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Dina Eliezer¹ and Brenda Major¹

Abstract

Two experiments examined responses to bystanders who claimed that another person experienced discrimination. Participants read about a woman or man who experienced sexism and whose co-worker (male or female) either expressed sympathy or claimed that the target experienced sexism. Participants then evaluated the co-worker (bystander). Overall, participants evaluated bystanders who claimed that someone else experienced discrimination more negatively than they evaluated bystanders who did not claim discrimination. Furthermore, female bystanders who claimed discrimination on behalf of someone else were derogated more than male bystanders who did the same. Additional analyses indicated that female bystanders who claimed that another person experienced discrimination were derogated more than male bystanders who did so because the former threatened participants' beliefs about the fairness of status differences to a greater extent than the later.

Keywords

discrimination, person perception, sexism, status, system justification

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In May 2008 the Supreme Court ruled that individuals who face retaliation after claiming discrimination are protected under the Civil Rights Acts of 1866. The Court decided in favor of two plaintiffs who alleged that they were treated negatively at work after reporting racial and age discrimination. Hedrick Humphries claimed that he was fired from his job because he filed a racial discrimination complaint, and Myrna Gomez-Perez reported that she was treated negatively by her superiors because she filed an age discrimination complaint (Greenhouse, 2008). The experience of these two plaintiffs is not uncommon. Forty percent of women who

file sexual harassment complaints report that they subsequently face backlash at work (Near & Jensen, 1983). People who claim that their outcomes are due to discrimination are perceived negatively by others even when discrimination certainly occurred (Kaiser & Miller, 2001, 2003).

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Although people who attribute their own poor treatment to discrimination face social costs, it is unknown whether the same social costs occur for people who attribute *someone else's* poor treatment to discrimination. For example, would one of Ms. Gomez-Perez' co-workers also face retaliation were she to attribute Ms Gomez-Perez' treatment at work to discrimination? This question is important because discrimination often takes place in social settings where uninvolved parties, or bystanders, may get involved. Prior research has focused exclusively on how perceivers evaluate people who claim that they personally experienced discrimination. In contrast, the current research examines how perceivers evaluate bystanders who claim that another person experienced discrimination.

The current research also extended prior research by examining how the group status of a bystander who claims discrimination influences perceivers' evaluations of the bystander.

Previous research has focused on how people evaluate members of low status groups (i.e., women and racial minorities) who claim discrimination, but it is unclear how people evaluate members of high status groups who also claim discrimination.

Interpersonal costs of claiming discrimination

People who blame their negative outcomes on discrimination are disliked (Dodd, Guilano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001; Garcia, Reser, Amo, Redersdorff, & Branscombe, 2005; Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Kaiser & Miller, 2003; Shelton & Stewart, 2004). In one of the first studies to show this (Kaiser & Miller, 2001), participants (predominately White) read a vignette about an African American male who received a failing grade on a test and who subsequently learned that there was a 0%, 50%, or 100% chance that the person who graded his test discriminated against African Americans. Participants then read that the target either attributed his grade to discrimination or to other factors (quality of answers or test difficulty). Participants evaluated

the target less favorably on both negative traits (i.e., troublemaker, complainer) and positive traits (i.e., likable, good friend) when he attributed his grade to discrimination rather than to alternative factors. Furthermore, the objective probability that discrimination had occurred did not influence participants' evaluations. Other experiments have since replicated these findings and shown that they apply to both racial and gender discrimination (see Dodd et al., 2001 for an exception).

One reason why people may be censured for (correctly) claiming they are victims of discrimination is that blaming one's outcomes on discrimination is seen as an external attribution that denies personal culpability. Thus, claiming discrimination violates the social norm that one should take personal responsibility for one's outcomes. People who make internal attributions for their poor outcomes are viewed more favorably than those who make external attributions (Jellison & Green, 1981). Indeed, people who frequently blame their poor outcomes on external causes are perceived to be chronic complainers (Kowalski, 1996). Importantly, however, people derogate targets who blame their negative outcomes on discrimination even more than they derogate targets who blame their negative outcomes on external factors unrelated to discrimination, such as test difficulty (Kaiser & Miller, 2001).

Another reason why people may be disliked for claiming discrimination is that they threaten perceivers' belief that differences in status and wealth between individuals and groups in society are fair (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Major, Kaiser, O'Brien, & McCoy, 2007). In Western societies, people widely endorse status justifying beliefs (SJBs), such as the protestant work ethic or belief in the permeability of the status system. These beliefs affirm the legitimacy of status differences that exist by holding people responsible for their status in life and locating the cause of their outcomes within their own efforts or merit (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Major et al., 2007). Claims of discrimination, which assert that people's outcomes are unfairly determined by characteristics like race

or gender, challenge the belief that people who hold low status positions in society deserve their outcomes. Various psychological theories suggest that people experience anxiety and threat when their beliefs are challenged. In order to reduce these feelings of threat people may engage in compensatory behaviors to preserve and bolster their deeply held beliefs (Festinger, 1957; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006). One way in which people may compensate for belief violations is by derogating and de-legitimizing the source which contradicted their beliefs in the first place.

