

Executive Summary

Who Perceives More Discrimination?

Individual Difference Predictors Among Latinos and Anglos

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Note: This is an executive summary of Shorey, H. S., Cowan, G., & Sullivan, M. P. (2002). Predicting perceptions of discrimination among Hispanics and Anglos. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 24 (3), 3-22. DOI: 10.1177/0739986302024001001.

When will people ascribe negative outcomes that they or that their group experience to discrimination? Using a sample of 126 Hispanics and 153 Anglo respondents, Shorey, Cowan, and Sullivan (2002) examined the extent to which self-esteem, perceived control (personal and interpersonal), independent and interdependent self-construal, and social dominance orientation predicted attributions of negative outcomes to racial prejudice and perceptions of personal and group discrimination. Their results—including findings that Hispanics (but not Anglos) saw

more group than personal discrimination, that Hispanics' perceptions of personal discrimination were positively associated with interdependent self-construals and negatively associated with self-esteem and personal and interpersonal control, and that among Anglos (but not Hispanics) social dominance orientation predicted perceptions of group discrimination—serve as a reminder that it is important to avoid overgeneralizations about Latinos as a whole as well as to recognize ethnic differences in the experience and perception of discrimination.

When will people ascribe negative outcomes that they or that their group experience to discrimination? This is an important question, because it gets at the heart of how we perceive intergroup relations and speaks to debates about cherished American ideals regarding equal opportunity, individual freedom, and social mobility. It is also important because, unfortunately, although discrimination appears to be alive and well in U.S. workplaces and society, both experience and research (e.g., Ellemers & Barretto, 2008) suggest that not all individuals are equally likely to perceive discrimination or even believe that it exists, including when they are a member of a group more likely to be its target. What factors predict which people are more likely to perceive that they personally have been the targets of group-based discrimination or to believe that discrimination can explain negative outcomes they may have experienced? What predicts who is more likely to perceive that their group has been the target of discrimination?

This is also an important question, because, as Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief, and Bradley et al. (2003) point out, estimates of discrimination typically rely on people's accounts of whether or not they have been its target, and this means that, depending on who is responding, such estimates could end up over- or under-estimating the true extent of discrimination. Related to this, as described by racial identity theories (e.g., Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Helms, 1990; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001), Latinos—much like other members of racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States—can vary in their perceptions of the country's racial system and in their views of their own identity in relation to that system, as well as in the degree to which they accept the status quo with regard to racial hierarchies. Finally, discrimination can often be subtle and not quite so evident (e.g., Dovidio, 2001), and in such situations, it is particularly likely that people will diverge in whether or not they see outcomes as due to discrimination or other factors. Indeed, most situations tend to be ambiguous, such that it is not self-evident that discrimination is happening. Given these issues, it is unlikely that Latinos will view situations and make



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attributions of discrimination uniformly, and so it could be helpful to know the individual-level factors that are associated with perceptions of discrimination among Latinos, as well as the group-level differences in such perceptions (and their correlates) between Latinos and Anglos.

Do members of oppressed groups always explain negative outcomes as due to discrimination? Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004) discuss how people, even when in a disadvantaged group, may be likely to hold beliefs that legitimize the current social structure, even when that structure can hurt their group and them personally. Essentially, they review evidence to support the idea that people tend to rationalize the status quo. This means that, to the extent that they see the system as legitimate, members of high-status groups would be more likely to favor the ingroup, but members of low-status groups would be more likely to favor the outgroup.

In essence, because in many cases it is not possible to establish with objectivity that discrimination is actually occurring, what may ultimately matter most is what people are experiencing and what they believe is happening. In support of this, a number of researchers have shown that believing that one is the target of discrimination can be associated with stress and other negative

outcomes (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Deitch et al., 2003; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Particularly as workplaces become more diverse, creating inclusive cultures that engage people of different ethnic backgrounds, including Latinos, may in part depend on understanding the factors associated with such perceptions of discrimination. Thus, it makes particular sense to investigate not only perceptions of discrimination, but also their correlates.

