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## Minimizing the Pervasiveness of Women's Personal Experiences of Gender Discrimination

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Discrimination

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Abstract

Given the Rejection-Identification Model (Branscombe, et al., 1999) which shows that perceiving discrimination to be pervasive is a negative experience, it was suggested that there would be conditions under which women would instead minimize the pervasiveness of discrimination. Study 1 ( $N = 91$ ) showed that when women envisioned themselves in a situation of academic discrimination, they defined it as pervasive but when they experienced a similar laboratory simulation of academic discrimination, its pervasiveness was minimized. Study 2 ( $N = 159$ ) showed that women who envisioned themselves experiencing discrimination minimized its pervasiveness more so than women reading about discrimination happening to someone else. Further, mediation analysis showed that minimizing the pervasiveness enhanced positive affect about personal discrimination. Implications for minimizing on both an individual and social level are discussed.

### Minimizing the Pervasiveness of Women's Personal Experiences of Gender Discrimination

In 1989, after the Montreal Massacre (where a man shot 14 women on a university campus, because he thought they were feminists), there were debates about how this incident of gender discrimination should be defined (Malette & Chalouh, 1991). One opinion that arose was that the tragedy was solely the act of a madman and could not happen again. In other words, the Massacre was defined as an isolated event. A second opposing opinion was that the murderer's actions were instead reflective of a wider problem, namely society's condoning of violence against women. It was argued that women had been targeted in the past (e.g., Salem Witch Trials), showing that discrimination against women had persisted in time. In addition, this was only one among many contexts in which violence against women had already occurred (e.g., domestic abuse, rape, stalking). Thus, this opinion was defining the Montreal Massacre as an example of the pervasiveness of society's discrimination against women.

Indeed, defining discrimination as isolated or pervasive can have differential psychological implications for its victims. In particular, the Rejection Identification Model (RIM; Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999) argues that defining discrimination as pervasive has negative psychological implications. Defining discrimination as pervasive involves the recognition that as a disadvantaged group member, one is experiencing more severe types of discrimination (e.g., safety issues) than members of advantaged groups, as well as expectations that discrimination will occur again in the future and across a wider variety of contexts. The

model distinguishes between recognizing that a single event of discrimination has occurred, and defining the cause of that event as pervasive. A woman may recognize she has experienced discrimination, but if she defines that experience as something that is isolated, the consequences will be different than if she defines that experience as pervasive.

More specifically, it is the belief that discrimination is pervasive that is hypothesized to impair well-being. In other words, being rejected by the dominant group is a painful experience. For example, Branscombe et al. (1999) showed that African-Americans' perceptions that discrimination had occurred in the past, and will again in the future were related to decreased personal and collective well-being. Similarly, Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz and Owen (2002) showed that women's perceptions of ingroup disadvantage, outgroup privilege, attributions for prejudice across contexts and past experience with discrimination were related to decreased psychological well-being (life satisfaction, personal self-esteem, positive affect, anxiety, depression). In an experimental study, testing the causal relationship between perceived pervasive discrimination and well-being, Schmitt, Branscombe and Postmes (2003) manipulated situations of pervasive versus rare discrimination in two studies. In Study 1, they showed participants one of two essays, depicting either reductions in sexism (rare discrimination) or the high incidence of sexism (pervasive). In Study 2, they manipulated women's attributions for a single event, by describing one (rare) or many (pervasive) sexist confederate(s) as discriminatory. In both studies, those exposed to pervasive discrimination reported lower self-esteem and less positive affect than those exposed to rare

discrimination. Thus, the empirical evidence supports the RIM in that disadvantaged groups who define discrimination as pervasive also show decreased well-being.

If defining discrimination as pervasive is such a negative experience, it is logical to expect that under certain conditions, disadvantaged groups would seek to redefine this meaning of discrimination. Although the RIM examines the consequences of perceiving pervasive discrimination, it has not yet addressed possible antecedents of perceiving pervasive discrimination. Thus, the purpose of this research is to examine conditions under which women may define discrimination as isolated or pervasive.