Consistent with this explanation, prior research shows that the more strongly people endorse beliefs that justify the status system as fair, the more they derogate members of racial minority groups who blame their own outcomes on discrimination. Endorsement of these beliefs, however, does not predict derogation of people who attribute their outcomes to other types of external factors (Kaiser, Dyrenforth, & Hagiwara, 2006).

Drawing on the above research, we reasoned that even though people who claim that someone else's outcomes were due to discrimination are not complaining about their own outcomes (and hence are not violating the norm of personal responsibility), they nonetheless threaten people's belief that status differences in society are just. Consequently, we hypothesized that people would evaluate a bystander who labeled a co-worker's negative treatment as discrimination more negatively than a bystander who did not do so (Hypothesis 1). By examining reactions to uninvolved bystanders who attribute *another person's* outcomes, rather than their own outcomes, to discrimination, we rule out alternative explanations for why discrimination claimants may be derogated. People who claim discrimination for personal outcomes may be derogated for using discrimination as an excuse to protect their own self-esteem or to absolve themselves of personal responsibility. However, people who claim discrimination for another person's outcomes are unlikely to be derogated for the above reasons. Thus, the current research provides a more

convincing test of the hypothesis that people who blame outcomes on discrimination are met with criticism because they threaten perceivers' beliefs about the fairness of status differences in society.

Group membership of the discrimination claimant

We further hypothesized that the group status of the bystander would moderate perceivers' evaluations. As noted above, prior research has focused on reactions to members of low status groups who claim that they personally experienced discrimination. The current studies extend this research by comparing reactions to low versus high status group members who claim that another person experienced discrimination. Current theory and research suggest two plausible, but competing predictions regarding the effects of a claimant's group status on evaluations. We elaborate on these hypotheses below.

One prediction is that low status bystanders who claim discrimination will be evaluated more negatively than high status bystanders who do so (Hypothesis 2a). Research on responses to people who confront discrimination is consistent with this prediction. For example, participants who imagined that a member of a low status group confronted them for making a prejudiced comment reported that he or she was overreacting to a greater extent than participants who imagined a high status confronter (Czopp and Monteith, 2003). Another study found that people perceived a Black woman who confronted a White man for making a racist remark to be ruder and less persuasive than a White woman who also confronted a White man (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010).

Low status bystanders who claim discrimination may be derogated more than high status bystanders who do so because the former's claims of discrimination pose a greater threat to people's beliefs about the fairness of status differences. Because social activism and change are typically initiated by members of disadvantaged groups, rather than advantaged groups, low status discrimination claimants may be perceived as social activists who are motivated to alter the

status quo (Berryman-Fink & Verderber, 1985; McCabe, 2005). This reasoning leads to the hypothesis that perceivers' endorsement of status justifying beliefs will moderate responses to low status bystanders who claim discrimination, such that the more perceivers endorse status justifying beliefs the more they will derogate low status bystanders who claim discrimination (Hypothesis 3a).

Available theory and research, however, also suggest a competing prediction, namely, that high status bystanders who claim discrimination will be derogated more than low status bystanders who claim discrimination (Hypothesis 2b). High status groups, compared to low status groups, have greater influence over and capacity to both preserve and change the status quo (Jackman, 1994). Accordingly, a claim of discrimination by a member of a high status group may be perceived as more consequential, and hence as a greater threat, than a claim of discrimination by a low status group member.

Thus, high status group members who claim discrimination may be evaluated more negatively than low status group members who do so because high status discrimination claimants pose a greater threat to the status system. This reasoning leads to the prediction that perceivers' endorsement of status justifying beliefs will moderate responses to *high status* bystanders who claim discrimination. Specifically, we predict that the more perceivers endorse status justifying beliefs the more they will derogate high status bystanders who claim discrimination (Hypothesis 3b).

Overview of hypotheses and experiments

We conducted two experiments in which male and female participants read a vignette describing an incident in which a woman (Study 1 and 2) or a man (Study 2) was rejected for a professional opportunity by an opposite gender boss who gave a sexist explanation for the rejection. In both cases, a co-worker (either male or

female) who overheard the boss' explanation said something to the target of discrimination. In one condition he or she only expressed sympathy. In the other condition, he or she expressed sympathy and also claimed that the target was a victim of sexist and unfair treatment.

We tested three major hypotheses in these studies. First, we hypothesized that people would derogate bystanders who claimed that someone else was a target of discrimination more than bystanders who did not make this claim (Hypothesis 1). Second, we tested two competing hypotheses regarding how the bystander's group membership would influence perceivers' evaluations. Hypothesis 2a predicted that people would derogate a low status bystander who claimed discrimination more than a high status bystander who did so, while Hypothesis 2b predicted the reverse. Third, we tested two competing hypotheses to explain *why* low and high status bystanders may be differentially evaluated for claiming discrimination. Hypothesis 3a predicted that the more perceivers endorsed status justifying beliefs the more they would derogate low status bystanders who claimed discrimination because low status discrimination claimants pose a threat to the system. Hypothesis 3b predicted that the more perceivers endorsed status justifying beliefs the more they would derogate high status bystanders who claimed discrimination because high status discrimination claimants pose a threat to the system. Study 1 tested Hypotheses 1, 2a, and 2b. Study 2 sought to replicate the findings of Study 1, test Hypotheses 3a and 3b, rule out an alternative explanation for the findings of Study 1, and test a possible mediator.

