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Self-Group Distancing and Cross-Race Effect in Asian Americans

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Abstract

When individuals are faced with a social identity threat, they typically take one of two routes: self-group distancing or collective action. In situations where discrimination poses a significant social threat, individuals may disengage from their ingroup in an attempt to preserve their social standing and reputation (van Veelen et al., 2020; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Alternatively, individuals may cope with this social identity threat by combining efforts with their group to turn the hostile experience of discrimination into a positive outcome, creating mobilization and advocacy for their entire group (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). The extent to which an individual identifies with their racial group will determine which of these two routes they choose (Derks et al., 2015). Further, individuals may also respond to discrimination by altering their social group boundaries, either including or excluding others from their group. The primary objective of this study is to examine how Asian Americans respond to conditions of discrimination and what strategies they utilize when dealing with those conditions. Additionally, the study aims to analyze the impact of identity centrality and discrimination on an individual's memory for ingroup vs. outgroup faces, specifically comparing White and Asian faces. The study found that low centrality participants had poorer memory for ingroup faces than high centrality participants when exposed to discrimination, suggesting low centrality individuals engage in self-group distancing. High centrality participants had better memory when exposed to discrimination, suggesting that they engage in collective action. The study also found that exposure to discrimination prompted high centrality participants to expand their social group boundaries, allowing for the inclusion of others into their ingroup.

Self-Group Distancing and Cross-Race Effect in Asian Americans

Picture the vibrant and bustling pathways of a college campus in the midst of spring, with tulips blooming and students roaming around. A group of young students are gathered, among them a few newcomers eager to get acquainted with the campus and their fellow students. In this diverse gathering, Lilith, a student at the college, couldn't help but notice another student who shared her East Asian identity. However, instead of the friendly connection Lilith expected to feel, she noticed a subtle tension in the air. It almost felt like the other East Asian student was avoiding her gaze, not wanting to acknowledge Lilith's presence. Lilith suspected that the other student was deliberately disengaging, perhaps for fear of not being too closely associated with her. While Lilith tried her best not to take the other student's behavior too personally, she searched her mind for a reasonable explanation. She was unable to recall if she could have possibly said or done something wrong, something to offend the other student in the short time they had known each other.

While Lilith struggled to uncover the reasoning behind the other student's actions, a researcher studying self-group distancing could provide a potential explanation. While individuals like Lilith may feel a sense of connection at the sight of someone from their ethnic background, others may react differently. For some individuals, meeting someone from their ethnic group poses a dilemma. In an attempt to protect themselves from potential stereotyping and discrimination, these individuals may disengage from their ethnic community and try to avoid interactions altogether. This attempt to disengage is referred to as self-group distancing. Unfortunately, this decision risks losing ties and potential support from fellow ingroup members. However, self-group distancing is not the only strategy that groups facing social threat utilize. In alignment with how Lilith may react, collective mobilization is another action groups may take

to cope with the threat of discrimination. For example, African American communities grappling with unequal treatment and injustice often come together and harness their collective strength to challenge oppressive systems and advocate for change (Branscombe et al., 1999), as opposed to distancing themselves from their group. These differing responses highlight the complexities of human behavior in the face of discrimination. From self-group distancing for self-preservation to collective action for group empowerment, our reactions to discrimination shape our individual experiences and social group dynamics.

Underneath experiences and instances of self-group distancing are instances of social identity threat. To understand either phenomenon, one must understand the other. Social identity threat has been defined as the “psychological experience of people coming to suspect that they are valued less in a context because of their social identity” (Veldman et al., 2020; Steele et al., 2002). According to social identity theory, individuals construct parts of their identity around the social groups to which they belong (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). When they sense a threat to their social identity, such as through discrimination or other negative associations, individuals may cope by altering their levels of engagement with their ingroup, leading to varied perceptions of identity centrality. These varying degrees of identity centrality may sway individuals toward self-preservation through self-group distancing or empowerment through collective action. The current study aims to extend these findings by considering Asian Americans as a minority ethnic group. In recent years, there has been increased awareness of anti-Asian discrimination in the United States. Still, Asian Americans remain marginalized and invisible in the realm of scientific and psychological research (Yip et al., 2021). Although Asian Americans have been enduring various forms of stereotyping and prejudice throughout history, the surge in xenophobia and anti-

Asian rhetoric following the COVID-19 crisis highlights the need for visibility and advocacy for the Asian American community (Yip et al., 2021; Tessler et al., 2020).

At times, individuals demonstrate their levels of identity centrality through self-group distancing, a strategy employed for self-preservation. In situations where discrimination poses a social threat, self-group distancing is observed as individuals disengaging from their ingroup in an attempt to preserve their social standing or social identity (van Veelen et al., 2020; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Because social rejection is generally a negative experience, individuals seek to minimize the extent to which they are victimized to protect their wellbeing (Branscombe et al., 1999). This self-preservation may manifest as individuals pursuing opportunities for individual mobility, such as aligning themselves with a different, more positively regarded social group. A prominent example of self-group distancing has been documented in studies of women in the workplace. Often perceived as a socially threatened group, women who experience discrimination in the workplace may distance themselves from other women to enhance their status or reputation (Derks et al., 2015). Derks et al. (2015) drew from this phenomenon, known as the Queen Bee Phenomenon, to hypothesize that individuals identifying as part of an ethnic minority will exhibit a similar pattern of self-group distancing as women in the workplace.