This is what Hal Shorey, Gloria Cowan, and Mary Sullivan (2002) set out to investigate in their study of the predictors of perceptions of discrimination among Latinos and Anglos. Focusing on Hispanic and Anglo undergraduate students in California, a state that has experienced large demographic shifts ahead of other parts of the country, Shorey et al. examined the extent to which self-esteem, perceived control (personal and

interpersonal), independent and interdependent self-construal (associated with individualism and collectivism, respectively), and social dominance orientation (an individual's acceptance of and preference for a hierarchical and unequal relationship among groups) were each associated with 1) respondents' tendency to blame racial discrimination for negative outcomes in ambiguous situations, 2) their perceptions of the degree to which they personally see themselves as targets of racial discrimination, and 3) their perceptions of the degree to which their group has been the target of discrimination.

Participants in their study were 126 Latino and 153 Anglo men and women, who were asked to complete seven instruments: 1) Branscombe et al.'s (1999) 10-item measure of the tendency to see racial prejudice as a causal factor for negative outcomes; 2) two items assessing the degree to which the participant believed he or she had been a target of racial discrimination; 3) two items assessing participants' views about how much members of their group have been the targets of systematic discrimination; 4) a 10-item measure of self-esteem; 5) 10-item measures of perceived personal control and perceived interpersonal control (assessing the respondents' beliefs about the degree to which they have control over their own outcomes, and control in interpersonal situations, respectively); 6) 14-item measures of independent and interdependent self-construal, assessing the degree to which respondents see themselves as autonomous and separate from others (individualistic) or as mutually dependent with others in their circles (collectivistic); and 7) a 16-item measure of Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), which indicates how much the respondent approves of inequality versus equality as general principles for organizing society.

Shorey et al. found a number of interesting results. First, Anglo respondents tended not to distinguish between personal and group discrimination (and on average saw relatively little of both); in contrast, Hispanic respondents did distinguish between the two types of discrimination and on average saw more discrimination directed at their group than at them-

selves personally, a phenomenon that some have labeled the personal/group discrimination discrepancy (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997).

Some people – perhaps those who see structural or intergroup forces at work – believe that individual outcomes are not necessarily understood solely at the individual level, but rather should be better explained and understood in the larger social context of interacting groups and institutions. From this perspective, my outcomes and those of other members of my group are seen not only as emerging from individual behavior, but also from one's location in a larger and complex social system, a social system in which identity can play an important role apart from individual choice. On this view, racial or ethnic discrimination is often a pertinent basis for explaining negative outcomes in interracial or interethnic situations.



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Others – perhaps those who believe that people's advancement is a matter of individual choice and effort and that it is possible to transcend society's group-based status hierarchies – are more likely to explain individual outcomes as directly emerging from individual behavior. From this perspective, people's outcomes and experiences are seen to depend on what they have done more than on abstract forces at a larger systems level. On that view, any negative outcomes that an individual experiences in an intergroup situation may be explained less by discrimination than by specific aspects of the behavior of the particular people involved.

Major, Gramzow, McCoy, Levin, Schmader, and Sidanius (2002) referred to the idea that people might differentially see themselves as the targets of discrimination, depending on both



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on the degree to which they believe that individual mobility is possible in society and on whether or not they belong to the low- or high-status group as the *status-legitimacy hypothesis*. In a series of three studies, they found that, indeed, when members of low-status groups (e.g., African Americans, Latinos, and women) experienced a negative outcome or rejection from a member of the corresponding high-status group (e.g., European, Americans, and men), they were less likely to perceive that outcome as due to discrimination to the degree that they believed in the ideology of individual mobility. In contrast, when the high-status group members experienced a negative outcome from members of the low-status group, they were more likely to explain it as due to discrimination to the

extent that they endorsed the ideology of individual mobility. (This pattern was not present when rejection was by a member of the same group. In that case, beliefs in individual mobility were not related to attributions to discrimination.)