Study 1

Method

Participants One hundred fifty-six undergraduates (101 females and 55 males) participated in the study. The majority of participants self-identified as White (61.5%), the rest of the

participants self-identified as Latino (9.0%), Black (1.9%), Asian (16.0%), or Other (11.5%).

Design and procedure The design was a 2 (Bystander comment: Claim discrimination, No claim) \times 2 (Bystander gender: Male, Female) \times 2 (Participant gender: Male, Female) between participants factorial. Participants enrolled in a social psychology class completed the study during class on a volunteer basis.

Materials and measures Participants read a vignette, evaluated the bystander, and completed a manipulation check.

Vignette Participants in the claim discrimination condition read the following vignette: Jessica works as an administrative assistant at a prestigious law firm. She takes pride in her work and frequently spends long hours in the office to ensure that she completes her assignments well. Every year the law firm offers law school funding to an especially promising administrative assistant. Jessica applies for the funding along with several other employees. Jessica thinks she has a good chance of being selected. Steve, a partner at the firm and Jessica's boss, informs her that she did not get the funding because; like most women, she is not assertive enough to be a lawyer and may get too emotionally involved with clients. Jessica is upset about not receiving the funding and also unsure about what to make of Steve's comment. Jessica's co-worker Ralph/Rebecca was not eligible to apply for the funding because he/she worked in a different division of the law firm. However, he/she overhears Steve's comment from his/her office next door. When Ralph/Rebecca passes Jessica in the hall later that day he tells Jessica that he/she's sorry she didn't get the grant and that Steve's explanation for why she didn't get the grant was really sexist and unfair.

The vignette was the same in the no claim condition except the bystander only said he/she was "sorry she did not receive the grant".

Bystander evaluations Participants indicated the extent to which a series of traits described the

bystander on scales from 0 (Not at all) to 6 (Very much). These traits included: a complainer, a trouble maker, emotional, argumentative, hypersensitive, and irritating. These items, which were identical to those used by Kaiser and Miller (2001, 2003), formed a reliable scale, and were averaged ($\alpha = .80$). Since emotional and hypersensitive are traits thought to be more stereotypical of women we conducted a parallel set of analyses for both studies in which we excluded these items from the derogation scale. The pattern of results remained the same regardless of whether or not the emotional and hypersensitive items were included, thus we retained those items in the analyses described below.

Manipulation check We asked participants to briefly write what the co-worker (bystander) said to the victim of discrimination.

Results

Manipulation check Four participants answered the manipulation check incorrectly and were excluded from the analyses, reducing the sample to 152 participants. Twenty-three participants left the manipulation check blank but were still included in the sample because it was unknown whether they knew the correct answer.¹

Negative evaluation of bystander Consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants evaluated the bystander who labeled the victim's experience as discrimination ($M = 2.80$, $SE = .12$) significantly more negatively than the bystander who did not ($M = 1.89$, $SE = .11$), $F(1, 144) = 29.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$. We also observed a main effect for gender of bystander, such that participants derogated the female bystander ($M = 2.51$, $SE = .12$) more than the male bystander ($M = 2.17$, $SE = .12$), $F(1, 144) = 4.11$, $p = .044$, $\eta_p^2 = .028$.

These main effects were qualified by the predicted two way interaction between the bystander's comment and the bystander's gender, $F(1, 144) = 3.81$, $p = .053$, $\eta_p^2 = .026$. Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, participants evaluated the female

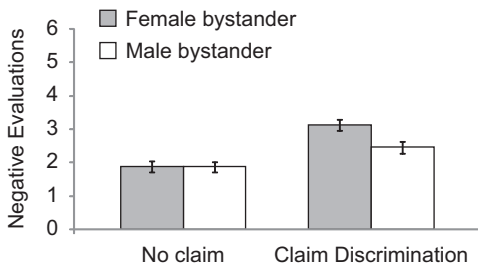


Figure 1. Mean negative evaluations of the bystander as a function of the bystander's comment (claim discrimination vs. no claim) and the bystander's gender in Study 1. Error bars denote standard error.

bystander who claimed discrimination ($M = 3.13$, $SE = .17$) more negatively than the male bystander who did so, ($M = 2.47$, $SE = .18$), $F(1, 144) = 7.35$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .049$. Importantly, male ($M = 1.88$, $SE = .16$) and female bystanders ($M = 1.89$, $SE = .16$) who did not claim discrimination were evaluated equally, $F(1, 144) = .003$, $p = .96$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. Furthermore, both the female bystander who claimed discrimination, $F(1, 144) = 29.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$, and the male bystander who claimed discrimination, $F(1, 144) = 5.80$, $p = .017$, $\eta_p^2 = .039$, were evaluated more negatively than the same-gender bystander who did not make this claim. However, this effect was far more pronounced for the female bystander than the male bystander (see Figure 1). There were no other significant effects or interactions. Importantly, male and female participants did not differ in their evaluations of the bystanders.

