

“United We Stand, Divided We Fall”! The Protective Function of Self-Stereotyping for Stigmatised Members’ Psychological Well-Being

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Self-stereotyping is a process by which people who belong to a stigmatised social group tend to describe themselves more with both positive and negative stereotypical personality traits compared to traits that are irrelevant to the ingroup stereotype. A study is presented that shows how self-stereotyping serves to maintain psychological well-being among Southern Italian participants who suffer from an historical social stigma. Following the rejection-identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), perceptions of prejudice are directly negatively linked with well-being, but are compensated for via increased identification with the minority group that has a positive impact on psychological well-being. In the present study we propose that the compensatory role of ingroup identification on well-being is completely mediated by minority members’ tendency to self-stereotype. A structural equation analysis provided support for this hypothesis. The present results highlight the importance of the self-stereotyping process in maintaining psychological well-being for members of low-status groups.

L’auto stéréotypie est un processus par lequel des individus appartenant à un groupe social stigmatisé tendent à se décrire plus avec des traits de personnalité stéréotypés positifs et négatifs qu’avec des traits ne correspondant pas au stéréotype de l’in group. La présente étude montre comment l’auto stéréotypie sert à maintenir un bien-être psychologique chez des sujets italiens du sud qui souffrent d’un stigmate social historique. Selon le modèle de l’identification-rejet (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), certaines perceptions du préjugé sont directement et négativement liées au bien-être mais sont compensées par une identification accrue au groupe minoritaire qui a un impact positif sur le bien-être psychologique. Dans la présente étude nous proposons l’hypothèse suivante: le rôle compensatoire de l’identification à l’in group sur le bien-être est complètement lié à la tendance à l’auto-stéréotype des membres du groupe minoritaire. L’utilisation du modèle d’équation structurelle confirme cette hypothèse. Les résultats soulignent l’importance du processus d’auto-stéréotype dans le maintien du bien-être psychologique des membres de groupe de faible statut.

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INTRODUCTION

One is born Black, female, or as a Southern Italian; one cannot choose to be Black, female, or a Southerner. In general, people tend to avoid negative events, but being a member of a stigmatised group is not always under one's control. The assumption in the present work is that self-stereotyping is one of the strategies that stigmatised members can adopt to cope with the threat of their ingroup membership. Several studies on self-stereotyping (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Simon & Hamilton, 1994; Simon, Hadstedt, & Aufderheide, 1997; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997; Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995; Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996; Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002; Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, Crisp, & Redersdorff, 2006) have shown the specificity of this process for disadvantaged group members relative to privileged groups. Using different measures of self-stereotyping, in terms of self-description (Hogg & Turner, 1987), self-typicality (Simon et al., 1997), self-evaluation (Pickett et al., 2002), or self-construal (Guimond et al., 2006), previous research has generally shown that people belonging to numerical or status minorities are more likely than majority members to ascribe stereotypic characteristics to the self. Our self-stereotyping measure indexed the extent to which people attributed relevant group characteristics, both positive and negative, to the self and the ingroup (Latrofa, 2008). Using this measure, we tested the hypothesis that self-stereotyping has a protective function for stigmatised members and has the capacity to enhance their psychological well-being.

Coping with Discrimination: The Rejection-Identification Model

Independently of research on self-stereotyping, several studies in social psychology have shown that one's membership in a stigmatised group can make an important contribution to psychological well-being. Schmitt and Branscombe (2002) reviewed several lines of research showing a negative effect of stigma consciousness on psychological well-being. Numerous studies clearly show that the perception that one is a victim of prejudice undermines both physical and mental health (for a recent review see Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). It increases negative affect (e.g. Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998), depression (e.g. McCoy & Major, 2003), anxiety (e.g. Baumeister & Tice, 1990), and diminishes one's life satisfaction (e.g. Cozzarelli & Karafa, 1998). Moreover, research shows that problems of psychological and physical health are more common in disadvantaged groups such as women (e.g. Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002), African-Americans (e.g. Branscombe & al., 1999), lesbians and gays (e.g. Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999). Schmitt and Branscombe (2002) argue

that for stigmatised group members attributions to prejudice may painfully affect internal aspects of the self, so that, when individuals are aware of their negative ingroup stigma, this awareness has a negative impact on their psychological well-being.

According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and several empirical findings (e.g. Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; McCoy & Major, 2003), to the extent that individuals feel rejected by a powerful outgroup, they are more likely to increase identification with their disadvantaged ingroup. The devalued perception of the ingroup, paradoxically, leads individuals to favour and protect the unity of the disadvantaged ingroup (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). The apparent paradox disappears when individuals realise that they have no prospect of being accepted by the advantaged outgroup. As a consequence, identifying with the devalued ingroup becomes a strategy with which they restore their need to feel accepted. In other words, when rejected by a privileged outgroup, the motivation to identify with the ingroup, even though it is disadvantaged, can be conceptualised as a compensating strategy that satisfies a need to feel accepted.

