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## The Effect of Historical Narratives and Flag Type

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**Description**

This research will examine the effect of mainstream or marginalized historical narratives and the Confederate or American flag on temporal distancing, patriotism, perception of injustice, and assimilationist national identity. We expect that participants exposed to marginalized narratives will indicate higher perceived distance, especially when exposed to the Confederate flag. We expect that participants exposed to mainstream narratives will be highest on blind patriotism, especially when exposed to the American flag. We expect that participants in the American flag marginalized narrative condition would perceive the most racism and would reject more assimilationist conceptions of national identity. For the dependent measures of patriotism, perception of injustice, and national identity, we expect to find differences within the Confederate flag condition according to the meaning participants associate with the Confederate flag. These results will help us understand how people may respond to threatening narratives, how flag exposure may impact that response, and how historical narratives or flags can be presented to increase social justice awareness.

**Location**

CUB Ballroom

**Disciplines**

Personality and Social Contexts | Psychology | Social Psychology

**Comments**

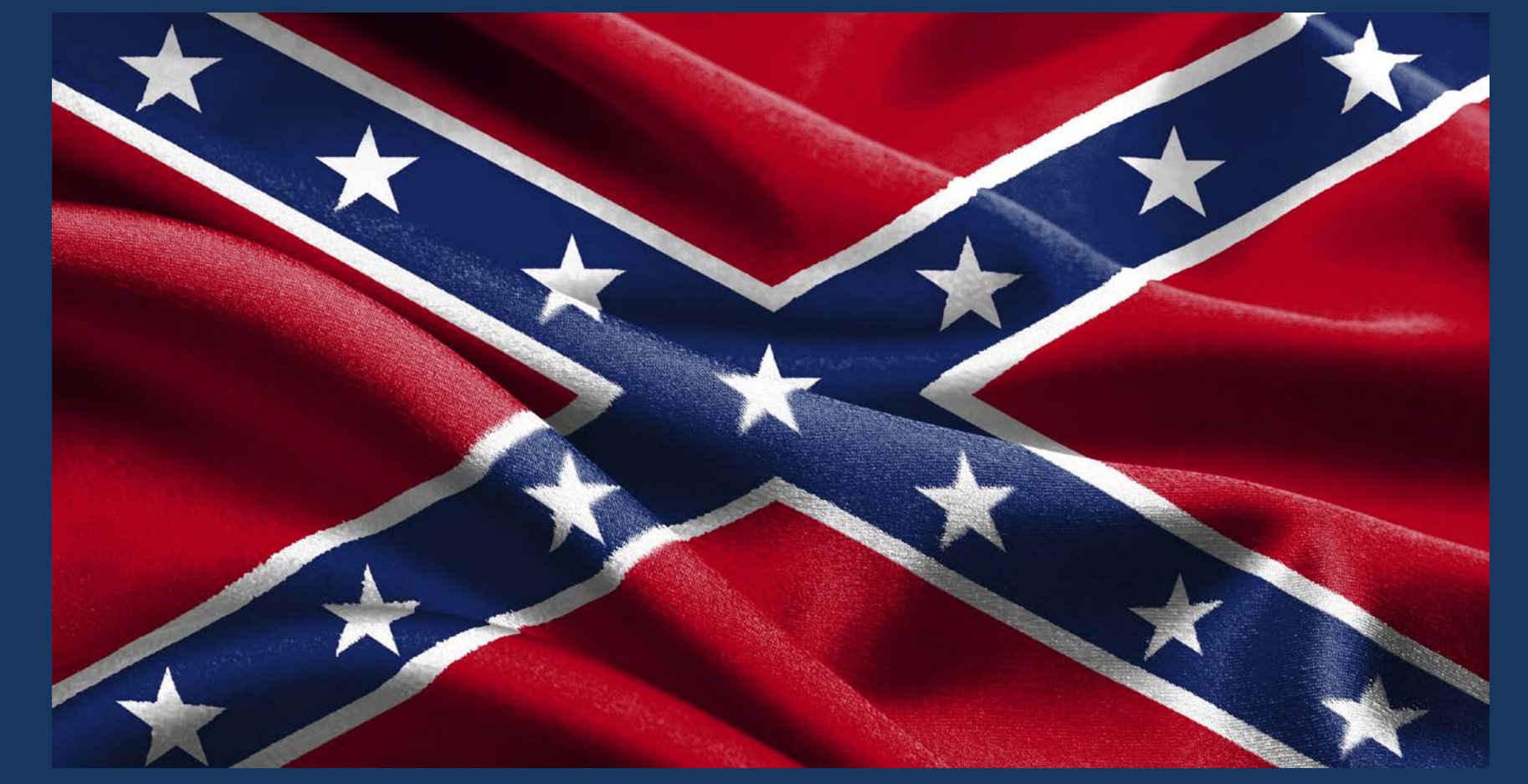
Psychology Senior Thesis





# The Effect of Historical Narratives and Flag Type

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## Introduction