Discussion

Previous research indicates that there are social costs to claiming that one's own negative outcomes are due to discrimination (e.g., Kaiser & Miller, 2001). The current research is the first to demonstrate that there are also social costs to claiming that another person's negative outcomes are due to discrimination. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, both male and female bystanders who told a co-worker that they thought her negative treatment was sexist and unfair were evaluated less favorably, as

complainers and troublemakers, compared to bystanders who only expressed sympathy for the co-worker's treatment.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, we found that participants evaluated a female bystander who blamed a woman's rejection on discrimination more negatively than a male bystander who did so. Furthermore, although men who claimed discrimination were still evaluated more negatively than men who did not do so, the difference in evaluation of women who did versus did not claim discrimination was far greater. This difference was not due to the possibly gendered nature of some scale items (hypersensitive, emotional) since female bystanders were not evaluated any differently than male bystanders in the no claim condition and since the results remained the same when the items in question were excluded from the scale.

Study 1 did not provide support for Hypotheses 2b. High status (male) bystanders who claimed discrimination were *not* derogated more than low status (female) bystanders who did so. Furthermore, since Hypothesis 2b was not confirmed, Hypothesis 3b is not relevant as a potential explanation. The current research does not support the argument that high status bystanders pose a greater threat to the system than low status bystanders because the former's claims of discrimination are viewed as more consequential. Nonetheless, a claim of discrimination is a relatively small challenge to the status system. It is possible that high status bystanders would pose a greater threat to the system than low status bystanders if they pursued a more severe challenge to the status quo, such as testifying at a discrimination lawsuit.

Study 2

Study 1 provided support for our primary hypothesis (Hypothesis 1). It also provided support for Hypothesis 2a. However, it did not address why low status group members are derogated more than high status group members when they claim discrimination. Recall that Hypothesis 3a predicted that members of low

status groups (women) who claimed discrimination would be evaluated more negatively than members of high status groups (men) who did so because the former would pose a greater threat to people's beliefs about the fairness of status differences than the latter. To test this hypothesis in Study 2, we examined participants' endorsement of status justifying beliefs as a moderator of their responses to female versus male bystanders who claim discrimination. We predicted that status justifying beliefs (SJBs) would interact with the bystander's gender and comment to predict negative evaluations of the female bystander. Specifically, we hypothesized that the more strongly participants believed that the status system was fair, the more they would derogate a *female* bystander who claimed discrimination relative to a *female* bystander who did not. In contrast, we hypothesized that SJB endorsement would not moderate, or would weakly moderate, responses to the *male* bystander who did or did not claim discrimination.

Furthermore, we proposed that the reason why female discrimination claimants pose more of a threat to the status system than male discrimination claimants is that they are more likely to be perceived as activists who aim to change the system. Thus, we hypothesized that perceived activism would mediate the greater derogation of female relative to male discrimination claimants (Hypothesis 4).

Study 2 also addressed a limitation of Study 1. In Study 1, the female bystander belonged to the same group as the victim of discrimination, while the male bystander did not. This raises the possibility that people derogated the female bystander more than the male bystander because she seemed to act in line with her own group (and self) interest. We tested this alternative hypothesis in Study 2 by varying the gender of the victim of discrimination as well as the bystander. This allowed us to compare perceivers' responses to male or female bystanders who claim that either a male or female target experienced discrimination. If perceivers derogate bystanders for acting in line with their own interests, then participants should derogate

a male bystander more than a female bystander when he claims that a man was a target of discrimination.

Method

Participants Two hundred and ninety-five participants (209 women and 86 men) were recruited from a psychology participant pool to complete the study in exchange for partial course credit. Half of the sample self-identified as White (50%); the remaining participants self-identified as Latino (14.6%), Black (2.4%), Asian (15.6%), or Mixed Race/Other (17.3%).

Design and procedure The study design was a 2 (Bystander comment: Claim discrimination, No claim) \times 2 (Target of discrimination gender: Male, Female) \times 2 (Bystander gender: Male, Female) \times 2 (Participant gender: Male, Female) between participant factorial. The design is the same as study one, with the addition of one new factor (gender of the target of discrimination). Male and female participants completed the study online. Participants completed a measure of status justifying beliefs, embedded in other distracter questions, before they read the vignette.

Materials and measures Participants completed a measure of status justifying beliefs, read a vignette, completed a measure of perceived activism, an evaluation of the bystander, and a manipulation check.

Status justifying beliefs Status justifying beliefs (SJBs) were assessed using four items, adapted from Levin, Sidanius, Rabinowitz, and Federico (1998), which indexed beliefs about the permeability of the status system and the extent to which anyone could advance regardless of group membership. Participants indicated their agreement with the following four statements; "America is an open society where all individuals can achieve higher status", "Advancement in our society is possible for all individuals", "Individual members of certain groups have difficulty achieving higher

status,” (reverse scored) “Individual members of certain groups are often unable to advance in our society” (reverse scored) on scales from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much) ($\alpha = .80$). Although these items index only one aspect of status justifying beliefs, the extent to which anyone can achieve higher status, previous research reveals that these beliefs are closely related to other aspects of status justifying beliefs, including endorsement of the protestant work ethic and beliefs about the legitimacy of status differences (O’Brien & Major, 2005).

Vignette Participants read a vignette that paralleled Study 1 except the target of discrimination was denied educational funding to become a therapist instead of educational funding to become a lawyer. The setting was changed from a law firm to a psychiatric clinic in order to present a plausible instance of discrimination for both male and female targets. The female target was told by a male boss that “[she] is not analytical enough to be a therapist and may get too emotionally involved with patients.” The male target was told by a female boss that “[he] is not sensitive enough to be a therapist and may not understand patients’ feelings.” The rest of the vignette was the same as Study 1; a male or female co-worker overheard the situation and then approached the target and either expressed sympathy or expressed sympathy and claimed that the boss made a sexist comment.

