

“I Think They Discriminated Against Me”:

Using Prototype Theory and Organizational Justice Theory for Understanding Perceived
Discrimination in Selection and Promotion Situations

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Abstract

Research in Industrial/Organizational (I/O) psychology has generally focused on objective measures of employment discrimination and has virtually neglected individuals' subjective *perceptions* as to whether a selection or promotion process is discriminatory or not. This paper presents two theoretical models as organizing frameworks to explain candidates' likelihood of perceiving that discrimination has occurred in a certain selection or promotion situation. The prototype model stresses the importance of the prototypical victim-perpetrator combination, the perceived intention of the decision-maker, and the perceived harm caused as possible antecedents of perceived employment discrimination. In the organizational justice model, procedural, informational, interpersonal, and distributive fairness play a central role in determining candidates' perceptions of discrimination. The fairness heuristic helps to explain which type of fairness information dominates these perceptions. Applications and research propositions are discussed as well as the similarities and differences between the two models. We conclude by offering several factors that may determine which model is used in deciding whether or not discrimination has occurred.

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Employment discrimination is a major focus of research in Industrial/Organizational (I/O) psychology. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was an important impetus for lawsuits in this area, and subsequent laws (e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) have served to increase litigation. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 appears to be a key turning point in terms of lawsuits, with the number of employment lawsuits growing more than 20% annually in the last decade (Sharf & Jones, 1999). From an organization's viewpoint, class action lawsuits are of particular concern because of the potential costs involved. Even if a case is settled out of court, the costs can run into millions of dollars (Sharf & Jones, 1999). As an example, Wal-Mart Corporation was recently sued for sex discrimination in pay and promotions with a potential “class” of some 1.5 million members. I/O psychologists have played a significant role in the employment discrimination area, particularly with regard to the development of selection and promotion processes that will withstand legal scrutiny (e.g., Terpstra, Mohamed, & Kethley, 1999; Williamson, Campion, Malos, Roehling, & Campion, 1997). To a lesser degree, I/O psychologists have served as expert witnesses in the courtroom, testifying either for plaintiffs or defendants regarding the legality of these processes. Accordingly, there exists an impressive literature in I/O psychology regarding measures of the discriminatory impact (e.g., the Four-Fifths rule of thumb, the Fisher exact test, differential prediction) of various selection and promotion processes. There is also a relatively small, but rapidly growing, literature addressing why the tendency for bias and discrimination exists and the interventions that can reduce this problem (e.g., Brief & Barsky, 2000; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Most recently, Kunda

and Spencer (2003) developed a theory focusing on the situational factors that determine whether stereotypes will come to play in making various judgments.

Despite this vast literature addressing the presence and determinants of discrimination, individuals' *perceptions* as to whether a selection or promotion process is discriminatory or not have been largely ignored by both researchers and practitioners. This is rather surprising, given that individuals may have little or no idea as to how a court might assess discrimination, let alone whether they have enough information to accurately conclude whether discrimination has occurred. With few exceptions (e.g., Goldman, 2001), there is practically no theory or research in I/O psychology to help understand perceptions of discrimination or to compare perceptions of discrimination to judicial decisions regarding discrimination. Why an employee or applicant would decide that a negative selection or promotion decision is due to discrimination based on his or her race, age, gender, religion or other group membership, rather than due to the lack of qualifications or to other reasons (e.g., personal friendship) has rarely been addressed in I/O psychology.

The topic of perceived discrimination has, however, been addressed in the social-psychological literature, where a growing body of studies exists. In a seminal paper, Major, Quinton, and McCoy (2002) provided a comprehensive review of perceived discrimination and emphasized areas in this research that deserve further examination. Their review focused on prototypes, and related literature, in understanding perceived discrimination (e.g., Inman & Baron, 1996; Inman, Huerta, & Oh, 1998). A second approach, the justice model, was largely ignored in the Major et al. review. The justice model has its roots in understanding general fairness and equity issues, with distributive fairness and procedural fairness being related to discrimination complaints (Goldman, 2001; Lind, Greenberg, Scott, & Welchans, 2000). Although initially grounded in social psychology, in the last two decades, a plethora of research

on organizational justice has been produced in the domain of I/O psychology which appears to be relevant to the issue of perceived discrimination as well.

There are several different possible explanations as to why an individual may have been rejected for a job opening or promotion opportunity, including the fact that he or she was simply not the most qualified candidate or that he or she was rejected in favor of a personal friend of the hiring manager. The focus of this paper is what determines whether an individual perceives that discrimination (based on his or her race, gender, age, or any number of other characteristics) was the reason for this rejection. Towards that end, we contribute to existing research on discrimination by proposing two different models as organizing theoretical frameworks to explain people's likelihood of perceiving that employment discrimination has occurred in regards to a selection or promotion decision. There are several unique aspects to this paper. First, the notion of perceived discrimination being an important variable of interest has not been addressed in the I/O psychology literature. Second, we offer two different models of the antecedents of perceived discrimination; most of the literature has focused on just one of these models. Third, we elaborate and build on these models, contributing new ideas beyond what has been said to date in the literature about them.