In their study, Derks et al. (2015) investigated the prevalence of self-group distancing responses to ethnic discrimination in Surinamese Hindustani individuals residing in the Netherlands. While earlier research on self-group distancing focused on gender dynamics, Derks et al. (2015) were the first to show that this phenomenon also extends to ethnic minorities. Their findings confirmed that some Hindustani employees engage in self-group distancing by expressing lower positive affect about their Hindustani coworkers and aligning themselves with more Dutch characteristics. They posit a possible explanation for this behavior, suggesting that

low-identifying minority group members may distance themselves from their devalued ethnic group in an attempt to gain acceptance from their Dutch counterparts. This established that the self-group distancing phenomenon observed in gender dynamics was not specific to women in the workplace but is a more generic response to social inequality (Derks et al., 2015).

An alternative approach individuals utilize to cope with social threat is engaging in collective action. This involves combining efforts with one's group to turn negative experiences into positive outcomes, ultimately creating mobilization for the entire group (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). In African American communities, perceptions of unequal or unfair treatment often result in resentment towards oppressive groups in power and the consolidation of group efforts to mobilize together (Branscombe et al., 1999). Simultaneously, stronger individual identification within one's social group was documented as a result. This approach was also documented in Derks et al.'s (2015) study of Hindustani individuals living in the Netherlands. In addition to self-group distancing, they also found that some group members, when faced with "group-based discrimination," become motivated to improve their group's image. This results in them emphasizing the positive qualities of their group and highlighting their distinctiveness from Dutch employees on a competence dimension. By emphasizing a positive ingroup stereotype, they improve the group's image as a whole rather than focusing on individually distancing themselves from the negative group stereotype (Derks et al., 2015; Leach & Livingstone, 2015). Thus, although some individuals cope with social threat by distancing themselves from their ingroup, others choose to strengthen the connection with their ingroup to foster a sense of collective action.

Up to this point, we have seen two possible responses to experiences of discrimination: self-group distancing and collective action. It is essential to note conditions under which an

individual would choose to engage in one coping response over the other. In the face of social identity threat, not all group members are likely to exhibit self-group distancing. This response is suggested to be contingent upon an individual's identification with their ethnic or racial ingroup (Ellemers et al., 2002; Derks et al., 2015). Individuals who identify strongly with their group and consider it a significant part of their identity will likely be concerned about the social standing of their group. As a result, they will be more motivated to collectively cope and improve their group's position in the social hierarchy. On the other hand, individuals who do not identify strongly with their group are more likely to be concerned with their own social standing. Therefore, they are more likely to engage in self-group distancing as a means of self-preservation and individual mobilization (Derks et al., 2015).

Moreover, research has shown that group identification impacts memory for faces (Hugenberg et al., 2013), whereas identity centrality and exposure to discrimination interactively predict identification with the group (Gibson, 2022; Cameron et al., 2005). The underlying rationale here is that our level of identification with a specific group should correlate with our ability to recall faces from that group. This concept, known as the cross-race effect, posits that individuals tend to have better recognition for faces of their racial ingroup than for racial outgroup faces (Hugenberg et al., 2013). This tendency to show superior memory for ingroup faces has been documented in various different ingroup vs. outgroup distinctions, like age and gender. While memory for ingroup faces is deemed superior, it appears as though this effect results in members of racial outgroups to "look the same" as one another. Further, shifts in our levels of identification may manifest in changes in our memory patterns (Hugenberg et al., 2013). Previous literature has documented self-group distancing in both racial and ethnic minorities via self-report measures (Derks et al., 2015). The present research aims to document

this effect using a memory encoding task to assess individuals' coping strategies when faced with discrimination. One reason for transitioning to measures like memory for faces is to determine if implicit measures, like memory, will align with the explicit measures of a self-report questionnaire or yield different results. The benefits of a behavioral measure were made evident when, contrary to previous research, data from our lab documented a reverse effect - increased own-race memory among low centrality participants and reduced own-race memory among high centrality participants (Light et al., 2024). The goal of the present research is to replicate this study and offer further clarification on these effects.

One potential explanation for this observed effect is that ingroup bias functions differently in Asian Americans (Ng et al., 2016). In comparing European and East Asian Canadians, researchers identified distinctions in each group's social categorization process. Although European Canadians define their social categories based on factors like race and nationality, East Asian Canadians define social categories around pre-existing relationships, like friends and family. Brewer and Yuki (2007) distinguished between a relational self, defined in terms of connections and role relationships with significant others, and a collective self, defined in terms of prototypical properties among members of a common ingroup. Drawing on this distinction, Yuki (2003) proposed that the primary characteristics of group cognition and behavior may differ across cultural contexts. As a result of these distinctions, it appears that first-generation East Asian Canadians did not show the same level of memory for own-group faces as European Canadians did. Because East Asians conceptualize their social groups differently compared to other cultures, in that they are more characterized by direct familial or platonic relationships with others (Ng et al., 2016; Brewer & Yuki, 2007), it is conceivable that the faces of unfamiliar individuals that are shown to them during a memory encoding task will not be

perceived as part of their ingroup, irrespective of racial identity. Thus, the motivation to connect with or distance from ingroup members might not be related to memory for Asian faces. Further, the cross-race effect documented by Ng et al. was attributed to “a combination of perceptual experience, social categorization, and people's motivations to individuate” (Ng et al., 2016).