In line with this reasoning, Branscombe et al. (1999) demonstrated that perceived discrimination against an ingroup increases individuals' level of identification with that stigmatised group and compensates for the negative effect that the perception of discrimination has on psychological well-being. This "rejection-identification" hypothesis was tested in a sample of African Americans. The researchers found that perceptions of discrimination had a negative and direct effect on participants' subjective well-being. At the same time, the more participants perceived discrimination towards their group, the more they identified with it. Identification, in turn, was positively related to psychological well-being. As such, ingroup identification was shown to be an efficient strategy with which to protect the self from the negative consequences of social stigma.

More recently, Schmitt et al. (2002) provided another empirical test that assessed the importance of ingroup identification as a mechanism for protecting one's psychological well-being from the negative effects of discrimination. In this case, the rejection-identification model was tested for both a high-status (i.e. men) and a low-status group (i.e. women). The data clearly showed that perceptions of discrimination had a negative effect on the well-being of female participants but had no effect at all on the psychological well-being of males. Moreover, the more women perceived discrimination, the higher their identification with their ingroup, leading again to increments in psychological well-being. As with African Americans (Branscombe et al., 1999), ingroup identification was thereby shown to help disadvantaged group members defend their subjective well-being from the

negative consequences of being a member of a stigmatised group. Importantly, the male participants did not show any of these compensating reactions, suggesting that they did not feel threatened in the first place or that ingroup identification plays another role for dominant groups.

Starting from the rejection-identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999), we hypothesise that members of stigmatised groups cope with the negative effects of discrimination, not only by increasing ingroup identification (as proposed by Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt et al., 2002), but also (and especially) by ascribing ingroup stereotypical features to their self-image. In other words, the concept of self-stereotyping will be added to the rejection-identification model and introduced as a necessary variable for explaining the way in which stigmatised group members deal with the negative effect of their group membership on psychological well-being.

Ingroup Identification and Self-Stereotyping

Analysing the relations between the self and the ingroup, both Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) propose that the group and the individual are intrinsically connected so that one cannot study people's self-construal independently or separately from their social group. According to SIT, people represent part of their self-concept in terms of a positive social identity. Such identification reflects an individual's positive feelings towards their ingroup and their self-perception (e.g. Ellemers et al., 2002; Spears et al., 1997; Leach, Van Zomeren, Zebel, Vliek, Pennekamp, Doosje, & Ouwerkerk, in press). Expanding upon SIT, SCT considers how individuals' social identity may also result in a specific perception of the self and various social behaviours, such as depersonalisation and ingroup favouritism. According to SCT, categorisation as a group member necessarily implies the depersonalisation of the self. This process has been defined in terms of an increased perception of the self as an interchangeable exemplar of a certain social group, at the same time losing one's perception of oneself as a unique person. Following this line of reasoning, as a consequence of the depersonalisation process, the representation of the self will be based mainly on the representation of the prototypical ingroup member—a phenomenon that is widely known in the literature as self-stereotyping.

Consistent both with SIT and SCT, and specifically in the realm of stigmatised social groups, previous research has shown that higher levels of ingroup identification are related to higher levels of self-stereotyping (Latrofa, 2008; Spears et al., 1997, Study 1 and 2; Pickett et al., 2002, Study 2). In other words, higher levels of identification with the minority ingroup have been associated with stronger predispositions to describe oneself in terms of the stereotypical attributes of the stigmatised ingroup.

For the present analysis, however, it is important to differentiate the roles of ingroup identification and self-stereotyping. While ingroup identification mostly reflects the degree to which one likes or is committed to one's group, the process of self-stereotyping concerns the definition of the self in terms of typical ingroup features. According to SIT, ingroup identification reflects the positive feelings of the individual towards one's group membership. Such positive affiliation can be expressed both in terms of commitment (e.g. "I like my group") or in terms of the importance or centrality of one's group membership to self-definition (e.g. "Being a member of this group is important to me"). These aspects of identification have been differentiated in previous research (e.g. see Cameron, 2004; Leach et al., in press) and are investigated in the present study. According to SCT, on the other hand, self-stereotyping reflects the perception and representation of the self in terms of positive and negative ingroup stereotypes. When measuring self-stereotyping, one accesses the content of one's identity in terms of ingroup stereotypes. Thus, although these two processes are intrinsically related, it is possible to argue that identification mainly expresses the strength of the positive affiliation between the self and the ingroup, while self-stereotyping reflects the extent to which individuals assign the same stereotypical features, both positive and negative, to both the ingroup and the self (Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996).

