Alleged Perpetrators' Reactions to Accusations of Discrimination

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Abstract

Purpose
We examine alleged perpetrators' reactions to being accused of discrimination.

Design/methodology/approach
We examine how the mode of confrontation as well as the perpetrator's status relate to the alleged perpetrator's state of anger and the likelihood of providing a justification to the victim. To test the hypotheses, we conducted an experimental design using an organizational scenario.

Findings
The mode of confrontation predicts the likelihood of providing a justification to the victim. We also found that both anger and the likelihood of providing a justification for a charge of discrimination are higher when the mode of confrontation is indirect and the alleged perpetrator is the supervisor.

Research limitations/implications
An organizational scenario limits the realism of the study such that results may not generalize to actual organizational settings (Stone, Hosoda, Lukaszewski, & Phillips, 2008). In addition, our response rate was low. Nevertheless, a full understanding of issues related to reactions to alleged discrimination will depend upon research conducted in a variety of settings under a variety of conditions.

Practical implications
It is unlikely that direct confrontations will be instrumental in correcting misperceptions of discriminatory behavior. Organizations need to provide training on how to manage confrontation episodes as an opportunity to mitigate perceived mistreatment.

Originality/value
Which mode of confrontation is best? Indirect confrontation is associated with a higher likelihood of the alleged perpetrator providing a justification for a charge of discrimination, particularly when the alleged perpetrator is the supervisor. However, anger is also higher when supervisors are confronted indirectly about allegations of discrimination.

Keywords: anger; reactions to alleged discrimination; justification; indirect confrontation;

direct confrontation.

Alleged Perpetrators' Reactions to Accusations of Discrimination

Theoretical and empirical work shows the ways in which employees react to perceived discrimination and the antecedents and consequences of those responses (e.g., Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & Dubois, 1997; Malamut & Offermann, 2001). Much less is known about the reactions of those accused of discriminatory behaviors. As in the justice literature, which has largely examined the dynamics between employees and supervisors and generally focused on the employee's perceptions of justice (Korsgaard, Roberson, & Rymph, 1998; Scott, Colquitt, & Zapata-Phelan, 2007), the literature on reactions to perceptions of discrimination has mainly focused on understanding the reactions from the perspective of the victim of discrimination, not the perpetrator. In this study, we examine the reactions of alleged perpetrators of discrimination.

The few studies that examined the reactions of alleged perpetrators of discrimination focused on understanding the affective reactions to being accused of discriminatory behaviors. In one experiment, Czopp and Monteith (2003) found that perpetrators felt stronger negative affect and stronger feelings of discomfort when confronted about racial bias as opposed to gender bias. In a second experimental study, Czopp, Monteith, and Mark (2006) found that perpetrators' anger was higher when a confrontation was worded as a high-threat accusation of racism as opposed to a low-threat appeal for fairness.

Studying an emotional state such as anger is important because strong affective feelings may be present when we face problems that are important to us (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). Being accused of discrimination is one such problem. Yet, more needs to be known both theoretically and empirically in order to better understand how affective reactions unfold in a discrimination complaint. It is also important to examine how to restore the social standing of all parties involved in a discrimination complaint because group identification is

important for all members of the organization (Tyler, 1989). These issues are the focus of our research.

We build upon prior research in three ways. First, the research of Czopp and collaborators has been influential in understanding alleged perpetrators' reactions to victims' accusations when the reasons for the mistreatment (e.g., race or sex) are clear. Instead, we focus on subtle discrimination because in today's work environment, discrimination manifests itself in subtle ways (Cortina, 2008; Dipboye & Colella, 2005). With subtle discrimination, the reasons for discrimination are unclear and there is attributional ambiguity (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Victims may believe that they have been discriminated against but may not know the perpetrator's motives (Deitch et al., 2003).

Second, we assess two perpetrator reactions to being accused of discrimination, anger and the likelihood of providing a justification for a charge of discrimination, or attempts to reduce the negative consequences of a predicament (Greenberg, 1990). Studying justifications is relevant in the context of subtle discrimination where different interpretations can be made for an event (Greenberg, 1990; Shaw, Wild, & Colquitt, 2003). Justifications are beneficial in reducing perceived mistreatment by lessening the negative perceptions of a questionable behavior (Greenberg, 1990; Shaw et al., 2003). We expand on Czopp and collaborators' research by examining anger and the likelihood of providing a justification when discrimination is subtle.

Finally, we build on prior work by studying direct and indirect confrontation and the status of the alleged perpetrator. In direct confrontation, the victim takes action against the perpetrator and addresses the perpetrator directly (Knapp et al., 1997). In indirect confrontation, the victim uses organizational support and remedies to stop further harm to the victim (Knapp et al., 1997). We focus on direct and indirect confrontation because these are two ways employees respond to alleged discrimination, which may counteract further losses

to both the employees and the employers (Knapp et al., 2007; Malamut & Offermann, 2001). We also examine the status of the alleged perpetrator (coworker/supervisor) because a perpetrator's social standing with both the group and the organization as a whole and the costs the perpetrator incurs in a confrontation may relate to the perpetrator's reactions (Tyler, 1989).