The remainder of the paper is divided into the following sections. We first begin with a discussion of the focal criterion variable, namely, perceived discrimination. Second, we review the possible antecedents of perceived discrimination, offering two theoretical models (prototype model and justice model). Third, we comment briefly on possible consequences of perceived discrimination. We conclude with a critical discussion that focuses on the similarities and differences between the two proposed models and provide some suggestions as to when and where a respondent might use one rather than the other model for determining whether discrimination has occurred.

It is important to note that different people use various terms associated with our topic quite differently. To avoid confusion, we use the term “perceived discrimination” throughout the paper to refer to a situation where an individual believes that he or she has been treated unfairly because of race, gender, age, or any other such characteristic. Occasionally, we use the term “prejudice” in a similar vein. For this paper, an “unfair decision” means a decision that is believed to have been made without regard to proper procedures or is based on irrelevant factors (e.g., friendships). Thus, an unfair decision is not necessarily due to discrimination.

Focal Criterion: Perceived Discrimination

Most of the prior literature in I/O psychology on discrimination has examined actual differences in terms of predictors or outcomes. There is a large literature, for example, on racial differences on cognitive ability tests (e.g., Hough, Oswald, & Ployhart, 2001; Schmitt, Clause, & Pulakos, 1996), integrity tests (e.g., Ones & Viswesvaran, 1998), interviews (e.g., Huffcutt, Conway, Roth, & Stone, 2001), and performance ratings (e.g., Ford, Kraiger, & Schechtman, 1986). There is a somewhat smaller body of research concerning gender differences in pay (e.g., Birnbaum, 1985; Gollob, 1984; Harris, Gilbreath, & Sunday, 2002; McFatter, 1987). The major emphasis in all of these areas has been on real, rather than perceived, differences between Blacks and Whites and between men and women with regard to these measures. It is only in the area of sexual harassment (e.g., Corr & Jackson, 2001) that researchers have considered individuals’ perceptions as to whether or not discrimination has occurred.

While most of our examples focus on race discrimination, the models presented here potentially apply for any type of discrimination, including gender, national origin, and sexual orientation discrimination. An underlying assumption is that one’s perceptions as to whether a particular situation reflects discrimination may differ substantially, depending on a variety of individual and situational factors. The emphasis in this paper is on the *antecedents* of perceived

discrimination. That is, we consider various factors that will lead respondents to perceive there to be more, or less, discrimination leveled against the target of the decision (i.e., the candidate). A better theoretical understanding of perceptions of discrimination is important because these perceptions may not necessarily match with existing objective indices of discrimination. Moreover, as we will discuss later in this paper, perceived discrimination may have some important consequences, so this construct may be relevant for both theoretical and practical considerations.

Prototype Model

Background

One approach, which has been examined by Inman and her colleagues (e.g., Inman & Baron, 1996; Inman et al., 1998), has used the notion of prototypes, or expectations, in order to understand the determinants of perceived discrimination. The underlying variable appears to be the degree to which the decision-maker is perceived to have violated the norm of social responsibility, which assumes that powerful individuals should not take advantage of the less powerful (Rodin, Price, Bryson, and Sanchez, 1990). Thus, the greater the degree to which the decision-maker appears to have violated that norm in treating someone (e.g., in making a hiring or promotion decision), the more likely that the decision-maker is perceived to have discriminated against the target (i.e., the rejected candidate). To date, research examining the prototype model has considered the victim-perpetrator characteristics (i.e., the demographics of the actors involved), the perceived intention on the part of the decision-maker, and the perceived harm to the recipient. The next section reviews research regarding these variables as well as two individual (subgroup identity and mood) moderator variables that may be relevant. A summary of the components of the prototype model is provided in Figure 1.

Prototype Model

According to the prototype model, perceived discrimination is determined by how well a particular event or incident reflects widely held beliefs, expectations, and norms about (the violation of) social responsibility. Inman and Baron (1996) suggested that people hold certain expectancies as to who the perpetrators and victims of discrimination are and these expectancies determine judgments of discrimination. For instance, Inman and her colleagues found that perpetrators who were expected to be in a power position (i.e., were historically assumed to have power in a specific situation) were believed more likely to be discriminating than perpetrators not expected to be in a power position (i.e., were not historically assumed to have power in a specific position). As an example, imagine that a White manager in a bank rejects a Black candidate for a job promotion. In such a situation, the candidate should be relatively likely to assume that the decision was based on discrimination. Compare that with a situation where a Black manager in a bank rejects a White candidate for a job promotion. In that case, the candidate should be less likely to attribute the decision to discrimination. The difference, according to prototype theory, is that historically speaking, White managers have held much more power than Black managers in the banking industry. At the same time, Blacks have historically experienced difficulty in achieving employment success in the banking industry (it is important to note that tremendous strides have been made in many occupations by minorities and that such generalizations will be increasingly difficult to make now and in the future).

