

Derogating the Victim: The Interpersonal Consequences of Blaming Events on Discrimination

Cheryl R. Kaiser

University of California at Santa Barbara

Carol T. Miller

University of Vermont

This experiment examines whether African Americans who attribute negative events to discrimination incur interpersonal costs, such as being viewed as troublemakers. An African American job candidate who attributed a rejection to discrimination was perceived as more of a troublemaker (e.g. hypersensitive, irritating) than an African American who attributed rejection either to his interviewing skills or to job competition. This devaluation occurred even when discrimination was blatant, such as when the employer made old-fashioned racist statements (e.g. 'Black people are just not as smart as White people'). This suggests that members of stigmatized groups may be reluctant to publicly acknowledge being the target of discrimination because it is socially costly to do so.

keywords attribution, discrimination, impression formation, prejudice, stigma

MEMBERS of stigmatized groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, face prejudice and discrimination in many aspects of their lives (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). For instance, prejudice and discrimination can block access to such resources as educational and employment opportunities and quality healthcare, and can also create interpersonal obstacles, such as being rejected and ignored (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). One way the stigmatized can cope with prejudice and discrimination is by speaking up or calling attention to the injustices they face. In fact, claims of discrimination may have a number of benefits,

such as reducing prejudiced-based hassles and creating social change. Surprisingly, however, members of stigmatized groups are often reluctant to publicly admit that they have been targeted by prejudice (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Goldman, 2001; Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Stangor,

Author's note

Address correspondence to: Cheryl R. Kaiser, Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9660, USA [email: c_kaiser@psych.ucsb.edu]

Swim, Van Allen, & Sechrist, 2002; Swim & Hyers, 1999).

In one study (Stangor et al., 2002), for example, members of low status groups (women and African Americans) received failing feedback on a test of creative thinking from a prejudiced higher status evaluator (men and European Americans respectively). After receiving the negative feedback, participants made attributions for their test grade to both discrimination and the quality of their test answers. One third of the participants made these attributions in complete anonymity, another third made them out loud in the presence of an ingroup member (another woman or African American respectively), and a final third made them out loud in the presence of an outgroup member (a man or a European American respectively). Women and African Americans were less likely to blame their poor grade on discrimination relative to their test performance when they made these claims in the presence of an outgroup rather than an ingroup member or when they were alone.

Likewise, Swim and Hyers (1999) found that women were reluctant to confront a man who made sexist comments. In this study, undergraduate women interacted with a group of confederates, one of whom was a man who made a series of sexist or nonsexist remarks. More than half (55%) of the women responded to these sexist comments by doing nothing at all—that is, they ignored the sexist man's remarks. This occurred despite the fact that virtually all (91%) of the women who did not respond to the remarks reported negative thoughts and feelings about the man and most (75%) thought he was sexist. Thus, despite recognizing prejudice, most of the women did not verbally express their displeasure to the man who made the sexist comments.

Why are members of stigmatized groups often reluctant to publicly acknowledge discrimination when they see it? Because a discrimination claim is a form of complaining, the interpersonal consequences (e.g. being viewed as fickle or as a whiner) that suppress more general complaints may also characterize the reactions of targets of prejudice (Kowalski,

1996). Targets of prejudice and discrimination might consider such factors as whether making discrimination complaints will change how they are treated, affect their interpersonal relationships, or influence the perceptions and attitudes of others toward them (Stangor et al., 2002; Swim & Hyers, 1999). When targets of prejudice perceive that the costs of claiming discrimination are low, they may be likely to make such claims. In contrast, when the costs of claiming discrimination are high, targets of prejudice may refrain from voicing a complaint, even when they are dissatisfied (Stangor et al., 2002; Swim & Hyers, 1999). This distinction is important, because people who do not challenge discrimination may be just as unhappy as those who do challenge it, but they may assess the costs and benefits of complaining differently (Swim & Hyers, 1999).

