

REF. 10. The Home Side of Org. Behavior.

CHAPTER 5

Subtle (and Not So Subtle) Discrimination in Organizations

Robert L. Dipboye, Stefanie K. Halverson

PASTA:	52
COPIAS:	15
R\$:	2.10
R\$:	2.00
	FR

Not so long ago unfair discrimination in the workplace was open, tolerated, and even encouraged. Blatant discrimination against women and minorities, the disabled, and older workers only began to diminish to a substantial degree in the United States after the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. After three decades of enforcement of these laws, the workplace has become more open and tolerant. Nevertheless, a variety of groups continue to suffer from unfair treatment in the workplace despite laws, court decisions, and social pressures against discrimination. In this chapter we focus on discrimination against four groups: racial and ethnic minorities, women, older persons, and the disabled. A fifth group, gays and lesbians, is not covered here because it is the focus of another chapter in this volume. Differential treatment is not necessarily unfair but becomes unfair when it is based on "attributes irrelevant to judgment of a person's competence or worth" (Piper, 1993, p. 293) and is "selectively unjustified" (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986, p. 3). Consistent with these views, we define unfair employment discrimination as occurring when persons in a "social category" (Jones, 1986), persons with a particular "group identity" (Cox, 1993, p. 64), or persons with certain "ascribed characteristics" (Messner, 1989, p. 71) are put at a disadvantage in the workplace relative to other groups with comparable potential or proven

success (Cascio, 1998). Unfair discrimination becomes illegal when it occurs on the basis of attributes covered under the civil rights laws (for example, race and religion).

We make three primary points in this chapter. First, despite the clear progress that has been made in civil rights over the last half century, unfair discrimination in the workplace is still a problem. Second, although discrimination continues in its more blatant forms, much of today's discrimination takes a more subtle form and has slipped out of the light into the dark side of the organization. This leads to our third assertion that discrimination in the workplace is shaped not only by factors within the individuals who perpetuate the discrimination but also by factors at the group, organizational, and societal and economic levels. Moreover, these factors often conflict, and the subtlety and instability with which discrimination occurs in the workplace reflects this conflict. Those who are the perpetrators typically see themselves as unbiased, have rational justifications for their acts, and may be unaware of their own behavior and attitudes. In the maelstrom of conflicting and inconsistent pressures that can exist in an organization, active attempts to suppress biases can, with slight changes in the context, give way to unrestrained discrimination against the target.

Unfair Discrimination Is Still a Problem

It is obvious that there has been progress since the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s in providing greater opportunities for minority, older, female, and disabled employees. But does discrimination continue to be a significant problem? There are at least three sources of evidence showing that unfair discrimination is a continuing problem that deserves our attention.

Surveys Showing Perceived Discrimination

Opinion polls with national representative samples provide one source of evidence. Although the findings vary with the question asked, these polls tend to show that a substantial proportion of respondents perceive women, minorities, disabled, and older employees as subject to discrimination in the workplace. In a nationwide poll conducted in 2000 by NBC News, 37 percent of the total sample

said that they had been discriminated against in the workplace on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, religion, or ethnicity (retrieved from Polling the Nation Survey Database, October 20, 2003; <http://poll.orpub.com/poll/lpext.dll?f=templates&fn=main-h.htm>). In another national poll conducted in 2002, fully 67 percent of the sample of forty-five- to seventy-six-year-old persons agreed that there is age discrimination in the workplace (American Association of Retired Persons, 2002). An NBC News—*Wall Street Journal* telephone survey in 2000 found that 44 percent of women said that they had been personally discriminated against in the workplace because of their sex and almost a third reported that they had been sexually harassed (Hunt, 2000). In another NBC News—*Wall Street Journal* poll conducted in 1995, 47 percent of those surveyed said that the disabled face unfair discrimination, 31 percent said they were treated fairly, and 11 percent said that they were given unfair preference (retrieved from Polling the Nation Survey Database, October 20, 2003; <http://poll.orpub.com/poll/lpext.dll?f=templates&fn=main-h.htm>). The disabled also perceive discrimination. Hallock, Hendricks, and Broadbent (1998) found that 53 percent of disabled people in their sample reported at least some discrimination and 14 percent reported discrimination as often or very often.

It is not surprising that members of groups that are targets of discrimination are more likely to see discrimination as a problem. In a random, nationwide survey of 2,203 adults in 2002, 50 percent of African Americans but only 18 percent of all adults reported that black individuals were "often" the target of workplace discrimination (Taylor, 2002). In the same survey, 27 percent of women compared to 19 percent of all adults reported that women were frequent victims of discrimination. Somewhat similar differences were reported by the Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University (Joyner, 2002). In this survey, 28 percent of the black respondents said that they personally had suffered discrimination in the workplace and 55 percent said that they knew of a coworker who suffered discrimination. Of the Hispanics in the sample, 22 percent said that they had been the targets of discrimination and 18 percent said that they knew of a coworker who had suffered discrimination. By comparison, only 13 percent of the white persons surveyed said that they had suffered discrimination and only 6 percent said that they had observed discrimination. Feelings on the

part of a group that they are the target of discrimination should be a cause of concern, even if more objective data does not support this claim. Not only are they an indicator of actual discrimination but such perceptions are also related to a variety of negative outcomes, including stress, dissatisfaction, and tension (Sanchez & Brock, 1996).

Inequalities in Labor Market Outcomes

Census and department of labor statistics provide a second source of data. Workers who are older, female, or disabled or who belong to a racial or ethnic minority are at a disadvantage in compensation, employment, and job status, compared to white, nondisabled males. The unemployment rate in 2002 for whites was 4.2 percent compared to 7.7 percent for blacks and 6.1 percent for Hispanics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2003b, tables 7 and 11). Whites who find employment are more likely to be in the management occupations than blacks and Hispanics but less likely to be handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers and laborers than blacks and Hispanics. The 2001 weekly earnings for whites was \$612 compared to \$487 for blacks (80 percent of whites) and \$414 for Hispanics (67 percent of whites).

