Do Municipal-issued ID Cards Buffer Against Identity-based Biased Treatment? A Field Experiment in Retail Stores

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Abstract

The current field experiment examined discrimination against Latino customers in retail stores, and municipal identification (ID) cards as potential buffers against this type of discrimination. In an audit experiment, Latino “customers” were subject to discrimination relative to a matched team of European-American “customers” when making ten-dollar check payments at retail stores. Specifically, Latinos were asked to present an ID card more frequently than European-American customers, were quoted a higher minimum dollar amount for purchasing a gift certificate, and received more negative affect from salespersons. A municipal-issued ID card successfully buffered Latinos from further discrimination following an ID request. The association of Latino identity with foreignness and undocumented immigration and the usefulness of municipal ID card programs for reducing bias against Latinos are discussed.
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A 2008 report by the Pew Hispanic Center estimated that a staggering 11.2 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Undocumented immigrants living in the United States come from countries all over the world; however, a large majority (76%) of the nation's undocumented immigrants are Latino. This statistic does not paint an accurate picture of all Latinos residing in the United States, the vast majority of whom are citizens or legal residents (Massey & Sanchez, 2010). Still, issues of documentation and immigration shape the public image of all Latinos (Castañeda, 2007; Lyman, 2006; Suro, 1998). The primary objective of the current research was to investigate how the public image of Latinos in the United States shapes biased treatment of individual Latinos versus European Americans when documentation is relevant. We provide a rigorous design to detect biased behavior and move beyond standard Black-European-American models of discrimination by situating discrimination in a context where documentation is relevant.

Overwhelming evidence shows that almost all new immigrants are hopeful, law abiding, family and community oriented, and hardworking (Massey & Sanchez, 2010). Yet, immigrants who are undocumented face hardship while carrying out the most mundane tasks of daily life, such as opening a bank account, securing health insurance or purchasing goods without cash. From the perspective of American institutions, immigrants’ lack of documentation makes it difficult to accurately assess the political, economic, educational, and health care needs of a given community. Thus, some argue that it is in the best interests of American citizens and undocumented immigrants alike to be provided with some form of official government sanctioned form of identification.

Against this backdrop, the question of local municipalities offering official documentation for undocumented immigrants has been of great interest to policy makers and immigration advocacy groups (Ditlmann, Lagunes, & Levin, 2011; Zapana, 2008). Six cities in the United States already offer municipal-issued identification cards to their residents regardless of ethnicity, citizenship and immigration or employment status. The second objective of the current research was to investigate whether a municipal-issued ID card is a successful buffer against biased treatment faced by Latinos. This focus will help us understand the ongoing process of bias and societal structures that can inoculate individuals against bias.

We addressed both objectives, biased treatment of Latinos and municipal-issued ID cards as a potential buffer against such bias, with a field experiment. More specifically, we directly observed salesperson-customer interactions when an ostensible customer attempted to purchase goods with a personal check. By presenting customers who were equivalent in age, verbal skill, physical attractiveness, masculinity, and extroversion but who differed by ethnicity (Latino versus European-American) and legitimacy of identification (municipal-issued versus unofficial), we observed the degree to which considerations about customer's ethnicity and type of identification affected the treatment they received from salespersons (e.g., whether an ID was requested, whether an ID was accepted for check payment).

Furthermore, similar to recent advances in field experimentation (King, Shapiro, Hebl, Singletary, & Turney, 2006; Pager, Western, & Bonikowski, 2009; Paluck, 2010), we moved beyond experimental estimates of bias to explore the processes by which discrimination, if found, occurs. By examining the interactions between salespersons and customers, we gained new insights into how ethnicity and identification type influence salespersons’ perceptions of customers’ legitimacy and presumed trustworthiness. Studying the multi-faceted character of
bias in the context of documentation illuminates the range of decisions that may reduce opportunities for people in need of documentation to carry out mundane tasks and that often taint the experience of Latino Americans or documented immigrants who are falsely stereotyped as undocumented.

The Perpetual Foreigner: Requesting Identification

American citizens perceive Latinos to be the ethnic minority group that is most likely to be the victim of racial discrimination (Pew Research Center, 2010). This perception maps onto Latinos’ self-reported experiences. Young Latinos in their twenties perceive substantial amounts of everyday discrimination (Pérez, Fortuna, & Alegría, 2008). Archival evidence often implicates discrimination against Latinos, for example, in earnings of Latino-owned firms (Carvajal, 2004) or in capital sentencing (Lee, 2007). Experimental research reveals discrimination against Latinos in simulated jury decision-making contexts (Bottom, Davies, & Epstein, 2004) and throughout hiring processes (Cross, Kenney, Mell, & Zimmerman, 1990; Pager et al., 2009). Research on bias occurring outside of people’s awareness reveals that European Americans show bias against Latinos on the Implicit Association Test (Aberson, Shoemaker, & Tomolillo, 2004; Devos, Gavin, & Quintana, 2010; Weyant, 2005) and during automatic shooting simulations (Sadler, Correll, Park, & Judd, 2010).

