Stop Complaining! The Social Costs of Making Attributions to Discrimination

Cheryl R. Kaiser
Carol T. Miller
University of Vermont

Recent research indicates that stigmatized people may avoid claims of discrimination because such attributions are costly in terms of perceived control over outcomes and social self-esteem. The authors hypothesized that minimization of discrimination also occurs in part because negative social costs accompany attributions to discrimination. In Experiment 1, an African American who attributed a failing test grade to discrimination was perceived as a complainer and was less favorably evaluated in general than was an African American who attributed his failure to the quality of his test answers. This overall devaluation occurred regardless of the objective likelihood that discrimination occurred. Experiment 2 replicated these findings and revealed that this devaluation generally occurred only when the target made discrimination attributions, not when he made other external attributions. The social costs of making attributions to discrimination may prevent stigmatized people from confronting the discrimination they face in their daily lives.

> Generally, I get myself into trouble because I deal with it [discrimination] head on. And generally, I'm considered a troublemaker, or someone who's constantly looking at race, and someone who's looking to argue.
>
> —African American woman
> (Feagin & Sikes, 1994, p. 282)

There is much recent debate about whether and with what effects stigmatized people attribute negative events to discrimination (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, 1997). There are a number of benefits that stigmatized people may derive from attributing poor outcomes to discrimination. Stigmatized people can maintain their self-esteem in the face of failure by locating the cause of their failure in the prejudice of others rather than in their own actions (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991, Study 2). In so doing, stigmatized people can maintain high-performance self-esteem (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997) and low levels of depressed affect (Crocker et al., 1991) relative to people who do not attribute their failure to discrimination.

Despite the advantages gained from attributing failure to discrimination, there is evidence to suggest that stigmatized people often are reluctant to make discrimination attributions (Ruggiero & Marx, 1999; Ruggiero, Steele, Hwang, & Marx, 2000; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, 1997). In a series of experiments, Ruggiero and her colleagues demonstrated that stigmatized people attribute their failure to discrimination only when they are virtually certain that they have been discriminated against.

In these experiments, members of various stigmatized groups (i.e., women, Blacks, Asians) receive a failing grade on a purported test of future career success. Prior to receiving their grade, the participants are informed that there is some chance (e.g., 100%, 75%, 50%, 25%, or 0%) that an outgroup member who discriminates against their group will evaluate their test. After receiving their failing grade, the participants make causal attributions about whether discrimination and the quality of their answers influenced their test grade. Ruggiero and her colleagues find that only the participants in the 100% prejudiced evaluators condition attribute their failure mainly to discrimination. Participants in the 75%, 50%, 25%, and 0% conditions minimize attributions to dis-

Authors' Note: We thank Sarah Jerutis, Katharine Mable, and Jason Wimette for their competent assistance with data collection. This research was partially supported by a graduate student summer fellowship from the University of Vermont. Portions of the research were presented at the first annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Nashville, Tennessee, February 2000, and at the Society for Experimental Social Psychology, Atlanta, Georgia, October 2000. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Cheryl R. Kaiser, Department of Psychology, University of Vermont, John Dewey Hall, Burlington, VT 05405-0134; e-mail: ckaiser@zoo.uvm.edu.

PSPB, Vol. 27 No. 2, February 2001 254-263

crimination and blame their failure predominantly on the quality of their answers.

Ruggiero suggests that minimization of discrimination occurs because attributions to discrimination are associated with low levels of social self-esteem, perceived social control, and perceived performance control (Ruggiero & Marx, 1999; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). In their view, the benefit of making discrimination attributions (enhanced performance self-esteem) does not compensate for the damage attributions to discrimination do to perceived control and social self-esteem.

One finding in experiments such as those described above that has not received enough attention is that even when stigmatized people do attribute their failure to discrimination, the attributions are not as strong as would be suspected given the strong cues indicating that discrimination was probably the cause of poor outcomes. Attributions to discrimination even in conditions in which discrimination is highly likely often do not reach ceiling levels that would be expected in these situations (Crocker, Cornwell, & Major, 1993; Crocker et al., 1991; Kaiser & Miller, in press). Even in Ruggiero's 100% prejudiced judges condition (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, 1997), the mean attribution to discrimination fell between approximately 7 and 8 on a scale anchored with 0 (*not at all due to discrimination*) and 10 (*very much due to discrimination*).

Why do stigmatized people in situations such as these not make strong claims that discrimination was the cause of the outcomes they received? We believe that there may be negative social consequences associated with attributing events to discrimination. Claiming that one has been victimized by discrimination may not be socially desirable (Crosby, 1984; Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998). People who attribute their failure to discrimination may risk being labeled as hypersensitive, emotional, and generally unpleasant (Feagin & Sikes, 1994).

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 the relationship (Haslett & Lipman, 1997). At best, there was no change in the relationship, and at worst, tension increased. Thus, confronting sexist behavior resulted in costs to social and professional relationships.