Of those with a work disability who were in the twenty-five to sixty-four age range in 2001, 28.7 percent were in the workforce and 8.7 percent were unemployed, whereas 78.2 percent of those without a disability in this age range were in the workforce and 3.3 percent were unemployed (U.S. Census Bureau, August 22, 2002). The average full-time earnings of disabled working persons twenty-five to sixty-four years of age was 63 percent of the earnings of persons of the same age without a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, August 22, 2002, table 3). Moreover, there is evidence that the employment status of disabled workers aged twenty-one to thirty-nine may have actually declined in the years following the passage of the Americans with Disability Act (Acemoglu & Angrist, 2001).

Of the approximately one million workers fifty-five and older who were displaced from 1997 to 1999, only 53 percent were reemployed by February 2000, compared to 80 percent of the twenty-five- to fifty-four-year-olds who were displaced during the same period. In 2002 the percentage of the civilian noninstitutional pop-

ulation that was not in the labor force was only 15.87 percent for those who were thirty-five to forty-four years old, compared to 17.91 percent for those who were forty-five to fifty-four years old and 38.08 percent for those who were fifty-five to sixty-four years old (U.S. Department of Labor, 2003a, table 3). Workers who are fifty-five to sixty-four are significantly less likely to be hired in firms with health care plans than in those without, and this disparity increases with the cost of the health program (Scott, Berger, & Garen, 1995).

Finally, women continue to be underrepresented in many higher paid occupations and continue to receive lower wages than men. In 2001, 78.5 percent of administrative support personnel and 77.3 percent of operators, fabricators, and laborers were men (U.S. Department of Labor, 2003b, table 11). Women rarely make it to the top positions in organizations and constitute only 4 percent of the CEOs in the Fortune 500s (Catalyst, 2000). Even when women occupy managerial positions, there is some indication that they may tend to have the title of manager without the same responsibilities (Reskin & Ross, 1992). Women working full time during 2001 had median weekly earnings that were 76 percent the earnings of men. According to a General Accounting Office study of women's pay from 1995 to 2000, the gap between the salaries of men and women widened for managers in seven of ten industries (Seglin, May 17, 2002).

Disparities in labor market outcomes alone are not sufficient proof of unfair discrimination. An alternative explanation for the disparities we have cited here is that the disadvantaged groups bring less human capital to the work situation in the form of skills, education, and experience. Although research has shown that the differences diminish once these factors are taken into account, substantial inequalities are still found (for a discussion of this research see Cohn, 2000). This research has shown that gaps in labor market outcomes as a function of race-ethnicity, gender, and age persist even after controlling for differences in human capital (Blau & Kahn, 1997; Egan & Bendick, 1994; England, 1982, 1984; Gill, 1989; Kilbourne et al., 1994; Nesbitt, 1997; Polacheck, 1981; Reskin & Ross, 1992; Valian, 2000; Wanner & McDonald, 1983; Wellington, 1994). Just how much of the disparities remain after accounting for differences in human capital is subject to continuing debate

and will not be addressed in this chapter. We will simply assert that these inequalities in outcomes continue, and discrimination remains one of several viable explanations for these inequalities.

Field and Laboratory Research Showing Unfair Discrimination

As a third source of evidence, we can also point to research in the laboratory and the field demonstrating unfair discrimination. Perhaps the most direct evidence for discrimination in hiring has been provided in several field experiments in which persons from a disadvantaged group have been matched with persons from a non-disadvantaged group and have been shown to receive less favorable treatment when applying for jobs (Bendick, Brown, & Wall, 1997; Bendick, Jackson, & Reinoso, 1994; Bendick, Jackson, Reinoso, & Hodges, 1991; Bendick, Jackson, & Romero, 1996; Boggs, Sellers, & Bendick, 1993; Buchanan, 1997; Siegelman, 1999). Although the lab and field research in psychology and management has shown that unfair discrimination "can" occur and has teased out various dynamics underlying its occurrence, this research is mostly based on opportunistic samples and cannot provide the basis for estimating the extent of occurrence at a national level. The scientific surveys showing perceptions of discrimination and the research showing gaps in labor market outcomes are more convincing demonstrations, in our opinion, that there is a problem.

We believe discrimination remains a substantial problem in the work place. But what of those who disagree with our position and are convinced that unfair discrimination is infrequent and has little impact on labor market outcomes? Even if one assumes that it is a low base rate phenomenon, discrimination still occurs and can harm those who are the victims. Consequently, research is needed to understand the causes of unfair discrimination and ways to eliminate it, just as research continues on other relatively rare phenomena (for example, workplace violence, theft).

Discrimination Can Be Subtle as Well as Blatant

We would not claim on the basis of opinion polls, labor market data, or the lab and field research that inequalities in the workplace are solely the result of unfair discrimination; neither can we

specify the extent to which unfair discrimination occurs. Nevertheless, we would assert on the basis of the research that unfair discrimination is neither rare nor inconsequential. Perhaps the most vivid examples of discrimination are the complaints filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) alleging employment discrimination in the private sector. These complaints increased 4.45 percent from the previous year to 84,442 in Fiscal Year 2002 (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2003). The largest single category of complaints was for race discrimination (29,910, up 3.5 percent from FY 2001), followed by sex-gender discrimination (25,536 alleged, up 1.6 percent from FY 2001). Age constitutes the third highest source of complaints in 2001 (up 14.5 percent from FY 2001). This category of complaints has shown the largest increases since 1997, and as the baby-boom generation ages is likely to increase further. The fourth highest source of complaints to the EEOC and the most ambiguous is disability (15,964, down 3 percent from FY 2001). With 43 million disabled Americans, according to the last census, this is an area where there are likely to be even greater complaints in the future. The largest increases were for national origin discrimination (9,046, up 13 percent from FY 2001) and religious discrimination (2,572, up 21 percent from FY 2001).

The cases taken to the EEOC illustrate the more blatant variety of discrimination. Consider these recent examples.

A cafeteria company agreed to pay the EEOC \$175,000 fine to settle a race discrimination lawsuit. An employee who worked as a grill cook and server was told by the kitchen manager to "go back to Africa" and that "all Black people are crack heads and all they do is get drunk and live on welfare." In addition to these charges, the White general manager was accused of throwing away applications from Black applicants (Sixel, April 2, 2002).