The present research focuses on a social situation with which Latinos contend on a daily basis: requests for legitimate proof of identification. Our research begins with the assumption that in the United States, Latinos’ legitimacy as legal residents is continuously questioned, and concerns about Latinos’ legal status shape people’s everyday encounters with them. Even though the majority of Latinos in the U.S. are American citizens or legal immigrants, issues of documentation and immigration shape their public image (Abrajano & Singh, 2009; Castañeda, 2007; Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Ditlmann, & Lagunes, 2010; Lyman, 2006; Suro, 1998). Indeed, there is a strong association between Latino identity and undocumented immigration. For instance, Americans are most likely to think about Latinos when asked to complete surveys about “illegal aliens” (Cowan et al., 1997) and negative rhetoric and ethnic slurs about Latinos in the United States build on people’s stereotypes about undocumented immigration (Marshall & Eberhardt, 2011). Because Latinos are automatically presumed to be undocumented immigrants, people are likely to routinely request proof of identification (ID cards) from them in situations in which documentation is relevant. When purchasing goods in a retail store with a check, for example, Latino customers are likely asked for identification more frequently than European-American customers, presumably because Latinos invite greater suspicion about their legal status and, thus, the credibility of their checks.

Legally, requests for ID cards do not constitute a form of discrimination. In fact, such requests may be perceived as a racially neutral and wise business practice. Yet, we argue that repeated requests for ID cards, especially if one is a legal resident or American citizen, constitutes bias expressed in the form of micro-aggressions, “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial group” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilini, 2007, p. 273). ID card requests constitute bias if Latinos are more likely than European Americans to be the targets of these requests. Moreover, negative emotions accompanying requests for ID cards, such as frowns and perceived aggravation, would further suggest negative bias. The subtlety of micro-aggressions does not render them harmless; to the contrary, their cumulative effect undermines the psychological well-being of targets because they occur frequently and are hard to detect, interpret and avoid. In
the context of the current field experiment, our first objective was to examine whether matched pairs of Latino and European-American “customers” who attempted to purchase goods with a check were differentially asked for proof of ID and encountered negative affect from the salesperson.

**Conceptualizing Lack of Documentation: Municipal-issued or Unofficial Identification**

Our second objective was to examine whether matched pairs of Latino and European-American “customers” who attempted to purchase goods with a check could successfully complete the transaction as a function of presenting municipal-issued versus unofficial ID cards. Municipal-issued ID cards are city government sanctioned ID cards available to all residents of participating cities regardless of their immigration status. Unofficial ID cards are non-government sanctioned personal identification purchased from privately owned companies. Interactions between salespersons and customers are multi-faceted. After the initial encounter, when requests for ID cards may be relevant, the customer must present some form of documentation. The salesperson must then decide whether to reject or accept the documentation in order to complete the sale. In the current experiment, we explored the ongoing processes by which bias against Latinos may occur. After the initial request (or not) for identification, we randomly assigned Latino and European-American “customers” to present either a municipal-issued or an unofficial ID card and observed whether salespersons accepted or declined the ID card.

The present research offers a framework for understanding how bias may affect the perceived legitimacy of ID cards. We suggest that in the absence of other information, ID cards convey the credibility of the card owner. Drawing from previous research on ambiguous social contexts and bias (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008), we argue that the degree of ambiguity and legitimacy of the card creates a context in which stereotypes, expectations, and assumptions about the person presenting the ID will be cognitively activated and applied.

Unambiguous and legitimate ID cards are expected to be accepted by salespersons at equivalent rates from Latino and European-American customers. By contrast, ambiguous and illegitimate ID cards might elicit documentation-related stereotypes about Latinos and European Americans. Consequently, ambiguous cards are expected to be declined by salespersons at differential rates depending on customers’ ethnicity.

Two alternative predictions about the direction of this bias are possible. On the one hand, salespersons may be more likely to decline ambiguous ID cards from Latino customers than European-American customers. Psychological models of stereotyping proposing that individuals engage in bias against minorities when they can attribute their behavior to a given situation support this hypothesis (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). An ambiguous ID card offers a situation that provides justification for expressing bias against Latinos.

