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The Language of Acceptance: Spanish Proficiency and Perceived Intragroup Rejection among
Latinos

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Abstract

The present study examines perceived acceptance from one's ingroup (i.e., intragroup acceptance) and collective self-esteem among Latinos as a function of Spanish proficiency. Using a correlational design, Study 1 demonstrates that Latinos' ($n = 53$) Spanish speaking inability is associated with lower private regard, membership, and less felt similarity to other Latinos, which was explained in part by greater perceptions of intragroup rejection. Moreover, Study 1 results were not moderated by overall Latino identification. Utilizing an experimental design, Study 2 demonstrates that Non-Spanish speaking Latinos ($n = 40$) put in a situation wherein they must disclose their inability to speak Spanish to another Latino were less likely to categorize themselves as Latinos, reported lower collective self-esteem, and reported less connectedness to other Latinos. These findings are discussed within a broader model of intragroup acceptance and identification, whereby cultural practices serve as markers of credibility that aid in felt acceptance within ethnic minority communities. Implications for acculturation are discussed.

Key words: Bilingualism, Intragroup acceptance, Latinos/Hispanics, Social Identity

The Language of Acceptance: Spanish Fluency and Intragroup Rejection among Latinos

As of 2010, the U.S. Census reports that 50.4 million Hispanic/Latinos reside in the United States. Moreover, Hispanics and Latinos accounted for 43% of the population growth in the U.S. from 2000 to 2010, indicating that Hispanics and Latinos represent one of the fastest growing racial-ethnic group in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2010). While the Latino/Hispanic population grows, the longer Hispanics and Latinos reside in the U.S., the more likely they are to lose their Spanish speaking ability via processes of acculturation (Rumbaut, Massey, & Bean, 2006). For example, 50% of the Latino and Hispanic population stop speaking Spanish fluently by the third generation and only 10% are fluent in Spanish by the fourth generation. Yet, at any given time in the U.S., the majority of Latinos (nearly 80%) speak Spanish fluently (U.S., Census, 2000). Thus, while the prototypical Latino continues to speak Spanish, as the generational gap widens and acculturation processes ensue, Latino Americans may find that they are no longer fluent in the language of first generation Latinos. What consequences does Spanish speaking inability have for perceived intragroup acceptance from fellow Latinos? The present studies examine whether Latinos' Spanish proficiency may serve as a predictor of perceived intragroup acceptance from fellow Latinos.

Most research on acceptance within minority communities has focused on outgroup rejection and discrimination of minorities by majority group members. This research finds that outgroup rejection heightens ingroup identification among minority group members (rejection-identification model; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), which may buffer self-esteem in the face of discrimination (Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006). The rejection-identification model

posits that increases in ingroup identification resulting from outgroup rejection may be strategic for low status groups such as racial minorities, as a means to bolster one's sense of belonging and acceptance (Branscombe, et al., 1999). However, little is understood about how individuals experience and cope with *intragroup rejection*, perceptions of rejection from fellow ingroup members. For example, what causes ethnic minorities to feel less accepted by their fellow ingroup members? What are the psychological consequences of intragroup rejection? The present paper will review the existing literature on intragroup acceptance and posit language fluency as a prominent indicator of perceived intragroup acceptance. To that end, we will present two studies that examine perceived intragroup rejection among Latinos based on their Spanish fluency. We propose a model of intragroup rejection whereby failure to engage in core cultural practices of the ingroup (e.g., Spanish speaking among Latinos) predicts perceptions of intragroup rejection and therefore, leads non-fluent Latinos to be less likely to connect with other Latinos and have positive regard for their ethnic minority group—factors which may reduce self-categorization as Latino.

Intragroup Acceptance

Past research suggests that feelings of intragroup rejection threaten group identification. For example, when individuals are arbitrarily assigned to groups, group members who received negative feedback from ingroup members tend to report weaker identification with their ingroup and allocate fewer resources to the ingroup (e.g., Branscombe, Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2002). Additionally, feeling respected and valued by other group members strengthens individuals' group identification and self-esteem (e.g., Smith & Tyler, 1997, Smith, Tyler, Huo, Ortiz, & Lind, 1998, Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2001, 2002). The rejection-identification model (Branscombe, et al., 1999; Postmes & Branscombe, 2002) predicts that intragroup rejection is

inversely related to group identification while intergroup rejection is positively related to group identification. Specifically, they find that perceived intragroup rejection among Black Americans predicts less Black self-categorization and identification, which in turn, predicts lower personal and race-based collective self-esteem (Postmes & Branscombe, 2002).