Without admitting guilt and to avoid a major lawsuit, a large Wall Street financial firm settled for \$1 million with women who had filed complaints alleging "blatant sexism" (Markon & Carroll, February 21, 2002). The women complained of being "yelled at, sworn at, and belittled by men in the company." One woman said her manager invited himself into her apartment and then refused her request for a transfer because he "would miss having (her) beautiful body around."

A Chicago-area auto dealership was ordered to pay \$100,000 in damages for age discrimination (freedman, January 7, 2002). A fifty-nine-year

old applicant for a sales position was not interviewed despite twenty-four years of experience. Seven younger applicants for the same position were hired. The interviewer had noted the ages of the applicants he had interviewed. The general manager testified that he was not aware that it was illegal to discriminate on the basis of age. A jury found in favor of the plaintiff and this was upheld in a federal appeals court.

The president of a Houston manufacturer earning \$225,000 was fired and his health benefits taken away after being diagnosed with a form of cancer similar to leukemia. The EEOC sued the company for violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The suit was settled five years after the plaintiff's death (Tedford, May 2, 2000).

As seen in these examples, blatant discrimination still exists. It is obvious, however, that this form of discrimination has become less common in the workplace. Civil rights laws have made such behavior illegal, and due in large part to the enforcement of these laws, attitudes and social norms have shifted dramatically in favor of nondiscrimination. Being seen as prejudiced is now something to be avoided. Our thesis is that unfair discrimination in today's workplace is likely to be much subtler than the behavior found in the above-mentioned examples. The following hypothetical incident illustrates the subtle variety of discrimination.

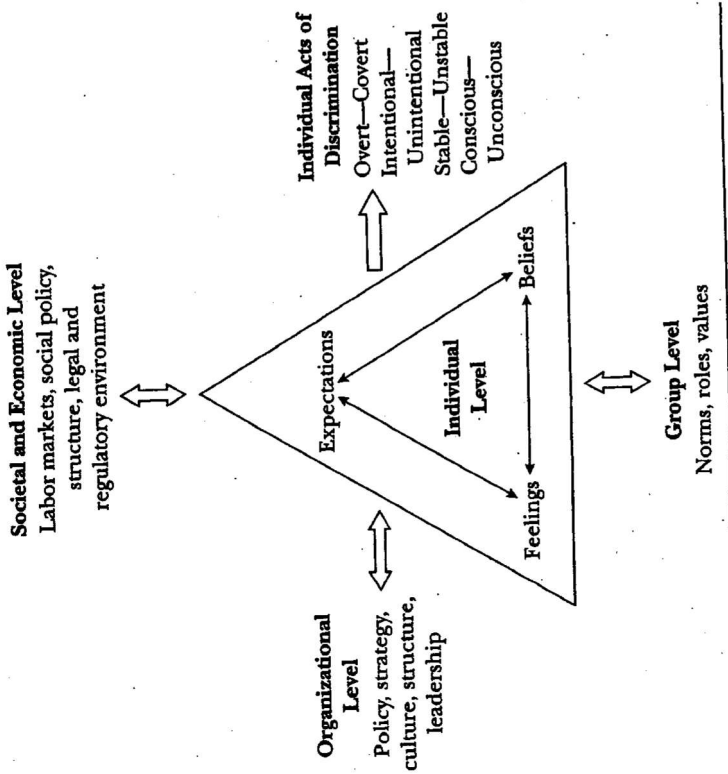
A woman working for a large corporation in a professional position feels isolated from her mostly male coworkers. An invitation is seldom extended when her coworkers go out to lunch. At meetings she often feels as though her male coworkers interrupt her and fail to give her contributions the serious consideration they deserve. She feels that when she asserts herself in meetings she is seen as overly aggressive but when she is quiet she is considered to be the "typical" passive female. The male coworkers, on the other hand, generally feel that she is qualified in several respects and would admit that she has done well in the technical aspects of her job. But they also have said in private that she lacks some of the "business savvy" and "social skills" needed for the job. They believe that like some other women and minorities she was hired because management needed to meet affirmative action goals. Recently corporate management has implemented a "rank and yank" system of 360-degree appraisal whereby the bottom performing team member each year will be fired. The feeling that she is the "weak link" has solidified and become more open since this system was announced. Still, her coworkers suspect she has an advantage and will probably survive because she is a woman.

Unlike the EEOC cases we cited, it is unlikely that formal charges of discrimination would be filed for a case such as this, and if a charge were filed, it would be unlikely to serve as a successful basis for a lawsuit. Isolation from social interactions, interruptions in meetings, or the private misgivings of coworkers provide a tenuous basis for a formal charge. Nevertheless, this example is illustrative of how discrimination can be experienced in today's workplace. In this case, aversive feelings and stereotypical beliefs are held in check out of concern with violating personal and public standards of conduct. Despite the absence of overt bias, the ambiguity and ambivalence on the part of both parties to the interaction can adversely affect the well-being and success of minority, older, female, and disabled employees. The ambiguity and ambivalence can also set the stage for what could become overt and blatant discrimination against these individuals given changes in the situation that provide a rationale or justification for the discrimination. In the remainder of this chapter we will consider how to understand discrimination of both the blatant and subtle varieties as they occur in an organizational context.

Toward a Model of Discrimination in the Organization

Greater insight into unfair discrimination in organizations is likely to come from a multilevel approach that incorporates factors at not only the individual level but also at the group, organizational, and societal and economic levels. As a step in this direction we present the model depicted in Figure 5.1. Although this model distinguishes among the different levels of causes, the outcome that is our primary concern is the act of discrimination that occurs at the level of an individual organizational participant. This act is described along four dimensions: overt-covert, intentional-unintentional, stable-unstable, and conscious-unconscious. Blatant discrimination can be characterized as unfair treatment of the target persons that is overt, conscious, intentional, and stable over time. The subtlest unfair discrimination is covert, unconscious, unintentional, and unstable over time. These four dimensions can be viewed as continua in which behavior is often at some point between the extremes.

Figure 5.1. Acts of Unfair Discrimination as a Function of Conflicts Among Pressures For and Against These Acts at Various Levels.