We have examined one potential set of costs that may be responsible for the reluctance of the stigmatized to publicly blame negative events on discrimination. Our focus is on interpersonal costs, such as seeming like a troublemaker or being disliked, which can arise when one makes a public discrimination claim. Several qualitative and retrospective correlational research studies suggest that targets of prejudice believe that publicly claiming discrimination is socially costly and worry about being perceived as troublemakers and targeted for retaliation when they make such claims (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995; Haslett & Lipman, 1997; Latting, 1993; Near & Jensen, 1983). For example, in a study of female attorneys' responses to sex discrimination in the workplace, none of the women reported that confronting a peer's sexist behavior improved their relationships with him (Haslett & Lipman, 1997). At best, the relationships remained the same, and at worst, they deteriorated. In another study, 40% of women who brought sexual harassment allegations against their employers reported that those employers responded by retaliating against them (Near & Jensen, 1983). Likewise, interviews with African Americans reveal that they anticipate social backlash from confronting discrimination (Feagin & Sikes, 1994).

These and other studies thus suggest that confronting prejudiced behavior may result in costs to social and professional relationships. Experimental evidence that claiming discrimination is interpersonally costly is rare, however.

In recent experimental research on this issue, Kaiser and Miller (2001, Study 2) asked participants to read a vignette about an African American person who attributed a negative event (a failing test grade) either to discrimination, his test answers (an internal attribution), or the difficulty of the test (an external attribution). The test administrator had told the African American either that there was no chance, a 50% chance, or a 100% chance that a racist European American evaluator had graded his test. Participants rated the extent to which the African American was a troublemaker, likable, and true to himself. Results revealed that when the African American attributed his failing grade to discrimination, he was perceived as more of a troublemaker (e.g. hypersensitive, emotional, irritating) than when he attributed the grade either to his test answers or to the difficulty of the test. He also seemed less likable (e.g. friendly, good personality) overall when he attributed his grade to discrimination rather than to his test answers (but not when he attributed the grade to test difficulty). This devaluation occurred regardless of the objective likelihood that discrimination occurred, even when discrimination was certain (because 100% of the evaluators were prejudiced). Although the African American student clearly suffered negative consequences in this research, he also was rated as more true to himself when he attributed his failure to discrimination rather than to other internal and external factors.

Although Kaiser and Miller's (2001) research shows that people who make discrimination claims are viewed as troublemakers, the amount of prejudice facing the target person in that research was conveyed through second-hand information (base rate information delivered by the test administrator to the target person). That is, participants never saw any direct evidence that the test graders were racist. Even though this prejudice manipulation was

successful in establishing different levels of perceived prejudice, it is possible that the participants' apparent insensitivity to the amount of prejudice facing the target person occurred because the manipulation lacked the emotional saliency or credibility that is often associated with witnessing discrimination directly (e.g. Fazio & Zanna, 1978).

Research on social influence shows that relative to information obtained indirectly, direct information engenders more confidence, is more cognitively accessible, and influences subsequent behavior more strongly (Fazio, Chen, McDonel, & Sherman, 1982; Fazio & Zanna, 1978, 1981). A stronger test of the hypothesis that people view discrimination claimants as troublemakers (even when it is clear that they have been victimized) might thus involve directly exposing participants to the source of prejudiced information.

It is also possible that insensitivity to the amount of prejudice facing the target person in Kaiser and Miller's (2001) research occurred because grading situations are not prototypical of discrimination. And mathematical descriptions of discrimination (percentages) may have less impact than verbal descriptions. Thus, it would be useful to see whether people are still insensitive to discrimination in other situations and when they have direct exposure to its perpetrators and must draw their own conclusions about the extent to which discrimination has harmed a target person.

Study overview and hypotheses

In the following experiment, we examined whether observers who are directly exposed to evidence of prejudice will still negatively evaluate the targets of that prejudice, when those targets make discrimination claims. We also studied a more realistic discriminatory event—an African American job candidate who faced low, moderate, or high levels of prejudice and claimed that discrimination, his interviewing skills, or competition for the job was responsible for his failure to be hired.

We predicted that the African American man would be viewed as more of a troublemaker

when he attributed his job rejection to discrimination than when he attributed it to his interviewing skills or job competition. We also expected the man to seem less likable when he attributed his failure to discrimination rather than to his interviewing skills. These patterns should occur when prejudice is absent or moderate. But when participants are exposed to direct evidence of strong prejudice, one of two patterns of results may occur. On the one hand, if Kaiser and Miller's (2001) findings were due to how the information about prejudice was conveyed, then direct exposure to prejudice-related information should increase the accessibility and credibility of that information and participants should show sensitivity to discrimination. In other words, targets of discrimination should not be devalued when they attribute negative events to prejudice, if there is direct evidence of that prejudice. On the other hand, if Kaiser and Miller's (2001) findings are robust and not due to their methodology, then targets of discrimination who attribute negative events to prejudice should incur social costs regardless of how much prejudice they face. Finally, we expected that one benefit of attributing negative events to discrimination might be seeming more true to oneself.

