Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
1999, Vol. 77, No. 1, 135–149

0022-3514/99/$3.00

Perceiving Pervasive Discrimination Among African Americans: Implications for Group Identification and Well-Being

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The processes involved in well-being maintenance among African Americans who differed in their attributions to prejudice were examined. A rejection–identification model was proposed where stable attributions to prejudice represent rejection by the dominant group. This results in a direct and negative effect on well-being. The model also predicts a positive effect on well-being that is mediated by minority group identification. In other words, the generally negative consequences of perceiving oneself as a victim of racial prejudice can be somewhat alleviated by identification with the minority group. Structural equation analyses provided support for the model and ruled out alternative theoretical possibilities. Perceiving prejudice as pervasive produces effects on well-being that are fundamentally different from those that may arise from an unstable attribution to prejudice for a single negative outcome.

Since the time of Lewin (1948), social psychological research has reflected an abiding concern for the alleviation of social problems. Given this emphasis, it is not surprising that perspectives on prejudice and discrimination have primarily focused on their source—those who are members of dominant social groups. Thus, there are large literatures that have examined individual differences in stereotyped beliefs, prejudicial attitudes, and willingness to discriminate against a variety of devalued groups (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994; Crandall, 1994; Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; Deaux, 1984; Devine, 1989; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993; Hummert, 1990). Because this research has focused on those who have the power to impose their views on the targets of their prejudice, it can be considered essentially a psychology of the powerful. In contrast, some researchers have begun to build a psychology of the relatively powerless by concentrating on the experience of devalued groups and considering what responses they are likely to exhibit when coping with their plight (see Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Crocker & Major, 1989; Crosby, 1982; Deschamps, 1982; Dion & Earn, 1975; Jones et al., 1984; Major, 1987, 1994; Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Our research was aimed at developing a greater understanding of the psychology of disadvantaged groups. Accordingly, we assessed the impact of individual differences in stable attributions to prejudice for the psychological well-being of members of a devalued group. We developed a rejection–identification model that claims that attributing negative outcomes to prejudice across situations can simultaneously exert both positive and negative effects on well-being. To support our view, we examined individual differences in African Americans' attributions to prejudice and considered the effects of such attributions on multiple variables: minority group identification, hostility toward Whites, and various indicators of psychological well-being. We tested our theoretical predictions, as well as alternative views, with structural equation modeling techniques.

Coping With Prejudice

As Crocker and Major (1989) have pointed out, several theoretical perspectives in social psychology predict that experiencing prejudice will damage the self-esteem of its targets. First, if members of stigmatized groups recognize prejudice as rejection by the dominant group, the "looking-glass" approach to the self (Cooley, 1956; Mead, 1934) suggests that those who recognize others' negative view of their group membership are likely to internalize that negative evaluation and have lower self-esteem. Likewise, an efficacy-based approach to self-esteem posits that because positive self-esteem is built by gaining a sense of control over one's environment (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; White, 1959) and rejection by the dominant group reduces feelings of control (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997), attributions to prejudice should harm self-esteem.

Despite these good reasons for expecting self-esteem differences between dominant and devalued groups, Crocker and Major (1989) argued that such self-esteem deficits among the stigmatized are rarely observed. They proposed that attributing negative outcomes to prejudice, selective devaluing of certain performance dimensions, and using in-group rather than out-group comparisons for evaluating success all help devalued groups maintain levels of self-esteem equivalent to that of dominant groups.

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Portions of this research were presented at the meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, May 1995, and at a Kurt Lewin Institute workshop at Free University, Amsterdam, February 1996. We thank Ken Dion, Bertjan Doosje, Naomi Ellemers, Brenda Major, Tom Postmes, Russell Spears, and Frederick Rhodewalt for their helpful feedback on an earlier version of this article.

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In this article, we focus on the attributional coping mechanism and its implications for well-being among devalued groups of people. As pointed out by Williams, Shore, and Grahe (1998), people's reactions to negative treatment are likely to depend on the length of time they are exposed to the negative treatment. Similarly, we propose that the effect of recognizing prejudice against one's group depends on how pervasive prejudice is and on expectancies of encountering prejudice in the future. That is, the effects of making attributions to prejudice may be fundamentally different depending on whether the attribution is specific to a single instance of prejudice or whether it is reflective of a more general sense of stable and pervasive prejudice against one's group.

Coping With a Single Instance of Prejudicial Treatment

Much social psychological research has demonstrated that humans are active agents who have an amazing ability to recover from negative life events (Major, 1994; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Attributional research has shown that when faced with negative feedback or treatment from others, people often discount that negative feedback in order to protect their self-esteem. By making excuses that shift the cause of a negative event from a central aspect of the self to something that is less central (Snyder & Higgins, 1985), or by shifting from a stable internal dimension to an unstable external one, self-esteem can be protected (Weiner, 1985). In fact, research on self-handicapping has shown that when people perceive a negative outcome as possible, they can arrange for an external or less central cause for failure as a possible future explanation before their performance is even evaluated. More to the point, providing oneself with such an excuse in advance does protect self-esteem when a negative outcome is subsequently experienced (Rhodewalt, Morf, Hazlett, & Fairfield, 1991). Thus, people do, indeed, protect valued aspects of the self by strategically attributing failure to less valued aspects of the self or to the situation.

Although the idea that people generally use attributional strategies to protect or enhance their self-concepts is well supported, the more specific contention that attributions to prejudice for negative outcomes will protect the self-esteem of the stigmatized has been tested empirically in only a few studies thus far. An early study by Dion (1975) found that women who received negative feedback from an evaluator and attributed that feedback to discrimination tended to report higher levels of self-esteem than women who did not make an attribution to prejudice.[1] More recently, Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, and Major (1991, Study 1) asked women to write an essay that was then ostensibly critiqued by a fictitious male evaluator. The researchers manipulated the plausibility of an attribution to prejudice by leading the participant to believe that the evaluator of their performance was or was not sexist. Although no significant self-esteem differences were observed as a function of whether an attribution to prejudice was plausible or not, participants who received negative feedback and for whom an attribution to prejudice was plausible did report more positive mood compared with those for whom a prejudice attribution was not plausible. In Crocker et al.'s Study 2, African American participants received either positive or negative feedback from a fictitious White evaluator. The researchers manipulated the plausibility of prejudice attributions by leading participants to believe that the evaluator could see them (and their skin color) or not. Although self-esteem did not differ significantly as a function of the plausibility of attributions to prejudice when feedback was negative, the means were in the expected direction.

More recently, Major and Crocker (1993) noted that attributions to prejudice will *not* be self-protective when the stigmatized person feels that the rejection stemming from the stigma is justified or when the individual feels responsible for having the stigma. For instance, Crocker, Cornwell, and Major (1993) found that when overweight female participants were rejected by an attractive male evaluator, they attributed the rejection to their weight and experienced more negative affect compared with women of average weight. Crocker et al. (1993) concluded that attributions to rejection based on one's weight are not protective because participants see rejection based on weight as legitimate. Thus, the effects of attributions to prejudice depend not just on the externality of the attribution but also on what the attribution means for the devalued group member. An attribution to prejudice that is seen by targets as legitimate implies that they and their group membership are deserving of negative treatment, and consequently self-esteem should be harmed by such perceptions.