It is crucial to note that this framework does not imply that East Asians disregard the ingroup as a meaningful social unit. Research indicates that they do impose boundaries between ingroups and outgroups. However, East Asians typically portray their ingroups as complex networks of interrelated individual members instead of depersonalized entities (Brewer & Yuki, 2007). This framework might offer the explanation necessary to clarify the observed effects in our previous study. With that in mind, an alternative explanation is that the boundaries of the ingroup itself might be shifting. Gibson (2022) theorized that some social groups, when perceiving social threat, attempt to protect their group boundaries to confer advantages among their own members. We hypothesize that along with increasing ingroup identification, discrimination salience increases the restrictiveness of ingroup boundaries in Asian Americans. As a result, not all Asian faces will be perceived as ingroup members and thus afforded the ingroup bias in face recognition.

Along that vein, we are interested in exploring the degree to which individuals include other Asian ethnic groups within their racial ingroup. For instance, would a Chinese American consider Korean, Japanese, or Vietnamese Americans as part of their racial ingroup? It is possible that, when perceiving social threat, individuals may narrow their social boundaries to protect their ingroup's status. We might observe participants having more restrictive ingroup boundaries, thereby excluding other Asian ethnicities from their racial ingroup (Gibson, 2022). Research indicates that Asian Americans frequently identify themselves with their specific ethnic

identities rather than adopting the broader Asian label. Approximately 52% of Asian adults report using ethnic labels that identify their heritage and family roots, either alone or combined with “American” (e.g., Chinese or Chinese American). Further, only 16% of Asian adults report using the label “Asian-American” when describing their ethnic identity (Ruiz et al., 2023). In other words, while one’s ethnic identity could be central to their self-identification, it may not extend to a broader umbrella of Asian identity (i.e., a high identifier in Korean identity might not be a high identifier for an Asian identity).

Social Closure Theory

Social closure theory, proposed by sociologist Max Weber, defined social closure as “a process for drawing boundaries, constructing identities, and building communities to monopolize scarce resources for one’s own group and exclude others from using them” (Albiston et al., 2018). Social closure is a mechanism utilized to confer advantages for one’s own group while excluding others who may wish to reap the benefits of the same advantages. When this social closure happens to fall along the lines of race and sex, however, it is considered to be a form of discrimination. Still, what if this social closure is used as a coping mechanism or response to discrimination instead? In the face of discrimination, some groups may opt to secure their own advantages by closing off the opportunities of any outgroups. Generally, people mobilize and implement the social closure standards to defend the status of their groups (Abascal, 2020). This takes the shape of rearticulating the boundary that separates them from the outgroup and creating a new vision of what their ingroup looks like. Weber’s interpretation of social closure was rooted heavily in its production and maintenance of inequality (Abascal, 2020). Although early theorists used the concept of social closure to delineate between class boundaries, the same arguments using social closure can be made for race and ethnicity through Weber’s notion of status groups

(Gibson, 2022). According to several theoretical perspectives, groups should respond to social threats by contracting the boundaries around them (Abascal, 2020). Thus, contrary to Weber's beliefs, social closure can take the form of ingroup bias as opposed to outgroup discrimination; in other words, it does not directly discriminate against the outgroup but instead discriminates in favor of the ingroup (Albiston et al., 2018).

Further, different social groups vary regarding the rigidity of their social boundaries. Whereas some social groups have permissive social boundaries, others may have more restrictive social boundaries (Gibson, 2022). Despite focus being placed on the contraction of social boundaries in the face of social threat, there is also the possibility of witnessing an expansion of social boundaries. To the threatened group, this would look like opening the boundaries of their social group in order to increase membership, therefore increasing the group's power (Gibson, 2022; Okamoto, 2003; Wimmer, 2013). Since social closure theory generally postulates that threatened group members will push for strategies of solidarity with their ingroup (i.e., restriction of group boundaries), the principle of solidarity and exclusion is predicted amongst threatened Asian Americans (Gibson, 2022). This general understanding drives our hypothesis that Asian Americans may restrict their ingroup boundaries when exposed to conditions of salience (i.e., perceiving a social threat).

Social Identity Threat and Self-Group Distancing

Social identity threats, if endured continuously, have been found to have a detrimental effect on one's overall well-being (Veldman et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2015; Pascoe & Richman, 2009). Research indicates that individuals targeted by social identity threats are not passive recipients of these adverse effects but rather are resilient and actively cope with the hardships that they face (Veldman et al., 2020; Barreto, 2014; De Lemus et al., 2013; Derks et al., 2016). In

“out-group dominated domains,” targets of social identity threat often resort to distancing themselves from their ingroup, either psychologically or physically. This kind of self-group distancing consists of highlighting dissimilarities with one’s ingroup, expressing negative opinions of one’s ingroup, or trying to hide their “devalued identity” (Veldman et al., 2020). Although self-group distancing can take many different forms, its ultimate objective is to disassociate from the devalued ingroup and align with a higher-value outgroup. Simply put, self-group distancing is a means of coping with threats to one’s social identity and offers individuals a way of maintaining control over how they are perceived.

