How status and stereotypes impact attributions to discrimination: The stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis

Laurie T. O’Brien a,*, Zoe Kinias b, Brenda Major b

a Department of Psychology, Tulane University, 2007 Percival Stern Hall, New Orleans, LA 70118, USA
b Department of Psychology, University of California Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9660, USA

Received 13 January 2006; revised 20 December 2006
Available online 30 December 2006

Abstract

Past research suggests a status-asymmetry effect in attributions to discrimination such that people are more likely to make attributions to discrimination when the victim is from a lower status group than the perpetrator as compared to when the victim is from a higher status group than the perpetrator. The present studies test a stereotype-asymmetry effect, such that people are more likely to make attributions to discrimination when rejection occurs in a domain in which the victim is negatively rather than positively stereotyped. In Study 1 (observers) and Study 2 (victims), participants attributed rejection following a job interview to discrimination more when the victim was negatively stereotyped than when the victim was positively stereotyped. The stereotypicality of the domain was more important than the relative status of the victim and the perpetrator in determining judgments of discrimination. Thus stereotype-asymmetry is a key feature of the discrimination prototype.

Keywords: Attributions to discrimination; Stereotypes; Status; Prototypes

Introduction

"In 2000, Ms. Mahl filed a charge of sex discrimination claiming she had not been promoted after ten years because of her gender."

"In 1998, Mr. Lynn filed a sex discrimination suit alleging that he received more severe punishment than a female colleague for committing the same offences."

The above lawsuits required both the plaintiff and members of the court to make a judgment about whether a negative outcome—being fired, disciplined, or passed over for promotion—was due to discrimination. The resulting judgment had significant personal, social, and economic consequences for both the plaintiffs and the defendants. Accordingly, it is important to understand the cues that people use to reach the decision that they, or someone else, have been victims of discrimination. In recent years, social psychologists have demonstrated that a variety of personal and situational factors influence the likelihood that a given action will be attributed to discrimination (for reviews see Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; Stangor et al., 2003). We propose that people expect that discrimination is more likely to occur in domains in which the victim’s group is negatively stereotyped than domains in which the victim’s group is positively stereotyped, and hence are more likely to attribute negative outcomes to discrimination in the former than the latter case. We call this the stereotype-asymmetry effect.

Discrimination prototypes

People have prototypes (or expectancies) about discrimination; people compare events against their prototype for discrimination and the more closely the event in question fits the prototype, the more likely it is to be labeled discrim-
ination (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991; Flournoy, Prentice-Dunn, & Klinger, 2002; Harris, Lievens, & Van Hoey, 2004; Inman & Baron, 1996; Inman, Huerta, & Oh, 1998; Morera, Dupont, Leyens, & Desert, 2004; Rodin, Price, Bryson, & Sanchez, 1990). Discrimination is prototypically viewed as an intergroup phenomenon, i.e., as occurring between members of different groups rather than within the same group (Inman & Baron, 1996; Rodin et al., 1990). As a consequence, the same negative action is more likely to be labeled as discrimination if the perpetrator and victim are from different social groups than if they are from the same social group.

Researchers have further argued that victims are typically expected to be members of lower status groups relative to their victims, a hypothesis that Rodin and colleagues have dubbed the status-asymmetry hypothesis (Inman & Baron, 1996; Rodin et al., 1990). Consistent with this hypothesis, several studies have shown that observers are more likely to make attributions to discrimination when the victim is from a lower status group (e.g., Blacks, women) than the perpetrator (e.g., Whites, men) as compared to when the victim is from a higher status group than the perpetrator (Inman & Baron, 1996; Rodin et al., 1990). One limitation of this research is that it has examined attributions to discrimination in domains in which the lower status group is negatively stereotyped relative to the higher status group. This confounds the chronic status of perpetrator and victim with group stereotypes about the perpetrator and victim.

The stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis

The present paper extends this research to investigate a potential third feature of the discrimination prototype: the expectation that discrimination primarily occurs in domains in which the target’s (victim’s) group is negatively rather than positively stereotyped. In addition to knowledge about the chronic status of social groups, people are also aware of stereotypes about which groups are believed to be more or less competent within specific contexts (e.g., Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick & Fiske, 1999; Heikes, 1991; Koenig & Eagly, 2005; Leyens, Desert, & Croizet, 2000; Stone, 2002; Stone, Lynch, & Sjomeling, 1999). Although high status groups are generally stereotyped as more competent than low status groups, in some domains, low status groups are stereotyped as more competent than high status groups. For example, although men are stereotyped as being more rational and better at math than women, women are stereotyped as being more intuitive, emotionally sensitive, and better with children than men (e.g., Leyens et al., 2000; O’Brien & Crandall, 2003).