Blatant discrimination is most likely to occur when the multi-level antecedents are aligned and consistent in the pressure on the person to engage in the discriminatory act. For instance, situations exist in which organizational participants may feel strong group and organizational pressure to act in ways that unfairly discriminate against members of a group. At the same time they may have personally held feelings and beliefs that support such acts. In such an instance we would expect that the discrimination is more likely to emerge in a form that is relatively open and intentional. Moreover, we would expect the organizational participant to be aware

of his or her own discriminatory behavior and to show this behavior consistently over time. Conversely, more subtle discrimination is likely when there is conflict among these various pressures. For instance, acts of discrimination are more likely to be of a subtle form when an organizational participant holds prejudicial attitudes but is restrained from acting on those attitudes as the result of organizational and group pressures against discrimination. Another situation would be where an organizational participant's attitudes and beliefs are unbiased but there are pressures at the group, organizational, and the societal and economic levels to discriminate. Still another situation might be where the pressures external to the organizational participant are aligned either in support of or opposed to discrimination. Despite the consistency among external pressures on the individual, internal conflict among the beliefs and attitudes held by the participant could still exist with regard to the target person. When there is conflict among the multi-level determinants of discrimination or conflict within the individual, one could expect that discriminatory acts that emerge are more likely to be covert, unintentional, and unconscious. Moreover, such acts in these situations are more likely to be unstable such that treatment of the target person may swing from one extreme to another given changes external to the participant. Thus, personal biases seem unlikely to appear when these acts are likely to be seen by others as biased but may emerge unrestrained when there is strong pressure from the group or organization to show "team spirit" and "fit in." In the face of such pressures, discriminatory acts can be rationalized and expressed in a form that is not aversive to the agent of the discrimination.

Individual-Level Pressures For and Against Discrimination

The typical focus in previous discussions of discrimination has been on the feelings and beliefs of the individual who commits the act of discrimination (Fiske, 1998). Although they are not the sole factor to consider, these same components are important to understanding discrimination in the organization. The primary cognitive component consists of the prototypes, schemata, and stereotypes that encourage shortcuts in the processing of information on members

of groups. People hold stereotypes or schemata regarding groups and fall back on these cognitive structures in their perceptions and evaluations of individual members of these groups. In economics the term "statistical discrimination" is used to refer to the attribution of the average characteristics of the group to individual members of a group (Sattinger, 1998). The affective component consists of the emotional reactions to members of a group, which can exist in a variety of forms but is usually associated with prejudice. For instance, Stone and Colella (1996) posit several affective responses to disabled individuals, including revulsion, sympathy, discomfort, fear, resentment, frustration, anxiety-stress, and guilt. Perhaps as the result of socialization and conditioning going back to childhood, people have visceral reactions that they cannot control, that are unconscious, and may be rooted in basic psychological needs (for example, self-esteem needs). Discrimination itself is usually conceived as the behavioral component and consists of patterns of verbal and nonverbal behavior. For instance, differences in characteristic communication patterns can be responsible for problems in relationships between men and women (Haslett, Geis, & Carter, 1992) and blacks and whites (Erickson, 1979). Although discrimination can be a consequence of the cognitive and affective components, the three components can be independent or reciprocally dependent on one another. Each component may be conscious and controlled, such as when an individual intentionally discriminates against a member of a disadvantaged group. Each can also be unconscious and uncontrolled, such as when reactions to a disadvantaged person occur in an unthinking, automatic manner. Moreover, these three components can act in unison or exist in conflict with one another.

When the cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors are aligned in supporting bias against members of a targeted group, a blatant form of discrimination is the likely outcome. Discrimination against blacks can occur in the form of stereotyping of blacks, the experience of negative feelings such as disgust, fear, and dislike in the presence of blacks, and negative verbal and nonverbal behavior toward blacks. All of this may be quite conscious and intentional. However, a common theme in the social psychological research over the last two decades is that old-fashioned racism has

been replaced by more subtle varieties in the form of symbolic racism (Kinder & Sears, 1981), modern racism (McConahay & Hough, 1976), racial ambivalence (Katz & Hass, 1988), and aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). There are differences in these theories of racism, but there are several themes underlying these theories that characterize subtle discrimination. Although we will discuss these themes in the context of subtle racism, these same themes have been applied to discrimination against women (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and the disabled (Snyder, Kleck, Strenta, & Mentzer, 1979) and could be easily extended to older employees. The themes are as follows:

1. *Affirmation of traditional values can be a cover for prejudice.* In symbolic racism, there is old-fashioned racial hatred that is expressed in terms of the belief that blacks do not possess discipline, self-control, self-reliance, and other traditional values. Similarly, in modern racism, white individuals who are prejudiced avoid direct statements of racism but indirectly convey racism in the positions that they espouse. For instance, opposition to affirmative action may be principled and reasonable but can also be a cover-up for an underlying anti-black attitude.
2. *There is considerable ambivalence in attitudes toward members of outgroups.* Stereotypes may be predominantly negative but almost always contain positive components. Katz and Hass (1988) in their theory of racial ambivalence posit that perceptions of blacks as deserving sympathy and help conflict with perceptions of blacks as deviant and not playing by the rules. One prediction of their model is that the more intense the ambivalence (that is, the more intense the negative and positive feelings), the more unstable the response. For instance, a black person may receive even greater rewards in response to good performance and more punishment in response to poor performance than would a white person (Katz & Glass, 1979).
3. *There are negative affective reactions that can be unconscious and uncontrolled.* The theory of aversive racism proposes that socialization in American culture and cognitive biases have instilled a bias among whites against blacks and other minorities. Nevertheless, there are modern norms against overt racism so that

whites cannot admit to themselves that they have these biases. There are two consequences of this. First, even well-intentioned people, who do not think of themselves as prejudiced against a group, may have rapid, automatic, racially biased associations, which would be aversive to them if they were consciously aware of them. Prejudicial attitudes may leak unconsciously into the treatment of a black person by a white person. In a demonstration of this, Vanman, Paul, Ito, and Miller (1997) had participants work with a black or white partner. More liking was reported for black partners than white partners on a self-report measure, but at the same time facial electromyography (EMG) activity indicated greater negative emotional reaction to blacks. A second consequence is automaticity in the processing of information on stereotyped groups. Payne (2001) found that subjects who were primed with photographs of black persons were more likely to identify the subsequent signal as a gun compared to subjects primed with a picture of a white person.

