When experiencing discrimination predicts greater outgroup affiliation: The role of intergroup mobility in moderating rejection-(Dis)identification patterns

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ABSTRACT

Research has documented how groups cope with perceived discrimination by enhancing their identification with their minority ingroup and reducing their identification with the majority outgroup. However, these patterns have not been consistent across contexts nor examined in relation to discrimination encountered online. Through a survey of PRC Chinese immigrants in Singapore, we examine how online perceived discrimination relates to attitudes toward the Singaporean host society via both ingroup and outgroup identification. We also test the role of intergroup mobility, the perceived level of opportunity ingroup members have to form relationships with dominant outgroup members, as a moderator of these relations. Results show that PRC Chinese immigrants who perceived more discrimination online identified more strongly with both their PRC Chinese ingroup and the Singaporean host society outgroup. In turn, greater PRC Chinese and Singaporean identification related to more positive attitudes toward Singaporeans. Moreover, intergroup mobility moderated these associations, such that the PRC Chinese who perceived greater mobility were more likely to strengthen their identification with Singaporeans as their online perceived discrimination increased. We argue that intergroup mobility beliefs may play a key role in shaping defensive responses to perceived discrimination.

Introduction

The widespread circulation of discriminatory content on social media endangers the well-being of stigmatized minority groups (English et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2021; Tynes et al., 2008). Beyond mirroring the discrimination that takes place in the offline world, online discrimination could amplify intergroup tensions. Due to the quasi-anonymous self-expression it provides, social media can enhance the salience of deindividuated group identities (Fox & Moreland, 2015; Tynes et al., 2004) and facilitate the spread of hate speech through content recommendation algorithms (Baccarella et al., 2018; Ben-David & Fernandez, 2016; Soral et al., 2020). As such, minority groups may be vulnerable to a pervasive culture of discrimination online. Even so, most research investigating the consequences of perceived discrimination has focused on the well-being and mental health outcomes of victims (e.g., Pascoe &
Richman, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2014). Empirical research is limited on how online perceived discrimination influences intergroup attitudes, especially from the perspective of the victimized minority group. How and under what conditions does online perceived discrimination deepen intergroup divides?

In this study, we draw on the rejection-identification model (RIM; Branscombe et al., 1999) and the rejection-disidentification model (RDIM; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009) to investigate the mechanisms through which online perceived discrimination relates to intergroup attitudes. Through a cross-sectional survey with 430 immigrants from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) living in Singapore, we test the theoretical prediction that perceiving more discrimination online would be associated with more antagonistic attitudes toward a majority outgroup via both increased minority ingroup identification (RIM) and decreased majority outgroup identification (RDIM). At the time of data collection in 2022, various COVID-19 restrictions were in place that limited the extent of face-to-face contact, so focusing our analysis on the effects of discriminatory encounters online became especially important and practical. Prior studies on the RIM/RDIM have been primarily carried out in Western contexts, where there are often salient intergroup differences based on ethnicity, culture, and/or language. Our study provides rare insight into a unique case where immigrants from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) experience discrimination from a host society where the majority share similar ethnic, cultural, and linguistic roots (Liu, 2015). Compared to other immigrant groups in Singapore, the PRC Chinese are stereotyped as the least warm and most threatening to Singapore’s cultural identity, despite their commonalities (Chen et al., 2021). As such, evidence suggests that Singaporeans do view the PRC Chinese as a low-status outgroup, but it is unclear whether RIM/RDIM assumptions will hold in a context where the ingroup and outgroup share ancestral similarities.

Though the RIM/RDIM has been supported in several domains (e.g., Badea et al., 2011; Bogart et al., 2018; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009), other studies found only partial or no support for theoretical predictions (Bastug & Akca, 2019; Bobowik et al., 2017; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2020; Wiley, 2013). To contribute one explanation for these mixed results, the present study tests the moderating role of intergroup mobility, the perceived level of opportunity minority ingroup members have to form and change their relationships with people belonging to a majority outgroup. People who perceive greater intergroup mobility may be less sensitive to group-based rejection and less likely to defensively favor the ingroup over the outgroup in response to discrimination experiences. Taken together, the objectives of the present study are two-fold: (1) to unpack the association between online perceived discrimination and intergroup attitudes by testing the RIM/RDIM models in a novel intergroup context, and (2) to examine the role of intergroup mobility in moderating the associations predicted by these models.

Rejection-(Dis)identification and intergroup attitudes

Perceived discrimination is associated with negative consequences for well-being (Moradi & Risco, 2006; Verkuyten, 1998); however, strengthening ingroup identification may offer a “social cure” to remedy this effect (Jetten et al., 2011). The rejection-identification model (RIM) contends that when minority groups perceive rejection based on their social identity, they may identify more strongly with their rejected group to bolster their well-being against threats (Branscombe et al., 1999). Perceived rejection makes salient intergroup boundaries, underlining differences the perceivers has with an offending group and similarities with others who share the discriminated identity. Therefore, discriminated group members may enhance identification with their ingroup as a social cure to remedy this effect (Jetten et al., 2011). The rejection-disidentification model (RDIM) contends that when minority groups perceive rejection based on their social identity, they may identify more strongly with their rejected group to bolster their well-being against threats (Branscombe et al., 1999). Perceived rejection makes salient intergroup boundaries, underlining differences the perceivers has with an offending group and similarities with others who share the discriminated identity. Therefore, discriminated group members may enhance identification with their ingroup as a social cure to remedy this effect (Jetten et al., 2011). The rejection-disidentification model (RDIM) contends that when minority groups perceive rejection based on their social identity, they may identify more strongly with their rejected group to bolster their well-being against threats (Branscombe et al., 1999). Perceived rejection makes salient intergroup boundaries, underlining differences the perceivers has with an offending group and similarities with others who share the discriminated identity. Therefore, discriminated group members may enhance identification with their ingroup as a social cure to remedy this effect (Jetten et al., 2011).
Assuming the assumptions of the RIM and RDIM can be replicated in a Singaporean immigration context, we put forth the following hypotheses:

**H1.** Online perceived discrimination among Chinese migrants is (a) positively associated with Chinese ingroup identification and (b) negatively associated with Singaporean outgroup identification.

