

# What Are the Odds? How Demographic Similarity Affects the Prevalence of Perceived Employment Discrimination

Derek R. Avery  
University of Houston

Patrick F. McKay  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

David C. Wilson  
University of Delaware

Because research is needed to identify the conditions that facilitate or impede the prevalence of perceived workplace discrimination, the authors examined the effects of demographics and demographic similarity on the prevalence of sex- and race/ethnicity-based perceived workplace discrimination. Results from a national survey of 763 full-time, United States employees show perceived sex-based discrimination at work was more prevalent among female than male employees, and perceived race-based discrimination at work was more prevalent among Black and Hispanic than White employees. Additionally, perceived racial/ethnic discrimination was less prevalent among those with same-race/ethnicity supervisors. The effect of employee–coworker sex similarity on perceived sex discrimination was significant only for women, and the effects of supervisor–subordinate racial similarity on the prevalence of perceived racial discrimination varied between Black and White respondents, depending on employee–residential–community racial similarity.

*Keywords:* diversity, discrimination, women, minorities, relational demography

Perceived workplace discrimination can be quite costly for individuals and employers. For individuals, it can increase work tension, detract from psychological and physical health, diminish job satisfaction, and lead to stigmatization. For organizations, perceived discrimination can undermine employee commitment and lessen organizational citizenship behavior, morale, and job performance (see Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006, for a recent review of this literature). Of course, the costs garnering the most attention involve lawsuits (E. H. James & Wooten, 2006). First, in many instances, the company must pay attorney costs and deal with the impact of prospective negative publicity, irrespective of the outcome. This is compounded further should the company lose the case and have to pay the judgment, which can amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. Finally, there is often stockholder and consumer backlash, which can cost additional millions in decreased stock prices and lost sales (e.g., Ursel & Armstrong-Stassen, 2006; Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995).

Consequently, researchers have invested a great deal of attention of late toward determining the antecedents of discrimination claiming. Much of this work (e.g., Goldman, 2001, 2003; Gold-

man, Paddock, & Cropanzano, 2004; Groth, Goldman, Gilliland, & Bies, 2002; Lind, Greenberg, Scott, & Welchans, 2000; Wakefield & Uggen, 2004) has examined the process through which individuals arrive at and commit to the decision to file a discrimination claim. Prior to making a claim, however, an individual must perceive discrimination has taken place. Thus, a worthwhile extension to the literature on discrimination claiming would be to investigate the determinants of whether or not an individual perceives discrimination against his or her person in the workplace (Harris, Lievens, & Van Hove, 2004).

In a highly relevant theoretical discussion, Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat (1980–1981) described a three-step process concerning the emergence and transformation of disputes. According to their model, an individual must conclude that an experience has been injurious (i.e., naming) and attribute the fault to a particular party (i.e., blaming) before a claim will be initiated. They also posited that researchers “should pay more attention to the early stages of disputes and to the factors that determine whether naming, blaming, and claiming will occur” (p. 636). Accordingly, the present study attempts to delve into this important issue with regard to perceived discrimination. Building on the relational demography framework introduced by Tsui and O’Reilly (1989), we examine the role of demographics and demographic similarity with one’s supervisor, coworkers, and community in predicting the prevalence of perceived sex- and race/ethnicity-based workplace discrimination. Relational demography, which is grounded in social identity theory (Stryker, 1968; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), predicts greater demographic similarity to those in one’s workplace surroundings should result in greater perceptions of support and fairness and, presumably, less incidence of perceived discrimination.

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Derek R. Avery, Department of Psychology, University of Houston; Patrick F. McKay, School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; David C. Wilson, Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Delaware.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Derek R. Avery, Department of Psychology, University of Houston, 126 Heyne Building, Houston, TX 77204-5022. E-mail: davery@uh.edu

This research is important for several reasons. First, although recent authors (Goldman et al., 2006; Riordan, Schaffer, & Stewart, 2005) have made theoretical arguments relating relational demography and perceived discrimination, “little research has actually examined the impact of relational demography within groups on discrimination” (Riordan et al., 2005, p. 38). Second, by also considering the impact of community characteristics, we adhere to the recent call for authors to pay greater attention to these factors when investigating the effects of diversity within organizations (Brief, Butz, & Dietch, 2005). Third, perceived discrimination is an important variable of interest because it predicts several key outcomes such as employee well-being, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, work tension, and organizational citizenship behavior (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Donaldson, 2001; K. James, Lovato, & Khoo, 1994; Sanchez & Brock, 1996). Thus, perceived discrimination could be the mechanism through which demographic similarity influences these critical outcomes (Riordan et al., 2005).

Additionally, despite significant variation in the way perceived discrimination has been measured in the literature (Goldman et al., 2006), prior research on perceived employment discrimination has examined frequency and severity but virtually ignored its prevalence (for exceptions, see Elliott & Smith, 2001; Kasschau, 1977; Kirby & Jackson, 1999; Pavalko, Mossakowski, & Hamilton, 2003). Although it is certainly important to understand how often individuals perceive discrimination (frequency) and its magnitude when perceived (severity), it is also important to acquire some sense of how prevalent it may be among members of different groups and in different types of situations. Although prevalence may be related to frequency, the two are not synonymous. Whereas frequency pertains to how often discrimination is perceived (e.g., daily, weekly, or monthly), prevalence concerns the numerical proportion of individuals who perceive it to occur. For instance, a particular group could perceive discrimination to occur far more regularly than another group, but the proportion of affected members could be identical for the two groups.

To our knowledge, only four published studies have focused on predicting the prevalence of perceived discrimination in the workplace. Unfortunately, Kasschau's (1977) results are dated and involved a sample of middle-aged and older Los Angeles county residents. In the subsequent studies, one sample contained only British Blacks in London (Kirby & Jackson, 1999), another collapsed across minority groups using employees from only three U.S. cities (Elliott & Smith, 2001), and the final used a national sample containing only women (Pavalko et al., 2003). Thus, none is well positioned to assess (a) the current prevalence of perceived workplace discrimination in the U.S., (b) demographic differences in prevalence, or (c) contextual factors that may influence this incidence. Clearly, this information is vital to individuals and organizations alike because of the aforementioned prospective costs for either party if employees perceive discrimination to occur. In the sections to follow, we articulate the theoretical rationale for this study and propose research hypotheses.