Researchers have also described this form of self-group distancing as pursuing “individual mobility” or “positional moves” (Gibson, 2022; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). One example of research investigating these approaches to racial identification documented Latin Americans’ association with their racial group. Those with higher education and English fluency were more likely to identify as solely “American,” but were found to embrace the racialized “Latin American” label when exposed to conditions of discrimination (Gibson, 2022; Golash-Boza, 2016). A similar process has been observed in Asian Americans. High levels of racial discrimination aided a process known as “panethnic consciousness” in Asian Americans, supporting the notion that discrimination acts as a powerful catalyst for racial identification (Gibson, 2022; Masuoka, 2006). The marginalization of certain groups has lent to the strengthening of their racial identities in an attempt to give visibility to their experiences.

Present Research

The current study aims to analyze how Asian Americans respond to conditions of discrimination and the strategies they employ when coping with those circumstances, while also considering the influence of their levels of identity centrality on the results. It also hopes to

examine how these differing levels of identity centrality, coupled with exposure to discrimination, might also impact one's memory for perceived ingroup vs. outgroup faces, specifically comparing White and Asian faces. More specifically, it focuses on measuring the memory of faces belonging to various Asian American ethnicities when exposed to discrimination conditions. The question we aim to answer is: What are the effects of reminders of discrimination on Asian Americans' memory for White vs. Asian faces? We believe identity centrality moderates the relationship between discrimination salience and facial recognition, and that this effect may be mediated by more restrictive definitions of racial ingroups, drawing on Gibson's (2022) social closure theory. We hypothesize that better memory of ingroup faces (Asian) means that participants have higher identity centrality, meaning they strongly identify with their Asian American identity.

The measures we will utilize will provide a somewhat comprehensive understanding of how people view their ethnic identities and categorize their ingroups. We may see a more expansive perception of racial ingroup such that different Asian ethnicities are perceived as part of one's ethnic ingroup when people are in a more expansive mode. On the contrary, we may also see more restrictive boundaries, such that other Asian ethnicities are not included as part of their racial ingroup. This could explain why our lab's initial findings opposed the general literature regarding self-group distancing in discrimination salience conditions.

Method

Participants

Participants in the current study included 445 Asian-Americans (280 female; 158 male; 13 unsure; participants were allowed to select more than one gender identity), residing in the United States with the ability to read and write in English. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to

72 years old ($M_{age} = 31.8$; $SD = 10.8$) and included both East and South Asian racial identities (340 East Asian; 105 South Asian). The study took place online through the Prolific platform, and participants were compensated for their time.

Measures

– Identification

Consenting participants first completed the Multi-Component Ingroup Identification Scale (14 items; e.g., “I feel a bond with [Ingroup]”, “I feel committed to [Ingroup]”, and “I am similar to the average [Ingroup] person”), which was used to operationalize ingroup identification. This scale uses statements centering around solidarity, satisfaction, centrality, individual self-stereotyping, and in-group homogeneity to give a comprehensive understanding of their levels of racial and ethnic centrality. The current study focused on the centrality components of the scale (3 items; e.g., “I often think about the fact that I am [Ingroup]” and “The fact that I am [Ingroup] is an important part of my identity”). Participants rated these items on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Taking the average across items in the centrality subscale, higher scores indicated higher levels of identity centrality. Prior to the present research, there were no existing measures for how Asian Americans define their racial ingroup. To operationalize participants’ social boundaries, an 18-item scale was created to measure their identification with their own specific ethnic identity as compared to others. This included statements such as, “To what extent do you view *Korean/Chinese/Japanese/etc.* as being a part of your racial ingroup?” Goh and McCue’s (2021) categorizations of ethnic identities were used to create this scale.

– *Manipulation*

Group status threat was manipulated through the discrimination condition within the study. Participants were randomly assigned to either the discrimination or control condition. Within the discrimination condition, depending on the participants' ethnic identity, they were tasked with reading an article that detailed a situation involving discrimination against an individual with the same ethnic identity. Within the control condition, participants were tasked with reading an article about the ongoing loneliness epidemic in the US. This was selected to ensure participants felt some discomfort in the control condition, as with the manipulation condition. Following the news articles, participants were asked in an open-ended question if the story in the article reminded them of other stories they have heard or experienced, as well as how the story made them feel.

– *Memory*

Finally, a facial recognition memory task was administered to measure participants' identity centrality further. Participants were shown a series of White and Asian faces (16 White; 16 Asian) from the Chicago Face Database (Ma et al., 2015; Lakshmi et al., 2020) and were shown each face for approximately one second. Following this initial encoding, participants were asked questions about their ingroup boundaries. Then, participants were shown another series of White and Asian faces and were tasked with determining whether or not they had seen the faces in the earlier facial memory task. This task tested participants' ability to remember White vs. Asian faces.