Most studies on the RIM/RDIM have focused on its implications for well-being, providing evidence that increased group identification (whether ingroup or outgroup) bolsters well-being against rejection (see Bobowik et al., 2017; Badea et al., 2011; Stuart et al., 2020). In the present study, we are interested in uncovering the implications of these identification patterns on intergroup attitudes. Rejection based on one’s ingroup minority identity has been directly associated with more negative perceptions of the offending outgroup majority (Badea et al., 2011; Branscombe et al., 1999; da Silva et al., 2021). Discrimination signals a threat to one’s group status, thus inciting hostility toward the dominant group as a defensive mechanism (Branscombe & Wann, 1994). Thus, we also predict the following:

**H2.** Online perceived discrimination among Chinese migrants is directly associated with more negative attitudes toward Singaporeans.

Separately, ingroup and outgroup identification have also been differentially associated with attitudes toward a salient outgroup. From a social identity theory perspective, more significant commitment to one’s ingroup may be associated with distancing from a direct outgroup (Ellemers et al., 1997), especially when groups are perceived to be incompatible or in competition (Stephan et al., 2016). The association between ingroup identification and negative perceptions toward an outgroup has been supported in experimental and correlational research (Jackson, 2002; Jetten et al., 1997; Lyons et al., 2010; Sassenberg & Wieber, 2005). Complementing this perspective, we would expect a reverse pattern of effects for outgroup identification—that is, reduced identification with the host society outgroup would relate to more negative intergroup attitudes. Conversely, identifying more strongly with a majority group may activate a superordinate ingroup identity, fostering more inclusive perceptions (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Supporting this idea, one study on ethnic minorities found that greater identification with the host society predicted improved attitudes toward the national majority group (Munniksma et al., 2015).

Given the theoretical and empirical support for the associations between perceived discrimination, minority ingroup vs. host society outgroup identification, and intergroup attitudes, we predict the following parallel mediation model (see Fig. 1):

**H3a.** Online perceived discrimination predicts more negative attitudes toward Singaporeans through increased identification with the PRC Chinese.

**H3b.** Online perceived discrimination predicts more negative attitudes toward Singaporeans through reduced identification with Singaporeans.

**The moderating role of intergroup mobility**

In their study on the RIM/RDIM among various ethnic immigrant minority groups in Europe, Bobowik et al. (2017) discussed several explanations for why Iranian immigrants identified less with their ethnic ingroup in response to perceived discrimination. One explanation is that Iranians may have perceived greater opportunities to integrate with the majority host society due to their relatively...
educated and entrepreneurial status in the Netherlands (Bobowik et al., 2017). Indeed, other studies have identified group-based boundary conditions to the RIM/RDIM. For example, when a minority group perceives cultural or ethical values to be compatible with a majority group, perceived discrimination is less likely to result in increased minority identification (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2012). Likewise, when group-based rejection is seen as legitimate and valid, perceived discrimination does not precipitate increased solidarity with one’s ingroup (Jetten et al., 2011). The literature on RIM/RDIM suggests that perceived rejection from an outgroup only drives self-protective group (dis)identification patterns in contexts where intergroup relationships seem unlikely or undeserved. What about social norms that facilitate or encourage opportunities to form relationships across groups?

While studies have identified certain boundary conditions to the RIM model, no research thus far has empirically examined contextual differences in opportunities for intergroup relationships. In the social identity literature, the construct that aligns most closely to this idea is group permeability, “the perceived objective or subjective possibility of changing group membership, and/or of changing hierarchical status” (Armenta et al., 2017, p. 420). When group boundaries are permeable, members of low-status groups have been found to reduce their identification with the ingroup (Armenta et al., 2017; Ellmers et al., 1988; Ellemers et al., 1990), and are more likely to engage in upward mobility strategies that prioritize their individual needs (Branscombe et al., 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In contrast, when boundaries are impermeable, opportunities for individual mobility may be more constrained, so low-status ingroup members enhance their status through collective strategies that aim to empower the group identity (e.g., Jackson et al., 1996; Lalonde & Silverman, 1994). Moreover, a few experimental studies have found that when people are made to think group boundaries are impermeable, perceived discrimination against the group is less likely to threaten well-being and self-esteem (Bourguignon et al., 2015; Garstka et al., 2004), possibly because they see opportunities for individual upward mobility.

These studies suggest that the fluidity of boundaries between groups can moderate people’s defensiveness in response to discrimination, and this may therefore have implications for downstream intergroup attitudes. However, permeability is narrowly defined in terms of one’s potential to become a member or to achieve the same level of socio-economic status as another group. Little attention has been paid to the opportunities for forming social connections or relationships across groups. Only two studies (Terry et al., 2001; 2006), to our knowledge, measured permeability with some items that asked about one’s perceived social opportunities with an outgroup. However, these measures focused on the individual’s relational opportunities, not the perceived relational opportunities of the ingroup as a whole. Armenta et al. (2017), in their attempt to develop a standardized self-report scale for group permeability, initially developed items that captured “social permeability,” but these items did not correlate sufficiently with the latent factors corresponding to membership and status permeability. As such, the perceived opportunities for intergroup relationships may be an entirely distinct construct from group permeability.

