
Why Are Attributions to Discrimination Interpersonally Costly? A Test of System- and Group-Justifying Motivations

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In two studies, Whites' endorsement of system-justifying beliefs predicted increased negativity toward Blacks who blamed negative events on discrimination. Whites' system-justifying beliefs were not associated with negativity toward Blacks who blamed negative events on other internal causes, external causes, or nondiscriminatory unfairness. These negative reactions toward discrimination claimants were mediated by perceptions that the claimant held dissimilar values and failed to take personal responsibility for outcomes. In both studies, participants' White Identification did not moderate the relationship between the Black target's attribution for failure and subsequent negative perceptions of that individual, thus providing evidence against a group-justification explanation of these findings.

Keywords: *discrimination; attribution; legitimacy; system justification; group identification; person perception*

Scholars studying prejudice have devoted considerable attention to understanding the psychological consequences of attributing negative events to discrimination. To date, this research has focused almost exclusively on discrimination attributions as a private, interpretational phenomenon with consequences primarily for the attributor's self-esteem (see Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b, for reviews). This limited focus is unfortunate because discrimination attributions occur in a social context and thus have important implications for interpersonal relationships. In this article, we argue that a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic and complex processes involved in making discrimination attributions cannot

be achieved without considering the interpersonal consequences of these judgments. We first describe these interpersonal consequences and then integrate this research within a theoretical framework examining how system- and group-justifying beliefs moderate these consequences.

Interpersonal Nature of Discrimination Attributions

In the first investigation documenting the interpersonal consequences of discrimination attributions, Kaiser and Miller (2001) had White participants read about a Black man who received a failing test grade from a grader who was certainly, possibly, or not at all prejudiced against Blacks. Participants then learned that the target attributed his grade either to discrimination, his inadequate test answers (an internal attribution), or the test difficulty (an external attribution). Both internal and external attribution control groups were utilized because discrimination attributions are both internal (causal locus resides within one's social

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identity) and external (causal locus resides within another's prejudice). When the target attributed his grade to discrimination, he was derogated (e.g., perceived as irritating, a complainer) to a greater extent than when he attributed his grade to other causes, and this occurred regardless of the likelihood that a racist evaluator graded the test.

Similarly, several experiments utilizing Kaiser and Miller's design (Garcia, Reser, Amo, Redersdorff, & Branscombe, 2005; Stangor et al., 2003) as well as other paradigms (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Kaiser & Miller, 2003; Shelton & Stewart, 2004) demonstrate that individuals belonging to a variety of groups experience interpersonal costs when they make discrimination attributions. However, researchers are still uncertain why these interpersonal costs occur. In this article, we examine the role of system- and group-justifying processes in understanding the interpersonal consequences of discrimination attributions.

System-Justifying Beliefs

Most human societies are structured hierarchically where groups at the top rungs of the hierarchy have greater access to material (e.g., property, income) and social capital (e.g., power, respect) than groups at the lower rungs of the hierarchy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Because individuals at all levels of the social hierarchy possess a fundamental desire to see their world as fair (Lerner, 1980) and because members of powerful groups are motivated to protect their privileged position (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), cultural beliefs are created to explain and justify the status system (Jost & Hunyady, 2002). Jost and Banaji (1994) dubbed this type of status legitimizing belief system, "system justification."

In the United States, prevailing system-justifying beliefs (SJBs) include the Belief in a Just World (BJW), the Protestant Work Ethic, Social Dominance Orientation, and the belief that the U.S. status system is permeable and that advancement is possible for everyone (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; O'Brien & Major, 2005). Because these beliefs locate the causes of events internally within attributes of individuals (e.g., their effort and talent), endorsing SJBs leads to the inference that individuals are responsible for their position in life. In addition, when beliefs in internal causality and personal responsibility are applied to the group level, they imply that groups at the top rungs of the social hierarchy are entitled to their privileged position because they have worked hard and groups at the bottom rungs of the hierarchy are to blame for their low status because they have not worked hard enough. That is, these beliefs make what at first glance looks like evidence of injustice appear

as fair and natural because the social hierarchy reflects the differential inputs and thus social value of groups (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Jost & Hunyady, 2002).

SJBs and the Interpersonal Consequences of Discrimination Attributions

We believe that integrating theoretical perspectives on SJBs with research on the interpersonal consequences of discrimination attributions can help explain why claiming discrimination is interpersonally costly. When groups at the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy claim to be victims of discrimination, these claims are at odds with the belief that the United States is a fair society where anyone, regardless of their position in the hierarchy, can get to the top. Because discrimination claimants challenge SJBs, strong endorsers of this belief system are apt to view discrimination claimants as possessing dissimilar values, of inadequately adhering to norms about personal responsibility, and as generally a threat against their worldview (Byrne & Wong, 1962; Crandall et al., 2001; Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Lerner, 1980; Rokeach, 1968). Thus, for these reasons, strong endorsers of SJBs will be apt to react negatively when they encounter low-status group members who blame negative events on discrimination.

A study by Jost and Burgess (2000) provides some evidence consistent with this hypothesis. They had participants read a story about a woman who was denied entry into her university's honors program (her qualifications were ambiguous) and subsequently sued the university for sex discrimination. They found that the more men endorsed the BJW and Social Dominance Orientation (assessed after reading the story), the more negatively they evaluated the woman.

Although this study is consistent with our perspective, it leaves several questions unanswered. Because this study was designed for a different purpose, it does not contain a control group (such as a condition where a woman acts assertively about nondiscriminatory issues) that could clear up interpretational ambiguities. Because SJBs are positively associated with prejudice (including sexism; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), it is possible that men who strongly endorse SJBs would have evaluated any woman (especially an assertive woman) negatively (Rudman, 1998). Thus, the negative reactions observed in this study could have occurred simply because the target was assertive and thus not stereotype consistent. Finally, as we will discuss below, this study cannot separate system-justifying motivations from group-justifying motivations, thus leaving the motivation behind the men's reactions ambiguous.

*Group Justification and the Interpersonal
Consequences of Discrimination Attributions*

When introducing System-Justification Theory, Jost and Banaji (1994) noted that group justification, a primary feature of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), is consistent with the system-justification motive for groups at the top rungs of the social hierarchy (see also Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Group justification involves “the desire to develop and maintain favorable images of one’s own group and to defend and justify the actions of fellow ingroup members” (Jost & Hunyady, 2002, p. 121). Because behaviors that promote the interests of high-status groups also justify the current social arrangements, system-justifying and group-justifying motivations are often conflated for high-status groups. Indeed, SJBs and group identification (a common measure of group justification) are positively correlated among Whites (O’Brien & Major, 2005).

