

Shooting the Messenger to Spite the Message: Exploring Reactions
to Claims of Racial Discrimination

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Abstract

Two experiments explored the potential for evaluative backlash toward minorities who make claims of racial discrimination. Guided by the literature on attitudes and persuasion, I examined three factors that are likely to be important in influencing individuals' reactions when evaluating individuals who present claims of discrimination: characteristics of the messenger, characteristics of the message, and characteristics of the recipient. In Experiment 1, participants evaluated a White or Black confederate who gave a speech expressing no claim, a weak claim, or a strong claim of racial discrimination. As predicted, results indicated evaluative backlash: participants gave more negative ratings to Black compared to White claimants only when the claim was strong. Experiment 2 further explored evaluative backlash by considering the role of message quality and the message recipient's meritocracy beliefs. As predicted, participants rated Black claimants more negatively than Whites when they used low quality arguments; but this backlash was eliminated when Black claimants used high quality arguments. Furthermore, recipients' meritocracy ideologies significantly moderated the interaction between the claimant's race and quality of the claim. Participants with relatively strong meritocracy beliefs were the source of evaluative backlash when hearing low quality arguments. Overall, these findings suggest that an integrated approach that considers characteristics of the messenger, the message, and the recipient can contribute to our understanding of how people react to claims of discrimination and the consequences of such reactions for the claimants.

Shooting the Messenger to Spite the Message: Exploring Reactions to Claims of Racial Discrimination

Although researchers have shifted their attention to varieties of racial discrimination that emerge in more subtle and implicit ways today than in the past, we cannot ignore the overt forms of racial discrimination that are still prevalent in our society (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). It is not uncommon to experience racially biased incidents -- from hearing a racist comment or witnessing an act of discrimination to noticing differences in opportunities for minority groups. Yet, recognition of these incidents involving bias varies significantly between racial groups. For example, 50% of Black Americans reported being treated unfairly because of their race, whereas 69% of White Americans believe that Blacks and Whites are treated the same (Dovidio et al., 2002). This racial divide has an ironic consequence for those recipients of bias who have the desire or need to confront it -- they may be reluctant to do so. When people claim discrimination as a factor that influences their outcomes, they are more likely to be derogated by others (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008; Kaiser & Miller, 2001). Considering this potential for evaluative backlash, how might minorities and their majority allies maximize positive outcomes when claiming discrimination? Understanding the conditions that lead to minority and majority members' indifference or contrition in such situations will facilitate efforts to improve interracial communication as well as to reduce discrimination.

Factors Affecting Reactions to Discrimination Claims

The broad goal of this line of work is to identify the conditions under which people from advantaged groups are most likely to recognize and to respond favorably to legitimate claims of discrimination. While research indicates that people often derogate those claiming discrimination, few of these studies have examined the conditions that might increase or decrease this effect. One possible reason for this gap is a lack of an overall theoretical approach to

understanding the problem. Essentially, a claim of discrimination is a persuasive communication. The confronter is attempting to inform the perceiver of relevant information on which to base his or her thoughts, feelings, and actions. Based on this assumption, theory and research on attitude change and persuasion might be useful in exploring the phenomenon of evaluative backlash. This literature suggests that three broad factors are likely to be important when individuals present claims of discrimination: 1) the messenger, 2) the message, and 3) the audience (for a review, see Albarracín, Johnson, & Zanna, 2005). More plainly, researchers must consider who says what to whom. In this section, I review the literature on evaluative backlash through the lens of attitude change research, examining the extent to which each of these factors influences responses to claims of discrimination.

Who Confronts? The Messenger

Messengers can vary on a number of dimensions, which may influence how their claim is perceived. In the context of confronting discrimination, researchers have focused on social category membership. For example, the person claiming discrimination may be a member of a minority group or a devalued group (e.g., Black individuals confronting racial discrimination or women confronting sexism) or a majority group member ally (e.g., White individuals confronting racial discrimination or men confronting sexism). Much of the research assumes that the social category membership of individuals claiming discrimination will shape how others respond to them (guided by stereotypes or prejudices). While social category does make a difference, findings from these studies have been inconsistent across different paradigms and dependent measures.

Most of the research focuses on evaluations of the messenger. Those who confront discrimination generally are disliked and perceived as complainers (Kaiser & Miller, 2001;

Swim & Hyers, 1999). For example, one study found that a Black target who attributes his failure to discrimination is viewed less favorably and is seen as more of a complainer than if he attributes his failure to the quality of his answers or to the difficulty of the test (Kaiser & Miller, 2001); this work, however, did not compare differential reactions to Black versus White targets. Furthermore, prior research has demonstrated that Blacks are aware of the possibility of such negative evaluations. A previous study using survey responses found that Blacks reported being nervous about being labeled as complainers or troublemakers if they confront discrimination (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). It is possible that Blacks who are faced with discrimination are reluctant to confront it because of the known social costs.

Although most work has demonstrated that individuals who confront are viewed more negatively, the findings on how minority targets are perceived when they confront vary (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006; Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Swim & Hyers, 1999). In one study, (Czopp et al., 2006) Black or White confederates confronted (or did not confront) White participants about their use of stereotypes. Participants were negative in their view of people who confronted, but they did not give more negative evaluations to the Black confederate than to the White confederate. Other work has also shown that, when third parties view a confrontation, they evaluate the Black confronter more negatively and as less persuasive than the White confronter (Rasinki & Czopp, 2010). Thus, past work suggests that (a) observers dislike individuals who confront discrimination, regardless of the confronter's race, (b) when minority group members attribute their own failure to discrimination, observers perceive them more negatively and (c) when outside observers watch a confrontation, they more negatively perceive a Black person (vs. a White person) who confronts discrimination.

Studies have explored how the race of a confronter influences the perceiver's affective reactions, with mixed findings. In research examining reactions to hypothetical confrontations, White participants who imagined being confronted by a White or Black person believed they would feel more negative self-directed affect (e.g., disappointed with one's self, guilty, shameful) when the communicator was White than when the communicator was Black (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). However, in other studies examining real confrontations (Czopp et al., 2006), White participants showed the opposite pattern. Participants felt more negative self-directed affect when the confronter was Black than when the confronter was White, possibly because people were more concerned about appearing prejudiced when face-to-face with the Black target (see Czopp et al., 2006).

Outside of the literature on confrontation, a few studies in the attitudes and persuasion literature have examined the extent to which the communicator's race influences whether people are persuaded by a message (e.g., Petty, Fleming & White, 1999; Quails & Moore, 1990;). Elaborated in later sections, these studies parallel the confrontation literature, showing that the social category membership of the messenger interacts with characteristics of the message and the perceiver to influence judgments.

