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# Rebels With a Cause: Group Identification as a Response to Perceived Discrimination From the Mainstream

**Jolanda Jetten**

*University of Amsterdam and University of Exeter*

**Nyla R. Branscombe**

**Michael T. Schmitt**

*University of Kansas*

**Russell Spears**

*University of Amsterdam*

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*Two studies involving people with body piercings tested the hypothesis that perceived discrimination increases group identification. In Study 1, group identification mediated the positive relationship between perceived discrimination and attempts to differentiate the ingroup from the mainstream. In Study 2, perceived discrimination against people with body piercings was manipulated and was found to increase group identification. Support was found for the prediction that group identification mediates the relationship between perceptions of discrimination and collective self-esteem. Results demonstrate the importance of group identification for both the meaning of group membership and its consequences for well-being among members of disadvantaged groups.*

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**B**ody adornment and body modification are universal phenomena. Indeed, the human body can be conceptualized as a canvas on which social and personal identities are communicated. Yet, across cultures and historical periods there are wide differences in which body modifications are prohibited and which are deemed to be appropriate. Many such body modifications are imposed as a result of being born into a specific group or are acquired during ritual transitions to full group membership. However, body markers and the group memberships they reflect also can be self-selected. We investigated people who self-select relatively permanent, nonnormative forms of body markings—those who seek and receive body piercings.

Although body piercings have become increasingly popular in Western countries in the past decade (Clarke,

1994; Wojcik, 1995), they have by no means fully diffused through the population. Unlike earlobe piercings, which are widely accepted, piercings in other parts of the body (e.g., nose, eyebrow, tongue, navel, or genitalia) are frequently perceived as weird or antinormative (Camphausen, 1997). Those with such piercings might encounter incomprehension or even disgust from members of the general public. Given that those with body piercings might realistically expect to receive legally sanctioned discrimination on the part of the mainstream (Lansner, 1998), we address the psychological consequences of such discrimination for willingness to identify with others who also have body piercings.

## *Consequences of Perceived Discrimination for Group Identification*

One response among group members who expect to encounter prejudice directed at their group might be to rid themselves of, or attempt to conceal, that group

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membership (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984). In contrast to this individual mobility (“passing”) approach, such identity threats may be coped with by adopting a more group-based strategy (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997). Specifically, perceptions of discrimination might strengthen identification with those who share the stigma. When taking this more group-based approach, members of devalued groups are likely to engage in social creativity by rejecting dominant group standards and instead placing greater emphasis and value on how they differ from the dominant group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, an important aim of the present research is to examine the effects of perceived mainstream rejection based on one’s body piercings on group identification, intergroup differentiation, and collective well-being. We argue that enhanced social identification can ultimately act as a buffer against the threat of social rejection that discrimination represents.

Discrimination on the part of the mainstream represents a threat to one’s group identity because it implies that the culture as a whole devalues that group membership. Research in the social identity theory tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has demonstrated that group members frequently react to threats to their group identity with increased group identification and cohesion (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). This prediction has been supported by research involving historically disadvantaged groups, such as African Americans, where perceptions of discrimination across situations increase group identification (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). The predicted positive relationship between perceptions of discrimination and group identification has been observed in women, Jews, homosexuals, and nonmainstream college groups (Cozzarelli & Karafa, 1998; Dion & Earn, 1975; Gurin & Townsend, 1986; Simon et al., 1998).

*The Multiple Potential  
Meanings of Group  
Membership*

Social identity theory has characterized identification with social groups as a way of defining the individual’s place in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Researchers have considered various dimensions on which social identities can differ in terms of their meaning for group members (Brown & Williams, 1984; Deaux, 1996; Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Cotting, 1999; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Jackson & Smith, 1999). We consider how the meaning of being a group member might differ as a function of how the group’s position in the social structure is perceived. More specifically, we investigated how perceived discrimination against those with body piercings can alter the meaning of that group member-

ship. In other words, we explore how perceptions of intergroup phenomena can alter how group membership helps define the self in relation to others.