### Theoretical Background

The general premise to be investigated is that dissimilarity is related to the likelihood of an employee or group of employees (e.g., women, minorities) perceiving discriminatory treatment. Al-

though the law differentiates discrimination into two categories according to intent (i.e., disparate treatment vs. disparate impact), this distinction is immaterial here because we are concerned only with whether employees believe discrimination has taken place, irrespective of intent (Harris et al., 2004). In looking at the relationship between relational demography and perceived discrimination, we focus on two types of dissimilarity. First, we examine whether being dissimilar to the dominant plurality in the United States—White men—has an impact on perceived discrimination. Second, we examine whether being dissimilar to those in one's workplace surroundings influences perceived discrimination. Hence, we examine whether being different from (a) White men or (b) those in one's work setting (who may or may not be White men) affects the prevalence of perceived discrimination.

### *Prototypical Dissimilarity*

With regard to the first type of dissimilarity, we draw on the literature discussing prototypes of prejudice. A prototype is a mental model people use as an example or referent for a particular category or descriptor. Prior research has shown individuals are more likely to detect discriminatory treatment when it is consistent with their expectations (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991; Inman & Baron, 1996). It seems people draw their own conclusions concerning who is more likely to experience and perpetrate discrimination. Often, these conclusions involve prototypes of White men, due to their position of relative advantage in the United States, as perpetrators of discrimination, and females and minorities, due to their positions of relative disadvantage, as victims of it (Inman & Baron, 1996). In fact, Inman and Baron (1996) found participants in two experimental studies were more likely to label identical treatment as discriminatory if the perpetrator was a White man and the victim was a woman or minority (as compared to when these roles were reversed). Thus, women and minorities should be more likely than White men to deem any perceived mistreatment, which commonly occurs (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005), as discriminatory if perpetrated by a White man.

We should note that research (e.g., Crosby, 1984; Major et al., 2002) has shown some individuals to be reluctant to attribute negative experiences to discrimination. This occurs primarily because they feel self-presentation pressures or a need to belong (Carvallo & Pelham, 2006; Sechrist, Swim, & Stangor, 2004). In anonymous conditions, such as in our study, the impact of these factors should be minimal. Moreover, minorities and women generally identify more strongly with their racial/ethnic and sex groups than do Whites and men, respectively (Phinney, 1992; Wilson & Liu, 2003). Higher group identification makes one's group identity more salient (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). When group identities are salient, individuals are more likely to interpret occurrences using a group frame (i.e., viewing events in terms of race or sex), which increases the probability of perceiving discrimination (Davidson & Friedman, 1998; Friedman & Davidson, 1999) whether such a perception is accurate or not.

### *Demographic Dissimilarity*

Another type of dissimilarity that should relate to perceived discrimination is between an individual employee and those in his

or her workplace surroundings. Both Goldman et al. (2006) and Riordan et al. (2005) recently provided theoretical arguments suggesting demographic similarity to others at work should impact perceived workplace discrimination. To support this proposed linkage, they refer to relational demography, a framework drawing from several established theories and paradigms (e.g., social identity and self-categorization theories, similarity-attraction hypothesis, tokenism). After an extensive review of these multiple literatures, Riordan et al. concluded, "together, these works support the idea that employees who are demographically dissimilar to other workgroup members will feel the effects of outgroup bias and discrimination" (p. 56). Other recent reviews and inquiry (e.g., Goldman et al., 2006; Ragins, Cornwell, & Miller, 2003) have drawn similar conclusions. In the present study, we examine similarity to both coworkers and the supervisor because each could be perceived as a potential source of discriminatory treatment (Ensher et al., 2001).

Essentially, individuals classify themselves and others into categories based on observable characteristics such as race and sex (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1987). These classifications form the basis for distinctions between similar (i.e., in-group members) and dissimilar others (i.e., out-group members). Interpersonal similarity among in-group members tends to heighten attraction between individuals (Byrne, 1971). Consequently, employees often congregate and form friendships and network ties with others sharing their demographic profile (Ibarra, 1995; Lawrence, 2006; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998). For dissimilar employees, this tendency can lead to exclusion from social networks and feelings of isolation or alienation that should heighten the salience of one's distinctive identity and of prospective identity threats, such as perceived discriminatory treatment (Cota & Dion, 1986; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Randel, 2002). Likewise, those demographically different from their supervisor often perceive less trust and support (Jeanquart-Barone, 1993, 1996), which could increase the prevalence of perceived discrimination.

Integrating the preceding discussion leads to two general theoretical conclusions. First, employees dissimilar to the White male prototype (i.e., women and minorities) should be more prone to perceive discrimination than White men. Second, irrespective of the individual's race or sex, greater dissimilarity to others at work should correspond to a greater prevalence of perceived discrimination. This logic provides the grounding for our hypotheses presented in the next section.

## Research Hypotheses

### *Racial, Ethnic, and Sex Differences*

In the United States, minorities and women are considered lower status groups than Whites and men, respectively (Simpson & Walker, 2002). Accordingly, they often tend to be stigmatized as less capable than White men (Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Oyserman & Swim, 2001), which makes the burden of proving oneself competent and deserving more challenging for members of these subordinate categories than for the dominant group (Foschi, 2000; Heilman, 2001). Additionally, these disproportionately higher standards for subordinate group members should increase the likelihood of their being (a) cognizant of potentially discriminatory treatment and (b) prone to perceive it as such (Inman & Baron,

1996). In fact, minorities and women generally have significantly higher expectations of experiencing discrimination than do White men (Levin, Sinclair, Veniegas, & Taylor, 2002), and individuals with greater expectations of discrimination are more likely to perceive it when circumstances are ambiguous (Johnson, Lecci, & Swim, 2006).

Although prior evidence (e.g., Goldman et al., 2006) indicates women and minorities are more apt to file discrimination claims, lawsuits are but one of the key prospective outcomes of perceived discrimination. Thus, it is important to determine if women and minorities are more likely than men and majority group members to perceive discriminatory treatment.