Examining alleged perpetrators' reactions to being accused of discrimination is important for individual, organizational, and societal reasons. This study helps build theory to understand how emotions such as anger and the likelihood of restoring questionable behaviors through justifications may change as a function of the type of confrontation and the status of the alleged perpetrator. This study also provides practical recommendations for managers in terms of the types of reactions that different confrontations may elicit. Furthermore, this study is important for society because understanding alleged perpetrators' reactions to being accused of discrimination may help prevent further losses for employers, employees, and society at large – by reducing the likelihood of claims being filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Theory and Hypotheses

According to the group-value model (Tyler, 1989), people are concerned with their long-term relationships with authorities and with the institutions to which they belong. The group-value model assumes that people value being members in social groups. Groups provide information about the propriety of the members' behaviors within the group. If the propriety of one of the group members' behaviors is questioned, the social standing of that member in the group is at risk. The group-value model further suggests that the process of questioning the social standing within the group will be related to a variety of affective reactions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Lind & Tyler, 1988).

We follow a similar rationale to understand perpetrators' reactions to allegations of discrimination when the victim uses confrontation as a response to an apparent mistreatment. Confronting is an act of complaining in which a victim expresses dissatisfaction when expectations are not met (Kowalski, 1996). A confrontation questions the propriety of the alleged perpetrator's behavior and increases the alleged perpetrator's social costs (Kowalski, 1996; Tyler, 1989), putting the social standing of the individual in the group at risk.

Furthermore, the mode (i.e., direct/indirect) in which the victim confronts the alleged perpetrator should matter. When the confrontation is indirect as opposed to direct, there are more stakeholders involved in the confrontation, which raises the alleged perpetrator's social costs because his/her alleged behavior is made public to a third party. The alleged perpetrator has higher costs because he/she is questioned about the propriety of his/her behavior in front of a third party, and therefore, his/her social standing is being questioned both by the victim and by authorities involved in the complaint process. In contrast, direct confrontations only involve one-on-one interactions. Therefore, when the confrontation is indirect as opposed to direct, feelings of anger should be higher because having one's social standing within the group questioned involves not only the victim but also third parties within the organization (Lind & Tyler, 1988).

This reasoning is consistent with theories stating that feelings of shame associated with threats to one's self-image can lead to anger (Tangney, 1995; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992). This is also consistent with Kowalski (1996), who expects greater tolerance and acceptance of those confronting individuals directly compared to those who use indirect confrontation. Empirically, Czopp et al. (2006) found that state of anger is higher in a high-threat confrontation condition than in a low-threat confrontation condition. Therefore, we expect anger to be higher in indirect confrontations (conducted through the HR manager) compared to direct confrontations.

In addition, the mode of confrontation (direct/indirect) should relate to the perpetrator's likelihood of providing a justification for a charge of discrimination. People value membership and identification in social groups and care about their relationship with third parties (Tyler, 1989). Conversely, they are troubled when their social standing in the group is questioned. Because group identification and social standing are important for group membership, providing a justification will reduce the negative consequences of an apparent negative event (Greenberg, 1990). As such, justifications mitigate apparent unfair actions. Given the costs attached to the mode of confrontation (i.e., direct/indirect) and the need for the alleged perpetrator to restore his/her social standing within the group, it follows that the likelihood of providing a justification will be greater when the mode of confrontation is indirect as opposed to direct. Therefore, we propose that:

> Hypothesis 1: The state of anger of the alleged perpetrator will be higher when the mode of confrontation is indirect as opposed to direct.
>
> Hypothesis 2: The likelihood of the alleged perpetrator providing a justification for a charge of discrimination will be higher when the mode of confrontation is indirect as opposed to direct.

Relational concerns matter because group identification and self-validation within the group provide the basis for belonging to the group (Tyler, 1989). An additional assumption of the model is that members of any group value their social status in the group (Lind & Tyler, 1988). When that status is questioned and/or rejected, the social standing within the group is at risk, which should relate to a variety of affective reactions and attitudes (Lind & Tyler, 1988).

Following a similar rationale, a complaint related to a perpetrator's questionable behavior signals a lack of dignity on the perpetrator's part. We propose that this is especially the case when the alleged perpetrator is the supervisor as opposed to a coworker because the status of the supervisor is being ignored or rejected (Lind & Tyler, 1988). When the alleged perpetrator is a supervisor, there is a *de facto* formal status difference between the parties. A

supervisor has authority over the target, and this status difference is being questioned by the victim of the alleged discriminatory behavior, suggesting that the perpetrator's behaviors lack propriety. When the status is ignored or rejected, there is a greater chance that the alleged perpetrator will react negatively to what may seem to be an unfair action taken by the victim because his/her social standing is being questioned (Lind & Tyler, 1988). As a consequence, anger should increase when the alleged perpetrator is a supervisor as opposed to a coworker.