Social identification is not only a process reflecting what group members have in common but also can reflect how the ingroup differs from other groups. Although both intragroup similarity and intergroup differentiation are likely effects of group identification (Deaux et al., 1999; Jackson & Smith, 1999; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the relative strength of these two aspects of group definition may differ. Some groups, those with body piercings in particular, may define themselves primarily in terms of who they are not. We argue that body piercings can serve as an identity marker that sets oneself apart from the mainstream and its norms (Hebdige, 1979). Indeed, rejection of mainstream norms might well be a prerequisite for building a positive identity when one is a member of a socially devalued group. Several studies have revealed that when confronted with discrimination, disadvantaged group members disidentify with the normative standards of the dominant group and increase the relevance of dimensions on which the ingroup is distinct (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Steele, 1997). Thus, for people with body piercings, we predict that intergroup differentiation is more central to group identification and more influenced by perceptions of discrimination than is intragroup similarity.

In addition to signaling one’s similarity to the other ingroup members and differences from outgroup members, body piercings may be seen in personal identity terms. Specifically, body piercings might be seen as enhancing one’s personal physical appearance. However, those who strongly identify with the group are likely to see the personal aesthetic value of their piercings as less important than do low identifiers. Indeed, for the highly identified, body piercings may serve as a means of communicating one’s rejection of mainstream beauty standards. For this reason, we predict that among those with body piercings, group identification will be negatively related to personal aesthetics as a source of meaning.

In two studies, we examined the effects of perceived discrimination on these three potential meanings of group identification (intergroup differentiation, intragroup similarity, and personal aesthetics), as well as the well-being consequences for people with body piercings. Because perceived discrimination represents a threat to social identity, in both studies, we predicted that perceived discrimination against people with body piercings would encourage identification with the group as a whole. We also examined how group identification mediates the relationship between perceived discrimi-

nation and the meanings and affective consequences of group membership.

#### STUDY 1

With a sample of people with body piercings, we tested a model that predicts that perceptions of discrimination will encourage group identification and that group identification will, in turn, affect the meaning of having body piercings. Specifically, we predicted that identification would be positively related to intergroup differentiation and intragroup similarity but negatively related to having piercings as a means of enhancing personal aesthetics. We also predicted that identification with people with body piercings would be more strongly related to intergroup differentiation than intragroup similarity.

#### Method

*Respondents.* Customers (32 men, 41 women) in a body piercing shop in The Netherlands completed a questionnaire concerning their perceptions of the consequences of having body piercings. Participation was voluntary but was solicited by the owner or an employee of the store who had clearly visible piercings themselves. Respondents were approached when they came back for their check-ups (to examine whether the piercing healed properly), when they visited the shop to purchase a new piece of jewelry for their piercings, or when they came to socialize with others in the shop. The mean age of the respondents was 22 years, and approximately half were students.

*Procedure.* It was explained that our aim was to gain a better understanding of what it means to have a body piercing. In addition, it was made clear in the introduction that their responses would remain anonymous and would be used for research purposes only. Respondents were asked to put their questionnaires in a sealed box when they were finished.

Perceptions of discrimination were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much*, with the item, "Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your piercing?" Two additional items assessed the extent to which they thought having a piercing has social costs versus benefits.

*Group identification.* Respondents' identification with other people with a piercing was measured with five items adapted from Jetten et al. (1996) (e.g., I identify with other people who have a piercing) on 7-point scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (7). Cronbach's alpha for these items was .83.

*Meanings of body piercings.* Participants responded to measures of intergroup differentiation, intragroup similarity, and personal aesthetics using a scale ranging from

*not at all important* (1) to *very important* (7). We measured intergroup differentiation with the following four items: "I want to break through taboos," "I want to shock others with my piercing(s)," "I want to distinguish myself from the mainstream," and "I want to distinguish myself from others" ( $\alpha = .83$ ). We measured intragroup similarity using two items: "I want to fit in with my friends who also have a piercing" and "My friends made me enthusiastic to also get a piercing" ( $\alpha = .61$ ). Personal aesthetics was measured using the following two items: "I think a piercing is beautiful" and "I think a piercing is like any other nice jewelry" ( $\alpha = .63$ ).