*Hypothesis 1:* Perceived workplace discrimination will be less prevalent among White men than amongst members of subordinate groups (i.e., women, Blacks, and Hispanics).

### *Workplace Demographic Similarity*

The first hypothesis predicted perceived workplace discrimination would be more prevalent among those dissimilar to the traditional prototypical White male employee. Contextual factors also should influence this likelihood for all employees. As discussed previously, higher dissimilarity between an individual and others in the workplace (i.e., supervisor and coworkers) likely increases the salience of potentially discriminatory treatment. Supporting this view, relational demography research generally has shown individuals who are more demographically similar to those in their workplace perceive more supportive work environments (Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). In fact, racial and sex similarity to one's coworkers and supervisors often enhances feelings of inclusion, trust, and support (Foley, Linnehan, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2006; Jeanquart-Barone, 1993; Pelled, Ledford, & Mohrman, 1999). Thus, dissimilar employees should be more apt to perceive discrimination.

Although a recent review (Riordan et al., 2005) concluded no known work has explicitly tested the preceding conclusion, some existing evidence provides preliminary support. For instance, at least two studies have linked supervisor-subordinate similarity to perceived discrimination. Jeanquart-Barone (1996) found minorities with racially similar supervisors reported significantly less perceived discrimination than did those with racially dissimilar supervisors. Subsequently, Elliott and Smith (2001) reported subordinates in racially similar supervisor-subordinate dyads, irrespective of their race, were less likely to believe they had endured racial discrimination than those in racially dissimilar dyads. Analogously, research has shown similarity to one's coworkers and supervisor in terms of sexual orientation to correspond to less experienced homophobia and perceived workplace discrimination (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Ragins et al., 2003). Moreover, Hispanic attorneys in firms with a greater proportion of Hispanic attorneys perceived less of a glass ceiling limiting their advancement (Foley, Kidder, & Powell, 2002). Accordingly, we anticipate demographic similarity with one's supervisors or coworkers, whether race-, ethnicity-, or sex-based, to correspond to a lower probability of any employee perceiving discrimination.

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceived workplace discrimination will be less prevalent among those with demographically similar (i.e., sex, racial, and ethnic) supervisors.

*Hypothesis 3:* Perceived workplace discrimination will be less prevalent among those with demographically similar (i.e., sex, racial, and ethnic) coworkers.

### Potential Moderators of Relational Demography Effects

#### *Asymmetry*

Although many findings have supported the premise that similarity to others in one's surroundings enhances attitudes and outcomes (Tsui & Gutek, 1999), some research has suggested the effects of similarity depend on the group to which an individual belongs. In particular, asymmetrical relational demography effects often are reported across race and sex. For instance, Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly (1992) found sex dissimilarity corresponded to increased withdrawal behavior and intentions among men but to increased attachment among women. Likewise, increasing racial and ethnic dissimilarity corresponded to decreased organizational attachment among Whites but had no effect on attachment among minorities. Subsequent studies also have reported asymmetrical findings, but some produced an opposite pattern of results. For example, Chatman and O'Reilly (2004) recently found women were more likely than men to leave homogenous work groups. Moreover, Liao, Joshi, and Chuang (2004) reported significantly stronger negative effects of racial dissimilarity on organizational commitment and coworker satisfaction for minorities than for White employees.

Although the nature of asymmetrical findings reported in the literature has been inconsistent, theory suggests a particular direction in this instance. Members of traditionally subordinate groups who find themselves in the numerical minority are subjected to higher visibility, scrutiny, and performance standards than majority-group members (Jackson, Thoits, & Taylor, 1995; Roth, 2004). As such, they are more attentive to differential treatment and more likely to perceive discrimination. In addition, lower status groups hold greater concern about identity affirmation than do members of higher status groups (Tajfel, 1982). Thus, being dissimilar may be more impactful to women and minorities than to White men. Although several findings have shown this to be the case with actual discrimination (e.g., Joshi, Liao, & Jackson, 2006; Maume, 1999; Stauffer & Buckley, 2005), no known research has examined asymmetrical effects of dissimilarity on perceived discrimination.

*Hypothesis 4:* Sex similarity to one's coworkers and supervisor will have a greater effect on the prevalence of perceived workplace discrimination among women than men.

*Hypothesis 5:* Racial/ethnic similarity to one's coworkers and supervisor will have a greater effect on the prevalence of perceived workplace discrimination among minority employees than White employees.

#### *Community Demographic Similarity*

Perhaps one reason for the inconsistent asymmetrical findings discussed above involves scholars failing to consider the contexts of the communities in which the employees studied were embedded. The characteristics of an employee's residential community could influence the impact of demographic dissimilarity within the

organization. As Brief, Umphress, et al. (2005) stated when looking at the effects of employees' residential community characteristics, "community conflicts produce attitudinal baggage; and, when this baggage is unpacked, community matters spill over into organizations" (p. 839).

In the present study, there is reason to believe demographic similarity between employees and residents of their communities influences minority and majority employees differently. Concerning minorities, higher racial/ethnic similarity at home corresponds to higher levels of racial/ethnic identification (Bledsoe, Welch, Sigelman, & Combs, 1995; Lau, 1989; Wade & Okesola, 2002). As Gay (2004) recently stated,

By providing the social and institutional settings that facilitate interpersonal contact, draw attention to the collective aspects of Black life, and allow for the transmission of group-based norms, residence in a predominantly Black community may increase the likelihood that shared values and shared fate will be demonstrated and perceived. (p. 547)

Greater identification with one's racial/ethnic group promotes the use of a group-based frame to interpret events (Davidson & Friedman, 1998; Friedman & Davidson, 1999), which increases the salience of discrimination, making it more likely to be perceived.