We propose that both ingroup identification and self-stereotyping are important in order to compensate for negative outcomes associated with membership of a stigmatised group. Specifically, we suggest that individuals' perceptions of discrimination will increase the need to feel socially accepted by boosting their identification with their stigmatised ingroup. This, in turn, motivates participants to rebuild their own self-view on the basis of the stereotypical dimensions of the ingroup (self-stereotyping). Accordingly, a novel feature of the present study is its hypothesis that the compensatory role of ingroup identification on well-being is completely mediated by minority members' tendency to self-stereotype (see Figure 1). That is, the negative consequences of perceptions of discrimination for stigmatised group members are buffered not only by affiliation with the ingroup, but also (and especially) by affirmation of one's identity in terms of both positive and negative stereotypical traits.

The Present Study

Following this rationale, we examined a sample of Southern Italians—a group that suffers from an historical stigma. Specifically, Southern Italians are considered to be a low economic-social status group compared to Northern Italians. It is important to note that Southern Italians generally perceive their disadvantaged position as illegitimate. As shown in Figure 1,

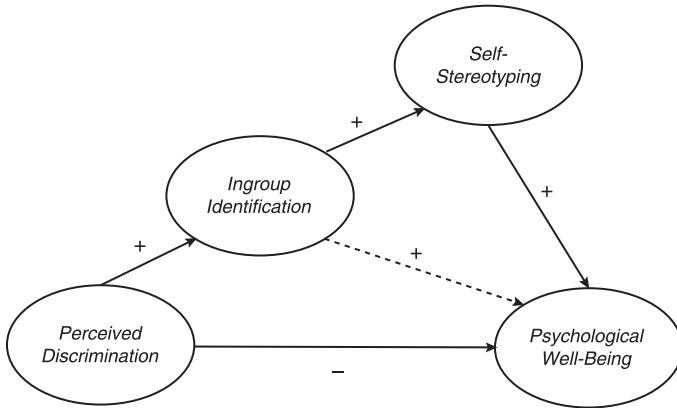


FIGURE 1. Links between the main variables investigated in our model on the role of self-stereotyping on well-being.

we predict that Southern Italians' perception of personal discrimination would have a negative impact on their psychological well-being. Moreover, we expect that participants who perceive themselves to be victims of discrimination will identify more strongly with their ingroup and will more likely describe themselves with both positive and negative ingroup stereotypes. Finally we hypothesise that not only participants' level of identification, but especially their level of self-stereotyping, should increase their psychological well-being. In this way, the present study tests the hypothesis that although perceptions of personal discrimination have negative consequences for stigmatised group members, these perceptions instigate a compensatory process through identification and self-stereotyping that increases their well-being.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and sixty-seven Southern Italians (86 men, 81 women) participated in this study. Participants were final year high school students who were recruited from the same high school in a big city in the south of Italy. The mean age of the sample was 19 years. All participants identified as Southerners. A large majority (97.6%) of the participants were born in the South of Italy, 94.3 per cent had a Southern father and 92.2 per cent had a Southern mother. Almost all participants had resided all their lives in the South of Italy (95.2%).

Procedure

Within each class, participants were asked to take part in research on “Self-perception and group membership”. At the beginning of each session, the experimenter (who was from the South of Italy herself) gave general instructions to the students to complete the questionnaire. The order of the measures was randomised within each questionnaire, except for the Identification Scale that was always presented on the first page and the demographic items (sex, age, place of birth, mother’s place of birth, father’s place of birth, profession) that always appeared on the last page.

Measures

Perception of Discrimination. Participants expressed their level of agreement on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 (“*totally disagree*” to “*totally agree*”). In order to distinguish Personal and Group Discrimination we submitted the 10 items¹ of the Perceived Discrimination Scale to a factor analysis with an oblimin rotation. All but two items had high to moderately high loadings on the first factor in the non-rotated factor solution. These two items clearly loaded on one factor after rotation and consisted of the personal discrimination items. The other two factors that emerged comprised two different aspects of the group discrimination scale (i.e. ingroup disadvantage and outgroup privilege).

Personal Discrimination. One factor consisted of two items and was related to participants’ perception of being personally discriminated against as a member of the Southern Group (e.g. “I have personally been a victim of prejudice because I am a Southerner”) (inter-item $r = .41$).

Group Discrimination. The other two factors included the remaining eight items that were all associated with the general perception of discrimination against the Southern group as a whole. Specifically, four of these items loaded on one factor clearly linked to the ingroup disadvantages (e.g. “Southerners as a group have usually been discriminated against”), whereas the other four items loaded on the other factor more connected to outgroup privileges (e.g. “There are privileges that only Northerners have had and that they would not have received if they had been Southerners”). The index of *Ingroup Disadvantages* was calculated averaging these four items

¹ These 10 items were embedded in a larger set of items that asked participants about concrete differences between the North and the South of Italy (e.g. “Health care is generally better in the North than in the South”, “People from the South live in a less secure environment than those living in the North”).

($\alpha = .70$); as for the index of *Outgroup Privileges* we averaged just two ($\alpha = .68$) of the initial four items that provided the best internal reliability for the construct of outgroup privileges.