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 152 undergraduate students from an introductory psychology course who took part in the experiment to partially fulfill a course requirement. Participants were on average 18.63 years of age. The sample was 58% female, 42% male, and predominately European American (95.4%). The experiment used a 4 (Level of Prejudice: extremely high, high, moderate, low) \times 3 (Attribution: discrimination, interview skills, job competition) between-participants design.

Materials and procedure

Participants arrived at a large classroom where a female European American experimenter informed them that the purpose of the research was to examine college students'

perceptions of the employment interview process. The participants then received summaries of the experiment and learned that they would be examining a portfolio that described several aspects of an actual job interview. Their task would be to evaluate the interview process.

The participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions and completed the measures at their own pace. Everyone read a job description for an automotive sales manager position. This description outlined the qualifications needed for the position, as well as information about salary and benefits. Participants next read about the person who conducted the job interview. This description included the person's background with the company, his appearance (blond hair and fair skin, indicating a European American heritage), the major questions asked during the interview, and the room where the interview was conducted.

The participants next examined information about the job candidate. This included the candidate's background and job qualifications and included a photograph of him—an African American man who was professionally dressed. The candidate's prior work experience was commensurate with the requirements detailed in the job description and his application was 'above average' in overall quality.

The participants then reviewed the interviewer's hiring decision and corresponding comments. These comments represented the interviewer's personal reflections and were not shared with the company or the job candidate. All participants learned that the candidate was not offered the job. The interviewer's explanation for this decision was manipulated to reflect varying levels of racial discrimination (extremely high, high, moderate, and low). The comments were as follows:

Extremely high prejudice 'I do not recommend that the company hire this applicant. Black people are just not as smart as white people. Recently, I've had bad experiences with black employees. Black people tend to be unmotivated, unprofessional, and overall just

poor employees. I've never hired a black person and I never will.'

High prejudice 'I do not recommend that the company hire this applicant. Recently, I've had bad experiences with black employees. Black people tend to be unmotivated, unprofessional, and overall just poor employees. It takes a lot of effort to train a new manager, and I'm not willing to invest that time into someone from a group with such a poor track record of success.'

Moderate prejudice 'I do not recommend that the company hire this applicant. Although the candidate had pretty good credentials, I decided to offer the job to another candidate who seemed to have more potential to successfully manage the automotive sales team. Recently, I've had some mixed experiences with black people. Although some people like him work out well, it's still a big financial risk. It takes a lot of effort to train a new manager, and I'm not willing to invest that time into someone unless I'm certain that they will succeed.'

Low prejudice 'I do not recommend that the company hire this applicant. Although the candidate had pretty good credentials, I decided to offer the job to another candidate who seemed to have more potential to successfully manage the automotive sales team.'

Next, participants learned about the job candidate's reaction to the hiring decision. This information was conveyed through a survey completed by the job candidate as a means of providing the company with feedback about the interview process. The candidate rated the extent to which six possible factors affected the hiring decision. Those factors were discrimination, his interviewing skills, strong competition for the position, the candidate's anxiety, his academic credentials, and his previous employment history. The attribution scales ranged from 0 (*not at all responsible*) to 10 (*very much responsible*). The candidate's attributions indicated that in his opinion, just one factor was the main cause for the rejection. Specifically, ratings of *discrimination*, the *quality*

of his interviewing skills, or the fact that *competition for the position was strong*, were manipulated so that one factor was rated as an 8 and the other two were rated as 2's. The remaining three factors (anxiety, academic credentials, and previous employment history) were always rated as 1's. The interview skills and competition attributions served as control conditions. The interview skills condition represented an internal attribution for rejection and the competition attribution represented an external attribution for rejection. The latter condition controlled for the possibility that people who fail to take responsibility for their outcomes are perceived negatively (Carlston & Shovar, 1983).