Conversely, higher racial/ethnic *dissimilarity* at home among White employees corresponds to higher levels of racial salience (Brief, Umphress, et al., 2005). For instance, Brief, Umphress, et al. (2005) conducted two studies examining how the racial composition of Whites' residential communities affected their attitudes toward organizational diversity. In the first study, they found White employees who lived closer to Blacks perceived lower quality work relationships with their coworkers when workplace diversity was higher. In the second study, they found White job applicants whose neighborhoods contained a greater proportion of Hispanics to be less attracted to ethnically diverse (as opposed to homogenous) prospective employers. The authors attributed these results to the fact that their White participants (presumably in the first study, but measured in the second) correlated minority representation with intergroup conflict, which is consistent with prior research (Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989; Taylor, 1998). Thus, a greater presence of Blacks and Hispanics in one's residential community (which heightens similarity for Blacks and Hispanics, but dissimilarity for Whites) appears to elevate the salience of race/ethnicity for all groups.

At least two studies have produced results consistent with this logic. First, Aries et al. (1998) conducted a field study examining college students in their natural settings. Their results revealed that although White participants were more aware of race when they were in the numerical minority, non-White participants were more aware of race when they were in the numerical majority. Subsequently, Kim-Ju and Liem (2003) experimentally manipulated the ethnic context and found ethnic self-awareness to be highest for Whites in the numerical minority and Asian Americans in the numerical majority. These results, in conjunction with the preceding discussion, suggest racial/ethnic similarity in one's residential community should heighten salience for minorities and lessen it for majority group members.

Accordingly, we expect employee-community racial/ethnic dissimilarity to have the opposite effect for White employees than for their Black and Hispanic counterparts. On the one hand, lower

levels of employee–community racial/ethnic similarity should correspond to increased racial salience and, therefore, stronger effects of workplace racial/ethnic similarity on perceived discrimination for White employees. On the other hand, higher levels of employee–community racial/ethnic similarity should correspond to stronger effects of workplace racial/ethnic similarity on perceived discrimination for Black and Hispanic employees.

*Hypothesis 6:* There will be a three-way interaction between ethnicity, employee–community ethnic similarity, and (a) supervisor–subordinate and (b) employee–coworker ethnic similarity on the prevalence of perceived workplace discrimination. Specifically, when employee–community ethnic similarity is higher, the negative effects (i.e., more similarity corresponds to less prevalent perceived discrimination) of workplace ethnic similarity on perceived discrimination will be stronger for Hispanic than for White employees. The opposite will be true when employee–community similarity is lower.

*Hypothesis 7:* There will be a three-way interaction between race, employee–community racial similarity, and (a) supervisor–subordinate and (b) employee–coworker racial similarity on the prevalence of perceived workplace discrimination. Specifically, when employee–community racial similarity is higher, the negative effects (i.e., more similarity corresponds to less prevalent perceived discrimination) of workplace racial similarity on perceived discrimination will be stronger for Black than for White employees. The opposite will be true when employee–community similarity is lower.

Figure 1 contains a graphic illustration summarizing the research hypotheses.

Method

Survey

In the first quarter of 2005, 1,252 individuals employed in the United States of America took part in the Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission 40th Anniversary Civil Rights in the Workplace survey, conducted by the Gallup Organization. The Gallup Organization contacted participants by phone and asked questions concerning diversity and discrimination in the workplace. Gallup used a random digit dial (RDD) stratified sampling technique to secure a disproportionate sample of racially and ethnically diverse workers in the U.S. Stratified samples commonly are used to attain larger proportions of underrepresented or harder to reach populations. To attain higher proportions of racial and ethnic minorities, Gallup increased its calling volume in areas with higher Black and Hispanic racial/ethnic density. Surveyors asked a number of preliminary screening questions to identify members of the working population (i.e., is the individual a member of the full-time U.S. workforce?) and sample eligibility (i.e., does the individual fit into my demographic quota?). Because (a) minorities are not equally likely to be chosen in a simple random sampling of the population and (b) relatively balanced subgroup sample sizes are needed for statistical analyses, each surveyor was given a quota for the number of participants that could belong to each racial/ethnic group. Once the quota for a particular group had been met, members of that group were no longer eligible for participation and were screened out (American Association for Public Opinion Research [AAPOR], 2006).

In all, Gallup contacted 2,843 individuals. A sizeable portion ( $n = 1,123$ ) failed the screener questions for eligibility in the study, indicating they did not belong to the target population or were a member of a group whose quota the surveyor had met. Of the remaining 1,720, approximately a quarter ( $n = 468$ ) refused to participate. It is important to note that the standard definitions of the AAPOR deem households without an eligible respondent and those who are screened by a “closed” quota as ineligible and, thus, not a valid contact (AAPOR, 2006). Accordingly, the response rate (i.e., the number of respondents divided by the number of eligible respondents  $\times 100$ ; Fink, 2006) was 72.7% ( $1,252/1,720 \times 100$ ). Respondents were employed in various industries (e.g., science, wholesale, construction, finance, agriculture) in a number of capacities (e.g., manufacturing, service, professional, managerial), suggesting a high degree of generality for the study findings.

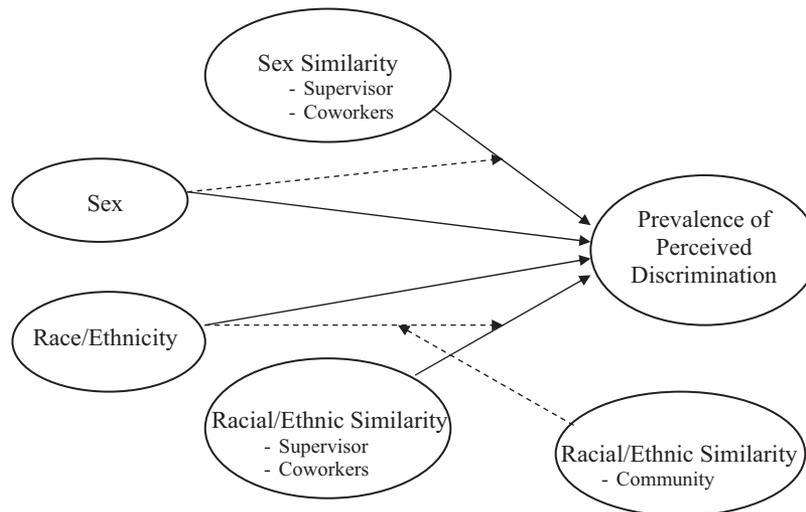


Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

### Sampling Weights

Similar to prior research seeking to generalize to the working population of the United States (e.g., Frone, 2000, 2006), we weighted the data using standard procedures for sample survey data (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999). Because participants from areas with larger minority populations were oversampled to ensure adequate statistical power for testing our hypotheses, the sampling weights were calculated to bring the racial/ethnic demographics of our sample back in line with those of the working population. Specifically, the weight variable is a poststratification weight that accounts for participants' selection probability and for known differences between the racial and ethnic composition of our sample and that of the workforce, which comes from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The Bureau of Labor Statistics and other federal agencies also use the CPS to estimate population statistics in the Census off-years.

