

Stigma-Based Solidarity: Understanding the Psychological Foundations of Conflict and Coalition Among Members of Different Stigmatized Groups

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Maureen A. Craig^{1,2} and Jennifer A. Richeson^{3,4}

¹Department of Psychology, The Ohio State University; ²Department of Psychology, New York University;

³Department of Psychology, Northwestern University; and ⁴Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

Abstract

With growing diversity and increased media attention to inequality, it is likely that stigmatized-group members will have increased political influence on social issues affecting other stigmatized groups. When might members of different stigmatized groups see commonality in their experiences or disadvantaged status, and when might another stigmatized group be treated solely as an out-group? This article provides an overview of new and important lines of research examining how perceived discrimination may shape intergroup relations among members of different stigmatized groups. Specifically, perceived discrimination is highlighted as a potentially common experience for members of different stigmatized groups that at times elicits coalitional attitudes, but is often solely experienced as a threat to social identity and thus elicits intergroup derogation. The dimensions on which individuals are stigmatized, aspects of their discrimination experiences, and contextual factors are important for predicting whether perceiving discrimination will spur coalition or derogation. This topic is vital for understanding intergroup relations and political behavior in the 21st century.

Keywords

intergroup relations, stigma, minority groups, perceived discrimination

The United States is undergoing unprecedented increases in racial and cultural diversity. Concurrently, issues highlighting the disadvantaged status of various social groups (e.g., pay equality, racial tensions in law enforcement, and same-sex marriage) are at the forefront of media and political discussions. Members of stigmatized groups have growing political influence on issues affecting other stigmatized groups, yet current models of intergroup relations are unclear in predicting the dynamics of such intraminority intergroup relations. When might members of one stigmatized group evaluate another stigmatized group through the lens of perceived commonality via shared disadvantage—or, instead, solely as another out-group? The present work highlights perceived discrimination as one potential catalyst for coalition or derogation among members of different stigmatized groups.

Stigmatization as a Facilitator of Coalition or Derogation

Relationships among members of different stigmatized groups may be shaped by discrimination in a manner that dominant-to-stigmatized intergroup relations are not (Allport, 1954; Richeson & Craig, 2011). Despite facing different forms of discrimination, stigmatized individuals may perceive commonalities among types of discrimination and support coalitions with other oppressed groups (e.g., ideological orientations such as oppressed-minority ideology or inclusive victim consciousness; see Sellers,

Corresponding Author:

Maureen A. Craig, Department of Psychology, The Ohio State University, 1835 Neil Ave., Columbus, OH 43210

E-mail: craig.305@osu.edu

Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Vollhardt, 2015). That is, discrimination could be construed as an experience commonly held with members of other stigmatized groups and/or lead stigmatized group members to categorize themselves in terms of a common “disadvantaged” identity (i.e., a common ingroup identity; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), eliciting more positive attitudes toward stigmatized out-groups.

Alternatively, stigmatized individuals may consider their group’s discrimination experiences to be unique (e.g., exclusive victim consciousness; Vollhardt, 2015). Perceived discrimination, therefore, may be construed solely as a threat to one’s social identity without activating perceived commonality. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that social identity threats (SITs), such as making in-group discrimination salient, could elicit negative intergroup relations in the service of repairing group esteem (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Prior research revealed that although perceived discrimination can promote coalitional attitudes among members of different stigmatized groups (e.g., Craig & Richeson, 2012; Galanis & Jones, 1986), it also often results in the derogation of other such groups (e.g., Craig, DeHart, Richeson, & Fiedorowicz, 2012; Craig & Richeson, 2014). Indeed, the current literature suggests that derogation resulting from SIT may be the default outcome of perceived discrimination but also may be disrupted by factors that promote a more coalitional mindset, such as perceived similarity. Figure 1 offers a working model of the factors through which perceived (in-group) discrimination may facilitate coalitional, rather than derogatory, attitudes toward other stigmatized groups.