**Temporal Distancing:** When one's identity is threatened, the mind unconsciously defends itself through temporally distancing itself and selectively forgetting the hostile information (Markus and Kitayama, 2010).

**Patriotism:** Strength of in-group national identity predicts a positive relationship with levels of patriotism for one's nation (Miron et al., 2010).

**Perception of Injustice:** White Americans overall perceive less systemic racism (Adams et al., 2008; Nelson, Adams, and Salter, 2012). White Americans' self-esteem ratings are negatively impacted by perceptions of systematic racism (Adams et al., 2008).

**National Identity:** American national identity is strongly centered around ideas of freedom and democracy and very weakly centered on ideas of ancestry and cultural traditions, showing a stronger ideology-based identity (Ditlmann et al., 2011).

**U.S. vs. Confederate Flag:** Southern American identity has a strong positive correlation with racial attitudes for white Americans (Reingold and Wike, 1998).

## Methods

### Participants & Procedure

119 participants (95 female, 22 male, 2 other gender) aged 18-80 ( $M = 34.61$ ) were recruited via Facebook snowball sampling. The majority were U.S. Citizens (96.6%) and White/Caucasian (89.9%). Ps were randomly assigned to a mainstream or marginalized history condition and a U.S. flag or Confederate flag condition.

### Measures

**Temporal Distancing:** (Peetz, Gunn, & Wilson, 2010) Participants were asked to indicate on a number line from 0 (very recent) to 100 (very long ago) how far away the described event feels from the present ( $\alpha = .66$ ).

*The remaining DVs were measured on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).*

**Patriotism:** Ps responded to six statements. Items assessed blind patriotism (lower scores) (e.g., I would support my country right or wrong) and constructive patriotism (higher scores) (e.g., I oppose some U.S. policies because I care about my country and want to improve it) ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