Likewise, interviews with middle-class African Americans reveal that they anticipate backlash from confronting discrimination (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). One participant describes the tension surrounding claims of discrimination:

> Now, you can't holler discrimination, because they're going to think that you're trying to get a lawsuit, or trying to [get] a free meal or something, so you really can't come out and say, "I'm being discriminated against." You got to handle it in a more mature, more adult way, a more, I guess you could say, a more timid way. You've got to know it's there, do all you can do to avoid it. (Feagin & Sikes, 1994, p. 279)

The sentiments expressed by this participant about others' reactions to discrimination claims are common in the informal, interview-based literature. This literature convincingly argues that in some cases the costs of challenging discrimination can be severe (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Haslett & Lipman, 1997; Latting, 1993). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is little, if any, experimental literature addressing this issue.

Challenging discrimination also may be costly because it involves pointing out an individual villain who has engaged in discriminatory behavior (Crosby, 1984). This blame-pointing process may be unpleasant for stigmatized people, especially if the perpetrator of discrimination is someone whom they will have to interact with on a regular basis. Moreover, discrimination accusations against someone with power who controls important resources (e.g., an employer) may result in retaliation and further negative treatment (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995; Haslett & Lipman, 1997).

Making a discrimination claim is a form of complaining (Crosby, 1993; Swim & Hyers, 1999). Kowalski (1996) proposed that the two major factors influencing complaining are dissatisfaction with the current situation and an assessment of the costs and benefits of complaining. Dissatisfaction, which Kowalski defines as a discrepancy between how the individual thinks he or she should be treated and how he or she is being treated, is neither necessary nor sufficient to induce complaining. Even if the individual is greatly dissatisfied with the current situation, a complaint will occur only if the person believes that the benefits of complaining outweigh the costs. If a person believes that complaining will produce desired outcomes (even in the absence of dissatisfaction), complaining is likely to occur. Thus, an assessment of the costs and benefits of voicing a complaint are essential components of whether complaining will occur (Kowalski, 1996).

Kowalski's (1996) model of complaining provides insight into the decision-making process that stigmatized people may engage in when deciding whether to confront discrimination (Swim & Hyers, 1999). When stigmatized people experience dissatisfaction, they might consider such factors as whether complaining will cause a change in how they are being treated, will affect their relationships with those who are responsible for their dissatisfaction, and will influence others' perceptions and attitudes toward them (Swim & Hyers, 1999). In addition, some situations may not be worth the amount

of cognitive energy that would be needed to confront a prejudiced person (Haslett & Lipman, 1997).

Stigmatized people who perceive that the costs of pointing out discrimination are low may be likely to take a stand against discrimination. In contrast, stigmatized people who believe that the costs of claiming discrimination are high may refrain from voicing a complaint even when they are dissatisfied (Swim & Hyers, 1999). This distinction is important because people who do not challenge discrimination may be equally or even more dissatisfied with their situation as those who do challenge it but may differentially assess the costs and benefits of complaining (Swim & Hyers, 1999).

Fear of the consequences of confronting discriminators may keep stigmatized people from publicly acting on their dissatisfaction. Swim and Hyers (1999) examined this in an experiment on women's public and private responses to sexism. Undergraduate women engaged in a group discussion in which a male confederate made sexist or nonsexist comments. Although more than half of the women in the sexist condition did not verbally respond to the sexist comments, private ratings made after the interaction revealed that 75% of these women who failed to respond rated the confederate as sexist and 91% had negative thoughts and feelings about him. Thus, although most of the women did not confront the sexist confederate, there is little evidence indicating that they were satisfied with his behavior or believed his behavior was unbiased. Swim and Hyers (1999) suggest that perceived costs of confronting discrimination, such as violations of norms governing polite behavior and fear of retaliation, are responsible for the lack of confrontation toward perpetrators of discrimination.

Swim and Hyer's (1999) work is pivotal in recognizing the concerns that stigmatized people face when deciding to make claims of discrimination. This insight into the thoughts of stigmatized people sheds some much-needed light on other costs and benefits associated with making attributions to discrimination. Whereas more research is certainly necessary on stigmatized people's perceptions of the costs associated with confronting discrimination, there is also a strong need for experimental research documenting that these negative costs actually exist.

EXPERIMENT 1

Accordingly, the goal of our first experiment is to establish empirically that there are social costs for stigmatized people who make attributions to discrimination. We examined participants' reactions to a description of an African American man who attributed or did not attribute a negative event (a failing test grade) to discrimination. In addition, the probability that discrimination actually occurred was manipulated in a manner that reflected certain, possible, or no discrimination. The situation we described was of Ruggiero and Taylor's (1995, 1997) experimental situation in which minimization of discrimination has been documented. We predicted that the stigmatized person would be devalued when he attributed his failure to discrimination relative to when he attributed his failure to the quality of his test answers. This pattern should occur when prejudice is either possible or absent. When prejudice is certain, a discrimination attribution should appear appropriate and, consequently, should not result in negative evaluations.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 108 undergraduate student volunteers from introductory-level psychology courses, some of whom received course credit for their participation. Participants ranged from 17 to 41 years of age, with an average age of 19.64 years. The sample was predominantly male (76.6%) and European American (95.3%).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Experiment 1 was a 3 (chance of prejudice) × 2 (attribution type) between-participants design. Chance of prejudice was manipulated by informing the participants that the African American's test was graded by one judge from a panel of eight and that all, half, or none of the judges discriminated against African Americans. Attribution type was manipulated by showing the participants a survey ostensibly filled out by the African American man in which he attributed his failure either to discrimination or the quality of his answers.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