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate their gender, age, the number and location of their piercings, the percentage of their friends who had body piercings, and their desire to have more piercings in the future.

#### Results

*Number of body piercings.* The average number of body piercings per participant was 4.83 (ranging from 1 to 28). The median number of piercings was 2. The mean percentage of friends who have a body piercing was estimated at 40%. A substantial number of the respondents (64%) indicated that they had at least one visible piercing. Half of the sample (53%) indicated that they would like to have more piercings in the future. Preliminary analyses found that gender was not related to any of the measures. Thus, this variable is ignored in the analyses we report.

*Perceptions of discrimination.* In line with previous research on disadvantaged groups (Crosby, 1982; Ruggiero & Major, 1998), respondents did not report high levels of perceived discrimination ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ). However, respondents did indicate that they were aware that having a piercing has more social costs ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) than benefits ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ),  $F(1,71) = 12.74$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### Path Analyses

The relationships among the measured variables were analyzed with EQS for Windows (Version 5.7b). To determine the fit of the proposed model, we report the chi-square goodness of fit test, the Normative Fit Index (NFI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). A chi-square value of zero indicates optimal fit, whereas a higher chi-square indicates worse fit. More specifically, a nonsignificant chi-square indicates that the difference between the observed and estimated variance-covariance matrices is not significantly different from zero. The NFI and CFI give an indication of the extent to which the tested model is superior to the null model, which specifies no covariance between the measured variables. The value of these indices can vary between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating a better fit between

the observed and estimated covariance matrices. Values higher than .90 indicate adequate fit of the model to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1995).

The path model that we proposed predicts that perceived discrimination positively influences group identification. We hypothesized that group identification would be positively related to intergroup differentiation, somewhat less positively related to intragroup similarity, and negatively related to personal aesthetics. Furthermore, we expected that group identification would mediate the relationship between perceived discrimination and intergroup differentiation, the primary meaning of this group membership. We specified a model in which each construct of interest was represented by a single mean scale score.

The hypothesized model and the estimated parameters are presented in Figure 1. The analyses revealed that this model fits the data extremely well, as indicated by a nonsignificant chi-square value,  $\chi^2(6) = 4.46, p = .61$ , and high NFI and CFI values (.93 and 1.00, respectively). Adding other parameters to the model did not increase model fit. Perceived discrimination positively predicted group identification, and group identification was, in turn, positively related to intergroup differentiation and intragroup similarity, but negatively related to personal aesthetics. As predicted, group identification was more strongly related to intergroup differentiation than to intragroup similarity,  $F(1, 67) = 2.60, p < .05$ .

As shown in Table 1, the intergroup differentiation dimension was positively correlated with perceived discrimination. We performed additional analyses to test whether group identification mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and intergroup differentiation. We examined whether the strength of the relationship between identification (the mediator) and intergroup differentiation (the dependent variable) became nonsignificant when the direct path from perceived discrimination to intergroup differentiation was included in the model (Baron & Kenny, 1986). We found that when the direct path was included in the analysis, the path between group identification and intergroup differentiation was essentially unchanged and remained significant ( $\beta = .59$ ). Furthermore, the direct path from perceived discrimination to intergroup differentiation was not significant ( $\beta = .06$ ). Thus, these data support the conclusion that the relationship between perceived discrimination and intergroup differentiation is completely mediated by group identification.