### Respondent Characteristics

Like Frone (2006), we describe our respondents using weighted means and percentages. The poststratification weights are normed so that they sum to reflect the actual sample size; therefore, although the means and percentages are weighted, the sample sizes in parentheses are the actual unweighted group sizes. After eliminating respondents with missing data and those from demographic groups without sufficient sample sizes (e.g., Asian Americans), we reduced the working sample size to 763. The sample consisted of 53.8% men ( $n = 325$ ) and 46.2% women ( $n = 438$ ). Nearly three-quarters were White (75.7%,  $n = 338$ ), 13.9% were Hispanic ( $n = 225$ ) and 10.5% were Black ( $n = 200$ ). These percentages correspond almost identically to those of the 2005 CPS in which 53.7% of the workforce was male, and 46.3% was female. Additionally, looking at the percentage of the workforce in the CPS that was Black, Hispanic, or White (so as to be comparable with our sample), 76.2% of this total were White, 13.8% were Hispanic, and 10.0% were Black. We also were able to compare the age of our sample to that of the workforce. The median age of the U.S. workforce in 2004 was 40.3 years (Toossi, 2005), which is highly comparable to the median of 41 years for the weighted data in our sample.

### Measures

*Prevalence of perceived discrimination.* Participants were asked if they had been discriminated against for any reason in their workplace within the last 12 months. Those who responded "yes" were given the opportunity to state what they believed to be the basis of this discrimination. Participants were permitted to list up to three bases. For the purposes of this study, we coded sex-based and race/ethnicity-based perceived discrimination as any respondent who identified sex or race, respectively, as a basis for having been discriminated against in the last year (0 = no, 1 = yes).

*Supervisor-subordinate similarity.* Participants indicated the sex and race/ethnicity of their supervisor at work. As in prior research (e.g., Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui, Porter, & Egan, 2002), supervisor sex and racial/ethnic similarity were dummy coded, with those in dissimilar dyads coded as 0 and those in similar dyads coded as 1. Looking at sex, 67% ( $n = 496$ ) were same-sex

and 33% ( $n = 267$ ) were different-sex dyads. With respect to race/ethnicity, 79% ( $n = 454$ ) were similar- and 21% ( $n = 309$ ) were cross-race/ethnicity dyads.

*Employee-coworker similarity.* Participants classified the sex and racial/ethnic composition of their coworkers. Sex was described as mostly male, balanced, or mostly female. Race/ethnicity was classified as either mostly in-group (same race/ethnicity) or mostly out-group (different race/ethnicity) members. Thus, sex similarity was coded as 1 = mostly dissimilar (18.3%;  $n = 132$ ), 2 = balanced (25.5%;  $n = 187$ ), and 3 = mostly similar (56.3%;  $n = 444$ ). Racial similarity was dummy coded with 0 for those in mostly dissimilar (42.1%;  $n = 397$ ) and 1 for those in mostly similar settings (57.9%;  $n = 366$ ).

Although similar coding schemes have been used in prior relational demography research (e.g., Riordan & Shore, 1997), we conducted a small-scale ( $N = 31$ ) validation study using a convenience sample to examine whether participants were likely to have interpreted these categories in the manner we expected (see the Appendix for items). For sex, participants estimated the percentage of women in groups described as mostly women, mostly men, and sex balanced. They repeated the same procedure for the percentage of men in each of the same three groups. For race, they estimated the percentage perceived to be racially similar to themselves in groups described as mostly similar and mostly dissimilar and repeated this process for the percentage perceived to be racially dissimilar in the two groups. Typical definitions of *mostly* suggest viewers would interpret this as being in the majority, which Kanter (1977) estimated to be approximately 65%. Thus, in a group described as mostly women (men), we would expect the average estimate of the percentage of women (men) to be around 65.

Both patterns of results were consistent with what we expected. Using repeated measures analysis of variance, we observed a significant Context  $\times$  Sex interaction,  $F(2, 60) = 45.18, p < .01, \eta^2 = .60$ . Post hoc tests of least significant difference indicated the estimated percentage of women was significantly higher in mostly female groups than in balanced or mostly male groups (68.71% vs. 49.97% and 33.94%, respectively). Likewise, the estimated percentage of men was significantly higher in mostly male groups than in balanced or mostly female groups (66.87% vs. 32.42% and 50.23%, respectively). A significant Context  $\times$  Race interaction also was observed,  $F(1, 30) = 60.64, p < .01, \eta^2 = .67$ . Again, post hoc tests indicated the percentage of individuals perceived to be racially similar (68.87%) was significantly higher than that perceived to be dissimilar (29.74%) in mostly similar settings. The opposite was true in mostly dissimilar settings, with participants perceiving more dissimilar than similar individuals (70.03% vs. 24.87%). Thus, we have some measure of confidence that our participants interpreted our coding scheme in the intended manner.

*Employee-community racial/ethnic similarity.* In order to stratify samples demographically, Gallup has collected racial demography information (i.e., percentage White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian American) associated with zip codes from the U.S. Census. Like Brief, Umphress, et al. (2005), we used this as an approximation of the racial/ethnic population of an individual's surrounding residential community. On the basis of this information, we created a variable for each respondent indicating the percentage of individuals in the zip code who were of the same race/ethnicity as the participant.