The experimental sessions occurred in a large classroom setting. After arriving at the classroom, participants received a consent form, a summary of the experiment, and a packet containing the study measures from an experimenter who was blind to condition. There were no further instructions and participants completed the measures at their own pace. The experimental summary contained a cover story describing the experiment as an impression formation task in which participants would evaluate the behavior of a participant who took part in a study on career success that we conducted during the previous year. The participants were told that research participants sometimes attempt to present themselves favorably during studies and that we needed their help in interpreting, or coding, the behavior of the research participants.

Participants received a description of the purported experiment in which the African American had supposedly participated. In actuality, the description was of Ruggiero and Taylor's (1995, 1997) minimization of dis-

crimination experiment. The participants were led to believe that the research participant (a 20-year-old African American college student) had taken a test that assessed his future career success. Our participants read that after the African American student completed the test, an apologetic female experimenter informed him that there was some chance that a prejudiced judge would evaluate his test. Specifically, the experimenter informed him that eight graduate students were being paid to grade the tests and that one of them would be responsible for grading his answers. The experimenter also told the African American student that all of the eight judges scheduled for the day happened to be White and that none, four, or all of them discriminated against Blacks. Presumably, our participants imagined that there was some chance that the African American student would be discriminated against. The participants next read that the African American student received a failing grade on his test and was asked to fill out a survey. The next page of the packet contained a completed survey ostensibly filled out by the African American student.

The survey was identical to Ruggiero and Taylor's (1997) attribution measure. The participants saw that the African American student rated the extent to which six possible factors affected his test grade (anxiety, previous academic training, ability and effort, answer quality, discrimination, and test type). The attribution scales ranged in responsibility for the grade from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*). The two most theoretically relevant attributions are answer quality and discrimination. Ruggiero and Taylor (1995, 1997) consistently find that participants who face ambiguous prejudice attribute their failure to the quality of their answers and not discrimination. In contrast, participants who face certain prejudice attribute their failure to discrimination and not the quality of their answers.

The African American student's attributions for his test grade were manipulated by indicating that only one item on the survey was predominantly responsible for his grade. Specifically, attributions to answer quality and discrimination were manipulated so that answer quality was rated as an 8 and discrimination as a 2 (in the attribution to answer quality condition) or vice versa (in the attribution to discrimination condition). We chose these points on the rating scale because they are representative of the attributions to answer quality and discrimination made by participants in prior research. Ruggiero and Taylor (1995, 1997) typically find that mean attributions to answer quality range from 6.5 to 7.0 in the 50% prejudiced judges condition and from 2.4 to 3.0 in the 100% prejudiced judges condition. Mean attributions to discrimination range from 1.8 to 3.5 in the 50% prejudiced judges condition and 6.8 to 8.2 in the 100% prejudiced judges condition. We kept the target's ostensible ratings on the remaining four attribution items constant. They were always rated as a 1 or a 2.

After viewing the survey answers, the participants completed measures of the extent to which the African American student was a complainer, made a favorable impression, was true to himself, and was potentially successful in his future. The items in these scales were embedded among several filler items. All items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The complainer scale consisted of six items assessing the extent to which the participant was hypersensitive, irritating, a complainer, a troublemaker, emotional, and argumentative. The items in this scale were internally consistent (alpha = .84). A 15-item scale measured the favorablity of the impression created by the stigmatized person (alpha = .88). This scale consisted of items assessing the extent to which the participant was likable, friendly, honest, easy to get along with, intelligent, independent, responsible, optimistic, respectable, considerate, nice to converse with, made a good impression, would be a good friend, would be a good coworker, and had a good personality. Participants' attributions about the extent to which the African American student behaved true to himself were assessed with a single-item measure (expressing his true opinions is important to him). Two items comprised the employment success scale: I would hire him for a job and he seems to have a strong work ethic. This scale was internally consistent (alpha = .70).

The participants completed a manipulation check by indicating the extent (on the same 7-point scale) to which the African American student blamed his failure on both answer quality and discrimination. To check on the probability of prejudice manipulation, we had the participants circle the number of judges that they were told discriminated against African Americans (ranging from 0 to 8).

The final page of the study measures packet assessed suspicion about the hypotheses. The participants generated possible explanations about the study's purpose and indicated when these explanations occurred to them. Participants who reported that the experiment concerned their evaluations of African Americans who do or do not make discrimination claims were considered suspicious. Finally, the participants provided demographic information including their race, gender, and age. After completing this, they delivered their packet to a research assistant in another room who debriefed them.

