapsed into a single index of trait self-esteem ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ).

Five items measured our respondents' identification with the group of Africans: 'I perceive myself above all as a person of African descent,' 'I feel strong ties with African descent,' 'I consider myself as belonging to the group of Africans,' 'I frankly admit to be an African' and 'I identify as an African.' An index of identification was created on the basis of these 5 items ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ).

## **Results**

### *Preliminary Analyses*

Because age and gender have been shown to influence self-esteem (Diener, 1984; Kling et al., 2000), we controlled for these variables in all our analyses. Table 1 presents the means and correlation coefficients for our four variables (controlling for age and gender). As can be seen, perceived personal discrimination was significantly related to identification ( $r = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) but not to self-esteem ( $r = -0.07$ , *ns.*). In contrast, perceived group discrimination was marginally and positively linked to



Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of the variables in Study 1

	1	2	3	4
1. Personal Discrimination	—	0.50***	0.18**	-0.07
2. Group Discrimination		—	0.08	0.12 <sup>†</sup>
3. Identification			—	0.15*
4. Self-esteem				—
Mean (Standard Deviation)	4.47 (1.67)	4.91 (1.39)	6.00 (1.07)	5.76 (0.84)

Note: <sup>†</sup> $p < 0.1$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

self-esteem ( $r = 0.12$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ) but was not correlated to identification ( $r = 0.08$ , *ns.*). Such a correlation pattern is compatible with the idea that it is important to distinguish between perceived group and personal discrimination as these two aspects affect self-esteem in a distinctive way. In line with the Rejection–Identification model, personal discrimination was unrelated to self-esteem, at least when identification is not controlled for. In contrast, perceived group discrimination tended to be positively related to self-esteem.

#### Test of the Rejection–Identification Model

In our initial examination of the viability of the Rejection–Identification model, we included perceived group and personal discrimination (along with age and gender) into a multiple regression analysis with self-esteem as the criterion. The model was highly significant,  $F(4, 232) = 4.46$ ,  $p < 0.005$ , adj.  $R^2 = 0.06$ . Whereas perceived personal discrimination was now negatively related to personal self-esteem ( $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $p < 0.03$ ), perceived group discrimination was positively related to personal self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This result confirms that perceived group and personal discrimination partly overlap but that their unique contribution on self-esteem are in opposite directions.

In order to check for the link between discrimination and identification, we then regressed identification on perceived personal and group discrimination, controlling for age and gender. The model was marginally significant,  $F(4, 235) = 2.13$ ,  $p < 0.08$ , adj.  $R^2 = 0.02$ . In line with the correlation analyses, perceived personal discrimination was linked to identification ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.02$ ). Interestingly, perceived group discrimination was not related to identification ( $\beta = -0.03$ , *ns.*).

Next, we regressed self-esteem on identification, controlling for age and gender. This model was highly significant,  $F(3, 233) = 4.97$ ,  $p < 0.005$ , adj.  $R^2 = 0.05$ . Identification with the group of Africans was positively related to self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.02$ ).

Finally, to test for the suppressing effect of identification on the link between perceived personal discrimination and personal self-esteem, we computed a multiple regression analysis with personal discrimination and identification as predictors and self-esteem as criterion, controlling for group discrimination as well as age and gender. This model was significant,  $F(5, 231) = 5.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , adj.  $R^2 = 0.08$ . Perceived personal discrimination was negatively linked to self-esteem ( $\beta = -0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), perceived group discrimination was positively linked to self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and group identification was positively linked to self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In support of the Rejection–Identification model, the Sobel test approached significance ( $z = 1.78$ ,  $p < 0.08$ , two-tailed), suggesting that identification played a suppressor role in the relationship between perceived personal discrimination and self-esteem. In contrast, inclusion of identification in the model did not alter the link between group discrimination and self-esteem ( $z = -0.04$ , *ns.*).

## Discussion

The aim of the present study was to clarify the links between perceived discrimination on the one hand and identification and self-esteem on the other. In light of the confusion between personal and group discrimination observed in recent empirical work on the Rejection–Identification model and given the recurrent insistence of several authors on the importance to distinguish between these two aspects, a particularly important ambition of our first study was to investigate the relation between each one of these two aspects of discrimination and our criterion variables, controlling for the other. Our main prediction was that the Rejection–Identification model would be supported in the present data. Specifically, we expected our African immigrants living in Belgium to show that their level of personal discrimination is negatively related to self-esteem when the analysis controls for their level of identification. We hoped that this pattern would hold even when controlling for group discrimination. Because the literature on discrimination offers no clear image of the relation between perceived group discrimination and self-esteem, we did not make specific hypotheses about the relationship between those two concepts.