After reviewing this information, participants rated the extent to which the job candidate was a troublemaker (the job candidate seems: hypersensitive, like a complainer, irritating, like a troublemaker, and argumentative, $\alpha = .81$), seemed nice (the job candidate seems: likable, to have a good personality, nice to have a conversation with, easy to get along with, considerate, and good to have as a friend, $\alpha = .89$), and was true to himself (the job candidate seems true to himself, tackles problems head on, believes that expressing his true opinions is important, $\alpha = .71$). The specific items were adapted from those used by Kaiser and Miller (2001). Several filler items were also used. All ratings were made on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Participants next evaluated the interviewer (e.g. did he ask appropriate interview questions; did he have a good personality) and various aspects of the job position and interview setting (does the job sound interesting; did the interview room seem comfortable), again on 7-point scales. Except for one item, which measured participants' perceptions of the extent to which the interviewer was racist, these items were included to disguise the purpose of the research and were of no theoretical interest.

Suspicion was examined by asking participants to provide written summaries of our research goals and to indicate when these ideas occurred to them. When participants turned

this information in, they were given a final survey that contained manipulation checks and checks on the saliency of the interviewer's and candidate's race. The manipulation check on attributions for the job rejection involved 7-point scales (endpoints were 1 *strongly disagree* and 7 *strongly agree*) measuring the extent to which the job candidate blamed his job rejection on his interviewing skills, the strong competition he faced, and discrimination. As another check on the prejudice manipulation, participants rated on a 7-point scale the extent to which they believed that discrimination was responsible for the candidate's failure to get the job. Participants were fully debriefed after completing these measures.

Results

Manipulation checks

Interviewer's level of prejudice The manipulation check on interviewer prejudice involved participants' ratings of the extent to which the interviewer seemed racist and the likelihood that discrimination was responsible for the candidate's job rejection. These two items were highly correlated ($r(152) = .66, p < .001$), and were thus averaged for this analysis. Examination of the means revealed that the extremely high prejudice and high prejudice conditions were quite similar. In fact, the means for these conditions were both nearly at the top of the 7-point scale ($M = 6.83, SD = 0.73$ and $M = 6.55, SD = 0.83$ for the extremely high and high prejudice conditions respectively). Because these means were statistically indistinguishable from each other and significantly different from the means in all the other conditions, the extremely high and high prejudice conditions were combined to create what we will hereafter refer to as simply the high prejudice condition. Our final level of prejudice variable thus had just three levels: high, moderate, and low prejudice.

A 3 (Level of Prejudice: high prejudice, moderate prejudice, and low prejudice) \times 3 (Attribution: discrimination, interview skills, or job competition) analysis of variance (ANOVA)

on ratings of the interviewer's level of prejudice produced a significant main effect for level of prejudice ($F(2, 143) = 61.88, p < .001$). Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$) revealed that all three level of prejudice conditions differed significantly from each other (M s = 6.70, 6.04, and 4.26, and SD s = 0.79, 1.16, and 1.55, for the high, moderate, and low prejudice conditions respectively). Thus, the manipulation was successful in establishing different amounts of prejudice facing the African American job candidate. There was also a marginally significant main effect for attribution type ($F(2, 143) = 2.79, p = .07$). Bonferroni multiple comparison tests revealed that none of the attribution type conditions differed from each other (M s = 6.07, 6.01, and 5.70 for the discrimination, interview skills, and job competition conditions respectively, p s $> .27$). Level of prejudice and attribution type did not interact significantly with each other ($F(4, 143) = 0.09, p = .47$).

Attributions for the rejection Separate 3 (Level of Prejudice: high prejudice, moderate prejudice, and low prejudice) \times 3 (Attribution: discrimination, interview skills, or job competition) ANOVAs were conducted on the job applicants' attributions of his failure to discrimination, interviewing skills, and job competition. All follow-up comparisons were examined with Bonferroni tests ($p < .05$). Participants in the discrimination condition ($M = 6.71, SD = 0.50$) were significantly more likely than those in the interview skills ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.93$) and job competition conditions ($M = 2.02, SD = 1.39$) to report that the job candidate attributed his rejection to discrimination ($F(2, 143) = 145.09, p < .001$). Participants in the interview skills condition ($M = 5.46, SD = 2.08$) were significantly more likely than those in the discrimination ($M = 1.55, SD = 0.84$) and job competition conditions ($M = 1.96, SD = 1.41$) to report that the job candidate attributed his rejection to his interviewing skills ($F(2, 143) = 85.67, p < .001$). Finally, participants in the job competition condition ($M = 6.53, SD = 0.97$) were significantly more likely than those in the discrimination ($M = 1.94, SD = 1.25$) and