Research on ethnic minorities argues that intragroup rejection is likely in later generations as part of the acculturation process of assimilation wherein individuals adopt and display aspects of the dominant culture and perceive resistance from other ingroup members often of earlier generations (Castillo, Conoley, Brossart, & Quiros, 2007). Some Latinos, for example, may fear being rejected by other Latinos by seeming “too White” by doing well in academics, not speaking the Spanish language well, or having too many White friends (Castillo, 2009; Castillo et al., 2007). Similar processes appear to be at play for other minority groups who fear appearing ethnically deviant by succeeding in cross racial activities and thus, subsequently hide their achievements in these nonstereotypical domains (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). Moreover, their fears about backlash for appearing cross-racially competent (e.g., too White) may be warranted as perceivers tend to negatively evaluate targets who perform well in cross-racial tasks (e.g., White rappers; Phelan & Rudman, 2010). Moreover, perceived intragroup rejection from peers and family members has been linked to experiencing lower social support from, and greater conflict with, close family members forecasting negative implications for psychological adjustment (Castillo, et al., 2007, Castillo, 2009). Perceived intragroup rejection from family members and friends also predicts greater acculturative stress because perceived intragroup rejection tends to create competing demands from acculturation processes and interpersonal acceptance by family members (Castillo, Cano, Chen, Blucker, & Olds, 2008; Castillo et al., 2007).

Prior research on Latinos and intragroup rejection has not examined the specific practices that might cue perceptions of intragroup rejection and the subsequent distancing behaviors that minorities who fear rejection may engage in to protect themselves from these threats. The purpose of the current study is to examine whether lack of Spanish speaking ability serves as a threat to intragroup acceptance for Latinos, such that Latinos who do not speak Spanish feel more rejected by fellow Latinos, distance themselves from other Latinos and have lower collective self-esteem, which causes them to be less likely to self-categorize as Latino.

Language as Intragroup Acceptance

Broadly applied, language itself may be one avenue of smoothing interactions and therefore, achieving acceptance with others. For example, communication accommodation theory (Giles, 1973) suggests that people tend to engage in convergent linguistic patterns with liked others via speech patterns, dialects, and language choices (e.g., Street & Giles, 1982) and distance themselves from disliked others via divergent linguistic patterns (e.g., Giles, 1973; 1977). Because perceptions of similarity aid in attractiveness, mimicry in speech patterns can create better rapport between individuals in interactions (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). In addition, speaking in languages associated with one's ethnic identity is known to make one's ethnic identity more salient and thus, can be an important source of similarity that aids bonding during intraracial interactions (Yip, 2005). However, Latinos who are unable to use language as a means of fostering identification with other Latinos may have more difficulty feeling accepted by other Latinos because they do not engage in this cultural practice that is so strongly linked to their ethnic identity.

In our research, we explore whether or not having Spanish proficiency may serve as an intragroup acceptance threat among Latinos. We contend that Latinos who do not engage in the

core cultural practice of speaking Spanish may feel rejected by other Latinos. We explore the consequences of this core practice as an intragroup acceptance threat among Latinos in two studies. The first study is a correlational study demonstrating how Spanish speaking ability predicts lower Latino private regard, membership and less felt similarity to Latinos via greater perceptions of intragroup rejection. We also test whether overall level of identification moderates the effect of intragroup rejection on private regard, membership, and similarity to ensure that intragroup rejection is impactful for both those Latinos higher and lower in overall identification (Study 1). In addition, we examine whether intragroup rejection is impactful for both those high and low in Spanish proficiency to ensure that intragroup rejection operates as a threat to collective self-esteem with affective consequences (Study 1). Moreover, we examine whether generation status moderates the link between Spanish proficiency and perceived intragroup acceptance to test the generalizability of the results. Study 2 examines whether making Spanish speaking ability salient in an intragroup context causes Latinos who don't speak Spanish to report lower private regard, less connectedness to other Latinos, and less self-categorization as Latino.

Study 1

Method

Participants. Fifty-three participants were recruited from Rutgers University's Introductory Psychology Subject Pool according to subject pool guidelines based on their Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.¹ Participants who identified as Hispanic/Latino were invited to participate in a survey administered over the web in exchange for course credit. The entire sample was born in the U.S and consisted of 40 women and 13 men (M age = 19.19). Self-described generational status was as follows: 11% first generation, 70% second generation, 6%

third or more generation, and 13% did not identify as immigrant. The measures were completed in the order that they are presented below.

Measures.

Spanish speaking ability. One item asked participants to rate their Spanish speaking ability on a scale of 1 (*very little ability*) to 6 (*very high ability*). The mean response was 3.91 ($sd = 1.50$).

Intragroup rejection. This scale included the following 2 items created by the authors “I feel that I do not fit in with other Latino/Hispanics,” “I feel that I fit in with other Latino/Hispanic students,” (reverse-coded) and 2 items from the in-group rejection scale (Postmes & Branscombe, 2002): “Sometimes I feel rejected by members of my own race,” and “I often feel like I am treated better by people who are of a different race than by those who are of the same race as me.” Responses were indicated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). These items were averaged such that higher scores corresponded with higher felt rejection from the ingroup. Principal components factor analysis revealed only one factor that accounted for 64% of the variance in the items and each item loaded above .76. Scale reliability was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$). The mean response was 2.84 ($sd = 1.44$).