Similarly, we expect that the likelihood of providing a justification for a charge of discrimination will be greater when the alleged perpetrator is a supervisor as opposed to a coworker. When the alleged perpetrator is a supervisor, the costs attached to the victim's claims of discrimination should be higher than when the alleged perpetrator is a coworker. As an agent of the organization, the supervisor's social and legal standing is questioned if his/her behaviors lack propriety. Supervisors are responsible for the well-being of their employees and should be trained to prevent discrimination from occurring. When the alleged perpetrator is the coworker, he/she may not necessarily be associated with a victim in accomplishing a task (e.g., in working on a specific project) or connected to the victim by a prescribed relationship (i.e., mandated by the organization). Therefore, there are lower costs attached to a coworker. The higher costs associated with a supervisor's status and social standing being questioned will likely lead to a greater need to restore his/her standing within the group compared to when a coworker is the alleged perpetrator. It follows that when the alleged perpetrator is the supervisor, there should be a greater likelihood of the perpetrator providing justifications in order to minimize the victim's perceptions of the perpetrator's wrong-doing. Thus far, there has been no research concerning the likelihood of providing a justification when someone is accused of discriminatory behaviors. Therefore, based on theory, we expect that:

> Hypothesis 3: The state of anger of the alleged perpetrator will be higher when the alleged perpetrator is a supervisor as opposed to a coworker.

Hypothesis 4: The likelihood of the alleged perpetrator providing a justification for a charge of discrimination will be higher when the alleged perpetrator is a supervisor as opposed to a coworker.

In turn, when the confrontation takes place indirectly through the HR manager (as opposed to directly going to the perpetrator) and the alleged perpetrator is the supervisor (as opposed to a coworker), anger will be stronger. The involvement of a third party makes public the fact that the social standing of the alleged perpetrator with the organization in general and of authority figures in particular is put at risk if an employee questions the propriety of the perpetrator's behavior. In addition, the involvement of a third party signals the victim's rejection of the supervisor as an authority figure because the supervisor's actions are apparently inappropriate. Both the involvement of a third party and the victim's rejection of the supervisor as an authority figure may be viewed as violations of basic group values, which may increase anger (Lind & Tyler, 1988). When the perpetrator is the supervisor and the confrontation is indirect, the victim's rejection of the perpetrator's status and questioning of the propriety of the perpetrator's behavior in front of authority figures may lead alleged perpetrators to feel significantly more anger than when the confrontation is direct and the person confronting is a coworker. When the perpetrator is a coworker and the confrontation is direct, there are no third parties involved and, overall, the social costs are lower.

Similarly, justifications from the alleged perpetrator will also be more likely when the confrontation is indirect as opposed to direct and when the perpetrator is a supervisor as opposed to a coworker. There are increased social costs attached to an indirect confrontation because a third party is involved (Kowalski, 1996). There is also a greater need to restore one's social standing within the organization when the perpetrator holds a higher social status (i.e., the supervisor; Tyler, 1989). Therefore, we propose that:

Hypothesis 5: There will be an interaction of the perpetrator status and mode of confrontation on state of anger of the alleged perpetrator. The state of anger will be

higher when the alleged perpetrator is (a) a supervisor as opposed to (b) a coworker and the confrontation is (c) indirect as opposed to (d) direct.

Hypothesis 6: There will be an interaction of the perpetrator status and mode of confrontation on the likelihood of the alleged perpetrator providing a justification for a charge of discrimination. A justification will more likely be provided when the alleged perpetrator is (a) a supervisor as opposed to (b) a coworker and the confrontation is (c) indirect as opposed to (d) direct.

Method

Sample

We used StudyResponse.org to recruit employees to answer an Internet survey. StudyResponse has over 95,000 registered individuals who agree to receive solicitations to answer research surveys. Participants receive prizes such as gift certificates for Amazon.com. Stanton (1998) developed research that supports the validity of data collected through the Internet. A total of 3,074 U.S. residents were randomly selected from the StudyResponse database and invited to participate, and 254 answered the survey (8.26% response rate). We ran analyses to check for non-response bias on sex, race, employment status (full-time versus part-time), and age. Results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between those who answered the survey and those who did not in terms of sex [$\chi^2(1) = 1.65$, $p > .05$], race [$\chi^2(1) = 1.61$, $p > .05$] or full-time/part-time employment situation [$\chi^2(1) = .15$, $p > .05$]. However, respondents were a few years older ($M = 40.19$, $SD = 10.38$) than non-respondents ($M = 35.12$, $SD = 10.63$), $t(3055) = -7.06$, $p < .05$.

Of the 254 respondents, we eliminated those who had ever been discriminated against at work either by a supervisor or by a coworker. We decided to eliminate these responses for two reasons. First, a personal experience of discrimination might cause one to react differently to the organizational scenario. Second, theory and empirical evidence indicate that most individuals do not believe that they have been the victims of discrimination because most people recognize discrimination directed at their group members but not at themselves

(Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). Given these findings, we examined how a coworker and/or supervisor would react under conditions in which they have never experienced discrimination, mimicking what would happen with most employees. This resulted in a total of 166 participants.

Most participants were female (69.3%), and the average age was 40. The racial/ethnic background of the sample was as follows: 83.1% White, 5.4% Hispanic, 4.8% Asian American, 2.4% African American, and 1.8% Other. Average full-time work experience was around 18 years, and 74.1% worked full-time while the rest worked part-time.