This observation raises the possibility that group justification, rather than or in addition to system justification, might explain why Whites who endorse SJBs would react negatively to Black discrimination claimants. When Blacks claim that Whites cause their oppression, this can threaten Whites’ perceptions about the integrity of their racial group and this type of accusation could lead Whites to justify their ingroups’ actions by derogating discrimination claimants and finding fault within those individuals rather than within their own group. Furthermore, these group-justifying responses are particularly likely to characterize highly identified group members because these individuals consider the group a central part of the self (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002).

Overview and Hypotheses

We conducted two studies aimed at elucidating and further developing research on the interpersonal consequences of discrimination attributions. In these studies, we examined the moderating role of both SJBs and White Identification in understanding why Whites react negatively toward Black discrimination claimants. The inclusion of both system- and group-justifying beliefs is important because it is rare for research to simultaneously measure and compare the contributions of both of these critical processes in investigations of system threats. Our overarching hypothesis is that both system- and group-justifying beliefs moderate interpersonal reaction to discrimination claimants, such that stronger endorsement of these beliefs is associated with more negative interpersonal reactions toward Blacks who claim discrimination.

STUDY 1

Method

PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Participants were 195 White undergraduates (M age = 19.5 years, SD = 2.9 years, 74.9% women) at a large university who participated in exchange for credit toward a class research requirement. The experiment involved one manipulated independent variable (Attribution Type) and two continuous predictors (BJW and White identity).

PROCEDURES

Participants who had completed Web-based measures of BJW and White identity in the days prior to the experiment arrived at the laboratory individually and were greeted by a professionally dressed experimenter who led them to a cubicle with a computer. The experimenter explained that the study involved a collaborative project with a local organization that was aimed at investigating several tests used in the hiring process. Participants were told that two other participants were involved in the study session and that each person would be randomly assigned to one of three roles. Specifically, participants learned that one participant would take a test, another would grade the test, and the third would observe this process and provide impressions of the testing process. All participants were told that due to the time slot they selected, they were assigned to the observer role and would be viewing the activities of the test-taker and test-evaluator who had arrived earlier and were already working in nearby rooms (in actuality, the test-taker and test-evaluator were represented by computerized scripts). Participants also were told that the test-taker and test-evaluator were aware that the observer would watch the entire interaction live via computer. The experimenter explained that all participants would swap basic information with each other (including a digital photograph) to get a general sense of the people involved in the interaction. The experimenter then photographed the participant for the purpose of sharing this information with the other participants. Finally, the experimenter initiated the computer program and left the room.

Participants began by answering a few personal questions (e.g., college major, hobbies) that were purportedly to be delivered to their interaction partners. Next, they were presented with an introduction screen for each of the other participants that included a photograph and responses to the same personal questions they had just completed. On the introduction screens, the test-taker was always pictured as a Black man and the test-evaluator was always pictured as a White man.

TABLE 1

	<i>Discrimination Attribution Condition</i>	<i>Answer Quality Attribution Condition</i>	<i>Test Difficulty Attribution Condition</i>
Manipulation check item			
Discrimination	4.80 (1.35) _a	1.69 (1.35) _b	1.55 (1.13) _c
Answers	1.76 (1.29) _b	3.26 (2.19) _a	2.60 (1.71) _b
Test difficulty	1.28 (1.01) _c	1.54 (1.22) _b	4.82 (1.48) _a

NOTE: Means with columns not sharing a common subscript significantly differ. *SDs* are parenthesized.

Two different photographs (equated for physical attractiveness) were used to represent the test-taker and test-evaluator. These photographs were counterbalanced, creating four different test-taker and test-evaluator combinations. After receiving information about the other participants, the computer displayed a screen showing that the test-taker's test was being loaded onto their computer. The test involved listing different uses for everyday objects (e.g., table, trunk). The test-taker's completed test was presented for 120 s, and participants were told to examine the test to get a sense of the test-taker's performance.¹ This information then disappeared and was replaced with a screen indicating that the test-evaluator's feedback was being loaded onto the computer. The test-evaluator's feedback indicated that the test-taker performed poorly and this evaluation was accompanied by a blatant racist comment. Specifically, the test-evaluator wrote,

I guess your creativity test was alright. Some of your answers were creative. But honestly, most of them were not too creative at all. I kind of expected to see more effort from a college student. I would say that your test performance is in the bottom half of test-takers. But this isn't too suprising [*sic*]. My experience has been that minorities at MSU don't do as good [*sic*] as the White students. So, I'd say this is a below average test."

Next, participants observed the test-taker's reaction to this feedback. This reaction, which constituted the attribution-type manipulation, was conveyed by showing participants a survey ostensibly completed by the test-taker indicating that he blamed his poor test performance on the quality of his answers, discrimination, or the difficulty of the test. The test-taker's survey indicated that one of these three attributions was rated as a strong cause of the event (rated as an 8 on a 0-10 scale) and the other two causes were rated low (2s on the scale). Finally, participants completed dependent measures (they were ensured that their responses would not be seen by the other participants) before being probed for suspicion and debriefed.

MEASURES

BJW. SJBs were operationalized with five items from Lipkus, Dalbert, and Siegler's (1996) BJW for Others Scale. Sample items included, "I feel that the world treats people fairly" and "I feel that people get what they deserve" ($\alpha = .81$). Items on this measure, as well as all other measures in this study, were rated on a 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) scale.

White identity. White identity was assessed with Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) four-item identity centrality subscale ($\alpha = .82$), which assesses the importance of a group to one's sense of self. Sample items included, "The ethnic group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am" and "In general, belonging to my ethnic group is an important part of my self-image."

Target derogation. Interpersonal reactions toward the test-taker were assessed with Kaiser and Miller's (2001, 2003) target derogation items, which assessed the extent to which the target was perceived as emotional, irritating, hypersensitive, a complainer, a trouble maker, and argumentative ($\alpha = .77$).

Manipulation check. To ensure that participants attended to the test-taker's attribution for his test performance, we had participants respond to three items assessing the extent to which the test-taker blamed his test feedback on discrimination, his answer quality, and test difficulty. In addition, participants indicated the extent to which the test-evaluator was prejudiced toward Blacks.

Results

SUSPICION AND MANIPULATION CHECK

Eighteen participants were excluded from the final analyses (3 because of procedural errors and 15 because of suspicion), leaving 177 participants in the final sample.