In line with our hypothesis, a negative link between perceived personal discrimination and self-esteem emerged when perceived group discrimination was controlled for. This relation was even stronger when we controlled for identification, replicating the Rejection–Identification model. In other words, our data indicate that identification suppressed the link between personal discrimination and well-being even when taking group discrimination into account.

Interestingly, our data also showed that perceived group discrimination was positively related to self-esteem, especially when we controlled for personal discrimination. This pattern supports the predictions of the discounting hypothesis (Crocker & Major, 1989) which posits that perceiving group discrimination is protective for stigmatized people. This finding is compatible with the idea that perceiving group discrimination could protect well-being by deflecting responsibility from the self in the face of failure. Although some studies on discrimination and relative deprivation predict that perceived group discrimination should be positively related to group identification and group cognition (Jetten et al. 2001; Petta & Walker, 1992), we did not find evidence for such a relation. In contrast, as predicted by the Rejection–Identification model, personal discrimination is positively related to identification in our data.

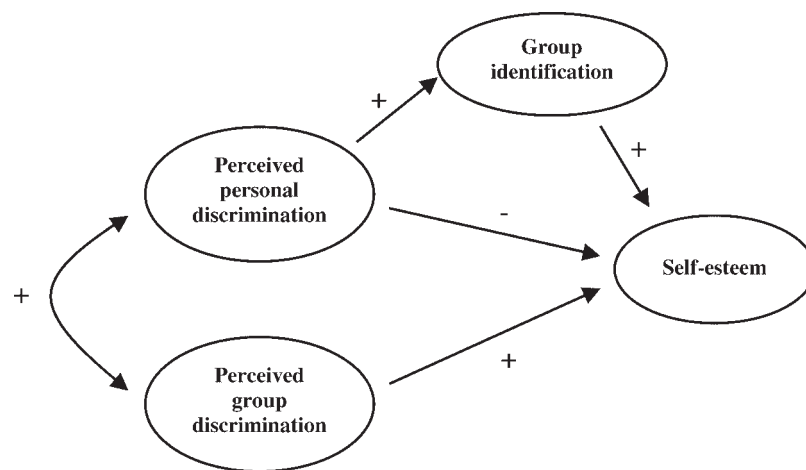


Figure 1. A refined model of rejection-identification



In sum, the present set of data indicates that the distinction between the two kinds of discrimination is indeed appropriate and important. Besides the fact that we replicate the personal-group discrimination discrepancy, perceptions of group and personal discrimination show distinct relationships with self-esteem. Moreover, it appears that identification plays a suppressing role in the relationship between personal discrimination and self-esteem and that this pattern is not affected by the inclusion of group discrimination in the model. This first exploratory study allowed to come up with a more definite model of the links between discrimination, at the personal and group level, and identification and self-esteem. This model is depicted in Figure 1. Because our results may be due to the specificity of our population, namely African immigrants, we decided to replicate our results and test the proposed model on a different population in order to reinforce the validity our conclusions.

## STUDY 2: WOMEN

The aim of our second study was to replicate the differential effects of group and personal discrimination on self-esteem observed in Study 1 on another stigmatized group, namely women. In Study 1, we observed that when group and personal perceptions of discrimination are both included in the multiple regression analysis, there is evidence both for a positive link between group discrimination and self-esteem and a negative link between personal discrimination and self-esteem. When considered separately, however, these two perceptions seemed less clearly related to self-esteem.

Our second and more important hypothesis pertained to the Rejection–Identification model. As in Study 1, we expected to find a positive relationship between perceived personal discrimination and group identification as well as a positive link between group identification and self-esteem. More importantly, we also predicted a significantly more negative link between perceived personal discrimination and self-esteem when group identification is controlled for than when it is not. Again, we hypothesized that this pattern would hold even in the presence of perceived group discrimination in the model.

### Method

#### *Participants*

178 female participants were invited to participate in our study. Mean age of the sample was 31 years old. As this data collection was part of a wider study, we also asked if people were working or not. Whereas 94 participants currently held a job, 84 were either students, unemployed, or retired.

#### *Procedure*

Women were approached by different experimenters in a number of settings and were asked to fill in the questionnaire at their own pace.

#### *Measures*

Perception of discrimination was measured with four items using 7-point scales ranging from 1 (= I do not agree at all) to 7 (= I agree totally). Assuming perceived group and personal discrimination to

be distinct concepts, we computed a principal component analysis with an oblimin rotation, imposing a two-factor solution. The first factor comprised the two group discrimination items namely 'The group of women is often confronted with discrimination' and 'Actually, women don't meet that much discrimination against their group' (reverse coded). The correlation between those items was acceptable ( $r = 0.54$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and we thus collapsed them into a single score of perceived group discrimination.