Results

To test our hypothesis that high identity centrality would be related to better memory of ingroup (Asian) faces, we conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA with Race of Faces and

discrimination condition predicting memory. We ran a 2 (Race of Faces: White vs. [Own-Group] Asian) \times 2 (Discrimination Condition: Discrimination Saliency vs. Control) mixed ANOVA, with the first factor between-subjects and the last two factors within-subjects. This yielded a main effect for Race of Faces such that, on average, participants had better memory for own-race (Asian) faces as opposed to White faces ($F(1, 388) = 71.97, p < 0.001; M = 1.50, SE = 0.04$). However, there was no significant interaction between Race of Faces and discrimination ($F(1,388) = 0.05, p = 0.824$), suggesting that this effect did not vary by condition (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

Table 1

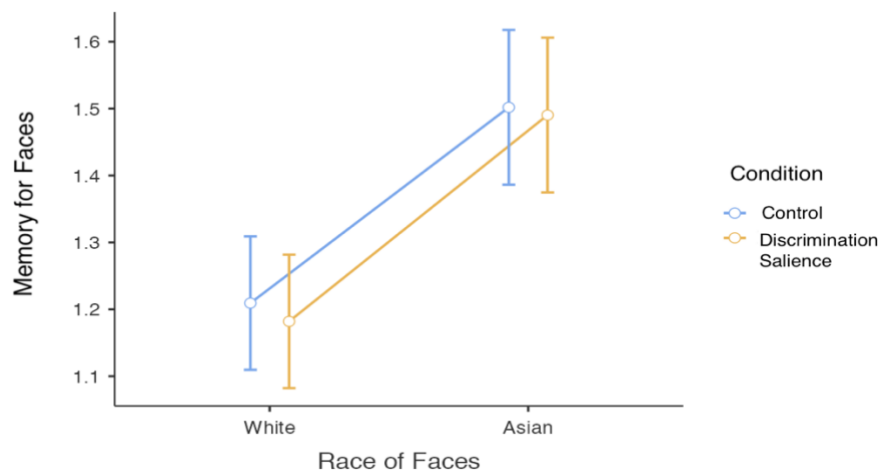
Estimated Marginal Means of Race of Faces and Discrimination

Discrimination	Race	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Control	White	1.21	0.0507	1.11	1.31
	Asian	1.50	0.0588	1.39	1.62
Manipulation	White	1.18	0.0507	1.08	1.28
	Asian	1.49	0.0588	.37	1.61

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

Figure 1

Estimated Marginal Means of Race of Faces and Discrimination on Memory



Note. Race of faces and discrimination salience vs. control condition predicting memory for White vs. Asian faces.

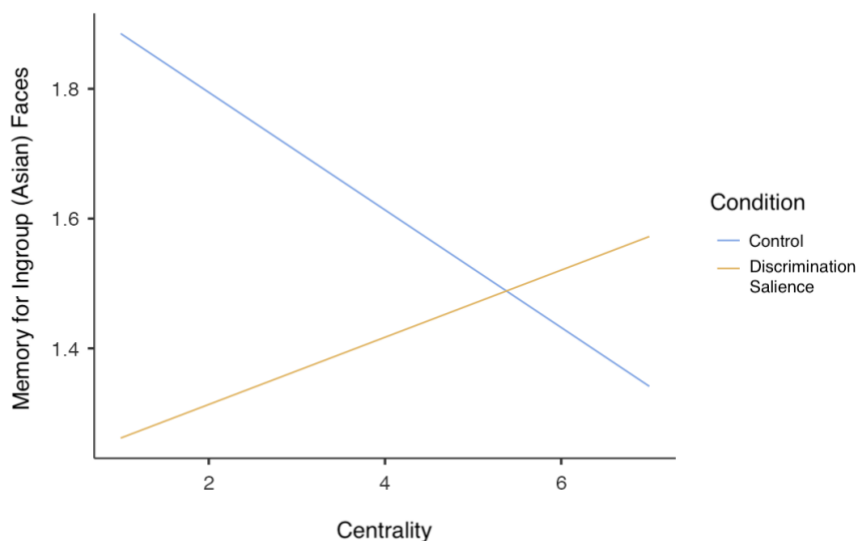
We next ran a linear regression analysis predicting memory for Asian faces as a function of discrimination condition and identity centrality (see Table 2). Results indicated a main effect of discrimination ($B = -0.08$, $t(387) = -1.99$, $p = 0.05$) and identity centrality ($B = -0.09$, $t(387) = -1.96$, $p = 0.05$), meaning both variables had an effect on increasing participants' memory for Asian faces. These effects were qualified by a significant interaction between identity centrality and discrimination ($B = 0.14$, $t(387) = 2.04$, $p = 0.04$). In the control condition, participants with low identity centrality were found to have better memory for Asian faces than participants with high identity centrality. However, the opposite is seen in the discrimination condition. Participants with low identity centrality were found to have poorer memory for Asian faces than participants with high identity centrality (Figure 2).