A second consequence of aversive racism and people's anxiety about appearing prejudiced (to themselves or to others) is that when nonegalitarian behavior can be explained in terms of something other than prejudice, people are more likely to act on their prejudice. A series of studies by Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder, Kleck, Strenta, & Mentzer, 1979) illustrates this phenomenon. Participants are asked to evaluate a movie playing on one of two monitors separated by a partition. Already sitting in front of each of the monitors is a confederate, who is either "normal" or stigmatized (for example, disabled, black). The critical manipulation is whether both monitors show the same movie or two different ones. When there are different movies showing and the individuals can attribute not sitting with the stigmatized other to personal preference for the movie, they are more likely to avoid sitting with the stigmatized person. The two-movie condition renders the motivation for the participant's avoidance of the stigmatized person ambiguous. People are more likely to avoid sitting with the minority or disabled person because their prejudice can be disguised as a legitimate preference for the other movie.

Pressures For and Against Discrimination That Are External to the Participant

In the previous discussions of the various forms of subtle discrimination, the primary emphasis in the psychological literature has been on these intraindividual events that can lead to discrimination. A common theme is that there is a conflict or tension among these factors that leads to instability and ambivalence in the treatment of the persons who are the target of discrimination. These theories also have been used to understand workplace discrimination. However, the model in Figure 5.1 is based on the assumption that other factors in addition to those at the individual level need to be incorporated to account for subtle and blatant forms of discrimination in organizations.

Group-Level Pressures

One of the strongest motives underlying human behavior in organizations is the need to belong and to be accepted by one's peers. The power of group norms and pressures to conform to these norms has been repeatedly shown in field studies and laboratory experiments. A major antecedent of unfair discrimination is conformity to the expectations of other group members (Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000). Group norms not only define reality for group members but also communicate how members can obtain the approval and avoid the criticisms of fellow group members. The recent allegations of harassment of women at some Wall Street firms may reflect a group culture in these companies that is dominated by young white upwardly mobile professional men (Markon & Carroll, 2002; McGeehan, 2001). Likewise, the racial graffiti that is a problem in manufacturing and production settings may reflect a group culture dominated by working class white men. Sexual harassment, racial epithets, and offensive posters are the harsher ways in which a group culture can encourage discrimination. Less obvious are other manifestations such as attending more to what some people say than others and giving more credit for accomplishments and access to information to some people over others (Ibarra, 1993).

Organizational-Level Pressures

At the organizational level, the policies, strategies, culture, structure, and top-level leadership of the organization can encourage unfair discrimination. Perry, Davis-Blake, and Kulik (1994) speculate that high levels of job title proliferation are associated with high levels of gender segregation in occupations. Also, within job ladders, if entry-level jobs are segregated by gender, the pool of individuals available for promotion will consist primarily of individuals of one gender. Another important factor is the degree of formality and standardization in human resource management procedures. When employees rely on highly subjective, unstructured, and invalidated human resource procedures without regard to the job-relatedness of these procedures, one can expect more discrimination (Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995). There is more than one underlying reason for this, including a lack of accountability that allows discrimination to go undetected and unpunished and high levels of task uncertainty that may lead decision makers to fall back on stereotypes and their feelings when making decisions about employees.

The values and behaviors of top-level management are another organizational level factor to consider. The CEO and his or her management team sets the tone for the organization. When top-level management is guilty of ageism, sexism, racism, or discrimination against the disabled, these acts of discrimination send a message to those below them in the organization. For example, one of the authors is aware of widely circulated stories within a major corporation of the CEO's womanizing and harassment of women. For some male employees in the organization this seemed to be received as a message that it was OK to be sexist as long as they espoused egalitarianism between the sexes and were not overt in their sexism. For some female employees it was a message that no matter what they did, they would still be discriminated against because they were only valued as a sex object.

Societal and Economic-Level Pressures

At this level, there are factors such as the structure of labor markets, social policy, investments by society in human capital, and the legal and regulatory framework. Market forces are particularly important and have been largely ignored in the industrial and

organizational literature. There is convincing evidence for a buffering explanation for sex segregation in occupations (see Cohn, 2000 for a discussion). In capital-intensive segments of the economy, labor costs are relatively minor and employers can afford to discriminate. In other words, these firms can afford the luxury of preferring well-paid men over women. In labor-intensive segments of the economy, cheap labor is needed to ensure a profit, and it is here that we find that a more substantial proportion of women are hired (Cohn, 2000). By contrast, in capital-intensive firms personnel costs are a smaller part of the budget and the organization can afford the "luxury" of indulging their biases and discriminating against women.

Customer preference is another economic force. A recent case brought by the EEOC provides an example (U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission, March 6, 2002). In this case, the plaintiffs alleged that they had suffered racial discrimination at a drinking-water processing and delivery company. African American drivers were assigned to routes in low-income neighborhoods, which were often less profitable than routes in affluent communities. Because pay and promotion were tied to the profitability of the routes, the African American drivers received lower compensation and fewer promotions than those assigned to the affluent areas. "Black drivers understood that they would work the so-called 'ghetto routes' while Beverly Hills would be handled by White drivers" (p. 1).

It may well have been that this differential treatment was not motivated by a dislike of black drivers or an attempt to keep them down. Instead, this discrimination may well have been guided by what were seen as legitimate economic considerations. Perhaps, for instance, customers prefer drivers of the same race and are more likely to buy water if the driver is of the same race. Although we suspect that such customer preferences are often more imagined than real, and are subject to modification, in the short term they might represent realistic economic considerations. In one of the prominent court cases brought against airlines for discriminating against male flight attendants, expert witnesses argued that airline attendants should be female because passengers need and expect the nurturance of a woman (*Diaz v. Pan American World Airways, Inc.*). There may have been some truth to this at the time, in

the sense that customers had grown accustomed to being served by women. Such arguments failed to recognize that customer tastes such as these can easily change, and after over two decades during which male flight attendants have become common, the argument seems silly in retrospect.