What Do They Say? The Message

Research on attitudes suggests that how people respond to claims of discrimination will depend on message characteristics such as whether the message intensity is strong vs. mild (i.e., the force with which the message is conveyed), or whether it includes high vs. low quality arguments (e.g., Albarracín, Johnson, & Zanna, 2005). Furthermore, research on attitudes suggests that the extremity of the argument plays an important role in the persuasiveness of the message. If a message is too extreme (e.g., arguing that people need only 1 or 2 hours of sleep

per night), it becomes less persuasive than if it is more moderate (e.g., arguing that people need 4 hours of sleep per night; Bochner & Insko, 1966). Although the literature suggests that a variety of message characteristics are clearly important in determining the impact of a communication, little work on confronting discrimination has focused on how the message is conveyed or the content of the message. The confrontation literature and the persuasion literature have focused on two different ways in which a message is communicated. The confrontation literature has focused on whether the message is conveyed in a hostile or non-hostile manner (Czopp et al., 2006; Tangney, 1995), whereas the persuasion literature has focused on message quality and how quality influences perceptions of the message (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Within the confrontation literature, previous research has focused on how hostile vs. non-hostile interactions influence individuals' perceptions when they are confronted about their discriminatory behavior. This work suggests that communicators who engage in hostile confrontations will experience the most negative impact. For example, hostile confrontations lead to contempt or anger directed toward the confronter (Czopp et al., 2006; Tangney, 1995). Furthermore, hostile confrontations can produce a threat to the message recipient's self-image. When such a threat occurs, people are more likely to display more violence or aggression toward the confronter (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). In work specifically examining confrontations about racism, Czopp et al. (2006) found that, when the confronter was hostile toward the participant (i.e. told the participant not to be racist), confronted individuals showed increased anger toward, and greater dislike of, the confronter. Thus, work on confrontation suggests that reactions to claims of discrimination should vary as a function of the strength of the claim as well as the content of the claim. When someone strongly claims discrimination, perceivers will show more negative reactions and possibly more anger and less contrition toward

the claimant. Furthermore, if the content of the claim is personally directed as it has been in the studies to date, it may lead to different reactions than if the content is directed toward a group or society. The present work builds on this idea by examining different ways of conveying claims of discrimination. Furthermore, in contrast to prior work examining hostile versus non-hostile claims (Czopp et al., 2006), in the present studies, the claims of discrimination were not directed toward the individual, but rather toward discrimination in society. Therefore, instead of hostilely attacking participants, the claims contained remarks that strongly confronted issues about discrimination in society today.

A major focus in the persuasion literature has been on message quality, specifically, how the quality of the message influences evaluations of the messenger and perceptions of the message. Messages containing higher quality arguments have been shown to have a greater impact on persuasion (see Albarracín et al., 2005). The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is a cognitive model of persuasion that explains information processing, message reception, and attitude change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The ELM proposes that there are two routes to persuasion, the central and the peripheral. When motivation and ability to process the message are strong, people will follow the central route, where argument quality plays a crucial role. Specifically, high quality arguments are associated with more favorable thoughts and will therefore be more persuasive than lower quality arguments, which lead to unfavorable thoughts. The current work combines ideas from the attitudes and persuasion literature and work on confronting discrimination to examine the extent to which claims of discrimination that are higher in quality will be more persuasive and will have more favorable outcomes for the communicator than those that are lower in quality.

Claiming discrimination with high quality arguments should have a more favorable outcome for the claimant. The first positive outcome will be that the communicator will be more persuasive, which is likely to make the perceiver more aware and accepting of the discrimination claim. A more persuasive claim will lead perceivers to agree more with the claimant, and therefore they will rate the communicator more positively. A claim based on lower quality arguments will be accompanied by unfavorable thoughts, which will influence perceivers' views of the communicator in a negative way.

There is also some work that examines how message reception is influenced by the communicator's race. The main finding is that when races are matched (e.g., Black communicator and Black perceiver), the message is more persuasive (Quails & Moore, 1990; Whittler, 1989; Whittler & DiMeo, 1991). Previous work has demonstrated that when communicators take the position that is expected of them (e.g. a Black supporting civil rights or a woman supporting feminist issues), then the message is processed more superficially (Petty, Fleming, Priester, & Feinstein, 2001). Whereas, if the communicator takes a stance that is contrary to what the perceiver would expect, then the message is processed more deeply (Petty et al., 2001). Little work has examined the role of the communicator's race when the message focuses on race relations. This question is particularly important because, in the context of race relations, the communicator's race may provide a cue for credibility.

To Whom Do They Say It? The Audience

A variety of perceiver characteristics such as involvement, category membership, expectations, and ideologies may influence responses to persuasive communications. Previous work in the persuasion literature has focused on how perceivers who are high or low in prejudice react to high or low quality arguments by Black or White communicators. The most prominent

finding is that Whites who are low in prejudice are more persuaded by Blacks communicating high quality arguments than by Whites using high quality arguments (Petty, Fleming, & White, 1999). Whites who are high in prejudice show the opposite pattern; when argument quality is high, they are more persuaded by White communicators than Black communicators (Petty et al., 1999). This work suggests that individuals who want to appear low in prejudice put more effort into evaluating the communicator's message when the communicator is a member of a stigmatized group.

While previous research has demonstrated that audience characteristics matter, the current work extends this finding by suggesting that people's worldview beliefs will influence how they perceive claims of discrimination. Some people hold a meritocracy worldview; they believe that individuals from any group can get ahead in America and that success stems from hard work (Major, Kaiser, O'Brien, & McCoy, 2007). Others reject this belief and do not think that hard work necessarily leads to success. A claim of discrimination, suggesting that an individual's progress toward success can be significantly and systematically hampered, is inconsistent with meritocracy ideologies. Thus, discrimination violates the worldview of high meritocracy endorsers because they believe that it is possible for anyone to get ahead if they work hard enough. Therefore, higher meritocracy endorsers believe that discrimination should not influence success. In contrast, discrimination confirms the worldview of meritocracy rejecters because they expect discrimination to be a factor that limits people's success.

The Current Research

Prior work suggests that reactions to claims of discrimination are influenced by the messenger's group membership, the strength of the message, and audience characteristics. Much of the past work has investigated each of these variables separately, or in a way that did not

allow for an analysis of the independent and joint effects of each variable on perceivers' reactions (e.g., Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Czopp et al., 2006; Kaiser & Miller, 2001). The current work takes a more integrated approach by examining how these three variables operate together to shape perceivers' reactions.