Long-Term Strategies for Coping With Prejudice

Although attributions to prejudice might be capable of protecting the self-esteem of devalued group members who face a single negative outcome, the recognition that prejudice against one's group is pervasive and stable might have rather different consequences. In fact, we concur that an attribution to prejudice for a single outcome could have the protective qualities predicted by Crocker and Major (1989), as long as the cause or prejudice itself is seen as unstable. However, we also claim that stable attributions to prejudice that reflect perceptions of widespread bias against one's social group will have negative consequences for well-being. Indeed, negative outcomes that are attributed to stable causes have been found to elicit hopelessness and resignation (Weiner, Russell, & Lerman, 1979).

Attributions to Prejudice as Exclusion and Rejection

A pattern of stable attributions to prejudice is likely to reflect perceived systematic and unaltering exclusion and rejection on the part of the dominant group. To the extent that the stigmas involved in this exclusion are categories such as gender, race, or age, targets of discrimination are likely to be aware that they may face prejudice in a number of situations at many different times (cf. Deaux & Major, 1987; Kite, Deaux, & Miele, 1991; Sigelman & Welch, 1991).

Many theoretical approaches predict that feeling rejected and excluded in this way will harm self-esteem. Indeed, numerous theorists have speculated that humans are motivated to seek inclusion and avoid exclusion (e.g., Ainsworth, 1989; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Brewer, 1997; Maslow, 1968; Rosenberg, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Williams & Sommer, 1997),

[1] However, women who received negative feedback from a male evaluator, making an attribution to prejudice plausible, showed significantly lower self-esteem than women who received negative feedback from a female evaluator, suggesting that even when attributions to prejudice are plausible well-being can be lowered.

and empirical research has supported the contention that exclusion is painful. Social exclusion has been found to result in anxiety (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Bowlby, 1973), depression (Frable, 1993), and lowered self-esteem (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). Feelings of rejection due to cultural estrangement or feeling like a cultural misfit is correlated with lower levels of self-esteem, general life satisfaction, anxiety, and depression (Cozzarelli & Karafa, 1998). Williams et al. (1998) found that being excluded by receiving the "silent treatment" reduced self-esteem, feelings of control, sense of belonging, and perceptions of a meaningful existence. Indeed, extreme forms of perceived rejection and alienation are predictive of suicide (Durkheim, 1897).

More generally, the perception that one is a victim and is worse off than others is extremely aversive, making it an inference that people tend to avoid. As Taylor, Wood, and Lichtman (1983) reported, victims of cancer, rape, and natural disaster use a variety of strategies to minimize the extent of their own victimization. Likewise, a number of studies have found that minimizing the degree to which one is discriminated against protects well-being in devalued group members (cf. Crosby, 1982, 1984). For example, the more that women (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997; Landrine, Klonoff, Gibbs, Manning, & Lund, 1995) or African Americans (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996) perceive themselves to be victims of either gender or racial prejudice, respectively, the more they exhibit debilitating psychiatric and physical health symptoms. Similarly, Dion and Earn (1975) showed that, among Jewish participants, attributions to prejudice were positively related to feelings of stress and negative affect. One recent experiment showed that when participants contemplated the disadvantages that they have received because of their gender group membership, women's self-esteem was reliably lower compared with men's; however, when they were asked to think about their gender group's benefits, the reverse pattern was obtained in women and men (Branscombe, 1998).

Several studies by Ruggiero and Taylor (1995, 1997) have supported the hypothesis that devalued group members are motivated to avoid making attributions to prejudice and only do so in the presence of strong situational factors. In a series of studies, they found that devalued group members were rather reluctant to attribute negative outcomes to prejudice; in fact, unless participants were told that it was a virtual certainty that they had been discriminated against, they preferred to attribute failure to their own personal inadequacies. Furthermore, making attributions to prejudice harmed participants' social self-esteem and feelings of control—major markers of psychological adjustment (Lachman & Weaver, 1998).

Attributions to Prejudice and Minority Group Identification

According to social identity theory, recognizing that the powerful majority is prejudiced and discriminates against one's in-group will lead to increased identification with the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). More generally, Turner, Hogg, Turner, and Smith (1984) found that failure that threatens the status of the group can increase in-group cohesion and group identification. Using experimentally created groups, Ellemers (1993) found that when individual social mobility was seen as impossible, identification among low-status group members was higher compared with when participants felt that they could move to a higher status on their own. In other words, recognizing barriers to individual mobility—and expectations of prejudice should be a powerful such barrier—can increase levels of identification among devalued individuals. Consistent with this hypothesis, Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, and Schmitt (1999) found that manipulations of future expectations concerning the likelihood of discrimination in a socially devalued group (in their experiment, people with body piercings) caused an increase in identification with that cultural group.

One reason that attributions to prejudice can increase group identification is people's desire to feel that they belong. Therefore, when devalued group members believe that acceptance and fair treatment by a more powerful group is improbable, identifying with the lower status in-group may be the best possible strategy for feeling accepted and enhancing psychological well-being. In other words, if one cannot gain acceptance in the group with much of society's power and prestige, the most adaptive response might be to increase one's investment in one's own group, or to "love the one you're with."

Many studies using a variety of groups have found the more that devalued group members recognize prejudice against their group, the more highly identified they are with that group. Studies of Jews (Dion & Earn, 1975; Radke, Trager, & Davis, 1949; Rollins, 1973), women (Dion, 1975; Gurin & Townsend, 1986), African Americans (Gurin, Gurin, Lao, & Beattie, 1969; Sanders Thompson, 1990), Hispanics (Chavira & Phinney, 1991), lesbians (Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O'Connell, & Whalen, 1989), and nonmainstream college groups (e.g., punks, hippies, nerds; Cozzarelli & Karafa, 1998) have all found that recognition of prejudice is associated with higher levels of group identification. Furthermore, reminding gay men of their devalued group status causes an increase in identification with the gay movement compared with when the group's devalued status is not made salient (Simon et al., 1998). In fact, recent evidence suggests that attributions to prejudice are especially likely to increase minority group identification when prejudice is seen as pervasive. Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, and Banaji (1998) found that when perpetrators of discrimination are seen as isolated individuals, targets of discrimination respond in an individualistic fashion, but when the discrimination comes from multiple out-group members, it evokes more collectivistic responses.

The converse possibility—that minority group identification increases the likelihood of making attributions to prejudice—was suggested by Crocker and Major (1989). They argued that high levels of minority group identification might facilitate the use of self-protective strategies such as attributing negative outcomes to prejudice. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that highly identified group members are likely to interpret outcomes in intergroup terms (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Smith, Spears, & Oyen, 1994) and, as a result, might be more likely to perceive discrimination against the in-group and engage in collective action (Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1983; Klandermans, 1997). Thus, because there is reason to believe that the relationship between identification and attributions to prejudice could result from either variable having an impact on the other, tests of the directionality (or bidirectionality) of the relationship, which we performed, should be useful.