Procedure

The design of the study was a 2 x 2 between participants design manipulating perpetrator status (coworker/supervisor) and mode of confrontation (direct/indirect). Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four different organizational scenarios. Participants were asked to read the organizational scenario carefully and imagine themselves in the role of the alleged perpetrator (coworker/supervisor). The organizational scenario portrayed a situation occurring at a sales company called Trylotech, where an employee named Daniel perceives that he has been excluded – a form of subtle discrimination (Haslett & Lipman, 1997) – from golf outings. We manipulated the perpetrator's status (coworker/supervisor) as follows:

> "You have [worked in sales at Trylotech, Inc. / been the sales supervisor at Trylotech, Inc.]. (…) [Some of your coworkers / Some of your employees] were recently having a conversation about their sales clients. (…) Daniel found out that the other employees have gained a significant number of new and high profile clients by participating in golf outings to which you have informally invited them. (…) Daniel has never been invited to golf and he is bothered by the idea that his coworkers are getting extra information on potential clients (…). Daniel becomes progressively disturbed (…)."

We manipulated the mode of confrontation (direct/indirect) as follows:

> "At the end of the day (…) Daniel approaches you and explains his dissatisfaction regarding not being invited to golf and the resulting difference in opportunities he has with clients (…) / A few days later you receive an unexpected email from Chris, the Human Resource (HR) Manager. Chris informs you in the email that Daniel (…) has

> submitted a claim. The claim states dissatisfaction regarding not being invited to golf and the resulting difference in opportunities he has with clients (…)."

Immediately after reading the organizational scenarios, participants answered questions measuring the two dependent variables (state of anger and the likelihood of providing a justification), the control variables, and the manipulation checks.

Measures

State of anger. We used Spielberger, Jacobs, Russel, and Crane's (1983) 15-item measure and adapted it for our purposes by including the name "Daniel" in the appropriate items. One item stated: "Based on the claim made by Daniel, what is the likelihood that you will feel irritated?" Participants answered the items on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 6 (*very likely*). The reliability of the measure was $\alpha = .95$. Goldman (2003) provided validity evidence for this measure. State of anger was correlated with legal claiming ($r = .13$, $p < .01$) and trait anger ($r = .31$, $p < .01$). Lane and Hobfoll (1992) found that state of anger was related to patient health symptoms ($r = .46$, $p < .01$) and loss of resources ($r = .28$, $p < .05$). Additional validity evidence is provided in Corcoran and Fisher (1987).

Providing a justification for a charge of discrimination. We used two items from Czopp and Monteith (2003), adapting them to add the name "Daniel." One of the items stated: "Based on the claim made by Daniel, what is the likelihood that you will justify your actions to Daniel?" Anchors were in a Likert-type scale from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 6 (*very likely*). The reliability of the measure was $\alpha = .81$. We conducted a pilot study to test the validity of this measure. By adapting Colquitt's (2001) measure, we found that justification was positively correlated to distributive justice ($r = .23$, $p < .05$), procedural justice ($r = .24$, $p < .05$), and interactional justice ($r = .38$, $p < .001$). We also conducted a confirmatory factor analysis with justification and the three justice measures and found that a four-factor structure had better indices than a three-, a two-, or a one-factor structure.

Control variables. We controlled for trait anger because it is related to state of anger (Goldman, 2003). We used Spielberger et al.'s (1983) 15-item measure of trait anger. The reliability for this measure was $\alpha = .91$. We controlled for age because it is related to negative affect (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). In addition, age is a status marker that may be associated with perpetrators' reactions (Shore & Goldberg, 2005). We controlled for the perceived offensiveness of not inviting someone to play golf because this may increase state of anger. Based on the conflict literature, we controlled for goal interdependence between the two parties involved, defined as being oriented toward mutually desired outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 1989), because it may relate to both state of anger and the likelihood of providing a justification.

Manipulation checks. To check the manipulation for the mode of confrontation (direct/indirect), we asked: "Instead of going straight to you, Daniel talks to the HR manager about not being invited to golf." To check the manipulation for status of the perpetrator (coworker/supervisor), participants were asked to agree/disagree with the following statement: "You are a sales person at Trylotech Inc." Finally, given the ambiguous case of discrimination we wanted to portray across the four organizational scenarios, we asked participants to agree/disagree with the following statement: "Daniel has experienced discrimination." The answer to these items were in a Likert-type format from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Analysis

We first examined the manipulation checks. Those in the indirect confrontation condition reported higher agreement with the statement: "Instead of going straight to you, Daniel talks to the HR manager about not being invited to golf" than did those in the direct condition ($M_{Indirect} = 4.55$, $SD = 1.72$; $M_{Direct} = 2.42$, $SD = 1.27$; $t = -8.90$, $p \leq .001$). Those in the coworker condition reported higher agreement with the statement: "You are a sales person

at Trilotech Inc." than did those in the supervisor condition ($M_{Coworker}$ = 4.47, *SD* = 1.49; $M_{Supervisor}$ = 2.39, *SD* = 1.60; *t* = 8.62, $p \leq .001$). Finally, as expected, the reported discrimination was not different from the neutral midpoint of the scale (i.e., 3.50) in any of the conditions. In summary, the manipulations worked as expected and the condition of ambiguous discrimination was also perceived as expected.

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted on the two dependent variables (i.e., the likelihood of providing a justification and state of anger), using a two (supervisor/coworker) by two (direct confrontation/indirect confrontation) between-participants design. We controlled for trait anger, age, goal dependence, and the perceived offense of not inviting someone to play golf. Next, we conducted two multiple regression analyses to test the hypotheses.