*Alternative models.* Additional models were tested to investigate alternative perspectives on the relationships between perceived discrimination, group identification, and the meanings of body piercings. First, a model was tested where personal aesthetics, intragroup similarity, intergroup differentiation, and perceptions of

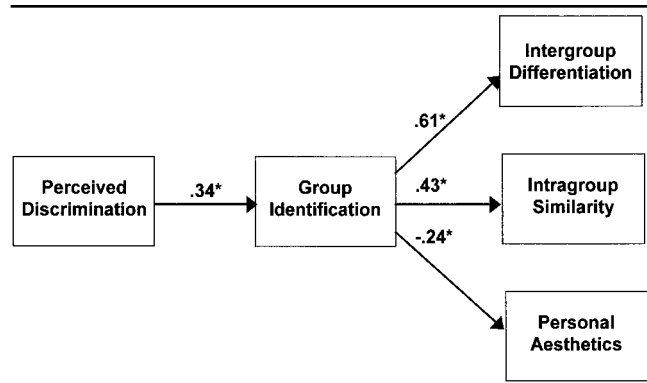


Figure 1 Study 1: Path model testing the relationships between perceived discrimination, group identification, and the meanings of body piercings.

NOTE: Path weights are significant at  $p < .05$ .

discrimination all predicted group identification. This model is consistent with our model in that it predicts that perceived discrimination will encourage group identification, but it differs in that it tests the prediction that the three meanings of group membership are causes rather than consequences of group identification (Deaux et al., 1999). This model did not fit the data well, as indicated by a significant chi-square,  $\chi^2(6) = 15.82, p < .01$ , and low NFI and CFI values (.75 and .82, respectively).

Second, we tested the reverse of the model presented in Figure 1, in which personal aesthetics, intragroup similarity, and intergroup differentiation predicted group identification. In this model, group identification, in turn, predicted perceptions of discrimination. This model tests the possibility that the meanings of group membership influence group identification and that group identification encourages perceived discrimination (see Crocker & Major, 1989). This model did not fit the data as well as our predicted model, as indicated by a higher chi-square value,  $\chi^2(6) = 10.12, p < .12$ , and lower fit indices (NFI = .84, CFI = .92).

We also tested an alternative model in which the three meanings of having body piercings mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and group identification. Previous work has reported a positive relationship between perceived discrimination and group identification. This model tests the hypothesis that perceived discrimination has an effect on group identification via altering the meaning of that group membership. In this alternative model, perceived discrimination affects all three meanings variables, and these meanings, in turn, affect identification with the group. However, this model did not reach an acceptable level of fit,  $\chi^2(4) = 10.57, p < .05$  (NFI = .83, CFI = .88).

Because number of body piercings and perceptions of discrimination were correlated ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ), an

**TABLE 1: Study 1: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations**

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived discrimination	1.0				
2. Group identification	.34**	1.0			
3. Intergroup differentiation	.26*	.61**	1.0		
4. Intragroup similarity	.17	.43**	.22	1.0	
5. Personal aesthetic	-.13	-.24*	-.08	-.29*	1.0
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	3.06 (2.01)	2.62 (1.11)	3.10 (1.70)	2.42 (1.41)	6.35 (.96)

NOTE:  $N = 70$ . Possible range for all measures was 1 to 7, with higher numbers indicating greater agreement with that measure.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

additional model was tested to rule out the possibility that the relationship between perceptions of discrimination and identification is due to both of these variables being related to the number of piercings. Therefore, number of piercings was included as a covariate in the model to control for its influence. It was allowed to correlate with perceptions of discrimination, and the significance of the path from number of piercings to group identification was tested. Although this analysis confirmed that number of piercings was related to perceived discrimination, number of piercings did not predict group identification ( $\beta = .03$ ) or alter the significance any of the other paths in the model,  $\chi^2(9) = 9.02$ ,  $p = .44$  (NFI = .83, CFI = 1.00).