Table 1. Means and standard deviations

Variable	Discrimination attribution: level of prejudice			Interview skills attribution: level of prejudice			Competition attribution: level of prejudice		
	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low
Troublemaker	2.78 (1.03)	2.88 (1.04)	3.18 (1.25)	2.32 (0.91)	2.55 (0.99)	2.37 (0.92)	2.31 (0.98)	2.69 (0.75)	2.42 (1.09)
Niceness	4.92 (0.82)	5.49 (1.02)	5.05 (0.94)	5.14 (0.87)	5.27 (0.84)	5.03 (0.68)	5.21 (0.90)	4.87 (0.70)	5.27 (1.15)
True to self	5.43 (0.97)	5.61 (0.96)	5.46 (1.00)	4.59 (0.87)	4.74 (0.85)	4.69 (0.69)	4.67 (0.94)	5.08 (0.75)	4.85 (1.16)

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. All variables were rated on 7-point scales with endpoints of 1 and 7. Higher scores represent higher levels of each variable.

interview skills conditions ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.80$) to report that the job candidate attributed his rejection to job competition ($F(2, 143) = 134.97$, $p < .001$). Level of prejudice did not produce significant main effects or interactions with attribution in any of these analyses.

Participants correctly identified the race of both the job candidate (94% accuracy) and the interviewer (95% accuracy). No one guessed that our research tested the effects on observers of African Americans' attributions for negative events.

Relationships among the dependent variables

Correlations among the dependent variables indicated that the niceness variable was related negatively to the troublemaker variable ($r(152) = -.62$, $p < .001$), and positively to the true to self variable ($r(152) = .52$, $p < .001$). The troublemaker variable was related negatively to the true to self variable ($r(152) = -.19$, $p = .02$). Given the prevalence of halo effects in impression formation (Asch, 1946), it is not surprising that these variables were correlated with each other. Because we wanted to see how specific perceptions of the job candidate were influenced by his attributions for failure, and to compare our results with those of Kaiser and Miller (2001), these measures were analyzed separately.

Impressions of the target person

Participants' impressions of the job candidate were analyzed using 3 (Level of Prejudice) \times 3

(Attribution) ANOVAs, followed by Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$).¹

Troublemaker The analysis of troublemaker ratings produced a significant main effect for attribution ($F(2, 134) = 3.91$, $p = .02$; $\eta^2 = .05$). The job candidate seemed significantly more of a troublemaker in the discrimination condition ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.08$) than in both the interview skills ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.92$) and competition attribution conditions ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.95$). The interview skills and job competition conditions did not differ significantly from each other.

Neither the main effect for level of prejudice ($F(2, 134) = 0.93$, $p = .40$), nor the interaction between level of prejudice and attribution ($F(4, 134) = 0.37$, $p = .83$), was significant. Thus, whether he faced high, moderate, or low levels of racism, the job candidate was rated as more of a troublemaker when he attributed his job rejection to discrimination rather than to his interviewing skills or to job competition. This disturbing finding replicates those reported in Kaiser and Miller (2001). See Table 1 for the individual cell means.

Niceness The analysis of niceness ratings produced no significant effects. The target did not seem less nice when he attributed the job rejection to discrimination ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 0.92$, rather than to his interviewing skills ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 0.81$), or to job competition ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 0.92$).

True to self The analysis of true to self ratings produced a significant attribution effect ($F(2, 134) = 7.64, p < .01; \eta^2 = .12$). The job candidate seemed more true to himself in the discrimination condition ($M = 5.48, SD = 0.96$) than in the interview skills ($M = 4.65, SD = 0.81$) and job competition ($M = 4.81, SD = 0.96$) conditions. True to self ratings in the interview skills and job competition conditions did not differ from each other. Neither the main effect for level of prejudice ($F(2, 134) = 0.72, p = .49$), nor the interaction between level of prejudice and attribution ($F(4, 134) = 0.17, p = .96$), was significant.