On the other hand, salespersons may also be less likely to decline an ambiguous card from Latino customers than European-American customers. Alternative models of stereotyping propose that perceivers engage in stereotyping when the target’s behavior is inconsistent or counter-stereotypical (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2010). If people typically stereotype Latinos as undocumented immigrants without any documentation, and European Americans as American citizens with documentation, then ambiguous and illegitimate cards may activate a “something is better than nothing” mindset when presented by a Latino and a suspicious mindset (“why would an American have unofficial identification?”) when presented
by a European American. In this case, salespersons are expected to decline the ambiguous and illegitimate card more frequently when presented by European Americans than Latinos.

In the present experiment, we used a municipal-issued card as unambiguous and legitimate ID card. Recently, various cities have experimented with offering “municipal-issued” forms of identification. These cities offer ID cards to all city residents regardless of their immigration status. Such municipal-issued cards serve as official identification in many situations, such as checking out a book at the public library, opening a bank account, or making a check payment at local stores. The first municipal-issued identification program, called Elm City Resident Card program, started in Connecticut in 2007. Because it was the first of its kind in the United States, it received substantial public attention and served as a pilot for other cities (Ditlmann, Lagunes, & Levin, 2011). Since 2007, five cities (San Francisco and Oakland in California; In New Jersey, the local governments of Trenton, Princeton, and Mercer County) have adopted similar programs. We used the Elm City Resident Card in our experiment (see Appendix A). Because it has only been introduced in the last five years, the Elm City Resident Card may not be as familiar to institutions in the municipalities as federal-issued ID cards (e.g., passports, driver’s licenses). From the perspective of salespersons, however, municipal-issued cards are credible because the source that certifies the information on the card – the city government – is trustworthy.

Secondly, we used an unofficial card as ambiguous and illegitimate ID card (see Appendix A). We use the term “unofficial identification” to describe non-government sanctioned personal identification purchased from privately owned companies. To obtain much needed documentation, individuals often purchase unofficial ID cards in vending locations around the country in the hopes that local institutions will accept them. In contrast to municipal-issued cards, these cards are not sanctioned by any government institution and very few requirements exist for purchasing them. From the perspective of salespersons, unofficial cards are less credible because the source that certifies the information on the card – a private company that makes money by selling ID cards – is unknown and not trustworthy.

The Current Experiment
Past research clearly establishes that bias against Latinos exists (e.g, Aberson et al., 2004; Bottom, Davies, & Epstein, 2004; Devos et al., 2010; Sadler et al., 2010). However, because prior studies have primarily been conducted in laboratory environments, they fail to identify real social contexts in which Latinos actually experience discrimination, as well as the nature and extent of discrimination against Latinos. Laboratory experiments of discrimination infer salespersons’ behavior from data on basic paradigms often involving college student samples. Moreover, surprisingly few empirical studies in psychology actually focus on discriminatory behaviors and instead focus on attitudes and beliefs that are assumed to predict discrimination (Paluck & Green, 2009). The present research diverges from common practice. We used a field experiment to test whether biased behavior exists in retail stores, a real-world setting with which most Americans engage frequently. Furthermore, we tested the effectiveness of a real and current policy, municipal ID cards, for combating such bias. The current approach, referred to as an audit methodology, involved the use of matched teams of customers—testers—who attempted to purchase real goods with a check and recorded a variety of responses about the course of the interaction with the salesperson. Because our Latino and European-American testers were matched on a wide variety of characteristics (e.g., age, attractiveness), confounds that provide alternative explanations to bias (e.g., social class, idiosyncrasies of individual testers) are
controlled. In part due to logistical requirements, in-person audit studies are rare, with only a handful of studies on discrimination against Latinos (Kenney & Wissoker, 1994; Marianne, 1995; Ondrich, Stricker, & Yinger, 1999; Pager et al., 2009). To our knowledge, our study is the first to examine both race and type of documentation in the same experiment. In addition, we extended our analysis from card acceptance and decline rates to examine a richer set of outcomes that capture emotional reactions in the salesperson-customer interaction. By using a comprehensive set of outcomes in a field setting, we provide a unique window into how bias unfolds over the course of an interaction and the character of bias that Latinos may face on a daily basis.

We hypothesized that matched pairs of Latino and European-American testers who attempted to purchase goods with a check would be differentially asked for proof of identification (ID) and would encounter different rates of negative affect from the salesperson. In addition, we hypothesized that salespersons would accept the municipal-issued card at equivalent rates from Latino and European-American customers. By contrast, the unofficial card was expected to lead salespersons to engage in bias. We further tested whether salespersons would be more or less likely to decline an unofficial ID card from Latino customers than European-American customers.