Ingroup Identification. Participants' level of identification with their ingroup was assessed using five items. Two items measured participants' sense of *Commitment* to the ingroup ("How much do you feel part of the South of Italy?", "How proud are you to be a Southern Italian?"). The three remaining items instead indicated the *Centrality* of participants' group membership ("Is being a Southern Italian a central aspect of yourself?", "How much does being a Southern Italian affect your way of being and thinking?", "Is being a Southern Italian an important part of your self-representation?"). A factor analysis with an oblimin rotation revealed two factors confirming the proposed split of the identification scale into two factors: one included the two items of commitment, and the second factor comprised the three items of centrality. Both subscales were reliable (α 's = .76 and .83, respectively) and all items were judged on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7 ("not at all" to "very much").

Self-Stereotyping. As in previous research (Latrofa, 2008), self-stereotyping was defined as the similarity between the self and the ingroup along stereotypical dimensions. Participants rated both the self and their southern ingroup on 16 personality traits of which four were stereotypical-positive (friendly, warm, expansive, generous), four were stereotypical-negative (noisy, quarrelsome, superstitious, revengeful), four were counter-stereotypical-positive (concrete, independent, organised, progressive) and four were counter-stereotypical-negative (closed, unfriendly, materialistic, stressed). The list of traits was completed with four group-irrelevant filler traits including both positive and negative ones. Participants always rated the self first followed by the ingroup. They assessed how typical each trait was of the self/ingroup on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 ("very atypical" to "very typical"). The self-stereotyping indices were obtained by calculating within-participants correlations between self and ingroup ratings separately on positive stereotype-relevant traits (*Positive Traits*) and negative stereotype-relevant traits (*Negative Traits*). As such, the self-stereotyping index included both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical traits leaving out the group-irrelevant ones. Indeed, as we used a similarity index, we expected a similar correlation between self and ingroup ratings both on stereotypical (the more applicable to the self the more applicable to the ingroup) and on counter-stereotypical traits (the less applicable to the self the less applicable to the ingroup). To increase the normality of the distribution of correlations, both correlational indexes were transformed into *Z* Fisher values before they were entered in the analysis.

Finally, participants were asked to rate how positive (vs. negative) each of the 20 personality traits was on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“*very negative*”) to 7 (“*very positive*”).²

Psychological Well-Being. Participants’ psychological well-being was assessed using six related indices:

Positive Affect. Participants were asked to assess how often they feel six positive emotions (optimistic, glad, proud, happy, satisfied, and enthusiastic; Schmitt et al., 2002). The response scale ranged from 1 to 7 (“*almost never*” to “*almost always*”) and showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$).

Negative Affect. Similarly, participants were asked to indicate how often they experienced four negative emotions (depressed, unhappy, sad, and worn-out; Branscombe et al., 1999). As with positive affect, the scale ranged from 1 to 7 (“*almost never*” to “*almost always*”) and showed good reliability ($\alpha = .79$).

Inclusion. Following Rook (1987), inclusion was measured using four items taken from the UCLA Short-Form Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). Participants were asked how frequently they felt: “Apart from others”, “In tune with others”, “Accepted by others”, and how often “They could find a friend when they wanted one”. The scale ranged from 1 to 7 (“*almost never*” to “*almost always*”) and showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = .79$). Positive and Negative Affect, and the Inclusion items were always presented on the same page.

Self-Esteem. The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory was used. Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 (“*strongly disagree*” to “*strongly agree*”) ($\alpha = .80$).

Life Satisfaction. Participants indicated their agreement on 7-point scales (1, “*strongly disagree*” to 7, “*strongly agree*”) to three items ($\alpha = .83$) (“I am pleased with my accomplishment in life”, “Although some parts of my life could be improved, overall, I have no complaints”, “I am satisfied with my life”; Schmitt et al., 2002).

Depression. We used the CES-D Scale (The Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; Radloff, 1977; see Fava, 1981, for the Italian

² Analyses on the valence ratings confirm that participants in the present experiment perceived both the positive and the negative traits as was originally intended.

version). Participants were asked to rate how often they felt or found themselves in each of the 20 emotional situations (e.g. "I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me", "I thought my life had been a failure", "My sleep was restless", "I had crying spells", "I felt that people dislike me") during the last 7 days ($\alpha = .89$). The response scale ranged from 1 ("never or almost never", "less than 1 day") to 4 ("often or always", "5-7 days").

Additional Measures Verifying Participants' Ingroup Perceptions. Among the Perceived Discrimination items, we added two items related to perceptions of the *illegitimacy* of differences between the South and the North of Italy ("The differences in terms of social status between the South and the North are justifiable" (reverse coded), "The differences in terms of social status between the South and the North are illegitimate") (inter-item $r = .48$).

Immediately following the identification items, two items measured participants' perception of their own group's *Status* ("In general, how often does Italian society refer to the Southern Italians as a low-status group?", "How much do you personally consider the Southern Italians as a low-status group?").