### Discussion

In this study, we obtained strong support for our prediction that perceptions of discrimination are associated with increased group identification. Because perceived discrimination represents a threat to group identity, it leads people to identify more strongly with others who share that stigma (Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999; Simon et al., 1998). The present study revealed that among those with body piercings, perceived discrimination encourages intergroup differentiation and that group identification mediates this relationship. In line with predictions, there was a significant positive relationship between the group-level meanings and group identification, and this relationship was stronger for intergroup differentiation than for intragroup similarity. Furthermore, group identification and personal aesthetics were negatively related. This significant negative relationship reinforces the argument that body piercings can signify the rejection of the mainstream and its standards of beauty (Hebdige, 1979). It also was demonstrated that although there was a positive relationship between number of piercings and perceptions of discrimination, number of piercings did not explain the relationship between perceived discrimination and group identification. Thus, the model that best accounts for the data is one in which perceived discrimination—

via group identification—alters the meaning of having a body piercing, encouraging the perception that it is a marker that differentiates one's ingroup from the mainstream.

### STUDY 2

Study 1 found that perceived discrimination altered the meaning of having a body piercing via increasing group identification. In Study 2, we explore the mediating role of group identification in the relationship between perceived discrimination and collective self-esteem—the affective component of group membership. Based on Branscombe, Schmitt, et al.'s (1999) Rejection-Identification Model, we predicted an indirect positive effect of perceived discrimination on collective self-esteem that is mediated by group identification and a direct negative relationship between perceptions of discrimination and collective self-esteem. In other words, recognizing the disadvantages that the ingroup must face has harmful effects on collective well-being, but these negative effects can be attenuated by increasing identification with one's minority ingroup. Branscombe, Schmitt, et al. (1999) found that for African Americans who perceived discrimination against their group, well-being was harmed but participants coped with this negative effect via increased identification with their racial group. Evidence of a positive relationship between minority group identification and self-esteem has been obtained in previous research employing a wide variety of social groups (Bat-Chava, 1994; Frible, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Hammersmith & Weinberg, 1973; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). Thus, the costs of being targeted for discrimination may be compensated for by the psychological benefits derivable from increased identification with other ingroup members.

In Study 2, we manipulate perceptions of mainstream discrimination against people with body piercings. This allows for a stronger test of the hypothesis that perceiving discrimination against a devalued ingroup increases identification with that group. Although Study 1 found greater support for a model in which perceived discrimi-

nation influences group identification compared to the reverse causal model where group identification influences perceived discrimination, it remains important to investigate this issue experimentally. Therefore, we provided participants with feedback that they could expect negative discriminatory treatment, positive reactions from the general public, or with no feedback in a control condition. In line with the findings of Study 1, it was predicted that perceived discrimination would result in greater group identification compared to perceptions of positive treatment. The control condition was included as a baseline, with the expectation that identification in this condition would fall between the negative and positive expectancy conditions. We predicted that the effects of the manipulation of discrimination expectancies on group identification would result in an indirect positive effect on collective self-esteem. However, we also predicted a direct negative effect of perceived discrimination on collective self-esteem.

#### Method

*Respondents.* Customers (29 men, 74 women;  $M$  age = 21 years) in the same body piercing shop as in Study 1 agreed to complete a questionnaire in exchange for 5 guilders (approximately U.S.\$3). Approximately 58% of the respondents were students.

*Manipulation of perceived discrimination.* Participants read a brief overview concerning a prior study that had ostensibly assessed the general public's opinions regarding people with body piercings. In the negative treatment condition, participants read information stating that "in general people who do not have a piercing have a negative impression of people with a piercing." In addition, the ostensible results of that study were summarized as follows: (a) 79% of the people surveyed said they do not like interacting socially with people who have a piercing, (b) 80% of the people surveyed indicated that they did think that it was likely that people with a piercing would be discriminated against in the workplace, (c) 75% of the people surveyed indicated that they looked down on people with a piercing, and (d) 88% of the respondents indicated that they would have problems hiring someone with a piercing. In the positive treatment condition, participants read that the general public has positive impressions of people with body piercings, using the same percentages as listed above. They were told that the majority of people surveyed like interacting with people with piercings, think that discrimination against people with piercings is unlikely, admire people with piercings, and would have no problem hiring someone with piercings. No feedback was given in the control condition.