Why are opportunities for intergroup relations important to spotlight beyond group permeability? Studies suggest that positive social connections with outgroup members can be strongly influential in shaping intergroup attitudes (Davies et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2019). On a practical level, for group identity categories that are fundamentally fixed or difficult to change (e.g., race, nationality), forming intergroup relationships may be more feasible strategies in the short term for upward mobility than changing one’s group membership or socio-economic status. As such, it is important to study how perceptions of relational opportunities with outgroups shape the resources or strategies people draw on in response to group-based discrimination.

One socio-ecological construct that does capture the perceived opportunities for relationship formation in a given society is relational mobility, the level of freedom people have to forge new relationships and discard old ones out of personal choice (versus external obligation; Yuki & Schug, 2012). Like group permeability, relational mobility perceptions have been found to moderate responses to social rejection, but at an interpersonal (not an intergroup) level (Lou & Li, 2017; Sato et al., 2014). Lou and Li (2017) found that Hong Kong Chinese people who perceived society as low on relational mobility developed a fixed or “destiny” mindset toward relationship formation, and were thus more likely to respond with negative emotions when faced with social rejection. In contrast, European Canadians, who perceived their society to be more relationally mobile, were less sensitive to social rejection, as they could easily form new connections to compensate for the loss (Lou & Li, 2017). In social environments with low relational mobility, people may feel they have no choice but to stick with the groups or relationships they already have; as such, they are incentivized to maintain the status quo of harmony and stability within these networks (Yuki & Schug, 2012; Li et al., 2016; Yuki & Schug, 2020). In contrast, people in societies with high relational mobility may feel less afflicted by social rejection, and may employ promotion-oriented practices that build their social capital to attract more desirable relationship partners (Lou & Li, 2017; Sato et al., 2014; Yuki & Schug, 2012).

Given that perceived discrimination represents a form of social rejection at the intergroup level, relational mobility may similarly influence how victims respond to it. However, relational mobility is theoretically defined by a “mutual contract” where people of two different groups should have equal levels of opportunity to form relationships with members of each others’ groups (Thomson et al., 2018). As such, the construct as it is does not account for intergroup dynamics where there are tangible group differences in status and opportunity (e.g., rich vs. poor, citizen vs. migrant). Groups with different levels of status have been found to engage in different intergroup behaviors (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987). In the present context, it may be subjectively harder for members of low-status groups to initiate and establish bonds with members of high-status groups than it is vice versa. Migrants, many of whom occupy a low-status minority position in their host societies, may perceive the availability of social opportunities differently depending on the reference group in question (Zhang & Li, 2014).

Therefore, given that relational mobility may not consistently account for how people respond to group-based rejection in unbalanced intergroup contexts, we focus specifically on the role of intergroup mobility, which we define as the level of opportunity ingroup members have to form and change their relationships with members of an outgroup. Unlike relational mobility, we do not operationalize perceptions of intergroup mobility in terms of a mutual contract; instead, we define it from the vantage point of one’s own group. This is because perceptions of the ingroup’s opportunities may not cohere with perceptions of the outgroup’s
opportunities, especially in contexts of intergroup inequality. Furthermore, this construct is distinct from group permeability, which typically focuses on the fluidity of group membership or status (Armenta et al., 2017). Intergroup mobility may be an outcome or correlate of permeability, given that the potential for achieving the same status as another group may then invite opportunities for intergroup relationship formation.

Drawing on evidence that relational mobility can buffer against the threat of interpersonal rejection, we theorize that intergroup mobility primarily moderates group attachments in response to online perceived discrimination. People who perceive greater intergroup mobility may take a growth mindset toward group integration (similar to relational mobility in interpersonal contexts; Lou & Li, 2017), perceiving more flexibility to take control over the outcomes of relationships with people of different groups, in spite of discrimination. Compared to people who perceive low intergroup mobility, those who perceive high intergroup mobility may be more resilient against group-based social rejection, reducing the need to defensively increase ingroup (RIM) and decrease outgroup identification (RDIM). In the context of our study, high-mobility Chinese migrants may rely on individual coping resources, and strive to socially integrate with the majority group (Bobowik et al., 2017). We thus hypothesize the following moderated mediation model (see Fig. 2):

**H4a**. Intergroup mobility moderates the association between online perceived discrimination and ingroup identification, such that discrimination has a more positive association with ingroup identification (RIM) for migrants with low intergroup mobility.

**H4b**. Intergroup mobility moderates the association between online perceived discrimination and outgroup identification, such that discrimination has a more negative association with outgroup identification (RDIM) for migrants with low intergroup mobility.