Given that defining general discrimination as pervasive is painful (Branscombe et al., 1999), we suggest that when women are confronted with a personal experience of discrimination, one way of re-defining this event in a less stressful way will be to minimize its pervasiveness. For example, a young woman who is told by a teacher that her math abilities will not exceed that of her male classmates, may recognize she is being discriminated against, but at the same time seek to minimize the pervasiveness of the event across time (“it can’t happen again”) or context (“it won’t affect me anywhere else”). Indeed, public institutions such as the police, or public health offices often define negative events as isolated in order to avoid a “public panic”. In the case of the Montreal Massacre, the reference to the tragedy as a random act of violence may have been a means to reduce public fear about the possibility of increasing hate crimes. Thus, if extreme or personal events are too obvious to deny, a means of re-defining it in a less stressful way may be to minimize its pervasiveness.

The first study was therefore designed to examine women's definitions of discrimination before and after confronting an obvious situation of gender discrimination. We operationally defined minimization of pervasiveness as the use of unstable and specific attributions, and perceived pervasiveness as the use of stable and global attributions for discrimination. This is consistent with the RIM which has defined perceived pervasiveness as the belief that discrimination is stable across time and is widespread across contexts (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt et al., 2002). Women were first asked to envision an academic situation of discrimination and their attributions for this situation were measured. Later in the semester, these same women were asked to participate in an ostensibly different study. They were exposed to an academic situation of gender discrimination, and then measured again on their attributions for this experience. It was hypothesized that women would minimize the pervasiveness of discrimination (i.e., use more unstable and specific attributions) more so when they were confronting a situation of academic discrimination than when they had envisioned such a situation.

### Study 1

#### *Participants*

Female participants from psychology courses ( $N = 391$ , Mean age = 21,  $SD = 2.81$ ) participated in a mass-testing session. Reported ethnicity of students was 94% European-American, .4% African-American, 1.8% American-Indian and 3.8% labeled themselves as "other." One hundred of these women were telephoned later in the semester and asked to

participate in a presumably unrelated study for course credit. Ninety-one agreed to participate and the reported ethnicity was the similar due to the homogeneity of the region: 93.4% European-American, 1.1% African-American, 2.3% American-Indian, and 3.2% "other".

### *Procedure*

*Pre-testing.* During a mass-testing session, psychology students completed a variety of questionnaires for several researchers. For this study in particular, women were asked to imagine themselves in an academic situation of discrimination and to indicate their attributions for this situation.

*Laboratory simulation of discrimination.* Participants entered the lab in groups of five to 10. Two men per session were also included in the experiment because past research has shown the discrimination manipulation is more realistic when men are present (Foster, 2001; Foster, Matheson, & Poole, 1994), However, because the men leave the experiment before dependent measures are collected, they were not included in the analyses.

Participants were first given an overview of what the experiment would entail. That overview was in reality, a cover story designed to conceal the purpose of the study. Specifically, a female research assistant told participants that this was an experiment in a program of studies that investigated test-taking anxiety. To assess how their anxiety might be related to test performance, they would first complete a sample task, similar to what appears on the Graduate Record Examination, a standardized test used for admittance into graduate school. They would be given five multiple choice questions to complete in five minutes. After



completion of the questions, their scores would be assessed by the experimenter using the criteria that testing agencies had presumably provided. Allegedly, only the highest scoring participants would then be selected to enter what was called the “video group.” The other participants would remain behind to participate in an alleged second part of the experiment.

The purpose of these group delineations was to simulate a meritocratic situation (e.g., Foster, Matheson & Poole, 1994; Foster, 2001; Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1990). As such, the methodological goal was to establish a group that participants would aspire to be in and inclusion would reflect personal success and high social value. The second group represented a lack of success and low social value. This differential evaluation of the two groups was achieved by varying the mundaneness of the task and the rewards associated with the work performed. Supposedly, those who performed well would be asked to provide some ideas about how to develop a video for students that might help them overcome the anxiety associated with test-taking. They were told this would occur in a different experimental room, where refreshments would be served and that they would be eligible for a \$100 lottery. Thus, their skills were valued by the experimenters and they could receive a large reward. In contrast, those who did not perform well would continue to complete a series of tests that would assess whether their performance generalizes to other types of skills such as math. Also, they would only be eligible for a \$10 lottery. Thus, their continuation in the experiment would be tedious, their skills less valued by the experimenter, and only a small reward could be received. In reality, the task and scoring were bogus, and all participants were eligible for the \$100 lottery.