Collective Self-Esteem. Participants completed the race-based collective self-esteem measure developed by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). This measure consists of four subscales (private regard, membership, identification, and public regard) with four items in each subscale. Though the scale was administered in its entirety, the measures of private regard and membership scale serve as our primary measures of collective self-esteem while identification was tested as a moderator of perceived intragroup rejection effects. Public regard was not included in the analysis because it was not a part of our hypotheses. On a scale from 1 (*strongly*

disagree) to 7 (*strongly agree*), participants were asked to think about their Latino/Hispanic identity and indicate the extent to which they agreed with items about their racial identity. An example item from the identification subscale is: “The racial/ethnic group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.” Responses were averaged such that higher scores indicated greater identification ($M = 4.61$). Scale reliability was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$). An example item from the private regard subscale is: “I am glad to be part of my racial/ethnic group.” Responses were averaged such that higher scores indicated higher private regard ($M = 6.22$). Scale reliability was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$). An example item from the Membership subscale ($M = 5.39$) is: “I often feel I’m a useless member of my racial/ethnic group.” Subscale reliability was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$).

Similarity to other Latinos. Participants were asked to indicate their responses to 5 items on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*). Example items include, “Compared to other members of your ethnic group, how typically Hispanic/Latino are you?” and “How similar are you to the typical Hispanic/Latino person?” Principal components factor analysis revealed only one factor that accounted for 74% of the variance in the items with each item loading above .80. Scale reliability was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$). The mean response was 4.16 ($sd = 1.69$).

Depressive affect. Depression was assessed with the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977). The 20-item scale was anchored on a scale from 1 (rarely/none of the time) to 4 (Most or all of the time). Participants were asked about their experiences of negative affect in the last week. An example item is “I felt lonely.” Higher scores indicate higher depression ($M = 1.78$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$).

Results

Table 1 reveals that higher proficiency in Spanish was associated with less intragroup rejection ($r = -.47$), more Latino private regard (i.e., having greater pride in one's Latino heritage, $r = .51$), greater Latino membership (i.e., perceiving oneself as a more favorable member of the Latino group; $r = .60$) and indicated greater perceived similarity to other Latinos ($r = .59$). In addition, perceived intragroup rejection negatively predicted Latino private regard ($r = -.47$), feeling like a positive group member ($r = -.58$) and felt similarity to other Latinos ($r = -.56$).

To test whether intragroup rejection mediated the link between Spanish fluency and Latino private regard, we regressed Latino private regard on Spanish fluency at Step 1 and intragroup rejection at Step 2 (following Baron & Kenny, 1986). The significant main effect of Spanish fluency on private regard was reduced from $\beta = .51$ ($p < .001$) to $\beta = .37$ ($p = .008$). According to the Sobel test (1982), intragroup rejection partially mediated of the link between fluency and Latino private regard ($Z = 1.94$, $p < .05$). Spanish fluency and intragroup rejection accounted for 33% of the variance in Latino private regard. To test whether intragroup rejection mediated the link between Spanish fluency and Latino membership, we regressed Latino membership on Spanish fluency at Step 1 and intragroup rejection at Step 2. The significant main effect of Spanish fluency on membership was reduced from $\beta = .60$ ($p < .001$) to $\beta = .42$ ($p = .001$). Intragroup rejection partially mediated of the link between fluency and collective self-esteem (Sobel $Z = 2.42$, $p = .05$). These two predictors (fluency and intragroup rejection) accounted for 45% of the variance in Latino membership. To test whether intragroup rejection mediated the link between Spanish fluency and felt similarity to other Latinos, we regressed felt similarity on Spanish fluency and intragroup rejection. The effect of Spanish fluency on similarity ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$) was reduced ($\beta = .42$, $p = .001$) when intragroup rejection was

added to the regression model. A Sobel test confirmed that intragroup rejection partially mediated of the link between fluency and felt similarity ($Z = 2.38, p = .02$). These two predictors (fluency and intragroup rejection) accounted for 45% of the variance in felt similarity to other Latinos.

Ruling Out Key Caveats and Moderators

Generational Status. Because generational status may alter the meaning of Spanish speaking ability such that later generations (for whom Spanish speaking ability has often diminished) may not view Spanish proficiency as a meaningful indicator of their Latino status, we conducted further analysis to test generational status as a moderator and thus, the generalizability of our results. As expected, in our sample, generation status was related to Spanish speaking ability ($F(3, 52) = 2.64, p = .06$) such that first ($M = 4.33$) and second generation Latinos ($M = 4.11$) indicated better Spanish speaking ability than third generation ($M = 2.00$) and nonimmigrant identified Latinos ($M = 3.29$).² In order to test for moderation by generational status in linear regression, we created 3 dummy codes for generation status with first generation as the referent group. Then, we regressed perceived intragroup rejection on language ability, generational status variables, and the interaction between language ability and the generation status variables (see Aiken & West, 1991). Results confirmed that Spanish speaking ability continue to predict lower perceived intragroup rejection ($\beta = -.58, p < .001$). More importantly, main effects of and interactions with generational status were not significant. Inspection of correlations also confirmed that the relationship between Spanish speaking ability and intragroup rejection was in the expected direction for each generational status group. Thus, lack of Spanish proficiency though more common among later generations was associated with greater intragroup rejection for all generational statuses.