The present work builds on previous research in three ways. First, it extends earlier work focusing on the communicator by exploring how his race affects perceivers' reactions (Experiment 1). Specifically, the present work examines whether the evaluative backlash toward claimants might differ depending on the target's group membership, and also how it may be moderated by other factors within the confrontation context. Second, it extends limited earlier work focusing on the hostility of the message by examining instead how assertively (strongly) the claim is presented (Experiment 1) and the quality of the arguments used to support the claim (Experiment 2). Finally, the current work extends earlier work focusing on the perceiver by examining whether worldview beliefs influence reactions when claimants vary in racial group membership (Experiment 2).

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 examined the extent to which characteristics of the communicator (racial group membership) and the strength of the claim shape perceivers' reactions to a person claiming discrimination. In addition to adding to the literature by examining how the claim is conveyed, the present work also departs from prior work in another way. Prior work has focused on claims of discrimination in which either the communicator argued that his own failure resulted from discrimination (Kaiser & Miller, 2001), or situations in which the claim was directed toward participants who had been made to feel that they had personally acted in a biased manner (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Czopp et al., 2006). Thus, in prior work, the message itself was confounded

with its self-threatening quality. In contrast, in the present experiment, the claims of discrimination focused on an institutional level of discrimination rather than one person's discriminatory actions. Using a claim of institutional discrimination should be less self-threatening, and hence minimize the confound between self-threat and the content of the message.

To examine these issues, I simulated an interpersonal interaction. Participants watched a video of their partner (a confederate) who was either Black or White. In the video, the partner gave a short speech that either strongly or mildly claimed societal discrimination toward Blacks, or did not claim discrimination. Participants also gave their own speech in reaction to the partner's (confederate's) speech.

We hypothesized that majority group members (i.e., White perceivers) would be more likely to perceive a minority group member (i.e., a Black communicator) more negatively (e.g., as a complainer), and therefore they would evaluate the Black communicator less favorably than the White communicator when each claimed discrimination, especially when the claim was strong. We therefore predicted an interaction between communicator's race and strength of claim. We did not expect differences in reactions to Black or White speakers in the neutral condition when they did not make claims of discrimination.

Method

Participants

Participants (n=196) were undergraduate White males and females (n=115) from Tufts University. Students from the Introductory Psychology Participant Pool took part for a course requirement. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 24.

Design

The experiment used a 2 (Communicator Race: Black or White) \times 3 (Strength of Argument: Strong, Mild, or Neutral) between-subjects design.

Procedure

Pre-speech. When the participant arrived at the laboratory, he/she was greeted by the experimenter and seated at a computer terminal in an isolated cubicle. The participant learned that another participant (described as his or her partner) was in another cubicle and had started the experiment about a half hour earlier. After the participant had read the informed consent, the experimenter returned to the participant's room and finished giving him/her instructions. The experimenter explained that the study focused on partner interactions and communication. The experimenter also indicated that the participant would hear his or her partner's pre-recorded speech and then give an evaluation speech in response.

The experimenter further explained that the partner (the confederate) had already recorded his speech and that it had been transferred to the participant's computer via a flash-drive. The experimenter gave participants a blank piece of paper and explained that they would be able to jot down notes about their partner's speech and/or their upcoming speech. Participants learned that they had 2-minutes to prepare their speech and that it was important for them to portray their honest and true opinions. The experimenter also explained that, after the participant recorded his or her speech, it would be taken to the partner's computer via flash-drive and the partner would comment on it. Next, participants viewed a 2-minute speech prerecorded by the confederate with whom they were paired. The independent variables were manipulated in the recorded speeches.

Post-speech. After the 2-minute preparation period, participants gave a 2-minute speech that was recorded using a webcam. Once they finished recording their speech, the experimenter transferred it to a flash drive and participants completed a variety of dependent measures (described below). The experimenter informed participants that, while they were completing the questionnaires, their partner was going to watch their speech, answer a few questions, and then go home. When participants finished, the experimenter thoroughly debriefed them and probed for suspicion. During this process, the experimenter explained details about the study and gradually revealed that the other participant was in fact a confederate and his comments were in no way a reflection of his true attitudes. The experimenter requested that the participant not discuss the study with anyone else so that future participants would be able to give natural responses. The goals of the debriefing were to find out whether participants had any suspicions about the purpose of the study or the confederate, to give participants a better understanding of the research, and to answer any questions about the research. At the end of the study, the experimenter thanked the participants for taking part in the study.

Independent Variables

Communicator race. Participants were exposed to a video of a male confederate who was either Black or White. We pretested the faces to confirm that they were categorized into the correct racial group. We also verified that the faces did not vary on any important variables. There were no significant differences in attractiveness for the White confederate ($M = 3.43$) vs. the Black confederate ($M = 3.43$); on friendliness for the White confederate ($M = 4.07$) vs. the Black confederate ($M = 4.14$); or on hostility for the White confederate ($M = 2.71$) vs. the Black confederate ($M = 3.07$). All confederates recorded a pre-recorded speech for the neutral, mild,

and strong conditions. Confederates practiced the script and recorded the speech multiple times until they were able to give the speech in a natural manner.

Strength of claim. Participants viewed a video of a confederate giving a speech in which he strongly claimed discrimination, mildly claimed discrimination, or did not claim discrimination. Earlier, participants learned that their partner had been asked to talk about “Culture Houses on Campus” or “Dorm Life,” depending on the condition. The strong and mild speeches focused on the topic of culture houses on campus and were very similar, except that the strong speech included stronger, more assertive language and more direct statements (e.g. “I think that it is important for Blacks to be able to connect with a Black community, especially because Tufts is a predominantly White campus. I definitely think that it is unnecessary for White people to have their own house. I mean everywhere is a White house.”). The milder speech focused on culture houses but the statements were not as extreme or assertive (e.g., “I think that it is good that Tufts offers an Africana house. I think that it is important for Black students to be able to connect with a Black community. I don’t know if there is a White house or not.”). Note that the communicator did not make any claims that he had personally experienced discrimination; instead he claimed that institutions are still discriminatory and that this type of environment has consequences for Black students. The neutral speech focused on the topic of dorm life and did not include any mention of race or discrimination. Speeches were pretested to make sure that they varied on strength. A separate sample of pretest participants rated the speeches on a 7-point scale to indicate the extent to which they believed that the speech was extreme (“Not at all extreme” to “Very extreme”). The strong speech was significantly more extreme than the neutral speech, $t(28) = 3.53, p = .001$, and than the mild speech, $t(28) = 2.12, p$

< .05. The mild speech was marginally more extreme than the neutral speech, $t(28) = 1.62$, $p = .116$.