Discrimination in Organizations as a Role-Conflict Phenomenon

Acts of discrimination may occur as the result of any one of the factors at the individual, group, organizational, or the societal and economic level. One way to view unfair discrimination is in terms of role theory. The participant occupies a position in the organization, and expectations are communicated by those inside and outside the organization as to what behavior is desired of that person. From these expectations emerge the work role of the participant, which consists of the pattern of behavior associated with the position. Expectations for how the participant is to treat minorities, women, older, and disabled employees can be considered a type of role expectation.

One type of role conflict occurs when different people communicate conflicting expectations for whether a person should unfairly discriminate. For instance, management may communicate an expectation of nondiscrimination in the form of organizational policy, but the expectations communicated by coworkers may encourage the participant to go against policy and unfairly discriminate. Another situation might be where the expectations communicated to the participant conflict with his or her own beliefs and values. Thus, the participant may believe and feel that nondiscrimination is the right action but may perceive that he or she is expected to discriminate as the result of pressures from the work group and corporate policies. Inconsistencies among the various pressures on the individual participant depicted in Figure 5.1 could be experienced as role stress. And it is this stress that characterizes the ambivalence and instability associated with the various forms of subtle discrimination. Caught in the crossfire of inconsistent expectations, the participant may be influenced to behave in a discriminatory direction by factors that can rationalize the act.

Some Current Trends in Organizations That May Encourage Unfair Discrimination

We provide four examples of how the context might "tip" the balance in favor of discrimination in a situation characterized by conflicting pressures for and against discrimination and the role stress associated with this conflict. Paradoxically, each of these tipping points has been championed as ways that organizations can compete in an increasingly competitive global economy. We are not arguing against any of these four factors, but aim only to show how each one could have the unintended consequence of encouraging unfair discrimination in a situation in which the organizational participants are subject to conflict among the various pressures depicted in Figure 5.1.

Team Spirit Can Work Against Openness and Tolerance

One trend today is the use of team-based management whereby groups are given autonomy to select their own members, provide their own appraisals, administer their own rewards, and make important decisions about their work. Rather than having strictly defined job duties, there is flexibility in people performing each other's jobs. An unanticipated consequence of these arrangements is that groups of workers may become the primary force for socialization in the organization.

Some of the strongest resistance to diversity occurs when there is a highly autonomous group with elite status. For example, Special Forces units in the military are coming under increasing criticism for their exclusion of racial minorities and women (Kampeas, 2002). The Texas Rangers have been charged with the same criticisms (*Houston Chronicle*, 1988; Nethaway, 1995; Sixel, 1994).

Also associated with the emphasis on teams is the priority given to maintaining the cohesion and morale of the group or team. A recent charge of age discrimination against a national magazine involved a forty-year-old female college student who applied as an intern but was rejected on the basis of her age (*Washington Post*, Feb. 18, 2002). According to the editor of this magazine, "College internships, after all, thrive on a convivial, often social atmosphere where people of similar ages bond over new experiences. An older person working with a younger

counterpart on routine tasks such as sending faxes or doing research would disrupt the group dynamic of the magazine's program." Another example is a major corporation that was recently charged by the EEOC with blatant harassment of women (*Washington Post*, Jan. 25, 2002). It is alleged that the company sponsored a "best breast" competition in which pictures were taken of women's chests and posted on a bulletin board so employees could vote for a winner. It was described as an attempt to "create an overall friendly productive environment."

In all of these examples, the norms of a group may have allowed members to reframe inappropriate behavior as legitimate attempts to meet the needs of the group and to develop camaraderie. Moreover, the more cohesive the group, the stronger the power of the group to gain compliance to the norms and the greater the likelihood that members will go beyond mere compliance and internalize the norms. The "we feeling" of a group can encourage a contagion effect in which normally nonbiased individuals become uninhibited in the anonymity of the group situation and engage in inappropriate behavior.

Incentive and Appraisal Systems That Encourage Competition Can Encourage Unfair Discrimination

Another trend is an attempt by organizations to increase accountability by providing regular evaluations and rewarding employees for their individual performance. As Allport (1954) noted, one of the more powerful techniques for eliminating stereotypes and reducing prejudice is to put people into situations in which they must cooperate to achieve shared goals. However, organizations may undermine attempts to achieve diversity with reward and appraisal systems that place people in competition with one another. We would argue that diversity and EEOC policies that mandate tolerance are undercut by programs such as "rank and yank" systems of performance appraisal that have the effect of pitting employee against employee. Pay for performance can have the same effect. We would go so far as to assert that the reward structures of an organization probably do more than anything else to perpetuate discrimination. Not only do systems often reward competition, but they also fail to reward and even punish the mentoring of minorities and women.

Public Assertions of Vision, Values, Objectives, and Goals Can Substitute for Action

If people are rewarded for cooperation, we might ask, What are they rewarded to accomplish? What is the common goal that they pursue? Allport (1954) suggested that contact may lead to increased tolerance when there is a common goal and people believe they must work together to achieve these goals. All major corporations today take pride in lofty expressions of what they stand for and what they hope to achieve. Leaders who are charismatic are said to be the driving force of shared goals and values. Yet charisma can be a substitute for action. Weighty pronouncements on how discrimination will not be tolerated, or how diversity is a key value, can be the prelude for inaction.

How might this occur? One possibility is that top leaders issue vision statements that are essentially lies or cover-ups. Although outright lies occur, we think that the dynamics at work here are usually more subtle. An interesting possibility is that explicit pronouncements and the championing of egalitarian values and vision can actually increase discrimination as the result of giving a moral license. Monin and Miller (2001) provide evidence of this in an experiment in which participants were given a list of statements about women under instructions to state the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each of them (for example: "Some/Most women are better off at home taking care of the children"; "Men are more emotionally suited for politics than are some/most women"). The manipulation was whether the word "some" or "most" was used in the statements. When "most" was used, the participants had the opportunity to disagree with a biased statement (for example, that "most" women need a man to protect them). In a second study that followed this induction, participants were asked to imagine that they were a manager of a small company and were given the task of deciding whether a job was better suited for a man or a woman. Those who had been given the "most" wording were more likely to state a preference for a man in the job. Similar results were found for race. The reasoning was that prior assertions that could be construed as egalitarian gave the subject "license" to subsequently discriminate. It is interesting to speculate how organizations that require employees to espouse egalitarian values might actually provide license for subsequent discrimination.