*Demographic and control variables.* Participants reported their race (*Black* = 1, all others = 0), ethnicity (*Hispanic* = 1, all others = 0), sex (*male* = 0, *female* = 1), age (in years), education (1 = *less than high school graduate*, 2 = *high school graduate*, 3 = *trade/technical, vocational training*, 4 = *some college*, 5 = *college graduate*, 6 = *postgraduate work/degree*), income (1 = *under \$15,000*, 2 = *\$15,000-\$24,999*, 3 = *\$25,000-\$34,999*, 4 = *\$35,000-\$44,999*, 5 = *\$45,000-\$54,999*, 6 = *\$55,000-\$74,999*, 7 = *\$75,000-\$99,999*, 8 = *\$100,000 or over*), and union membership status (0 = *nonmember*, 1 = *member*). Members of certain racial and ethnic groups, men, younger adults, educated, and wealthy individuals all enjoy higher status in the United States and, therefore, should be less likely to experience workplace discrimination. Union membership should alert individuals to their employment rights, which could make them more sensitive to potentially discriminatory treatment.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables are located in Table 1. Because our dependent variables (sex-based and race/ethnicity-based discrimination) were dichotomous, we conducted weighted hierarchical moderated logistic regression to test the study hypotheses. Age, education, income, union membership, sex, and race were entered in Step 1, followed by the similarity variables in Step 2. In Steps 3 and 4, the two-way and three-way interactions were added (see Table 2). None of the control variables produced statistically significant coefficients in either model. Additionally, we created 16 industry dummy variables based upon participants' classification of their employers. Although we did not have reason to believe that industry would impact perceived discrimination, we wanted to ensure that our effects could not be attributed to some systematic difference between industries. Including these variables as covariates produced only two significant effects across the two models (i.e., transportation and accommodation on perceived racial/ethnic discrimination, manufacturing was referent category) and did not alter any of the results reported below. Thus, for the sake of parsimony, they are not included. Overall, 4.4% (3.3%) of respondents perceived sex-based (race/ethnicity-based) discrimination within the past year.

Turning to the hypotheses, Hypothesis 1 predicted perceived discrimination would be less prevalent among White men than among women and minorities. To test this, we examined the main effects of the sex and race dummy variables in Step 1. Overall, the variables in Step 1 accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in perceived sex-based discrimination,  $\chi^2(7) = 38.65$ ,  $p < .01$ , and race/ethnicity-based discrimination,  $\chi^2(7) = 20.77$ ,  $p < .01$ . The results indicated perceived sex-based discrimination was far more prevalent among women than men ( $B = 2.52$ ,  $p < .01$ , odds ratio [OR] = 12.47). This OR indicates women were nearly 12.5 times more likely than men to perceive sex-based discrimination. Additionally, perceived race/ethnicity-based discrimination was more prevalent among Black ( $B = 1.39$ ,  $p < .01$ , OR = 4.01) and Hispanic ( $B = 1.24$ ,  $p < .01$ , OR = 3.45) than White employees, with Blacks being just more than 4 times as likely and Hispanics being more than 3 times as likely to perceive race/ethnicity-based discrimination. This pattern of findings supports Hypothesis 1.

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	40.84	12.24	—													
2. Education	3.63	1.56	.12**	—												
3. Income	5.19	2.24	.23**	.43**	—											
4. Union	1.83	0.38	-.06	-.07	-.07*	—										
5. Female	0.46	0.50	.06	.07	-.06	.02	—									
6. Black	0.11	0.31	-.02	-.05	-.21**	-.10**	.07*	—								
7. Hispanic	0.14	0.35	-.16**	-.25**	-.30**	.04	-.04	-.01	—							
8. Supervisor sex similarity	0.67	0.47	-.02	-.01	.01	.01	-.37**	-.01	.01	—						
9. Coworker sex similarity	2.38	0.78	-.07*	.00	.04	-.09*	.01	.03	.29**	-.06	—					
10. Supervisor racial similarity	0.79	0.41	.08*	.07	.16**	.07	-.05	-.33**	.05	.05	-.03	—				
11. Coworker racial similarity	0.58	0.49	.05	.10**	.08	.06	.02	-.09**	-.12**	.02	.29**	-.02	—			
12. Community racial similarity	67.47	27.83	.11**	.04	.11**	.09*	.06	-.15**	-.33**	.06	.39**	.01	.28**	—		
13. Sex discrimination	0.04	0.21	.03	.04	.04	-.02	.19**	.05	-.02	-.17**	.01	.10**	.06	-.07	—	
14. Race/Ethnic discrimination	0.03	0.18	-.03	-.05	-.10**	-.03	.06	.11**	.09**	-.06	-.05	-.13**	-.26**	-.07	.26**	—

Note.  $N = 763$ . Union (1 = member), female (1 = female), Black (1 = Black), Hispanic (1 = Hispanic), supervisor sex similarity (1 = same), supervisor racial similarity (1 = same), coworker racial similarity (1 = mostly similar), sex discrimination (1 = yes), and race/ethnic discrimination (1 = yes) are dummy-coded variables. That "Black" and "Hispanic" variables in Table 1 are dummy coded means they contrast Black respondents with non-Black respondents and Hispanic respondents with non-Hispanic respondents, respectively. If we were to look at the correlation between a contrast-coded variable comparing Blacks and Whites on education, we see that the correlation is negative and significant ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Consequently, our sample accurately reflects that Whites tend to be more educated than Blacks, who tend to be more educated than Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). The Black dummy variable compares Blacks to Whites (whose numbers are higher than Blacks') and to Hispanics (whose numbers are lower than Blacks') combined, yielding a nonsignificant correlation. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2  
Summary of Weighted Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Discrimination