### Materials and methods

#### Sample

This study utilized an online survey sample of 430 Chinese citizens above 21 years old who currently resides in Singapore under one of the following valid immigration passes for employment: Employment Pass, S Pass, and Work Permit (Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 2022). Permanent residents (PRs) were excluded from this sample, as they are more likely than work pass holders to have resided in Singapore for a substantial amount of time and acculturate more strongly to the host society. In addition, given the study’s scope of interest in respondents with a clear sense of immigrant identity, we restricted our sample to temporary residents employed in Singapore. Respondents were recruited by Qualtrics LLC, a market research panel aggregator, through a quota sampling approach that aimed to target a reasonably equitable distribution of participants across gender and socio-economic status. Other studies on group identification, discrimination, and social media have similarly used stratified survey sampling approaches to make conclusions about broader populations (see Ahmed et al., 2021; Chae et al., 2011). The survey was administered in January 2022 and was fielded for three weeks. The authors designed the presentation of survey items and flow using Qualtrics’ proprietary survey software.

Prospective participants were screened for alignment with our sample criteria through demographic questions on the first page of the online survey. Respondents who failed to meet these criteria or did not consent to participation at the beginning of the survey were unable to complete the rest of the questions. To minimize fraudulent data, Qualtrics’ use of digital fingerprinting technology helps to
exclude bots and include only valid human respondents (ESOMAR, 2021). This study received ethics approval from the institutional review board at Nanyang Technological University with approval number IRB-2021-420.

Due to the strict sample requirements and the outflux of immigrants following Covid-19, recruiting a sample size beyond 430 was not feasible at the time. Nonetheless, we conducted a sensitivity power analysis using Monte Carlo simulations (with 1000 replications and 20,000 draws per replication) to assess how much power we had to uncover indirect effects in a model with two parallel mediators (Schoemann et al., 2017). We targeted a small standardized indirect effect size of \(0.036\), which we derived from estimates of the association between perceived discrimination and group identification (\(\beta = -0.18\); Bobowik et al., 2017), and the association between group identification and intergroup attitudes (\(\beta = -0.20\); Jackson, 2002; Lyons et al., 2010). Results indicated that we have 95 % power to detect parallel indirect effects of this size. Additional simulations revealed that with a sample of 430 participants, the smallest indirect effect size we could detect with 80 % power is 0.026.

As we did not have a benchmark for the effect size of an interaction between online perceived discrimination and intergroup mobility, we examined sample sizes from prior work that similarly published moderated mediation models with anti-immigrant discrimination as the predictor. Studies found significant evidence for moderated mediation with sample sizes ranging from as small as 204 to 470 (e.g., Bagci & Canpolat, 2020; Cariello et al., 2022; Xiong et al., 2021). We also conducted additional simulation-based power analyses for cross-sectional interactions (Baranger et al., 2023). Given 1000 simulations, and an average inter-correlation among variables of 0.15 (a small-to-medium correlation; Funder & Ozer, 2019), a sample of 430 has 80 % power to detect an interaction effect as small as 0.13.

### Measures

Scale items for online perceived discrimination, intergroup mobility, PRC Chinese identification, Singaporean identification, and negative attitudes toward Singaporeans were averaged to create aggregate indices for each variable. Though originally developed in English, all items were translated into Mandarin Chinese by a PRC Chinese research assistant. The third author, who is also PRC Chinese and a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese, back-translated the items to English to check that the translated items accurately matched the meaning of the original English items. Respondents could freely toggle between English and Mandarin Chinese while completing the survey.

**Online perceived discrimination.** Online perceived discrimination was measured using six Likert-type scale items adapted from Tynes et al. (2010), assessing how frequently cases of direct and vicarious discrimination are perceived to take place online (1 = Never, 7 = Almost Every day). Items were modified slightly to draw attention to instances of online discrimination on the basis of respondents’ national or immigrant identity. Items included “people have said mean or rude things about me because of my national or immigrant identity online” and “people have said things online that were untrue about people of my national or immigrant group.” A greater score on this scale indicates greater online perceived discrimination (\(M = 3.19, SD = 1.30, \alpha = 0.93\)).

**Intergroup mobility.** As there is no existing scale for intergroup mobility, we modified the six positively-coded items from the relational mobility scale developed by Thomson et al. (2018), which most closely captures perceived normative opportunities for relationship formation. The scale for intergroup mobility asked participants to rate their agreement with statements about opportunities to form relationships with Singaporeans and Singaporean groups (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). As the relational mobility scale does not focus on a social reference group and broadly referred to relationships in one’s society, we rewrote all items to focus on relationship formation with members of the Singaporean host society. See Table 1 for the full set of items. A higher score reflects greater perceived intergroup mobility (\(M = 4.59, SD = 1.02, \alpha = 0.86\)). Note that we did not adapt reverse-coded items from the relational mobility scale, given prior work that suggests reverse-coded items may do little to mitigate acquiescent responding. Instead, reverse-coded items can risk hampering a scale’s psychometric properties (e.g., reliability, dimensionality) due to being interpreted as confusing or semantically different from positively-coded items (García-Fernández et al., 2022; Sonderen et al., 2013). Given that items were already translated from English to Chinese, we decided to avoid risking a loss in reliability due to differences in linguistic interpretation (see Suárez-Alvarez et al., 2018 for a critique).