Results and Discussion

MANIPULATION CHECKS

Separate 3 (chance of prejudice: all, half, or none) × 2 (attribution type: discrimination or answer quality) anal-

yses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted on the extent to which participants reported that the stigmatized student in the vignette attributed his failure to discrimination and answer quality. The only significant effect for the extent to which the stigmatized person attributed his failure to discrimination was for attribution type, $F(1, 102) = 221.77$, $p = .000$. As expected, the participants reported greater attributions to discrimination in the discrimination condition ($M = 6.24$) than in the answer quality condition ($M = 2.46$). Likewise, the only significant effect for the extent to which the stigmatized student attributed his failure to answer quality was for attribution type, $F(1, 101) = 126.44$, $p = .000$. Participants rated attributions to answer quality higher in the answer quality condition ($M = 5.42$) than in the discrimination condition ($M = 2.07$). Thus, the attribution-type manipulation was successful in establishing the intended impression.

A 3 (chance of prejudice) × 2 (attribution type) ANOVA was performed on the participants' recollection of the number of prejudiced judges. Although there are fewer degrees of freedom in this analysis because this question was added to the study about two thirds of the way through the data collection process, the expected chance of prejudice effect was significant, $F(2, 25) = 24.06$, $p = .000$. Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$) revealed that the all, half, and none conditions were significantly different from each other (Ms = 7.30, 3.79, and 0.88, respectively). As anticipated, no other effects were significant.

Suspicion about the hypotheses was addressed by examining the participants' reported guesses about the purpose of the experiment. Ten participants correctly identified the purpose of the study and were removed from all further analyses.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Given the prevalence of halo and negative halo effects in impression formation (Asch, 1946), it is not surprising that some of our dependent variables were correlated. For example, a person who complains also may be seen as less likable or easy to get along with. Correlations revealed that the favorable impression variable was indeed associated with the complainer variable, $r(98) = -.67$, $p = .000$. In addition, career success was related to the favorable impression, $r(98) = .74$, $p = .000$, complainer, $r(98) = -.34$, $p = .001$, and true to self, $r(98) = .21$, $p = .04$, variables. Although these variables are not independent, we kept them as separate measures because we wanted to see if claims of discrimination would influence only perceptions of being a complainer or would influence other judgments about the target.

ATTRIBUTIONS ABOUT THE STIGMATIZED PERSON

Complainer. We hypothesized that the stigmatized person would be rated as more of a complainer when he attributed his failure to discrimination rather than the quality of his answers. A 3 (chance of prejudice) × 2 (attribution type) ANOVA revealed a significant effect for attribution type, $F(1, 92) = 39.28$, $p = .000$. The stigmatized person was judged to be more of a complainer when he attributed his failure to discrimination relative to answer quality ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.86$; $M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.90$, for the discrimination and answer quality conditions, respectively). To our surprise, the interaction between attribution type and chance of prejudice was not significant, $F(2, 92) = 0.24$, $p = .79$. Thus, regardless of how much prejudice the stigmatized person faced, he was evaluated as a greater complainer when he attributed his failure to discrimination. In fact, there was not even a main effect for chance of prejudice on how much of a complainer participants thought he was, $F(2, 92) = 0.42$, $p = .66$. An African American who said he received a poor grade due to discrimination was perceived as a complainer regardless of whether none, half, or all of the judges in the pool from which he was graded discriminated against African Americans.

Favorable impression. A 3 (chance of prejudice) × 2 (attribution type) ANOVA on impression favorability resulted in a significant main effect of attribution type, $F(1, 92) = 14.17$, $p = .000$. When the stigmatized person attributed his failure to discrimination, he created a less favorable impression than when he attributed his failure to the quality of his answers ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.60$; $M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.67$, for the discrimination and answer quality conditions, respectively). Again to our surprise, neither the interaction between attribution type and chance of prejudice, $F(2, 92) = 0.56$, $p = .57$, nor the main effect for chance of prejudice were significant, $F(2, 92) = 0.03$, $p = .97$. As was the case in the complainer analysis, attributions to discrimination resulted in less positive evaluations regardless of the chance of prejudice.

True to self. A 3 (chance of prejudice) × 2 (attribution type) ANOVA resulted in a significant effect of attribution type, $F(1, 92) = 15.26$, $p = .000$. When the stigmatized person attributed his failure to discrimination, he was evaluated as more true to self than when he attributed his failure to the quality of his answers ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.30$; $M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.39$, for the discrimination and answer quality conditions, respectively). In addition, there was a marginally significant effect for chance of prejudice, $F(2, 92) = 2.80$, $p = .07$. Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$) revealed that the stigmatized person was rated as more true to self when he faced zero prejudiced judges than when he faced eight prejudiced

judges ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.33$; $M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.38$; $M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.53$, for the none, half, and all conditions, respectively). It should also be noted that the interaction between chance of prejudice and attribution type was not significant, $F(2, 92) = 0.10$, $p = .91$. Thus, the stigmatized person was believed to be more true to self when he made an attribution to discrimination (regardless of how many potential judges were prejudiced) and to some extent when he faced no prejudiced judges (regardless of the type of attribution he made).