An analysis of variance with experimental condition as a between-subjects factor and the three manipulation check items (perceptions that the target attributed his failure to discrimination, answer quality, and test difficulty) as a within-subjects factor revealed the predicted Experimental Condition \times Attribution items interaction, $F(4, 346) = 85.05, p < .01$. In each experimental condition, participants correctly perceived that the target blamed his failure primarily on the respective experimentally induced cause (see Table 1).²

We next examined participants' ratings of the extent to which they believed the test-evaluator was prejudiced. Participants did indeed view the test-evaluator as prejudiced ($M = 4.90, SD = 1.32$), rating him near the top of the scale. Regression analyses revealed that participants' level of BJW and White identity did not influence ratings of the test-evaluator's prejudice ($ps > .19$);

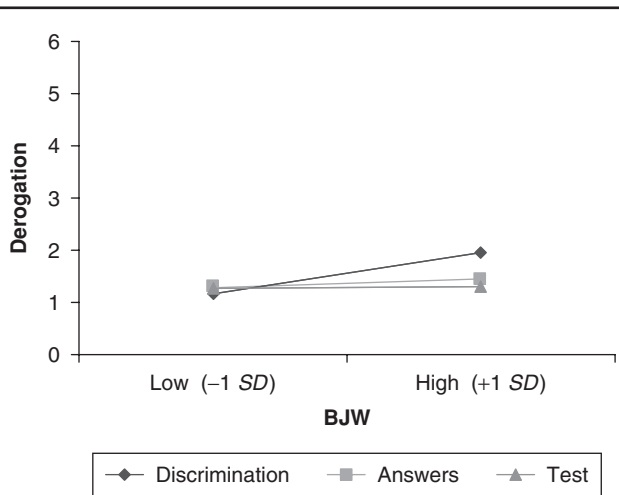


Figure 1 BJB moderates the relationship between attribution type and target derogation.

NOTE: BJB = Belief in a Just World.

** $p < .01$.

however, participants in the answer attribution condition did perceive the grader as less racist than did those in the discrimination attribution condition ($p < .01$). Of importance, however, neither BJB nor White identity interacted with experimental condition in predicting this item ($ps > .43$).³

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MEASURES

BJW ($M = 2.62$, $SD = .96$) was positively associated with White identity ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.39$, $r = .16$, $p < .05$), demonstrating that these beliefs are complementary for Whites. Target derogation ($M = 1.43$, $SD = .80$) was positively associated with BJB ($r = .23$, $p < .01$) and was positively but not significantly associated with White identity ($r = .12$, $p = .11$).

ANALYSIS PLAN

A single hierarchical regression analysis was used to test our predictions regarding BJB and White identity as moderators of the relationship between attribution type and target derogation. We entered the centered predictor variables (BJW and White identity) and the attribution type main effects on Step 1. We used two dummy-coded terms for attribution type (one that represents the discrimination condition vs. answer condition comparison and another that represents the discrimination condition vs. the test condition comparison). The discrimination condition was always the referent condition and was dummy-coded as zero. On Step 2, we entered the two-way interaction terms, and in Step 3, we entered the three-way interaction terms.

TARGET DEROGATION

The first step of the analysis examining target derogation was significant ($R^2 = .08$, $p < .01$), revealing that participants in the discrimination attribution condition ($M = 1.65$) derogated the target person more than those in the test attribution condition ($M = 1.29$, $\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$). Ratings in the discrimination condition did not differ from those in the answer attribution condition ($M = 1.38$, $\beta = -.15$, $p = .09$). In addition, the more participants endorsed BJB, the more they derogated the test-taker ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$). As predicted, Step 2 accounted for a significant amount of additional variance ($\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p < .05$) and revealed just two significant terms. Specifically, the relationship between BJB and derogation was significantly different in the discrimination condition relative to both the answer condition ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .05$) and the test condition ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .05$). Counter to hypotheses, the relationship between White identity and derogation did not differ in the discrimination condition relative to either the answer condition ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .90$) or the test condition ($\beta = .04$, $p = .72$). Finally, Step 3 did not account for a significant increase in variability ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p = .13$).

We next examined the simple slopes for the significant two-way interactions between BJB and experimental condition. These slopes revealed that BJB was positively related to derogation in the discrimination condition ($\beta = .51$, $p < .01$) but was unrelated to derogation in both the test condition ($\beta = .02$, $p = .86$) and the answer quality condition ($\beta = .09$, $p = .45$). As seen in Figure 1, this pattern is consistent with the SJB hypothesis and suggests that discrimination claimants challenge the legitimacy of the status hierarchy.

Discussion

Study 1 examined two theoretically plausible moderators of interpersonal reactions toward discrimination claimants. The analyses demonstrated that the more individuals endorsed BJB, the more they derogated the test-taker when he blamed poor feedback on racism, but not when he blamed it on other internal or external causes. Although this relative difference in target derogation is theoretically and statistically meaningful, it is important to recognize that derogation scores were below the scale midpoint in all experimental conditions. Study 1 also provides surprising evidence that White identity does not moderate interpersonal responses toward discrimination claimants.

Although Study 1 supports our SJB hypotheses, we conducted a second study to conceptually replicate these findings as well as to address some of the limitations of this study. First, one could question whether

internal and external attribution control groups represent the best set of controls to which discrimination attributions should be compared. We chose internal and external attribution control groups because discrimination attributions are both internal and external (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002a). However, discrimination attributions also are judgments of unfairness (Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003). Thus, one could question whether our findings might occur when Blacks engage in any type of unfairness attribution.

We believe that relative to other types of unfairness attributions, discrimination attributions may be particularly likely to threaten SJBs. Specifically, because low-status group members' discrimination attributions serve as reminders that discrimination is chronic and pervasive, these attributions will carry a great deal of "total relevance," that is, their implications extend beyond the current situation (Heider, 1958; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b). In contrast, other types of personal unfairness attributions might be more "locally relevant" (Heider, 1958) because although they also may threaten SJBs, they are unlikely to pose a chronic and pervasive threat to this belief system. Thus, although many types of attributions can challenge SJBs, discrimination attributions might be especially likely to do so. In Study 2, we addressed this by comparing discrimination attributions to nondiscriminatory unfairness attributions.

Second, participants in the control conditions in Study 1 learned not only that the target blamed his failure on nondiscriminatory causes but also that this individual explicitly did not blame failure on discrimination. That is, when the target conveyed that internal or external causes were responsible for his grade, he also stated that discrimination was not the cause. Thus, it is possible that participants who endorsed SJBs react more positively to individuals who deny discrimination rather than more negatively to individuals who claim discrimination. Thus, in Study 2, our control group does not involve denial of discrimination.

Third, because one might argue that BJW is primarily focused on perceptions of personal control over the environment (e.g., Lerner, 1980) and not on more systematic legitimacy concerns, Study 2 employed two measures that more closely capture SJBs.