Variable	Sex 1	Race 1	Sex 2	Race 2	Sex 3	Race 3	Sex 4	Race 4
Age	1.00	1.00	1.01	1.00	1.01	1.00	1.01	1.00
Education	1.02	0.99	1.04	0.97	1.05	1.05	1.05	1.14
Income	1.16	0.89	1.16	0.86	1.12	0.83	1.12	0.78*
Union	0.79	0.64	0.62	0.67	0.54	0.63	0.53	0.64
Female (F)	12.47**	1.93	9.21**	1.78	6.88	2.61	8.10	2.74
Black (B)	1.96	4.01**	5.04**	1.53	95.73	1.83	52.65	10.00
Hispanic (H)	1.26	3.45*	2.56	1.05	74.00	0.88	14.01	5.69
Supervisor-subordinate sex similarity (SSS)			0.58	0.78	0.51	1.22	0.58	1.45
Employee-coworker sex similarity (CSS)			0.45**	0.69	1.16	0.94	1.20	0.83
Supervisor-subordinate race similarity (SRS)			1.69	0.21**	29.18	0.16*	14.94	0.43
Employee-coworker race similarity (CRS)			2.78*	0.94	3.80	0.99	3.89	1.17
Employee-community race similarity (CS)			1.01	0.99	1.02	0.96*	0.96	0.91*
F × SSS					1.10	0.48	0.94	0.40
F × CSS					0.35	0.61	0.33	0.69
B × SRS					0.08	2.27	0.20	0.86
H × SRS					0.01	1.75	0.01	0.66
B × CRS					0.44	0.83	0.18	0.73
H × CRS					0.98	1.18	3.85	1.08
B × CS					1.02	1.03	1.07	1.12*
H × CS					0.97	1.02	1.00	1.08
SRS × CS					0.99	1.04	1.06	1.13**
B × SRS × CS							0.93	0.84**
B × CRS × CS							1.07	0.99
H × SRS × CS							0.92	0.89
H × CRS × CS							1.06	1.00
Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.046	.025	.082	.048	.094	.056	.099	.068
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.151	.099	.268	.189	.306	.222	.322	.267
Omnibus χ <sup>2</sup> (step)	38.65**	20.77**	31.29**	19.26**	10.43	7.26	4.55	10.04*

Note. N = 763. Except where otherwise noted, the statistics are odds ratios (OR). An OR > 1 indicates a positive relationship, an OR = 1 indicates a null relationship, and an OR < 1 indicates a negative relationship with the incidence of perceived discrimination. Union, female, Black, Hispanic, SSS, SRS, and CRS are dummy-coded variables.

\* p < .05. \*\* p < .01.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 predicted similarity with one’s supervisor and coworkers, respectively, would result in a lower prevalence of perceived discrimination. We tested these hypotheses by examining the main effects of supervisor-subordinate and employee-coworker sex and racial/ethnic similarity, respectively, in Step 2 of our regression model. The addition of the variables in this step accounted for a statistically significant amount of incremental variance in both sex-based perceived discrimination,  $\chi^2(5) = 31.29, p < .01$ , and race/ethnicity-based perceived discrimination,  $\chi^2(5) = 19.26, p < .01$ . Perceived sex-based discrimination was significantly more prevalent among employees with fewer same-sex coworkers ( $B = -0.79, p < .01, OR = 0.45$ ); however, employee-coworker racial/ethnic similarity failed to attenuate the prevalence of racial/ethnic discrimination in a similar fashion ( $B = -0.07, p = ns, OR = 0.94$ ). Moreover, perceived race/ethnicity-based discrimination was less prevalent among employees with racially similar supervisors, who were less than a quarter as likely to perceive race/ethnicity-based discrimination as those with supervisors belonging to a different racial/ethnic group ( $B = -1.57, p < .01, OR = 0.21$ ). In contrast, supervisor-subordinate sex similarity did not relate to the prevalence of either type of perceived discrimination. Unexpectedly, employee-coworker racial similarity related positively to the prevalence of perceived sex-based discrimination ( $B = 1.24, p < .05, OR = 2.78$ ), such that employees were nearly 3 times more likely to perceive sex dis-

crimination when their coworkers were mostly racially/ethnically similar as opposed to mostly dissimilar. Consequently, Hypotheses 2 and 3 were partially supported.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 predicted asymmetrical effects of similarity across sex and racial/ethnic groups, respectively. In particular, we expected stronger effects of similarity for women (Hypothesis 4) and minorities (Hypothesis 5) than for men and Whites, respectively. To test these effects, we examined composite two-way interactions between sex and sex similarity and race/ethnicity and racial/ethnic similarity, respectively, in Step 3 of our regression model. Due to a high degree of multicollinearity with another of the composite interaction terms ( $r > .7$ ), we omitted the Employee-Coworker Racial/Ethnic Similarity × Employee-Community Racial/Ethnic Similarity composite term from the analyses (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Concerning perceived sex discrimination, the Sex × Employee-Coworker Sex Dissimilarity interaction was statistically significant in the unweighted ( $B = -1.35, p < .05, OR = 0.26$ ) but not the weighted analyses (see Table 2). To examine why this difference occurred, we conducted some post hoc probing of this interaction. We found that the incidence rate of perceiving sex-based discrimination was very low among men in the weighted data (0.68%). This limited variance in the dependent variable resulted in the standard errors of the regression coefficients for the male subgroup being considerably larger than those for the female subgroup. These disparor-

tionately large standard errors made it nearly impossible to detect a significant Sex × Employee–Coworker Sex Similarity interaction. Looking at the results of a subgroup analysis, we found the effect of employee–coworker sex similarity for men was positive and nonsignificant ( $B = 0.97, p = .43, OR = 2.65$ ) but negative and significant for women ( $B = -0.87, p < .01, OR = 0.42$ ). Moreover, the effect of sex on perceived sex-based discrimination was significant in mostly dissimilar settings ( $B = 4.12, p < .05, OR = 61.43$ ) but not in sex-balanced settings ( $B = 2.20, p = .06, OR = 9.02$ ) and mostly similar settings ( $B = 1.53, p = .07, OR = 4.62$ ). See Figure 2 for a graphic illustration of this interaction. These ORs indicate women were far more likely than men to perceive sex discrimination when most of their coworkers were of the opposite sex, but this effect was less pronounced in sex balanced and mostly same-sex settings. Sex and race did not moderate the influence of any of the other types of similarity on either type of perceived discrimination. Hence, Hypothesis 4 received partial support, whereas the findings did not corroborate Hypothesis 5.