In the present context, however, the rejected candidate may ultimately find out who was promoted. Thus, it seems important to consider not only who was rejected, but also who was accepted for the position. We would expect, following the present example, that if another Black candidate was promoted, the rejected candidate would be less likely to conclude that race discrimination had taken place; conversely, if a White candidate was promoted, the rejected

candidate would be more likely to conclude that discrimination had occurred. In short, we expect that when it is known who received the job offer or promotion opportunity, the successful candidate's group membership will have an important effect on perceptions of discrimination. If the individual who was hired or promoted is of the same race as the rejected candidate, then the rejected candidate would be less likely to conclude that discrimination had occurred on the basis of race. Of course in that case, the rejected candidate may conclude that there was discrimination based on another group category, such as gender.

It should be also pointed out that a rejected candidate will not always know who the decision-maker (e.g., hiring manager) was. In that case, he or she may focus on the organization or department as a whole. That is, people generally believe that organizations have a reputation or image (e.g., Turban and Cable, 2003), which may include a diversity dimension reflecting prejudice or lack thereof against various groups (e.g., Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998). Thus, even in the absence of knowing who the decision-maker is, a rejected candidate may have a perception of the organization's reputation in this regard, which may in turn be used to determine whether discrimination has occurred. We also acknowledge that there may be multiple decision-makers (e.g., a panel of interviewers) involved in choosing the candidate for promotion or hire. We would expect that in that case, the rejected candidate may simply attempt to determine who was the major responsible party for the negative decision.

Perceived Harm and Perceived Intention

Swim, Scott, Sechrist, Campbell, and Stangor (2003) hypothesized that the greater degree to which the decision-maker was regarded as being intentional in his or her action, the more discriminatory the action was perceived to be. Similarly, they hypothesized that the greater the amount of harm caused by the action, the more likely that the action would be judged to be discriminatory. Swim et al. also predicted an interaction between intention and harm such that

harm would have the greatest effect on perceptions of discrimination when the decision-maker's intention is unknown or intention is limited. Conversely, harm would have the least effect when the decision-maker is assumed to have intended to discriminate. Swim et al. found strong support for all three of these hypotheses.

Given the apparent importance of intentions, a critical question in need of further research is how respondents determine the intentions of a decision-maker. We recommend that further work on intentions should borrow from the work of Malle and his colleagues (Malle, 1999; Malle & Knobe, 1997; Malle, Knobe, O'Laughlin, Pearce, & Nelson, 2000). Malle et al. (2000) argued that respondents use "folk explanations" in trying to understand why people act the way they do. Malle et al. indicated that respondents may use either "representational mental states" (i.e., desires, values, attitudes, or beliefs) or "causal history reason" (i.e., a factor that is outside of the actor's awareness) to account for people's behavior. Representational mental states refer to conscious beliefs that a person has, which in turn directly affect behavior. Intentional behavior is explained by representational mental states. Causal history reasons refer to "factors that lay in the causal history...but are not themselves reasons [that drive performance]." Causal history reasons often are in the form of dispositions or personality traits and are generally used to explain unintentional behavior. In the present context, an example of a representational mental state explanation might be that the hiring manager believes that women are not suited for the kinds of jobs available in his department (i.e., a belief) and therefore he hires Bob rather than Mary. An example of a causal history reason explanation might be that the hiring manager appears uncomfortable with women (i.e., a disposition), and therefore he hires Bob rather than Mary. The former explanation suggests greater intentionality than the latter explanation, and therefore may lead respondents to ascribing greater perceived discrimination in the former situation compared to the latter situation.

In addition to representational mental states and causal history reasons, Malle et al. (2000) introduced the notion of enabling factors that allow the behavior to occur. In other words, people use enabling factors to explain how the actor's intention translated into behavior. In the present context, the absence of an effective human resource department might be seen as an enabling factor.

The importance of enabling factors is expected to vary, depending on other considerations (Malle et al., 2000). Enabling factors are more frequently mentioned when the behavior is difficult than when it is easy. In a company under a court-ordered affirmative action program to hire women, for instance, a manager who fails to hire a highly qualified woman might be viewed as having exhibited a "difficult" behavior and therefore the focus would turn to what enabling factors made that behavior possible.