*Manipulation checks.* All responses were made on 7-point scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (7). The success of the manipulation of perceived discrimination was assessed with four items (e.g., "People with a piercing are disadvantaged by society";  $\alpha = .92$ ), adapted from Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, and Young (1999).

*Dependent measures.* Participants completed the same measure of group identification as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Feelings of group-level well-being were assessed with the private collective self-esteem subscale (e.g., "Overall, I often feel that people with a piercing are not worthwhile") and the membership subscale (e.g., "I am a worthy member of the group people with a piercing") of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale. These eight items were averaged ( $\alpha = .62$ ) so that higher scores indicate more positive self-esteem derived from this group membership. Finally, as in Study 1, we assessed participants' number of piercings, location of the piercings, the number of friends who also have a piercing and whether they would like to have more piercings in the future.

#### Results

*Number of body piercings.* The number of body piercings ranged from 1 to 32, with an average of 3.52 and a median of 2. Consistent with Study 1, 65% of respondents indicated that they had at least one visible piercing. Again, approximately half of the respondents indicated that they would have more piercings in the future and that 32% of their friends have piercings.

#### Effectiveness of the Manipulation

The manipulation significantly predicted perceived discrimination,  $F(2, 100) = 4.69, p < .01$ . Perceived discrimination was higher in the negative ( $M = 4.08, SD = 1.37$ ) than the positive feedback condition ( $M = 3.04, SD = 1.37$ ),  $F(1, 70) = 9.73, p < .01$ . Perceived discrimination was at an intermediate level for those in the control condition ( $M = 3.23, SD = 1.55$ ), and it was significantly lower than the negative feedback condition,  $F(1, 56) = 4.80, p < .05$ . The positive and the control conditions did not differ significantly on perceived discrimination,  $F < 1$ .

Overall, the manipulation of perceived discrimination was successful. Compared to either the participants in the control or positive expectancy condition, more perceived discrimination was reported by the respondents who received the feedback that "people with a piercing" are likely to be discriminated against by members of the general public. However, compared to the control "baseline" condition, we were less successful in lowering perceptions of discrimination in the positive feedback condition.

### Effects of Perceived Discrimination

**Group identification.** The manipulation of perceived discrimination affected group identification,  $F(2, 100) = 2.82, p = .06$ . Group identification was higher when respondents received negative feedback ( $M = 2.66, SD = 1.10$ ) compared to when they received positive feedback ( $M = 2.06, SD = .89$ ),  $F(1, 70) = 6.45, p < .02$ . Group identification was at an intermediate level for those in the control condition ( $M = 2.33, SD = 1.19$ ) but was not significantly different from either the positive or negative feedback condition.

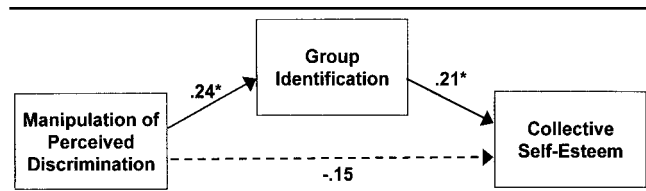
### Path Analyses

We predicted that perceptions of discrimination would increase group identification and that group identification would have a positive impact on collective self-esteem. We also predicted that there would be a negative direct relationship between the manipulation of perceptions of discrimination and collective self-esteem. The manipulation of perceived discrimination was included in the model using two contrast codes (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983, pp. 204-207). The first contrast variable tested for the effect of negative discrimination expectancies compared to positive expectancies and was coded as  $-1$  for the positive expectancy condition,  $0$  for the control condition, and  $+1$  for the negative expectancy condition. The second contrast variable compared the control condition to the other two conditions. The second contrast variable is not included in the path diagram but was included in the analyses as a predictor of both group identification and collective self-esteem. Again, we specified a model in which the dependent variables were each represented by a single mean scale score.<sup>1</sup>

The hypothesized model and the estimated parameters are shown in Figure 2. The manipulation of discrimination expectancies increased group identification, replicating the relationship between the variables observed in Study 1. In addition, the path from identification to collective self-esteem was also significant and positive. As predicted, the direct path from perceived discrimination and collective self-esteem was negative, although not significantly so ( $p = .07$ , one-tailed). As expected, the second contrast coded variable, testing for differences between the control and the other two conditions, had no significant effects on either group identification or collective self-esteem.