**PRC Chinese (national ingroup) identification.** Four items were adapted from Doosje et al. (1998) to capture how strongly respondents identified with their PRC Chinese national ingroup (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Items included “I identify

### Table 1
Descriptive statistics for items in the intergroup mobility scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>(M)</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
<th>Item-Total Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>They (the PRC Chinese people around you) have many chances to get to know people from Singapore.</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is common for these PRC Chinese people to have a conversation with a Singaporean they have never met before.</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>They (the PRC Chinese people around you) are able to choose, according to their own preferences, the Singaporean people whom they interact with in their daily life.</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>If they did not like their current PRC Chinese groups, they could leave for better ones within the Singaporean community.</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is easy for them to meet new Singaporean people.</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>They are able to choose the Singaporean groups and organizations they belong to.</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The question stem for the scale is: “How much do you feel the following statements accurately describe people from China in the immediate society where you live and their ability to form relationships with Singaporeans?”*
Table 2
Descriptive statistics and unstandardized zero-order correlations between all variables used in analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
<th>7.</th>
<th>8.</th>
<th>9.</th>
<th>10.</th>
<th>11.</th>
<th>12.</th>
<th>13.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Online Perceived Discrimination</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.24 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.20 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.40 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ingroup Identification</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.24 * *</td>
<td>.41 * *</td>
<td>.41 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Outgroup Identification</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.20 * *</td>
<td>.40 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Intergroup Mobility</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.21 * *</td>
<td>.37 * *</td>
<td>.53 * *</td>
<td>.35 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negative Attitudes</td>
<td>38.56</td>
<td>18.43</td>
<td>.12 *</td>
<td>-.37 * *</td>
<td>-.53 * *</td>
<td>-.35 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Age</td>
<td>35.16</td>
<td>10.18</td>
<td>-.21 * *</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.10 *</td>
<td>.13 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Education</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.11 *</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Years Lived in Singapore</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.21 * *</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.13 * *</td>
<td>.12 *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Income</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.20 * *</td>
<td>.17 * *</td>
<td>.25 * *</td>
<td>.18 * *</td>
<td>-.19 * *</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.23 * *</td>
<td>.21 * *</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Gender (1 = Woman, 0 = Man)</td>
<td>49.3 %</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.10 *</td>
<td>-.13 * *</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.13 * *</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Work Permit (1 = Yes, 0 = No)</td>
<td>39.8 %</td>
<td>.14 * *</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.10 *</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>13. Employment Pass (1 = Yes, 0 = No)</td>
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Note. % = percentage of participants who selected the category coded as “1” for binary variables. * p < .05, * * p < .01.
with other people who are PRC Chinese” and “I feel committed to my PRC Chinese group.” A higher average score on this scale reflects stronger identification with the PRC Chinese ingroup ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.10, \alpha = 0.85$).

**Singaporean (host society outgroup) identification.** To match the operationalization of ingroup identification, scale items used to measure identification with the Singaporean outgroup were identical to the four ingroup identification items adapted from Doosie et al. (1998), with the reference group modified accordingly. Items included “I identify with other people who are Singaporean” and “I feel committed to the Singaporean group.” A higher score indicates greater identification with Singaporeans ($M = 4.73, SD = 1.10, \alpha = 0.90$).

**Negative attitudes toward Singaporeans.** A semantic differential feeling thermometer (Alwin, 1997) with seven items asked respondents to indicate their feelings toward the Singaporean outgroup using a 100-point slider scale. The extreme end of each scale was marked by an opposing adjective or noun denoting perceptions of the outgroup. Word pairs included “Cold (0)...Warm (100),” “Hostile (0)...Friendly (100),” “Suspicious (0)...Trusting (100),” and “Disgust (0)...Admiration (100).” Other studies measuring intergroup attitudes have incorporated similar feeling thermometer scales (Cao & Lin, 2017; Wright et al., 1997). Items were then reverse-scored so that a higher number on this scale is associated with more negative attitudes toward the Singaporean outgroup ($M = 38.56, SD = 18.43, \alpha = 0.93$).

Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables are shown in Table 2.

**Results**

**Mediation model**

We ran a bootstrapped parallel mediation analysis using Model 4 on the PROCESS macro for SPSS (v3.5; Hayes, 2017) with 5000 bootstrap samples, controlling for age, gender, education, years lived in Singapore, and household income. First, we assessed whether demographic covariates predicted attitudes toward Singaporeans based on ordinary least squares (OLS) regression coefficients generated in the analysis. Age was positively associated with negative attitudes ($\beta = 0.10, t(419) = 2.52, p = 0.01$), aligning with research that finds older people are more likely to endorse more prejudiced views (Gonsalkorale et al., 2009). Compared to work pass holders, S pass ($\beta = -0.24, t(419) = -2.27, p = 0.02$) and employment pass holders ($\beta = -0.22, t(417) = -2.37, p = 0.02$) were both less likely to hold negative attitudes toward Singaporeans. Gender, education, household income, and years lived in Singapore were not significant predictors ($p > .05$). While controlling for these demographic variables, and accounting for the indirect effects in the model, we found that online perceived discrimination did not have a direct effect on intergroup attitudes ($\beta = 0.04, t(419) = 0.89, p = 0.37$).

Despite the lack of evidence for a direct effect of online perceived discrimination on attitudes, results were indicative of significant indirect effects on attitudes via both ingroup and outgroup identification. Supporting H1a, people who reported greater online perceived discrimination identified more strongly with the ingroup ($\beta = 0.20, t(421) = 4.14, p < .001$). Greater ingroup identification, in turn, related to less negative attitudes toward the host society outgroup ($\beta = -0.19, t(419) = -4.17, p < .001$). In parallel, contradicting H1b, online perceived discrimination also related to greater identification with the host society outgroup ($\beta = 0.15, t(421) = 3.02, p = 0.002$). Greater outgroup identification, in turn, was strongly associated with less negative attitudes toward the outgroup (to a clearly greater extent than ingroup identification was; $\beta = -0.45, t(421) = -9.85, p < .001$).