Results

With the use of Wilks' lambda, a test statistic for equality of group means, the combined dependent variables were found to be statistically significantly related to both the mode of confrontation (direct/indirect), F (2, 157) = 19.51, $p \leq .001$ and the interaction of mode of confrontation and perpetrator status (supervisor/coworker), F (2, 157) = 6.34, $p \leq .01$. However, the perpetrator's status (supervisor/coworker) was not statistically significant. The results reflected an association between the mode of confrontation and the multivariate dependent variables, $\eta^2 = .20$. The association was lower for the relationship between the combined dependent variables (i.e., anger and justification) and the interaction between the mode of confrontation and the perpetrator status, $\eta^2 = .08$. The means, standard deviations, and sample size per condition are shown in Table 1.

Test of Hypotheses

In Hypothesis 1, we stated that the state of anger of the alleged perpetrator will be higher when the mode of confrontation is indirect as opposed to direct. After adjusting for

differences in the covariates, the mode of confrontation was not statistically significantly related to state of anger, F (1, 158) = 3.16, $p > .05$ (see Table 2). In Hypothesis 2, we stated that the likelihood of the alleged perpetrator providing a justification will be higher when the mode of confrontation is indirect as opposed to direct. The mode of confrontation was positively and statistically significantly related to justification, F (1, 158) = 37.36, $p \leq .001$. When the mode of confrontation was indirect, justification was higher than when the mode of confrontation was direct (M_{Direct} = 3.73, SE = .12, CI = 3.49-3.97; $M_{Indirect}$ = 4.72, SE = .11, CI = 4.51-4.94).

In Hypothesis 3, we stated that the state of anger of the alleged perpetrator will be higher when the alleged perpetrator is a supervisor as opposed to a coworker, and in Hypothesis 4 we stated that the likelihood of the alleged perpetrator providing a justification will be higher when the alleged perpetrator is a supervisor as opposed to a coworker. The perpetrator's status was not related to either state of anger, F (1, 158) = 2.44, $p \geq .05$ or justification, F (1, 158) = .14, $p \geq .05$. In Hypothesis 5, we proposed that state of anger would be higher when the alleged perpetrator is (a) the supervisor as opposed to (b) a coworker and the confrontation is (c) indirect as opposed to (d) direct. This interaction was positive and statistically significant, F (1, 158) = 8.05, $p \leq .01$. When the perpetrator was (a) the supervisor and the mode of confrontation was (c) indirect, state of anger was higher than when the perpetrator was the (b) coworker and the mode of confrontation was (d) direct ($M_{Coworker/Direct}$= 1.88, SE = .12, CI = 1.65-2.10; $M_{Supervisor/Indirect}$= 2.27, SE = .11, CI = 2.05-2.49). Finally, in Hypothesis 6 we proposed that the likelihood of providing a justification would be higher when the alleged perpetrator is (a) the supervisor as opposed to (b) a coworker and the confrontation is (c) indirect as opposed to (d) direct. This interaction was positive and statistically significant, F (1, 158) = 3.93, $p \leq .05$. When the perpetrator was (a) the supervisor and the mode of confrontation was (c) indirect, justification was higher than

when the perpetrator was (b) the coworker and the mode of confrontation was (d) direct ($M_{Coworker/Direct}$= 3.92, *SE* = .16, CI = 3.60-4.24; $M_{Supervisor/Indirect}$= 4.85, *SE* = .16, *CI* = 4.54-5.17).

Based on these results, we conducted two multiple regression analyses to further test the hypotheses with statistically significant results obtained in the MANCOVA by entering all the variables at the same time. The means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 3. We regressed state of anger on mode of confrontation, status of perpetrator, the interaction of perpetrator's status and mode of confrontation, and controls (Table 4). The model was statistically significant, F (7, 158) = 15.66, $p \leq .001$, R^2 = .41. The interaction of perpetrator's status and mode of confrontation was negative and statistically significant, β = −.32, $p \leq .01$. In examining the interaction (see Figure 1), state of anger was higher when the perpetrator was the supervisor as opposed to a coworker and the confrontation was indirect as opposed to direct. We conducted a regression analysis to check the subset of means, and we found that they were significantly different, t = 2.41, $p < .05$, supporting Hypothesis 5. The difference in means for direct confrontation of a supervisor versus a coworker was also significant (t = 3.19, $p < .05$),

We also regressed the likelihood of providing a justification on the same independent and control variables (Table 5). The model was statistically significant, F (7, 158) = 7.72, $p \leq .001$, R^2 = .26. Mode of confrontation was positive and statistically significant, β = .29, $p \leq .01$. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported. The interaction of perpetrator's status and mode of confrontation was positive and statistically significant, β = .25, $p \leq .05$. As expected, the likelihood of providing a justification was higher when the mode of confrontation was indirect (as opposed to direct) and the perpetrator was a supervisor as opposed to a coworker, providing support for Hypothesis 6 (see Figure 2).

Discussion

On the one hand, our results suggest that indirect confrontation when the alleged perpetrator is the supervisor may have better outcomes for the organization because alleged perpetrators are more likely to provide a justification for a charge of discrimination, and this may help clarify to the victim the reasons for the perceived mistreatment. On the other hand, indirectly confronting supervisors is also associated with the accused perpetrator's anger.