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

For each of the subscales we report the relative means and standard deviations as shown in Table 1. As predicted, participants acknowledged that Italian society at large treats Southern Italians as a low-status group ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.19$) and in general consider this status difference to be illegitimate ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 1.55$). In contrast, they personally do not consider their own ingroup to be a low-status group ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.38$).

Using a series of regression analyses, we assessed whether each subscale of psychological well-being could be predicted by personal discrimination, ingroup identification, and self-stereotyping. Personal discrimination tended to predict well-being negatively as far as positive affect ($\beta = -.01$, ns), inclusion ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .07$), and self-esteem ($\beta = -.04$, ns) were concerned. In the case of life satisfaction ($\beta = -.18$, $p = .02$), negative affect ($\beta = .15$, $p = .05$), and depression ($\beta = .21$, $p = .007$), this tendency became significant. Although personal discrimination was not always a significant predictor of each subscale of psychological well-being, overall the regression equations suggest that the higher the level of perceived discrimination at the personal level, the lower the level of reported psychological well-being for participants in our sample. On the other hand, the level of identification with the ingroup did not predict well-being: positive affect ($\beta = .04$, ns), inclusion ($\beta = .08$, ns), self-esteem ($\beta = -.07$, ns), life satisfaction ($\beta = .13$, ns), negative

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for all Measures

	M	SD
Group status		
Society	5.20	1.19
Personally	2.50	1.38
Illegitimacy	5.78	1.55
Perceived discrimination		
Personal	2.87	1.69
Group		
Ingroup disadvantage	4.37	1.18
Outgroup privilege	4.79	1.45
Ingroup identification		
Commitment	4.93	1.37
Centrality	3.01	1.41
Self-stereotyping		
Positive Traits	.07	.55
Negative Traits	.31	.62
Psychological well-being		
Positive affect	4.93	1.01
Negative affect	3.45	1.14
Inclusion	5.27	1.15
Self-esteem	3.18	.47
Life satisfaction	5.17	1.25
Depression	1.81	.50

affect ($\beta = -.01$, ns), and depression ($\beta = -.08$, ns). Finally, the level of self-stereotyping was always a significant predictor of each measure of well-being, showing a positive link with positive affect ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$), inclusion ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$), self-esteem ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), and life satisfaction ($\beta = .17$, $p = .03$), and a consistent negative relationship with both negative affect ($\beta = -.23$, $p = .003$) and depression ($\beta = -.18$, $p = .02$). In other words, higher levels of self-stereotyping were always associated with higher levels of psychological well-being. We entered the three predictor variables simultaneously for each regression equation on the following criteria: positive affect $F(3, 161) = 8.31$, $p = .004$, adj. $R^2 = .12$; negative affect $F(3, 161) = 4.60$, $p = .004$, adj. $R^2 = .06$; inclusion $F(3, 161) = 9.92$, $p = .002$, adj. $R^2 = .14$; life satisfaction $F(3, 160) = 4.60$, $p = .004$, adj. $R^2 = .06$; self-esteem $F(3, 161) = 4.68$, $p = .004$, adj. $R^2 = .06$; and depression $F(3, 161) = 4.99$, $p = .002$, adj. $R^2 = .07$. In most cases, adding the interaction terms in the regression equations did not result in a significant increment in R^2 . Only when predicting self-esteem did the interaction between personal discrimination and self-stereotyping result in a significant increase in explained variance ($R^2_{change} = .032$, $p = .02$).

Structural Equation Model Analysis

We tested relationships among the measured variables with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis using LISREL, Version 8.71 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). SEM produces several fit indexes that determine the degree to which the specified model fits the sample data. For each model, we present five fit indices that are also reported in previous studies on the same issue (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt et al., 2002): the chi-square (χ^2) goodness-of-fit index that evaluates the degree of difference between the reproduced covariance matrix and the observed covariance matrix; the ratio χ^2/df (numbers of degree of freedom associated with the χ^2) as a more reliable fit index; the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). Sometimes, even in the presence of good fit indices, the tested model contained paths that did not reach statistical significance; therefore, for each model we also reported the significance of the hypothesised paths. Indicative in this regard are the correlations between the measured variables as shown in Table 2.

Personal Discrimination: Ingroup Identification vs. Self-Stereotyping. First, considering the low correlation between personal and group discrimination ($r = .10$, ns) and previous results by Bourguignon, Seron, Yzerbyt, and Herman (2006) that underlined the specific role of perceptions of personal but not group discrimination in the rejection-identification model,