![Diagram](https://example.com/diagram.png)

**Fig. 3.** Statistical mediation model with PRC Chinese national identification and Singaporean host society identification mediating the relationship between online perceived discrimination and negative attitudes toward the Singaporean outgroup. Coefficients are standardized. Covariates include age, gender, education, immigration pass type, years lived in Singapore, and household income. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$. 

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**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables.
Overall, there was significant evidence for parallel mediation, as bootstrapped confidence intervals for the indirect effects of online perceived discrimination via ingroup (β = –0.04, 95% CI [–0.07, –0.01]) and outgroup identification (β = –0.07, 95% CI [–0.12, –0.01]) did not include zero. However, the directions of these associations (see Fig. 3) did not completely align with H3a and H3b, which predicted that online perceived discrimination would indirectly lead to more negative intergroup attitudes through increased ingroup identification and reduced outgroup identification.

Moderated mediation model

Given the evidence for parallel mediation, we proceeded to test H4, which predicted intergroup mobility to moderate the mediated effects of online perceived discrimination via ingroup (H4a) and outgroup identification (H4b). To test these predictions in one pathway model, we used Model 8 in the PROCESS macro for SPSS, a conditional process model that assesses both first-stage moderated mediation and moderation of the direct effect (Hayes, 2017). Slope estimates, standard errors, and moderated mediation indices are shown in Table 3, with simple slopes estimated at –1 SD, mean, and +1 SD of intergroup mobility.

The strength of the indirect effects via both ingroup identification and outgroup identification varied at different levels of intergroup mobility, thus satisfying the criteria for moderated mediation using conditional process analysis (Hayes, 2017). For the mediation pathway via ingroup identification, the index of moderated mediation was significant, as the confidence interval of the index did not include zero (β = –0.02, 95% CI [–0.04, –0.003]). For people who perceived intergroup mobility (–1 SD), the indirect effect of online perceived discrimination via ingroup identification was not significant (β = –0.01, 95% CI [–0.02, 0.05]). In contrast, when intergroup mobility was high (+1 SD), the indirect effect was significant, such that perceived discrimination was associated with more positive attitudes toward the Singaporean outgroup through greater identification with the PRC Chinese ingroup (β = –0.03, 95% CI [–0.06, –0.094]). Though there was evidence for moderated mediation, these findings are contrary to our expectations (H4a) that online perceived discrimination would positively predict ingroup identification for those who perceived low, not high, intergroup mobility.

However, the interaction between online perceived discrimination and intergroup mobility clearly supported out predictions for the outgroup identification pathway. The index of moderated mediation via the outgroup identification pathway was also significant, with a confidence interval that excluded zero (β = –0.08, 95% CI [–0.12, –0.04]). Online perceived discrimination predicted more negative attitudes toward the outgroup via reduced outgroup identification, but only for people who perceived low intergroup mobility (–1 SD; β = 0.10, 95% CI [0.03, 0.17]). In contrast, for people who perceived high intergroup mobility (+1 SD), this association trended in the opposite direction, such that perceived discrimination related to more positive attitudes because of increased outgroup identification (β = –0.06, 95% CI [–0.13, –0.01]). These results support H4b, which predicted that perceived discrimination should predict less outgroup identification most strongly among people who perceive low, not high, intergroup mobility.

The interaction between online perceived discrimination and intergroup mobility was significant when predicting both ingroup identification (β = 0.12, t(419) = 3.26, p = .001) and outgroup identification (β = 0.19, t(419) = 5.44, p < .001). These interactions are plotted in Fig. 4 (ingroup identification) and Fig. 5 (outgroup identification), respectively. Simple slopes show that for high-mobility immigrants, as online perceived discrimination increased, they experienced both greater national ingroup (in line with the RIM) and host society outgroup identification than those who reported lower intergroup mobility. In fact, low-mobility immigrants reported reduced identification with the host society outgroup (in line with the RDIM) with increased discrimination, enacting a response pattern opposite to those who perceived higher intergroup mobility.

Intergroup mobility did not moderate the direct effect of online perceived discrimination on negative attitudes toward the Singaporean outgroup (β = 0.02, t(417) = 0.53, p = 0.59), so the interactions were specific to the indirect effects via ingroup and outgroup identification.

Discussion

When faced with discrimination, one would think that the most instinctive response is to establish distance from the offender (rejection-disidentification), and, instead, find support and solidarity with others who’ve been similarly victimized (rejection-identification). Based on prior work, these concurrent tendencies to identify with similar others and disidentify from offenders should encourage the formation of negative attitudes toward the offending outgroup. However, our study conducted in the context of PRC
Fig. 4. Simple slopes of the interaction between online perceived discrimination and intergroup mobility predicting identification with the PRC Chinese ingroup. \( b \) = unstandardized regression coefficient, \( SE \) = standard error of unstandardized regression coefficient. Covariates include age, gender, education, immigration pass type, years lived in Singapore, and household income.

Fig. 5. Simple slopes of the interaction between online perceived discrimination and intergroup mobility predicting identification with the Singaporean outgroup. \( b \) = unstandardized regression coefficient, \( SE \) = standard error of unstandardized regression coefficient. Covariates include age, gender, education, immigration pass type, years lived in Singapore, and household income.
Chinese and Singaporean relations portrays a more complex picture.

