



Discrimination divides across identity dimensions: Perceived racism reduces support for gay rights and increases anti-gay bias[☆]



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HIGHLIGHTS

- 3 studies examine perceived racism's effect on attitudes toward sexual minorities.
- Two studies analyze large-scale datasets and one study manipulates racism salience.
- Anti-ingroup racism led racial minorities to express bias toward sexual minorities.
- Discrimination harms intraminority intergroup relations across identity dimensions.

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ABSTRACT

Recent research has found that perceiving racial discrimination toward one's own group results in the expression of more positive attitudes toward members of other racial minority groups; however, perceiving sexism results in the expression of more negative attitudes toward other stigmatized groups, namely, racial minorities. One possibility for this seeming discrepancy is that perceived group disadvantage better enables identification with other disadvantaged groups within a dimension of identity (i.e., among racial minorities) than across dimensions of identity (i.e., between White women and racial minorities). The present research investigates this possibility or, rather, whether racial discrimination is such a potent experience for racial minorities that making it salient will increase identification with and, thus, facilitate more positive attitudes toward members of other stigmatized groups, even those that cross an identity dimension (e.g., sexual minorities). Analyses of two nationally representative datasets (Studies 1a & 1b) reveal that perceived racial discrimination against the ingroup is associated with more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Similarly, a laboratory experiment with Black and Latino participants (Study 2) reveals that making racial discrimination against the ingroup salient leads to more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as well as less support for policies that would benefit sexual minorities. Overall, the present research suggests that although perceived discrimination may result in more positive attitudes within an identity dimension, it is associated with more *negative* intra-minority intergroup relations across dimensions of identity.

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In 2008, an unprecedented number of racial minorities participated in the historic event of electing the first Black president of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Also on the ballot in California during the 2008 election cycle was Proposition 8—a proposal to amend the

California State Constitution to recognize only marriages between opposite-sex pairs.¹ Some expected Black Americans to empathize with gay Americans and vote against the ban due to Black Americans' own experiences with institutionalized discrimination, especially in the marriage domain (DiMassa & Garrison, 2008). Contrary to those expectations, however, Black and Latino voters tended to support the

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¹ As of the writing of this manuscript, a Ninth Circuit court ruling deemed Proposition 8 unconstitutional and in the appeal to the US Supreme Court it was ruled that the supporters of Proposition 8 did not have standing to appeal. Thus, Proposition 8 is effectively overturned.

ban on same-sex marriage to a greater extent than White and Asian voters (58% and 59%, compared to 49% and 48%, respectively; Egan & Sherrill, 2009). Hence, many were surprised that racial minorities who had fought for civil rights themselves were relatively unsupportive of gay and lesbian marriage rights. The present research examines whether the basic assumption that racial minority voters would feel greater empathy toward gay men and lesbians due to having faced similar forms of discrimination and disadvantage was misplaced. Specifically, three studies examine the relation between perceived racial discrimination and racial minority individuals' attitudes regarding sexual minorities and support for civil rights for gay men and lesbians.

The present studies build upon recent research exploring relations among members of different stigmatized groups—*intra-minority intergroup* relations. The larger question governing this line of research is whether the experiences that often distinguish low- from high-status group members (e.g., discrimination) may alter the trajectory of *intra-minority intergroup* relations, such that they unfold differently than do relations between members of majority and minority groups (Richeson & Craig, 2011). Members of different stigmatized groups share a disadvantaged societal status; perceived discrimination against their own group could be construed as a common experience held with other disadvantaged groups leading to positive intergroup relations. The Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) suggests that perceived discrimination may lead members of different stigmatized groups to categorize themselves in terms of a common “disadvantaged” identity and, thus, may result in more positive attitudes toward stigmatized outgroups. Alternatively, extant research on Social Identity Threat (SIT; Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999) predicts that perceived discrimination against one's group—a clear threat to the value of one's social identity—should lead to more negative evaluations of stigmatized outgroups in order to bolster group esteem.

The CIIM prediction that perceived discrimination is associated with perceived commonality and positive attitudes among different stigmatized groups has found support. For instance, prior work with Blacks and Latinos has found a positive association between perceived discrimination against one's own group and perceived commonality with another racial minority group (e.g., Craig & Richeson, 2012; Sanchez, 2008). Further, exposing racial minority participants (e.g., Asian Americans, Latinos) to discrimination against their own racial/ethnic group (i.e., anti-Asian/anti-Latino prejudice) leads to greater perceived similarity with and more positive evaluations of other racial minorities (e.g., Blacks; Craig & Richeson, 2012).