To make the potential for gender discrimination salient, the experimenter warned participants,

I should warn you that this task and the way it is scored could be considered to be discriminatory against women. It seems that women don't do well on this task and so it is very rare that women are allowed into the video group, while men almost always get in. We can talk about this after the experiment if you like, but we do have time limitations for this experiment so we should continue.

Participants were then given five minutes to complete their tasks, which were then collected and ostensibly scored by a male research assistant (who had presumably been chosen to help with the experiment because of his success in the video group in a previous session). False feedback was then given such that only women received a failing score while men received a passing score. Those who "passed" were then asked to follow a male research assistant to a different room where they would presumably participate in the video development. As only the men left the room (in reality, to be debriefed), it became clear that consistent with the warning, only men were successful. After the men had left, female participants completed a questionnaire and told the alleged second part of the experiment would follow the questionnaire. This questionnaire was described as a way to assess their opinions on the use of the task but actually contained the manipulation checks and dependent measures. Once they had completed the questionnaire, they were told that this was the end of the experiment and then given an oral and written debriefing. This debriefing, given to both women and men, is a detailed, four-page description of the purpose of the study, an explanation as to why deception was necessary to examine the purpose, repeated confirmation

that their performance was not actually measured, as well as a contact sheet with phone numbers of local counseling centers, the researcher, and the chair of the Psychology Department. Discussions after debriefing in this and other studies indicate that participants understand the need for deception to obtain spontaneous reactions, and no adverse reactions have been reported (Foster, 1999, 2001; Foster, Matheson, & Poole, 1994). *Materials*

*Mass testing scenario and attributions.* During the mass testing session, participants were asked to imagine themselves in the following scenario, derived from the Attributions for Discrimination Questionnaire (Foster, 2001):

As a part of a demonstration in one of your classes, the whole class is asked to complete a short task assessing your cognitive ability. The professor warns the class that the women should try extra hard because this particular measure has been known to yield low scores for women, while men end up always performing well. The professor grades the tasks after everyone has completed it and says, "The men performed well, the women did not".

Women then indicated on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 how much what was happening in the scenario was "extremely likely to be present again" to "not at all likely to be present again" (unstable/stable) and how much it was likely to influence "just this situation" to "all other areas of my life" (specific/global.) Higher scores reflected stable and global attributions for discrimination.

*Laboratory measures of Attributions and Affect.* After being exposed to gender

discrimination in the lab participants read: “Today in the experiment you were told that you either passed or failed a certain task.” Unstable/stable attributions were assessed by asking “In the future, will the reason you either passed or failed the task be present, i.e., will it affect your performance in the future?”. Specific/global attributions were asked by asking “Does the reason you either passed or failed the task influence just this situation, or does it also influence other areas of your life?” These questions were based on the Attribution Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Peterson, Semmel, von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky & Seligman, 1982) and were scored along a 0 to 10 scale so that higher scores reflected stable and global attributions.

Participants were then asked to indicate how they “feel at this moment” using 13 adjectives based on Nowlis’ Mood Adjective Checklist (MACL; 1965). They rated the adjectives on a scale ranging from “not at all like this” (0) to “extremely likely like this” (10). Three adjectives were combined for a mean anger (angry, frustrated, resentful; Cronbach alpha = .85), five were combined for a mean positive affect (calm, easy-going, comfortable, relaxed, content; Cronbach alpha = .92), and five were combined for a mean general negative affect (upset, tense, nervous, confused, unsure; Cronbach alpha = .84). Research shows that people can experience both positive and negative feelings simultaneously, and that as one type (e.g., negative) of affect increases, the other (e.g., positive) does not necessarily disappear. As such, these scales were analyzed separately, rather than as one overall measure of affect (e.g., Larsen, McGraw & Cacioppo, 2001; Schimmack, 2001).