Discussion

This experiment provides disturbing evidence that claiming discrimination has social consequences. An African American who claimed that discrimination was responsible for a job rejection was seen as more of a troublemaker than someone who claimed that the rejection was due to his interviewing skills or the quality of the other job applicants. This devaluation occurred even when participants were directly exposed to highly prejudiced comments made by the person responsible for the hiring decision. This rules out the possibility that Kaiser and Miller's (2001) original finding was due to the fact that participants in their research were never directly exposed to the source of prejudice.

Although our results revealed that someone who claimed discrimination was perceived as more of a troublemaker, he did not seem less nice, relative to someone who took personal responsibility for the negative event. This finding is inconsistent with Kaiser and Miller (2001) and raises questions about whether claiming discrimination is indeed an interpersonally costly behavior. These inconsistencies may be due in part to methodological differences. Compared to Kaiser and Miller's (2001) experiments, the present experiment provided participants with more individuating information (e.g. a photograph, job qualifications) about the target person, and so they may have been reluctant to say some types of negative

things about him (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 2002). In particular, individuating information may have made our (primarily) White participants reluctant to label an African American as 'not nice'.

In addition, the niceness measure we employed included items aimed at assessing interpersonal relationships (such as desiring a friendship with the target person and perceiving him as likable). It is not socially acceptable to express disinterest in befriending African Americans (e.g. Devine, 1989; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), so participants may have been eager to endorse these niceness items. Consistent with this argument, Shelton (2003) found that in cross-race interactions, the European American participants expressed more liking for their African American partners than the African American participants expressed for their European American partners. Likewise, Mendes, Blascovich, Lickel, and Hunter (2002) found that although participants rated African American interaction partners as more likable than European Americans, they experienced more cardiovascular threat during interactions with African Americans. Perhaps a more subtle or indirect measure of 'niceness' would have revealed less tolerance among our participants for discrimination claims by the job candidate.

Despite our niceness results, the job candidate did indeed incur negative consequences. Few people would be pleased to learn that others perceive them as irritating, troublemakers, argumentative, hypersensitive, and complainers (Berscheid & Walster, 1978). Being perceived as a troublemaker may be particularly frustrating and disturbing to people who claim discrimination in situations where there is little doubt that they actually experienced discrimination.

Our findings add to the small body of research on the interpersonal nature of attributions to discrimination (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Stangor et al., 2002; Swim & Hyers, 1999). Work in this area is beginning to provide converging evidence that members of stigmatized groups often remain silent when faced with prejudice because there are costs associated

with speaking up. In other words, attributions to prejudice pose an interpersonal or self-presentational dilemma for the stigmatized.

Broadly speaking, attributing negative outcomes to discrimination can be considered a form of excuse making. This does *not* imply that such attributions are not justified or do not have a basis in reality. Research suggests that although excuses for negative events can have important intrapersonal benefits, such as protecting self-esteem and mental health (e.g. Snyder & Higgins, 1988), they may also have substantial interpersonal costs (Schlenker, Pontari, & Christopher, 2001). For example, blaming negative events on other people is considered anti-normative and can weaken the excuse maker's perceived character. The interpersonal costs of other-blaming can occur even when observers are personally unattached to the excuse maker and the situation. The costs associated with other-blaming may be particularly evident when people make accusations of prejudice. Because we like to see ourselves (and our social groups) as egalitarian, this type of other-blaming may be particularly threatening (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991).

Additionally, if someone is perceived as a chronic excuse maker, then others will respond negatively to that person, even when those excuses are substantiated with supporting evidence (Schlenker et al., 2001). This may explain why participants in our experiment were insensitive to the amount of prejudice facing the job candidate when they made ratings of the extent to which he was a troublemaker. If African Americans are perceived as hypersensitive to signs of discrimination, then their claims of discrimination may not be viewed as credible, and those who make such claims may incur costs.

Although claiming discrimination did have negative consequences in this experiment, there may also be some interpersonal benefits derived from speaking up. Specifically, a job candidate who claimed discrimination was perceived as true to himself. It is interesting that this occurred in conjunction with being perceived as a troublemaker. Participants were apparently willing to give the job candidate

credit for standing up for his beliefs, but also thought he was hypersensitive and troublemaking when he did so. There may be occasions when being perceived as uninhibited or true to oneself is more valuable than avoiding not being perceived as a troublemaker. For instance, social activists may be willing to complain about discrimination because they are more concerned with creating social change than with how others perceive them (Swim & Hyers, 1999).