Finally, in Study 2, we examined three theoretically derived processes that might explain why strong endorsers of SJBs react negatively toward low-status discrimination claimants. Specifically, we examined (a) perceived value dissimilarity with the claimant, (b) perceptions that the claimant failed to take personal responsibility for outcomes, and (c) threatened/angry affect. We describe our rationale for each variable below.

Because discrimination claimants convey that the status system is illegitimate, strong endorsers of SJBs

may perceive discrimination claimants as possessing dissimilar values, and this could serve as a reason for reacting negatively toward them. There is a large literature showing that people react harshly toward individuals who question the validity of their core assumptions about the world (Byrne & Wong, 1962; Greenberg et al., 1997; Lerner, 1980). Indeed, several theories of prejudice argue that discrimination is expressed because out-group members are viewed as violating one's own group's values (Biernat, Vescio, & Theno, 1996; Crandall et al., 2001; Katz & Hass, 1988; Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Rokeach, 1968).

Second, blaming events on discrimination involves absolving oneself of personal responsibility for negative events, and this violates a central feature of SJBs (Crandall et al., 2001; Crandall & Martinez, 1996). Indeed, Garcia et al. (2005) report that people who blame failure on discrimination are perceived as taking less responsibility for that event than people who blame the failure on themselves. This personal responsibility explanation can be distinguished from the value dissimilarity explanation because the former focuses on the nature of the specific attribution and the latter on the discrimination claimant's character.

Third, the negative interpersonal consequences of claiming discrimination might stem from affective reactions to having one's worldview questioned. Several theoretical perspectives assert that challenges to core beliefs cause increased uncertainty, threat, and anger, which can be alleviated by punishing the source of the threat (Greenberg et al., 1997; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Kaiser, Vick, & Major, 2004; Lerner, 1980). Thus, discrimination claimants might make strong endorsers of SJBs feel threatened, and this in turn could lead to their derogation.

STUDY 2

Method

PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Participants were 44 White undergraduates (63.6% women, M age = 19.3 years, SD = 1.1 years) at a large research university who participated in exchange for credit toward a class requirement. The experiment employed one manipulated variable (Attribution Type) and two continuous variables (SJBs and White identity).

PROCEDURES

Participants who had completed two SJBs measures and a White identity measure online in the days prior to the lab session reported to the laboratory for a study

purportedly examining impression formation. The experimenter, who was blind to experimental condition, told participants that they would read two essays that were written by other students at their university and that they would then provide their impressions of those individuals. Participants received a packet containing information describing two essay-writers. Each packet included demographic information about the essay-writer (e.g., gender, age, race), which was followed by the student's handwritten essay. The second essay in the packet was filler information included for the purpose of mitigating suspicion that might arise in a study where participants anticipated evaluating just one Black American. The first essay was always written by a 19-year-old Black man who wrote about receiving a poor paper grade. The essay-writer explained that he had put a great deal of effort into the paper and had another student read it prior to submitting it to his teaching assistant. The essay-writer then conveyed that he received a poor grade and that the teaching assistant treated him rudely when he went to discuss his grade.

In the discrimination attribution condition, the essay-writer confided that he had a friend doing work-study in the teaching assistant's department and that this friend reported that several minority students had complained to the department that this teaching assistant was rude to minority students. The essay ended with the writer stating, "This was a really frustrating experience with a *racist*. I hope the department follows up with this TA." In the unfairness attribution condition, the essay was identical with the exception that the essay-writer's work-study friend reported that several students had complained that this teaching assistant was rude to all students. The essay ended with the statement, "This was a really frustrating experience with a *jerk*. I hope the department follows up with this TA." By comparing discrimination attributions and unfairness/other-blame attributions, we can address the possibility that the findings in Study 1 occurred because people react negatively toward individuals who claim to experience unfairness or engage in other-blame more generally.

Participants then completed measures assessing potential process variables (value similarity, responsibility judgments, threatened/angry affect) and interpersonal reactions toward the essay-writer. Participants then completed a manipulation check on the essay-writer's attribution for his negative event and indicated the extent to which they personally believed that the essay-writer experienced racism.

Participants were then told that there was one short task left to complete. The experimenter informed participants that the university was in the process of making budget cuts and was interested in obtaining student feedback on which of several campus groups

should receive cuts. One group was described as serving the interests of Black students, and we operationalized budget cuts from this group as negativity toward Blacks. Participants were then debriefed and thanked.

ONLINE PRESCREENING MEASURES

SJBs. Participants completed a 12-item SJB scale (items were adapted from Levin, Sidanius, Rabinowitz, & Frederico, 1998), which assesses predominant U.S. SJBs (i.e., Protestant Work Ethic beliefs, individual mobility beliefs, and legitimacy beliefs). Sample items include the following: "If people work hard they almost always get what they want"; "In America, getting ahead doesn't always depend on hard work (reverse)"; "Advancement in American society is possible for all individuals"; "Individual members of certain groups are often unable to advance in American society (reverse)"; "America is a just society where differences in status between groups reflect actual group differences"; and "Differences in status between groups in American society are the result of injustice" (reverse). Items were rated on scales with endpoints of 0 (*strongly disagree*) and 6 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .86$).

Social Dominance Orientation. Participants completed Pratto et al.'s (1994) Social Dominance Orientation Scale. Sample items include the following: "If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems" and "Group equality should be our ideal" (reverse). Scale endpoints were 0 (*I feel very negative about this statement*) and 6 (*I feel very positive about this statement*; $\alpha = .93$).

White identity. White identity was assessed with the centrality subscale of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale. We modified the scale wording in this study so that questions referred to participants' racial group rather than ethnic group. We did this to ensure that participants were thinking about their White identity rather than other identities (e.g., religion). Scale endpoints were 0 (*strongly disagree*) and 6 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .84$).

LABORATORY SESSION MEASURES

Target derogation. Target derogation was assessed with the same items used in Study 1. Scale endpoints were 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .82$). Unless otherwise noted, this 1 to 7 scale was used for all dependent measures collected during the laboratory session.

Social distance. We included four items assessing the desire for social distance from the target. Items were as follows: "I would want Person A [Person A referred to the essay-writer] as a very close friend"; "I would be pleased if Person A was my roommate"; "I would enjoy working on a group project with Person A"; and

TABLE 2

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. SJBs	2.04	0.82					
2. White identity	2.73	1.37	.19				
3. Target derogation	3.95	1.09	.44**	.23			
4. Social distance	4.44	1.18	.40**	.05	.68**		
5. Blackout cuts	4.45	5.95	.45**	.04	.08	.21	

NOTE: SJBs = system-justifying beliefs.