Among economic immigrants from China residing in Singapore, online perceived discrimination did relate to greater identification with the PRC Chinese identity, but it was surprisingly also associated with greater identification with the Singaporean host society. Why would perceived discrimination predict greater identification with both ingroup and outgroup? Relatedly, why would both ingroup and outgroup identification predict more positive attitudes toward the outgroup? One possible reason addressing both questions is that although PRC Chinese migrants are viewed as a low-status outgroup by Singaporeans (see Chen et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Ramsay & Pang, 2017), the lines between ingroup and outgroup may be more complex from the point of view of PRC Chinese immigrants. Without factoring in the role of intergroup mobility, the experience of group-based rejection may have motivated our PRC Chinese participants to identify with a common ethnic ingroup that transcends lines of citizenship. When faced with racial discrimination, ingroup members have been found to strengthen their identification with both their ingroup and racialized outgroups that exhibit similar traits or circumstances along relevant dimensions (Craig & Richeson, 2012; Huang, 2021). Indeed, superordinate identity categories with salient cues—in this case, a shared ethnicity and native language—have a higher likelihood of being adopted for common ingroup identification (Peker et al., 2010). Furthermore, by virtue of both being East Asian, PRC Chinese immigrants and the Singaporean Chinese majority are both susceptible to being victims of racism at an international scale, especially in light of Covid-19 (Lu et al., 2021). These factors suggest that although PRC Chinese and Singaporeans are distinct groups on the dimension of national identity (and viewed as such by Singaporeans), their similarities on other dimensions may make these boundaries more permeable to begin with. Instead of prioritizing national ingroup over outgroup, PRC Chinese immigrants who face discrimination may have drawn on identity cues that unite both groups, allowing them to develop more positive attitudes toward Singaporeans as a whole.

Outside of context, another possible reason for these associations is that ingroup attachment may be psychologically distinct from a tendency to derogate against an outgroup (Brewer, 1999), and associations could vary depending on the type of attachment at play. Recent studies have distinguished different forms of ingroup identification, with some being more closely related to decreased outgroup affinity than others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; Leidner et al., 2010). Unlike collective narcissism, an aggrandized, defensive form of ingroup attachment, the secure form of ingroup identification has been found to predict more benevolent attitudes toward outgroups (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). In the present study, it is possible that our PRC Chinese participants were generally inclined toward the more secure variety of ingroup identification, which suppresses the need for defensive identification patterns that derogate the outgroup. Future research testing the RIM and RDIM among immigrant minorities should test how different forms of ingroup (dis)identification stem from perceived discrimination.

Importantly, beyond testing the RIM/RIDM, we found that these indirect effects of online discrimination via ingroup and outgroup identification were qualified by a significant interaction with intergroup mobility. For PRC Chinese participants who perceived fewer opportunities to forge relationships with Singaporeans (i.e., low mobility perceptions), we observed the expected rejection-disidentification pattern—discrimination related to less identification with the host society, which, in turn, predicted more negative intergroup attitudes. On the other hand, for those who perceived more opportunities for intergroup relations (i.e., high mobility perceptions), more frequent discrimination related to greater identification with the host society, which facilitated more positive intergroup attitudes. Our results thus provide initial evidence for the role of intergroup mobility as a protective mechanism against identity threats, precluding the need for minority ingroup members to defensively distance themselves from a higher-status group. Instead, it could potentially motivate greater attention to identity cues or categories that bridge intergroup divides.

This study contributes to a nascent body of research on how relational norms at an intergroup level could influence how low-status group members respond to identity-based rejection. Prior studies linking relational mobility to rejection sensitivity have only investigated reactions to rejection at an interpersonal level (Lou & Li, 2017; Sato et al., 2014), without considering the potentially divergent intragroup and intergroup opportunities for relationship formation. Earlier work on group permeability also operationalized permeability narrowly as the potential to change group membership and/or status (Armenta et al., 2017; Ellemers et al., 1988; 1990). Though relevant, this operationalization does not specifically capture perceptions of social norms between groups that emerge in public life. This study provides early evidence to demonstrate how perceived opportunities for intergroup relationships can measured, and how these mobility beliefs have potentially functional outcomes for majority-minority relations.

A broader implication of these findings is that perceiving discrimination against one’s group may not be consistently related to antagonism toward a high-status outgroup. Rather, these patterns may hinge on contextual considerations. This possibility is especially germane to our sample of PRC Chinese immigrants, who share ethnocultural similarities with the majority ethnic group in the Singaporean host society. Importantly, we do not discount the findings supporting the RIM and RDIM in prior work, as this study is just one piece of the puzzle with a novel sample. However, we would like to echo calls made by other identity researchers to study group processes in a way that moves beyond rigid social categories and accounts for socio-historical context and intersectional identities (e.g., Cikara et al., 2022; Lei et al., 2023; Vollhardt et al., 2021). Intergroup contexts like the one in the present study—where ingroup and outgroup distinctions may be complex or dynamic—are understudied, yet important contexts that invite a more nuanced investigation into mechanisms and boundary conditions for existing theory (see Cikara et al., 2022). For example, follow-up research on the RIM/RIDM in Singapore could explore how perceptions of discrimination along one stigmatized dimension (e.g., differences in nationality) might motivate identification with an outgroup based on a shared, less threatened dimension (e.g., similarities in Chinese culture). Looking at the intersections of different identity dimensions may help to explain the seemingly inconsistent associations between online perceived discrimination, ingroup vs. outgroup identification, and intergroup attitudes.