*Manipulation check.* To assess whether an experience of gender discrimination was

adequately portrayed, participants read, “Ethical guidelines require that we ask several questions”. They were then asked to indicate “In this experiment, how fairly were you personally treated due to your gender?” and “how much did this task discriminate against you personally, due to your gender?” using a scale ranging from “not at all” (0) to “extremely” (10). Scores on the fairness question were re-coded so that higher scores reflected both higher perceived unfairness and personal discrimination.

### Results

*Manipulation Check.* For the manipulation of discrimination to have been successful, women would need to score toward the high end of the scale on both measures. A Student’s t-test for one sample was used to test scores against the midpoint of the scale (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Women’s scores were significantly higher than the midpoint on both the unfairness measure ( $M = 6.30, SD = 3.11, t(90) = 3.93, p = .0001$ ) and the discrimination measure ( $M = 7.03, SD = 3.12, t(90) = 6.21, p = .0001$ ). Thus, women perceived the personal experience of discrimination that was portrayed.

*Main Analysis.* To determine if the pre (during mass testing) and post-discrimination (in the lab) measures of attributions differed, a repeated measures analysis was conducted with context (envisioned, experienced discrimination), and attribution type (stability, globality) as the two repeated measures. There was an interaction between context and attribution type,  $F(1,84) = 43.55, p = .0001, \eta^2 = .341$ . Consistent with expectations, simple effects showed that when envisioning discrimination, women rated it as more pervasive (i.e., stable and global) than

when confronting discrimination (see Table 1). Examined from a different perspective, simple effects also showed that when envisioning discrimination, women rated the scenario as more stable than global. After confronting discrimination, there was only a marginally significant difference such that women rated their experience as more global than stable (see Table 1).

To examine how perceptions of the *amount* of discrimination and *pervasiveness* of discrimination may differentially predict affect, a series of regression analyses were conducted. First, given the strong correlations (see Table 2) the two manipulation check measures were combined to create a composite score of perceived amount of discrimination where high scores reflected high perceived discrimination. In addition, the stability and globality dimensions assessed after confronting discrimination were combined for a composite score of perceived pervasiveness of discrimination. The three affect measures were then regressed onto perceived amount and pervasiveness of discrimination. The discrimination variables predicted variability in negative affect (see Table 3), but only perceived pervasiveness uniquely predicted negative affect, such that the more women perceived their experience to be pervasive, the more negative affect they reported. The discrimination variables also predicted significant variability in positive affect and again, only perceived pervasiveness was uniquely related, such that the more women perceived the pervasiveness of their experience, the less positive affect they reported. Finally, when the discrimination variables were regressed onto anger, both perceived amount, and pervasiveness of discrimination uniquely predicted anger such that the greater the amount of discrimination and the more pervasiveness women perceived, the more

anger they reported.

### Discussion

Consistent with expectations, women's definitions of discrimination differed depending on whether they were envisioning or confronting discrimination. In particular, when women envisioned an experience of academic discrimination, they defined it as more pervasive than when experiencing such a situation. Further, this minimization occurred despite recognizing its existence. That is, women reported experiencing personal discrimination, and as well, the amount of personal discrimination perceived was unrelated to the extent to which it was defined as isolated. This suggests that consistent with the RIM (Branscombe et al., 1999), recognizing that discrimination has occurred is distinct from how it is defined. In this study, women recognized they were experiencing discrimination, yet redefined the experience so that "it won't happen again, and it won't affect me elsewhere".

Also consistent with the RIM (Branscombe et al., 1999), the psychological consequences of this re-definition were positive: minimizing the pervasiveness of the event was associated with decreased negative affect, anger and increased positive affect. In fact, the amount of discrimination perceived was only related to anger. Thus, it is not simply the experience of discrimination, but how women define it that can have implications for affect.

Unexpectedly, the results also showed that the relative use of global versus stable attributions differed depending on the context. In particular, when women were envisioning personally experiencing discrimination they defined it as more pervasive across time (the

stability dimension) than context (the globality dimension). They may have been reasoning “this kind of thing always happens, but it won’t affect other situations in my life”. However, this effect was not maintained upon experiencing discrimination. Instead there was a nonsignificant trend toward defining the actual situation more pervasive across context than time. This may suggest that recognizing the stability of discrimination is most threatening and as such, requires the most redefining.