Perceived activism Participants answered two questions to assess their perceptions of the bystander’s level of activism against sexism; “Do you think X is a feminist?” and “How often do you think X talks about sexism” on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much). We combined the items to form an index ($r = .40, p < .001$).

Negative evaluation The negative evaluation measure was the same as study 1 ($\alpha = .82$) except that it was on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much), instead of 0 through 6. Thus, we rescaled the responses to match Study 1. We also rescaled the items of the perceived activism scale in the same way.

Manipulation check In order to avoid the high number of missing responses that we encountered for the open ended manipulation check in Study 1, we asked participants to answer a multiple choice manipulation check in Study 2. Participants selected one of four possible comments made by the co-worker (bystander) to the target of discrimination. The first option was the bystander’s comment in the claim discrimination condition, the second option was the bystander’s comment in the no claim condition, the third option was that someone more qualified probably received the funding, and the fourth option was the boss’ comment.

Results

Manipulation check Thirty one participants (10.5% of the sample) answered the manipulation check incorrectly. The high number of incorrect responses is likely due to the fact that the study was conducted online rather than in a classroom like Study 1. Participants are less attentive to experimental instructions and manipulations when unsupervised, as they are during online studies, than when supervised, as they are during classroom or lab studies (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). We excluded the participants who answered the manipulation check incorrectly, reducing the sample to 264 participants.

Negative evaluation of bystander Consistent with Hypothesis 1, we observed a main effect for bystander comment such that participants rated the bystander who claimed discrimination ($M = 2.28, SE = .10$) more negatively than the bystander who made no such claim ($M = 1.77, SE = .095$), $F(1, 248) = 13.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .052$. We also found an unpredicted main effect for gender of participant such that male participants ($M = 2.17, SE = .12$) evaluated the bystander more negatively than female participants ($M = 1.88, SE = .072$) did, $F(1, 248) = 4.39, p = .037, \eta_p^2 = .017$.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, we observed the predicted interaction between bystander

comment (claim discrimination versus no claim) and bystander gender, $F(1, 248) = 7.58, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .030$. Participants derogated the female bystander ($M = 2.58, SE = .15$) who claimed discrimination more than the male bystander who did so ($M = 1.99, SE = .14$), $F(1, 248) = 8.49, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .033$. Once again, there was no difference in participants' ratings of the female ($M = 1.68, SE = .13$) and male bystander ($M = 1.86, SE = .14$) who did not claim discrimination, $F(1, 248) = .86, p = .36, \eta_p^2 = .003$. As in Study 1, the female bystander who claimed discrimination was derogated more than the female bystander who made no such claim, $F(1, 248) = 20.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .077$. However, unlike Study 1, there was no difference between evaluations of the male bystander who did and did not claim discrimination, $F(1, 248) = .46, p = .50, \eta_p^2 = .002$. No other effects were significant (see Figure 2).

Note that female bystanders who claimed discrimination were evaluated more negatively than male bystanders who claimed discrimination regardless of whether the target of discrimination was an ingroup or outgroup member. Thus, the alternative explanation for the findings of Study 1, that female bystanders were evaluated more negatively than male bystanders because they acted in line with their own interests by helping an ingroup member, did not receive support.

Moderating effect of status justifying beliefs

We reasoned that perceivers derogate low status individuals who claim discrimination more than high status individuals who do so because the former threaten perceivers' belief in fair system. Accordingly, we hypothesized that the more strongly perceivers believed in a fair status system, the more they would derogate bystanders who claimed discrimination, especially if the discrimination claimant belonged to a low status group. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis, entering status justifying beliefs (SJBs) centered, bystander comment, bystander gender, target gender, and participant gender on Step 1, the two-way interactions on Step 2, the three-way interactions on

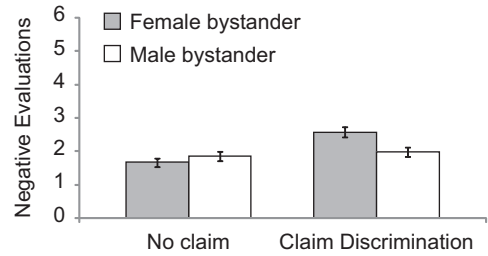


Figure 2. Mean negative evaluations of the bystander as a function of the bystander's comment (claim discrimination vs. no claim) and the bystander's gender in Study 2. Error bars denote standard error.

Step 3, the four-way interactions on Step 4, and the five-way interaction on Step 5. Consistent with our hypothesis, we observed a significant three-way interaction between SJB endorsement, bystander comment, and bystander gender ($\beta = -.35, p = .004; \Delta R^2 = .053, p = .12$). Unexpectedly, there was also an interaction between SJBs, bystander comment, and participant gender, ($\beta = .22, p = .029; \Delta R^2 = .053, p = .12$). We did not explore this interaction any further because it was not relevant to our goal of examining how SJBs moderate responses to male and female bystanders who do or do not claim discrimination. No other effects involving SJBs were significant.