Dimension of Stigmatization

Individuals can be stigmatized along a number of different dimensions of social identity (e.g., race, gender). One important factor for predicting whether perceiving discrimination will spur coalition or derogation is whether individuals are stigmatized along the same identity dimension (e.g., race: Blacks and Latinos) or across different identity dimensions (e.g., race and gender: Black men and White women).¹

Stigma within an identity dimension

Research exploring intergroup relations among members of different racial minority groups largely suggests that perceiving that one’s racial group faces discrimination is associated with increased perceived commonality with, and expressed positivity toward, other racial minority groups (Craig & Richeson, 2012; Sanchez, 2008). Perceived similarity between racial minority groups mediates the effect of salient anti-in-group discrimination on

positive attitudes (Craig & Richeson, 2012). One possible explanation for this effect is that a common in-group identity, perhaps as “racial minorities,” is activated in response to salient anti-in-group racial discrimination. Consistent with this idea, perceived discrimination based on college students’ national identity predicts identification with a collective “international student” identity (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). Overall, this work suggests that perceived in-group discrimination can evoke more coalitional attitudes toward groups that face stigmatization along the same dimension of identity.

Stigma across identity dimensions

Conversely, research suggests that perceived discrimination against one’s in-group leads individuals to evaluate groups that are stigmatized along a different dimension of identity more negatively (e.g., Craig et al., 2012; Craig & Richeson, 2014; Gordon, 1943). Exposure to anti-Black and anti-Latino discrimination, respectively, leads (straight) Blacks and Latinos to express more *negative* attitudes toward sexual minorities and less support for policies benefiting sexual minorities, compared with exposure to racial disparities in health—this pattern also emerged in analyses of nationally representative samples of Asian Americans and Black Americans (Craig & Richeson, 2014). This cross-category divide is not limited to racial minority group members’ attitudes toward sexual minorities. Salient sexism leads White women to express more racial bias against Blacks and Latinos (Craig et al., 2012). Overall, this research suggests that perceived discrimination triggers SIT, which, in turn, motivates the derogation of stigmatized out-groups. Consistent with this SIT mechanism, affirming a different aspect of White women’s collective identity eliminates the effect of salient sexism on expressed racial bias (Craig et al., 2012).

Bridging the Categorical Gap

The work reviewed thus far suggests that perceived in-group discrimination is likely perceived as a threat to the value of one’s social identity, which generates derogatory out-group tendencies unless those tendencies are buffered or reversed (for potential buffers, see the top of Fig. 1). For groups stigmatized along the same dimension of identity, perceptions of group similarity also tend to increase when in-group discrimination is salient and seem to provide one such buffer. Below, we consider three additional potential ways to reduce, if not reverse, the tendency for salient in-group discrimination to engender derogation across dimensions of social identity: explicitly connecting the in-group to the stigmatized out-group, making meaning of the in-group’s victimization experiences, and strengthening personal connections to stigmatization.