The second factor comprised the two items of personal discrimination namely 'As a women, I rarely feel discriminated against' (reverse-coded) and 'It happens sometimes that I am left aside because I am a woman'. Again, the correlation coefficient between those two items was high enough ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) that we could compute an index of perceived personal discrimination. Like in Study 1, there was strong evidence for the personal—group discrimination discrepancy as participants reported a lower level of personal discrimination ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) than group discrimination ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $F(1, 177) = 177.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.50$ .

Self-esteem was measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory. This time, we used the original four levels scale, ranging from 1 (= I do not agree at all) to 4 (= I totally agree). Internal consistency was good ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) and we collapsed the ten items into a single score of trait self-esteem.

Seven items tapped group identification, namely: 'I identify with the group of women,' 'For me, it is important to belong to the group of women,' 'I think that I am a woman that represents well the group of women,' 'I perceive myself as belonging to the group of women,' 'I feel strong ties with other women,' 'The fact that I belong to the group of women does not mean much to me' (reverse coded) and 'In my opinion, I am not a good exemplar of the group of women' (reverse coded). Participants had to indicate their agreement with the items on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (= do not agree at all) to 7 (= agree totally). Again, the reliability of this scale was good ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ). We thus averaged the seven items to secure one identification index.

## Results

### *Preliminary Analyses*

We controlled for age and work status in all our analyses, as these variables have been shown to be linked to self-esteem (Belle & Doucet, 2003). The key descriptive statistics of our four main variables along with the correlation coefficients are presented in Table 2. As was the case in Study 1, perceived personal discrimination was related to identification ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) but not to self-esteem ( $r = -0.06$ , *ns.*). In contrast, perceived group discrimination was related to self-esteem ( $r = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) but not to identification ( $r = 0.09$ , *ns.*).

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of main variables in Study 2

	1	2	3	4
1. Personal Discrimination	—	0.38***	0.20**	-0.06
2. Group Discrimination		—	0.09	0.15*
3. Identification			—	0.18*
4. Self-esteem				—
Mean (Standard Deviation)	3.05 (1.48)	4.59 (1.27)	4.86 (1.30)	3.40 (0.48)

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

*Rejection—Identification Model*

In order to test the Rejection–Identification model, we computed a series of regression analyses. First, we included both types of perceived discrimination in a regression analysis which used self-esteem as our criterion. The model came out significant,  $F(4, 173) = 2.98, p < 0.05, \text{adj. } R^2 = 0.04$ . As was the case with our African sample, the response of women revealed that perceived personal discrimination tended to be negatively related to self-esteem ( $\beta = -0.14, p < 0.09$ ), as predicted by the Rejection–Identification model. In contrast, and like before, perceived group discrimination was positively related to self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$ ).

Next, we checked for the impact of personal discrimination on identification, controlling for group discrimination. The regression model came out marginally significant,  $F(4, 173) = 2.13, p < 0.09, \text{adj. } R^2 = 0.03$ . As expected, whereas group discrimination was not related to identification ( $\beta = 0.02, ns.$ ), personal discrimination was positively and significantly related to identification ( $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.02$ ).

We then regressed self-esteem on identification. This model was significant,  $F(3, 174) = 3.56, p < 0.02, \text{adj. } R^2 = 0.04$ , with identification being positively related to self-esteem ( $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.02$ ).

Finally, we regressed self-esteem on identification and both types of perceived discrimination. This model was highly significant,  $F(5, 172) = 3.84, p < 0.005, \text{adj. } R = 0.07$ . In line with expectations, both group discrimination ( $\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$ ) and identification ( $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.05$ ) were positively related to self-esteem. More importantly, personal discrimination was now significantly and negatively related to self-esteem ( $\beta = -0.18, p < 0.05$ ). We computed a Sobel test in order to check whether the inclusion of identification in the model on top of both types of discrimination rendered the link between personal discrimination and self-esteem more negative. This test was marginally significant, ( $z = 1.76, p < 0.08$ ), indicating that identification likely acted as a buffer between personal discrimination and self-esteem. In contrast, group identification did not affect the links between group discrimination and self-esteem ( $z = 0.23, ns.$ ).

**Discussion**

In line with our predictions, Study 2 nicely replicated the findings of Study 1 with another stigmatized group, namely women. Perceived group and personal discrimination showed opposite links with self-esteem. Indeed, when considered together, perceived personal discrimination showed the expected negative relationship with self-esteem whereas group discrimination was positively related to self-esteem.