Enabling factors are more often the focus when the underlying reasons for the behavior are well understood. Conversely, enabling factors are less likely to be considered when the intentions are not well understood. For example, perhaps a manager who previously had shown himself to be very supportive of promoting women was found to have rejected an apparently qualified woman for promotion. Because the manager's behavior would not be well understood, respondents are likely to focus more on understanding his intention for this surprising decision. Alternatively, if this manager had a history of not hiring women, the focus is likely to be more on the enabling factors that allowed the manager to reject her (e.g., on the human resource department's failure to monitor the situation).

At least two additional variables should be considered in this context. One variable concerns the nature of the prior interactions between the rejected candidate and the decision-maker (Ilgen & Favero, 1985) or organization. Indeed, in a promotion decision situation, there may be a long history of interactions between the manager making the promotion decision and

the rejected candidate. To the degree to which these interactions were positive and cordial, we would expect that the candidate would be less likely to assume any discriminatory intention by the decision-maker. Thus, previous interactions should be considered in understanding perceptions of intention. In the absence of a specific known decision-maker, where the rejected candidate may rely more on perceptions of the organization's reputation for diversity/discrimination, intentionality may be influenced by other interactions between the rejected candidate and the organization, or by information provided by the rejected candidate's friends and family members regarding the organization.

Second, greater attention must be paid to the nature of the explanation for a rejection. Kappen and Branscombe (2001), for instance, examined the effects of four different gender-related reasons for preventing subjects from attending an event. In the first condition, subjects were merely told that their gender was the reason. In the second condition, subjects were told that they were too small (for women) or too large (for men). Subjects in the third condition were told that they were too small (for women) or too large (for men) and were given a logical explanation for the relevance of size. Finally, in the fourth condition, no reason was given for the rejection. Subjects in the first condition were significantly more likely to attribute the decision to discrimination than subjects in the second or third conditions. Interestingly, subjects in the fourth condition (no explanation) were more likely to attribute the decision to discrimination than subjects in the second or third condition. It seems reasonable to expect, then, that the reason provided to the candidate may determine whether the behavior was believed to be intentional and therefore the degree to which discrimination has occurred.

Individual differences

An important variable in understanding perceptions of discrimination may be *subgroup identity*. Specifically, we propose that people who more strongly identify with a particular

subgroup which has historically experienced discrimination will be more likely to perceive discrimination in a selection or promotion context than those who do not identify with the group (Johnson & Lecci, 2003; King, 2003; Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997; Operario & Fiske, 2001). Operario and Fiske, for instance, found that respondents who were high on ethnic identity reported experiencing significantly more discrimination than respondents who were low on ethnic identity. This effect was only found for minority subjects; ethnic identity did not affect Whites, for whom ethnic identity may not be a meaningful categorization. In a second study, using only minority (Asian, Black, and Latino) subjects, Operario and Fiske (2001) manipulated the behavior of a partner in an experimental setting and reported that ratings of discrimination were highest for those subjects who identified most with their ethnic group.

Despite a consistent set of studies indicating the importance of subgroup identity on perceptions of discrimination, there has been little research and theorizing as to why this effect occurs. One explanation has focused on increased sensitization, whereby individuals who highly identify with a subgroup are more sensitive to inequalities and therefore are more likely to attribute bad outcomes to discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

A second individual differences variable that can influence perceptions of employment discrimination is *mood*. Research has shown that mood plays an important role in judgments and decisions of all kinds (Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991). Mood may serve as a piece of information in judging an event or situation. Tying this literature to perceptions of discrimination, Sechrist, Swim, and Mark (2003) examined the effect of mood on ratings of discrimination. Sechrist et al. reported that women who were induced to have a negative mood perceived more discrimination than women in a positive mood. Moreover, when reading scenarios describing potential discrimination, subjects in a negative mood were more likely to perceive discrimination to have occurred. These effects, however, were tempered by whether or not an external

attribution for their mood was made. Sechrist et al. manipulated this factor by informing half of the subjects that their current mood may have been affected by the previous questionnaires that they completed. Indeed, for the subjects who were told this, mood had little or no effect on their ratings of discrimination.

This research indicates that mood may play a role in perceptions of employment discrimination. A closely related question is whether mood also has an indirect effect on perceived discrimination, through the other antecedents in the prototype model. For instance, does mood affect the perceived intentionality of the decision-maker's behavior or actions? We recommend that researchers include both of these individual differences variables in future investigations.

Organizational Justice Model

Background

In the last 10 or 15 years, research on applicant reactions to selection processes has produced a large body of literature (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). Developing largely off a growing interest in procedural fairness (Greenberg, 1986, 1987), Gilliland's (1993) theoretical model and empirical test (Gilliland, 1994) provoked substantial interest in this area. Most recently, an empirical measure for many of its key variables (Bauer et al., 2001), as well as other developments, have continued a flurry of activity in this area. Despite the plethora of research on candidate reactions to selection processes in terms of fairness, there is almost a complete absence of literature on candidate perceptions of discrimination in selection processes. Although some might argue that perceptions of justice and perceptions of discrimination are often synonymous, we do not think this is the case. As explained earlier, a decision may be perceived as unfair for a variety of reasons. Consistent with Goldman (2001), we consider justice perceptions to be an important predictor of perceptions of discrimination and legal claiming behavior.