**Method**

In our field experiment we randomly assigned Latino and European-American testers to make check payments for $10 gift-certificates in retail stores and compared how often salespersons responded to this request. Hindering ethnic minorities from making small everyday purchases with a check sends a denigrating message. It also excludes Latinos from a basic, everyday activity where their immigration status is irrelevant. To maximize standardization across stores, we instructed testers to purchase gift certificates instead of products. Many stores have a ten-dollar (or less) minimum for gift certificates. To ensure that all purchases had a chance of being successful (while keeping the overall cost for the experiment low) testers attempted to make $10 gift certificate purchases. If a salesperson asked for ID, we randomly assigned testers to present the municipal-issued versus unofficial card. We assessed several objective outcomes (e.g., ID card request) and one subjective (facial expression) outcome to capture biased treatment in the store.

**Participants**

We recorded the responses of salespersons towards testers in a total of 217 stores in downtown New Haven, Connecticut, and in three nearby malls. Latino testers visited 111 stores and European-American testers visited 106. As a result of random assignment, testers presented the municipal card in 97 stores and the unofficial card in 118.

**Procedure**

We sent three matched pairs of Latinos and European Americans to purchase $10 gift certificates using check payment in 217 stores. The testers were young men, ages 24 to 30. Most were between 5’9 and 6’1 in height and all were recruited in New Haven, CT. We provide more detail on how they were selected and matched below. In each store, testers presented either the municipal-issued card or the unofficial card. The municipal-issued Elm City Resident Card is clearly labeled and presents the holder’s personal information. The unofficial ID card contains this information but is also labeled with the brand name “Ameracard” and “Connecticut” in bold
on the front. An inscription on the back states: “Not an official identification card.” (see Appendix A)

Throughout a period of four weeks we randomly assigned 7-10 stores per trial from our sample of 217 stores to Latino versus European-American testers. Testers never conducted more than one trial per day. Before each trial, we provided them with the list of stores they were randomly assigned to for this trial. Before testers entered a store they drew one of two ID cards, municipal-issued or unofficial card, from a shuffling bag so as to randomly assign themselves to one of the ID card conditions while remaining unaware of the type of ID they were going to present.

Following the same script, testers individually entered each store and asked to purchase a $10 gift certificate. If the salesperson responded that the minimum for gift certificates was higher than $10 (typically $15) they accepted that higher minimum. Each store was visited only once. When prompted for payment, the testers asked, whether the store accepted checks. When salespersons asked them to present ID, the testers presented the card they had drawn before entering the store. If the card was accepted, they completed the purchase transaction. One of the drawbacks of studying the nature of bias as it unfolds in ongoing, real-world interactions is that we contend with selective attrition in our study. Only testers who were asked to present ID had an opportunity to observe whether that ID card was declined. We address this threat to internal validity analytically in Appendix B. Fortunately, the random assignment of card to store is uncompromised within Latinos and European-American targets.

After leaving the store, testers immediately filled out a report sheet that included information on the store and our outcome variables. Specifically, they recorded (a) whether the salesperson asked them for ID, (b) what minimum price they were quoted for the gift-certificate, (c) the salespersons’ facial expressions during the initial attempt to purchase the goods (i.e., smile, neutral expression, frown) and (d) whether the ID card they presented was declined. For the coding of salesperson’s facial expressions, testers applied what was learned during an extensive training and coded the salespersons' facial expressions at the moment of receiving the ID as a smile, neutral expression, or frown. For example, following Ekman and Friesen (1976), they counted a frown as any facial gesture that involved a lowering of the brows and a vertical wrinkling of the forehead, between the eyes. Similarly, they counted a smile when there was widening of eyes and pulling up of the lip corners or actual show of teeth.

To rule out several alternatives to tester's ethnicity that might account for our findings we coded the types of stores in 13 categories based on the primary products they sell (e.g., apparel, jewelry, home) and recorded testers' perceptions of salespersons' ethnicities in five categories (European-American, Black, Latino, Asian, Other/Don't Know). We also recorded whether other customers were present during the purchase interaction.

**Tester matching and preparation.** One frequent criticism of audit studies is that race/ethnicity cannot be manipulated and that it is therefore difficult to pinpoint the causal effect of this variable. Idiosyncrasies of testers may drive the observed effects (Heckman, 1998). Most of this criticism is directed primarily towards hiring studies, which constitute the core of audit studies; customer-cashier interactions are far less complex and more structured than employer-prospective employee interactions, which makes it easier to achieve a high level of standardization across different individuals. Nevertheless we took several measures to assure maximal comparability between testers in both groups.