Employment success. A 3 (chance of prejudice) × 2 (attribution type) ANOVA on employment success resulted in no significant effects (Fs < 1.79, ps > .17).

The results of this study revealed that there are social costs associated with making attributions to discrimination. Specifically, an African American man was evaluated more negatively when he attributed a failure to discrimination rather than the quality of his work. This negative evaluation occurred on measures of complaining and impression favorability. It was noteworthy that the participants were insensitive to the amount of discrimination present in the situation. That is, the African American student who made a discrimination attribution was thought to be as much of a complainer when he faced certain prejudice as he was when he faced no prejudice. This lack of an interaction between chance of prejudice and attribution type suggests that making an attribution to prejudice, even when it is objectively justified, still results in negative evaluations.

It is also striking that the participants rated the African American student as more true to self when he made a discrimination attribution compared to an answer quality attribution. Perhaps the participants believed that stigmatized people who fail to acknowledge being victimized by discrimination are not being completely honest with themselves. It is interesting that this finding occurred in conjunction with an overall devaluation of the African American student who attributed his failure to discrimination. The participants recognized that the African American student was probably discriminated against and gave him credit for being true to himself when he stood up to it but still devalued him when he made an attribution to discrimination.

Although the results of Experiment 1 provide preliminary support for the hypothesis that discrimination claims are accompanied by social costs, one important alternative explanation must be ruled out. The two attributions, discrimination and answer quality, differ in the extent to which failure is attributed to external and internal causes. Discrimination is an external attribution and answer quality is an internal attribution. It is possible that people who make external attributions for failure are generally devalued relative to people who make internal attributions. Consequently, it is important to determine if stigmatized people who make other kinds of external attributions are devalued to the same extent as those who make discrimination claims.

Another important issue that needs further examination is the gender distribution of participants in Experiment 1. The small sample of female participants raises questions about whether women who have relatively more experience with being targets of discrimination than men do would devalue a person who claimed discrimination.

Experiment 2 was designed to address these issues. This experiment was conceptually very similar to Experiment 1. As in Experiment 1, the participants read a description about an African American student who failed a test in which discrimination was certain, possible, or absent. In this experiment, the attribution-type independent variable was expanded to include an additional external attribution control group. Specifically, the stigmatized person attributed his failure to discrimination, answer quality, or difficulty of the test (external attribution control group). We hypothesized that attributions to discrimination, and not external attributions in general, would result in negative social costs. In addition, we hypothesized that the African American student who attributes his failure to discrimination will be evaluated as more true to self relative to the student who makes answer quality and test difficulty attributions. Finally, because of the participants' insensitivity to the amount of prejudice in the situation in Experiment 1, we predicted that chance of prejudice and attribution type would not interact. Thus, we are predicting that the African American student who makes a discrimination attribution will be devalued regardless of the amount of discrimination in the environment.

EXPERIMENT 2

Method

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 154 undergraduate students from an introductory psychology course who participated in this experiment to partially fulfill a course requirement. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 28 years, with a mean of 19.12 years. The sample was predominantly female (62.9%) and European American (94.0%).

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

The material and procedures for Experiment 2 were very similar to those used in Experiment 1. One methodological difference in this experiment was that the experimenter provided the participants with a verbal

explanation of the study and elaborated on the cover story described in the written summary. As was the case in the previous experiment, the participants read the same description of a 20-year-old African American student who took part in a study of future career success. All aspects of this description were identical to the one used in Experiment 1.

One important difference in this experiment was the presentation of the African American student's attributional survey answers. This survey contained five possible explanations for the failing grade (anxiety, previous academic training, difficulty of the test, answer quality, and discrimination). We manipulated the African American student's attribution for his failing grade by indicating on his survey that only one item was the main cause of failure. Specifically, answer quality, discrimination, and difficulty of the test were manipulated so that one was always rated as an 8 and the other two were given ratings of 2. The remaining two attribution items, anxiety and previous academic training, were always rated as a 1 or a 2, respectively.

After examining the African American student's attributions for the failing grade, the participants evaluated him on a 32-item survey. As in Experiment 1, all items were rated on a 7-point scale. The complainer and favorability scales were identical to those used in Experiment 1. In this experiment, the true to self variable was increased to three items (expressing his true opinions in important to him, being true to himself is important to him, and he tackles problems head on). The internal consistency of this scale was adequate (alpha = .65).

The next page contained manipulation checks on both attributions for failure (answer quality, discrimination, and the difficulty of the test) and the number of prejudiced judges. Participants were instructed to answer the questions on this page without looking back through the rest of the study measures packet. Finally, the participants provided possible purposes of the study and demographic information. After all participants had completed the measures, the experimenter debriefed them.