We contribute to the management literature in at least two ways. First, we examine the conditions under which perpetrators' reactions are more probable following allegations of an ambiguous claim of discrimination. This issue is important because the ways perpetrators react may be linked to either a reduction or an increase in perceived mistreatment (Goldman, 2003; Shaw et al., 2003). Second, we examine the reactions of alleged perpetrators. The perpetrator side of the perpetrator-victim relationship has been largely ignored in research related to reactions to discrimination in work environments. A practical contribution of this study is to show that confrontations will lead to different outcomes depending upon the mode of confrontation and the status of the alleged perpetrator.

Theoretical, Practical, and Societal Implications

A major theoretical implication of our findings relates to the group-value model. If the alleged perpetrator considers the spectrum of possibilities of the victim's actions when faced with a direct confrontation, the perpetrator's best response is probably to provide a justification for a charge of discrimination. Providing a justification may help prevent further actions from the victim, such as filing a claim with the HR department (i.e., indirect confrontation), filing a claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or discussing the problem with friends at work. However, we find the opposite effect. Apparently, perpetrators minimize the seriousness of the problem when the confrontation is direct and are less likely to provide justifications for charges of discrimination. In summary,

perpetrators seem to perceive few costs to themselves as a result of victims' direct confrontation, possibly because their social standing with the organization does not seem at risk.

This theoretical implication is directly related to a major practical implication. Direct confrontations could represent a critical moment in which the perpetrator has the opportunity to correct perceived mistreatment. Yet participants in the study did not see it as such since the likelihood of providing a justification was lower in the direct confrontation than in the indirect confrontation. Furthermore, empirical evidence shows that rather than receiving a justification, victims who vocalize a complaint about mistreatment from perpetrators experience higher levels of retaliation from those perpetrators (Cortina & Magley, 2002). Organizations should invest in specific training beyond conflict resolution skills. Specifically, organizations should provide training on how to manage confrontation episodes as an opportunity to mitigate perceived mistreatment, which may ultimately end in a discriminatory claim. Additionally, organizations might train those who file discrimination charges to use indirect, non-confrontational charges rather than direct, confrontational charges.

Although organizations should be interested in managing direct confrontation episodes to lessen perceived mistreatment, society as a whole should know how or when organizations may minimize these types of problems. This is important ethically in order to build an environment of equal treatment in society as well practically to reduce litigation costs. Our findings ultimately imply that researchers should invest time and effort in examining "best practices" for managing accusations of discrimination.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations in our research. Our study was an organizational scenario and thus lacked realism such that results may not generalize to actual organizational settings (Stone et al. 2008). However, participants who responded to these scenarios were

current employees with many years of full-time work experience (M = 17.82, SD = 10.66) working in a variety of different industries. In addition, we excluded all participants who had ever experienced discrimination by supervisors or coworkers, mimicking what may happen in real work settings, in which employees may not be empathetic to problems they have never experienced. Given the difficulty of collecting data on reactions to allegations of discrimination in a field setting, the sample and the results presented in this study seem reasonable. Future research should explore how perpetrators who have been discriminated against respond to an apparent discriminatory allegation. In particular, empathy may be higher in those who have had similar experiences.

The second limitation is that although we examined the mode of confrontation, we did not explore some potentially key behaviors and emotional states required for a positive response on the part of the alleged perpetrator. For example, disrespectful behaviors when confronting the perpetrator may exacerbate the problem rather than remedy it. Future research should examine the conditions under which direct confrontation may lead to positive outcomes for both parties involved in the dispute. In addition, future research could manipulate how discrimination unfolds (blatant/subtle), the severity of the discrimination, the type of discrimination (e.g., sex) as well as how the perceived perpetrators' discriminatory intent influences perpetrators' reactions to discrimination.

Additionally, our response rate was low and our findings therefore cannot be generalized. However, it is important to note that the sample reflects the civilian labor force of the United States for 2008, particularly for Whites and Asian Americans (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009), and representation seems more important than the actual number of participants answering the survey (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000). Yet we cannot generalize our findings to the entire U.S. population because the random selection of participants in our sample was based on a pool that was not originally generated randomly.

The effect sizes of our results are also relatively small. The organizational scenario study may have underestimated effects because it was imagined by those who have had no experience of discrimination. In that regard, our effects may be understated and may explain the lack of support for our hypotheses related to state of anger. Nevertheless, a full understanding of issues related to reactions to discrimination will depend upon research conducted in a variety of settings under a variety of conditions (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006). Therefore, despite limitations, our research is critical to advancing the understanding of perpetrators reactions to being accused of discrimination (Goldman et al., 2006).

Finally, we limited the organizational scenario of our study to a male victim. It is possible that having a male instead of a female victim could have affected the responses we obtained. Additionally, the social dominance orientation of the alleged perpetrator or the value perpetrators place on hierarchical structures among social groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) may also predict reactions to being accused of discrimination. Perpetrators with a high social dominance orientation may be less likely to provide a justification for their behavior and be angrier than those low in social dominance, particularly when the victim is a subordinate, because these perpetrators tend to show little empathy for low-status individuals (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Future research may build on our study by exploring how social dominance orientation, perceptions of power differentials, and the gender of victims of discrimination impact perpetrators' reactions to allegations. In addition, scholars may examine both the demographics of alleged perpetrators and different types of discrimination in an effort to understand perpetrators' reactions to being accused of discrimination, whether the discrimination is subtle or blatant.