In this section, we describe the organizational justice model in greater detail. Specifically, we review the distributive and procedural justice factors that determine perceptions of employment discrimination. In addition, we apply relatively recent developments in the justice literature in social psychology about how justice judgments are formed (i.e., how do people combine information about procedural and distributive justice into an overall fairness judgment) to the area of perceived discrimination. Figure 2 gives an overview of the factors in the organizational justice model.

Distributive Fairness

Much of the early organizational justice literature has focused on distributive justice, which is concerned with the fairness of organizational outcomes (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg, 1987). Although this concept seems to have high relevance for perceived discrimination in selection and promotion, this has been empirically examined in only a handful of studies. As noted above, Goldman (2001) reported that distributive justice was negatively related to terminated employees' filing of an employment discrimination claim.

More specifically, the distributive justice perspective suggests that the content of the actual selection or promotion decision plays a key role in the perception of discrimination. We would therefore expect that rejected candidates are more likely to perceive that discrimination has occurred in the selection or promotion process than accepted candidates, all else being equal. However, it is also very important to consider the expectations that people have regarding their performance (Gilliland, 1993, 1994). Do applicants receive the hiring decision they feel they deserve? Perception of discrimination would be more likely when performance expectations are not met than when they are met.

In the development of performance expectations, three distributive rules can be applied: equity, equality, and need. Although the fairness of outcomes is generally determined on the

basis of equity, sometimes the other rules can become more salient, especially in the context of discrimination (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Gilliland, 1993). According to equity theory, distributions are considered fair when the ratio of a candidate's inputs (such as qualifications and ability) and outcomes (such as invitation for interview and job offer) is equally balanced, in comparison with another person or with oneself in previous selection or promotion situations (Greenberg, 1987).

In contrast, the equality rule states that all applicants should have an equal chance of receiving a positive outcome, regardless of their own inputs and characteristics. If candidates get a negative selection decision based on their race or gender, this rule is violated. This shows that the equality rule, especially its violation, seems to play a central role in the perception of discrimination. Along these lines, Gilliland (1993) proposed that equality will have a greater impact on overall outcome fairness for those individuals who have had prior exposure to discrimination and those who belong to frequently discriminated upon groups than for others.

Finally, the needs rule claims that outcomes should be distributed on the basis of individual (special) needs. From this perspective, certain minority groups should receive preferential treatment. Again, this rule can be particularly important in a discrimination context. For instance, the needs rule can be used to justify certain affirmative action programs.

From the above discussion, it follows that respecting one distributive rule can lead to the violation of others. For example, if you grant certain disadvantaged groups a special treatment, the equality rule is obviously violated. Which rule is more salient for candidates in the evaluation of distributive justice is determined by a host of individual (e.g., personal characteristics, previous experiences, subgroup identity) and situational factors (e.g., test or interview type, personal characteristics of interviewer).

Procedural Fairness

Another important component of organizational justice is procedural justice which incorporates the fairness of the process or procedures used to determine organizational outcomes (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg, 1987). Although there is a lack of research linking procedural fairness to perceived discrimination in a selection or promotion context, previous studies have already demonstrated that procedural fairness is negatively related to terminated employees' wrongful-termination or discrimination claiming (Goldman, 2001; Lind et al., 2000).

Gilliland (1993, 1995) applied the procedural justice perspective to personnel selection systems and identified a number of rules that candidates can rely on in their evaluation of procedural fairness. Again, which rule is more salient depends on many individual (e.g., personal characteristics, previous experiences) and situational influences (e.g., type of selection procedure, extent of rule violation, stage in selection process). Gilliland's rules are grouped into three components that correspond to the non-distributive forms of justice proposed by Colquitt et al. (2001): formal characteristics or procedural justice in a strict sense, explanation or informational justice, and interpersonal treatment or interpersonal justice. The last two categories together are sometimes referred to as interactional justice (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998).

An essential element of procedural justice in a strict sense is "voice" or the control that people can exert over the decision process (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1987). In order to be judged fair, a selection procedure should not only offer voice opportunity, but also be job-related, consistent, accurate, and unbiased. If these conditions are met, it is likely that the perception of discrimination among candidates for selection or promotion will be lower.