Again, only personal discrimination was found to be related to identification. We also replicated the pattern predicted by the Rejection–Identification model, even with group discrimination included in the equation. Controlling for identification tended to make the link between personal discrimination and self-esteem more negative. At the same time, the inclusion of identification in the model did not affect the relationship between group discrimination and self-esteem.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The present studies aimed at examining the relation between perceived discrimination and self-esteem. In line with the Rejection–Identification model, we expected the negative relation between perceived discrimination and self-esteem to become more negative when taking into account people's

level of identification. In line with the literature on personal-group discrimination discrepancy (Taylor et al., 1994) as well as relative deprivation theory, we decided to make a distinction between two levels of discrimination, namely group discrimination and personal discrimination. Indeed, the literature suggests that personal and group deprivation may have different effects on self-esteem (Postmes et al., 1999; Smith & Ortiz, 2002). We expected the predictions of the Rejection–Identification model to hold when considering personal discrimination. We had no specific expectations as far as group discrimination was concerned.

The data obtained in Study 1, using African immigrants living in Belgium, and in Study 2, using Belgian women, provide strong and convergent support for our hypotheses. In both studies, we observed evidence for the personal-group discrimination discrepancy. Both studies also confirmed that group discrimination and personal discrimination play opposite roles in their relationship with self-esteem. Whereas personal discrimination was negatively related to self-esteem, as predicted by the Rejection–Identification model or relative deprivation theory, especially when controlling for identification, group discrimination showed a positive relationship with self-esteem.

Our findings lend strong credence to the conclusions set forth by the Rejection–Identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). They also suggest that it is indeed most important to distinguish between perceptions of personal discrimination on the one hand and group discrimination on the other.

Clearly, several explanations could account for the opposite relations between personal and group discrimination and self-esteem. If the negative impact of personal discrimination on self-esteem can be easily explained, the positive effect of group discrimination may prove somewhat less obvious. According to the discounting hypothesis, perceiving discrimination may be an efficient strategy to protect self-esteem from the ill-effects of failure (Crocker & Major, 1989). However, the reasons that would have group discrimination rather than personal discrimination fill up this role are less clear. It may be that group discrimination encompasses the self but less so than personal discrimination. Whereas acknowledging the fact that one is confronted with personal discrimination would be too painful and would thus fail to protect self-esteem, in line with Schmitt and Branscombe's (2002b) reasoning, group discrimination may prove distant enough from the self in its ramifications that it can serve as an efficient excuse for life's wanderings (Taylor et al., 1994). Moreover, the fact that the whole group is seen as a victim likely dissipates personal responsibility. In other words, group discrimination would provide evidence that individuals are correct to assume that they bear little or no responsibility for their standing. In this sense, group discrimination buffers the negative effects of personal discrimination.

A second explanation builds upon and possibly complements the work on the personal-group discrimination discrepancy (Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O'Connell, & Whalen, 1989; Taylor, et al, 1994). As a matter of fact, recent developments on the personal-group discrimination discrepancy suggest that when people evaluate personal and group discrimination, they use different types of comparison (Postmes et al., 1999). When judging their personal level of discrimination, people are likely to rely upon intragroup comparisons, which raise self-protective concerns. If one believes that one is more discriminated against than other ingroup members, one will feel worse (Wills, 1981). When judging their group level of discrimination, people presumably rely upon intergroup comparisons, which raises group concerns (Postmes et al., 1999). In this case, group discrimination should not impact upon self-esteem, as the latter is not related to the group level. Our data, however, suggest another fascinating possibility, namely that perceiving group discrimination together with finding one's own standing acceptable raise self-esteem through positive contrast with other group members (Mussweiler, 2003). In other words, positive individual distinctiveness would explain the positive link of group discrimination with self-esteem. As it happens, several authors have been arguing that group discrimination is not a perception per se, but rather a form of semantic knowledge (Sidanius, Levin,

Federico, & Pratto, 2001). For instance, children are socialized into believing that their group is discriminated against even though they likely never witnessed it in reality. In this perspective, group discrimination is also seen as a backdrop against which people can estimate their own situation and decide that they are not that worse off. More than just considering that they are better than they should, they can also draw pride in believing that they overcame their collective destiny (Mussweiler, 2003).