Conclusion

Indirect confrontation, particularly when the alleged perpetrator is the supervisor, may result in better outcomes for the organization because alleged perpetrators would be more

likely to provide a justification, which has previously been associated with a reduction in perceptions of mistreatment (Shaw et al., 2003). Indirect confrontation may also be positive for the victim of the perceived discrimination because he/she may receive a clarification about the reasons why the perpetrator seemingly acted in a questionable way. However, the accused perpetrator's anger is also higher when the confrontation is indirect and the alleged perpetrator is the supervisor, although the means were generally low.

Understanding how to manage confrontation episodes is important not only for those who decide to use confrontation to resolve a conflict but also for those who are confronted. *Who* is confronted and *how* are important in understanding perpetrators' reactions. Given the individual and organizational resources at stake, we should invest greater research efforts in exploring actions that could be taken to restore perceptions of fair treatment in organizations.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Sample Sizes per Condition

	Dependent Variables	
Conditions	State of Anger	Likelihood of Providing a Justification for a Charge of Discrimination
Perpetrator Status		
Coworker		
M	2.23	4.29
SD	.86	1.15
N	89	89
Race/Ethnicity	82% White	82% White
Sex	67% Female	67% Female
Age	*M* = 37.66	*M* = 37.66
Supervisor		
M	2.25	4.29
SD	1.00	1.18
N	77	77
Race/Ethnicity	89% White	89% White
Sex	76% Female	76% Female
Age	*M* = 41.95	*M* = 41.95
Mode of Confrontation		
Direct		
M	2.17	3.78
SD	.95	1.04
N	74	74
Race/Ethnicity	83% White	83% White
Sex	67% Female	67% Female
Age	*M* = 39.82	*M* = 39.82
Indirect		
M	2.29	4.70
SD	.90	1.10
N	92	92
Race/Ethnicity	87% White	87% White
Sex	74% Female	74% Female
Age	*M* = 39.51	*M* = 39.51

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Sample Sizes per Condition (Cont.)

Conditions	Dependent Variables	
	State of Anger	Likelihood of Providing a Justification for a Charge of Discrimination
Perpetrator Status x Mode of Confrontation		
Coworker x Direct		
M	1.96	3.90
SD	.77	1.12
N	41	41
Race/Ethnicity	.76	.76
Sex	.70	.70
Age	37.65	37.65
Supervisor x Direct		
M	2.44	3.62
SD	1.09	.93
N	33	33
Race/Ethnicity	.90	.90
Sex	.63	.63
Age	42.52	42.52
Coworker x Indirect		
M	2.45	4.61
SD	.87	1.08
N	48	48
Race/Ethnicity	.85	.85
Sex	.65	.65
Age	37.67	37.67
Supervisor x Indirect		
M	2.10	4.78
SD	.92	1.12
N	44	44
Race/Ethnicity	.88	.88
Sex	.86	.86
Age	41.52	41.52

Table 2

MANCOVA Results of Perpetrator's Status (coworker/supervisor), Mode of Confrontation (direct/indirect), State Anger, and Likelihood of Providing a Justification for a Charge of Discrimination

	Dependent Variables	
	State Anger	Likelihood of Providing a Justification for a Charge of Discrimination
Source	*F*	*F*
Covariates		
Trait anger	39.86***	12.22***
Age	3.77*	1.93
Goal dependence	9.72**	7.12**
Perceived offensiveness	9.51**	4.45*
Conditions		
Perpetrator's status (S)	2.44	.14
Mode of confrontation (C)	3.16	37.36***
S x C	8.05**	3.93*

Note. $N = 166$.
* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$
*** $p \leq .001$

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. State of anger	2.24	.92	–						
2. Justification	4.29	1.16	.11	–					
3. Perpetrator's status	.46	.50	.01	.00	–				
4. Mode of confrontation	.55	.50	.06	.39**	.03	–			
5. Age	39.65	10.13	-.21*	-.13	.21*	-.02	–		
6. Goal dependence	4.39	1.15	-.28**	.09	.24*	.03	.24*	–	
7. Perceived offensiveness	3.07	1.39	.21*	-.08	.12	-.04	.13	.25*	–
8. Trait anger	2.49	.86	.55**	.13	-.04	-.13	-.18	-.25*	.19

Note. $N = 166$.
Perpetrator's status was coded as 0 = coworker, 1 = supervisor.
Mode of confrontation was coded as 0 = direct, 1 = indirect.
* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$

Table 4

Regressing State Anger on Perpetrator's Status, Mode of Confrontation, and Control Variables

Variable	b (SE)	β	*t*	R^2	*F*
Intercept	1.53 (.39)		3.92	.41	15.66 (7, 158)
Age	-.01 (.01)	-.13*	-1.94		
Goal dependence	-.17 (.06)	-.21**	-3.12		
Perceived offensiveness	.14 (.04)	.20**	3.08		
Trait anger	.46 (.07)	.43***	6.31		
Perpetrator's status (S)	.52 (.18)	.28**	2.94		
Mode of confrontation (C)	.53 (.16)	.29***	3.44		
S x C	-.66 (.23)	-.32*	-2.84		