One limitation of our research is that we did not measure actual behavior. In future research, it will be important to examine how people behave toward those who claim discrimination. Such behavior may depend on the specific domains in which the stigmatized are judged. For instance, people may be reluctant to engage in cooperative, highly interactive tasks with those they view as troublemakers or as irritating, but they may actually prefer these same persons in situations where freely speaking one's mind is desirable.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that we did not study different strategies for publicly claiming discrimination. The delivery of discrimination claims can vary widely, from the use of counter-normative channels (such as riots or protests) to relatively passive or minimally confrontational efforts aimed at educating perpetrators and observers about prejudice. Different types of discrimination claims may produce different interpersonal consequences, and it may be useful to examine the types of impressions created by different types of claims.

It will also be important to examine how members of socially devalued groups react to other members of their groups who blame negative events on discrimination. For example, do African Americans perceive other African Americans who claim discrimination negatively? Individual difference variables, such as group identification, may moderate ingroup members' perceptions of fellow group members who blame negative events on discrimination.

The fact that people who make claims of discrimination are perceived as troublemakers has many important implications. First, it suggests

that nonstigmatized individuals' reactions to those who claim discrimination may do little to help remedy discriminatory practices. If people attribute claims of discrimination to character flaws, then limited efforts may be made to explore discrimination that was originally responsible for the claim. Furthermore, unsupportive reactions by members of nonstigmatized groups may cause members of stigmatized groups to conclude (perhaps correctly) that their complaints about discrimination are not taken seriously, and this may lead the stigmatized to avoid publicly acknowledging discrimination in future situations.

Infrequent claims of discrimination may also hinder social change and prejudice reduction efforts. For instance, social movements aimed at improving the status of stigmatized groups cannot be undertaken without the public recognition that discrimination exists (Crosby, 1993; Lalonde & Cameron, 1994; Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1994). When discrimination is publicly recognized, members of stigmatized groups and their nonstigmatized allies have a forum for expressing their dissatisfaction. By calling attention to injustice and prejudice, social movements have the potential to change the way stigmatized groups are treated. Additionally, social movements may promote egalitarian social norms that subsequently influence attitudes toward the stigmatized (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001). Public claims of discrimination can thus have enormous societal benefits by exposing prejudice-based injustices and increasing social justice.

In conclusion, our research makes the important point that claiming discrimination is a risky behavior for members of stigmatized groups. Even when the stigmatized face clear discrimination, others perceive them as troublemakers when they express dissatisfaction. Although these findings are disturbing, it is important to recognize the barriers associated with claiming discrimination. Recognizing that interpersonal costs may inhibit members of stigmatized groups from expressing their dissatisfaction with discrimination is a necessary initial step in challenging and changing discriminatory practices.

Note

1. Because participant sex never interacted with either of the manipulated variables and was involved in only one significant main effect on niceness (with women viewing the target as nicer than men) and a marginal main effect ($p < .07$) on troublemaker (with women rating the target as somewhat less of a troublemaker than men), we collapsed across this variable in all analyses.

Acknowledgments

Portions of these data were presented at the Third Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology in Savannah, Georgia. We thank Richard Moreland, Brenda Major, and Shannon McCoy for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.

References

- Asch, S. E. (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 41*, 258–290.
- Berscheid, E., & Walster, E. (1978). *Interpersonal attraction*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Carlston, D. E., & Shovar, N. (1983). Effects of performance attributions on others' perceptions of the attributor. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44*, 515–525.
- Clark, R., Anderson, N. B., Clark, V. R., & Williams, D. R. (1999). Racism as a stressor for African Americans: A biopsychosocial model. *American Psychologist, 54*, 805–816.
- Crocker, J., Major, B., & Steele, C. (1998). Social stigma. In D. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 504–553). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Crosby, F. J. (1993). Why complain? *Journal of Social Issues, 49*, 169–184.
- Devine, P. G. (1989). Stereotypes and prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56*, 5–18.
- Devine, P. G., Monteith, M. J., Zuwerink, J. R., & Elliot, A. J. (1991). Prejudice with and without compunction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 817–830.
- Fazio, R. H., Chen, J., McDonel, E. C., & Sherman, S. J. (1982). Attitude accessibility, attitude-behavior consistency, and the strength of objective-evaluation association. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 18*, 339–357.