We hypothesize that people are more likely to expect discrimination to occur in domains in which the victim is negatively stereotyped than domains in which the victim is positively stereotyped. This expectation leads to greater judgments of discrimination in contexts in which the victim’s group is negatively stereotyped than in contexts in which the victim is positively stereotyped. We term this the stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis. Consider the sex discrimination lawsuits described at the beginning of this article. We argue that the perceived legitimacy of these discrimination claims is likely to be influenced by gender stereotypes. That is, Mr. Lynn’s claim of sex discrimination is regarded as more legitimate if he is a nurse (his actual profession) than a mechanic. Likewise, Ms. Mahl’s claim of sex discrimination is perceived as more credible if she is a mechanic (her actual profession) than a nurse.

Our stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis is consistent with research demonstrating the contextual nature of prejudice (Barden, Maddux, & Petty, 2004; Eagly, 2004; Eagly & Diekman, 2005; Goffman, 1963). For example, White Americans exhibit considerable prejudice against African Americans in educational contexts (where African Americans are negatively stereotyped), but display very little prejudice against African Americans in athletic contexts (where they are positively stereotyped). In contrast, White Americans manifest prejudice towards Asian Americans in athletic contexts (where they are negatively stereotyped), but not educational contexts (where they are positively stereotyped, Barden et al., 2004). To the extent that people are aware that prejudice is contextualized, they should expect discrimination to be more likely to manifest in domains in which the victim is negatively stereotyped as compared to domains in which the victim is positively stereotyped.

Research by Inman and colleagues examined whether people are sensitive to contextual cues when making judgments of trait prejudice (Inman et al., 1998; Study 1). They examined perceptions of trait prejudice in potential perpetrators in various contexts including those where Blacks are negatively stereotyped (e.g., the Senate, corporate America) and those where Whites are negatively stereotyped (e.g., rap music, basketball). The results of this research yielded some support for the idea that context affects judgments of discrimination. For example, when participants read about a Black player at a neighborhood basketball who court told a White player to “get lost”, they were more likely to rate him as “prejudiced” compared to a White player who told a Black player to “get lost”. Inman and colleagues argued that African Americans have situational power over Whites in the domain of basketball and claimed that this is why a Black person who rejected a White on the basketball court was more likely to be perceived as prejudiced than a White person who rejected a Black on the basketball court. Overall, however, results of this study were inconclusive, yielding some support for the stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis, but support for the status-asymmetry hypothesis as well. For example, they also found that, when White participants rated a Black rap music artist who refused to give a break to an aspiring White rap artist, he was seen as less prejudiced than a White artist who refused to give an aspiring Black artist a break.

One important difference between our stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis and Inman and colleagues’ perspective is their emphasis on power and ours on stereotypes. We
conceptualize power as the ability to influence another person’s outcomes (see Fiske, 1993; French & Raven, 1959; Smith & Trope, 2006). In the present research, we held power constant across conditions while manipulating stereotypes in order to show that discrimination attributions are influenced by group stereotypes. In addition, Inman and colleague’s study did not allow a comparison of trait prejudice ratings for individuals of the same group across equivalent stereotypical contexts (i.e., comparing a White’s rejection of a Black for CEO and a White’s rejection of a Black for a basketball team are too different to yield meaningful comparisons). Thus, their study did not test a key part of the stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis.

Victims’ and observers’ perspectives

One goal of the present research was to examine the independent effects of chronic status and group stereotypes on judgments of discrimination among victims of discrimination as well as observers of discrimination. Research suggests that there are both similarities and differences in the factors that affect judgments of discrimination among victims and observers (Inman, 2001; Sechrist, Swim, & Stangor, 2004; Swim, Scott, Sechrist, Campbell, & Stangor, 2003). Differences in judgments of discrimination by victims and observers appear to be primarily due to the divergent motivations faced by victims relative to observers. For example, victims’ judgments of discrimination are more likely to be impacted by a need to maintain personal control over one’s outcomes (Sechrist et al., 2004). The effect of stereotypes on judgments of discrimination, however, is not hypothesized to be a motivational process. Thus we expected to find support for the stereotype-symmetry hypothesis among both observers (Study 1) and victims (Study 2) of discrimination. To our knowledge, this is the first research to examine whether stereotypes of discrimination affect the judgments of victims of discrimination.