Shorey et al.'s first result builds on these lines of prior work, in that one interpretation is that their Hispanic respondents may have been engaged in self-protection by not seeing their individual outcomes as necessarily linked to those of their group as a whole. (Of course, it is also possible that, given that the respondents were college students, their assessment that they personally had experienced less discrimination than Hispanics overall was a realistic assessment – or at least, an acknowledgement of their relatively privileged position vis a vis the rest of their group.)

Second, using the results of the first three measures as the criterion variables, Shorey et al. (2002) found that Latino respondents who had lower self esteem, less personal and interpersonal control, and stronger individualistic values were more likely to believe that they had been the targets of personal discrimination and were more likely to attribute negative outcomes to racial prejudice. Finally, Anglos who had a stronger Social Dominance Orientation were more likely to say that their group was the target of discrimination, particularly among male respondents.

These findings aligned with Shorey et al.'s predictions only partially. On the one hand, as they predicted, Latinos with a greater sense of personal and interpersonal control were less likely to believe that they had been the targets of personal discrimination and to attribute negative outcomes to racial prejudice. Shorey et al. made this prediction based on the idea that, for members of low-status groups, blaming discrimination or prejudice for one's negative outcomes is a way of giving up control, and so one can maintain control by avoiding such attributions. It is also plausible, and perhaps more likely, as Shorey et al. point out, that those Hispanics who had experienced more discrimination ended up feeling less control over their outcomes. Of course, a case can also be made for a cyclical process, by which experiencing discrimination leads to diminished feelings of control and thus makes it more likely that we will perceive discrimination in future situations. Shorey et al. also expected that interdependent (or collectivist) Hispanics would be more likely to perceive discrimination, on the idea that these Hispanics would tend to see their outcomes as more connected to those of other Hispanics, and indeed this association was present in the data.

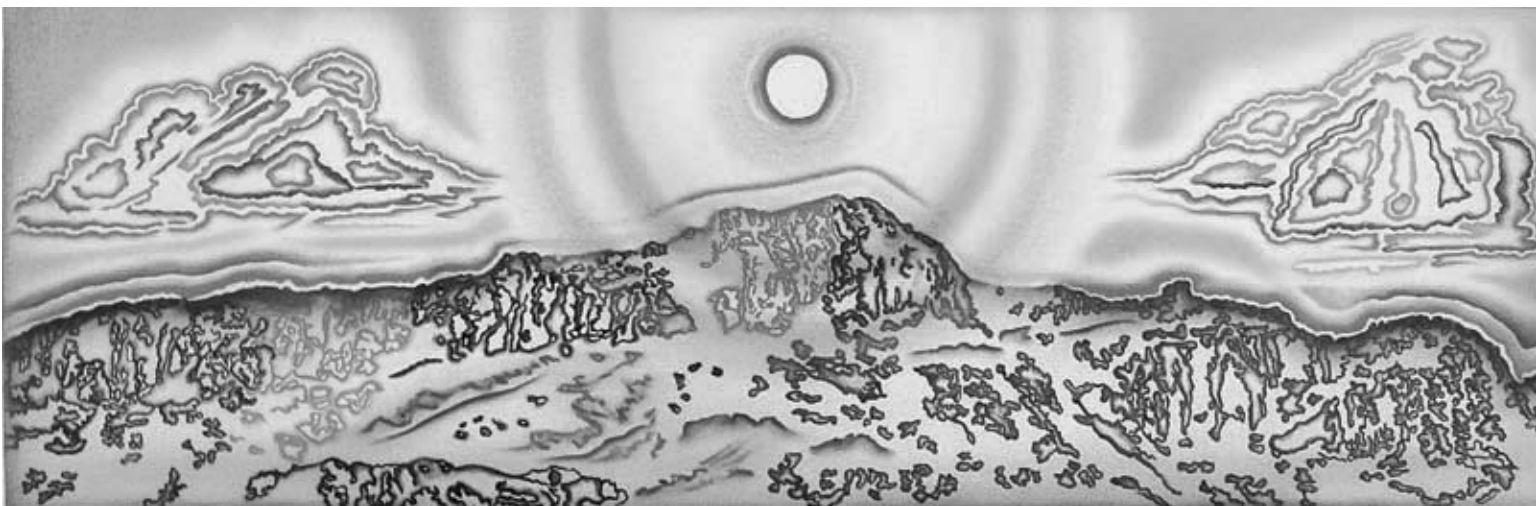
On the other hand, Shorey et al. did not find support for their predictions that Anglo perceptions of discrimination would be related to self-esteem, control, and independent self-construals. Also, they found that, among Hispanics and among Anglo women, self-esteem was associated with a lower likelihood of perceiving oneself as a target of discrimination, and for the Hispanics only, with attributing negative outcomes to racial prejudice. This was in contrast to prior research (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997), which reported that among members of oppressed groups (women, Asians, and Blacks) there was no such association. One explanation is that avoiding attributions to discrimination is a way to protect one's self-esteem. Of course, the possibility also exists that those who believed they had been the targets of discrimination felt less self-esteem as a result.