Results and Discussion

MANIPULATION CHECKS

Separate 3 (chance of prejudice: all, half, or none) × 3 (attribution type: answer quality, discrimination, or test difficulty) ANOVAs were conducted on the extent to which the participants reported that the African American student attributed his failure to discrimination, answer quality, and test difficulty. The ANOVA on perceived attributions to discrimination resulted in only one significant effect, which was for attribution type, $F(2, 142) = 111.63$, $p = .000$. Bonferroni post hoc tests ($p < .05$) revealed that the discrimination condition was significantly higher than the answer quality and test difficulty conditions. Moreover, the answer quality and test difficulty conditions did not differ from each other (*M*s = 6.29, 2.49, and 2.64, for the discrimination, answer quality, and test difficulty conditions, respectively).

The ANOVA on answer quality revealed only one significant effect, which was for attribution type, $F(2, 142) = 31.20$, $p = .000$. Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$) indicated that ratings of attributions to answer quality were higher in the answer quality condition ($M = 4.96$) than in the discrimination ($M = 2.08$) and test difficulty conditions ($M = 3.42$). Although the post hoc tests revealed that the discrimination and test difficulty conditions also were significantly different from each other, the crucial finding is that both of these conditions are different from the answer quality condition.

The third ANOVA on test difficulty also resulted in one significant effect for attribution type, $F(2, 142) = 159.09$, $p = .000$. Bonferroni post hoc tests revealed that perceived attributions to test difficulty were higher in the test difficulty condition than in the answer quality and discrimination conditions (*M*s = 1.86, 2.68, and 6.32, for the discrimination, answer quality, and test difficulty conditions, respectively). Although the means for the answer quality and discrimination conditions were significantly different from each other, the most theoretically meaningful aspect of this manipulation check is that both of these conditions be less than the test difficulty condition, which was the case.

The second manipulation check on the number of prejudiced judges was addressed with a 3 (chance of prejudice) × 3 (attribution type) ANOVA. The ANOVA revealed just one significant effect, which was for chance of prejudice, $F(2, 140) = 454.93$, $p = .000$. Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$) indicated that all three chance of prejudice conditions differed significantly from each other (*M*s = 7.36, 3.98, 0.16, for the all, half, and none conditions, respectively). Thus, the participants correctly recalled the amount of potential prejudice facing the African American student.

Examination of the potential experimental hypotheses generated by the participants revealed that 12 participants were suspicious. These participants were removed from all subsequent analyses.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Correlations among the dependent variables revealed that favorable impression was related to the complainer, $r(142) = -.47$, $p = .000$, and true to self variables, $r(142) = .46$, $p = .000$. As in Experiment 1, our intent in discovering specifically how perceptions of the target as a complainer were influenced by his attributions led us to keep these measures as separate scales.

ATTRIBUTIONS ABOUT THE STIGMATIZED PERSON

Complainer. A 3 (chance of prejudice) × 3 (attribution type) × 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted on the participants' rating of the extent to which the African American student was a complainer. Because participant gender did not produce a main effect and was not involved in any interactions, Fs < 1.96, ps > .145, we collapsed across this variable for the remaining analyses. As predicted, there was a significant effect for attribution type, $F(2, 133) = 18.25$, $p = .000$. Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$) revealed that the discrimination condition was significantly higher than both the answer quality and test difficulty conditions ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.93$; $M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.80$; $M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.02$, for the discrimination, answer quality, and test difficulty conditions, respectively). Moreover, the answer quality and test difficulty conditions did not significantly differ from each other. Thus, the social cost of being labeled a complainer appears to be a result of making a discrimination attribution, not just an external attribution. It also should be noted that neither the interaction between chance of prejudice and attribution type nor the main effect for chance of prejudice was significant; $F(4, 133) = 1.72$, $p = .15$, and $F(2, 133) = 0.95$, $p = .39$, respectively. Thus, regardless of whether he faced 100%, 50%, or 0% prejudiced judges, an African American was rated as more of a complainer when he attributed his failure to discrimination rather than answer quality or test difficulty.

Favorable impression. A 3 (chance of prejudice) × 3 (attribution type) × 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted on impression favorability. Participant gender did not produce a main effect and was not involved in any interactions, Fs < 0.84, ps > .501. We therefore collapsed across this variable in the remaining analyses. The anticipated attribution-type effect approached significance, $F(2, 133) = 2.98$, $p = .054$. Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$) revealed that the discrimination condition was marginally significantly different ($p = .06$) from the answer quality condition, with the test difficulty condition falling in between the other conditions and not different from either one ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.60$; $M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.56$; $M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.60$, for the discrimination, answer quality, and test difficulty conditions, respectively). Thus, there was a tendency to evaluate the target less favorably when he attributed his failure to discrimination relative to the quality of his answers. In addition, neither the interaction between chance of prejudice and attribution type nor the chance of prejudice effect was significant, $F(4, 133) = 0.54$, $p = .71$, and $F(2, 133) = 0.38$, $p = .68$, respectively.