We carefully chose our testers to match on several important dimensions (age, verbal skill, physical attractiveness, masculinity and extroversion). Heavy recruiting efforts resulted in
over 40 in person interviews of individuals who fulfilled the strict residency requirements necessary to obtain the municipal-issued ID card. The first author and a research assistant conducted the interviews with potential testers. We independently rated applicants on verbal skills, physical attractiveness, masculinity and extroversion on 7-point scales following each interview and then compared and discussed our impressions.

Once we had selected six testers we prepared them with a nine-day extensive training that involved memorizing and practicing the script through role-play in the lab; standardizing testers' appearances, and verbal and nonverbal behaviors; and learning and practicing assessment of salespersons' facial expressions. The assessment of facial expressions included a presentation by an expert on non-verbal communication, a discussion of photographs with different facial expressions that focused on objective criteria for differentiating between smiles, neutral expressions and frowns (e.g., a vertical wrinkling of the forehead), and practice in role play with each other. Testers learned to identify one moment in the interaction when they were to “take a mental snapshot” of the salesperson’s facial expression to maximize objectivity. They were instructed to tap their left foot at the exact moment when they “took the picture.” This tap solidified the snapshot method and allowed external observers to control whether testers were applying what they had learned during the training during the experimental phase. At the end of the training, we conducted separate trials with each tester in an actual store. During these trials, we validated the assessments of the tester and continued training if the tester’s assessments deviated from our own assessments or if the tester’s behavior deviated from the script or the behavior of other testers. For example, one tester had a low voice. We continued to complete practice trials with him until his voice was comparable to that of the other testers.

To ensure that differences in awareness and expectation of ethnicity-based rejection were not confounded with the ethnicity of testers, we kept them unaware of our discrimination hypothesis by separating them throughout the entire study. In addition, we emphasized our interest in comparing the municipal-issued card to the unofficial card to distract them from thinking about their ethnicity. In a final evaluation we asked our testers what “the study was about.” Only one European-American and one Latino tester stated clearly that testing for ethnic discrimination was one of the objectives. We checked if their responses deviated substantially from the rest of their group and combined them with the rest of the group after confirming that this was not the case.

Thirty-four of the 217 tester interactions in the stores were monitored by a trained observer who was blind to the study predictions. The observer recorded whether the testers deviated from the script (yes or no) and rated their non-verbal behaviors on two 1-7 scales (not at all to extremely): "How neutral was the tester in the interaction with the salesperson?" and "How friendly was the tester in the interaction with the salesperson?" These two items, with the first one reverse-scored, were combined to form a single index of "friendliness" (Cronbach’s α=.73). The observer did not detect a single deviation from the script, and no significant difference in Latino and European-American testers' friendliness, t(32)=1.12, p=.27. Together with our careful matching procedure and extensive training the secret observer results give us confidence that the effects we observed are due to differences in ethnicity rather than idiosyncrasies of individual testers.
Results

Requesting ID Cards

If individuals think of Latinos as perpetual foreigners, potentially with undocumented presence in the United States, then salespersons should be more likely to request identification from Latino testers than European-American testers. Furthermore, salespersons should display more negative emotion towards Latino testers, an indication of annoyance or displeasure at having to serve them. For the same reason, they may also quote a higher minimum dollar amount for the gift certificate. Consistent with this reasoning we found that salespersons asked Latino testers for identification more frequently than European-American testers (85% versus 74%, B=0.68, SE=0.34, p=0.05) (see Appendix B for a detailed listing of the finding for each tester). Next, multinomial regression was used to test the effect of tester ethnicity on salesperson’s facial expressions. We excluded 45 stores where salespersons did not request identification because facial expression assessments were made when the card was handed to salesperson. We found that, together with asking for identification more frequently, salespersons expressed a higher ratio of frowns relative to neutral expressions when serving the Latino tester compared to the European-American tester (B=1.14, SE=0.42, p<0.01) (see Figure 1). There was no effect of ethnicity on the ratio of smiles relative to neutral expressions (B=0.08, SE=0.73, p=0.91). In addition, the Latino tester was more likely to be quoted a higher minimum dollar amount for the gift certificate than the European-American testers. Logistic regression was used to test the effect of tester ethnicity on the minimum dollar amount ($10.00 = 0, more than $10.00 = 1). Though both Latino and European-American testers asked to buy $10 gift certificates in the stores they visited according to random assignment, we found that salespersons who interacted with Latinos were more likely to claim that the store’s minimum dollar amount for a gift certificate was greater than $10 (9% for Latinos versus 2% for European Americans, B=1.64, SE=0.78, p=0.04). A Mann-Whitney test confirms these findings by showing that the mean rank for minimum dollar amount is significantly higher for Latino testers, 113, than for European-American testers, 105, U=5455, p=0.02, two-tailed. Including store type, salesperson gender, and salesperson ethnicity and minimum dollar amount in the analyses did not change any of the relevant significance levels.