Importance of Identity. Latino who do not speak Spanish are less likely to identify as Latino (see Table 1) and as a result, their lack of Spanish language proficiency may not operate as an intragroup acceptance threat. To examine this possibility, we examined whether overall importance of Latino identity moderated the effect of Spanish proficiency on intragroup rejection by regressing intragroup acceptance on Spanish proficiency, Latino importance, and the interaction between Spanish proficiency and Latino importance. As expected, we found that greater Spanish proficiency predicted lower intragroup rejection ($\beta = -.38, p = .009$). Latino centrality ($\beta = -.13, p = .41$) and the interaction between importance of identity and Spanish proficiency were not significant ($\beta = .09, p = .55$). Thus, Spanish proficiency predicted greater intragroup acceptance for Latinos regardless of their overall level of identification with Latinos.

Another possibility is that level of identification with Latino may determine whether intragroup rejection predicts private regard, membership and felt similarity to other Latinos. Thus, we tested whether level of identification moderated the link between intragroup rejection and private regard, membership and similarity. For private regard, we found significant main effects of importance ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) and ingroup rejection ($\beta = -.28, p = .009$) but no evidence of importance x intragroup rejection interactive effects ($\beta = .08, p = .50$). For membership, we found significant main effects of importance ($\beta = .47, p < .001$) and ingroup rejection ($\beta = -.41, p < .001$) but no evidence of interactive effects ($\beta = .12, p = .22$). For similarity, we found significant main effects of importance ($\beta = .39, p = .001$) and ingroup rejection ($\beta = -.43, p < .001$) but no evidence of interactive effects ($\beta = .03, p = .77$). Thus, intragroup rejection predicted lower collective self-esteem in their Latino identity and less felt similarity to other Latinos for both those higher and lower in overall Latino identification.

Intragroup Rejection and Affect. Lastly, though we have shown that intragroup rejection appears to predict Latino private regard, membership, and similarity to other Latinos, it is unclear whether intragroup rejection has affective consequences for the self in addition to identity-related consequences. One possibility is that for those who speak little Spanish, intragroup rejection simply does not have negative consequences. To examine whether perceived intragroup rejection predicted negative affect, we used the depressive symptoms inventory and examined whether perceived intragroup rejection interacted with Spanish proficiency to predict negative affect (i.e., do Latinos who speak little Spanish experience negative affect in response to intragroup rejection?). We regressed negative affect on language ability, ingroup rejection, and the interaction between the two. We found a significant interaction between language ability and ingroup rejection ($\beta = -.27, p = .05$; see Figure 1). Results suggest that for those with high language ability, intragroup rejection was unrelated to negative affect ($\beta = -.02, p = .93$) while for those with lower Spanish speaking ability, ingroup rejection was associated with greater negative affect ($\beta = .48, p = .01$).

Similar analyses were performed for private regard and membership. For membership, we found significant main effects of ingroup rejection ($\beta = -.31, p = .007$) and language ability ($\beta = .44, p < .001$) that were qualified by a significant interaction ($\beta = .31, p = .002$; see Figure 2) such that for those low in language ability, intragroup rejection was related to feeling lower in felt confident that they were a good member of the Latino group ($\beta = -.59, p < .001$) while those with higher Spanish speaking ability did not ($\beta = -.02, p = .87$). No such effects were found for private regard. Together, these findings suggest that intragroup rejection matters for those low in Spanish proficiency because it relates to greater negative affect and feeling like a “bad” member

of the Latino group. These results suggest that those with precarious ingroup standing such as those Latinos who speak very little Spanish may be most sensitive to intragroup rejection.

Discussion

Consistent with hypotheses, Spanish speaking ability was associated with less intragroup rejection, which partially accounted for Spanish speakers' greater private regard, greater membership and their greater feelings of felt similarity to the Latino community. In other words, findings suggest that the Latinos who have lower Spanish speaking ability indicated lower collective self-esteem and less similarity to other Latinos in part because they felt rejected from the Latino community. In addition, level of identification was not a moderator of these effects; however, Spanish proficiency moderated the link between intragroup rejection and both membership and depressive symptoms. The interactive effects suggested that intragroup rejection is accompanied by negative affect and lower membership for those with lower Spanish proficiency, who presumably perceive themselves as having more tenuous group standing. These findings suggest low Spanish proficiency may operate as an intragroup acceptance threat, however, Study 1's correlational design limits causal conclusions. To be more confident that the inability to speak Spanish among Latinos serves as an intragroup acceptance threat that causes less categorization as Latino and lower private regard, we created an experimental situation wherein Latinos who were unable to speak Spanish were forced to reveal their nonfluency in Spanish to a Latino experimenter who was fluent in Spanish. We expected that this situation would cause Latinos to report lower private regard, membership, less self-categorization as Latino and less felt connectedness to other Latinos compared to a control condition in which they did not reveal their Spanish speaking inability. Moreover, we measured self-reported competence

to ensure that being unable to Speak Spanish (rather than feelings of incompetence in general) predicted changes in self-categorization, private regard, connectedness, and membership.