We further explored the predicted interaction by reducing the regression equation, entering only SJBs, bystander comment and bystander gender on Step 1, the two-way interactions on Step 2, and the three-way interaction on Step 3. As expected, SJBs moderated reactions to bystanders who did versus did not claim discrimination when the bystander was female ($\beta = .23, p = .043$), but not when the bystander was male ($\beta = -.16, p = .19$). Belief in a fair status system was positively and significantly related to derogation of the female bystander when she claimed discrimination ($\beta = .31, p = .009$), but not when she made no claim ($\beta = -.017, p = .88$). In contrast, belief in a fair status system was unrelated to derogation of the male bystander both when he claimed discrimination ($\beta = -.029, p = .81$) and when he made no claim ($\beta = .20, p = .11$) (see Figure 3).

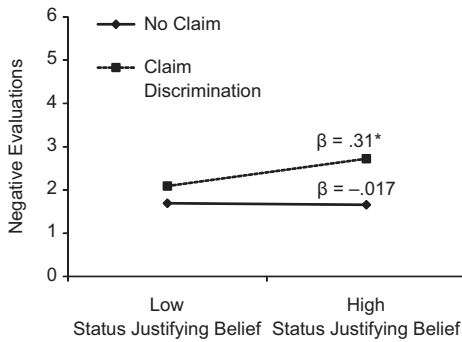


Figure 3. Mean negative evaluations of the *female* bystander as a function of bystander comment (claim discrimination vs. no claim) and status justifying belief (plotted 1 *SD* above and below the mean) in Study 2.

Mediating effect of perceived activism We hypothesized and found evidence to suggest that female bystanders are derogated more than male bystanders for claiming discrimination because they pose a greater threat to people's belief about the fairness of status differences (Hypothesis 3a). However, it is still unclear *why* female bystanders who claim discrimination pose more of a threat to the system than male bystanders who do so. Thus, we hypothesized that female bystanders pose a greater threat to the status system than male bystanders because they are perceived to be activists (Hypothesis 4). Since Hypotheses 3a and 4 are interrelated, we tested a moderated mediation model to examine whether perceived activism mediated the relationship between the gender of the discrimination claimant and negative evaluations and whether SJBs moderated this mediation.

Specifically, we first examined whether female bystanders who claimed discrimination were perceived as activists to a greater extent than male bystanders who claimed discrimination and whether this in turn led to greater derogation of female relative to male discrimination claimants. We then examined whether the relationship between perceived activism (mediator) and negative evaluations (dependent variable) was stronger the more perceivers endorsed status justifying beliefs (moderator) (see Figure 5). If viewing the

bystander as an activist threatens perceivers' beliefs in the status quo, the more perceivers endorse the status quo the more they should be threatened by, and thus derogate, a bystander who is perceived to be an activist. Furthermore, if female bystanders are perceived to be activists to a greater extent than male bystanders they should pose a greater threat to the status system and thus face greater derogation.

To test this hypothesis we followed the procedures and used the macro for moderated mediation (Model 3) designed by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007). First, we tested whether perceived activism mediated the relationship between the bystander comment by bystander gender interaction and negative evaluations. The independent variable, the bystander gender by bystander comment interaction, significantly predicted the dependent variable, negative evaluations, $\beta = -.20, p = .045; \Delta R^2 = .014$ (also demonstrated in the ANOVA analysis above).

Next, the independent variable, the bystander gender by bystander comment interaction, significantly predicted the mediator variable, perceived activism, $\beta = -.19, p = .044; \Delta R^2 = .013$. Participants perceived the female bystander who claimed discrimination to be more of an activist than the male bystander who claimed discrimination, $\beta = -.25, p = .003$. Importantly, the difference in perceptions of male and female discrimination claimants does not reflect a general unwillingness to label men as activists since participants perceived the male bystander who claimed discrimination to be more of an activist than the male bystander who did not do so, $\beta = .23, p = .005$. Similarly, the difference in perceptions of male and female discrimination claimants does not reflect a general tendency to label women as activists since participants did not differ in their ratings of the male and female bystanders who did not claim discrimination, $\beta = -.017, p = .83$ (see Figure 4).

Finally, when we entered the bystander gender by bystander comment interaction in the regression equation together with perceived activism to predict negative evaluations we found that the relationship between the

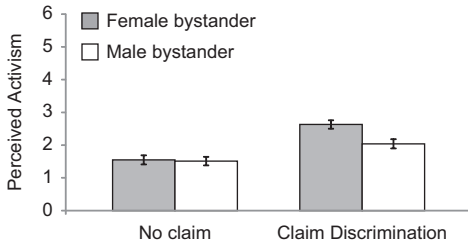


Figure 4. Mean perceived activism of the bystander as a function of the bystander’s comment (claim discrimination vs. no claim) and the bystander’s gender in Study 2. Error bars denote standard error.

bystander gender by bystander comment interaction and negative evaluations was significantly reduced to $\beta = -.13, p = .16$ (bootstrapping 95% CI does not include zero: $-.39, -.02$). Furthermore, the relationship between perceived activism and negative evaluations was significant, $\beta = .34, p < .001$. Thus, perceived activism significantly mediated the relationship between the bystander gender by bystander comment interaction and negative evaluations.