** $p < .01$.

“Person A seems like he/she would be easy to get along with.” All items were reverse-scored ($\alpha = .86$).

Blackout budget cuts. Participants were asked to provide feedback to the University Student Affairs and Services Office regarding funding for student groups (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993). Participants were told that \$1,000 must be cut from the budget and they were instructed to distribute those cuts among 13 listed organizations. The variable of interest was the amount of funding cut from “Blackout,” a group whose stated goal was to “uplift the Black community and all other minority groups.” Participants were allowed to distribute cuts in any manner, allowing a possible range of Blackout cuts from \$0 to \$1,000.

Value similarity. Value similarity was assessed with three items: “I am similar to Person A”; “Person A and I share common values”; and “Person A and I have similar personalities” ($\alpha = .82$).

Personal responsibility. Personal responsibility was assessed with the following five items: “Person A should have taken more personal responsibility for the negative outcome described in his/her essay”; “Person A is to blame for the negative event described in his/her essay”; “Person A is responsible for the negative event described in his/her essay”; “Person A could prevent negative events like the one described in the essay from occurring in the future”; and “There is little Person A can do to prevent similar events like the one described in the essay from occurring again” (reverse, $\alpha = .88$). Higher scores indicate greater propensity to hold the target responsible for the negative event.

Threatened/angry affect. Threatened/angry affect was assessed with six items assessing the extent to which the essay-writer made participants feel threatened, angry, bothered, agitated, annoyed, and irritated ($\alpha = .89$).

Manipulation check. To assess whether participants attended to the target’s attribution for the negative event, we asked them to describe that person’s experience. To assess participants’ perception of the amount of prejudice facing the target, we had them complete the 1-to-7-point scale indicating the extent to which they personally believed the essay-writer experienced racism.

Results

ANALYSIS PLAN

Because the SJB and SDO measures were positively correlated ($r = .55, p < .01$), we simplified the presentation of results by aggregating these measures into a single composite. None of the findings described below changed when these scales were examined individually (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics). As in Study 1, we used hierarchical regression analyses to test our hypotheses. However, because of the small sample size and resulting limited power, it is statistically inappropriate to examine the SJB and White identity predictors (and their interactions) simultaneously (Green, 1991; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Thus, separate analyses were run using the SJB aggregate measure and the White identity measure. In these analyses, the centered predictor variable and the attribution type main effect (the discrimination condition was coded as zero) were entered on Step 1 and the interaction between these factors was entered on Step 2.

MANIPULATION CHECKS

Participants’ open-ended descriptions of the target’s negative experience revealed that 18 of the 21 participants in the discrimination attribution condition spontaneously mentioned that the essay concerned racism. No participants in the unfairness attribution condition mentioned race or discrimination. All participants correctly identified the target’s race.

We next ran a regression analysis examining the extent to which participants’ personally believed the essay-writer experienced racism and whether this was affected by the experimental manipulation and SJBs. Step 1 revealed that participants in the discrimination attribution condition were more likely to perceive discrimination against the essay-writer ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.76$) compared to participants in the unfairness attribution condition ($M = 2.83, SD = 1.37$) ($\beta = -.42, p < .01$), $F(2, 41) = 9.37, p < .01, R^2 = .31$. Endorsement of SJBs did overall predict participants’ perceptions of racism ($\beta = -.41, p < .05$), but of importance, Step 2 was not significant ($\beta = .14, p = .48$), $\Delta R^2 = .01, p = .48$ (see Note 3). When we ran an identical regression analysis on this dependent variable with White identity as the predictor, White identity was unrelated to discrimination perceptions and did not interact with experimental condition ($ps > .79$).

THE MODERATING ROLE OF SJBS

Target derogation. We next examined whether SJBs moderated the relationship between experimental condition and target derogation. Step 1 was significant, $F(2, 41) = 5.22, p < .05, R^2 = .20$, indicating that the more participants endorsed SJBs, the more they

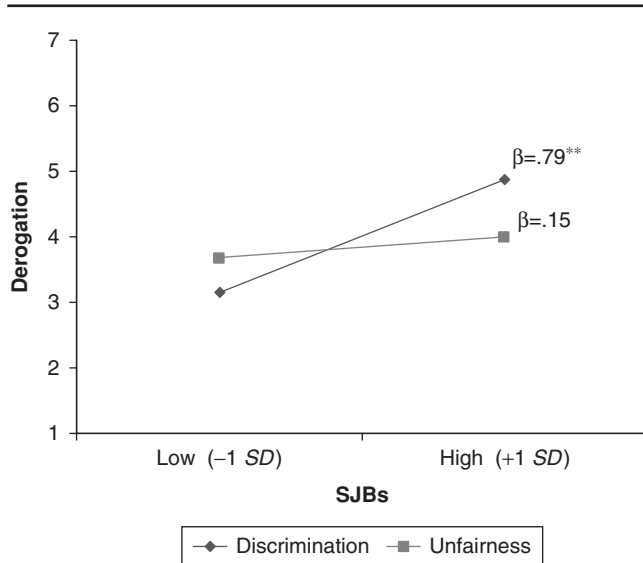


Figure 2 SJBs moderate the relationship between attribution type and target derogation.

NOTE: SJB = system-justifying beliefs.
** $p < .01$.

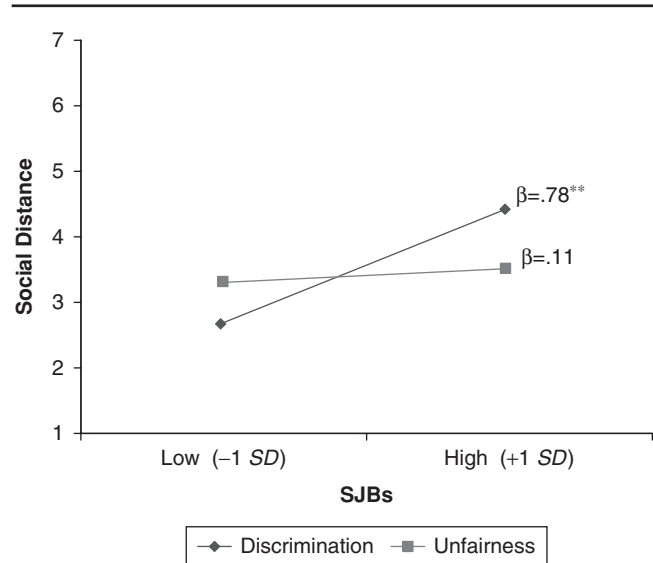


Figure 3 SJBs moderate the relationship between attribution type and social distance.