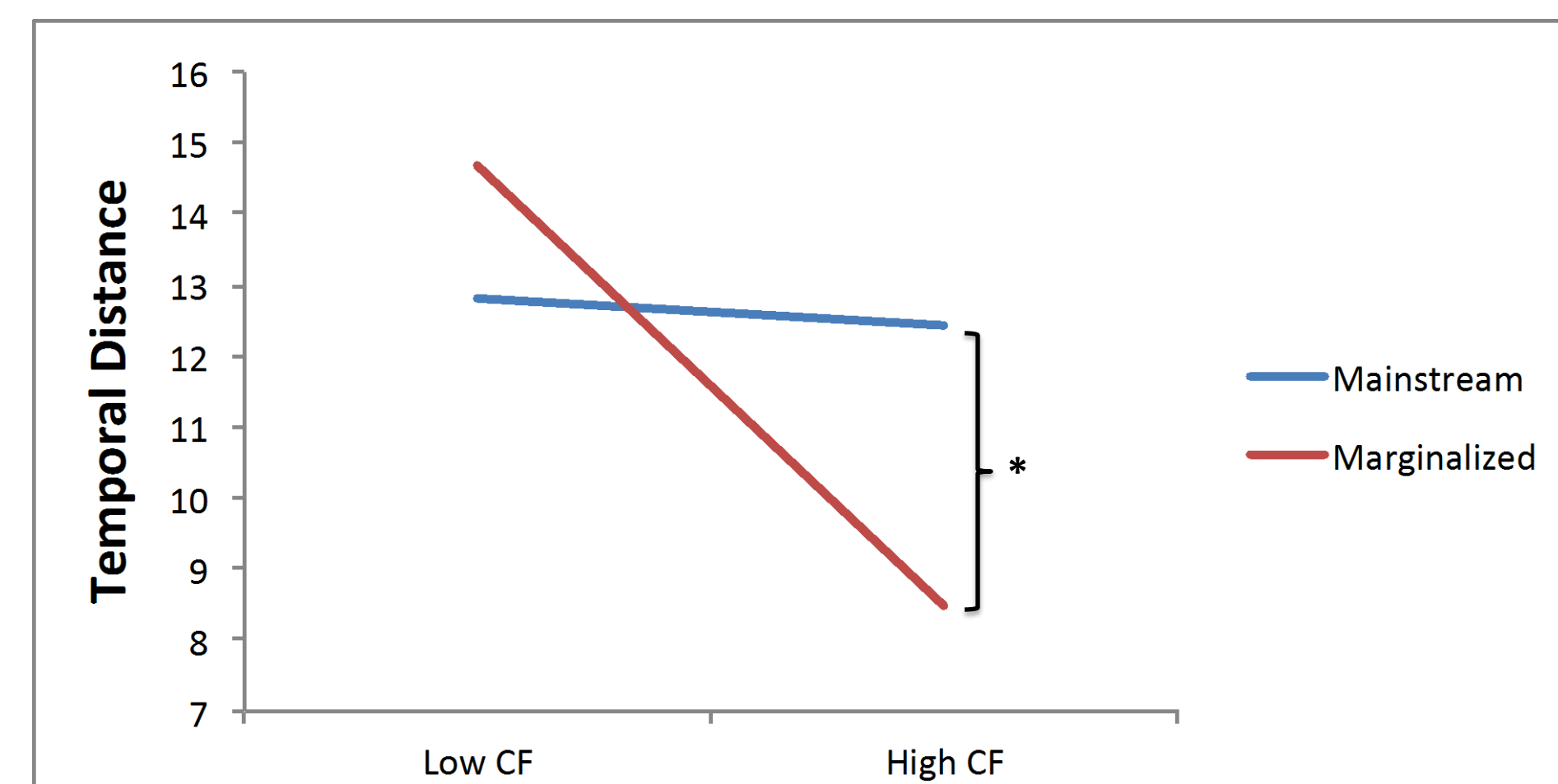
**Perception of Injustice:** (Mukherjee et al., 2016) Ps responded to nine statements. Items focus on sexism, racism, and immigration (e.g., using the word alien to describe an immigrant). Items were averaged so that high scores indicate a greater perception of injustice ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**National Identity:** Ps responded to six items (e.g., to be truly American, it is important to have U.S. citizenship). Items were averaged so that low scores indicate more rejection of assimilationist conceptions of national identity ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Confederate Flag Meaning:** (Confederate flag condition only) Ps responded to four statements. Items assess the flag as being associated with freedom (lower scores), (e.g., The Confederate flag stands for liberation) or with oppression (higher scores), (e.g., The Confederate flag represents a desire to maintain slavery) ( $\alpha = .57$ ).