### Alternative Model Testing

Crocker, Luhtanen, Broadnax, and Blaine (1999) suggested that perceived systematic discrimination against one's group can protect collective self-esteem by serving as an external attribution for the ingroup's nega-



**Figure 2** Study 2: Path model testing the relationships between the perceived discrimination manipulation, group identification, and collective self-esteem.

Path weights are significant at  $p < .05$ .

tive outcomes. To examine this alternative possibility, we tested a model in which collective self-esteem mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and group identification. However, this model did not satisfy the criteria for mediation because the relationship between perceived discrimination and collective self-esteem was not significant ( $\beta = -.11$ ). Indeed, in contrast to the Crocker et al. (1999) prediction, expectancies of discrimination tended to harm collective self-esteem. Thus, this alternative model was disconfirmed.

### Discussion

The manipulation of perceived discrimination allowed us to strengthen our claim about the causal relationship between perceptions of discrimination and group identification. Manipulation checks confirmed the success of the perceived discrimination manipulation. Participants in the high perceived discrimination condition identified more strongly with their group compared to those in the positive treatment condition. Collective self-esteem was not directly affected by the discrimination expectancy manipulation but was influenced indirectly via degree of group identification.

The present research corroborates the Branscombe, Schmitt, et al. (1999) findings by replicating the effects of perceived group discrimination on collective self-esteem among those who self-select the marks of a socially devalued group. As in the previous research, group identification mediated an indirect positive relationship between perceived discrimination and collective self-esteem. However, the direct negative effect of perceived discrimination found by Branscombe, Schmitt, et al. (1999) was only marginal in the present research. An alternative model in which collective self-esteem was considered as a mediator and identification as the dependent variable was disconfirmed because it did not satisfy the criteria for mediation.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our research provides insight into how identification with a socially devalued group can develop. Much prior research has investigated group identification as an

independent variable (see Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). Few investigations, however, have examined the factors underlying the emergence of group identification. We investigated the roots of group identification using a natural social group—people with body piercings. We found that group identification is not only a result of the potentially positive rewards that can be provided by a group membership but can develop from negative intergroup experiences such as prejudice or discrimination. In both of our studies, perceptions of discrimination against those with body piercings increased identification with that stigmatized group. This effect was not only found when perceived discrimination was measured (Study 1) but also when it was manipulated (Study 2). This provides strong evidence in favor of our reasoning concerning the predicted causal direction between these two variables and confirms what observers of group conflict have long suspected; namely, that intergroup hostility often galvanizes ingroup solidarity. Thus, group identification may be as much a product of intergroup factors as intragroup dynamics (see also Perreault & Bourhis, 1998). Both studies revealed the important mediating role of group identification for understanding the relationship between perceived discrimination and both cognitive and affective outcomes.

*Identification With a Stigmatized  
Group as Differentiation  
From the Mainstream*

In Study 1, we found that perceptions of discrimination were related to intergroup differentiation. Recognizing discrimination against one's ingroup increased the importance of conveying "who we are not" but was less strongly related to communicating "who we are" based on similarity to other group members. More important, group identification mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and intergroup differentiation. These results suggest that those identifying with others with body piercings are building a group identity based not on their commonalities but their *common dissimilarity* to the mainstream. Because group identification was negatively related to having a piercing in order to improve one's physical appearance, it further suggests that high identifiers may be rejecting mainstream norms of attractiveness.