Measures

Negative Impression Ratings. This scale consisted of six items assessing the extent to which the participant was hypersensitive, racist, a complainer, hostile, emotional, and argumentative (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). Ratings were made on a 1 to 7 point scale (“Not at all” to “Very much”). The items on this scale were internally consistent ($\alpha = .82$).

Positive Impression Ratings. Participants rated the confederate on a 15-item scale measuring favorable impressions ($\alpha = .93$). Ratings were made on a 1 to 7 point scale (“Not at all” to “Very much”). This scale consisted of items assessing the extent to which the participant was likable, friendly, honest, easy to get along with, intelligent, independent, responsible, optimistic, respectable, considerate, nice to converse with, made a good impression, would be a good friend, would be a good coworker, and had a good personality (Kaiser & Miller, 2001).

Results

Impressions of the Communicator

Negative Impressions. We predicted that there would be an evaluative backlash for Black claimants such that they would be rated more negatively than White claimants, especially in the strong claim condition. A 3 (speech type) \times 2 (race of partner) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for speech type, $F(2, 190) = 22.81$, $p < .0001$. Overall, participants rated all confederates who made strong claims more negatively than those who made mild and neutral claims. Planned contrasts indicated that targets giving the neutral speech were rated less negatively than those giving a mild speech, $t(193) = 3.78$, $p < .001$, and than those giving the strong speech, $t(193) = 6.40$, $p < .0001$. Also, claimants giving the strong speech were rated

more negatively than those giving the mild speech, $t(193) = 2.66, p < .01$. There also was a main effect of the confederate's race; overall, the Black communicator was rated more negatively than the White communicator $F(1,190) = 8.34, p < .01$.

However, consistent with our prediction, the main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between the claimant's race and strength of claim, $F(2,190) = 6.20, p = .002$. Figure 1 shows that, when the Black confederate strongly claimed discrimination, he was evaluated significantly more negatively than the White confederate. Planned comparisons indicated that the Black confederate was rated more negatively than the White confederate when he strongly claimed discrimination, $t(190) = 4.48, p < .0001$. Although the Black confederate also was evaluated more negatively than the White confederate when he made a mild claim, this contrast was not significant, $t(190) = 1.36, p > .05$. As expected, perceivers did not differ in their ratings of the Black versus White confederate in the no claim condition $t(190) = -.610, p > .05$. In addition, within the conditions in which participants viewed the Black confederate, they rated him more negatively in the mild compared to neutral speech condition, $t(190) = 3.82, p < .0001$, and more negatively in the strong compared to the neutral condition, $F(190) = 7.35, p < .0001$. They also rated the Black communicator more negatively in the strong compared to mild speech condition, $F(190) = 3.47, p < .001$. Within the conditions in which participants viewed the White confederate, they rated the him more negatively in the strong speech compared to neutral speech condition, $t(190) = 2.28, p < .05$, but the White communicator was not rated more negatively in the neutral compared to mild or the mild compared to strong speech conditions. Thus, when a Black confederate made a claim of societal discrimination toward his group, he was perceived more negatively (e.g., as more of a complainer) than a White confederate who made exactly the same claim.

Positive Impressions. We further tested our hypothesis by examining perceivers' evaluations along the positive dimension. We performed an analysis of variance on positive impressions by the claimant's race (Black or White) and strength of claim (none, mild, strong). The main effect of strength of claim was significant, $F(2,190) = 9.89, p < .0001$. Overall, participants rated all confederates who made strong claims less positively than those who made mild and neutral claims. Planned contrasts indicated that confederates giving the neutral speech were rated more positively than those giving the mild speech, $t(193) = 2.32, p < .05$, and those giving the strong speech, $t(193) = 4.51, p < .0001$. Participants also rated strong claimants less positively than mild claimants, $t(193) = 2.25, p < .05$. However, the interaction between claimant's race and strength of claim was not significant for positive impressions, $F(2, 190) = .867, n.s.$

Discussion

Experiment 1 examined how majority group members react to claims of discrimination. Specifically, it focused on integrating two variables: the claimant's race and the strength of the claim. Our findings support the idea that these factors must be considered together to understand perceivers' impressions of individuals who claim discrimination. Our main findings were: (a) strong claims led to more negative and less positive reactions to all claimants and (b) Black claimants were perceived more negatively than White claimants, particularly when they made strong claims of discrimination. Experiment 1 clarifies findings from previous research (Czopp et al., 2006; Rasinki & Czopp, 2010) by demonstrating that, although claimants are generally viewed less favorably when they strongly claim discrimination, a communicator who is a member of a devalued group and strongly claims discrimination is viewed even more negatively. Experiment 2 examined whether this backlash might be diminished when claimants use higher

quality (vs. lower quality) arguments. Furthermore, Experiment 2 also investigated how a characteristic of the perceiver (i.e., the degree to which perceivers endorse a meritocracy worldview) may influence evaluations of communicators making claims of discrimination.

Experiment 2

In Experiment 1, we found that there was an evaluative backlash for Blacks when they strongly claimed discrimination: Black claimants making a strong claim were evaluated more negatively (i.e. as hostile and complainers) than White claimants conveying the same message. Experiment 2 builds on this work by varying how a strong claim is made. Specifically, in Experiment 2, we manipulated argument quality to test whether the backlash for Black claimants is reduced when they use higher (vs. lower) quality arguments.

What Do They Say? The Message Revisited

In general, high quality arguments are more persuasive, and therefore, it is plausible that high quality arguments might mitigate the negative costs of making strong claims of discrimination. Although Petty et al. (1999) used a message unrelated to discrimination, they suggested that low prejudice individuals process messages from minority sources in a way that allows them to remain consistent with their non-prejudiced viewpoints. The current study builds upon this research in order to examine how high quality arguments are received when the message is related to discrimination. Furthermore, past work on argument quality has mainly looked at the reception of the message (i.e. persuasiveness), not at evaluations of the individual making the argument.