- Fazio, R. H., & Zanna, M. P. (1978). On the predictive validity of attitudes: The roles of direct experience and confidence. *Journal of Personality, 46*, 228–243.
- Fazio, R. H., & Zanna, M. P. (1981). Direct experience and attitude-behavior consistency. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 14, pp. 161–202.). New York: Academic Press.
- Feagin, J. R., & Sikes, M. P. (1994). *Living with racism: The Black middle-class experience*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Fitzgerald, L. F., Swan, S., & Fischer, K. (1995). Why didn't she just report him? The psychological and legal implications of women's responses to sexual harassment. *Journal of Social Issues, 51*, 117–138.
- Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (1986). The aversive form of racism. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 61–89). New York: Academic Press.
- Goldman, B. M. (2001). Toward an understanding of employment discrimination claiming: An integration of organizational justice and social information processing. *Personnel Psychology, 54*, 361–387.
- Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., & Pyszczynski, T. (1997). Terror management theory of self-esteem and cultural worldviews: Empirical assessments and conceptual refinements. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 29, pp. 61–139). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Haslett, B. B., & Lipman, S. (1997). Micro inequalities: Up close and personal. In N. V. Benokraitis (Ed.), *Subtle sexism: Current practice and prospects for change* (pp. 34–53). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jost, J. T., & Burgess, D. (2000). Attitudinal ambivalence and the conflict between group and system justification motives in low status groups. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*, 293–305.
- Kaiser, C. R., & Miller, C. T. (2001). Stop complaining!: The social costs of making attributions to discrimination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 254–263.
- Kowalski, R. M. (1996). Complaints and complaining: Functions, antecedents, and consequences. *Psychological Bulletin, 119*, 179–196.
- Lalonde, R. N., & Cameron, J. E. (1994). Behavioral responses to discrimination: A focus on action. In M. P. Zanna & J. M. Olson (Eds.), *The psychology of prejudice: The Ontario symposium* (Vol. 7, pp. 233–255). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Latting, J. K. (1993). Soliciting individual change in an interpersonal setting: The case of racially or sexually offensive language. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 29*, 464–484.
- Lerner, M. J. (1980). The belief in a just world: A fundamental delusion. New York: Plenum Press.
- Mendes, W. B., Blascovich, J., Lickel, B., & Hunter, S. (2002). Challenge and threat during social interactions with White and Black men. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 939–952.
- Near, J. P., & Jensen, T. C. (1983). The whistleblowing process: Retaliation and perceived effectiveness. *Work and Occupations, 10*, 3–28.
- Postmes, T., Spears, R., & Lea, M. (2002). Intergroup differentiation in computer-mediated communication: Effects of depersonalization. *Group Dynamics, 6*, 3–16.
- Schlenker, B. R., Pantari, B. A., & Christopher, A. N. (2001). Excuses and character: Personal and social implications of excuses. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5*, 15–32.
- Sechrist, G. B., & Stangor, C. (2001). Perceived consensus influences intergroup behavior and stereotype accessibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*, 645–654.
- Shelton, J. N. (2003). Interpersonal concerns in social encounters between majority and minority groups. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*.
- Snyder, C. R., & Higgins, R. L. (1988). Excuses: Their effective role in the negotiation of reality. *Psychological Bulletin, 104*, 23–35.
- Stangor, C., Swim, J. K., Van Allen, K. L., & Sechrist, G. B. (2002). Reporting discrimination in public and private contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 69–74.
- Swim, J. K., & Hyers, L. L. (1999). Excuse me—What did you say?!: Women's public and private responses to sexist remarks. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 35*, 68–88.
- Taylor, D. M., Wright, S. C., & Porter, L. E. (1994). Dimensions of perceived discrimination: The personal/group discrimination discrepancy. In M. P. Zanna & J. M. Olson (Eds.), *The psychology of prejudice: The Ontario symposium* (Vol. 7., pp. 233–255). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Paper received 4 July 2002; revised version accepted 31 July 2002.