Informational justice suggests that candidates should receive honest and timely explanations about the procedures and decisions, as well as feedback about their own performance (Colquitt et al., 2001; Gilliland, 1993). These principles offer important insights

about how the perception of discrimination could possibly be alleviated. Suppose that a gay candidate would not hear anything from the company he interviewed with. This leaves a lot of room for subjective interpretation and might lead him to conclude he was not selected on the basis of his sexual orientation. If, on the other hand, the company would have called him back soon after the interview and explained why he was not selected, the same conclusion would be less likely.

Perhaps the most important component in the context of perceived discrimination is interpersonal justice. It seems logical that when candidates from a minority group are not treated with politeness, dignity, warmth, and respect, they will be much more likely to feel discriminated against than when they are. Moreover, according to Gilliland (1993), fair interpersonal treatment also involves the absence of improper questions and prejudicial statements. Again, there appears to be a link to perceived discrimination (Gilliland, 1995). For instance, if a woman is asked about her being pregnant during the employment interview (even though it's illegal), she would probably feel discriminated because of her gender.

Fairness Heuristic

Whereas the previous two sections dealt with procedural fairness and distributive fairness separately, an important question is how people combine procedural and distributive fairness information to form overall fairness judgments. In their review, Brockner and Wiesenfeld (1996) concluded that these interactive effects can be described in three ways. A first relatively robust pattern is that when outcomes are seen as unfair, procedural fairness perceptions have a more direct influence on people's reactions than when outcomes are perceived to be fair. In addition, when procedural fairness is low, distributive fairness is more likely to be positively related to individuals' reactions than when procedural fairness is high. Finally, low procedural fairness and low distributive fairness yield the most negative reactions.

On the basis of recent research in the justice literature (e.g., Brockner, 2002; Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996; Lind, 2001; Van den Bos, 2001; Van den Bos, Lind, & Wilke, 2001), we propose fairness heuristic theory to explain possible interactive effects between procedural and distributive fairness in the context of discrimination. One of the central contributions of fairness heuristic theory is its focus on the cognitive processes underlying fairness reactions. In particular, it posits that people start looking for fairness-relevant information to cope with concerns of uncertainty or lack of trust. Examples in the context of discrimination are that we do not trust people who are on a selection board, that we do not know the final selection decision, and so forth. Moreover, fairness heuristic theory posits that people do not engage in a full exploration of fairness information. Instead, they quickly construct a fairness heuristic that they use to guide their reactions to future actions and decisions. This fairness heuristic is defined as a “*psychological shortcut used to decide whether to accept or reject the directives of people in positions of authority*” (Lind, Kulik, Ambrose, & de Vera Park, 1993, p. 225; see also Tyler & Lind, 1992).

The next question then becomes which type of fairness information (procedural, informational, interpersonal, distributive) people use as a cognitive shortcut to form overall fairness judgments. Research from a fairness heuristic perspective has shown that the availability (interpretability) and order (timing) of the information provided serve as drivers of the fairness heuristic and, therefore, have major effects on how procedural and distributive fairness are integrated in overall fairness judgments.

With regard to the *availability of the information provided*, Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, and Wilke (1997) argued that when comparison information about outcomes of others is not available, people will start using other information that is more readily available. In other words, they will use the latter information as a substitute for information that would be most directly

relevant but that is actually missing. In particular, Van den Bos et al. (1997) proposed that in many situations people may turn to the fairness of the procedure to assess how to react to their outcome because such procedural information is usually available. Several laboratory studies confirmed their propositions. When participants were not given information about the outcome of a socially relevant other (socially based comparison information), they relied more upon procedural information (i.e., whether they had the opportunity to voice) as a kind of heuristic substitute to form their outcome fairness judgments. Van den Bos, Wilke, Lind, and Vermunt (1998) found the same results (i.e., participants switched to procedural information as a basis for making fairness judgments) when people had only expectations about their outcome relative to others as opposed to when they actually knew the outcome of others.

These findings are particularly relevant in the context of employment discrimination. In particular, when candidates are applying for a job opening, they are unlikely to find out who was hired or only have vague expectations about who was hired. Since they lack this important information about the selection outcome of others, fairness heuristic theory posits that people will tend to focus on less relevant but more available procedural fairness information in their evaluation of discrimination. Conversely, candidates for a promotional opportunity will typically find out who was promoted. In this situation, fairness heuristic theory states that candidates will directly focus on the outcome information of others (distributive fairness) in their determination of discrimination instead of using a fairness heuristic.

Apart from the availability of information, the *order (timing) of the information provided* is another driver of the fairness heuristic. Specifically, Van den Bos, Vermunt, and Wilke (1997) found that “what is fair depends more on what comes first than on what comes next” (p. 95). In particular, procedural fairness had stronger effects on outcome judgments when people were informed about procedures before they were informed about outcomes, whereas distributive

fairness was more important in individuals' judgments when they were informed about outcomes before they were informed about procedures.