To Whom Do They Say It? The Audience Revisited

Individual characteristics of the perceiver are a crucial factor in understanding how a claim of discrimination (or any persuasive message) will be received. The present experiment

focused how worldview beliefs influence the effectiveness of a claim of discrimination. According to the worldview verification model, violations of expectancies that threaten an individual's worldview also will threaten his/her self-esteem; however, when perceptions confirm an individual's worldview, it will increase his/her self-esteem (Major, Kaiser, O'Brien, & McCoy, 2007). This idea is supported by work showing that, after being exposed to discrimination, women who held meritocracy beliefs experienced lower well-being than those who rejected meritocracy beliefs (Foster & Tsarfati, 2005). This finding holds even for participants who are merely reminded of discrimination against their group. Consistent with the worldview verification model, Latino Americans and women who endorsed meritocracy beliefs showed lower self-esteem when they perceived discrimination toward their group (Major et al., 2007). Furthermore, women who endorsed meritocracy beliefs showed lower self-esteem when they learned that discrimination toward their in-group was prevalent as compared to when they learned that discrimination against their in-group was rare (Major et al., 2007). These studies focused on minority group members who endorsed meritocracy ideologies, but studies also have looked at majority group members who endorse meritocracy ideologies. Whites who endorse worldview beliefs that legitimize the status hierarchy hold more negative attitudes toward strongly identified minorities (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). This work suggests that a Black claimant will elicit a more negative reaction from a perceiver who is White and who also strongly endorses meritocracy ideologies.

Although these studies suggest that people who endorse meritocracy beliefs are negatively impacted when they perceive discrimination or believe that discrimination is prevalent, such individuals may be less likely than those who reject meritocracy beliefs to interpret a situation as discriminatory. People who endorse meritocracy beliefs have been shown

to interpret situations that are inconsistent with their worldview in ways that make those situations more consistent with their worldview, suggesting that meritocracy endorsers versus rejecters may see the same situation quite differently (Ledgerwood, Jost, Mandisodza, & Pohl, 2011).

Because discrimination violates the worldview of individuals who endorse meritocratic beliefs, people with stronger meritocracy beliefs should react more negatively when others claim discrimination (Major et al., 2007). Experiment 2 examines whether people who endorse or reject meritocracy beliefs differ in how they respond to someone who claims discrimination.

In Experiment 2, we investigated (a) whether minority individuals who use high quality arguments would be evaluated less negatively than those who use low quality arguments, and (b) whether evaluative backlash would be heightened among individuals who endorse meritocracy ideologies. To investigate these issues, we used a paradigm similar to the one used in Experiment 1. A White or Black communicator discussed an issue relevant to students, and the speaker claimed discrimination using either high or low quality arguments. As in Experiment 1, the claim was not about personal discrimination; instead, it focused more generally on addressing discrimination by making individuals at colleges and universities more aware and accepting of minority students.

Hypothesis 1. Past work indicates that high quality arguments are perceived more favorably, whereas low quality arguments are associated with more unfavorable thoughts (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Therefore, we reasoned that high quality arguments would be associated with more favorable thoughts and be more persuasive (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Hypothesis 2. Given that high quality arguments can increase the persuasiveness of a message, we predicted an interaction between the claimant's race and quality of arguments.

Therefore, claimants will be less likely to be perceived negatively when they make their case using higher quality arguments. We predicted perceivers would evaluate Black claimants more negatively than White claimants when they used low quality arguments, but Black claimants would be evaluated similarly to White claimants when communicators used high quality arguments.

Hypothesis 3. Our third hypothesis is that the interaction between the claimant's race and quality of argument will be moderated by meritocracy beliefs. We expected that the predicted effect would be more pronounced for people who strongly endorse meritocracy ideologies.

Method

Participants

Participants were 155 undergraduate White males and females ($n = 83$) from Tufts University. Seven participants were excluded due to computer malfunction or because they recognized the confederate. Students from the Introductory Psychology Participant Pool took part for a course requirement. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 24.

Design

The experiment used a 2 (Communicator Race: Black or White) \times 2 (Argument Quality: High or Low) between-subjects design. Meritocracy beliefs were also assessed with a self-report questionnaire (in a separate earlier screening session), and the meritocracy scores were used as a continuous predictor variable.

Procedure

The procedure was similar to Experiment 1. To reduce suspicion, participants learned that their partners had previously recorded their speech in a separate experiment and that the partners were scheduled to come in for a follow up and watch the participant's speech. Instead of writing

notes after listening to the confederate's speech as in Experiment 1, participants instead were given 10 minutes to type their speech. Participants were allowed to read their speech into the video camera. All other aspects of the procedure were identical to Experiment 1.

Independent Variables

Communicator race. Participants were exposed to a video of a male confederate who was either Black or White. We pretested the faces to confirm that they were categorized into the correct racial group. We also verified that the faces did not vary on any important variables. In analyses of the responses of the pretest participants, there were no significant differences on attractiveness for the White confederate ($M = 3.10$) vs. the Black confederate ($M = 3.60$) or on friendliness for the White confederate ($M = 4.30$) vs. the Black confederate ($M = 4.00$). Pretest participants rated the Black confederate ($M = 2.30$) as more hostile than the White confederate ($M = 1.50$), $t(9) = 2.45$, $p < .05$. All confederates recorded a pre-recorded speech for the neutral, low, and high quality conditions.

Argument quality. Participants heard a speech containing arguments for why culture houses are important for Tufts University. The speech included either high quality or low quality arguments for having culture houses on campus. Past work has shown that high quality arguments are associated with more favorable thoughts, whereas low quality arguments are associated with more unfavorable thoughts (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In pilot testing, the high quality arguments produced more favorable thoughts and the low quality arguments elicited more unfavorable thoughts when participants were asked to think about them (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The high quality arguments contained specific examples and supporting evidence for having culture houses at Tufts University (e.g. "Culture houses play a major role in helping minority students deal with these events and keep these biases from having a negative impact on

their college experience”). The low quality arguments contained no examples and superficial evidence to support reasons for having culture houses at Tufts (e.g. “Having culture houses helps to improve Tufts’ image to the outside world”). Both speeches argued in favor of having culture house at Tufts, but the high quality arguments provided more compelling reasons than the low quality arguments. Furthermore, we had a separate set of participants rate the articles on a 4-item persuasiveness scale (persuasiveness, like, well-written, and convincing; $\alpha = .93$). Raters evaluated the arguments on a 7-point scale (“not at all persuasive” to “very persuasive”). The high and low quality arguments differed significantly in persuasiveness in the intended direction: high quality ($M = 3.96$) vs. low quality ($M = 3.46$), $t(48) = 11.24$, $p < .0001$.

Measures

Negative and Positive Impressions. The negative and positive evaluation scales were the same as the ones used in Experiment 1. The items on the negative and positive impression scales were internally consistent ($\alpha = .69$ and $\alpha = .89$).