Note. $N = 166$.
Perpetrator's status was coded as 0 = coworker, 1 = supervisor.
Mode of confrontation was coded as 0 = direct, 1 = indirect.
* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$
*** $p \leq .001$

Table 5

Regressing Likelihood of Providing a Justification for a Charge of Discrimination on Perpetrator's Status, Mode of Confrontation, and Control Variables

Variable	b (SE)	β	*t*	R^2	*F*
Intercept	2.99 (.55)		5.42	.26	7.72 (7, 158)
Age	-.01 (.01)	-.10	-1.39		
Goal dependence	.21 (.08)	.21**	2.67		
Perceived offensiveness	-.13 (.06)	-.16*	-2.11		
Trait anger	.36 (.10)	.27***	3.50		
Perpetrator's status (S)	-.39 (.25)	-.17	-1.57		
Mode of confrontation (C)	.67 (.22)	.29**	3.06		
S x C	.65 (.33)	.25*	1.98		

Note. $N = 166$.
Perpetrator's Status was coded as 0 = coworker, 1 = supervisor.
Mode of confrontation was coded as 0 = direct, 1 = indirect.
* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$
*** $p \leq .001$

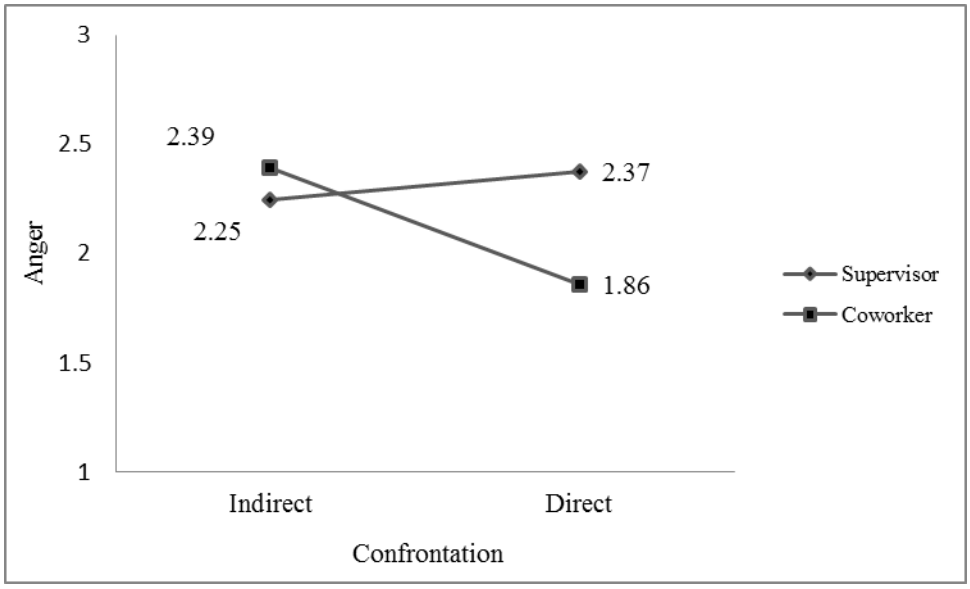

Figure 1. Interaction of mode of confrontation and perpetrator's status on anger.

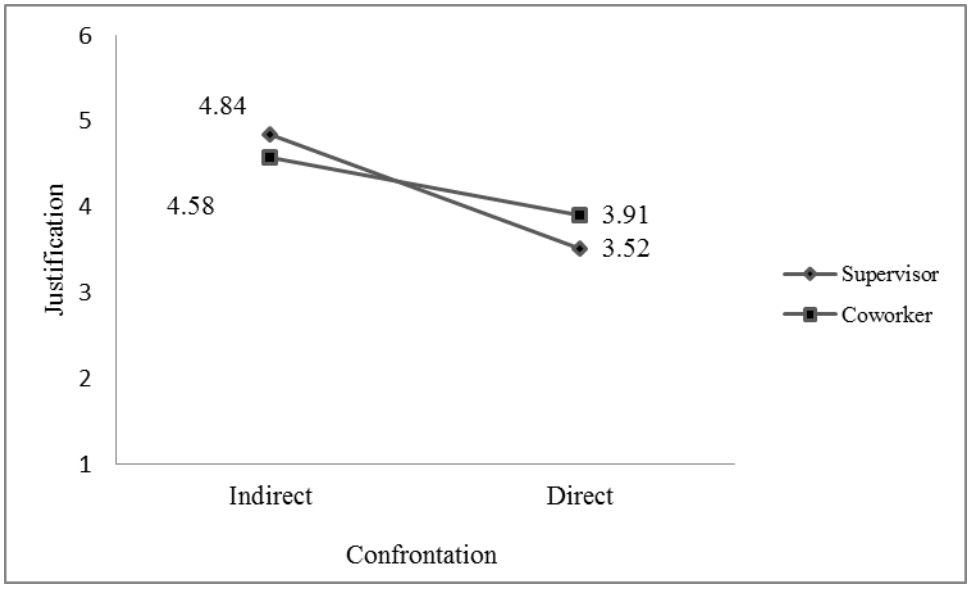

Figure 2. Interaction of mode of confrontation and perpetrator's status on the likelihood of providing a justification for a charge of discrimination.