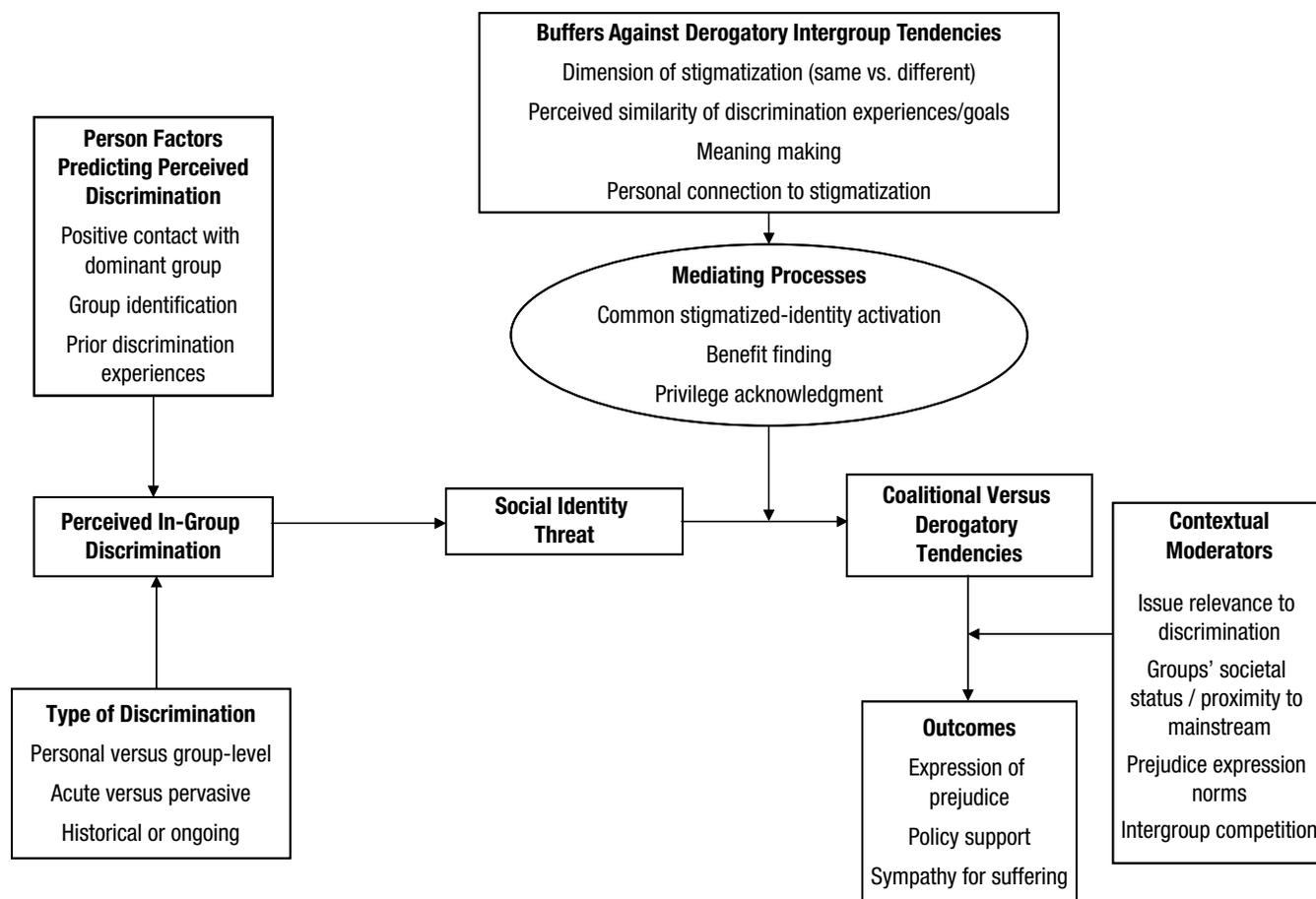


Fig. 1. A working model of perceived (in-group) discrimination's influence on intraminority intergroup relations. Personal-level factors influence whether discrimination is perceived, as do aspects of the discrimination experience. Perceived discrimination typically triggers social identity threat, which subsequently yields intergroup derogation, but this process can be disrupted by salient characteristics of the groups involved (e.g., how similar they are) or by how the discriminatory experience is processed (e.g., meaning making); this can promote the activation of a common in-group identity, benefit finding and perceived moral obligations to help others, or the acknowledgement of privilege, any of which could promote more coalitional tendencies. Contextual factors, however, also moderate whether these tendencies are expressed in downstream outcomes (e.g., behavior, policy support).

Explicitly connecting the in-group to another stigmatized group

One way to bridge the category divide is by making an explicit connection between the in-group and another stigmatized group. Explicitly linking Black victimization and mental illness, for example, led Black participants to express greater tolerance toward a mentally ill target (Galanis & Jones, 1986). Common experiences or challenges are also associated with more coalitional attitudes among stigmatized groups (e.g., Cortland et al., 2015; Tedin & Murray, 1994). For example, connecting past racial discrimination to current forms of discrimination toward sexual minorities (e.g., marriage laws) positively influences straight racial minorities' attitudes toward, and support for issues affecting, sexual minorities (Cortland et al., 2015). However, making these connections salient could also backfire. Specifically, such efforts could lead

individuals to contrast their discrimination with that experienced by stigmatized out-groups and, in turn, to perceive their group as the “real” or more severely victimized group (see Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007). Thus, making commonalities or common concerns salient seems to be one promising avenue for promoting coalition among stigmatized groups, but there are important boundary conditions that future research should explore in order to avoid defensive reactions such as competitive victimhood (Noor et al., 2008).