So, what are the implications of Shorey et al.'s research? First of all, prior theoretical and empirical work indicated that people differ in how we perceive and explain the social structure, and this has implications for when and to what degree we are likely to explain negative outcomes—whether our own or those of Latinos in general—as resulting from discrimination. Shorey et al.'s findings indicate that these differences are also associated with individual characteristics such as self-esteem and personal control.

Second, this variation among Latinos in the degree to which we perceive discrimination has implications for other important outcomes. For example, Sanchez and Brock (1996) studied 139 Latino employees of various organizations in Dade County, Florida, and found that those who perceived more discrimination at work were also less likely to be committed to the

organization or to be satisfied with their job, and more likely to experience tension at work, even after controlling for other potential stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity. For some of the outcome variables, this association depended on whether or not the respondent had grown up in the U.S., whether or not they were of Cuban background (i.e., in the dominant Latino group in Miami), whether or not they had a high salary, and whether or not they had job experience. Perceived discrimination had a weaker relationship with organizational commitment for those who grew up in the U.S.; a weaker relationship with work tension for Cubans; a weaker relationship with job satisfaction and work tension for those with higher salaries; and a weaker relationship with organizational commitment for those with more job experience.

In a related study, Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Donaldson (2001), based on data from 366 respondents in the Los Angeles area (of which 45% were Latino) found that those who perceived gender or racial discrimination on the part of their co-workers, their supervisors, or their organizations were less likely to express attitudes and demonstrate behaviors showing commitment and satisfaction. Specifically, perceived supervisor discrimination was associated with less organizational commitment and job satisfaction; perceived coworker discrimination was associated with organizational citizenship behavior; and perceived discrimination by the organization was associated with less job satisfaction, less organizational commitment, and less organizational citizenship behavior—even after statistically controlling for the other two types of perceived discrimination.



Thus, the more we perceive that we have been the targets of discrimination, the more negative outcomes we are likely to experience in relation to our work attitudes and results. Yet, even though perceived discrimination matters to Latinos, Shorey et al.'s findings remind us that it may affect them differentially depending on other factors, particularly individual differences, because those individual differences are associated with the likelihood of perceiving discrimination in the first place.

This is yet one more reminder that Latinos are not all the same. The experience and perceptions of one Latino do not necessarily speak to the experience and perception of other Latinos. So we as researchers, as leaders, and as executives, should seek to be more precise about the distinguishing features, whether personality, ideology, cultural features, or experience, when seeking to make generalizations about particular subgroups of Latinos. ■

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