To rule out that the differences in minimum dollar amount were due to particular store characteristics versus the ethnicity of the testers, we called all stores visited by Latinos after conclusion of our experiment and asked whether they had a minimum dollar amount for purchasing gift certificates. All but one of the stores that quoted a higher than $10 minimum amount to our Latino testers claimed on the phone that they sell gift certificates for ten dollars or less. Taken together, our results suggest that Latinos experience micro-aggressions in the retail context. When attempting to purchase goods with a check, the Latino are more likely than the European-American testers to be asked for identification, be frowned at by the salesperson during this request, and be quoted a higher minimum prize for purchasing a gift-certificate.

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1 One aspect of these data was presented as part of a larger essay on Latinos in the United States (Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Ditlmann, & Lagunes, 2010).

2 Close inspection of this finding shows that it is largely, but not exclusively, driven by one of our Latino testers.

3 Because of the time passed between completing the experiment and calling the stores it is possible that store policies changed.
Declining ID Cards

We expected that salespersons would accept the unambiguous municipal-issued card at equivalent rates from Latino and European-American customers. By contrast, the ambiguous unofficial card was expected to elicit stereotypes about Latinos and European Americans relevant to documentation and lead salespersons to engage in bias.

To test for a tester’s ethnicity (Latino, European-American) x ID Type (municipal-issued card, unofficial card) interaction, we analyzed the effect of ethnicity, identification type, and the interaction of ethnicity x identification type on whether the tester’s card was declined or accepted. No overall difference emerged on how often salespersons refused IDs from the Latino testers compared to the European-American testers ($B=-.58, SE=.54, p=.28$). However, a main effect of ID type ($B=-1.26, SE=.52, p=.02$) that was qualified by a significant Ethnicity x ID type interaction emerged ($B=1.61, SE=.70, p=.02$) (see Figure 2).

Salespersons’ refusal of the municipal-issued card did not depend on the ethnicity of the tester. The Latino tester’s municipal-issued ID was refused the same percentage (32%) as the European Americans’ municipal-issued card (21%) ($\chi^2(1, N=75)=1.18, p=.28$). The municipal-issued ID card therefore successfully inoculates individuals against bias. Interestingly, salespersons declined a municipal-issued identification card one third of the times it was presented, an issue we will return to in the discussion. The salesperson’s refusal of the unofficial card, however, varied depending on the tester’s ethnicity. Interestingly, the Latino tester’s unofficial card was refused far less (24%) than the European-American’s unofficial card (48%), $\chi^2(1, N=97)=5.68, p=.02$, suggesting that salespersons favored the Latino over the European-American tester in this instance. This general conclusion holds if we assume different plausible outcomes for the salespersons that dropped out of the study before the ID decline outcome because they did not request ID from the testers to begin with (see Appendix C). Including store-type, salesperson gender, salesperson ethnicity, and minimum dollar amount in this analysis did not change any of the relevant significance levels.

One alternative explanation for why salespersons refused the unofficial identification less from the Latino than the European-American testers is that they overcompensated to avoid appearing racist. If this was their main motivation, we should observe stronger differential treatment effects in the presence than in the absence of other customers. However, replicating the main analysis on a subsample of stores without other customers present ($n=91$) revealed the same significant Tester Ethnicity x ID Type interaction, ($B=1.95, SE=.98, p=.05$).

Discussion

In line with our predictions, matched pairs of Latino “customers” who attempted to purchase goods with a check were asked for proof of documentation more frequently than matched European-American “customers” and encountered more negative affect from the salesperson. The difference between Latino customers (probability of being asked for ID: .85) and European-American customers (probability of being asked for ID: .74) was of relatively small magnitude. However, asking for ID in a retail store is a subtle everyday hassle that accumulates over time to cause substantial harm in targets (Sue et al., 2007). Moreover, Latinos probably experience differential treatment of much greater magnitude than what we observed in stores when immigration status is directly relevant, for example, when being stopped in Arizona under the new and controversial Senate Bill 1070 that requires officials to stop individuals and check for their immigration status if they have “reasonable suspicion” about the legality of their presence in the United States (pp. 3-4; State of Arizona House of Representatives, 2010). Our
results show that merely being Latino can, at least in some instances, create suspicion about whether one holds proper documentation.