Overview

The current research is the first to examine the independent effects of chronic group status and group stereotypes on judgments of discrimination using a design that facilitates direct comparisons between the effects of status and stereotypes in an experimentally controlled domain. Across both studies, a victim, who was either from a chronically higher or lower status group than the perpetrator, was rejected for a job in a domain where the victim was either positively stereotyped or negatively stereotyped. This design allowed us to hold power constant across conditions because in all conditions the power held by the perpetrator was the ability to decide who was hired for the position.

The status-asymmetry hypothesis (Rodin et al., 1990) predicts a main effect of victim sex: attributions to discrimination should be higher when a female job-applicant is rejected than when a male applicant is rejected. The stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis predicts an interaction between victim sex and the stereotypicality of the required job skills. When a female applicant is rejected, attributions to discrimination should be higher when the job requires stereotypically masculine skills than when it requires stereotypically feminine skills. However, when a male applicant is rejected, attributions to discrimination should be higher when the job requires stereotypically feminine skills than when it requires stereotypically masculine skills.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Participants were 238 (56% female, 91% White) undergraduates. Nineteen participants (8%) were unable to answer basic informational questions about the materials (e.g., who was hired). These participants were deleted from the analyses leaving a final sample of 219 participants.

Design and procedures

The design was a 3 (Domain: Masculine, Feminine, or Neutral) x 2 (Victim Sex: Male or Female) between subjects factorial. After arriving to the lab in groups of 5–15, participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions; experimenters were blind to condition. Participants read a narrative about a fictitious corporation seeking a new “project manager”. They were given partial transcripts from interviews with two different applicants, and then learned which applicant was hired for the position. Finally, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the hiring process. Participants were assured their responses were anonymous.

Materials

The description of the requisite skills for the job varied as a function of condition. Descriptions were constructed on the basis of a pilot study examining which traits, skills, and college majors were viewed as stereotypically feminine, masculine, or neutral.

In the Feminine Domain condition, the senior manager in charge of the hiring was looking for someone with high levels of emotional sensitivity, expressive ability, empathy, and the ability to consider multiple people’s perspectives. Additionally, participants learned that previous people who had held the position had degrees in Creative Writing and Drama and were “caring and interpersonally sensitive”. In the Masculine Domain condition, the senior manager was looking for someone task focused and decisive with high levels of analytic thinking and spatial ability. Additionally, participants learned that previous people who had held the position had degrees in Engineering and Computer Science and were “rational and systematic”. In

---

1 Participant gender had no main effect on any of the dependent measures and did not interact with the independent variables.
the Neutral Domain condition, the senior manager was looking for someone who is intelligent, flexible, and who has good marketing skills. Additionally, participants learned that previous people who had held the position had degrees in Marketing and in Law and Society and were “goal-oriented and good at thinking outside the box”.

The narrative said that the senior manager would be interviewing two applicants for the job—Katrina and Brian. Participants were provided with partial transcripts of the interview for each applicant. In both transcripts, the manager asked the applicants to name two problems found in the workplace that require teamwork to solve. One applicant answered “planning for a new product” and “working on large interdepartmental projects” whereas the other applicant answered “budgeting” and “formulating new ideas”. Both applicants subsequently expanded on these answers. Pilot testing indicated that both applicants’ responses were perceived as equally qualified.

Measures

Attributions to discrimination. Attributions to discrimination (ATDs) were assessed with three items that formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .92$): “To what extent do you think the hiring decision was due to discrimination?”, “To what extent do you think the hiring decision was due to sexism?”, and “To what extent do you think the hiring decision was due to the applicants’ gender?” Participants responded on a 1–5 scale with endpoints labeled “not at all due to $X$” and “completely due to $X$”. These items were imbedded among other items.

Attributions to the applicant’s qualifications. Two items ($r = .40, p < .001$) assessing attributions to the internal qualities of the applicant were averaged: “To what extent do you think the hiring decision was due to the applicants’ responses in the interviews?” and “To what extent do you think the hiring decision was due to the applicants’ qualifications?” Participants responded on a five-point scale.

Manipulation check. Participants indicated the extent to which the project manager job sounded stereotypically masculine or feminine on a seven-point scale where “1” was labeled “stereotypically masculine” and “7” was labeled “stereotypically feminine”.