Study 2

Study 2 tested whether Latino individuals who were unable to speak Spanish would show lower collective self-esteem and less felt connection to other Latinos when forced to reveal their inability to speak Spanish to a Spanish fluent Latino. Research suggests that aprototypical group members are often rejected by their fellow ingroup members (the black sheep effect; Marques & Páez, 1994) because aprototypical group members threaten the distinctiveness and cohesiveness of the group (Hogg & Haines, 1996). Latinos who do not speak Spanish may anticipate rejection from other Latinos when their Spanish speaking inability is known and thus, engage in self-protective measures.

Being unable to engage in a core cultural practice of the ingroup may cause Latinos to disconnect from their Latino identity as a means of buffering themselves from threat and preserving personal self-worth (Branscombe et al., 1999). Minority group members who experience intragroup rejection may be less likely to categorize themselves as members of a group that is perceived to devalue them. Self-categorization is known to be an important underpinning of positive collective self-esteem and felt similarity and connectedness to one's ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Thus, in Study 2, we tested whether distancing oneself from the ingroup evidenced by less self-categorization as Latino would explain why revealing Spanish speaking inability was related to lower private regard, membership, and connectedness.

Method

Participants. Forty undergraduate self-identified Latino participants (19 men, 21 women) from the Rutgers University Introductory Psychology subject pool participated in the study in exchange for course credit (M age = 18.20). All participants indicated being born in the U.S. but no other information was collected about their generation status as it was not a moderator of the results in Study 2.

Procedure . Following Introductory Psychology subject pool guidelines, all participants completed an initial prescreen survey. This survey included questions about participants' race as well as their fluency in Spanish. Participants were pre-selected (without their knowledge about the pre-selection requirements) to participate in the study if they met the following requirements: 1) self-identified as Latino and 2) indicated that they spoke little or no Spanish.

All participants were greeted at the laboratory by a female, Latina native speaker of Spanish. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (Spanish or English). In the Spanish condition, the experimenter gave the instructions for the experimental session in Spanish. In this condition, participants either interrupted the experimenter's instructions to notify them they did not speak Spanish or, following the instructions, answered that they did not understand the explanation. This situation was effective in forcing all Latino participants in the experimental condition to reveal their inability to speak Spanish in the abovementioned manner. The experimenter then apologized for the assumption and re-read the instructions in English. In the English (control) condition, participants only heard the instructions in English and never revealed their Spanish speaking inability to the Latino experimenter.

The instructions in each condition indicated that the study was about the experiences and identities of Latinos. The study was described as for Latinos only, which helped us justify why the experimenter had assumed they spoke Spanish in the experimental condition and also made

Latino identity salient in both conditions. Following the instructions, all participants filled out a survey about their identities, which among other filler items included the pertinent measures of Latino self-categorization, collective self-esteem, and connectedness to other Latinos. Study 1 already demonstrated that the inability to speak Spanish was an intragroup acceptance threat. Thus, the revealing of this inability was expected to cause Latinos to show lowered self-categorization as Latino, lower collective self-esteem, and lower felt connectedness to other Latinos. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed about the nature of the study.

Measures.

Latino self-categorization. This scale included 5 items rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included, “I am Latino/Hispanic,” “I should be considered Latino/Hispanic,” and, “Most people consider me Latino/Hispanic.” Principal components factor analysis revealed only one factor that accounted for 52% of the variance in the items and each item loaded above .58. Scale reliability was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .73$).

Felt Connection with Other Latinos. This scale included 3 questions rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included, “I think that Latino people understand me better than other people,” and “I connect best with people who are Latino.” Principal components factor analysis revealed that only one factor that accounted for 77% of the variance in the items and each item loaded above .78. Scale reliability was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .73$).

Collective Self-Esteem. The same items for the private regard (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$) and membership subscales were used in Study 2 except that participants were asked to report their feelings about their identity right now to assess state levels of collective self-esteem in the moment.

Self-Rated Competence. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they would describe themselves as having competence traits (*capable, determined, and efficient*) on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). These traits have been used in prior research to measure competence (e.g., Sanchez & Bonam, 2009). In the present study, the scale was reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

Results and Discussion

Consistent with our hypotheses, Latinos who did not speak Spanish and revealed their inability to speak Spanish were less likely to categorize themselves as Latino, and indicated lower private regard and connectedness to other Latinos compared to Latinos who did not speak Spanish but did not have to reveal their inability to a fellow Latino experimenter (see Table 2). Latinos made to disclose their lack of Spanish speaking ability did indicate greater feelings of incompetence than those who were not induced to admit their lack of Spanish proficiency. To test whether competence ratings could alternatively explain our results, we ran ANCOVAs controlling for competence ratings and examined the effects of experimental condition. After controlling for the differences in self-perceived competence, the effect of condition was still significant for private regard ($F(1, 39) = 5.76, p = .02, \eta^2 = .14$), Latino connectedness ($F(1, 39) = 3.87, p = .06, \eta^2 = .10$), and Latino self-categorization ($F(1, 39) = 5.54, p = .02, \eta^2 = .13$). Consistent with t-tests, ANCOVAs were not significant for membership.