Darley (2001) has pointed out another reason that lofty, visionary statements may have an effect that is opposite of what was intended. According to Darley the mere "existence of corporate codes can cause superiors to assume that the codes are much on the minds of the subordinates, and of course this assumption may not be true. . . . The superior assumes that he or she has communicated such ethical precautions far earlier; therefore, they do not need to be a part of the present communication" (pp. 40-41). Most of the organizations found guilty of discrimination no doubt have equal opportunity and affirmative action statements that are disseminated. Moreover, many of the organizations found guilty of discrimination have as part of their vision statements endorsements of diversity. It is interesting to speculate on how the act of making such lofty pronouncements might lead to less monitoring and the assumption that there is conformity to these statements.

An Emphasis on Person-Organization (PO) Fit Can Encourage Discrimination

A major emphasis in industrial and organizational (IO) psychology and human resources (HR) that has been reinforced by court decisions and in the EEOC uniform guidelines is that the selection, appraisal, training, and compensation of employees should be based on careful, quantitative analysis of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes required in the job. As the result of a variety of factors, including increased competition and rapidly changing technologies, there has been a deemphasis of the traditional, individualistic, job-based model. Achieving a good fit to the core values of the organization has become a higher priority in many organizations than achieving a good fit to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics required in the job (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991; Chatman, 1991). An emphasis on "fitting in" with the values of the organization may open the door to discrimination (Brief, 1998, p. 140; Powell, 1998, p. 50).

We believe the greatest danger of a PO fit approach to HR is that these approaches are typically associated with unstructured, subjective evaluation procedures (Dipboye, 1994). When evaluation procedures are not standardized and firmly anchored in clear requirements, the individual stereotypes and prejudices of the individual evaluator are more likely to dominate. Moreover, a PO fit

approach may legitimize the common rationale used in discrimination against racial minorities, women, older workers, and the disabled—that they just "don't fit in."

Conclusions

Despite progress, discrimination against racial minorities, women, older employees, and the disabled continues. There are a variety of sources of discrimination. It is not surprising that those most widely studied by psychologists are at the individual level and include cognitive and affective factors. In most organizations, however, conflict typically occurs among these individual-level antecedents and factors at the organizational, group, and societal and economic levels. The delicate balance between pressures to discriminate and pressures for tolerance and egalitarianism can easily be tipped one way or the other by this context. Thus, team management, PO fit, formal pronouncements of equal opportunity policies, and incentive systems that encourage competition may provide the release and the rationalization for acts of discrimination.

Most organizations offer neither total equality in treatment and opportunity nor blatant mistreatment of minority, women, disabled, and older employees. The more typical situation is one in which employees with good intentions are caught in the crossfire and illegal and unfair discrimination occur for what seem to be the best of reasons. But it is this subtle form of discrimination, rather than the "old-fashioned" variety, that is the more pernicious.

References

- Acemoglu, D., & Angrist, J. D. (2001, October). Consequences of employment protection? The case of the Americans with disabilities act. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 109, 915-957.
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- American Association of Retired Persons. (2002, September). *Staying ahead of the curve: The AARP work and career study*. Washington, DC: AARP.
- Bendick, M., Jr., Brown, L. E., & Wall, K. (1997). *No foot in the door: An experimental study of employment discrimination against older workers*. Washington, DC: Fair Employment Council of Greater Washington, Inc.

- Bendick, M., Jr., Jackson, C., & Reinoso, V. (1994). Measuring employment discrimination through controlled experiments. *Review of Black Political Economy*, 23, 25-48.
- Bendick, M., Jr., Jackson, C., Reinoso, V., & Hodges, L. (1991). Discrimination against Latino job applicants: A controlled experiment. *Human Resource Management*, 30, 469-484.
- Bendick, M., Jr., Jackson, C., & Romero, J. H. (1996). Employment discrimination against older workers: An experimental study of hiring practices. *Journal of Aging and Social Policy*, 8, 25-46.
- Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (1997). Swimming upstream: Trends in the gender wage differential in 1980s. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 15, 1-42.
- Boggs, R., Sellers, J., & Bendick, M., Jr. (1993). Use of testing in civil rights enforcement. In M. Fix & R. Struyk (Eds.), *Clear and convincing evidence: Measurement of discrimination in America* (pp. 345-376). Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Bowen, D. E., Ledford, G. E., Jr., & Nathan, B. R. (1991). Hiring for the organization, not the job. *Academy of Management Executive*, 5, 35-50.
- Brief, A. P. (1998). *Attitudes in and around organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brief, A. P., Dietz, J., Cohen, R. R., Pugh, S. D., & Vaslow, J. B. (2000). Just doing business: Modern racism and obedience to authority as explanations for employment discrimination. *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, 81, 72-97.
- Buchanan, J. (1997, December 14). Black citizens tell tales of bias: In wake of Dillard's verdict, other shoppers share their experiences. *Kansas City Star*, p. A1.
- Cascio, W. F. (1998). *Applied psychology in human resource management*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Catalyst (2000). Census of women corporate officers and top earners. New York: Catalyst.
- Chatman, J. A. (1991). Matching people and organizations: Selection and socialization in public accounting firms. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36, 459-484.
- Cohn, S. (2000). *Race and gender discrimination at work*. Oxford, England: Westview Press.
- Cox, T. (1993). *Cultural diversity in organizations. Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Darley, J. M. (2001). The dynamics of authority influence in organizations and the unintended action consequences. In J. M. Darley, D. M. Messick, & T. R. Tyler (Eds.), *Social influences on ethical behavior in organizations* (pp. 37-52). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Diaz v. Pan American World Airways, Inc., 311 F. Supp. 559 (S. D. Fla. 1970).
- Dipboye, R. L. (1994). Structured and unstructured interviews: Beyond the job-fit model. In G. Ferris (Ed.), *Research in personnel and human resources management*, 12, (pp. 79-123). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (1986). Prejudice, discrimination, and racism: Historical trends and contemporary approaches. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination and racism* (pp. 1-34). New York: Academic Press.
- Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (2000). Aversive racism and selection. *Psychological Science*, 11, 315-319.
- Egan, M. L., & Bendick, M., Jr. (1994). International business careers in the United States: Salaries, advancement, and male-female differences. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 5, 33-50.
- England, P. (1982). Failure of human capital theory to explain occupational segregation. *Journal of Human Resources*, 17, 338-350.
- England, P. (1984). Wage appreciation and depreciation: A test of neoclassical economic explanations of occupational sex segregation. *Social Forces*, 62, 726-749.
- Erickson, F. (1979). Talking down: Some cultural sources of miscommunication in interracial interviews. In A. Wolfgang (Ed.), *Nonverbal behavior: Applications and cultural implications* (pp. 99-126). New York: Academic Press.
- Finkelstein, L. M., Burke, M. J., & Raju, N. S. (1995). Age discrimination in simulated employment contexts: An integrative analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80, 652-663.
- Fiske, S. T. (1998). Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (pp. 357-411). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Freedman, E. (2002, January 7). Dealership owes damages in age case. *Automotive News*, 76, 16.
- Gill, A. (1989). The role of discrimination in determining occupational structure. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 42, 610-623.
- Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The ambivalent sexism inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 491-512.
- Hallock, K. F., Hendricks, W., & Broadbent, E. (1998). Discrimination by gender and disability status: Do worker perceptions match statistical measures? *Southern Economic Journal*, 65, 245-263.
- Haslett, B. J., Geis, F. L., & Carter, M. R. (1992). *The organizational woman: Power and paradox*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Houston Chronicle (1988, January 14). Black troopers, NAACP allege racism within DPS, p. A12.