We hypothesized that stable attributions to prejudice would positively influence minority group identification, and that identification would be, in turn, positively related to well-being. Thus, attributions to prejudice may have an indirect, positive effect on well-being, mediated by identification with one's minority group. Because exclusion by the dominant group is painful, inclusion and identification with one's minority in-group may serve as an alternative means of protecting well-being. Several empirical studies have found that minority group identification is associated with lower depression (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Munford, 1994), more positive self-esteem (Bat-Chava, 1993, 1994; Grossman, Wirt, & Davids, 1985; Hall, 1966; Hammersmith & Weinberg, 1973; Munford, 1994; Paul & Fischer, 1980; Phinney, 1989, 1991; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990), and other measures of psychological adjustment (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Phinney, 1989; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998). In fact, the mere presence of similarly stigmatized others raises self-esteem and lowers depression and anxiety in gay, bisexual, lesbian, and bulimic individuals (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). Conversely, the effects of rejection from mainstream culture are most negative for devalued group members who lack a strong sense of minority group identification. Among American Indians, for example, those without a clear sense of themselves as either an Indian or an American are most likely to suffer from hopelessness, alcoholism, and suicide (Berlin, 1987).

Effects of Attributions to Prejudice on Hostility Toward the Out-Group

Several theoretical perspectives predict that recognizing stable prejudice against one's group will increase hostility toward the dominant group. According to social identity theory, acknowledgment of prejudice against one's group makes intergroup differentiation salient, which in turn encourages in-group favoritism (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wilder & Shapiro, 1991). Furthermore, prejudice against one's group is a threat to the group's status, and, as Branscombe and Wann (1994) have shown, such threats to a valued group identity increase derogation of the group that represents the threat.

Attributions to group-based prejudice are very likely to be seen as illegitimate by African Americans, who, at this historical juncture, feel entitled to treatment equal to that of Whites (Major, 1994; Sigelman & Welch, 1991). Not receiving a desirable outcome, or getting an undesirable one, should be most distressing when the procedure used to dispense those outcomes is seen as unfair and illegitimate (Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler, Rasinski, & McGraw, 1985). Thus, racial discrimination attributions among African Americans are likely to represent a violation of procedural justice that should evoke hostility toward the dominant group. As Ferguson and Rule (1983) have argued, harmful acts that are seen as immoral or illegitimate will elicit greater aggression than harmful acts that are not perceived this way. To the extent that prejudice is seen as illegitmate, attributions to prejudice should increase hostility toward members of the dominant group because they are likely to represent immoral violations of procedural justice. When prejudice is perceived as coming from multiple members of the dominant group across a variety of situations, it should be particularly likely that hostility will generalize to the out-group as a whole.

Overview of the Current Study

In this study we used questionnaire data from a sample of African Americans to test our model of the multiple effects of willingness to make attributions to prejudice. Unlike previous work that has manipulated the plausibility of an attribution to prejudice concerning a single event, we measured individual differences in the willingness to use prejudice as an explanation for negative outcomes in one's past and in future hypothetical situations. Because our hypotheses concerned the effects of perceiving prejudice as stable and pervasive, and not the effects of attributions to prejudice for a single event, our research was not a critical test of Crocker and Major's (1989) contention that an attribution to prejudice for a single performance outcome can protect well-being. We hypothesized that individual differences in the willingness to make attributions to prejudice for outcomes in one's past and common events that might be encountered in the future would have a direct and harmful effect on well-being. Previous studies have examined only the effects of attributions to prejudice on personal well-being; however, we included collective well-being in our model as well, predicting similar effects for both forms of well-being. Furthermore, we expected that individual differences in attributions to prejudice across a variety of situations would influence intergroup evaluations, increasing both minority group identification and hostility toward Whites. We also predicted that minority group identification would have a positive effect on both personal and collective well-being. In other words, minority group identification would mediate the positive component of the relationship between attributions to prejudice and well-being. We tested these predictions with structural equation modeling techniques. The rejection–identification model is conceptually illustrated in Figure 1.

We tested these predictions among African Americans who, because of their stigma, are likely to encounter many attributionally ambiguous situations in which they are unable to determine whether a negative outcome is due to their own personal attributes or to others' prejudice against their group. African Americans are especially appropriate for this study because they experience dis-

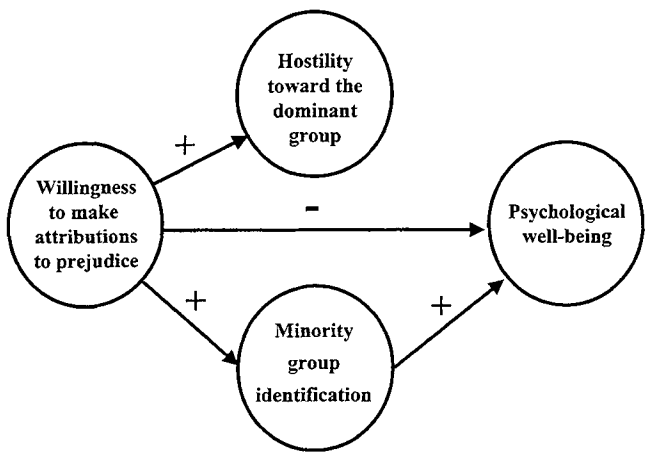

Figure 1. The rejection–identification model of the dual effects of attributions to prejudice on the psychological well-being of devalued group members.

crimination in a variety of arenas and perceive racial discrimination as an everyday occurrence affecting several areas of their lives, including education, housing, employment, promotion, and wages (Braddock & McPartland, 1987; Sigelman & Welch, 1991). Finally, African Americans are an appropriate group for testing our predictions because they tend to perceive racial discrimination as illegitimate (Major, 1994). It is primarily when prejudice is seen as illegitimate that the processes suggested by the rejection–identification model differ from the attributional discounting view.

Method

Preliminary Testing

To be assured that African Americans would perceive as legitimate the scenario outcomes used in our measure of cross-situational attributions to prejudice, we presented these items to a separate group of participants. Thirty-four African Americans from the Black Student Union at the University of Kansas were asked to rate the legitimacy of the treatment described in each of the 10 scenarios, that is, if they thought the treatment occurred because of someone's prejudice against their race. Participants responded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very illegitmate*) to 5 (*very legitimate*) to each of the situations displayed in Table 1. In addition, we measured participants' perceptions of the extent to which they have personally encountered discrimination in the past (using the two items we used in the main study and describe below). Overall, participants saw these outcomes, when due to racial prejudice, as very low in legitimacy ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 0.92$). In addition, the ratings of legitmacy for these 10 situations were not significantly correlated with participants' perceptions of the degree to which they have personally been the recipients of prejudicial treatment in the past. Thus, the 10 outcomes used in our measure are seen as illegitimate when attributed to prejudice, and perceptions of illegitimacy are not dependent on the degree of personal experience with discrimination.

Participants

One hundred thirty-nine African Americans (64 men, 72 women, and 3 unspecified) volunteered to participate in this study anonymously. Approximately half of the sample participated for course credit in an introductory psychology course; the other half was solicited from the Black Student Union, local churches, and other predominately African American organizations. All participants completed the study at the request of an African American male experimenter. Although 34% chose not to reveal their age, those who did ranged from 17 to 49 years old ($M = 22$). As for the educational level of the sample, 2% did not complete high school, 45% indicated that their highest level of education was high school completion, 15% had a college degree, and 3% had at least some graduate-level training. The total family income reported by 34.4% was $30,000 or less, 37.5% indicated that their family's income was between $30,000 and $50,000, and 28.1% indicated that their family's total income was above $50,000 per year.

Procedure and Measures

Participants signed an informed-consent document and then completed a booklet containing the measures described below. For each of the measures, we computed an aggregate score by averaging the individual items in each measure. The order of the measures was randomized within each questionnaire, except that the White hostility items and the demographic information were always solicited on the last page.