Meaning making

Meaning making provides another potential method of engendering positive attitudes among stigmatized groups. Considering the lessons of historical victimization faced by one's in-group, for instance, encourages individuals to

perceive themselves as holding a moral obligation to reduce the suffering of other (non-adversarial) stigmatized groups (Warner, Wohl, & Branscombe, 2014). This occurs because individuals attempt to find benefits of past experiences of in-group victimization and perceive greater similarity between their in-group and stigmatized out-groups (Warner et al., 2014). Perceived intergroup competition, however, is an important boundary condition here; considering the lessons of in-group victimization *reduces* the perceived moral obligation to reduce the suffering of an adversarial, albeit stigmatized, out-group. Nevertheless, meaning making may provide an avenue to positive intraminority intergroup relations.

Personal connection to stigmatization

Strengthening the connection between the self and group stigmatization may also facilitate coalition across identity dimensions. Consistent with this possibility, Craig and Richeson (2014) revealed a distinction between perceived group discrimination and perceived personal discrimination in racial minority group members' attitudes toward sexual minorities. Whereas perceiving that one's group faces racism positively predicted anti-gay bias, perceiving that one has personally faced racism was negatively correlated with anti-gay bias. Experimental work has supported this divergence (Craig, 2014); for example, straight White women who wrote about discrimination against women (group-level discrimination) subsequently expressed greater anti-gay bias, compared with those who wrote about personally faced sexism and participants in a no-sexism control condition. Reflecting on one's personal connection to discrimination may facilitate sympathy with groups stigmatized across dimensions of identity.

Research on the effects of perceived in-group discrimination on acknowledging group privilege has supported this hypothesis (Rosette & Tost, 2013). Specifically, the more Black men or White women perceived that they personally faced workplace discrimination (racism and sexism, respectively), the more likely they were to acknowledge their privileges (male and White privilege, respectively)—clear precursors to the emergence of coalitional ties (Rosette & Tost, 2013). Although these findings were limited to individuals who considered themselves moderately (vs. highly) successful, they suggest that considering discrimination's role in one dimension of social identity could facilitate acknowledging the potential role of discrimination (and/or group privilege) in producing inequality in other identity dimensions (McIntosh, 1988). Future research should explore the role of acknowledging personally faced discrimination or privilege in facilitating intergroup coalitions.

Caveats (aka Moderators)

Although research suggests that intraminority intergroup relations within a dimension of identity are more likely to yield coalitional tendencies than are relations across dimensions of identity, this general pattern is not without important caveats. Below, we identify several characteristics of perceivers, targets, and the broader context that likely moderate intraminority intergroup relations in general, as well as the effects of perceived discrimination on these relations.

Zero-sum perceptions

Perceptions of contexts as zero-sum or otherwise competitive may shape the emergence of coalitions (see Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). For example, perceiving that a similarly low-status out-group is increasing in status or resources tends to evoke more negative attitudes toward the "progressing" group (Gay, 2006; Rothgerber & Worchel, 1997). Conversely, shared economic concerns (e.g., poverty) positively predict support for coalitions among stigmatized groups (Tedin & Murray, 1994). Overall, intraminority coalitions are more likely if both groups can attain better outcomes together (i.e., they have common goals), compared to if only one group can attain a valued goal (McClain & Stewart, 2014; Meier, McClain, Polinard, & Wrinkle, 2004; Meier & Stewart, 1991).

Positive contact with the dominant group

Positive contact with members of the dominant group or the presumed perpetrating group reduces solidarity among stigmatized groups. For instance, Latinos who report higher levels of quality contact with Whites are less likely to express solidarity with Blacks, even if primed to focus on the groups' shared disadvantaged status (Glasford & Calcagno, 2012). This finding highlights a potential reason why building and sustaining coalitions among different stigmatized groups may be difficult, especially for groups that are in the severe numerical minority.

Prejudice-expression norms

Contextual norms about prejudice expression can also influence stigmatized-group members' behavior regarding stigmatized out-groups. Specifically, perceptions that members of powerful, dominant groups expect the expression of prejudice can lead stigmatized-group members to publicly (but not privately) express prejudice toward a member of another stigmatized group (Shapiro

& Neuberg, 2008). As with majority-group members (e.g., Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002), normative influence can have an important effect on the extent to which members of different stigmatized groups stand in solidarity with, or derogate, one another.