Despite the promising implications of this work, this study was not without its limitations. As this study employed a cross-sectional design, we are unable to draw firm conclusions about the causal pathways underlying the relationships between online perceived discrimination, intergroup mobility, ingroup vs. outgroup identification, and intergroup attitudes. Nonetheless, the role of perceived discrimination as an antecedent for group-based outcomes has been heavily substantiated in the literature (see Schmitt et al., 2014),
and we have strong theoretical reasons to assume that the experience of discrimination motivates how people connect with their social groups. Follow-up longitudinal research should test how perceptions of online discrimination relate to identification patterns and attitudes across time. In addition, future studies could attempt to experimentally manipulate the perceived frequency of online discrimination and intergroup mobility to observe their downstream effects on intergroup attitudes.

As many of the associations found among variables in the present study contradicted prior work, it is possible that some of the variance in our results could be due to noise in the data collection process. Given that we wanted to target a niche, stratified sample during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was important for us to use a panel aggregator like Qualtrics to help us source our data. Some studies have found that panel aggregators may produce lower data quality than crowdsourced survey platforms like Prolific Academic and CloudResearch (Douglas et al., 2023; Peer et al., 2021). In addition, the decision to remove reverse-coded items among our key variables could have enabled acquiescent responding, although some perspectives argue that reverse-coded items do not reduce response bias (see van Sonderen et al., 2013). We could not completely rule out these possibilities, but prior to confirming the final sample, the authors requested replacements for data points that showed clear evidence of speeding or straightlining. Furthermore, the fact that we found moderated effects of intergroup mobility on ingroup and outgroup identification, and that not all simple slopes were uniformly positive (i.e., the association between online perceived discrimination and outgroup identification was negative among low-mobility participants), suggests that our core results are not heavily driven by respondent inattention.

On a contextual level, the immigrant sample of PRC Chinese chosen for this study was unique due to their ethnic commonality with the host society majority, so results likely do not generalize to other immigrant groups who experience discrimination on multiple dimensions. Within the immigrant-heavy context of Singapore, this line of research would benefit from follow-up studies comparing multiple immigrant groups’ experiences. For immigrants from India, who do not share many identity overlaps with the Singaporean Chinese majority, we may see more evidence of traditional RIM/RIDM patterns that favor ingroup over outgroup attachment in response to online discrimination. Nonetheless, these patterns should still depend on immigrants’ variability in intergroup mobility perceptions. A comparison of the RIM/RIDM models across migrant communities (similar to what Bobowik et al., 2017 did across Europe) would offer a strong test of our assumptions about the importance of intergroup context within the same host society.

Relatedly, though we focused on the role of intergroup mobility perceptions in shaping the minority group perspective, relationship formation is a two-way street. Future research could not only compare levels of perceived intergroup mobility between PRC Chinese immigrants and Singaporean citizens, but could also examine how intergroup mobility perceptions among the Singaporean majority could motivate positive attitudes and allyship action intentions to uplift stigmatized migrants. Outcomes for acculturation are shaped not only by migrants’ own perceptions and actions, but also by high-status majority groups, who may wield a greater influence in bridging intergroup divides at a societal level.

To better understand how the construct of intergroup mobility stands in conversation with the relational mobility literature, future research could also systematically compare the effects of relational mobility with intergroup mobility on how people respond to group-based identity threats. Though it has rarely been applied to address intergroup relations, relational mobility has been found to positively moderate the effect of intergroup perspective-taking on prejudice reduction in Singapore (Wang et al., 2018), and the motivations behind ingroup favoritism may vary across cultures that assign different levels of importance to relational norms (Yuki & Takemura, 2013). Given that relational norms could vary depending on salient group memberships, we would expect intergroup mobility to be the strongest predictor of divergent patterns of group identification, yet relational mobility may occupy a more distal role as a broader, socio-ecological factor.

In sum, the present study offers preliminary evidence for a contextual boundary condition to rejection-identification (RIM) and rejection-disidentification (RIDM) associations among immigrant minorities in an understudied cultural context. Results from this work suggest that intergroup mobility beliefs could serve an adaptive, motivational function for minoritized immigrants. Instead of feeling defeated by discriminatory episodes, immigrants who perceive greater intergroup mobility may be more adamant in remedying these tensions by striving to increase affiliation with their host society. Without these beliefs in mobility, discriminated group members feeling defeated by discriminatory episodes, immigrants who perceive greater intergroup mobility may be more adamant in remedying positive moderate the effect of intergroup perspective-taking on prejudice reduction in Singapore (Wang et al., 2018), and the variance in our results could be due to noise in the data collection process. Given that we wanted to target a niche, stratified sample during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was important for us to use a panel aggregator like Qualtrics to help us source our data. Some studies have found that panel aggregators may produce lower data quality than crowdsourced survey platforms like Prolific Academic and CloudResearch (Douglas et al., 2023; Peer et al., 2021). In addition, the decision to remove reverse-coded items among our key variables could have enabled acquiescent responding, although some perspectives argue that reverse-coded items do not reduce response bias (see van Sonderen et al., 2013). We could not completely rule out these possibilities, but prior to confirming the final sample, the authors requested replacements for data points that showed clear evidence of speeding or straightlining. Furthermore, the fact that we found moderated effects of intergroup mobility on ingroup and outgroup identification, and that not all simple slopes were uniformly positive (i.e., the association between online perceived discrimination and outgroup identification was negative among low-mobility participants), suggests that our core results are not heavily driven by respondent inattention.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Arun Chib:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Mengxuan Cai:** Data curation, Project administration, Visualization. **Gabrielle C Ibasco:** Formal analysis, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Saifuddin Ahmed:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft.
Declarations of Competing Interest

None.

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