Attributions to prejudice across a variety of life situations. To measure individual differences in willingness to attribute negative outcomes to prejudice, we constructed a scale describing 10 negative outcomes that

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for the Perceived Attributions to Prejudice Items

Item	*M*	*SD*
1. Suppose you go into a "fancy" restaurant. Your server seems to be taking care of all the other customers except you. You are the last person whose order is taken.	72.3	22.2
2. Suppose you apply for a job that you believe you are qualified for. After the interview you learn that you didn't get the job.	54.0	21.4
3. Suppose you wish to buy a house. You go to a real estate company and the agent there takes you to look at homes that you know are in exclusively Black areas.	82.0	21.4
4. Suppose you parked your car at a parking meter and it has just expired. You arrive back at the car just as an officer is writing up a ticket. You try to persuade the officer not to give you the ticket, after all you are there now and the meter just expired. The officer gives you the ticket anyway.	48.2	29.2
5. Suppose you go to look at an apartment for rent. The manager of the building refuses to show it to you, saying that it has already been rented.	68.2	25.4
6. Suppose you are attracted to a particular White man/woman and ask that person out for a date and are turned down.	62.9	22.0
7. Suppose you have to fill out some government forms in order to apply for a loan that is important to you. You go to one office and they send you to another, then you go there and are sent somewhere else. No one seems to be really willing to help you out.	65.5	26.4
8. Suppose you are driving a few miles over the speed limit and the police pull you over. You receive a ticket for the maximum amount allowable.	61.3	29.2
9. Suppose you want to join a social organization. You are told that they are not taking any new members at this time.	60.4	26.3
10. Suppose your boss tells you that you are not performing your job as well as others doing that job.	46.8	25.7

Note. Participants were asked to read the description of each event and then to circle the percentage, listed in 5% increments, on a scale ranging from 0% (*due to factors other than racial prejudice*) to 100% (*completely due to racial prejudice*).

were attributionally ambiguous but that could be easily interpreted as situations in which racial prejudice might operate. The content of the different situations, which cover a variety of life contexts, were initially created with the assistance of African Americans in interviews in which they were asked to describe their personal experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination. In the instructions to the final measure, participants were asked to indicate how likely they were to attribute each outcome to racial prejudice or to other causes, if that event happened to them. Thus, one can conceptualize this measure as an indicator of the extent to which participants believed that prejudice against them would be a probable cause for future negative outcomes. The coefficient alpha for this measure was .84. The 10 items that we used are shown Table 1.

Past experience with racial discrimination. We assessed participants' past experience with racial discrimination by presenting them with two items: "I feel like I am personally a victim of society because of my race" and "I consider myself a person who has been deprived of the opportunities that are available to others because of my race." These items were intended to capture participants' general tendency to attribute negative outcomes in their lives to racial prejudice. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The coefficient alpha for this measure was .77.

Hostility toward Whites. We measured hostility toward Whites using 10 items and a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items included "When I see White people on the street, I can't help but think bad things about them" and "I use terms like 'white trash,' 'redneck,' or other names in reference to White people." The coefficient alpha for this measure was .86.

Minority group identification. We assessed minority group identification using 14 items from the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1990). The measure included items such as "I feel a strong attachment towards my ethnic group" and "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group." Items in this measure are similar to those used in other research to measure identification with social groups, including sports teams, occupational groups, and even experimentally created groups (see Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating greater identification with African Americans. The coefficient alpha for this measure was .82.

Personal well-being. We assessed personal well-being using two measures. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1979) is a well-validated measure of global personal self-esteem. Participants responded to the measure on a response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 4 (*strongly disagree*). Responses were reverse-scored where appropriate such that higher scores indicated higher personal self-esteem. The coefficient alpha for this measure was .83. Personal well-being was also measured by asking about the frequency of experiencing various negative emotions, which Diener, Larsen, Levine, and Emmons (1985) showed people are rather accurate at reporting. Participants were presented with a list of negative emotional states (e.g., depression, weary, helplessness, lifeless, sadness, and unhappy) and were asked to indicate how often they experienced each on a response scale ranging from 1 (*experience very infrequently*) to 9 (*experience very frequently*). The coefficient alpha for this measure was .89.

Collective well-being. We measured collective well-being using two subscales from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem (CSE) scale. We included items from the Membership subscale (e.g., "I am a worthy member of the social groups I belong to") and the Private Esteem subscale (e.g., "In general I'm glad to be a member of the social groups I belong to"). We chose not to use the Public subscale from the CSE measure because the participants' views of the how others perceive their group memberships were not as relevant to our hypotheses concerning well-being and potentially overlap with perceptions of prejudice. We did not use the Identity subscale from the CSE because we felt it would overlap too strongly with minority group identification. Participants indicated their level of agreement by responding on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). Responses were scored so that higher scores indicated higher levels of collective self-esteem. The coefficient alpha for each of the four-item CSE subscales was .70 and .79, respectively.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Means and standard deviations as well as the obtained and possible ranges for all of the variables in the study are presented in Table 2. The high scores on the measure of willingness to make attributions to prejudice clearly indicated that, overall, the participants believed that these events could be seen as easily due to racial prejudice. Averaged across situations, participants' scores indicated they thought the event outcomes were fairly likely to be due to racial prejudice ($M = 62\%$). More importantly, the obtained range of scores was very similar to the possible range, indicating substantial variability across participants. Men and women did not differ significantly on any of the eight measured variables in the study; therefore, we did not include gender in any of the subsequent analyses.

Using regression analyses, we assessed whether personal and collective well-being could be predicted by attributions to prejudice and level of group identification. For each regression equation, we entered the group identification and attributions to prejudice measures simultaneously. In no case did adding the

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for all Measures

Measure	*M*	*SD*	*Obtained range*	*Possible range*
Attributions to prejudice measures				
Future attributions to prejudice	62.07	16.28	11.0–97.5	0.0–100.0
Past attributions to prejudice	5.05	2.13	1.0–9.0	1.0–9.0
Minority group identification	3.32	0.43	1.9–4.0	1.0–4.0
Hostility toward Whites	4.12	1.67	1.0–8.3	1.0–9.0
Personal well-being measures				
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory	3.51	0.45	1.1–4.0	1.0–4.0
Frequency of negative emotions	3.26	1.55	1.0–9.0	1.0–9.0
Collective Self-Esteem scale				
Private subscale	5.80	1.00	2.5–7.0	1.0–7.0
Membership subscale	5.93	1.03	2.3–7.0	1.0–7.0

Table 3
Intercorrelations Among the Measured Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Future attributions to prejudice	—							
2. Past attributions to prejudice	.42***	—						
3. Minority group identification	.09	.26**	—					
4. Hostility toward Whites	.43***	.43***	.35***	—				
5. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory	−.09	−.09	.20*	−.15	—			
6. Frequency of negative emotions	.14	.14	−.17*	.15	−.45***	—		
7. Private CSE subscale	−.07	−.07	.47***	−.03	.47***	−.25**	—	
8. Membership CSE subscale	−.13	−.14	.24**	.01	.36***	−.19*	.61***	—

Note. CSE = Collective Self-Esteem.
*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$.

interaction term to the equation result in a significant increment in R^2. Attributions to prejudice were not significantly related to personal self-esteem, $\beta = -.11$, $F(1, 129) = 1.56$, $p = .21$; the frequency of negative emotions, $\beta = .15$, $F(1, 129) = 3.28$, $p = .07$; membership CSE, $\beta = -.16$, $F(1, 129) = 3.39$, $p = .07$; or private CSE, $\beta = -.12$, $F(1, 129) = 2.46$, $p = .12$. Although attributions to prejudice was not a significant predictor of any of the well-being measures, for each dependent variable there was a trend for those who were more willing to make attributions to prejudice to exhibit lower levels of well-being.