TABLE 2
Correlations between the Measured Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Perceived discrimination													
1. Personal	–												
2. Ingroup disadvantage	.20	–											
3. Outgroup privilege	-.01	.33	–										
Ingroup identification													
4. Commitment	.13	.00	-.14	–									
5. Centrality	.16	.02	-.02	.44	–								
Self-stereotyping													
6. Positive traits	-.03	-.03	-.15	.19	.18	–							
7. Negative traits	.01	.07	-.01	.19	.06	.34	–						
Psychological well-being													
8. Positive affect	-.01	-.09	-.05	.21	.03	.21	.39	–					
9. Negative affect	.15	.21	.08	-.13	.05	-.18	-.22	-.58	–				
10. Inclusion	-.14	-.08	.03	.18	.08	.37	.23	.54	-.46	–			
11. Life satisfaction	-.16	-.11	.01	.19	.07	.05	.27	.66	-.53	.45	–		
12. Self-esteem	-.07	-.03	-.01	.11	-.09	.17	.29	.72	-.58	.54	.63	–	
13. Depression	.21	.18	.07	-.14	-.02	-.15	-.16	-.55	.66	-.46	-.49	-.61	–

the present analysis focused only on participants' perception of their personal experience of discrimination. An alternative model to the one reported below, that focused on perceptions of group discrimination only, showed a significant negative path between group discrimination and psychological well-being. In line with Bourguignon et al. (2006), in this model no evidence was found for the compensatory role of identification since group discrimination was not linked with identification. Thus, consistent with the rejection-identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999), we proposed that perceived discrimination at the individual level would exert a direct and negative effect on personal well-being. However, in contrast to the rejection-identification model, we expected that the positive role of ingroup identification on psychological well-being would be completely mediated by minority members' tendency to stereotype themselves.

To test these predictions, we specified a model entering four latent factors. The first latent factor of personal discrimination was identified by the two items that emerged from the factor analysis. Second, both the commitment index and the centrality index loaded on the ingroup identification latent factor. The self-stereotyping latent factor was specified by the two correlational indexes between self and ingroup ratings, one including only the *positive traits* and the other the *negative traits*. Finally, all six subscales assessing the level of psychological well-being in our sample (*positive affect*, *negative affect*, *inclusion*, *self-esteem*, *life satisfaction*, and *depression*) loaded on the fourth latent factor that was named individual psychological well-being. Initial analysis indicated that the fit of the model would increase, allowing the errors of the negative affect and the depression subscales to co-vary. Adding this path makes sense knowing that the positive construct of psychological well-being cannot account for all the covariance between these two negative subscales. Hence, we allowed the errors associated with the latter two variables to correlate.

As expected, the hypothesised model fitted the sample data well, $\chi^2(49, N = 167) = 70.24, p = .02$, the ratio $\chi^2/df = 1.43$, NNFI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05. All of the estimated parameters were in a direction consistent with our predictions (see Figure 2). Specifically, perceived discrimination at the personal level negatively affected the psychological well-being of members of a stigmatised group. Actually this path was not statistically significant; however, we presume that this was due to the generally low level of perceived personal discrimination ($M = 2.83$) in our sample. A large majority of participants (95.2%) had resided all their young lives in the South of Italy, and for this reason there had been very few occasions on which they had encountered discriminatory behaviour against themselves as Southern Italians. Notwithstanding the low level of perceived personal discrimination in our sample, this variable tends to have a negative impact on participants' psychological well-being.

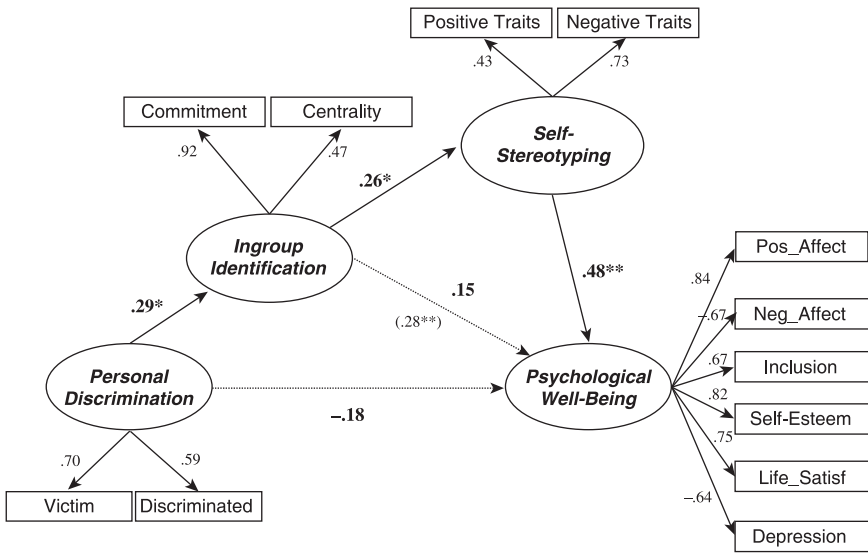


FIGURE 2. Structural Equation Model assessing both the direct and indirect effect of personal discrimination on psychological well-being of minority members. The estimated paths weights are standardised.
 * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Perceiving oneself to be discriminated against at the personal level, on the other hand, significantly predicted higher levels of identification with the stigmatised group. In addition, the more participants identified with the ingroup, the more they tended to stereotype themselves. Consequently, the more people self-stereotyped, the higher their psychological well-being. Finally, in this model the positive effect of ingroup identification on well-being (reported between parentheses in Figure 2), that supports the rejection-identification model, disappeared when controlling for self-stereotyping. In other words, when personally discriminated against, the indirect and positive role of ingroup identification on psychological well-being is fully mediated by minority members' tendency to stereotype themselves.