Despite support for the hypothesis that women will redefine an extreme personal experience of discrimination as more isolated, an alternative explanation is that women’s tendency to minimize the pervasiveness of discrimination was not necessarily due to the stress of discrimination, but rather because of the experimental context of a laboratory study. That is, perhaps women were defining their personal experience as isolated because by definition, what happens in the lab will be isolated in time and across context. Thus, the issue becomes how to test whether women were defining gender discrimination as isolated without exposing them to an isolated laboratory experiment. To do this, a questionnaire study was used, where more general perceptions about two types of discrimination could be assessed. This also enabled us to examine the extent to which minimizing the pervasiveness would occur in other types of discrimination experiences. One group of women read situations of discrimination where they had to envision themselves personally experiencing each, while a second group read situations of discrimination happening to another woman. It was hypothesized that those who envisioned themselves experiencing discrimination would minimize the pervasiveness of



discrimination more so (i.e., use more unstable and specific attributions) than women who read about others' experiences of discrimination.

## Study 2

### *Participants and Procedure*

Female psychology students ( $N = 159$ ) read and signed a consent form, then completed a questionnaire described to them as an investigation into various social opinions. Half the women ( $N = 79$ ) were given a questionnaire that asked them to envision themselves personally experiencing the discrimination depicted in each of 11 situations. The other half of the women ( $N = 80$ ) were given a revised version of the questionnaire that depicted discrimination happening to an unknown woman. Upon completion, women received written and oral debriefing. Participant's average age was 21.2 ( $SD = 2.53$ ) and reported ethnicity of students was 93% European-American, 2.2% American-Indian, and 4.8% labeled themselves as "other."

### *Materials and Experimental Conditions*

*Personal and Other Discrimination scenarios.* Scenarios were derived from the Attributions for Discrimination Questionnaire (Foster, 2001). Scenarios included themes of sexual objectification at work and on the street, sexual harassment, educational/job opportunities and date rape. Those exposed to the personal discrimination scenarios were asked to envision themselves in each scenario via the following instructions:

Please try to imagine **yourself** in each of the situations that follow. Try to imagine how being in each situation would make you feel. If such a situation

happened to you personally, what would you feel would have caused it? While events may have many causes we want you to think about the major cause, and keeping that in mind, think about what you believe caused it and answer the corresponding questions below.

Women exposed to discrimination happening to another woman read instructions and scenarios that omitted any reference to the word “you” or “personal”:

Please read each of the situations that follow. What would have caused it?

While events may have many causes, think about the major cause, and keeping that in mind, think about what caused it and answer the corresponding questions below.

A sample scenario read:

A woman’s (Imagine your) male employer tells her (you) that her (your) productivity has been low and that it is clear she is (you are) not attracting new clients to the firm. He tells her (you) that he is willing to help her (you) if she (you) will see him on a social basis. While she (you) resist(s), he reminds her (you) that if she was (you were) performing as she (you) should, there would be no need for the special attention he can give her (you).

Scenarios had been previously piloted to ensure the described situations were perceived as discriminatory (Foster, 2000). In particular, To ensure these scenarios were accurately depicting gender discrimination, they were piloted on a separate sample of 40 women. These

participants were asked to read the scenarios and then indicate on a scale ranging from totally disagree (0) to totally agree (10) the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that these scenarios exemplified the types of gender discrimination that women encounter. Overall, the women strongly agreed that these scenarios were examples of gender discrimination ( $M = 8.2$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ). All scenarios were read by participants in the same order.

*Attributions.* Following each scenario women indicated on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 how much the cause is “extremely likely to be present” to “not at all likely to be present again” (unstable/stable) and how much the cause influences “just this situation” to “all other areas of my (her) life” (specific/global.) Higher scores reflected stable (Cronbach alpha = .83) and global (Cronbach alpha = .79) attributions for discrimination.