Finally, it should be noted that, in both studies, personal and group perceptions of discrimination are positively related. Moreover, in both cases, group discrimination was (or tended to be) significantly related to self-esteem even when personal discrimination was not controlled for. In contrast, personal discrimination was not related to self-esteem when group discrimination was not included in the model. This pattern suggests that group discrimination suppressed the link between personal discrimination and self-esteem. As perceptions of personal discrimination increase, so do perceptions of group discrimination, which in turn, raise self-esteem. Perceptions of group discrimination thus seem to buffer the negative effects of personal discrimination on self-esteem in a manner that is very similar to identification. We think that group discrimination could protect well-being by allowing people to believe that one is not alone in one's plight. As such, perceptions of group discrimination renders exclusion a less solitary experience. While identification means inclusion, group discrimination has more to do with issues of common fate and common goals. The feeling of togetherness created by group discrimination could be protective. Common fate is one of the dimensions of entitativity (Campbell, 1958), the perception of one's ingroup as a real and meaningful entity. Entitativity has been proposed to be a positive characteristic of ingroups as it encompasses dimensions that render the group more powerful and efficient (Castano, Yzerbyt, & Bourguignon, 2003; Yzerbyt, Castano, Leyens, & Paladino, 2001; Yzerbyt, Judd, & Corneille, 2004). However, the absence of relationship between identification and group discrimination undermines this explanation. Further studies should investigate the relations between group discrimination and entitativity on the one hand and well-being on the other.

In both studies, identification was related to perceived personal discrimination but not to perceived group discrimination. This result may appear somewhat surprising in view of the relative deprivation literature which predict that the personal level of deprivation is related to individual cognition whereas group deprivation is related to group cognition. Moreover, some authors (Kessler et al., 2000; Postmes et al., 1999; Quinn et al., 1999) suggest that people make interpersonal or intragroup comparisons when evaluating personal discrimination whereas perceptions of group discrimination result from intergroup comparison. Obviously, the current state of the literature reveals that the relationship between identification and discrimination is far from straightforward.

While some authors find a link between identification and group discrimination (Gurin & Townsend, 1986; Petta & Walker, 1992), others do not (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001; Operario & Fiske, 2001). Some authors observed a relation between personal discrimination and identification (Branscombe et al., 1999; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 2001) and others fail to find such a link (Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998). And finally, several authors reported a link of identification with both personal and group discrimination (Tropp & Wright, 1999). In our view, these seemingly disparate results might be partly caused by the variety of measures of identification used in the existing studies. In fact, identification comes across as a concept that is widely used but rarely discussed within the discrimination literature (for exceptions, see Cameron, 2004; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). Different facets or definitions of identification could in fact be differently related to discrimination. We think that the absence of relationship between group discrimination and identification in our studies may be due to the specific (mainly cognitive) aspect of identification that was tapped in our measure. It would be interesting, in future studies, to more thoroughly investigate the link between different facets of identification and perceived personal and group discrimination.

In a similar vein, our studies strongly indicate that a better control of what type of discrimination is being measured (group vs. personal) is highly advisable. That is, we were able to replicate the Rejection–Identification model as it has been proposed by Schmitt, Branscombe and colleagues (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b). However even if only personal discrimination was significant in the model, controlling for group discrimination was necessary to make the pattern emerge. Interestingly, this latter variable was neither linked to identification nor negatively related to self-esteem.

Before concluding, we want to point out some limitations of the present research. We studied two broad social categories that are similar on a series of aspects. Prejudice against those groups is considered illegitimate and is legally forbidden in our society. Indeed, both racism and sexism are ‘officially’ outlawed. Both groups have at least some positive content associated with it, even if stereotypic (e.g. Africans are happy-go-lucky, women are affectionate) (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Membership in these groups is also uncontrollable: A Black African will likely remain so and so will a woman. We think that those aspects are important factors to consider when studying the impact of discrimination. It is our opinion that such features may greatly alter the relationship between discrimination, identification, and well-being. For example, some groups that are negatively defined, like unemployed or obese people, could fail to display a positive relationship between identification and well-being. Crandall, Tsang, Harvey, and Britt (2000) argued that the Rejection–Identification model worked only with meaningful identities, empowered with a real positive content. Many studies have shown the dangers of considering different social groups to be interchangeable. Meta-analyses of self-esteem levels revealed that African Americans were the sole discriminated group to brag higher levels of self-esteem than the dominant group (Kling et al., 1999; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Other studies have shown that different groups base their self-esteem on different aspects of their lives. In sum, it should not be surprising that whereas some groups are negatively affected by discrimination, others may not care as much (Bat-Chava, 1994; Crocker, 1999; Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Williams, Spencer, & Jackson, 1999). We think that researchers interested in issues of discrimination should always keep in mind that the groups they study are very specific. A more fine-tuned attention to the diversity of social reality may well limit the generality of our conclusions but it may also help us to be more in touch with the true nature of the phenomena that we are studying.

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