- Hunt, A. (2000, June 22). American Opinion (A special report)—Women, politics and the marketplace—major progress, inequities cross 3 generations—grandmother, mother, daughter reveal a tempered optimism amid 'universally held views.' *The Wall Street Journal*, p. A9.
- Hutchens, R. M. (1988). Do job opportunities decline with age? *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, 42, 89-99.
- Ibarra, H. (1993). Personal networks of women and minorities in management: A conceptual framework. *Academy of Management Review*, 18, 56-87.
- Jones, J. M. (1986). Racism: A cultural analysis of the problem. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination and racism* (pp. 279-314). New York: Academic Press.
- Joyner, T. (2002, January 18). A divided workplace. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, p. C1.
- Kampeas, R. (2002, April 2). Elitism vs. racism? Some see efforts to diversify Special Forces as lowering of standards for sake of image. *Houston Chronicle*, p. A9.
- Katz, I., & Glass, D. C. (1979). An ambivalence-amplification theory of behavior toward the stigmatized. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 55-70). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Katz, I., & Hass, R. G. (1988). Racial ambivalence and American value conflict: Correlational and priming studies of dual cognitive structures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 893-905.
- Kilbourne, B. S., England, P., Farkas, G., Beron, K., & Weir, D. (1994). Returns to skill, compensating differentials and gender bias: Effects of occupational characteristics on the wages of white women and men. *American Journal of Sociology*, 100, 689-720.
- Kinder, D., & Sears, D. O. (1981). Prejudice and politics: Symbolic racism versus racial threats to the good life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40, 414-431.
- Markon, J., & Carroll, J. (2002, February 21). Financial firm agrees to settle bias lawsuit. *The Wall Street Journal*, p. A3.
- McConahay, J. B., & Hough, J. C. (1976). Symbolic racism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 32, 23-45.
- McCeehan, P. (2001, September 9). EEOC suit targets Morgan Stanley/Bond saleswoman alleges gender bias. *The New York Times*.
- Messner, S. F. (1989). Economic discrimination and societal homicide rates: Further evidence on the cost of inequality. *American Sociological Review*, 54, 597-611.
- Monin, B., & Miller, D. T. (2001). Moral credentials and the expression of prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81, 33-43.
- Nesbitt, P. (1997). Clergy feminization: Controlled labor or transformative change? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 585-598.
- Nethaway, R. (1995, June 21). Legendary Texas lawmen have trouble keeping peace with women. *The Atlanta Journal*, p. A11.
- Payne, B. Keith (2001). Prejudice and perception: The role of automatic and controlled processes in misperceiving a weapon. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81, 181-192.
- Perry, E. L., Davis-Blake, A., & Kulik, C. T. (1994). Explaining gender-based selection decisions: A synthesis of contextual and cognitive approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 19, 786-820.
- Piper, A.M.S. (1993). Higher-order discrimination. In O. Flanagan & A. O. Rorty (Eds.), *Identity, character, and morality. Essays in moral psychology* (3rd ed.) (pp. 285-309). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Polacheck, S. (1981). Occupational self-selection: A human capital approach to sex differences in occupational structure. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 58, 60-69.
- Powell, G. N. (1998). Reinforcing and extending today's organizations: The simultaneous pursuit of person-organization fit and diversity. *Organizational Dynamics*, 26, 50-61.
- Reskin, B., & Ross, C. (1992). Jobs, authority and earnings among managers: Continuing significance of sex. *Work and Occupations*, 19, 342-365.
- Sanchez, J., & Brock, P. (1996). Outcomes of perceived discrimination among Hispanic employees: Is diversity management a luxury or a necessity? *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 704-719.
- Sattinger, M. (1998). Statistical discrimination with employment criteria. *International Economic Review*, 39, 205-237.
- Scott, F. A., Berger, M. C., & Garen, J. E. (1995). Do health insurance and pension costs reduce the job opportunities of older workers? *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 48, 775-791.
- Seglin, J. L. (2002, May 17). How to get a company's attention on women's pay. *The New York Times*.
- Stiegelman, P. (March, 1999). Racial discrimination in "everyday" commercial transactions: What do we know, what do we need to know, and how can we find out? In M. Fix & M. A. Turner (Eds.), *A national report card on discrimination: The role of testing* (Chapter 4). Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Sixel, L. M. (1994, January 5). Texas Rangers EEOC probe calls DFS practice discriminatory. *Houston Chronicle*, p. 1.
- Sixel, L. M. (2002, April 2). Prince will settle EEOC bias case/cafeeteria company to pay \$175,000 fine. *Houston Chronicle*, p. 2.
- Snyder, M. L., Kleck, R. E., Strenta, A., & Meutzer, S. J. (1979). Avoidance of the handicapped: An attributional ambiguity analysis. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 37, 2297-2306.