In contrast, minority group identification was a significant predictor of personal self-esteem, $\beta = .22$, $F(1, 129) = 6.66$, $p < .05$; frequency of experiencing negative emotions, $\beta = -.19$, $F(1, 129) = 5.06$, $p < .05$; membership CSE, $\beta = .28$, $F(1, 129) = 11.02$, $p < .01$; and private CSE, $\beta = .48$, $F(1, 129) = 38.56$, $p < .001$. In all cases, higher levels of group identification were associated with more positive well-being.

Structural Equation Modeling Analyses

Using EQS for Windows, Version 5.7 (Bentler, 1995), we tested several models concerning the nature of the interrelationships among the measured variables. For each model we tested, EQS produced several fit indices that we report. The one index that allows a test of statistical significance is the chi-square goodness-of-fit index. For this index, optimal fit is represented by a chi-square value of zero, and higher chi-square values indicate worse fit. A nonsignificant chi-square test statistic indicates that the difference between the observed and estimated variance–covariance matrices is not significantly different from zero. We also report other measures of fit: the nonnormative fit index (NNFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI). Both the NNFI and CFI indicate the degree to which the model in question is superior to a null model, which specifies no covariances between the variables. These metrics can range from 0 to 1, with higher numbers indicating a better fit between the observed and estimated covariance matrices. Although these indices do not have significance tests, values greater than .90 are generally considered to represent adequate fit of the model to the data (see Hu & Bentler, 1995, for a more detailed discussion of fit indices). Although fit indices are a measure of the extent to which the observed data can be reproduced by the hypothesized model, they are not the only criterion by which the adequacy of models can be evaluated. Models can fit the data well even when hypothesized paths in the model do not reach statistical significance, indicating that a model where those relationships are not present or are zero fits the data best. Thus, for each model we tested we also evaluated the significance of the models' hypothesized causal relationships. Listwise deletion was used to compute the correlation matrix shown in Table 3.

The rejection–identification model. We proposed the rejection–identification model that predicts that willingness to make attributions to prejudice would exert a direct and negative effect on personal well-being and collective well-being, but that minority group identification would mediate an indirect and positive effect on well-being.[2] We predicted that willingness to make attributions

[2] One advantage of testing our predictions using structural equation modeling techniques is that they permit us to test for a mediated relationship and a direct relationship that are opposite in their effect on the same variable. In other words, structural equation modeling allows us to test our hypothesis that attributions to prejudice will negatively affect well-being, but will also have a positive effect on well-being that is mediated by minority group identification. If this hypothesis is correct, then the mediated and direct effect should, at least partially, cancel each other out in the zero-order correlations. To the degree that the two effects are equal in strength, the overall correlation between willingness to make attributions to prejudice and well-being could be near zero. As shown in Table 3, the correlations between the indicators of willingness to make attributions to prejudice and the indicators of well-being are nonsignificant, although they are not directly pertinent because we are interested in the correlations between the latent constructs. Under traditional methods for testing for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986), it would appear as if there were no relationship whatsoever between attributions to prejudice and well-being. However, Baron and Kenny's approach to mediation assumes that the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable are similar in direction. Obviously, that does not apply to our predicted model and, therefore, we must test our predictions using structural equation modeling, which allows for separate estimates of these two effects. In fact, if our predictions are correct, it is impossible to assess the direct negative effect of willingness to make attributions to prejudice on well-being unless we address the extent to which the positive mediated relationship exists in our analysis.

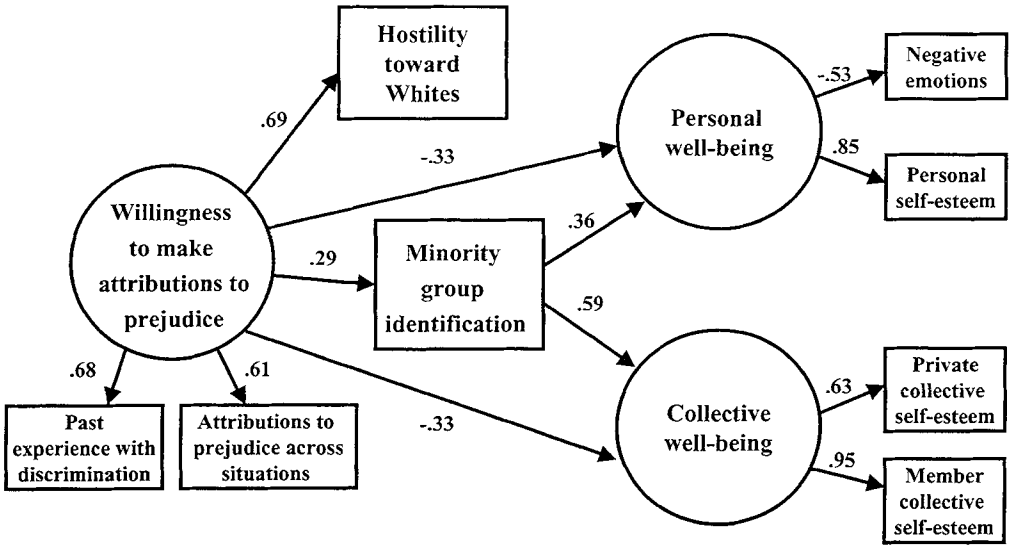

Figure 2. Structural equation model assessing both the direct and indirect effects of attributions to prejudice on personal and collective well-being in African Americans. All of the estimated path weights are standardized and significant ($ps < .05$).

to prejudice would increase group identification, and that identification would positively influence both personal and collective well-being. We also hypothesized that willingness to make attributions to prejudice would elevate hostility toward Whites.

To test these predictions, we specified a model where perceived past experience with racial prejudice and attributions to prejudice for future hypothetical situations loaded on a single latent factor. Thus, this latent factor taps people's perceptions of prejudice as a stable, pervasive phenomenon that they must endure. Both the frequency of experiencing negative emotions and Rosenberg's (1979) measure of self-esteem served as indicators of personal well-being. The Private and Membership subscales of the CSE scale served as indicators of the latent factor of collective well-being. Because willingness to make attributions to prejudice was unlikely to account for all of the covariance between hostility toward Whites and minority group identification, we allowed the errors associated with the latter two variables to correlate. For the same reason, we allowed the disturbances (i.e., errors for latent factors) between the latent factors of personal and collective well-being to correlate. The full model and estimated parameters from the optimized solution appear in Figure 2.