## Temporal Distancing

- ANOVA indicates that there are no significant main effects or interactions.
- Regression analysis indicates a marginally significant interaction between flag type and history type,  $\beta = -0.542$ ,  $p = .052$ . Simple slopes reveal that for those participants exposed to marginalized narratives, perceiving the Confederate flag as symbolic of slavery and social hierarchy (i.e., high scores on Confederate flag measure) is negatively associated with temporal distancing (i.e., low temporal distancing scores and less perceived distance), ( $b = -3.37$ ,  $p = .02$ ). However, there was no relationship between Confederate flag meaning and temporal distancing for those exposed to mainstream narratives ( $b = -0.21$ ,  $p = .77$ ).

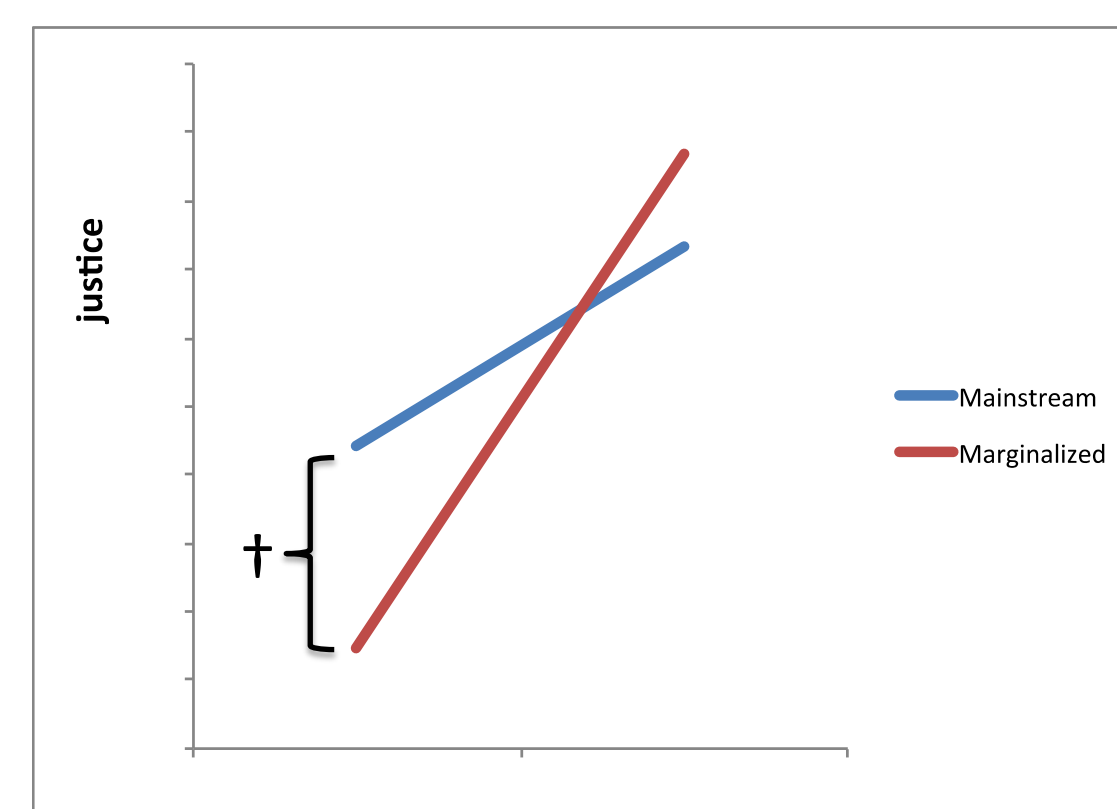


## Perception of Injustice

- ANOVA indicates that there is a significant main effect of flag type on perception of injustice, with participants exposed to the Confederate flag ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) perceiving significantly more injustice than participants exposed to the U.S. flag ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ),  $F(1, 115) = 5.00$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ . There is no significant main effect of history type or a significant interaction.