*Affect.* Following the attribution measure, participants rated 12 adjectives in terms of “how being in this situation would make you (them) feel, using a response scale ranging from “not at all like this” (0) to “totally like this” (10). The adjectives were combined to reflect general negative affect (distressed, nervous, sad, helpless, hesitant, uncertain; Cronbach alpha = .90), anger (angry, frustrated, resentful; Cronbach alpha = .89), and positive affect (leisurely, nonchalant, easy-going; Cronbach alpha = .97). These adjectives differed slightly from in study 1 as they had been piloted for use in a previous study (Foster & Dion, 2003) as adjectives that may be more generally applicable across all situations.

## Results

A 2(discrimination type; Other’s , Personal) x 2(Attribution type; Stability, Globality) x

11( Scenario) mixed measures MANOVA was conducted, with discrimination type as the between-subjects factor and attribution type and scenario as the within-subjects variables. The overall between-subjects effect was significant,  $F(1,150) = 362.77, p = .0001, \eta^2 = .707$  showing that, consistent with expectations, women who read about discrimination happening to others rated discrimination as more stable and global ( $M = 7.32, SE = .119$ ) than those envisioning it happening to themselves ( $M = 4.13, SE = .119$ ).

Tests of the within-subjects effects showed a three-way interaction between discrimination type, attribution type and scenario,  $F(10, 1500) = 5.13, p = .0001, \eta^2 = .033$ . Simple effects analysis showed that, when women were reading about others' experiences of discrimination (see Table 4), women rated all but scenarios two (rape) and four (harassment in graduate school) as more stable than global. In contrast, when women were envisioning discrimination happening to themselves (see Table 4), they rated all scenarios as more global than stable. Thus, consistent with Study 1, the relative use of global versus stable attributions varied across conditions.

To examine the relationships between attributions for discrimination and affect, several regressions were conducted. An overall stability and globality scores was computed across the 11 scenarios. Unlike in Study 1, these scores were not combined as a composite because their relationship was lower than in Study 1 (see Table 5). Each of the affect variables were regressed onto the stability and globality dimensions, as well as a variable dummy coded for condition (Aiken & West, 1991). For negative affect, only globality uniquely predicted such

that the more women perceived discrimination to exist across contexts, the more negative affect they reported (see Table 6 for summary). For anger, both stability and globality uniquely predicted such that the more women perceived discrimination to exist across context and time, the more anger they predicted. Finally, stability was uniquely related to positive affect such that the more women perceived the longevity of discrimination, the less positive affect they reported. In addition, discrimination type was uniquely related such that those who envisioned personal discrimination were more likely to report positive affect than those who read about discrimination happening to another woman.

The finding that those envisioning discrimination happening to themselves would report feeling more positive, seems inconsistent with the original rationale that anticipating personal discrimination is stressful enough to encourage a coping mechanism like minimizing its pervasiveness. It may be however that those in the personal discrimination condition reported greater positive affect because of their tendency to minimize these scenarios. Thus a mediation analysis was conducted to assess this possibility. Using the steps described in Baron and Kenny (1986), the first step was to regress the dependent variable (positive affect) onto the predictor variable (discrimination type); this path was significant,  $\beta = .302$ ,  $p = .001$ . The second step, which was to regress the mediator (stability) onto the predictor, was also significant,  $\beta = -.279$ ,  $p = .001$  such that those in the personal discrimination condition were more likely to minimize the stability of the discrimination scenarios. The third step was to regress the mediator onto the dependent variable, controlling for the predictor. This path was significant,  $\beta = -.299$ ,  $p =$

.001, such that the more women minimized the stability of discrimination, the less positive affect they reported. Finally, the path between type of discrimination and positive affect, controlling for the mediator was significant,  $\beta = .219, p = .004$ , but the Sobel test indicated that this relationship had significantly decreased,  $Z = 2.66, p = .007$ . Thus, the relationship between personal discrimination and positive affect was partially mediated by a tendency to minimize the longevity. Women therefore felt better about the personal discrimination scenarios in part because of their tendency to minimize them.

### Discussion

As expected, there was a difference across conditions such that women anticipating personal discrimination minimized its pervasiveness more so than women reading about discrimination happening to others. Thus, minimizing the pervasiveness did not appear to be merely an experimental artifact. Instead, consistent with Swim et al., (1998), even anticipating the potential for discrimination requires it be defined in a less threatening way. Further, this definition was effective in that it served partially to enhance positive feelings surrounding the anticipation of discrimination. This is consistent with Branscombe and colleagues' who have shown that perceiving discrimination to be pervasive decreases measures of well-being such as depression and self-esteem (Branscombe et al., 1999, in press; Schmitt et al., 2002).