NOTE: SJB = system-justifying beliefs.
** $p < .01$.

derogated the essay-writer ($\beta = .44, p < .01$). There was no effect of experimental condition ($\beta = -.08, p = .57$; Discrimination Condition $M = 4.08$; Unfairness Condition $M = 3.83$). Consistent with hypotheses, Step 2 accounted for a significant increase in the variance ($\Delta R^2 = .10, p < .05$) and there was a significant interaction between SJBs and experimental condition ($\beta = -.47, p < .05$).⁴ Examination of the simple slopes revealed that SJBs were positively related to derogation in the discrimination attribution condition ($\beta = .79, p < .05$) and unrelated to target derogation in the unfairness attribution condition ($\beta = .15, p = .40$). As can be seen in Figure 2, this pattern of results is consistent with Study 1.

Social distance. We next examined whether SJBs moderated the relationship between experimental condition and social distance. Step 1 was significant, $F(2, 41) = 4.10, p < .05, R^2 = .17$, and revealed that the more participants endorsed SJBs, the more distance they desired from the essay-writer ($\beta = .41, p < .01$). There was no effect of experimental condition ($\beta = .06, p = .67$; Discrimination Condition $M = 4.40$; Unfairness Condition $M = 4.47$). Consistent with predictions, Step 2 was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .11, p < .05$) and there was a significant interaction between SJBs and experimental condition ($\beta = -.50, p < .05$; see Note 4). The simple slopes in Figure 3 revealed that SJBs were positively related to social distance in the discrimination attribution condition ($\beta = .78, p < .01$) and unrelated to social distance in the unfairness attribution condition ($\beta = .11, p = .56$).

Blackout budget cuts. We next examined the amount of funds participants recommended cutting from Blackout. Three participants were excluded from this analysis (2 belonged to a group listed on the sheet and 1 filled out the form incorrectly). Because the distribution of budget cuts was skewed, we applied a square root transformation to normalize the data. The first step was significant, $F(2, 38) = 5.05, p < .05, R^2 = .21$, indicating that the more participants endorsed SJBs, the more money they cut from Blackout ($\beta = .44, p < .01$). There was no effect of condition ($\beta = -.11, p = .46$; Discrimination Condition $M = 5.32$; Unfairness Condition $M = 3.76$). Although the second step did not account for a significant increase in the variance and the interaction was not significant ($\Delta R^2 = .05, \beta = -.37, p < .11$),⁵ we proceeded with simple slope analyses because of our focused predictions and because of the support our hypothesis received on the other measures. SJBs were positively associated with budget cuts in both conditions; however, the relationship was significant in the discrimination attribution condition ($\beta = .73, p < .01$) but not in the unfairness attribution condition ($\beta = .25, p = .17$; see Figure 4).

THE MODERATING ROLE OF WHITE IDENTITY

Target derogation. We next turned toward examining whether White identity moderated the interpersonal consequences of discrimination attributions. We replicated the regression analyses described above, with the exception that White identity served as the moderator. The first step of the regression analysis examining target

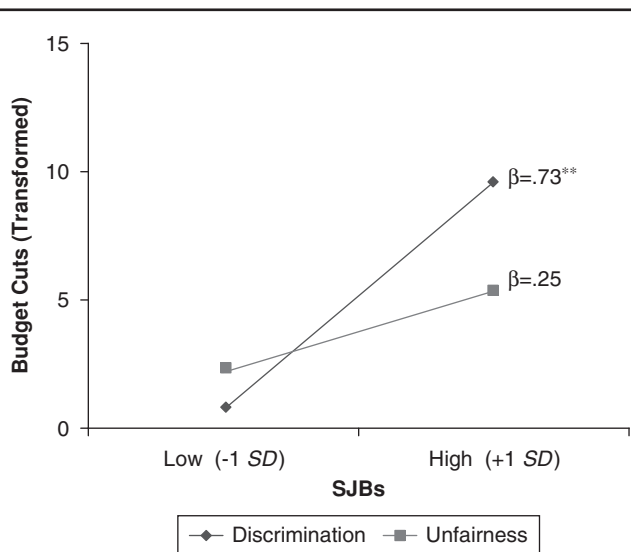


Figure 4 SJBs and the relationship between attribution type and Blackout budget cuts.

NOTE: SJB = system-justifying beliefs.
** $p < .01$.

derogation did not account for a significant amount of variance, $F(2, 41) = 1.68, p = .20, R^2 = .08$. White identity ($\beta = .25, p = .10$) did not significantly predicted target derogation. Step 2 did not account for a significant increase in variance ($\Delta R^2 = .03, p = .26$). Thus, as was the case in Study 1, discrimination attributions did not motivate group-justifying behaviors.

Social distance. Step 1 of the social distance analysis did not account for a significant amount of variability, $F(2, 41) = 0.06, p = .94, R^2 = .00$. White identity ($\beta = .05, p = .77$) did not significantly predicted social distance. Step 2 did not account for a significant increase in variance ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p = .35$).

Blackout budget cuts. The first step of the regression model examining Blackout budget cuts did not account for a significant amount of variability, $F(2, 38) = 0.38, p = .69, R^2 = .02$. White identity ($\beta = .05, p = .77$) did not significantly predict budget cuts. Step 2 trended toward accounting for a significant increase in variance, and the interaction was marginally significant ($\Delta R^2 = .08, \beta = .46, p = .09$). Because of this trend, we conducted simple slope analyses. White identity was negatively associated with Blackout budget cuts in the discrimination attribution condition ($\beta = -.32, p = .23$) and was positively associated with Blackout budget cuts in the unfairness attribution condition ($\beta = .25, p = .21$). The fact that increased White identity was associated with less negativity toward Blackout in the discrimination attribution condition was surprising and is inconsistent with a group-justification explanation.

WHY IS CLAIMING DISCRIMINATION INTERPERSONALLY COSTLY?

We next turned toward examining potential mechanisms that might explain the relationship between SJBs and interpersonal reactions toward discrimination claimants. We examined three theoretically derived potential mediators: value similarity, personal responsibility, and angry/threatened affect within the discrimination attribution condition.

First, SJBs significantly predicted target derogation (Figure 5A) and social distance (Figure 5B) and all three mediators. To provide a strong test of mediation, we entered SJBs and all three mediators simultaneously into a regression analysis predicting target derogation and into another regression analysis predicting social distance. As seen in Figure 5A, value similarity significantly mediated the relationship between SJBs and target derogation—a Sobel test confirmed that the drop in beta for SJBs was significant ($Z = 2.13, p < .05$). As seen in Figure 5B, both value similarity and personal responsibility mediated the relationship between SJBs and social distance, and both mediators significantly reduced the beta for SJBs ($Zs > 2.09, ps < .05$). Counter to predictions, angry/threatened affect did not mediate either relationship. Finally, because none of the mediators significantly predicted Blackout cuts ($ps > .07$), we did not conduct mediational analyses on this variable.