To test whether self-categorization as Latino mediated the relationship between revealing Spanish speaking inability and both private regard and connectedness, we conducted further analyses using regression following the procedure in Study 1. First, we found that self-categorization was predictive of greater private regard ($r = .58, p = .001$) and greater connectedness to other Latinos ($r = .52, p < .001$). Next, we regressed connectedness on

experimental condition at Step 1 and added the proposed mediator (Latino self-categorization) at Step 2. These results revealed that the original effect of condition on connectedness ($\beta = .34, p = .03$) became non-significant ($\beta = .14, p = .38$). The Sobel test confirmed evidence of mediation ($Z = 2.07, p = .04$). Next, we regressed private regard on the experimental condition at Step 1 and added the mediator (Latino self-categorization) at Step 2. These results revealed that the original effect of condition on collective self-esteem ($\beta = .56, p < .001$) was reduced when the mediator was included ($\beta = .38, p = .01$). The Sobel test confirmed partial mediation ($Z = 2.06, p = .04$). Though causality cannot be confirmed with these correlational data, these analyses supported the prediction that making Latinos reveal their Spanish speaking inability caused them to be less likely to categorize themselves as Latino and therefore, devalue the Latino group and feel disconnected from other Latinos.

General Discussion

Speaking Spanish is a common cultural practice of Latinos that may be lost through the process of acculturation (Rumbaut, et al., 2006). Because Spanish speaking ability serves as a prototype of Latinos, those who are unable to speak Spanish may perceive their absence of this cultural skill as an intragroup acceptance threat. Indeed, Study 1 demonstrated that Spanish speaking inability was associated with greater perceived intragroup rejection, lower collective self-esteem, and less felt similarity to other Latinos. When a fellow Latino becomes aware of one's inability to speak Spanish, Latinos may retreat from their ethnic group identity as a way to protect their self-worth in accordance with the rejection-identification research (Branscombe et al., 1999). The findings of Study 2 suggest that when Latinos' inability to speak Spanish is revealed to a fellow Latino, they are less likely to categorize themselves as Latino and also

indicate lower private regard and less felt connectedness to other Latinos than those whose Spanish speaking inability is not revealed.

These findings point to a growing literature on the malleability of self-categorization (e.g., Harris & Sim, 2002; Hitlin, Elders, & Brown, 2006). Categorization as Latino is not a given for those individuals of Latino descent. For example, research on the self-categorization of Latino/Hispanic individuals shows considerable variability in self-categorization from one time point to the next. Eschbach and Gomez (1998) found that Latinos who speak Spanish, live around other Latinos, and have lower economic status are more likely to maintain their Latino self-categorization across a span of two years while Latinos who do not speak Spanish are more likely to shift from Latino/Hispanic self-categorization to non-Latino/Hispanic across that time period. Because American society is increasingly multicultural and multiracial, with individuals who can identify and self-categorize in a multitude of different ways, it is increasingly important to understand the circumstances and situations that increase and decrease self-categorization into ethnic groups.

These findings also highlight the importance of cultural practices in fostering felt acceptance in the Latino community. Spanish speaking ability may be one of several cultural and ethnic factors that serve as ethnic prototypes driving felt acceptance within ethnic communities. For example, Black students feel more accepted by their fellow Black students if they have darker skin (Harvey, LaBeach, Pridgen, & Gocial, 2005), suggesting that lighter skin tone may serve as a characteristic that garners intragroup acceptance. Skin tone may also be related to feelings of acceptance among Latinos along with Spanish fluency, because skin tone may signal Latino group membership or indicate a shared experience of discrimination that unites ingroup members. In addition, other cultural practices (e.g., food, religion, dress, values) may also serve

as important additional “credentials” for proving “Latino-ness” among otherwise aprototypical Latinos. Thus, future studies should examine the combination of cultural cues that serve to facilitate feelings of intragroup acceptance to understand how more acculturated Latinos (who are unlikely to speak Spanish; Rumbaut, et al., 2006) maintain identification with other Latinos.

While cultural factors such as Spanish speaking ability among Latinos play a role in felt ingroup acceptance for Latinos themselves, Spanish speaking ability may also play a role in how others view and categorize Latinos. For example, Sanchez & Chavez (2010) asked non-Latino students to evaluate a Latino applicant for an internship position reserved for minority students. The Latino candidate was described as either bilingual (Spanish and English) or monolingual (English). The bilingual candidate was viewed as “more minority” and thus, more deserving of the minority internship and race-based affirmative action measures (Sanchez & Chavez, 2010). These findings persisted controlling for the slight advantage bilingual candidates had in competence ratings. Thus, perceivers may view Spanish speaking Latinos as more Latino—a similar process to that occurring for Latinos themselves who may, in part, base their self-categorization and collective self-esteem on their Spanish speaking ability.