Also consistent with study 1, there was a different pattern of attribution use across the conditions. Women reading about others' experiences of discrimination rated the conditions as pervasive across time ("it always happens"), but less so across context ("but it probably

won't affect me in other situations"). This effect was reversed for women envisioning their own experiences: they rated discrimination as pervasive across contexts but minimized it across time. Given that women were willing to define discrimination as a constant when it is happening to others, but not when it could happen to them, may suggest that, although we can often control the context into which they place ourselves, we cannot control the future.

### General Discussion

These two studies suggest that when experiencing or anticipating personal discrimination, women minimize its pervasiveness. Further, minimizing appears to have a purpose, namely to enhance positive feelings after anticipating discrimination. An unexpected finding was that both studies showed that minimizing the pervasiveness of discrimination can occur in different ways, depending on the situation. In less threatening situations (i.e., before confronting discrimination, or reading about others' experiences of discrimination), women minimized the pervasiveness of discrimination across contexts. That is, they rated these situations as likely to occur again in the future, but less likely to occur across contexts. Thus, while there is an overall tendency to define less threatening events as pervasive, there still appeared a tendency to minimize by defining discrimination as stable, but not widespread. In contrast, in the more threatening events (experiencing or anticipating personal discrimination), the way in which minimization occurred was different: these events were defined as widespread but not stable. Future research will therefore need to clarify the meaning and consequences of the different dimensions of perceived pervasiveness.

Future research will also need to address limitations of these studies, namely the measures and the homogeneity of the samples. Although they were based on the standard Attribution style Questionnaire (Peterson et al., 1982), the measures of pervasiveness were nevertheless two one-item measures. Given the findings that stability and globality appeared to have distinct implications, it will be necessary to develop more comprehensive measures of each. Second, research will need to assess the extent these findings apply to other cultures and ethnicities. It is possible that collectivist cultures, who are more focused on the connection between the group and individual, may not seek to minimize group experiences like discrimination. In addition, minimizing gender discrimination may be particularly difficult for members of minority ethnic groups given their chronic experience with discrimination. Visible minority women may live in a state of chronic anticipation of discrimination (Swim, Cohen & Hyers, 1998) and as such, may not be as likely to minimize discrimination.

Despite these limitations, the present research not only supports the RIM, but also shows that minimizing the pervasiveness may be an effective way of coping with personal discrimination. However, this presents what appears to be a paradox: minimizing pervasiveness is associated with feeling more positively on a psychological level, but may serve to impede social change. Empirical findings show that more women make specific attributions for discrimination, the less they participate in collective actions to enhance women's status (Foster, 2001). This is problematic in that, if the discrimination is considered pervasive then it will likely be defined as worthy of change. For example, the White Ribbon Campaign was co-



founded by Jack Layton, a Toronto city councillor who considered the Montreal Massacre to reflect widespread violence against women (Hurst, 1999). How can minimizing the pervasiveness of discrimination be good for us as individuals, but bad for us as a group? The different dimensions of pervasiveness may help to clarify this problem. It may be that recognizing how widespread discrimination is (i.e., globality) has implications for collective action, while minimizing how stable discrimination is has implications for well-being. The challenge for future research will be to understand how these definitions of discrimination may be balanced to satisfy both the needs to help oneself as well as one's group.