Results

Manipulation check

A 3(Domain) × 2(Victim Sex) ANOVA on participants’ ratings of the job stereotypicality revealed a main effect of Domain, $F(2,213) = 50.25, p < .001$. The Feminine Domain ($M = 4.91$) job was rated as more stereotypically feminine than the Neutral Domain ($M = 4.07$) job, $F(1,213) = 47.16, p < .001$. The Masculine Domain ($M = 3.50$) job was rated as less stereotypically feminine (and hence more stereotypically masculine) compared to the Neutral Domain, $F(1,213) = 9.18, p < .01$. There was also a main effect of Victim Sex, $F(1,213) = 10.22, p < .01$. Participants perceived the job to be more stereotypically feminine when the victim was male ($M = 4.63$) than when the victim was female ($M = 4.04$). The two-way interaction was not significant, $p > .22$.

Attributions to discrimination

A 3(Domain) × 2(Victim Sex) ANOVA on ATDs revealed only the significant interaction predicted by the stereotype-asymmetry perspective, $F(2,213) = 4.47, p < .05$. See Fig. 1.

When the victim was female, ATDs were highest in the Masculine Domain ($M = 2.61$), intermediate in the Neutral Domain ($M = 2.47$), and lowest in the Feminine Domain ($M = 2.11$). Planned contrasts revealed that the Masculine Domain condition was significantly greater than the Feminine Domain condition, $F(1,213) = 4.01, p < .05$, but the Neutral Domain was not significantly different from either the Feminine Domain condition, $F(1,213) = 2.01, p = .16$, or the Masculine Domain condition, $F < 1$.

When the victim was male, in contrast, ATDs were highest in the Feminine Domain ($M = 2.59$), intermediate in the Neutral Domain ($M = 2.29$), and lowest in the Masculine Domain ($M = 2.04$). Planned contrasts revealed the Feminine Domain condition was significantly greater than the Masculine Domain condition, $F(1,213) = 4.67, p < .05$, but the Neutral Domain was not significantly different from either the Feminine Domain, $F(1,213) = 1.54, p = .22$, or the Masculine Domain condition, $F < 1$.

Attributions to the target’s qualifications

A 3(Domain) × 2(Victim Sex) ANOVA on attributions to the applicant’s qualifications revealed no significant
effects, ps > .23. attributions to the applicant’s qualifications were negatively correlated with ATDs, \( r = -.59, p < .05 \).

**Discussion**

As predicted by the stereotype-asymmetry perspective, attributions to discrimination were a function of both victim sex and the stereotypicality of the domain. When the victims were female, participants were more likely to view the job rejection as due to discrimination when the job required stereotypically masculine skills as compared to when it required feminine skills. When the victims were male, however, participants were more likely to view the job rejection as due to discrimination when the job required stereotypically feminine skills than when it required masculine skills.

The planned contrasts revealed that, regardless of whether the victim was male or female, the Neutral condition did not differ from either the Masculine or Feminine conditions. Therefore, we excluded the Neutral condition from the follow-up study.

**Study 2**

The goal of Study 2 was to determine whether the stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis also applies to attributions to discrimination among victims of outgroup rejection. The effect of prototypes on judgments of discrimination is hypothesized to be a “cold” cognitive process and therefore should affect victims and observers of outgroup rejection in a similar manner. We expected to find a pattern of results similar to Study 1 for women and men who were rejected in masculine versus feminine domains.

However, it is possible that the stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis may not apply to victims. Inman (2001) found that surprise over receiving a negative evaluation was related to attributions to discrimination among victims but not observers. The more surprised victims were by receiving a negative evaluation, the more likely they were to make attributions to discrimination. Among observers, however, surprise over the victims’ evaluation was unrelated to their attributions to discrimination. It is possible that victims whose group is positively stereotyped within the rejection context may be more surprised by the rejection than victims whose group is negatively stereotyped. If increased surprise is associated with increased attributions to discrimination (see Inman, 2001), then we would expect a pattern of results directly opposite to those predicted by the stereotype-asymmetry perspective.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants were 104 White (62% male) undergraduates. Of the original 104 participants, 6 participants expressed suspicion about the procedures and 1 participant strongly indicated that he did not want the job participants were required to apply for. After deleting these participants from the analyses, the final sample was 97 participants.