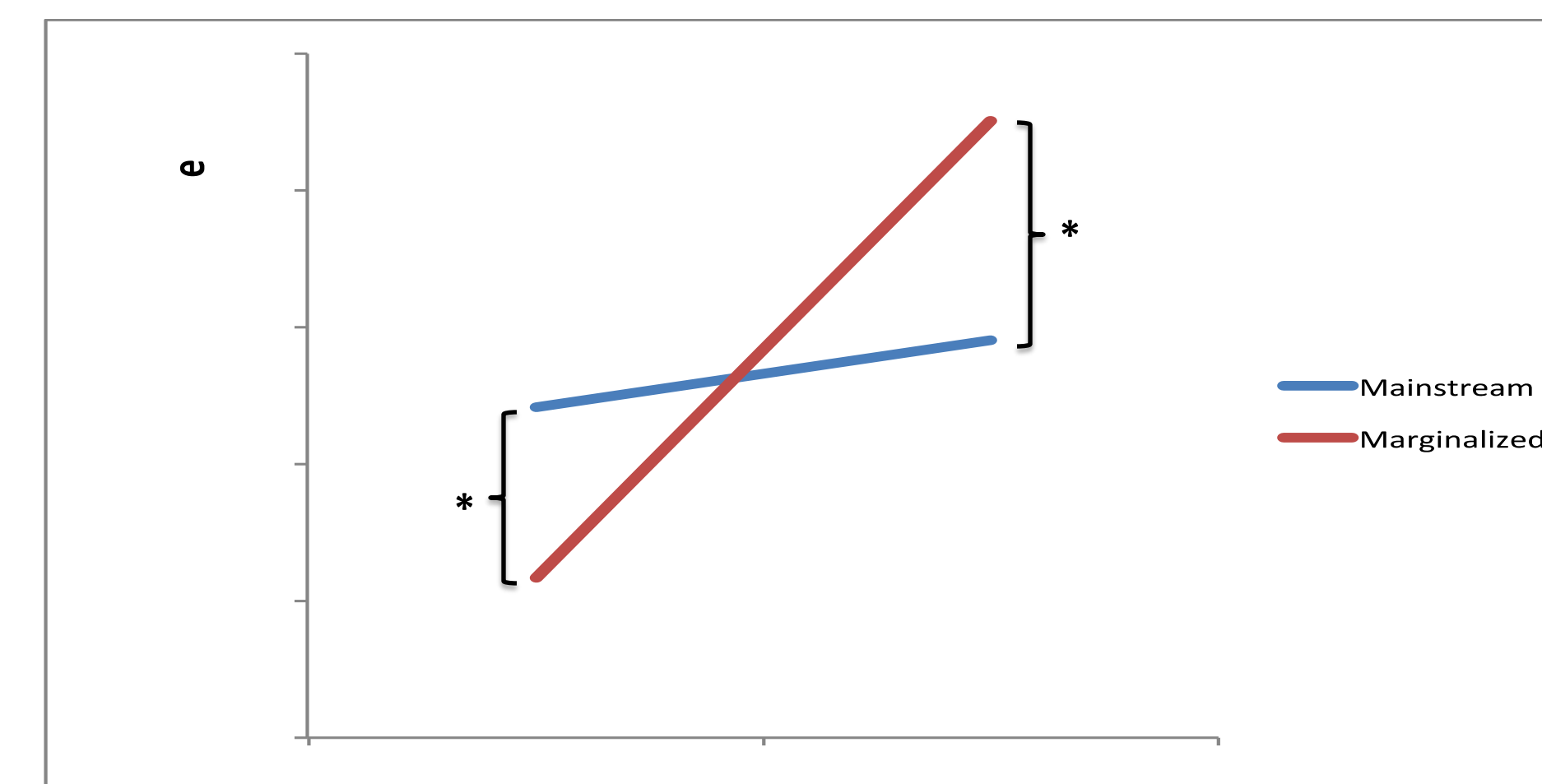


- Regression analysis indicates a marginally significant interaction between flag type and history type,  $\beta = 1.22$ ,  $p = .08$ . Simple slopes reveal that perceiving the Confederate flag as symbolic of slavery and social hierarchy (i.e., high scores on CF measure) is positively associated with perceptions of present-day injustice. This is especially more evident amongst those exposed to marginalized narratives ( $b = 0.79$ ,  $p = .001$ ), compared to those exposed to mainstream narratives ( $b = 0.32$ ,  $p = .01$ ).