We began our analyses by first testing an independence (or null) model, in which all of the parameters were set to zero. This model tests the assumption that there is no covariation among the variables in the model and is used to establish a baseline against which to compare our hypothesized model. As expected, the null model did not fit the data well, as evidenced by a large chi-square value, $\chi^2(28, N = 130) = 265.46, p < .001$. In contrast, the hypothesized model fit the data extremely well, $\chi^2(14, N = 130) = 17.67$, *ns*, NNFI = .969, CFI = .985, and was superior to the null model, $\Delta\chi^2(14, N = 130) = 247.79, p < .001$. Furthermore, all of the estimated parameters were significant and in the direction consistent with our predictions. Thus, individual differences in perceiving prejudice as likely to occur across situations significantly predicted hostility toward Whites and minority group identification. In addition, the more participants saw prejudice as pervasive, the more likely they were to have poor personal and collective well-being. Minority group identification, however, positively predicted both personal and collective well-being.

The hypothesized model accounted for 19% of the variance in collective well-being and 9% of the variance in personal well-being.[3] The total effect (both direct and indirect) of willingness to make attributions to prejudice on personal well-being was −.26; the total effect on collective well-being was −.16. Although our results were consistent with the idea that minority group identification partially alleviates the otherwise completely negative effects of attributions to prejudice, the overall relationship between willingness to make attributions to prejudice and the well-being constructs was still negative.

To summarize, these results were consistent with the proposed model in which willingness to make attributions to prejudice has a direct negative effect on both collective and personal well-being and an indirect and positive effect on well-being that is mediated by group identification. In this model, attributions to prejudice increase identification with one's minority group, which in turn enhances personal and collective well-being. In addition, our model predicts that attributions to prejudice will encourage hostility toward Whites. The model was able to account for the covariation among the measured variables extremely well.

Bidirectionality between identification and attribution. In addition to our hypothesis that attributions to prejudice affect minority group identification, high levels of minority group identification might facilitate attributions to prejudice, as pointed out by Crocker and Major (1989). Therefore, we tested a modified ver-

[3] This is comparable to the R^2 values associated with other predictors of personal self-esteem (e.g., satisfaction with friends, $R^2 = .10$; satisfaction with family, $R^2 = .08$; satisfaction with finances $R^2 = .04$) found in cross-cultural research by Diener and Diener (1995).

sion of the rejection–identification model that allowed for a bidirectional relationship between the attributions to prejudice factor and minority group identification. This model fit well, $\chi^2(15, N = 130) = 20.66$, *ns*, NNFI = .956, CFI = .976, but not quite as well as the original rejection-identification model. More importantly, although the path from attributions to prejudice to group identification remained significant, the new path from identification to attributions was not significant, standardized path weight = .06. Thus, in our data, we found greater support for the notion that attributional patterns influence identification than for a bidirectional relationship between these two variables.

The discounting model. Proposed by Crocker and Major (1989), this model predicts that an attribution to prejudice for a negative outcome will protect the self-esteem of a stigmatized group member. In contrast, the above test of the rejection–identification model suggests that when attributions are measured across situations, the relationship between attributions to prejudice and well-being is negative, not positive as the Crocker et al. (1991) perspective might suggest. Specifically, we found that attributions to prejudice were negatively related to both personal and collective well-being (see Figure 2). However, because the discounting model does not make specific predictions about group identification or hostility toward Whites, we tested a simpler model where the latent factor of attributions to prejudice affected the personal and collective well-being factors only. Again, we let the disturbances for the two well-being factors correlate. Although this model fit very well, $\chi^2(6, N = 130) = 3.85$, *ns*, NNFI = 1.038, CFI = 1.000, the paths from attributions to personal well-being (−.15) and collective well-being (−.19) were not significant and, importantly, they were in the reverse direction than what would be expected if attributions to prejudice were protecting well-being. Furthermore, the Wald Test (which indicates what changes to the model can be made without significantly reducing model fit) indicated that these two parameters could be fixed at zero without significantly reducing the fit of the model (Bentler, 1995). Thus, this analysis disconfirms the hypothesis that greater willingness to attribute negative outcomes to prejudice across situations exerts a direct positive effect on well-being.

Maladjustment model. One plausible alternative to our rejection–identification model is that people who are depressed and have low self-esteem will perceive the world as "out to get them," and will, therefore, make more attributions to prejudice. Such a process could also result in greater hostility toward Whites in those with low self-regard compared with their more well-adjusted counterparts (Kramer, 1998). To address this possible explanation of our data, we tested a model in which personal well-being predicted both hostility toward Whites and the latent factor of attributions to prejudice. Again, we allowed the error associated with hostility toward Whites and the disturbance associated with the latent variable of attributions to prejudice to covary. Although this model fit well, $\chi^2(3, N = 130) = 0.55$, *ns*, NNFI = 1.093, CFI = 1.000, the paths from personal well-being to hostility toward Whites (−.21) and to attributions to prejudice (−.24) were not significant. Furthermore, the Wald Test indicated that both paths could be fixed at zero without significantly reducing the fit of the model (Bentler, 1995). Thus, maladjustment did not significantly influence hostility toward Whites or attributions to prejudice.

A similar but more complex model with collective well-being added as a second predictor of hostility toward Whites and attributions to prejudice produced comparable results. Again, the model fit well, $\chi^2(9, N = 130) = 5.91$, *ns*, NNFI = 1.040, CFI = 1.000, but all of the paths leading from the well-being constructs to hostility toward Whites and attributions to prejudice were nonsignificant. According to the Wald Test, all of the paths from the well-being factors to hostility and attributions to prejudice could be dropped without significantly reducing model fit.

A series of other more complex models, which included a model using minority group identification, also did not support the possibility that greater maladjustment increases the perceived pervasiveness of prejudice. We tested a model in which group identification was a third predictor of attributions to prejudice and a predictor of well-being. We also tested a model in which identification predicted well-being, attributions, and hostility. Last, we tested a model in which in addition to the direct paths from well-being to attributions to prejudice and hostility toward Whites, minority group identification served as a mediator between well-being and both attributions to prejudice and hostility. Each model produced similar results—nonsignificant paths from the well-being factors to hostility toward Whites and attributions to prejudice. In no case did either of the well-being factors exert a significant negative effect on attributions to prejudice or hostility toward Whites. Thus, these results tend to disconfirm the possibility that a model where well-being predicts both pervasive perceptions of prejudice and hostility toward the out-group can provide an adequate account of our findings.

Discussion

In this study we tested a model of the effects of attributions to prejudice on well-being in African Americans. Consistent with conceptualizations of prejudice as stressful and capable of harming physical and mental health (Allison, 1998; Dion & Earn, 1975; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996), the evidence we obtained clearly shows that the overall relationship between a pattern of stable attributions to prejudice and well-being was negative. We found strong evidence in support of our rejection–identification model, which predicts that such stable attributions to prejudice have a direct harmful effect on well-being while increasing hostility toward Whites and minority group identification. Furthermore, our model predicts that minority group identification enhances psychological well-being. Therefore, the model suggests that attributions to prejudice can indirectly enhance well-being by encouraging minority group identification, while at the same time having a direct negative effect.