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Table 1

*Attributions for envisioning and confronting discrimination*

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<u>Attribution</u>	<u>Envisioning</u>		<u>Confronting</u>		<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
Stability	7.58	1.87	2.08	2.51	5.42	.0001
Globality	4.90	2.54	2.90	2.67	13.02	.0001
	<u>*t</u>	8.78	<u>*t</u>	-1.70		
	<u>p</u>	.001	<u>p</u>	.090		

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Note: \* refers to comparisons made within each condition

Table 2

*Zero-order correlations for study 1*


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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Pre-test stability	-								
2. Pre-test globality	.21*	-							
3. Post-test stability	.09	.18	-						
4. Post-test globality	.03	.18	.72**	-					
5. Unfairness	.14	.07	.03	.09	-				
6. Discrimination	.14	.06	.06	.02	.54**	-			
7. Anger	.09	.15	.28**	.32**	.28**	.23*	-		
8. Negative Affect	.16	.04	.34**	.32**	.04	.11	.75**	-	
9. Positive Affect	-.03	-.12	-.37**	-.37**	-.07	-.04	-.72**	-.70**	-

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*Note:* High scores reflect higher perceived pervasiveness, unfairness, discrimination, anger, positive and negative affect. Ns appear in parentheses. \*,  $p = .05$ ; \*\* $p = .001$ . Samples sizes range from 85 to 91.



Table 3

*Summary of Regressions for Study 1*

<u>Dependent variable</u>	<u>Predictor variable</u>	<u><math>\beta</math></u>	<u>R<sup>2</sup></u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Negative Affect	Perceived amount		.070		
	Perceived pervasiveness		.349**	.129	6.51
Positive Affect	Perceived amount		0.05		
	Perceived pervasiveness		-.401*	.165	8.71
Anger	Perceived amount		.282*		
	Perceived pervasiveness		.320**	.188	10.18

Note: \*, p = .01; \*\*, p = .001

Table 4

*Ratings of stability and globality across scenarios among women reading about self and other's discrimination*

Scenario theme	<u>Unstable/Stable</u>				<u>Specific/Global</u>			
	<u>Self</u>		<u>Other</u>		<u>Self</u>		<u>Other</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
1. Sexual harassment	3.49	2.46	7.93	1.96	5.89	2.96	7.23	1.85
2. Date rape	3.37	2.67	7.42	2.17	7.12	3.10	7.81	2.68
3. Job opportunities	2.12	1.56	8.27	1.44	6.46	2.49	6.61	2.34
4. Sexual harassment- school	3.62	2.04	6.92	1.76	6.44	2.39	6.70	2.49
5. Education opportunities	2.02	2.08	8.61	1.59	6.77	2.68	7.46	2.66
6. Professor stereotyping	2.22	2.16	8.01	1.59	4.51	3.06	5.67	2.82
7. Street harassment	2.28	2.27	8.79	1.58	4.32	3.13	5.84	3.01
8. Disrespect	2.10	2.15	8.35	1.51	6.31	2.93	6.97	2.70
9. Male mechanic stereotyping	1.88	1.96	8.72	1.49	4.78	3.15	6.03	3.01
10. Threats on street	2.80	2.28	8.24	1.83	4.53	3.03	5.66	3.13

11. Body objectification      2.94   2.21   7.80   1.91                      5.23   2.86   6.14   2.34

*Note:* Within the “self” condition, all scenarios differ at  $p = .0001$ ,  $t$ 's  $> -5.14$ . Within the “other” condition, scenarios differ at  $p = .0001$ ,  $t$ 's  $> 2.3$ ; Scenario 1 is significant at  $p = .02$ . Differences within scenarios 2, 4 are non-significant.

Table 5

*Zero-order correlations for study 2*


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		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Discrimination type-							
2. Stability	-.28**	-					
3. Globality	-.33**	.31**	-				
4. Anger	-.15*	.32**	.42**	-			
5. Negative Affect	-.05	.02	.44**	.65**	-		
6. Positive Affect	.30**	-.36**	-.21**	-.26**	.04	-	

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Note:

\*,  $p = .056$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .  $N = 159$

Table 6

*Summary of Regressions for Study 2*

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Dependent variable	Predictor variable	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F	p
Negative Affect	Type of discrimination		.082		
	Globality		.501**		
	Stability		-.115	.212	13.93 .0001
Positive Affect	Type of discrimination	.029			
	Globality		.360**		
	Stability		.220*	.217	14.35 .0001
Anger	Type of discrimination		.205*		
	Globality		-.052		
	Stability		-.287**	.176	11.05 .0001

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Note: Type of discrimination was dummy codes so that higher scores reflect personal discrimination. \*, p = .01; \*\*, p = .001