True to self. A 3 (chance of prejudice) × 3 (attribution type) × 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was performed on the true to self variable. Because participant gender did not produce a main effect and was not involved in any interactions, Fs < 0.57, ps > .604, we collapsed across this variable in all further analyses. The ANOVA yielded the anticipated significant attribution-type effect, $F(2, 133) = 10.54$, $p = .000$. Bonferroni multiple comparison tests ($p < .05$) indicated that ratings of being true to self were significantly higher in the discrimination condition than in the answer quality and test difficulty conditions. Moreover, true to self ratings in the answer quality and test difficulty conditions did not differ from each other ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 0.83$; $M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.32$; $M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.01$, for the discrimination, answer quality, and test difficulty conditions, respectively). Thus, when he attributed his failure to discrimination, the student was viewed as being the most true to self. In addition, neither the interaction between chance of prejudice and attribution type nor the chance of prejudice effect was significant, $F(4, 133) = 1.07$, $p = .38$, and $F(2, 133) = 0.21$, $p = .81$, respectively.

The results of Experiment 2 again reveal that there are social costs for stigmatized people who make claims of discrimination. Participants rated an African American who said he received a failing grade due to discrimination rather than answer quality or test difficulty as more of a complainer. In addition, the student who blamed his failure on discrimination made a marginally less favorable impression compared to the student who attributed his failure to the quality of his answers.

Moreover, these social costs were not simply due to the externalization of failure. When the target blamed his failure on a different external factor (i.e., difficulty of the test) he did not create a poor impression or come across as a complainer. In addition, as was the case in Experiment 1, despite the fact that the stigmatized person was devalued for making a discrimination attribution, our participants thought that the target who attributed failure to discrimination was the most true to self.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

These experiments revealed that our participants readily devalued an African American man who attributed his failure to discrimination. When the target said that discrimination was responsible for his failure, our participants thought he was a complainer. Regardless of how much discrimination the stigmatized person faced, he was rated as more hypersensitive, emotional, argumentative, irritating, trouble making, and complaining when he attributed his failure to discrimination relative to the quality of his answers or the difficulty of the test. In addition, the target who blamed his failure on discrimination rather than the quality of his answers created a somewhat less favorable impression on our participants. Thus, evidence supported our hypothesis that negative

social costs accompany claims of discrimination. Moreover, it is stunning that this negative impression was created even when discrimination was certainly the cause of the failing grade. Our participants did not rationally interpret the probability that the stigmatized person experienced discrimination.

Both experiments support the hypothesis that people who make claims of discrimination are perceived as more true to self. Perhaps our participants believed that stigmatized people who fail to attribute negative events to discrimination are using self-presentation strategies that disguise their true beliefs about discrimination.

It is disheartening that our participants generally devalued someone who made a discrimination claim, but it is even more disturbing that this occurred when discrimination was absolutely certain. The participants' lack of sensitivity to the amount of discrimination in the situation may have resulted from the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977). People show insensitivity to the pushes and pulls that situations exert on the behavior of others (Ross, 1977). The participants may not have given enough weight to the objective probability of discrimination faced by the African American who made a claim of discrimination.

It is also important to remember that our sample was predominantly European American. It is unlikely that our participants have been targeted by racial discrimination frequently in their lives. Their inexperience dealing with discrimination may have led them to underestimate the likelihood that they would attribute their failure to discrimination if in a similar situation. Likewise, our participants' beliefs about the likelihood of discrimination may have been overly optimistic. Perhaps they believed that discrimination is infrequent and that most people would not engage in discrimination.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of these experiments have troubling implications. The fear of being negatively evaluated may prevent stigmatized people from challenging the discrimination they face in their lives. If stigmatized people are dissuaded from complaining about discrimination, nonstigmatized people may incorrectly assume that stigmatized people are satisfied with how they are being treated. Thus, infrequent discrimination claims may be interpreted as a sign that discrimination is no longer a problem. Although overt discrimination has certainly declined in recent years, evidence suggests that discrimination still exists but is usually expressed in a subtle manner (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998). If society assumes that discrimination is no longer a major problem, this may justify abandoning policies to remedy discrimination. For example, laws banning discrimination against groups such as African Americans in employment and housing or targeting underrepresented groups for employment (i.e., affirmative action) are sometimes portrayed as efforts to give some groups special privilege. This characterization makes sense only if one assumes that discrimination no longer exists.

The social costs that accompany attributions to discrimination likely have negative consequence for stigmatized people. Our participants formed very different impressions of an African American student based solely on the way he answered a survey. Because interactions outside of the laboratory are more emotional, it seems likely that the social costs would be amplified in these settings. When nonstigmatized people interact with people who make discrimination claims, the nonstigmatized person's negative attitudes may leak out in subtle (or not so subtle) ways. For example, nonstigmatized people may behave in a less friendly fashion than usual or fail to make eye contact when interacting with stigmatized people who are known to make discrimination claims. In addition, stigmatized people are very good at monitoring the verbal and nonverbal behavior of nonstigmatized people (Fiske, Morling, & Stevens, 1996) and, consequently, are likely to pick up on this negative treatment from nonstigmatized people. Thus, nonstigmatized people's negative reactions toward those who make discrimination claims may make things difficult for stigmatized people. For instance, social interactions under such circumstances may be awkward or downright hostile.