As predicted, salespersons accepted the municipal-issued card at the same rate regardless of the ethnicity of the card owner. Although municipal-issued cards may be somewhat unfamiliar to salespersons—which seems to be reflected in a relatively high overall rate of decline in the stores—they are unambiguously government-sanctioned. Salespeople can thus make informed decisions about whether to decline or accept them, relying more on store policies than the ethnicity of the customer. Our experiment thus demonstrates that municipal-issued ID cards are an effective buffer against discrimination for Latino customers making check payments. This finding speaks to the power of social policies, such as municipal ID card programs, to inoculate individuals against bias by providing clear and trustworthy structures and guidelines.

Salespeople declined the unofficial card more frequently from European-American than from Latino testers. This direction of bias is predicted by psychological models of stereotypical expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Gutierrez & Unzueta, 2010). Consistent with previous research on Latinos as perpetual foreigners (Cowan et al., 1997; Marshal & Eberhardt, 2011) expectations about official documentation from Latinos appear to be low, instead Latinos are more likely to be seen as undocumented than European-Americans. Their low expectations for Latinos presumably led salespersons to accommodate Latinos who presented unofficial ID, thereby violating salespersons’ low expectations for ID, more than their European-American counterparts. Apparently, the unofficial card introduces a suspicious mindset for European-Americans (“why would an American have unofficial ID?”) and a “something is better than nothing” mindset for Latinos.

According to expectancy-violation theory (Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987), individuals who possess more favorable characteristics than expected are evaluated more positively than others with the same but expected characteristics. The initial high request for ID appears to reflect low expectations for ID towards Latinos. Later salespersons decline the unofficial card less from Latinos than European Americans because this unofficial card is “better than nothing” and, hence, more positive than what was expected. By showing how the same stereotype can manifest in differential and preferential treatment of Latinos throughout the course of an interaction our study underscores the importance of testing theories of discrimination in the field.

Moreover, studying the multi-faceted character of bias in the context of a municipal ID card program suggests that these programs successfully integrate all residents into a city community. In the context of our experiment, the municipal-issued card successfully eliminated bias against Latinos when making check-purchases. By reducing micro-aggressions against Latinos, municipal ID card programs are a promising venue for improving the safety and satisfaction of all city residents (for a detailed review of the policy see Ditlmann, Lagunes, & Levin, 2011).

Limitations

In the current experiment, we focused on establishing request and decline of ID cards as outcome variables because prior research on the unique dimensions of discrimination against Latinos is scarce. Our measures link the discrimination findings with the public image of Latinos as undocumented and foreign. However, to pinpoint the process underlying ID decline and acceptance from Latinos more precisely, future field-research should vary important characteristics of the matched testers such as “foreignness.” We use the final two paragraphs of this article to explain why we deem other mechanisms less plausible than the one we propose.
Salespersons may treat Latinos differentially from European Americans not because they think of them as undocumented and foreign but because they associate them with low economic status or high criminal intent (Ramirez Berg, 2002). To counteract the effect of stereotypes about social class, testers wore standardized clothing typical of middle class customers. To minimize salespersons’ potential fear of crime, testers spent a relatively small amount and made a low risk purchase of $10. More importantly, while the economic, the crime and the lack of documentation stereotype each explain why salespersons would request to see an ID card more frequently from Latino than European-American customers, undocumented is the only stereotype that also explains salespersons’ lower rate of declining the unofficial card from Latino than European-American customers. Low expectations with regards to low economic status or criminal intend should, if anything, lead to higher rates of declining an unofficial card.

A final alternative explanation is that salespersons treated Latinos better than European-Americans when deciding whether to accept the unofficial ID because they were afraid to violate egalitarian norms. Previous research shows that individuals sometimes treat members of minorities better than members of majorities because they fear appearing prejudiced. For example, Dutton (1971) found that when customers violated formal attire norms concierges were more likely to allow Black than European-American customers to dine in the expensive restaurant regardless. However, from an aversive racism perspective (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Dovidio et al., 2002) an unofficial, uncommon and ambiguous ID card provides an easy excuse and justification for treating minorities negatively. Furthermore, worries about norm violation should be exacerbated in the presence of other people (Castelli, & Tomelleri, 2008), however our effects occurred independent of the presence of other customers in the store. Taken together, prior research on aversive racism and the irrelevance of other customers to the present findings, rule out the norm violation hypothesis as an alternative explanation for our results.