Thought favorability. After responding to the confederate’s speech, participants were instructed to list any thoughts that went through their minds while they were listening to the speech. Participants were given 10 boxes to list their thoughts and were asked to write one thought per box and not to worry about spelling or grammar. Furthermore, the instructions indicated that they did not need to fill in all 10 boxes but that they should exhaust all of their thoughts (for more details on the thought listing procedure, see Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Coders rated the thoughts as favorable, unfavorable, neutral, or irrelevant. A favorability index was created by subtracting unfavorable thoughts from favorable thoughts, and dividing this score by the total number of message related thoughts (e.g., Brinol, Petty, Gallardo, & DeMarree, 2007;

Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994; Maio et al., 1996; Petty et al., 2002). A higher proportion indexes more positive thoughts. The coders showed high levels of consistency ($\alpha = .98$).

Persuasiveness. After hearing and responding to the speech, participants were asked to rate the argument on a variety of characteristics that measured the persuasiveness of the argument including the extent to which the argument was persuasive and convincing, and the extent to which they liked the argument and thought that the argument was high in quality. Participants made ratings on a 7-point scale (“not at all” to “very much”). The scale was internally consistent ($\alpha = .90$).

Argument agreement. Participants rated on a 7-point scale (“not at all” to “very much”) the extent to which they supported culture houses at Tufts.

Meritocracy Beliefs. Meritocracy beliefs were measured during a prescreening session that occurred at the beginning of the semester. The scale consisted of 16 questions aimed at measuring permeability, legitimacy, belief in a just world, and protestant work ethic. For each item, participants indicate on a 6-point scale the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement (from “strongly disagree” to “neither agree nor disagree” to “strongly agree”). Examples of items that measure permeability include: “Our society is an open society where all individuals can achieve higher status;” and “Individual members of certain groups are often unable to advance in our society.” Examples of the legitimacy items include: “Differences in status between groups in society are fair;” and “It is unfair that certain groups in society have less than other groups.” Examples of the belief in a just world items include: “I feel that people get what they deserve;” and “I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.” Examples of items on the protestant work ethic scale include: “If people work hard they almost always get

what they want;” and “If people work hard enough, they can be whatever they want to be in life.” The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .69$.

Results

Evaluations of the Argument

Thought favorability. We expected that high quality arguments would be associated with more favorable thoughts and be more persuasive. Therefore, we expected high quality arguments would elicit the most favorable thoughts regardless of the claimants’ race and low quality arguments would elicit less favorable thoughts when the claimant was Black. Regardless of whether the claimant was White or Black, participants had more favorable thoughts after hearing the high quality speech compared to the neutral speech, $t(106) = 2.43, p < .05$. Thought favorability did not differ significantly between the low quality and high quality conditions, although thought favorability was nonsignificantly higher in the high quality condition, $t(101) = 1.58, p = .118$. Thought favorability also did not differ significantly between the neutral speech versus the low quality speech. We did not find the predicted difference between thought favorability for Black claimants ($M = -.10$) compared to White ($M = -.22$) claimants in the low quality argument condition. Overall, thought favorability was very low; the means in the neutral ($M = -.23$), low quality ($M = -.16$), and high quality ($M = -.02$) were all less than 1.

Persuasiveness. Participants rated the arguments on a variety of dimensions in order to measure the degree to which they believed the message was persuasive. We expected ratings of persuasiveness to follow a pattern similar to the one predicted for thought favorability. Again, we did not find any differences by claimant’s race in ratings of argument persuasiveness. There was a main effect of argument quality, $F(1, 149) = 4.14, p < .05$. Neither low nor high quality

arguments differed from the neutral message, but high quality arguments were rated significantly higher in persuasiveness than were low quality arguments, $t(101) = 2.74, p < .01$.

Argument Agreement. Participants were most likely to support the arguments (by supporting culture houses at Tufts) when the argument quality was high, $F(2,149) = 3.06, p = .05$. Agreement, however, did not vary by the confederate's race, and or the interaction between race and argument quality.

Impressions of the Communicator

Negative Impressions. We expected that, when the arguments were low quality and the communicator was Black, the claimant would be viewed most negatively. In contrast, when the arguments were high in quality, we expected that the backlash would be lessened and that Black vs. White claimants would be viewed similarly. We also predicted that people would give less negative evaluations when Black claimants used high quality arguments than when they used low quality arguments. A 3 (argument quality) \times 2 (race of communicator) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for argument quality, $F(2, 149) = 12.29, p < .0001$. Overall, participants rated all confederates who made claims of discrimination more negatively than those who did not make a claim. Planned contrasts indicated that targets giving the neutral speech were rated less negatively than those using low quality arguments, $t(152) = 4.71, p < .0001$, and than those using high quality arguments, $t(152) = 3.35, p < .001$. Ratings of claimants in the high vs. low quality argument conditions did not differ significantly. Ratings also did not vary significantly overall by confederate's race.

In line with our prediction, there was a significant interaction between the claimant's race and the quality of arguments, $F(2,149) = 4.12, p = .018$. Figure 2 shows that, only when the Black communicator used low quality arguments to claim discrimination was he evaluated

significantly more negatively than the White communicator. Planned comparisons confirmed that the Black confederate was rated more negatively than the White confederate when he used low quality arguments to claim discrimination, $t(149) = 2.36, p < .05$. In contrast, in the high quality argument condition, impressions of the Black communicator were not significantly more negative than those for the White communicator, $t(149) = 1.08, p > .05$. Furthermore, perceivers did not differ in their ratings of the Black versus White confederate when no claim was made, $t(149) = 1.23, p > .05$. In addition, when participants viewed the Black communicator, they rated him more negatively when he used low quality arguments compared to the neutral condition, $t(149) = 5.19, p < .0001$, and more negatively when he used high quality arguments compared to the neutral condition, $t(149) = 2.47, p < .05$. They also rated the Black communicator more negatively when he used low quality compared to high quality arguments, $t(149) = 2.85, p < .01$. When participants viewed the White communicator, they rated the him more negatively when he used high quality arguments compared to neutral condition, $t(149) = 2.31, p < .05$, but the White communicator was not rated more negatively in the neutral compared to low quality or the low quality compared to high quality conditions. Therefore, when a Black communicator used low quality arguments to make a claim of discrimination, he was perceived more negatively (e.g. as more of a complainer) than a White communicator making exactly the same claim. When the Black claimant used high quality arguments, there was no difference between the negative impressions of Black vs. White communicators.