Personal Discrimination: The Central Role of Self-Stereotyping. To further examine the central role of self-stereotyping, over the ingroup identification, in compensating for the direct negative effect of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being, we tested three alternative models entering the same four latent factors as in the original model, but removing some paths. As such, the following three alternative models are nested within the original model allowing calculation of the χ^2 difference test between each

of the alternative models and the original model. If the χ^2_{diff} is significant, the null hypothesis of equal fit for both models will be rejected and the original model should be considered as the best of the two (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Muller, 2003).

First, we tested a modified version of the previously described model in which we removed the path from self-stereotyping to psychological well-being. The fit indices of this model clearly drop, with most of them falling below the value of acceptable fit, $\chi^2(50, N = 167) = 85.47, p = .001$, the ratio $\chi^2/df = 1.71$, NNFI = .94, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07. Moreover, the chi-square difference between this alternative and the original model, $\chi^2_{diff}(1, N = 167) = 15.23, p < .001$, was significant, indicating that the original model has better fit. In other words, the effect of self-stereotyping on psychological well-being, even though its removal makes the path from ingroup identification on well-being significant and positive, is fundamental in itself to fit the observed data well. Conversely, fixing the link between ingroup identification and psychological well-being to zero in the original model produced little change in the fit indices, $\chi^2(50, N = 167) = 71.61, p = .02$, the ratio $\chi^2/df = 1.43$, NNFI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05, and did not change the fit significantly compared to the original model, $\chi^2_{diff}(1, N = 167) = 1.37, ns$. These alternative models clearly show the central role of self-stereotyping in compensating the direct negative effect of personal discrimination on psychological well-being.

An alternative explanation for the obtained pattern of results may be that identification and self-stereotyping are related concepts and, as such, their role could easily be reversed. From this point of view, increments in perceptions of personal discrimination would predict self-stereotyping which in turn would result in heightened ingroup identification and well-being. To verify this possibility, a second alternative model was tested that swapped the causal relation between self-stereotyping and ingroup identification, creating a direct path between personal discrimination and self-stereotyping and between ingroup identification and well-being. Compared to the original model, this second alternative model has an unacceptably low fit, $\chi^2(51, N = 167) = 91.09, p < .001$, the ratio $\chi^2/df = 1.79$, NNFI = .93, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .07. In addition, the original model fit the data significantly better, $\chi^2_{diff}(2, N = 167) = 20.86, p < .001$. Accordingly, we ruled out the possibility of a direct effect of personal discrimination on self-stereotyping, at the same time rejecting the alternative path from self-stereotyping to ingroup identification and well-being.

DISCUSSION

The present study showed that the perception of discrimination in stigmatised members tends to lower their level of psychological well-being, as predicted

by Branscombe and colleagues' (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt et al., 2002) rejection-identification model. Specifically, we found that Southern Italians' perception of discrimination at both the group and the personal level undermined their psychological well-being. The question of interest was then to show how this threatening condition would motivate stigmatised group members to develop strategies to cope with this social threat.

In a first step, we found that discrimination at the group level was not associated with ingroup identification. Consistent with Bourguignon et al. (2006), this indicates that identification does not play a role in compensating for the negative effect of group discrimination on individuals' psychological well-being. Accordingly, we proceeded to test the hypothesis that members of stigmatised groups cope with the negative effects of discrimination, specifically at the personal level, not only through the tendency to increase ingroup identification as proposed by the rejection-identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt et al., 2002), but especially through the ascription of ingroup stereotypical features to their self-image.

Using structural equation modelling (SEM), we tested and found support for the above prediction. On the one hand, the proposed model confirmed the rejection-identification model's hypothesis of a negative relationship between personal discrimination and psychological well-being in members of a stigmatised group and the compensatory role for identification in mitigating this negative effect. On the other hand, however, the proposed model supported the predicted central role of the self-stereotyping process in mediating the positive effect of identification on psychological well-being. The central role of self-stereotyping over the ingroup identification process in compensating for the direct negative effect of perceived personal discrimination on psychological well-being, was further supported when testing alternative causal models that were nested within the original model. Analysis of three alternative models—removing the path from self-stereotyping to psychological well-being, fixing the link between ingroup identification and psychological well-being to zero, or swapping the causal relation between self-stereotyping and ingroup identification—always significantly decreased the fit of the original model to the data.