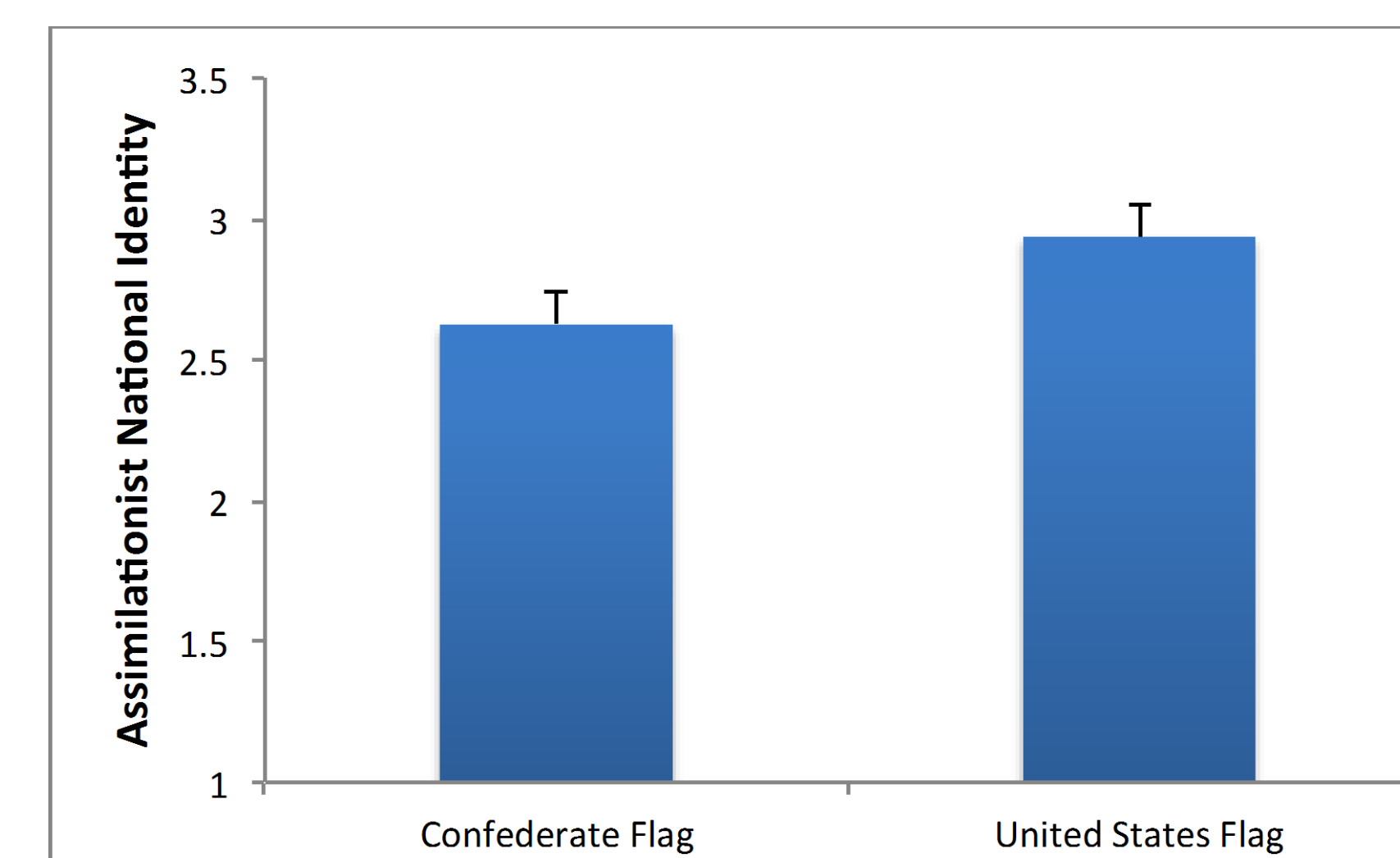
## Patriotism

- ANOVA indicates that there are no significant main effects or interactions.
- Regression analysis indicates a significant interaction between flag type and history type,  $\beta = 2.08$ ,  $p = .01$ . Simple slopes reveal that for those participants exposed to marginalized narratives, perceiving the Confederate flag as symbolic of slavery and social hierarchy (i.e., high scores on Confederate flag measure) is positively associated with constructive patriotism (i.e., high scores on patriotism measure), ( $b = 0.91$ ,  $p = .00$ ). However, there was no relationship between Confederate flag meaning and patriotism scores for those exposed to mainstream narratives ( $b = .14$ ,  $p = .28$ ).



## National Identity

- ANOVA indicates that there is a marginally significant main effect of flag type on national identity scores, with participants exposed to the U.S. flag ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) agreeing with more assimilationist conceptions of national identity (i.e., high national identity scores) than participants exposed to the Confederate flag ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ),  $F(1, 115) = 3.55$ ,  $p = .06$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ . There is no significant main effect of history type or a significant interaction.
- Regression analysis indicates a significant main effect of Confederate flag meaning on national identity scores,  $\beta = -.53$ ,  $p = .000$ , with participants associating the Confederate flag with slavery and social hierarchy (i.e., high scores on Confederate flag measure) agreeing with less assimilationist conceptions of national identity (i.e., low national identity scores) than participants associating the Confederate flag with liberation and states' rights (i.e., low scores on Confederate flag measure).



## Discussion

- The items for the Confederate flag meaning variable sought to assess whether Ps associated the flag with concepts of slavery, racism, & oppression (high CF scores), or with freedom and state's rights (low CF scores).
- Our results showed that how individuals perceive the meaning of the Confederate flag has a very polarizing effect on measures of temporal distancing, patriotism, and perception of injustice.