Discussion

Consistent with Study 1, Whites' SJBs predicted negative reactions toward Blacks who made discrimination attributions. SJBs did not predict interpersonal reactions toward Blacks who made nondiscriminatory unfairness attributions. Furthermore, the relationship between SJBs and interpersonal outcomes was mediated by perceptions that the target possessed different values and failed to take responsibility for the event described in his essay. Some caution is warranted in drawing conclusions about personal responsibility because it served as a mediator on just one measure.

By including an unfairness control group, we ruled out the possibility that the target derogation effect in Study 1 occurred simply because the target made a claim of unfairness. In addition, because the target in the control group did not deny discrimination, we can be confident that our effects in Study 1 were not due to increased favoritism engendered by Blacks who deny discrimination.

In Study 2, we again observed no evidence of group-justifying processes, that is, White identity did not moderate our effects. Perhaps group-justifying behavior was inhibited because highly identified Whites experienced

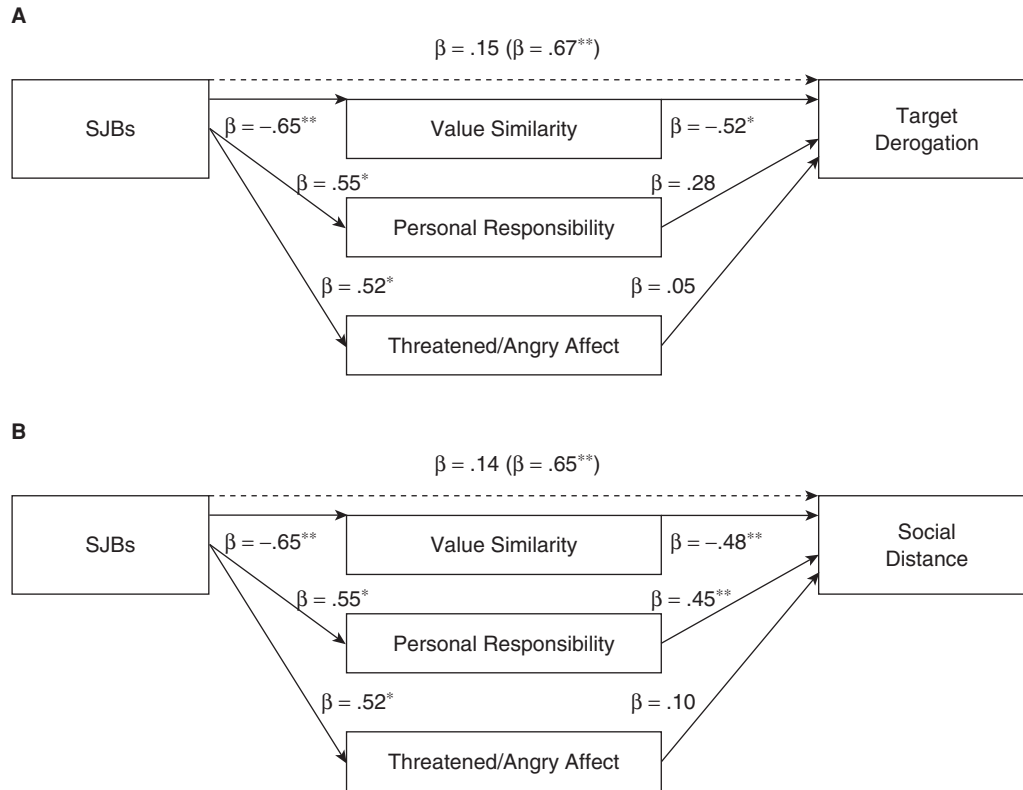


Figure 5 Mediation analyses.

NOTE: SJB = system-justifying beliefs.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

collective guilt because a member of their ethnic group engaged in socially inappropriate behavior (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Swim & Miller, 1999). The experience of collective guilt might explain why White identity was associated with less punitive behavior toward Blackout. Perhaps highly identified Whites attempted to reduce their collective guilt by treating Blacks better than they would under other circumstances.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

If theory and research on discrimination attributions is to advance, it is essential that research on this topic move beyond its nearly exclusive focus on the self-esteem consequences of these attributions. Here, we argued that a full appreciation of discrimination attributions requires understanding the interpersonal nature of these judgments. By examining SJBs and group identification, we addressed several theoretical and empirical questions about the interpersonal consequences of discrimination attributions.

Both studies demonstrated that the endorsement of SJBs predicts negative interpersonal reactions toward

discrimination claimants. This effect was observed with three different conceptual markers of SJBs, on several measures of interpersonal consequences, and with two methodological designs. Of importance, SJBs were not associated with negative interpersonal reactions toward Blacks who blamed negative events on other internal causes, external causes, or general unfairness.

Study 2 further develops this research by identifying process variables that begin to elucidate why claiming discrimination is interpersonally costly. We found evidence that strong SJB endorsers view discrimination claimants as possessing dissimilar values and this, in turn, was associated with negative interpersonal reactions toward them. This is consistent with theories arguing that perceiving someone as different results in negativity toward those individuals (Byrne & Wong, 1962; Greenberg et al., 1997; Lerner, 1980; Rokeach, 1968). We also found some evidence that strong SJB endorsers perceived discrimination claimants as failing to take responsibility for their outcomes, and these responsibility judgments in turn predicted more negativity toward them. This is consistent with the notion that SJBs contain a moral imperative about assuming personal responsibility (Crandall et al., 2001).

It is surprising that angry/threatened affect did not mediate the relationship between SJBs and negative reactions toward discrimination claimants. Strong SJB endorsers did in fact experience more anger/threat when faced with discrimination claimants, but this affective reaction did not mediate our effects. Perhaps participants' awareness that it is socially inappropriate to feel angry at Blacks led to attempts to control the effects of anger on their behavior. Alternatively, it is possible that indirect measures of anger/threat, such as psychophysiological or implicit markers, might mediate our effects.