Results of the present study make an important distinction between ingroup identification and self-stereotyping. Even if these two processes always seem to co-occur—the higher the level of identification with a stigmatised minority group, the higher the tendency to ascribe stereotypical ingroup characteristics (Spears et al., 1997; Pickett et al., 2002; Latrofa, 2008)—the present findings suggest that these two constructs may impact differently upon the self–ingroup relation. While ingroup identification concerns the degree to which one likes or invests in the ingroup, the process of self-stereotyping reflects one's self-definition as a prototypical member of the ingroup. A similar distinction is made in the recent work of Leach et al.

(in press) which proposes a hierarchical two-dimensional model of ingroup identification. These authors show that the level of satisfaction associated with being an ingroup member, the feeling of solidarity towards the ingroup, and the centrality of the ingroup for the individual, are three components that reflect one's self-investment. Separately, the perceived self-ingroup similarity (individual self-stereotyping) and homogeneity are both linked to the second dimension of self-definition. The present data show that both the identification process understood as commitment and centrality and the self-stereotyping process are indispensable in compensating the negative effects of perceived personal discrimination on well-being. Even though its direct effect on well-being disappears when self-stereotyping is included in the model, it is only through increments in ingroup identification that participants' perceived personal discrimination exerts an effect on self-stereotyping. It is important to note, however, that the present correlational model cannot be conclusive with regard to the causal relationship between ingroup identification and self-stereotyping, but the study clearly shows that in order to cope with the stigma, it is essential that stigmatised members strongly define themselves as prototypical ingroup members before they (re-)affirm their self-view on the basis of ingroup stereotypical traits (regardless of whether these traits are positive or negative).

As a consequence, the present data seem to suggest that the presence of perceived stigma against one's ingroup and the indirect compensation through identification and self-stereotyping reflects a complex phenomenon that cannot only be explained in terms of a desire to attain positive group distinctiveness or a positive self-view, as predicted by SIT (Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Indeed, our data seem to suggest that the negative aspects of the ingroup are also important and play a significant role in the formation of one's self-definition. Thus, our model suggests that self-stereotyping satisfies a need to (re)affirm one's identity as a member of a stigmatised ingroup over and above the need for a positive self-view. In line with this reasoning, a look at the correlations in Table 2 indicates that self-stereotyping along negative traits shows somewhat stronger correlations with both positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, and self-esteem than self-stereotyping along positive traits. In other words, it is at least as much the self-ascription of negative compared to positive ingroup stereotypes that makes members of stigmatised groups feel better.

The present findings may have implications for some of the work on system justification theory (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). According to this theoretical perspective, disadvantaged group members, driven by an ideological motive to justify the existing social order, internalise their inferior condition. A system justification explanation of the present data would suggest that perceiving discrimination against one's social identity

motivates the discriminated to increase their ingroup-identification and to build their self-representation along ingroup stereotypical characteristics because they tend to internalise their disadvantaged social position (including its negative connotations). As a consequence, self-stereotyping becomes a process that maintains, and almost reinforces, the negative social evaluation of the stigmatised within the pre-existing social order and can lead disadvantaged group members to refrain from engaging in social change strategies. Such an interpretation, however, may result in conflict with our data showing that self-stereotyping has a positive compensatory role on psychological well-being. Indeed, higher system justification motives and the associated internalisation process of one's inferior condition are known to be associated with decreased self-esteem, and increased depression and neuroticism for members of disadvantaged groups (Chen & Tyler, 2001; Jost & Thompson, 2000).

Consequently, our data suggest an alternative explanation. Given the strong positive relation between self-stereotyping and well-being on both positive and negative traits, an interpretation of self-stereotyping as a reactive process becomes more likely. In this sense it is possible to suggest that self-stereotyping would even motivate a group of disadvantaged people to undertake actions of social change. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) emphasises the role of cohesion within a disadvantaged group if they want to change their disadvantaged condition. Consistent with this assumption, previous research has already shown the central role of ingroup identification in predicting collective actions that aim to improve the social condition of stigmatised groups (see for a review, Wright & Tropp, 2002). More specifically, Simon, Loewy, Sturmer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier, and Spahlinger (1998) have demonstrated that beyond general collective identification with the ingroup, a distinct activist identity plays an important role in moderating the willingness of disadvantaged members to participate in collective actions. Thus, considering on the one hand the close link we demonstrated in the present work between ingroup identification and self-stereotyping, and on the other hand the evidence of self-stereotyping as a process that allows individuals to re-affirm themselves as active ingroup members, it is possible to hypothesise that the latter process can motivate stigmatised group members to undertake collective action. Future research, however, should address this link more directly and identify the conditions under which self-stereotyping may be a source for collective action and social change.

In conclusion, the present research clearly shows that for personal discrimination to have positive consequences for psychological well-being it is not sufficient for a person to like or feel close to their minority ingroup. Instead, they should actually become like the group, ascribing the ingroup's stereotype to the self. Following the principle that "*United we stand, divided*

we fall”, our model demonstrates that the best strategy for stigmatised group members to restore well-being in the context of a threatening condition comes from increasing the overlap between their self-description and that of the ingroup. In other words, the more they “become the ingroup”, the better they feel.

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