While the present studies make important advances in understanding the role of Spanish fluency in intragroup acceptance, several limitations should be recognized. For example, evidence of mediation in both studies should be interpreted with caution because of the correlational nature of the data. Furthermore, while the sample sizes for the studies were not very large, it is important to note that the effect sizes were large suggesting that revealing Spanish speaking ability has a large effect on self-categorization, collective self-esteem, and connectedness for Latinos. One important lingering question is whether less categorization as Latino corresponds with greater categorization as American or White. In addition, Study 2 did

not examine the negative affect that may occur in the face of intragroup rejection that in turn, may cause less self-categorization. Alternatively, it is possible that people infer their Latinoness in a more cognitive fashion (less via affective routes). For example, self-perception theory suggests that ambiguity may lead people to infer their attitudes from their behavior (e.g., Bem, 1972). In this case, Latinos who feel ambiguous standing among fellow Latinos may infer their self-categorization from their Spanish speaking ability. The processes that guide self-categorization for less prototypical members of racial minority groups remain important questions for future research.

Although the experimental procedures used in Study 2 mirrored real-world situations in which non-Spanish speaking Latinos are assumed to speak Spanish by other Latinos and thus reveal their inability, these results should be replicated using other situations in which Latinos voluntarily disclose their inability to speak Spanish. Conversely, future studies should examine the effects of revealing Spanish speaking ability by Latinos who are fluent. Diary studies examining language use (and engaging in other cultural practices) among Asian Americans suggests that speaking Asian languages can increase the salience of Asian identity (Yip, 2005). These findings suggest that engaging in cultural practices can increase the salience of ethnic identity, which may in turn foster positive regard and feelings of acceptance by fellow minority group members. Moreover, previous work on language suggests that linguistic similarities may serve to create greater rapport with others and indicate overall desire for bonding (Giles, 1973, 1977; see also Bargh & Chartrand, 1999 on mimicry).

Future research should examine important moderators of intragroup rejection. For example, overall ethnic identification could moderate the influence of perceived intragroup acceptance in the context and thereby, increase the tendency to engage in self-protective

processes in anticipation of rejection. Importantly, Study 1 suggested that overall identification did not moderate the link between intragroup rejection and private regard, membership or perceived similarity to other Latinos. Unfortunately, we did not include a measure of pre-existing levels of identification in Study 2 to test whether Latinos who have high identification would be most likely to be vulnerable to the Spanish fluency intragroup acceptance threat. Thus, moderation by overall identification in Study 2 has yet to be examined. Moreover, we examined perceptions of threat and a subtle disclosure manipulation. We did not, for example, manipulate actual intragroup rejection based on Spanish fluency. Level of identification may be an important buffer to actual intragroup rejection. Despite these limitations, the current findings alone are important in determining the situational factors that lead to less self-categorization as Latino, because repeated exposure to such situations (where one's lack of cultural practices are made salient) may be one source of global ethnic identification levels.

Concluding Remarks

The present studies provide evidence that inability to speak Spanish among Latinos serves as an intragroup acceptance threat, making them feel more rejected by fellow Latinos and less likely to self-categorize as Latino. Not only do the present studies add to the growing, but small literature on intragroup rejection, but they also emphasize the significance of Spanish language ability to Latino identity. This work has important implications for the understanding the role of perceived intragroup rejection in accultuation. We believe that research on possible threats to intragroup acceptance offers a way to understand how acculturated Latinos, and perhaps aprototypical racial minorities more broadly, negotiate and cope with being different from their Latino counterparts—an especially important undertaking when one considers the increasingly multicultural landscape.

Footnotes

1. Rutgers University students at New Brunswick reflect the racial diversity of New Jersey. According to the 2010 Census, 17% of the New Jersey population indicated a Latino/Hispanic background. Moreover, 13% of the New Jersey population indicated fluency in the Spanish language in 2004. At Rutgers University, specifically, 11.7% of enrolled University students indicated Latino/Hispanic backgrounds and 3% of the faculty indicating Latino/Hispanic backgrounds in 2009.
2. Using linear contrast codes weighting the two more recent immigrant groups as 1 and the two latter generation groups as -1, the contrast value (3.16) for Spanish speaking proficiency was significant ($t(52) = 2.70, p = .01$).

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Table 1

Zero-Order Correlations among Variables in Study 1

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|-------|----|
| 1. Spanish fluency | -- | | | | | | |
| 2. Intragroup Rejection | -0.47*** | -- | | | | | |
| 3. Membership CSE | 0.60*** | -0.58*** | -- | | | | |
| 4. Private Regard CSE | 0.51*** | -0.47*** | 0.70*** | -- | | | |
| 5. Importance CSE | 0.41** | -0.34* | 0.62*** | 0.56*** | -- | | |
| 6. Latino Similarity | 0.59*** | -0.56*** | 0.65*** | 0.56*** | 0.53*** | -- | |
| 7. Depressed Affect | -0.02 | 0.23+ | -0.40** | -0.05 | -0.18 | -0.02 | -- |

Note. + $p < .10$ * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Study 2 T-Test Results by Condition

| | Reveal Spanish Inability | | Control | | Cohen's <i>d</i> | <i>t</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|------------------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Latino Self-Categorization | 5.01 | 1.03 | 5.93 | 0.94 | 1.02 | 2.91** |
| Latino Private Regard | 5.40 | 0.90 | 6.25 | 0.74 | 1.33 | 3.24** |
| Latino Membership | 4.56 | 1.25 | 5.14 | 1.35 | 0.45 | 1.40 |
| Latino Connectedness | 3.70 | 1.35 | 4.50 | 1.11 | 0.70 | 2.27* |
| Self-Rated Competence | 5.52 | 0.93 | 6.14 | 0.82 | 0.71 | 2.21 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, Cohen's *d* values are absolute values