This primacy effect is also relevant in the context of discrimination. It demonstrates that early information will set the stage for the interpretation of later fairness information. Usually, candidates have had time to experience and consider the procedural elements of a given selection situation (e.g., the hiring manager was friendly) prior to receiving a selection decision. However, it is also possible that after receiving the selection decision, candidates hear that some procedural violations occurred (e.g., some test results were discounted). The same is true in legal cases about discrimination. Again, procedural information about the way the court case is conducted is typically known prior to the verdict. Yet, in some cases, people might be informed afterwards that crucial procedural mistakes were made. According to fairness heuristics theory, the relative importance of procedural and distributive fairness will depend on the timing and availability of this information. Other research about fairness heuristic theory (Lind, Kray, & Thompson, 2001; Van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1996) expanded the order effect findings by demonstrating that the same primacy effects also occur within a specific type of fairness information. For instance, Lind et al. (2001) demonstrated that early procedural information had a greater effect than subsequent procedural information, indicating that information presented earlier typically drives the fairness heuristic.

Applied to a discrimination context, these findings lead to a better understanding of the relative effects of the provision of different types of procedural information in the selection process. Generally, two forms of selection information are distinguished. First, information (about the job-relatedness of the selection procedures, about the scoring system, and about the purposes for which the scores will be used) might be provided to applicants prior to the selection process (Arvey & Sackett, 1993). Sitkin and Bies (1993) referred to this kind of information as

anticipatory explanations. Second, selection information also applies to the provision of information after the selection process. This form of selection information refers to the provision of an explanation or a justification for specific selection decisions, which have already been taken (Bies & Shapiro, 1988; Gilliland, 1993; Greenberg 1990). According to fairness heuristic theory, the provision of pretest information might have more impact on fairness reactions because this information is provided in an early phase. In addition, it might provide people with a better understanding of selection procedures, reducing uncertainty (see also Arvey & Sackett, 1993). This might be especially true for selection procedures, which applicants typically view as relatively unattractive (e.g., cognitive ability tests) or invasive (e.g., personality inventories) (Gilliland, 1993). Although some recent studies have examined the effects of pretest information (Lievens, De Corte, & Bryse, 2003; Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2002) and explanations (Horvath, Ryan, & Stierwalt, 2000; Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999) on fairness judgments, no research has explicitly used fairness heuristic theory as a conceptual framework to test these propositions in personnel selection in general or discrimination in particular.

Consequences of Perceived Discrimination

Although a detailed discussion of the *outcomes* of perceptions of discrimination is beyond the scope of this paper, we offer some suggestions in this regard. We suspect that there are at least three types of reactions to perceived discrimination: reduced psychological well-being, increased likelihood of taking legal action, and negative job attitudes and behaviors.

There have been several studies in the social psychological literature addressing the effects of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being. Of particular interest is the finding that perceived discrimination may have different effects for minority and majority groups. Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, and Owen (2002) reported that for women, experiencing more perceived discrimination lowered their psychological well-being. At the same time,

experiencing more perceived discrimination increased in-group identification for women, which in turn improved their psychological well-being. Thus, although there was a direct negative effect on well-being, perceived discrimination also had a positive, albeit indirect, effect on well-being. For men, however, Schmitt et al. reported that perceived discrimination had no effect on psychological well-being, neither directly, nor indirectly through in-group identification. Other studies looking at gender differences in the consequences of perceived discrimination have failed to report significant findings (e.g., Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Such findings suggest that much more research is needed regarding the effects of perceived workplace discrimination on psychological well-being.

Second, taking legal action or filing a discrimination charge with the appropriate state or federal agency would seem like a natural consequence of perceived discrimination. Yet, at least in the area of sexual harassment, it is widely believed that many employees who experience discrimination do not take any legal action (Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999). Kowalski's (1996) framework of complaining behavior provides a number of possible explanations for applicant and employee reluctance to take legal action. Very briefly, her model assumes that people will engage in complaining behavior when the perceived value of complaining outweighs the perceived value of not complaining. Kowalski offers a plethora of variables that may affect the likelihood of one complaining, including extraversion, age, and gender. Kowalski also hypothesized that self-presentation concerns will affect the likelihood of complaining, such that individuals who are highly fearful of negative evaluation or in high need of approval from others may be less likely to complain. Therefore, while increased probability of taking legal action is a likely outcome of perceived discrimination, there is a need to include other variables as predictors as well.

Finally, perceived discrimination is likely to affect other important I/O psychology variables of interest, such as turnover, organizational commitment, and citizenship behavior. Whether these consequences are as true for majority group members as they are for minority group members should be addressed with empirical studies.

We turn now to a brief discussion where we compare and contrast our two models and offer some suggestions as to when a respondent may use one model rather than the other model.