To focus our analysis a bit more, we ran a linear regression analysis looking at the effects of the discrimination condition on a re-centered version of our centrality variable. This allowed us to analyze the effects of the discrimination condition on our participants who scored for centrality 1 standard deviation above the mean (high in centrality) and conversely, 1 standard deviation below the mean (low in centrality). Among high centrality participants, their memory for ingroup faces was not significantly positively impacted by the discrimination condition ($B = 0.17$, $t(387) = 1.44$, $p = 0.15$). Contrastingly, there was a non-significant trend in the opposite direction wherein participants' memory for faces was still not being impacted by the discrimination condition ($B = -0.18$, $t(387) = -1.48$, $p = 0.14$). Although neither effect was significant, we can see opposite trends in participants' memory depending on whether they were high or low in centrality.

Table 2***Predictors of Memory for Ingroup (Asian) Faces***

Predictor	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	1.9757	0.2533	7.80	< .001
Centrality	-0.0906	0.0462	-1.96	0.051
Discrimination	-0.7657	0.3841	-1.99	0.047
Centrality × Discrimination	0.1424	0.0697	2.04	0.042

Note. Discrimination was coded such that 1 is discrimination salience condition and 0 is control condition.

Figure 2***Estimated Marginal Means of Centrality and Discrimination for Ingroup Faces***

Note. Memory for ingroup (Asian) faces as a function of centrality and discrimination salience vs. control condition.

We saw a significant interaction between centrality and discrimination consistent with our hypotheses. However, when controlling for memory of White faces, our results were slightly different. Memory for White faces yielded a significant result ($B = 0.68$, $t(384) = 14.20$, $p < .001$) (Table 3); this indicates that the same pattern is seen in memory for White faces as was

seen in memory for Asian faces. It seems that memory for faces is consistent across different races, thus making the previous interaction we saw between centrality and discrimination non-significant.

Table 3

Predictors of Memory for Outgroup (White) Faces

Predictor	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.8945	0.2228	4.01	< .001
Centrality	-0.0404	0.0382	-1.06	0.291
Discrimination	-0.4298	0.3146	-1.37	0.173
Memory for White Faces	0.6794	0.0479	14.20	< .001
Centrality × Discrimination	0.0815	0.0571	1.43	0.154

Note. Discrimination was coded such that 1 is discrimination salience condition and 0 is control condition.

Further, we conducted a 2 (Race of Faces: White vs. [Own-Group] Asian) × 2 (Discrimination Condition: Discrimination Salience vs. Control) × Continuous (Centrality) repeated-measures ANOVA with discrimination and identity centrality predicting memory for Race of Faces. No significant interaction was found between Race of Faces and either discrimination or identity centrality. This indicates that memory for both White and Asian faces present similar patterns across discrimination conditions and levels of centrality (Table 4). There was a significant effect of discrimination ($F(1,385) = 4.28, p = 0.04$), which means participants did have better memory in one condition over the other, that is, the discrimination condition (Table 5). Additionally, there was a significant interaction between discrimination and identity centrality ($F(1, 385) = 4.26, p = 0.04$). The relationship between centrality and memory for faces differs depending on the condition in which participants were assigned, with the participants in the discrimination condition showing better memory for own-group faces. However, there is no significant difference between memory for White vs. Asian faces.

Table 4*Estimated Marginal Means of Predictors of Memory for Race of Faces*

Within Subjects Effects			
	df	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Race of Faces	1	2.140	0.144
Race of Faces × Discrimination	1	0.609	0.436
Race of Faces × Centrality	1	0.123	0.726
Race of Faces × Discrimination × Centrality	1	0.725	0.395
Residual	385		

Table 5*Estimated Marginal Means of Discrimination and Centrality*

Between Subjects Effects			
	df	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Discrimination	1	4.281	0.039
Centrality	1	0.822	0.365
Discrimination × Centrality	1	4.262	0.040
Residual	385		

To test our hypothesis of social threat (i.e., discrimination) being a predictor of the restrictiveness of group boundaries, we ran another linear regression analysis to predict social group boundaries as a function of centrality and discrimination and any interactions they might have. Results indicated that participants with higher identity centrality had more permissive and inclusive social boundaries than those with lower identity centrality. As shown in Figure 3, social inclusivity was consistent across both the discrimination and control conditions. Further, a significant interaction between centrality and discrimination remained consistent in this analysis ($B = 0.0998$, $t(394) = 1.21$, $p < .001$) (Table 6). Looking more closely at the differences between East and South Asian participants, results indicated no significant interactions between centrality, discrimination, and race conditions (Figure 4). The main effect of centrality remains ($p < .001$), and a similar pattern between race conditions is seen in Figure 4, as was seen in the

combined social boundaries analysis of Figure 3. Contrary to hypotheses, centrality and discrimination did significantly affect the restrictiveness of social group boundaries.