Next, we tested whether SJBs moderated the relationship between the mediator, perceived activism, and the dependent variable, negative evaluations. SJBs were added to the final step of the mediation model described above and were found to significantly interact with perceived activism to predict negative evaluations ($\beta = .14, p = .012$). The positive direction of the regression coefficient indicates that the more participants endorsed the belief in a fair status system the stronger the relationship between perceived activism and negative evaluations. To further explore the moderated mediation we computed the difference between the two simple regression lines at one standard deviation above (3.10) and below (.75) the mean of perceived activism. These analyses indicated that the more participants believed the status system was fair, the more they derogated the bystander when they believed he or she was an activist ($\beta = .26, p = .001$) but not when they disbelieved he or she was an activist ($\beta = -.005, p = .95$) (see Figure 5).

Taken together, these results explain why female bystanders who claim discrimination are derogated more than men who do so. Female

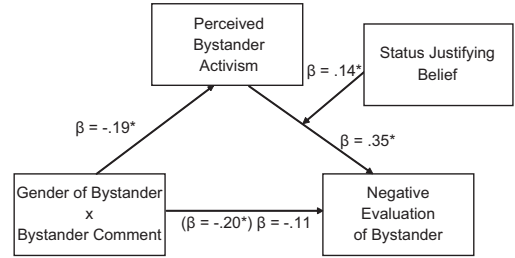


Figure 5. Perceived activism of bystander as a mediator of the interaction between bystander gender and bystander comment on negative evaluations of the bystander, moderated by status justifying beliefs, in Study 2.

Note: The beta values in this model reflect that of the final moderated mediation analysis, thus the values reported in the preliminary simple mediation will vary slightly from the values reported here, * $p < .05$; For the gender of bystander factor, 0 = female and 1 = male, and for the bystander comment factor 0 = no claim, 1 = claim.

bystanders who claimed discrimination were perceived to be greater activists than male bystanders who claimed discrimination and this perception may have led to more negative evaluations of the female bystander relative to the male bystander. Furthermore, this mediation was moderated by status justifying beliefs such that the more perceivers believed status differences were fair the more they derogated bystanders who they perceived to be activists. Thus, female bystanders who claim discrimination may be evaluated more negatively than male bystanders who claim discrimination because they are perceived to be activists and thus threaten people’s belief in a fair status system.

Discussion

Study 2 provided further support for Hypotheses 1 and 2a. People derogate bystanders who claim that another person experienced discrimination more than bystanders who do not make this claim, and they derogate women who claim that someone else experienced discrimination more than men who do so. Furthermore, although women who claim discrimination are evaluated far more negatively than women who make no such claim, men who claim discrimination are

only evaluated slightly more negatively than men who make no claim (Study 1) or the same as men who make no claim (Study 2). It is unclear why the pattern of results for the male bystander in Study 1 is different from Study 2. In Study 2, participants rated the bystanders less negatively overall, thus it may have been more difficult to detect the small difference in ratings between the male bystanders who did and did not claim discrimination. Nevertheless, the key findings are consistent across studies 1 and 2.

Study 2 also provided support for Hypothesis 3a. We proposed that people derogate a female bystander who claims discrimination more than a male bystander who does the same because the female bystander poses a greater threat to their beliefs about the fairness of the status hierarchy. Consistently, we found that status justifying beliefs interacted with the bystander's comment and the bystander's gender to predict negative evaluations. Specifically, the more participants believed the status system was fair the more they derogated the female bystander who claimed discrimination. However, there was no relationship between status justifying beliefs and derogation of the female bystander who made no discrimination claim or the male bystander who did or did not claim discrimination.

Our moderated mediation analysis further explained why female bystanders who claim discrimination pose more of a threat to the status system than male bystanders who claim discrimination. Specifically, female bystanders who claim discrimination are perceived as activists to a greater extent than male bystanders and in turn may be derogated more than male bystanders because they violate people's beliefs about the fairness of the status system.

Study 2 ruled out the possibility that the female discrimination claimant was derogated more than the male discrimination claimant simply because she was seen as intervening on behalf of an ingroup member (another woman), whereas the male was not. Instead, Study 2 demonstrated that people derogate a woman who claims discrimination more than a man who does so irrespective of whether the target of

discrimination is a woman or a man. Nonetheless, it is somewhat surprising that we found no effect of target gender on evaluations of bystanders who claimed discrimination. Given that men hold higher status positions than women in the current system, one could argue that evidence of a man failing to succeed threatens the status quo. Thus, a suggestion that a man's failure to succeed was illegitimate (i.e., due to discrimination) may be perceived positively because it reaffirms the status quo. However, the lack of difference in evaluations of the bystander by target gender may be due to the domain in which the target failed to advance. Therapy is not a stereotypically masculine domain. Our results may have been different if the male target failed in a domain in which men are believed to do especially well.

General discussion

We live in a society where people value equality and tolerance and denounce discrimination. Nonetheless, it appears that people have little tolerance for someone who claims that discrimination occurred. People perceive those who claim discrimination for their own outcomes as complainers and troublemakers (Kaiser & Miller, 2001, 2003). The current research demonstrates that such derogation even extends to people who claim that someone else's outcomes were due to discrimination.

Interpersonal costs of claiming discrimination

The current research advances prior research in three major ways, first by examining how perceivers evaluate uninvolved parties who witness and react to discrimination, second, by examining how the group status of the bystander influences perceivers' evaluations, and third by examining a specific mechanism to explain how group status and discrimination claims interact to predict negative evaluations.