Discussion

In spite of the importance of perceived discrimination in selection and promotion processes, there is a lack of conceptual models in this area. To stimulate and guide research we proposed two theoretical models from other well-founded domains to help explain candidates' likelihood of perceiving that discrimination has occurred. Relevant variables from these frameworks were identified as possible antecedents of perceived employment discrimination.

There are two ways to understand our models. One approach is to view them as complementary, rather than opposing models. In that way, they could be integrated to form one large model. Essentially, the prototype and organizational justice model try to explain the same phenomenon, but from a fundamentally different perspective. The prototype model stems from social psychology and focuses on the actors and in particular the perceived intention of the decision-maker. The organizational justice model focuses more on fairness considerations, such as how fair the process was, as well as the outcomes of other candidates.

However, both models share certain similarities. For instance, the extent to which the interaction between a job candidate and a company interviewer is friendly and respectful may be important in both models. According to the prototype model, this has a major influence on the perceived intention of the interviewer which subsequently determines perceived discrimination. In the organizational justice model, this interaction is a key component of interpersonal fairness

which in turn can be a determinant of perceived employment discrimination. Likewise, both models recognize the importance of the explanation for selection and promotion decisions that is provided to the candidates as a crucial antecedent of perceived discrimination. Moreover, we would not be surprised if the individual difference variables (i.e., subgroup identification and mood) had important effects on the justice model variables as well as on the prototype model variables. Thus, it seems reasonable that there will be overlap between these models.

It is also possible that these are two opposing models. However, rather than pitting one model against the other and attempting to determine which is the “right” model and which is the “wrong” model, it is quite conceivable that sometimes a respondent will use one model and sometimes a respondent will use the other model. Thus, there may be factors that determine whether an individual uses the prototype model or the organizational justice model in assessing whether discrimination has occurred. Dual-process models, which assume that people use quite different information-processing procedures depending on various circumstances, are common in social psychology (e.g., Chaiken & Trope, 1999). In this light, we offer three factors that may affect whether one uses the prototype or organizational justice model.

Missing Information

Our models assume that different information is used by the respondent. For example, the organizational justice model assumes that information about the process (e.g., procedures used) and outcomes (e.g., other candidates’ outcomes) is available. In some selection or promotion contexts, the employee or applicant is likely to have little or no information whatsoever about the processes used or the outcomes of other candidates. In that situation, the employee or applicant may use the prototype model to judge whether discrimination occurred. Alternatively, in organizations where promotion systems are highly publicized, and where it is known which candidates were promoted and which were not, candidates who were not promoted may have a

substantial amount of information regarding the processes used and the other candidates promoted and not promoted. In that case, the candidate may use the organizational justice model in determining whether discrimination occurred.

Subgroup Identity

We predict that the respondent's subgroup identity may determine which model is used. Candidates who have a strong subgroup identity are more likely to view ambiguous situations as discriminatory and therefore may be more suspicious of any process that is used. They may focus more on aspects such as who the decision-maker was. Unfortunately, there is only a limited literature comparing perceptions of different subgroups with regard to selection and promotion procedures and most of this work is limited to psychological tests (e.g., Chan, 1997). Most importantly, however, it is the person's subgroup identity, and not his or her actual race or gender, which seems most important.

Which Distributive Rule Is Used?

As described earlier, different candidates may subscribe to different distributive rules. While the equity rule emphasizes distributive fairness, the equality rule emphasizes that all applicants should have an equal chance of a positive outcome, regardless of their inputs and characteristics, while the needs rule emphasizes that outcomes should be based on needs. It seems reasonable to expect that individuals embracing the latter two rules would be more likely to apply a prototype model than the organizational justice model.

Conclusions

Although we focused on selection and promotion decisions, we submit that these models could serve as a basis for research about perceived discrimination in any number of employment situations, such as performance evaluation, reward management, leader-subordinate interactions, and so forth. Moreover, their usefulness is not limited to the domain of race discrimination.

Instead, the perceived discrimination explained by the models can be based on any personal characteristic, such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, health, and so forth. It should also be observed that our models have been primarily studied in the U.S. and to a lesser degree, in Western Europe. Nonetheless, we believe that they are also applicable to similar issues in other countries and cultures. We recommend that research be done to examine their cross-cultural generalizability.

It should also be recognized that there may be other theoretical frameworks (e.g., attribution theory; Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003) that will apply to the issue of perceived discrimination. We encourage researchers to consider other possible models and to conduct empirical investigations to determine which is the best in this case.

In sum, the present contribution is unique in that perceived discrimination has not yet been introduced to the I/O psychology. We also offer two different models of the antecedents of this construct, which nevertheless share some common features. Finally, we have introduced some refinements to these models, which should add to their value in understanding perceived discrimination.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. The prototype model of perceived employment discrimination.

Figure 2. The organizational justice model of perceived employment discrimination.