Despite this initial evidence regarding the promise of salient ingroup discrimination to engender more positive *intra-minority intergroup* relations, the results of a second set of experiments suggest that more *negative* reactions are also possible. Specifically, White women primed with pervasive sexism expressed more pro-White (relative to Black and Latino) self-reported and automatic racial bias, compared with White women who were not primed with sexism (Craig, DeHart, Richeson, & Fiedorowicz, 2012). Revealing the role of social identity threat in shaping these reactions, Craig et al. (2012, Study 3) found that a group-level affirmation prior to making sexism salient reduced its effect on intergroup bias. That is, White women who were affirmed prior to making sexism salient expressed similar levels of intergroup racial bias as did White women for whom sexism was not made salient. This work suggests, in other words, that making ingroup discrimination salient can indeed trigger social identity threat (Branscombe et al., 1999) without activating a sense of common disadvantage and, thus, result in the expression of greater bias against other disadvantaged groups.

What predicts whether the CIIM or SIT will govern stigmatized group members' responses to salient discrimination? One parsimonious explanation is that perceived discrimination against one's own group tends to promote bias directed toward other stigmatized groups across identity dimensions (e.g., across gender and race); however, within an identity dimension (e.g., race), perceived discrimination tends

to promote more positive *intra-minority intergroup* attitudes. This hypothesis seems particularly plausible, given that making ingroup discrimination salient increases the extent to which racial minority participants perceive their own groups to be similar to other racial minority groups, which predicts the expression of more positive attitudes toward those other racial minority groups (Craig & Richeson, 2012). In other words, perceived similarity seems to be important for engendering more positive intergroup attitudes, and may simply be easier to heighten within a dimension of identity rather than across dimensions.

Although this explanation is reasonable, another potential explanation for this pattern remains. That is, the evidence in support of perceived ingroup discrimination leading to more positive intergroup attitudes is largely based on racial minority participants' reactions to salient racial bias, whereas the evidence in support of perceived ingroup discrimination leading to more negative intergroup attitudes is based on White women's responses to salient sexism. Racial minorities and White women may respond differently to salient racism and sexism, respectively, because whereas racial minority group members are both numerical minorities in the US population as well as socio-culturally disadvantaged, women are in the numerical majority of the US population, albeit still socio-culturally devalued in many domains. Nevertheless, this difference in numerical minority vs. majority status could result in lower levels of group identification, a known predictor of reactions to discrimination (McCoy & Major, 2003). Consistent with this idea, previous research has found that, compared with Blacks and members of other disadvantaged groups (e.g., older adults), women have relatively low levels of gender group consciousness (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980), perhaps making it particularly difficult to activate the type of cross-category common “disadvantaged” identity that could engender more positive intergroup attitudes in response to salient sexism. By contrast, perceived racial discrimination could activate an ideology that promotes commonality among different oppressed groups (e.g., Oppressed Minority Ideology; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

Hence, it is possible that the differential findings observed in previous research are not attributable to the relative difficulty associated with activating a common ingroup identity and enhancing feelings of similarity across identity dimensions, compared to within an identity dimension, but, rather, reflect differences in the experiences of White women with sexism and racial minorities with racism. One way to test this alternate explanation is by observing the relation between perceived racial discrimination and the attitudes racial minorities express toward stigmatized outgroups from a different identity dimension. To that end, three studies explore how perceived discrimination against one's racial/ethnic ingroup influences attitudes toward sexual minorities.

Study 1a

Study 1a sought to examine whether perceiving discrimination against one's own racial group is associated with more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities, consistent with SIT theory or, rather, more positive attitudes toward sexual minorities, consistent with the CIIM. Because it should be more difficult to activate a common ingroup identity across dimensions of social identity (i.e., across race and sexual orientation) than within an identity dimension, we predicted that perceived anti-ingroup discrimination would be associated with more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities.

Data & methods

The present study examined the General Social Survey cumulative data set (GSS; Smith, Marsden, Hout, & Kim, 2013). The GSS is a large-scale survey of United States residents that has been conducted since 1972. In the interviews, which generally take about 1.5 h to conduct, respondents are asked about their attitudes and behaviors in relation to different political and social issues. There are many different questions asked in the GSS that could reasonably assess the constructs of

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