Positive Impressions. Overall, participants rated the Black communicator ($M = 4.9$) more positively than the White communicator ($M = 4.4$), $F(1,149) = 18.81, p < .0001$. There was not a significant main effect of quality. However, the interaction between argument quality and positive impressions was marginally significant, $F(2, 149) = 3.03, p = .051$. As shown in Figure

3, participants rated the Black communicator much more positively than the White communicator in the neutral condition, $t(149) = 4.28, p < .0001$. There were no differences between positive ratings of the Black vs. White communicator in the low quality or high quality conditions.

Meritocracy Ideologies. We tested whether the effect of the claimant's race and argument quality on negative and positive impressions of the communicator varied as a function of meritocracy beliefs (Hypothesis 3). Recall that we hypothesized that meritocracy beliefs would predict more negative and less positive evaluations when the communicator was Black (vs. White) and made a claim of discrimination, especially when the claim was low in quality; we did not expect differences by meritocracy beliefs when Black vs. White communicators did not discuss discrimination.

To test this idea, we performed regression analyses separately for negative impressions and positive impressions. Predictors included claimants' race, which was effect-coded (-1 for White and 1 for Black), meritocracy scores (centered following Aiken & West, 1991), and quality of arguments. To simplify the analyses (and reduce the number of interaction terms), message quality was included as neutral versus high quality (effect-coded as -1 and 1, respectively) in one set of analyses, and as neutral versus low quality (effect-coded as -1 and 1) in a second set of analyses. For each set of analyses, at Step 1, we entered claimants' race, the quality of argument variable, and meritocracy scores; at Step 2, we entered the two-way interactions (race \times quality; race \times meritocracy; meritocracy \times quality). At Step 3, we entered the three-way interaction (race \times quality \times meritocracy).

Analyses including Neutral versus Low Quality Speech Conditions

Negative Impressions. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the three-way interaction between claimant's race, quality of arguments (neutral vs. low), and meritocracy was significant, $F(1, 91) = 4.10, p < .05, b = .225, \beta = .187$. Figure 4 shows the patterns for participants in the low quality speech condition (Panel A) and in the neutral speech condition (Panel B). In the low quality condition, participants who strongly endorsed meritocracy rated the Black confederate more negatively than the White confederate. People who weakly endorsed meritocracy did not differ on their ratings of the Black and White communicators. The two slopes depicted in the low quality condition differed significantly, $t = 2.30, p = .024$. In contrast, ratings of the Black vs. White confederate did not vary as a function of meritocracy in the neutral speech condition.

Positive Impressions. The predicted three-way interaction between communicator's race, quality of arguments (neutral vs. low), and meritocracy was not significant for positive impressions.

Analyses including Neutral versus High Quality Conditions

Negative Impressions. A second set of analyses followed the same analytic strategy outlined above but compared the neutral versus high quality conditions. The three-way interaction between claimant's race, quality of arguments (neutral vs. high quality), and meritocracy was not significant for negative impressions, $F(1, 101) = .059, ns, b = .101, \beta = .025$. Also, none of the other effects involving meritocracy were significant.

Positive Impressions. The three-way interaction also was not significant for positive impressions.

Discussion

Experiment 2 extends previous work by using the attitude and persuasion literature to examine whether the backlash against Black claimants might be reduced or increased depending on the quality of the arguments used in the claim. Consistent with predictions, we demonstrated that Black claimants were evaluated more negatively when they used low quality claims of discrimination. When communicators used high quality arguments, White participants gave similar evaluations to both Black and White claimants.

Furthermore, Experiment 2 also investigated whether one characteristic of perceivers, the extent to which they endorsed a meritocracy worldview, might differentially predict reactions to claims of discrimination. We found that, when people strongly endorsed a meritocracy worldview, they more negatively evaluated Black claimants but only when the claimant used low quality arguments. This effect was eliminated when claimants used high quality arguments. Overall, these findings suggest that the communicator's race and message quality as well as perceivers' meritocracy beliefs are important predictors of how individuals perceive claims of discrimination. Furthermore, they indicate that, by altering message quality, it is possible to reduce backlash toward Black claimants.

General Discussion

The current work examined how majority group members react to claims of discrimination. Specifically, it focused on integrating three important variables: the claimants' race, aspects of the message (strength of the claim, quality of the message), and the perceivers' worldview beliefs. Our findings support the idea that these factors must be considered together to understand perceivers' impressions of individuals who claim discrimination. Our main findings were: (a) there is an evaluative backlash for Blacks making strong claims (Experiment 1), (b) high quality arguments reduce the backlash of making a strong claim (Experiment 2), (c) when

the arguments are low in quality, the backlash effect for Black claimants is mainly driven by perceivers who strongly endorse meritocracy ideologies (Experiment 2), and (d) using high quality arguments eliminates the costs of claiming discrimination for Blacks, even when the perceiver strongly endorses meritocracy ideologies (Experiment 2). Each of these findings is discussed in turn.

Interaction between Claimants' Race and Strength of Claim

Consistent with our predictions in Experiment 1, we found that, after being exposed to strong claims of discrimination in general (at an institutional level), White perceivers more negatively rated a Black claimant compared to a White claimant. Past research has found that, when a Black individual claims that he has been a victim of discrimination, he will be more likely to be seen as a complainer than a comparable Black individual who does not make such a claim (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). As the present work examined claims against society, our findings suggest that backlash against Blacks generalizes beyond claims directed toward an individual.

Experiment 1 also extended previous work by showing that White perceivers more negatively evaluate Black targets who claim discrimination. Past work has demonstrated that Black individuals who confront discrimination are viewed as more rude and less persuasive by a third party (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). Yet, past work did not find differences in negative impressions of Black confronters for one-on-one interactions (Czopp & Monteith, 2006). Experiment 1 suggests that the intensity of the claim plays a crucial role in determining whether there will be a backlash when a Black person makes a claim of discrimination. In Experiment 2, we were able to diminish the backlash of claiming discrimination, even for strong claims, by increasing message quality.