Intragroup similarity and intergroup differentiation both add to the meaningfulness of a group categorization (Turner, 1975). Although both are likely to be operating in all groups to some extent (Deaux et al., 1999), the relative importance of each is likely to differ. For example, their relative importance might shift depending on the developmental stage of the group (Deaux, 1996; Moreland & Levine, 1982; Worchel, Coutant-Sassic, & Grossman, 1992). In our research, the factor

that made intergroup differentiation most central among those with body piercings was the recognition of discrimination against the group. We think it is unlikely, however, that this effect of perceived discrimination is limited to self-selected group memberships such as people with body piercings. Indeed, a number of studies have shown that disadvantaged group members who are confronted with discrimination actively distance from the norms of the dominant group (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Major et al., 1998; Steele, 1997). We argue that rejection of mainstream norms is one form of social creativity that disadvantaged group members employ as a means of building a positive identity (Lemaine, 1974; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

*Group Identification  
and Collective Self-Esteem*

In Study 2, we illustrated how group identification mediates the effects of perceived discrimination on collective well-being. We hypothesized that group identification is a means of psychological protection following identity threats that stem from perceived discrimination. In line with our predictions, we found that perceived discrimination led to stronger attachment to the group, and this protected group-based esteem. Although the group investigated in the present research differs in some important ways from other stigmatized groups, the results demonstrate that the way those with body piercings cope with perceived discrimination is rather similar to other devalued groups that have been investigated in the past (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998).

Unlike earlier research, the present research contained a manipulation of perceived discrimination (Study 2) that provides greater confidence in the causal paths identified. Although the present results generally replicate and support the Rejection-Identification Model, the direct negative relationship found among African Americans (Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999) between perceived discrimination and collective self-esteem was less strong and not significant in the current study. It is likely that this weaker negative relationship results from the fact that participants in this study knew they could control rejection based on their stigma by either hiding their body markings or by removing them when necessary. Negative reactions from others for having body piercings are thus likely to be seen as avoidable, however unjust, and may be therefore less likely to harm collective self-esteem. In contrast, among historically devalued groups such as women and ethnic minorities, discrimination is much more likely to be perceived as stable, uncontrollable, and unavoidable across a wide variety of contexts. More generally, the degree to which perceived discrimination directly harms well-being varies for different types of social groups (see Schmitt &



Branscombe, in press). The strength of this relationship is moderated by factors such as the actual position of the group in the social structure and the stability of the status relations (Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Although perceived discrimination tends to harm the well-being of historically disadvantaged group members, perceived discrimination among dominant group members can protect or enhance their well-being (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998).

### Conclusions

The present research demonstrated that perceived discrimination against those with body piercings increased group identification, which in turn altered the meaning of group membership. The more our participants perceived discrimination against their group, the more the meaning of that group membership was based on collective dissimilarity from the mainstream. In other words, this perceived threat to their group encouraged those with body piercings to see their piercings as challenging mainstream norms. Thus, their perceptions of the intergroup context made them "rebels with a cause." In support of the Rejection-Identification Model (Branscombe, Schmitt, et al., 1999), we found that group identification increased in response to perceived discrimination and protected collective self-esteem in the face of threats to the group identity. In sum, we found that perceived discrimination, via its effects on group identification, altered the meaning and affective consequences of membership in a stigmatized group.

### NOTES

1. Readers who are aware of Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step approach to mediation might wonder whether the first requirement for demonstrating mediation is met. In other words, is the initial variable, perceived discrimination, correlated with the outcome, collective self-esteem? It is not ( $r = -.11, ns$ ). However, when the mediator acts as a suppresser variable, mediation can occur even if the overall correlation between the initial variable and the outcome variable is nonsignificant (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998). In this study, group identification acts as a suppresser variable because it is responsible for mediating a positive indirect effect from perceived discrimination to collective self-esteem, whereas the direct effect from perceived discrimination to collective self-esteem is negative. Thus, the essential steps in establishing mediation in the suppresser variable case require demonstrating that the initial variable is correlated with the mediator and that the mediator affects the outcome variable (Kenny et al., 1998). Our data meet both conditions.

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