The Pain of Rejection

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) stresses the importance of inclusion for well-being and predicts that rejection from important social groups will be painful. Like other kinds of victimization, perceiving oneself as a victim of prejudice is aversive, and minimizing the extent to which one is victimized can protect well-being (Taylor et al., 1983). The pain of attributions to prejudice might explain why devalued group members consistently underestimate the probability that they have been victimized by

prejudice (Crosby et al., 1989; Ruggiero & Major, 1998; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, 1997).[4]

Other predictions made by social identity theory were confirmed by our results. For instance, we found that attributions to prejudice are related to minority group identification. Not only can attributions to prejudice make one's group membership salient, but they also should motivate targets of discrimination to become increasingly reliant on the minority group as a means of building a meaningful and positive self-concept. Social identity theory likewise predicts our finding that attributions to prejudice, when considered threats to the minority group's status, are related to derogation of and hostility toward the dominant out-group. As previous researchers have argued (Major, 1994; Sigelman & Welch, 1991), our results support the hypothesis that African Americans see racial discrimination as illegitimate and feel entitled to equal treatment. When they perceive themselves as not receiving equal treatment across a variety of situations, they resent the powerful group and align themselves more closely to the minority group.

Integration With Other Approaches

Research on attributional protection strategies has clearly shown that people will shift the locus of the cause of a negative event to a less central aspect of the self, and that such a shift can protect self-esteem (Rhodewalt et al., 1991). Although people do engage in this type of attributional self-protection and are otherwise motivated to preserve a positive image of the self through a variety of constructive and construal processes (Kunda, 1990), attributions to prejudice may not be an effective means of accomplishing this goal over the long term. Even though an attribution to prejudice against one's group can be seen as an external attribution, it also involves a durable aspect of the self—one's group membership.[5] Thus, whether an attribution to prejudice means the recipient can expect stability of prejudicial treatment will be critical. For example, attributing a negative outcome to the prejudice of a lone bigot implies that such prejudice is the exception to an otherwise typically fair out-group—precisely the conditions that epitomize an unstable attribution. Because, in this case, the individual can assume that others are different (i.e., are not necessarily bigoted), then an attribution to prejudice will carry few implications for other situations and one's perceived ability to control future outcomes should remain intact. After all, a self-handicap works only if self-efficacy is maintained by its use (Snyder & Higgins, 1985). In contrast, perceiving the world as full of bigots whom one can encounter in any variety of situations should make it clear that control of one's future may be limited. Such reduced feelings of control may be compounded when pervasive negative treatments come from a dominant group with the power to act on its prejudices.

By contrast, because prejudice directed toward members of dominant groups by a minority group is by definition a rare occurrence, attributions to prejudice among dominant group members are likely to be unstable. Thus, attributions to prejudice among dominant groups are more likely to be psychologically beneficial. For example, men who were asked to think about the ways in which they had been discriminated against because of their gender and Whites who were asked to think about the disadvantages they had experienced because of their race exhibited higher self-esteem than participants who were asked to list beneficial outcomes that they had received based on those group memberships (Branscombe, 1998; Branscombe, Schiffhauer, & Valencia, 1998). Consistent with this evidence concerning the gains that can be made by dominant group members who make attributions to prejudice, recent studies suggest that dominant group members are more likely to be vigilant in their perceptions of prejudice against them, in contrast to devalued groups, who minimize prejudice.

Ruggiero and Major (1998) compared the willingness to make an attribution to prejudice for a negative outcome among Blacks and Whites, women and men, and experimentally created high- and low-status groups. In all three studies, high-status group members were more likely to attribute failure to prejudice than were low-status group members. Indeed, low-status group members minimized prejudice relative to other possible causes. If willingness to make attributions to prejudice is reflective of the potential gains that can be achieved, then dominant groups, for whom attributions to prejudice are less stable, will gain more from doing so than will devalued groups. Because of the important role that stability is likely to play in the effects of attributions to prejudice, future research in this area should both measure and manipulate the stability of attributions to prejudice. We expect that when attributions to prejudice are plausible but unstable, they might well protect well-being by allowing for the discounting of negative feedback, as described by Crocker et al. (1991). However, when attributions to prejudice are seen as plausible and stable, they will exert a direct negative effect on well-being and an indirect positive effect mediated by group identification.

Therefore, although at first glance our predictions and analysis might appear to be inconsistent with previous work that has suggested disadvantaged group members protect their well-being

[4] The one exception to this pattern was obtained by Crocker et al. (1991). They compared the attributions to prejudice made by Black and White participants who had received negative feedback from a White evaluator. Although the Black attribution ratings were higher than those of the White participants overall, as the authors themselves noted, this may have resulted from a confound between race of the evaluator and race of the participant. Apparently, the White participants had difficulty understanding the racial prejudice questions given that another White person had provided them with the feedback. This difficulty was not present for the Black participants who received feedback from an out-group member rather than from an in-group member.

[5] Attributions to prejudice are unlikely to be purely external. The presence of an external cause (the other's prejudice) does not lead the stigmatized individual to discount all internal causes. After all, both the stigmatized person's group membership (an internal cause) and the other's prejudice (an external cause) are necessary preconditions for discrimination to occur, although alone neither is sufficient. In a review of the literature on discounting, McClure (1998) concluded that "when a cause is judged as necessary to the effect, it is unlikely to be discounted" (p. 17). Indeed, some time ago, Kelley (1983) noted that the assumption that external and internal causes are inversely related was "quaintly simple" (p. 358). In support of this position, numerous empirical studies have found that internal and external attributional ratings are often independent (see McClure, 1998, for a review). Thus, rather than attributing the negative outcome to a lack of ability, effort, or some other personal characteristic, the stigmatized person who makes a prejudice attribution is at least partially attributing the outcome to his or her group membership, which can be another internal factor.

by discounting negative outcomes as due to prejudice, we argue that the differing results stem from the different meanings of the attributions that have been measured. Because we measured attributions to prejudice across time and situations, we can safely assume that participants who scored high on this measure perceived prejudice as stable and reflective of illegitimate rejection based on group membership. In contrast, we think that it is unlikely that participants in previous experimental studies would have inferred that their single brush with a biased evaluator reflected what they could expect to experience in other social situations. Furthermore, as Foster and Matheson (1998) have noted, "if discrimination were measured in relation to a specific situation . . ., having to take action to resolve this one specific situation may be less overwhelming. Indeed the thought of being able to change one situation is less overwhelming than having to change many situations" (p. 172). Thus, when attributions to prejudice are due to the presence of a lone bigot, but do not reflect a recognition of stable and pervasive prejudice in society, they may well have an overall self-protective effect, as predicted by Crocker and Major (1989). Unfortunately, the reality is that many African Americans experience prejudice as an everyday event (Allison, 1998; Sigelman & Welch, 1991) and are likely to see prejudice as stable and chronic.

Although we see the effects of attributions to prejudice on well-being as generally negative, the indirect positive effect that is mediated by group identification could obscure the negative effects when researchers look only at the overall relationship between attributions and well-being. In order to assess the negative effects of attributions to prejudice, researchers must first partial out the potentially positive effects that are mediated by identification. Because previous research on the effects of attributions to prejudice in experimental settings has not measured identification, that work was not able to assess the simultaneous positive and negative effects of attributions to prejudice that we documented. Because the relative sizes of the negative direct effect and the positive indirect effect might vary as a function of the situation and the particular group membership under examination, the simultaneous positive and negative effects of attributions to prejudice could each be significant, whereas the total effect of attributions to prejudice on well-being could be positive, negative, or near zero. For instance, attributions to prejudice in an experimental setting might make the participant's minority group membership especially salient, which would enhance self-esteem, and researchers might find an overall positive effect of that attribution. Consistent with this idea, Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, and Crocker (1998) found that salience of the minority group membership itself was responsible for increases in the self-esteem of African American participants, whereas attributions to prejudice were not significantly related to self-esteem. The lack of a significant correlation between attributions to prejudice and well-being in that work might have resulted from the simultaneous operation of positive and negative effects as predicted by our model.