Interaction between Claimants' Race and Message Quality

Previous work on confronting discrimination has focused on the negative consequences of confronting or making a claim of discrimination (Czopp & Monteith, 2006; Kaiser & Miller, 2001). The present work adds by demonstrating one way to overcome the costs of claiming discrimination. A claim of discrimination is also a persuasive message and often the goal of a claim is to try to alter someone's opinions and/or actions. Previous work has demonstrated that high quality arguments are more persuasive, but prior work has not shown whether they reduce negative evaluations of the communicator (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

To test whether the costs of claiming discrimination vary as a function of the message and the claimant, in Experiment 2, we manipulated the quality of the arguments used when a Black or White individual made a claim of discrimination in an attempt to reduce the negative consequences of claiming discrimination. In line with previous work, we found that White perceivers generally held less favorable impressions of claimants than of non-claimants. Also, we found that high quality messages were more persuasive, regardless of claimant race. More importantly, the quality of the message influenced perceivers' impressions: White perceivers gave less negative ratings to Black and White claimants who used high quality arguments. In contrast, White perceivers more negatively rated Black claimants than White claimants only when the claimants used low quality arguments. This work suggests that high quality claims lead to more favorable outcomes for Black claimants but that the quality of the arguments matters less for White claimants. Contrary to our expectations, individuals' ratings of how persuasive the message was did not vary as a function of the interaction between race and

message quality. Overall, however, we found that individuals rated high quality arguments as more persuasive than low quality arguments, and they were more persuaded by high quality arguments.

Perceivers' Ideologies and Evaluations of the Claimant

The present work extends research on meritocracy ideologies by exploring how meritocracy endorsers react when they are exposed to claims of discrimination. We expected that people who strongly endorse meritocracy would evaluate Black claimants most negatively when they used low quality arguments, but not when they used high quality arguments. As predicted, we found that the extent to which participants endorsed meritocracy predicted more negative ratings of Black communicators only when they used low quality arguments. In contrast, when the communicator used high quality arguments, people who strongly endorsed meritocracy gave similar evaluations of Black and White claimants. These findings are consistent with previous work that suggests that meritocracy endorsers often evaluate Black targets more negatively (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), but our findings suggest that these negative evaluations also depend on the quality of the message. Specifically, people who endorsed meritocracy beliefs were less likely to view a Black claimant in a negative way if the claimant used high quality arguments.

One possibility is that people who strongly endorse meritocracy beliefs feel more justified in their negative evaluations because the arguments are low in quality, yet they are only more negative when the claimant is Black. This explanation is consistent with the notion of aversive racism (e.g., Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2009), which suggests that, despite generally egalitarian values, racism surfaces in subtle ways when there is some ambiguity in the situation. Thus, evaluative backlash toward Blacks might be most likely to occur when it can be

justified in terms of some other feature of the situation that is not related to race. Our findings further suggest that this form of aversive racism might be most likely to occur among individuals who hold particular worldview beliefs (i.e., those who endorse meritocracy ideologies).

Another possibility is that people who strongly endorse meritocracy believe that Black communicators using low quality arguments are more typical of their group. Previous work has shown that people who strongly endorse meritocracy are more negative towards highly identified Blacks (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). It is plausible that Black claimants using high quality arguments are viewed as counter-typical group members, whereas Black claimants using low quality arguments are viewed as typical group members. Future work is necessary in order to fully understand the role of worldview beliefs in evaluating claims of discrimination.

The current research suggests that endorsing meritocracy ideologies is associated with more negative impressions of Black targets when they claim discrimination using low quality arguments. Perceivers who strongly endorse meritocracy did not more negatively view Black targets when they used high quality arguments. This finding suggests that the claiming discrimination using high quality arguments has the lowest costs for Blacks who claim discrimination. The current work extends the literature on claiming discrimination by looking at how characteristics of the perceiver influence evaluations of claimants. Furthermore, we found that, even among individuals who strongly endorse meritocracy ideologies, backlash was eliminated when the claimant used high quality arguments.

Limitations

This research has a few limitations. We had only one confederate representing each race group. This limitation makes it hard to know whether the findings were driven by a particular confederate. Although the pretest data demonstrated that the confederates did vary as intended

along the dimensions of Afrocentricity and Eurocentricity, it is possible that the perceivers' evaluations were based on characteristics other than the confederate's racial appearance. However, the same Black confederate and the same White confederate was used in each of the conditions (i.e., neutral, mild, strong in Experiment 1; neutral, low quality, high quality in Experiment 2), and the fact that differences occurred across each of these conditions within race (e.g., in Experiment 2, the same Black communicator was evaluated differently in the neutral vs. low vs. high quality conditions) increases our confidence in the findings. Furthermore, different confederates were used in Experiments 1 and 2, suggesting that the effects may be robust across different representatives of each racial group.

Second, meritocracy beliefs were measured and not manipulated, and thus the findings involving meritocracy beliefs are correlational. For this reason, it is not clear whether meritocracy beliefs lead to different perceptions of Black claimants, or whether a third variable related to meritocracy beliefs (e.g., degree to which people endorse prejudiced beliefs) might account for the effect.

Conclusions and Implications

The current research integrates three important variables to try to understand how people respond to claims of discrimination. Experiment 1 showed that the claimant's race and the strength of the claim interact to influence reactions to claims of discrimination. When the claimant was Black and strongly claimed discrimination, perceivers viewed him more negatively than when the claimant was White. In Experiment 2, we found a similar pattern of results when communicators used low quality arguments to claim discrimination. The Black communicator was rated more negatively when he used low quality arguments. When Black claimant's used high quality arguments, they were not rated more negatively than were White claimants.

Furthermore, when the perceiver endorsed a meritocracy worldview, they more negatively evaluated Black claimants using low quality arguments, but not Black claimants using high quality arguments.

This work has implications for understanding how people may respond when someone claims discrimination. Our findings suggest that mild claims of discrimination lead to less negative evaluations than do strong claims, and therefore mild claims may be more effective. Our findings also suggest that when making a strong claim of discrimination, high quality claims are most effective. Furthermore, our findings suggest that characteristics of the claimant and perceiver may contribute to the effectiveness of discrimination claims, and therefore it will be important to determine how to reduce or eliminate potential negative effects arising from both of these sources.

Taken together, Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 clarify the conditions under which people from advantaged groups are most likely to recognize legitimate claims of discrimination and to respond favorably to the claimant. This work moves beyond prior research on confronting discrimination by drawing on theory and research from the attitude and persuasion literature to create a novel, more integrated approach. Furthermore, this work suggests some conditions under which confronting discrimination may lead to attitude and behavior change and that remain to be explored in future research. Finally, this research has the potential to directly inform interventions designed to help individuals successfully confront discrimination and to promote smoother interracial exchanges.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Negative Partner Impression by Speech Type and Race of Speaker.

Figure 2. Negative Partner Impression by Quality and Race of Speaker.

Figure 3. Positive Partner Impression by Quality and Race of Speaker.

Figure 4. Claimant's Race, Speech Type (Neutral vs. Low Quality) and Meritocracy Beliefs as Predictors of Negative Partner Impression.