These findings also have implications for Ruggiero and Taylor's (1995, 1997) claim that stigmatized people are reluctant to attribute negative events to discrimination. Making a discrimination attribution in an experiment is not a private experience. Participants are aware that the experimenter will see their responses. It is possible that evaluation apprehension may be partly responsible for the minimization of discrimination finding. Participants who minimize attributions to discrimination may truly believe that discrimination was responsible for their failure but might be hesitant to acknowledge this on a form the experimenter will eventually see. Thus, minimization of discrimination may partly result from the participants' preoccupation about the impression their answers will create on others (see Swim et al., 1998, for a similar point).

LIMITATIONS

Although it seems likely that negative attitudes toward stigmatized people who make discrimination claims would result in negative behavior, we did not examine actual behavior in these experiments. Thus, we must be cautious in interpreting these findings. Future research examining whether these negative attitudes translate into behavior is certainly needed. In addition, it would be worthwhile to examine if these social costs are observed

when the effects of discrimination claims are compared to other attributions or excuses for failure. For example, would someone who claimed a negative event was due to bad luck or pressure from other responsibilities be evaluated negatively?

Another consideration in interpreting this research is that the suspicion rate ranged from 8% to 10% in these experiments. This raises the possibility that participants may have guessed the purpose of the study and confounded our hypotheses due to demand characteristics. We believe this is not a plausible explanation for our findings. In today's collegiate political climate, it is socially unacceptable to derogate African Americans. It is particularly not acceptable to derogate them if they are certainly the victims of prejudice (as was the case in the 100% chance of prejudice condition). Thus, the demand characteristic explanation would predict results very different from those we obtained.

Although we found that men and women were equally likely to devalue an African American who made a claim of discrimination, our sample size may have provided sufficient power to detect only relatively large gender differences in the effects of our probability of prejudice and attribution-type manipulations. Thus, future research may be well advised to further address whether men and women differ in their willingness to negatively evaluate someone who makes a discrimination claim.

CONCLUSIONS

The social costs and negative evaluations that arise from claims of discrimination may prevent stigmatized people from attributing their failure to discrimination. This is unfortunate because in many situations discrimination does affect the way people are treated. Our participants formed relatively negative impressions of an African American who attributed a negative event to discrimination. This finding is important because it documents a cost of perceiving discrimination that has been relatively unexamined.

Perhaps raising awareness about this issue can mitigate the social costs associated with making discrimination claims. If nonstigmatized people are made aware of these costs, they may be more likely to monitor their behavior and pay attention to the situations faced by stigmatized people.

REFERENCES

Asch, S. E. (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 41*, 258-290.

Branscombe, N. R., Schmitt, M. T., & Harvey, R. D. (1999). Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*, 135-149.

Crocker, J., Cornwell, B., & Major, B. (1993). The stigma of overweight: Affective consequences of attributional ambiguity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64*, 60-70.

Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological Review, 96*, 608-630.

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.

Crocker, J., Voelkl, K., Testa, M., & Major, B. (1991). Social stigma: The affective consequences of attributional ambiguity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 218-228.

Crosby, F. (1984). The denial of personal discrimination. *American Behavioral Scientist, 27*, 371-386.

Crosby, F. J. (1993). Why complain? *Journal of Social Issues, 49*, 169-184.

Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (1998). On the nature of contemporary prejudice: The causes, consequences, and challenges of aversive racism. In J. L. Eberhardt & S. T. Fiske (Eds.), *Confronting racism: The problem and the response* (pp. 3-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Feagin, J. R., & Sikes, M. P. (1994). *Living with racism: The Black middle-class experience*. Boston: Beacon.

Fiske, S. T., Morling, B., & Stevens, L. E. (1996). Controlling self and others: A theory of anxiety, mental control, and social control. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22*, 115-123.

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.

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.

Kaiser, C. R., & Miller, C. T. (in press). Reacting to impending discrimination: Compensation for prejudice and attributions to discrimination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Kowalski, R. M. (1996). Complaints and complaining: Functions, antecedents, and consequences. *Psychological Bulletin, 119*, 179-196.

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.

Ross, L. (1977). The intuitive psychologist and his shortcomings: Distortions in the attribution process. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 10). New York: Academic Press.

Ruggiero, K. M., & Marx, D. M. (1999). Less pain and more to gain: Why high status group members blame their failure on discrimination. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*, 774-784.

Ruggiero, K. M., Steele, J., Hwang, A., & Marx, D. M. (2000). "Why did I get a 'D'?" The effects of social comparisons on women's attributions to discrimination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*, 1271-1283.

Ruggiero, K. M., & Taylor, D. M. (1995). Coping with discrimination: How disadvantaged group members perceive the discrimination that confronts them. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68*, 826-838.

Ruggiero, K. M., & Taylor, D. M. (1997). Why minority group members perceive or do not perceive the discrimination that confronts them: The role of self-esteem and perceived control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*, 373-389.

Swim, J. K., Cohen, L. L., & Hyers, L. L. (1998). Experiencing everyday prejudice and discrimination. In J. K. Swim & C. Stangor (Eds.), *Prejudice: The target's perspective* (pp. 37-60). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

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.

Received August 25, 1999
Revision accepted January 7, 2000