- Unexpectedly, the data shows that for those that view the Confederate flag as a symbol of oppression, there are actually benefits to being occasionally exposed to the Confederate flag. By this, we mean that the exposure can lead to perceiving events of injustice in history as closer in time, which can encourage more activism towards that injustice. There was also an increased ability to identify modern situations of injustice. Finally, these individuals showed higher levels of constructive patriotism, which is beneficial towards discussions of change. When participants who associate the Confederate flag with freedom were exposed to the flag reverse effects were found. From this, we have learned that confronting these individuals about injustice does not help improve their attitudes.
- There were no significant effects of exposure to mainstream narratives except for perception of injustice. However, exposure to marginalized narratives affected temporal distancing, perception of injustice, and patriotism. When participants associate the Confederate flag with freedom, they are more blindly patriotic and perceive less injustice when exposed to marginalized narratives; however, participants who associate the flag with oppression are more constructively patriotic and feel closer to events of injustice when exposed to marginalized narratives.
- In certain locations, such as Gettysburg, PA, individuals are often exposed to both the U.S. and Confederate flags. The results of this study suggest that depending on what individuals associate with the Confederate flag, they might react differently to the historical information they are presented with. Tourists come to Gettysburg from both Northern and Southern states, bringing various conceptions of what the Confederate flag means, to learn about the history of the Battle of Gettysburg and the Civil War. Museums, restaurants, and national parks should be aware that when presenting historical narratives in the presence of the Confederate or U.S. flags, the information will impact tourists in different ways depending on what meanings the individuals associate with the flags.

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