Position of groups in society

Stigmatized groups' relative status in society can also shape intraminority intergroup relations. Minority group members often express greater bias against groups perceived to be closer to the mainstream (i.e., higher up the hierarchy; White & Langer, 1999). Importantly, however, making a superordinate minority identity salient can elicit more *positive* evaluations of the more mainstream group (White, Schmitt, & Langer, 2006). Similarly, perceived socioeconomic status (SES) has been found to moderate perceivers' reactions to individual targets of racial discrimination (Johnson & Kaiser, 2013). Specifically, Black victims of racism who are wealthy engender less empathy from other Blacks than do low-SES Black victims or those of unknown SES (Johnson & Kaiser, 2013). It is likely that the perceived SES of a stigmatized out-group similarly shapes intergroup relations among different stigmatized groups. Taken together, this work suggests that group positions within the hierarchy can influence intergroup relations among stigmatized groups (e.g., Blumer, 1958) and, further, that a salient common identity can buffer against derogation among these groups.

Future Directions and Conclusions

While, at times, stigmatized-group members may view other stigmatized groups simply as out-groups, there is potential to perceive commonality due to shared societal stigmatization. A missing but essential piece of the picture is how identification with multiple stigmatized identities may influence individuals' tendencies toward forming coalitions (see Cole, 2009). That is, the work reviewed here largely considered how discrimination due to membership in one stigmatized group shapes attitudes regarding stigmatized out-groups. Being disadvantaged along multiple dimensions may strengthen the connection between the self and disadvantage and/or facilitate the perception of different types of discrimination as similar, thus eliciting support for intraminority coalitions. Still, support for such intraminority coalitions is likely to be moderated by any number of factors, including the complexity with which multiple stigmatized identities are organized (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Another outstanding question is how the concealability of a stigmatized social identity may moderate the extent to which salient in-group discrimination engenders more positive or negative attitudes toward other stigmatized

groups. Like other dimensions of identity and stigmatization (e.g., perceived controllability), concealability/visibility may moderate the processes discussed herein. Last, in addition to these intriguing directions for future research, it is also essential for research to consider the extent to which expressions of coalitional attitudes actually translate into coalitional behaviors.

The current literature presents a landscape in which factors related to the perceiver, target, and context influence whether perceived discrimination facilitates coalitions among stigmatized-group members or promotes derogation. With increasing racial and cultural diversity, increasing visibility of sexual minorities and transgender individuals, growing economic inequality, and concerns about gender equity in any number of social milieu, understanding how members of stigmatized groups may coalesce over a shared disadvantaged status is vital for understanding intergroup relations and political behavior in the 21st century.

Recommended Reading

- Allport, G. W. (1954). (See References). A historical classic, whose Chapter 9 provides an initial exploration of how victimization could influence attitudes among stigmatized groups.
- Craig, M. A., & Richeson, J. A. (2012). (See References). A representative study that illustrates original empirical research exploring perceived discrimination's influence on stigmatized-group members' attitudes toward groups stigmatized within the same identity dimension.
- Craig, M. A., & Richeson, J. A. (2014). (See References). A representative study that illustrates original empirical research exploring perceived discrimination's influence on stigmatized-group members' attitudes toward groups stigmatized across different identity dimensions.
- McClain, P. D., & Stewart, J. (2014). (See References). A book whose Chapter 5 provides an accessible overview of the political science literature regarding coalitions among members of different racial minority groups.

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Notes

1. Of course, all individuals have multiple social identities and may be stigmatized along more than one of them. This identity

complexity is important and certain to affect some, if not most, of the processes examined here. Indeed, implicit in much of the research we review is an understanding that individuals can be stigmatized in one dimension of identity (gender) and hold high status in a different dimension (race, sexual orientation), and it is the intersections of these identities that makes both intraminority intergroup coalition and derogation possible. That said, it is certainly possible that holding multiple stigmatized identities results in different outcomes, if not pathways to those outcomes. Black women who are stigmatized in both race and gender, for instance, may respond differently to salient racism or salient sexism than their Black male and White female counterparts, respectively. Although we acknowledge the likely import of multiple-minority/disadvantaged status, the research conducted thus far has not yet examined this important possibility. Thus, we focus this review on work exploring how the salience of prejudice in one dimension of identity affects evaluations regarding members of stigmatized out-groups, but we underscore the need for more deliberate intersectional analyses in future research on this topic in the Conclusions section.

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