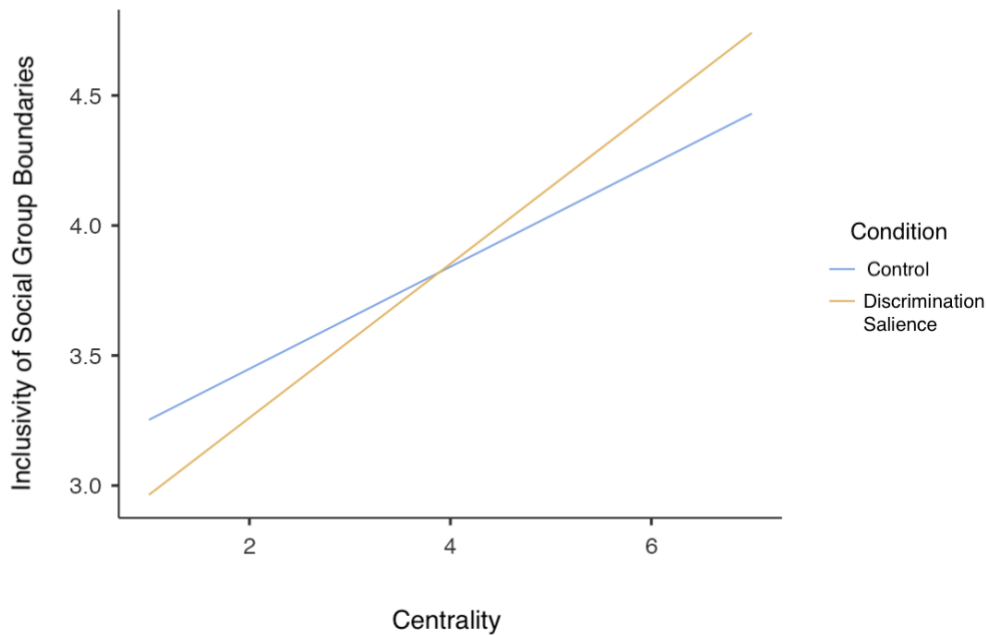
Table 6

Predictors for Inclusivity of Social Group Boundaries

Model Coefficients - Bound				
Predictor	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	3.0562	0.2991	10.216	< .001
Discrimination	-0.3881	0.4538	-0.855	0.393
Centrality	0.1963	0.0548	3.584	< .001
Centrality × Discrimination	0.0998	0.0826	1.209	0.227

Figure 3

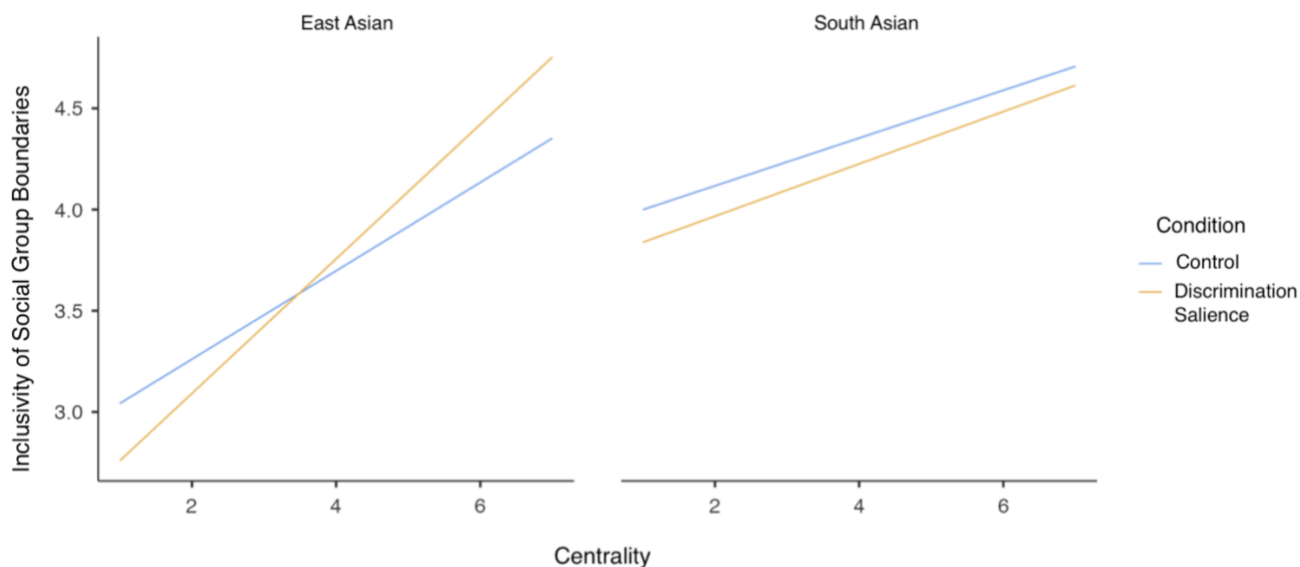
Estimated Marginal Means of Centrality and Discrimination on Social Group Boundaries



Note. Inclusivity of social group boundaries as a function of centrality and discrimination salience vs. control condition for all participants.

Figure 4

Estimated Marginal Means of Centrality and Discrimination on Social Group Boundaries of East vs. South Asians



Note. Inclusivity of social group boundaries as a function of centrality and discrimination saliency vs. control condition. Looking at East and South Asian participants separately.