**Design and procedures**

The design was a 2 (Domain: Masculine or Feminine) x 2 (Participant Sex: Male or Female) between subjects factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to either the Masculine or Feminine Domain condition and experimenters were unaware of the hypotheses. When participants arrived at the laboratory, they were escorted to one of three enclosed cubicles containing a networked computer. Participants were told that two other students (always having other gendered names) were also participating in the session.

The experimenter explained over an intercom that the three students would work together on a series of problem-solving tasks in a structured work group team. The team would consist of a manager, a co-manager, and a clerk. Participants were told that the manager role had already been randomly assigned to another participant and that the first task for the manager was to assign roles to the two remaining participants. The experimenter described the co-manager position as more desirable than the clerk position. Participants were told that members of the management team would be eligible to win $100 in a lottery and that the number of lottery tickets that they received would depend on their performance, whereas the clerk would not be eligible for the lottery.

In the Masculine Domain condition, participants were told that the important skills for doing well on the problem-solving task included analytic thinking, spatial ability, being task focused, decisive, and rational and that two men majoring in engineering and computer science won the previous lottery. In the Feminine Domain condition, participants were told that the important skills for doing well on the problem-solving task included emotional sensitivity, expressive ability, and intuition and that two women majoring in creative writing and drama won the previous lottery. Traits and college majors were chosen on the basis of the same pilot test used for study 1 materials.

The experimenter then took a digital photograph of the participant and pretended to take pictures of the other two bogus participants. Participants completed an application that would ostensibly be given to the manager consisting of a “background information” sheet that included gender and other demographic information, and a personal statement that asked participants to identify problems found in the workplace that require teamwork to solve and how teamwork would help solve the problems. While the participants awaited the manager’s decision, digital photos of the manager, the actual participant, and the other applicant appeared on the participant’s computer screen. The photos of the manager and the other applicant were always of the other sex as the actual participants, and the other-sex photos were counterbalanced for their appearance as “manager” and “other applicant.”
Next, the experimenter gave participants a role assignment sheet ostensibly completed by the manager which indicated that the manager had assigned the actual participant to the clerk role because the manager thought this role assignment would give the manager “a better chance to win the money”. Participants had three minutes to digest this feedback and then completed the dependent measures on the computer. Participants were told that their responses were confidential and would not be shared with other participants in the session. Finally, all participants were fully debriefed and entered into a $100 lottery awarded at the completion of data collection.

**Results**

**Manipulation check**

A 2(Domain) × 2(Target Sex) ANOVA on ratings of which sex would perform the co-manager role better revealed a main effect of Domain, $F(1, 84) = 116.74$, $p < .001$. Participants in the Feminine Domain condition ($M = 2.64$) were more likely to think a woman would perform the job better compared to participants in the Masculine Domain condition ($M = 1.32$). There was also a main effect of Sex, $F(1, 84) = 4.77$, $p < .05$, such that male participants ($M = 2.18$) were more likely than female participants ($M = 1.81$) to indicate that women would perform better. The Domain by Sex interaction was marginally significant, $F(1, 84) = 3.30$, $p = .07$. Both men and women were more likely to think a woman would do better in the Feminine Domain condition than the Masculine Domain condition; however, the magnitude of this difference was slightly larger for women.

**Attributions to discrimination**

A 2(Domain) × 2(Sex) ANOVA on ATDs revealed only an interaction between Domain and Sex, $F(1, 93) = 8.27$, $p < .01$. See Fig. 2.

Planned contrasts revealed that male participants were more likely to attribute their rejection to discrimination in the Feminine Domain condition ($M = 3.30$) than in the Masculine Domain condition ($M = 2.88$), $F(1, 93) = 4.11$, $p < .05$, but female participants were more likely to attribute their rejection to discrimination in the Masculine Domain condition ($M = 3.32$) than the Feminine Domain condition ($M = 2.78$), $F(1, 93) = 4.25$, $p < .05$.

**Attributions to participants’ qualifications**

A 2(Domain) × 2(Sex) ANOVA on attributions to the participants’ qualifications revealed no significant effects, $ps > .21$. Attributions to qualifications were negatively correlated with ATDs, $r = -.32$, $p < .01$.

**Surprise**

A 2(Domain) × 2(Sex) ANOVA on surprise revealed no significant effects, $ps > .43$. Surprise was negatively, but not significantly, correlated with ATDs, $r = -.17$, $p = .11$.

**Discussion**

Consistent with the stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis, attributions to discrimination were a function of both participant sex and the stereotypicality of the domain. Both male and female participants were more likely to attribute rejection to discrimination when they were rejected in a domain in which their gender group was negatively stereotyped than positively stereotyped.