Limitations and Caveats

The major limitation of the current study is that we relied on a correlational design. Although our model fit the data very well, other alternative models that we tested also fit. However, these alternative models can be rejected because the hypotheses they tested were not confirmed—the structural path coefficients predicted by those alternative models were not significant. A reverse-causality model, where poor self-esteem encourages attributions to prejudice and hostility toward Whites, was evaluated and not supported. Likewise, we considered the potential dual role of group identification as a result of attributions to prejudice and as an influence on attributions to prejudice. Again, because the alternative path possibility—identification to attributions to prejudice—was not significant when added to the model, we conclude that the relationship is primarily in the direction we hypothesized. More importantly, we constructed the rejection–identification model on the basis of theory and found that our data were consistent with that model. Although the use of a correlational data set requires caution in making causal inferences, our approach allowed us to assess the effects of attributions to prejudice across a variety of situations, not just attributions about a single event. In research we are conducting now, we experimentally manipulate perceptions of pervasiveness in order to further assess its effects on identification and well-being.

Although we examined individual differences in devalued group members' perceptions of prejudice, various aspects of the situation could certainly alter the plausibility of an attribution to prejudice. Indeed, the mean attributional probabilities that we observed for the 10 situations in our measure showed substantial variability. For items involving housing, in particular, participants saw exclusion as very likely to be the result of racial prejudice, whereas they were less certain that events involving work performance feedback might be due to prejudice. Although we conceptualize willingness to make attributions to prejudice as an individual-difference variable, we believe that such willingness is likely to be a function of actual experiential history, beliefs about the prevalence of prejudice, and salience of group membership in one's local environment. It would be useful for future investigations to examine these and other factors for their influence on people's willingness to make attributions to prejudice.

Implications for Coping Among Devalued Groups

Our model accounts for a meaningful proportion of the variance in African Americans' well-being and suggests one social mechanism by which the well-being of African Americans and other devalued groups can be protected. First, our results indicate that, over the long term, attributing negative outcomes to prejudice is unlikely to account for how devalued groups maintain levels of self-esteem comparable to those of privileged groups, as was initially suggested by Crocker and Major (1989). Although our data cannot speak to the potential self-protective effects of an attribution to prejudice for a single negative event, they are consistent with our contention that a pattern of attributions to prejudice harms well-being. Use of a prejudice-attributional strategy for self-protection is ultimately likely to lead to the perception that prejudice is pervasive and stable—conditions where we predict an attribution to prejudice will have the most negative effect. Attributions of this sort, where one's outcomes are caused by external, stable, and uncontrollable factors, can result in feelings of helplessness (Seligman, 1975). Indeed, the experience of repeated rejection by others, especially by those representing the dominant social group, may lead to the feeling that one's existence is meaningless and without value (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Because we found that the overall effect of attributions to prejudice is negative, the simplest suggestion for improving the well-being of devalued people might seem to be persuading devalued group members to minimize their perceived pervasiveness of prejudice. However, minorities already minimize the extent to which they are personally discriminated against, indicating that many devalued group members do use this self-protective strategy (see Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, & Young, 1999; Ruggiero & Major, 1998). More importantly, recognizing prejudice is important for the interests of the group as a whole because it leads to group identification (Jetten et al., 1999), a necessary condition for collective action. Indeed, increased pervasiveness of prejudice stemming from multiple out-group members has been shown to evoke more collectivistic responses (Abelson et al., 1998). Thus, while recognizing discrimination as a pervasive phenomenon has some negative consequences, attributions to prejudice and group identification are also catalysts for collective efforts that are needed to create important social change (Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1983; Klandermans, 1997).

If discouraging attributions to prejudice is not the answer, how then might devalued group members protect their well-being while prejudice exists in society? Our model suggests that we focus on minority group identification as an important predictor of well-being. There is considerable evidence that is consistent with Crocker and Major's (1989) contention that selective devaluing of certain performance dimensions and emphasizing in-group comparisons do protect the well-being of devalued groups of people. Selective devaluing (*social creativity,* in social identity theory terms) has received considerable support as a method of protecting well-being in low-status groups (Ellemers, 1993; Lemaine, 1974; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Spears & Manstead, 1989). Likewise, perceived similarity to other in-group members and employment of in-group standards for self-evaluation go hand in hand with group identification (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Although we contend that attributions to prejudice are likely to increase minority group identification, minority group identification is not simply a means of buffering individuals against encounters with prejudice. As Cross and Strauss (1998) pointed out, African American identification also serves a bonding, celebratory function that is separate from defensive responses to stigma. This bonding function may be affected by a number of social and cultural factors. For instance, cultural values that lead people to believe that individual upward mobility is possible (e.g., "the American Dream," "Protestant work ethic") are likely to reduce people's willingness to identify with devalued groups (Ellemers, 1993). From this perspective, stigmatized group members who perceive opportunities for moving upward or away from the devalued group, as is the case with overweight people (Crandall, 1994), will be especially unlikely to identify with their in-group and will have lower self-esteem (Tiggeman & Rothblum, 1997). On the more positive side, celebrating multiculturalism could be an important means of increasing minority group identification and enhancing well-being. A multicultural society provides opportunities for people to identify with the devalued group, especially in comparison to an assimilationist society, which encourages people to think of themselves as individuals, not as group members. Multiculturalism permits a feeling of group distinctiveness, which social identity theory claims is necessary for a positive social identity and positive well-being (Berry, 1984). Thus, multicultural societies protect the well-being of devalued groups by directly encouraging minority group identification and making possible an important self-protective strategy in the face of prejudice. As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, a decision will have to be made on whether to take an assimilationist or multicultural approach to intergroup relations. Approximately one third of the current population is non-White, and 13% is African American (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). Furthermore, the population of racial minorities is growing faster than that of White Americans. By 2050, minorities will constitute 50% of the United States population. On the basis of our findings and previous work demonstrating the importance of group identification for the well-being of devalued groups, we believe that multiculturalism may serve the interests of disadvantaged groups.

Conclusions

Research concerning the effects of attributions to prejudice has evolved since Crocker and Major's (1989) seminal theoretical article. Since that time, researchers have shifted their analyses away from a strict focus on in the internality or externality of attributions to prejudice to a more complex view that incorporates what attributions to prejudice might mean for devalued groups. Major and Crocker (1993) pointed out that attributions to prejudice have a harmful effect when prejudice is seen as legitimate. We have further extended the analysis of the plight of the devalued to consider the effects of attributions to prejudice that are experienced as stable and pervasive. We conceptualized such attributions to prejudice as the recognition that one's group is rejected by the dominant culture in a host of situations. Our data were consistent with the notion that perceiving prejudice as likely to occur across situations has simultaneously both positive and negative effects on well-being, with minority group identification mediating the positive effects. We believe that further insights into the psychology of the historically disenfranchised can only be garnered by continued consideration of the subjective experience of prejudice among those who must cope with it.

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Received May 26, 1998
Revision received November 25, 1998
Accepted December 3, 1998 ■