As predicted, we found that participants rated uninvolved bystanders who claimed that a co-worker was a victim of discrimination more

negatively than bystanders who did not mention discrimination to the co-worker. Importantly, we also found that female bystanders who claimed discrimination were evaluated more negatively than male bystanders who claimed discrimination.

We proposed, and found evidence to suggest that female bystanders who claim discrimination are evaluated more negatively than male bystanders who do so because they pose more of a threat to the status system. Consistently, higher endorsement of status justifying beliefs predicted greater derogation of the female bystander who claimed discrimination but not the male bystander who claimed discrimination or the male or female bystander who did not claim discrimination. Female bystanders may threaten people's belief in a fair system when they claim discrimination because they are particularly likely to be seen as activists who regularly claim discrimination and seek to change the system.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations of the current research suggest directions for future research. Our research was based on a vignette methodology, which limited our ability to explore how people behave or feel when actually engaged in the situation at hand. Nonetheless, we believe that a vignette methodology was appropriate for our goal of assessing third party evaluations of discrimination claimants. Past research shows that people are often inaccurate in predicting their behavior when asked to *imagine how they would behave* in a particular situation; (Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2009; Swim & Hyers, 1999). However, we did not assess participants' behavior or behavioral intentions in the current research, nor was this the focus of our research. Rather, we were interested in their evaluations of others. In real life situations people often learn about and form impressions of other people and their actions without ever meeting them. For example, they may learn about someone who claims discrimination by reading a newspaper article or watching TV. Furthermore, research suggests that people

are easily immersed in and persuaded by narratives, even when narratives are explicitly labeled as fiction (Green & Brock, 2000). Although we believe a vignette methodology was appropriate for our research question, future research should expand on the current research to examine how people behave when directly interacting with a discrimination claimant.

Second, our research focused on comparing how people evaluate a bystander who claimed discrimination (and expressed sympathy) to one who witnessed the same event but expressed only sympathy. There are many other comparisons that may be enlightening, such as with bystanders who make a different attribution for the negative outcome or bystanders who claim that discrimination did not occur. It may also be useful to compare evaluations of bystanders who claim discrimination to evaluations of targets who attribute their own outcomes to discrimination. Another interesting question for future research would be to examine how evaluations of bystanders who claim discrimination differ as function of who he or she reports to. It would be useful to examine how bystanders who report discrimination to a person in power are evaluated compared to bystanders who tell the victim of discrimination that his or her outcomes were due to discrimination.

Third, although we argue that bystanders who claim discrimination are evaluated "negatively," the average negative rating of the bystander who claimed discrimination was below the midpoint of the scale. Thus, although we can conclude that bystanders who claim discrimination are evaluated negatively relative to those who do not claim discrimination, further research is needed to determine whether people's disapproval of bystanders who claim discrimination is strong or only moderate and whether this disapproval leads to negative interpersonal behavior.

Similarly, although we assumed that participants' negative ratings of the bystander reflected the threat they experienced from a challenge to the status quo, we did not directly measure threat. Attempts to measure threat directly through self-report are often unsuccessful (Matheson & Cole,

2004; Steele & Aronson, 1995); thus, future research should attempt to measure whether people experience threat in response to a discrimination claimant by assessing implicit responses.

The current research was also limited in that it only examined evaluations of bystanders who claimed gender discrimination. Previous research, however, has found similar derogation of racial minorities who claim their outcomes are due to racial discrimination (Kaiser & Miller, 2003). Thus, it is likely that our results would generalize to bystanders who claim other types of discrimination.

Finally, the current research only examined reactions to bystanders who claimed discrimination when the situation was fairly blatant. In everyday social contexts discrimination is often more subtle. Future research should examine how people respond to bystanders who claim discrimination when the situation is more ambiguous as to whether or not discrimination occurred. People may derogate a bystander who claims discrimination even more when discrimination is ambiguous than when it is blatant because they may believe that the bystander's claim to discrimination is incorrect and illegitimately challenges the status system.

Implications

The questions explored in the current investigation are important because bystanders who attribute another person's outcome to discrimination may serve the important social functions of providing victims of discrimination with social support and helping them to recognize and take action against their unfair treatment (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005). Nonetheless, it seems that claiming discrimination on behalf of another person can be costly. Thus, bystanders who could assist victims of discrimination in a critical way may be reluctant to put themselves on the line.

Individuals who belong to a high status group, however, may be in a better position to claim discrimination without facing such high social costs. In the current research, men who claimed that

another person experienced discrimination were not derogated as much as women who did the same. Unfortunately, members of high status groups may be unlikely to claim discrimination on behalf of another because they may not recognize discrimination (Blumenthal, 1998; Eibach & Ehrlinger, 2006), they may be reluctant to take the risk of claiming discrimination (especially for a member of a low status out group), and they may worry about intervening inappropriately (Latane & Nida, 1981). Thus, it may be important to inform people, for example, during office diversity training, about their right and responsibility to report any discrimination they may witness.

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- 1 We completed a parallel set of analyses in which we excluded the 23 participants who left the manipulation check blank in addition to the participants who answered incorrectly. The pattern of results was the same.

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