The manipulation had no effect on participants’ ratings of surprise. In contrast with Inman (2001), surprise was not significantly related to attributions to discrimination. Compared to Inman’s study (2001), the reason for the rejection and the manager’s criterion for making a decision were

---

2 Degrees of freedom is smaller on this variable because, due to a computer malfunction, we had missing data for several subjects.
more ambiguous in the present study. These differences between the two studies may explain the different findings.

General discussion

We proposed that judgments about discrimination are sensitive to the context in which discrimination occurs such that, within a given context, people are more likely to make judgments of discrimination when the victim is negatively stereotyped rather than positively stereotyped. This is consistent with evidence that prejudice toward groups is not constant across all contexts—rather prejudice is more likely to manifest in situations where groups are negatively stereotyped than situations where groups are positively stereotyped (Barden et al., 2004). The present research suggests that, at some level, people may be aware that prejudice is contextualized and this awareness influences their expectations about which groups of people are likely to be targets of discrimination.

These findings qualify and extend research on discrimination prototypes. In most contexts, members of chronically high status groups are positively stereotyped relative to members of chronically low status groups. Thus it is not surprising that past research has seemed to support the status-asymmetry hypothesis (e.g., Inman & Baron, 1996; Rodin et al., 1990). The present research, however, builds on more recent research by Inman and colleagues (Inman et al., 1998) showing that context can affect attributions to discrimination. The present research suggests that contextual stereotypes about the competence of the victim are more influential in judgments of discrimination than the chronic status of the victim relative to the perpetrator.

The present research demonstrates that group stereotypes can affect attributions of discrimination among both observers (in Study 1) and victims (in Study 2) of discrimination. The use of different experimental paradigms that yielded similar findings suggests that the stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis may be quite robust. Although common cognitive processes may affect victims’ and observers’ judgments of gender discrimination, the design of the present research did not allow for a direct comparison between observers and victims. In addition, the lack of a Neutral condition in Study 2 tempers the conclusions that can be drawn about the apparent similarities between the two studies.

We investigated perceptions of intergroup rejection in the current research, in which the victims’ and perpetrators’ group stereotypes were yoked. When the victim was positively stereotyped, the perpetrator was negatively stereotyped and when the victim was negatively stereotyped, the perpetrator was positively stereotyped. Thus, it is impossible to know if stereotypes about the victim or stereotypes about the perpetrator have a stronger influence on judgments of discrimination. Although it is possible to independently manipulate the group membership of the perpetrator and target, this would require including conditions in which the perpetrator and target are from the same social group. The limitation of this approach is that people rarely perceive intragroup rejections as discriminatory (Inman & Baron, 1996).

The studies were intentionally designed so that the cause of the outcome was relatively ambiguous and it is important to note that attributions to discrimination were relatively low across both studies. We believe that this feature of our paradigms mimics situations in the real world where the causes for negative outcomes are often unclear. In addition, it seems likely that prototypes are most likely to impact perceptions of discrimination in cases where the cause of a rejection is unknown. In future research, it will be important to determine whether the stereotype-asymmetry hypothesis can predict attributions to discrimination when cues to discrimination are more blatant.

Conclusion

When people are turned down for a job, witness a co-worker fail to receive a promotion, or are called upon to be a juror in a discrimination lawsuit, they make judgments about whether that negative outcome was due to discrimination. Oftentimes, the true cause of these negative outcomes is ambiguous. Hence, people may rely on prototypes, or expectancies, to make judgments about whether or not discrimination occurred. The present research suggests that stereotype-asymmetry is a key aspect of these prototypes. Perhaps the most remarkable implication of this research is that stereotypicality of the domain was more important than the relative status of the perpetrator and the victim in determining judgments of discrimination. These data dispute the claim of some social critics (e.g., Bruce, 2003; Charen, 2004; McWhorter, 2003) that the US has become a culture of victimology in which people from chronically low status groups are more likely to see themselves, and to be seen by others, as victims of discrimination than people from chronically high status groups who face the same circumstances. Instead, these data indicate that when rejection occurs in contexts in which the higher status group is negatively stereotyped relative to the lower status group, both observers and members of high status groups are quite willing to say that the rejection was due to discrimination.

References


Heikens, E. J. (1991). When men are the minority: the case of men in nurs-


Major, B., Quinton, W. J., & McCoy, S. K. (2002). Antecedents and conse-