Conclusion

By examining the interactions between salespersons and customers, this paper presents new insights into how ethnicity and identification type influence salespersons’ perceptions of the customer’s legitimacy and presumable trustworthiness. Studying the multi-faceted character of bias in the context of documentation illuminates how strongly Latino identity is linked with behavioral indicators of stereotypes about lack of documentation and perpetual foreignness. Overall, our findings build on previous research that demonstrates that even though the majority of Latinos are American citizens and legal immigrants, issues of documentation and immigration shape their public image (Castañeda, 2007; Lyman, 2006; Suro, 1998). They also demonstrate the value of municipal ID card programs for the 11.3 million immigrants in the United States who are, in fact, undocumented and therefore in need of documentation to carry out mundane tasks and have a minimal standard of personal safety in cities across America.
References


Table I

 Means and Sample Sizes for All Four Groups in the Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Stores</th>
<th>Latino testers (n=111)</th>
<th>European-American testers (n=106)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ID requested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of ID</td>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>Unofficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID declined</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID accepted</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Nonverbal responses of salespersons to Latino and European-American testers
Figure 2. Decline of ID card by testers' ethnicity and type of ID card
Appendix A

Figure A1: Municipal-issued card

Figure AII: Unofficial card
Appendix B

In addition to the between group variability between Latino and White testers there was also a substantial amount of within group variability (see Table B1). However, even the lowest rate of ID request for a Latino tester was still higher than the highest rate for a White tester.
Table B I

*ID Acceptance Rate for Individual Testers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Tester</th>
<th>Latino testers</th>
<th>European-American (“White”) testers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino 1 (n=41)</td>
<td>White 1 (n=44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino 2 (n=38)</td>
<td>White 2 (n=41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino 3 (n=32)</td>
<td>White 3 (n=21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID requested</td>
<td>33 (81%)</td>
<td>30 (68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34 (90%)</td>
<td>32 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 (84%)</td>
<td>16 (76%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

In our experiment the difference in how often salespersons declined the unofficial card from Latino versus European-American testers was .24 percent points. Because they were not asked for ID, 5 Latino and 16 European-American testers who were assigned to present the unofficial ID card dropped out before we observed the effect of the card (see Table A1 for the exact numbers). We determine the potential consequences of attrition by investigating how the estimated treatment effect varies depending on how we fill in missing potential outcomes (Manski, 1989).

What might distinguish salespersons that did not request ID from those who did? Salespersons who did not request ID from Latinos and European Americans probably trust them to hold an official form of ID. The unofficial card violates that expectation and salespersons with high expectations would thus likely decline the card from both Latinos and Whites. Assuming that all dropped out salespersons would have declined the unofficial card from both Latinos and European Americans yields the following treatment effect for tester ethnicity:

\[(.48*.91)+(1*.09)\] – \[(.24*.73)+(1*.27)\]=.08

Assuming that salespersons decline the unofficial card from all dropped out testers leads to a difference between Latinos and European Americans of .08. This effect is substantially smaller than .24 but still a positive difference favoring Latino testers.

Alternatively, salespersons who did not request ID might be more careless than others. Thus, they would likely accept the unofficial card from both Latinos and European Americans. Assuming that all dropped out salespersons would have accepted the unofficial card from both Latinos and European Americans yields the following treatment effect for tester ethnicity:

\[(.48*.91)+(0*.09)\] – \[(.24*.73)+(0*.27)\]=.26

Assuming that salespersons accept the unofficial card from all dropped out testers leads to a difference of .26. In the absence of an empirical test that circumvents attrition, for example, by always presenting ID regardless of whether it was requested, we rely on assumptions to estimate the exact size of the difference in decline of unofficial card from Latino versus European-American testers. Obviously, this is far from ideal. However, we can at least conclude that the general biased treatment based on tester ethnicity effect holds up under the two main plausible assumptions about the salespersons that cause the attrition we contend with.
Table CI

* Frequencies and Sample Sizes for Unofficial ID Card Condition Including Information about Attrition *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Stores</th>
<th>Latino testers assigned to present unofficial card (n=58&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>European-American testers assigned to present unofficial card (n=60&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unofficial card requested</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unofficial card declined</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> One Latino and one European-American tester failed in one store each to record which card they were randomly assigned to present. Thus, one case is missing and disregarded in each condition.