Figure 1. *Effect of Ingroup Rejection by Language Ability on Negative Affect in Study 1. Results plotted one standard deviation above and below the mean. Negative affect was on a scale from 1 to 4*

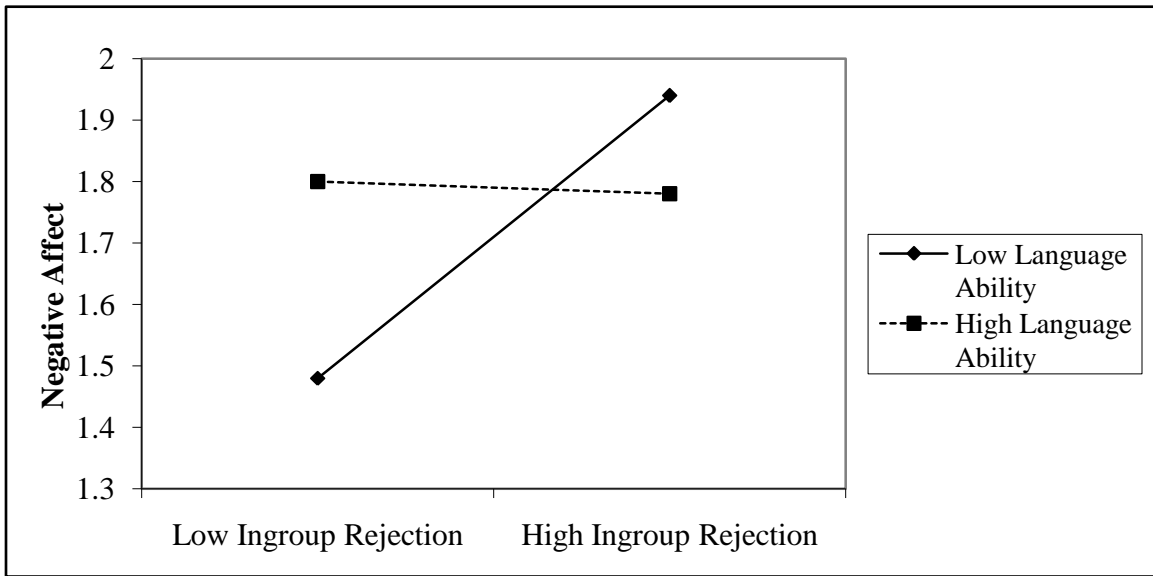
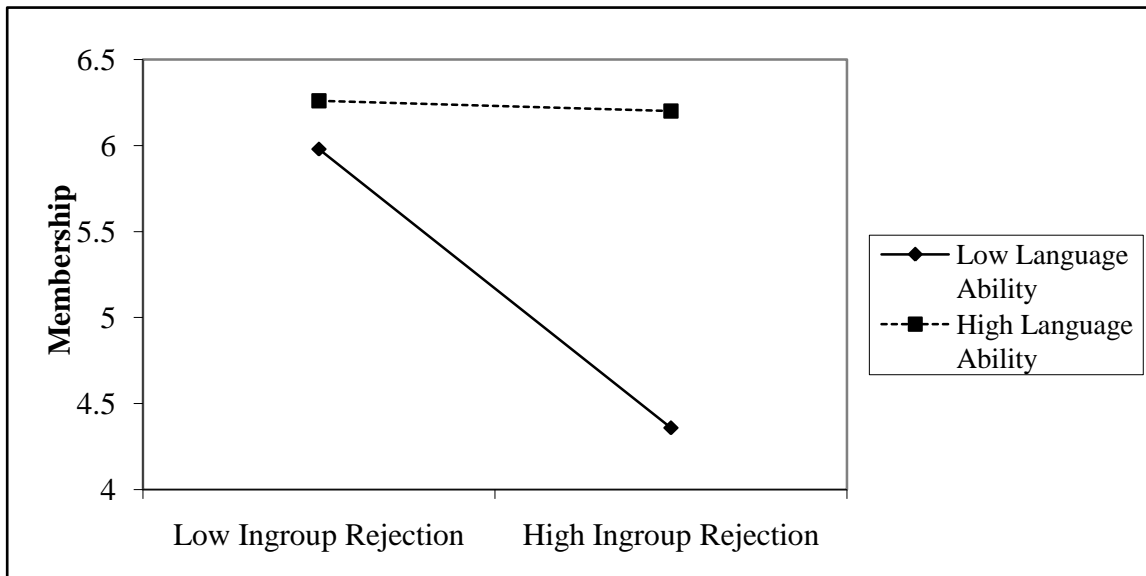


Figure 2. *Effect of Ingroup Rejection by Language Ability on Latino Membership in Study 1.*

Results plotted one standard deviation above and below the mean. Latino membership was on a scale from 1 to 7.



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