Our findings are consistent with Crandall and Eshleman's (2003) Justification-Suppression Model, which argues that the expression of prejudice is filtered through personal and social-based suppression factors that inhibit the expression of genuine prejudice. Genuine prejudice is expressed only when justifying factors allow the release of this attitude in a way that avoids being labeled as prejudiced. SJBs might release prejudice because they locate the cause of negative attitudes toward Blacks in nondiscriminatory factors (such as dissimilar values or personal irresponsibility). The fact that SJBs did not predict negative attitudes toward Blacks in our control groups suggests that discrimination attributions might cause enough justification to release pent-up prejudice. In future research, it would be useful also to include prejudice as a predictor to more directly test Justification-Suppression Model predictions.

Across both studies, discrimination claims did not motivate group-justifying responses. This is surprising because Blacks' claims about White racism should threaten Whites' collective self-integrity and this should lead to efforts to defend the group, particularly among highly identified group members. Perhaps highly identified Whites experienced collective guilt (e.g., Iyer et al., 2003; Swim & Miller, 1999) because a fellow ingroup member behaved in a racist way and they were thus unable to justify the ingroup's actions. Indeed, Johns, Schmader, and Lickel (2005) proposed that group identification can lead to both inhibition and intensification of group-justifying responses when witnessing ingroup members engage in discrimination. When ingroup members' discrimination is mild, this allows highly identified individuals enough latitude to construe the situation benevolently and to thus defend the group (see also Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). In contrast, when discrimination is severe, there is little latitude for group-serving justifications, and this can lead to negative collective emotions such as guilt. The fact that highly identified Whites in the discrimination attribution condition reacted particularly favorably toward Blacks on the budget cut measure is consistent with the argument that this behavior may have served to alleviate collective guilt stemming

from their group's inappropriate behavior. Alternatively, it is possible that our White identity measure was too insensitive to capture group-justifying responses. Although this measure is among the most commonly examined markers of group identification, there may be something qualitatively distinct about White identity that makes this measure less meaningful.

Caveats

Finally, the studies reported here are not without limitations. First, we assessed SJBs and group identification with an individual difference approach. Although these measures drew on the literature on these belief systems, it will be important to further examine these relationships with manipulations of these constructs.

Second, because individual difference constructs are most likely to moderate effects in ambiguous situations relative to unambiguous situations (Snyder & Ickes, 1985), the SJB effects reported here might be most likely to occur when discrimination is offered as an explanation for performance on a task that is of average quality. That is, if discrimination claimants perform exceptionally well on a task, then discrimination becomes a more plausible explanation for performance. In addition, individuals who observe such a discrimination claim might derogate the evaluator rather than the discrimination claimant, regardless of their personal endorsement of SJBs. In contrast, if performance is clearly abysmal, then discrimination becomes a less plausible explanation and most people, irrespective of SJB endorsement, would be irritated by such a claimant and respond negatively toward that individual. Thus, the SJB findings reported here might be limited to situations in which the discrimination claimant's performance is of average quality. In both of these studies, we deliberately created contexts in which task performance was not extreme in either direction. In Study 1, we did this explicitly through pilot testing. In Study 2, test performance was unclear, but we attempted to avoid an assumption of poor performance by having the essay-writer indicate that he put a great deal of effort into his essay and had a third party read it prior to submitting it in his course. Future research in which test performance is varied might further point to the contexts under which SJBs do and do not moderate interpersonal reactions toward discrimination claimants.

Third, we argued that discrimination claims threaten SJBs, but we did not provide a direct assessment of the extent to which these claims threatened these beliefs. Rather, threat was inferred by the presence of negativity toward the target. Although this approach is consistent with the literature on belief threat, it would nonetheless be useful for further studies to assess

whether discrimination claimants pose a direct threat to SJBs. Because belief threat is theorized to occur pre-consciously (Hafer, 2000; Lerner, 1980), implicit indicators of threat might provide the best test of this hypothesis. Indeed, research from a variety of perspectives demonstrates that belief threat is notoriously difficult to assess via self-reports (Arndt, Allen, & Greenberg, 2001; Hafer & Begue, 2005; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Fourth, our focus on negative aspects of claiming discrimination is not meant to imply claiming discrimination has no benefits. Indeed, discrimination claimants are perceived as more true to themselves (Kaiser & Miller, 2001) and more competent on the task in which performance was attributed to discrimination (Stangor et al., 2003). Discrimination claimants also experience increased personal control (Sechrist, Swim, & Stangor, 2004) and their claims reduce others' prejudice (Czopp & Monteith, 2003).

Finally, we restricted our focus to Whites' responses to Black discrimination claimants. We focused on this relationship because it represents one that is particularly problematic in society. Several recent studies, however, demonstrate that the costs of claiming discrimination are more general because both high- (e.g., Whites, men) and low-status (e.g., Blacks, women) group members respond negatively to both high- and low-status discrimination claimants (Garcia et al., 2005; Stangor et al., 2003). We believe that greater understanding of these inter- and intragroup processes can be achieved by integrating this research with theory on SJBs. One might expect a pattern of responding whereby both high- and low-status group members who endorse SJBs respond more negatively toward low-status discrimination claimants than toward high-status discrimination claimants. In contrast, both high- and low-status group members who reject SJBs might respond more favorably toward low-status discrimination claimants than toward high-status discrimination claimants.

Conclusions

This investigation compared the merits of system- and group-justifying processes as explanations for why discrimination claimants incur negative interpersonal consequences. Our research suggests that the interpersonal consequences of discrimination attributions stem in part because discrimination claimants challenge beliefs about system legitimacy and are thus seen by stronger endorsers of SJBs as possessing dissimilar values and as failing to take personal responsibility for outcomes. This research not only provides novel theoretical and empirical contributions to research examining discrimination attributions but also has a number of practical implications for understanding the predicaments faced by targets of prejudice.

NOTES

1. We designed the test-taker's actual performance on the creativity test so that it would reflect average performance. This design feature was important because very strong performance would make discrimination a more plausible explanation for the grade and very weak performance would make discrimination a less plausible explanation for the grade. We created an average test by basing the test-taker's test on the actual performance of participants who completed this task for another study. We then had an independent sample rate this average test on a scale of 1 (*very poor*) to 7 (*outstanding*). The test was indeed perceived as average ($M = 4.58$, $SD = .90$, $N = 159$).

2. When the analyses were run with separate regressions on each manipulation check item, neither Belief in a Just World (BJW) nor White identity produced significant main effects, and they did not interact with each other or experimental condition.

3. The conclusions are unchanged when analyses were run with participants' perceptions that the target faced racism as a covariate.

4. The Attribution Condition \times System-Justifying Beliefs (SJBs) interaction remained significant when this analysis was run with White identity as a covariate.

5. The Attribution Condition \times SJBs interaction effect remained the same ($p = .11$) when this analysis was run with White identity as a covariate.

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