Discussion

In the current research, we built on existing literature to examine whether identity centrality and perceived social threat in the form of discrimination play a role in the creation of social boundaries and memory for faces in Asian Americans. Looking at memory for faces, the control condition showed participants with low identity centrality as having better memory for Asian faces than high centrality participants. The discrimination condition showed the opposite; when exposed to the discrimination saliency condition, participants with high centrality participants had better memory for Asian faces than low centrality participants. These findings are consistent with existing literature.

When comparing the outcomes of high centrality participants between the control and discrimination salience conditions, it is possible that the exposure to discrimination triggered a response that activated a neural mechanism, resulting in enhanced memory for ingroup faces. Whatever their reaction to the discrimination may have been, if we are positing memory for faces to be an indicator of self-group distancing, it is evident that high centrality participants were drawn closer to their ingroup in some capacity. Conversely, when comparing the outcomes of low centrality participants between the control and discrimination salience conditions, it appears that they engaged in self-group distancing only in the discrimination salience condition. This confirms our hypothesis that people with lower levels of identity centrality may engage in self-group distancing when they perceive a social threat against their ingroup, whereas those with high identity centrality feel a call to solidarity with their ingroup. The low centrality participants' memory patterns could be attributed to a weaker connection with the ingroup overall, making it easier for them to distance themselves to avoid negative associations with the ingroup. Alternatively, the discrimination salience condition might have triggered a response in low centrality participants that resulted in them trying to avoid any possible experiences of being stereotyped or discriminated against.

Further, our study found no significant interactions between the race of faces in memory and discrimination or identity centrality. This suggests that there was no difference between memory for White and Asian faces. Although participants exhibited better memory in the discrimination condition than the control condition, this trend was consistent across memory for both White and Asian faces. This suggests that while the manipulation of the discrimination condition may affect memory mechanisms as a whole, it does not explicitly impact memory for different races (ingroup vs. outgroup). Although this contradicts our initial hypothesis, these

results offer valuable insights and guidance for future research. The consistent effect of discrimination on memory, regardless of racial groups, emphasizes the pervasive impact of discrimination on cognitive processes. This highlights the importance of addressing discrimination explicitly to promote equitable treatment and wellbeing. Future research in memory and discrimination could shed light on the intricacies of cognitive processes and social perception, particularly in racially diverse contexts.

Given this effect of discrimination on memory, it is also possible that the exposure to discrimination becomes overwhelming for participants, resulting in an inability to process new information. This inability to process new information could explain the consistent decline in memory for faces for both White and Asian faces in the discrimination condition. This kind of cognitive impairment when encountering discrimination could be very detrimental for a number of different reasons. If an individual were to encounter this type of cognitive process in a real-world situation in which they are experiencing discrimination, their impaired cognitive processing could potentially escalate an already tense situation. While this is merely speculative, these effects could manifest in the real world. Therefore, it is crucially important to address these impacts of discrimination on memory and cognitive functioning.

Our findings also suggest a malleability of group boundaries such that exposure to discrimination prompts high centrality participants to expand their social group boundaries and allow for the inclusion of others into their ingroup. This finding was consistent across both the discrimination and control conditions, allowing us to believe that these social boundaries are not as restrictive as we initially thought. These social boundaries are also consistent across both East and South Asian participants. These results challenge our initial hypothesis that exposure to discrimination might increase the restrictiveness of social group boundaries. It is conceivable

that, rather than perceiving threat and enforcing rigid social boundaries, individuals actually expand the boundaries of their ingroup to embrace more people, suggesting a desire for connection or mobilization. This inclination could indicate a collective desire to unite and mobilize against discrimination, supporting the notion of increasing membership to increase the group's power (Gibson, 2022; Okamoto, 2003; Wimmer 2013).

Conclusion

One notable strength of our study, setting it apart from previous research, is that it is the first to utilize a memory encoding task to measure participants' likelihood of self-group distancing in response to a manipulation condition. While previous studies have relied heavily on self-report measures, our study employs the utilization of a memory task to measure participants' memory for White vs. Asian faces, offering a potentially more objective perspective on the manifestation of self-group distancing in Asian Americans. Further, as with any survey-based study, our study could also bear some potential limitations. Despite mitigating the limitation of a self-report measure for self-group distancing, the absence of experimenter supervision could potentially affect the study's outcomes. For example, in the memory encoding portion of our study, we could not be sure that something was not distracting the participant or taking their attention away from their monitor. While we presume that participants remained engaged throughout the study, there remains a slight risk of distraction or inattention.

This study revealed self-group distancing responses among Asian Americans who have weaker identification with their racial identity, specifically when they are exposed to conditions of discrimination. Surprisingly, higher identity centrality did not predict better memory of ingroup faces. Instead, discrimination conditions yielded the same adverse effects on memory for both White and Asian faces, suggesting a broad impact of discrimination on memory overall.

The inclusivity of social group boundaries observed also reveals a new aspect of social group identity that supports the notion of increased membership being driven by the group's desire to maintain power (Gibson, 2022). Future research could focus on the underlying mechanisms behind discrimination's impact on memory and its role in the psychological and cognitive functioning of groups who perceive a social threat.

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