Hypotheses 6 and 7 predicted ethnic and racial similarity in one’s residential community, respectively, would elicit ethnic and racial differences in the effects of (a) supervisor–subordinate and (b) employee–coworker similarity. To test these hypotheses, we examined the effects of the three-way interactions between race/ethnicity, similarity (with supervisor and employees), and employee–community racial/ethnic similarity in Step 4 of our regression model. The addition of the three-way interactions accounted for a significant amount of incremental variance in race/ethnicity-based discrimination,  $\chi^2(4) = 10.04, p < .05$ . The Black × Community Racial Similarity × Supervisor–Subordinate Racial Similarity interaction produced a statistically significant coefficient ( $B = -0.18, p < .01, OR = 0.84$ ), whereas the Black × Community Racial Similarity × Coworker Similarity term did not. Figure 3 provides a graphic illustration of this effect. When employees were racially dissimilar to those in their residential community (at one or more standard deviations below the mean), White employees with White supervisors were less likely than those with minority supervisors to report perceived employment discrimination. Conversely, supervisor–subordinate racial similarity had a nonsignificant effect on the proportion of Black respondents perceiving discriminatory treatment ( $B = -12, p = .98, OR = 0.88$ ). When employees were racially similar to those in their residential community (at one or more standard deviations

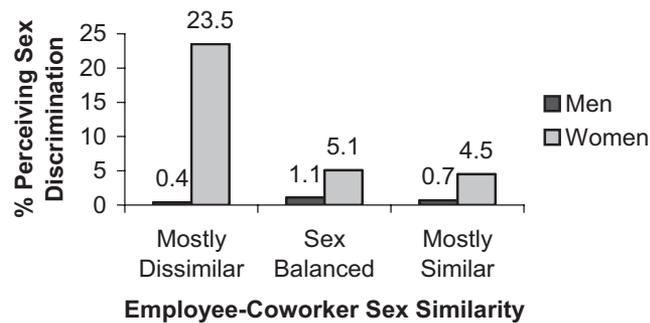


Figure 2. The interactive effects of sex and employee–coworker sex similarity on the prevalence of perceived sex discrimination.

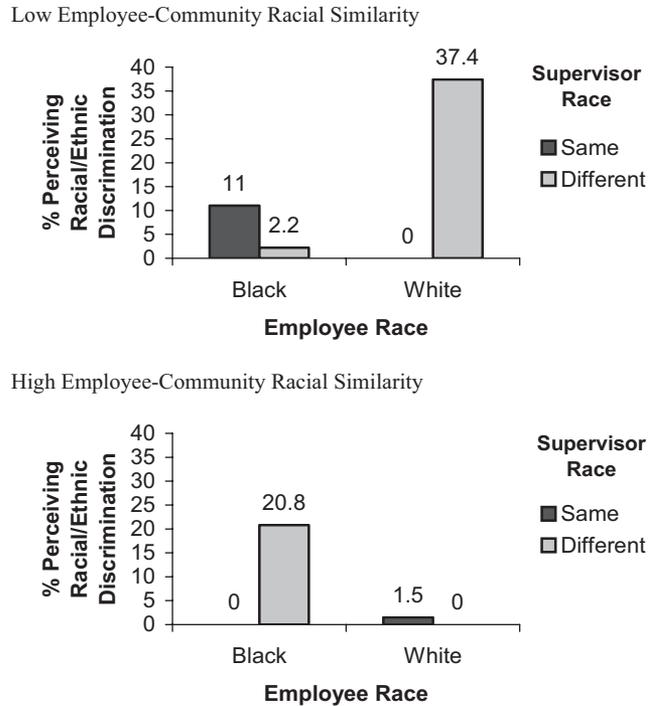


Figure 3. The interactive effects of employee–community racial similarity, employee race, and supervisor–subordinate racial similarity on the prevalence of perceived racial/ethnic discrimination.

above the mean), Black employees with Black supervisors were less likely than those with White supervisors to report employment discrimination. Conversely, supervisor–subordinate racial similarity had virtually no impact on the proportion of White respondents perceiving discriminatory treatment. Several of the cells plotted in Figure 2 involved incidence rates of zero (i.e., no reported instances of perceived discrimination). Thus, no effect sizes can be calculated for these subgroup effects. Nevertheless, the findings suggest racially similar supervisors correspond to less prevalent perceived discrimination than do dissimilar supervisors for (a) White employees when they are highly dissimilar to other residents in their community and (b) Black employees when they are highly similar to other residents in their community. Although no significant Hispanic–White differences were detected, we should note that the pattern and effect size of the Hispanic × Employee–Community Ethnic Similarity × Supervisor–Subordinate Ethnic Similarity interaction was quite comparable to that of the Black–White interaction reported above ( $B = -0.12, p = .08, OR = 0.89$ ). In sum, Hypothesis 6 was not supported, and Hypothesis 7 received partial support.

Post Hoc Analyses

Although not hypothesized a priori, it is interesting that the effects of prototypical and demographic dissimilarity on the prevalence of perceived discrimination were limited, for the most part, to the focal type of discrimination associated with the dissimilarity. In particular, sex and sex dissimilarity related to the prevalence of sex-based, but not race/ethnicity-based, perceived discrimination

and vice versa. Although the confidence intervals for effects on the two types of discrimination overlapped for nearly all of the variables (sex was the lone exception), this overall pattern is highly suggestive.

Additionally, though we focused on predicting the prevalence of perceived discrimination, some readers might wonder whether our model predicts the severity of discrimination perceived by participants. As a preliminary means of examining this possibility, we conducted hierarchical linear moderated multiple regression using our model to predict a variable ranging between zero and three indicating the number of bases of perceived discrimination reported by the participant (coefficient  $\alpha = .82$ ). Only three statistically significant effects emerged from the model. As in the logistic analyses, sex ( $\beta = 0.21, p < .01, \Delta R^2 = .04$ ) and Black ( $\beta = 0.14, p < .01, \Delta R^2 = .02$ ) were statistically significant. Additionally, supervisor–subordinate sex similarity also produced a significant effect ( $\beta = -0.15, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .01$ ). These main effects indicate women, Blacks, and employees with cross-sex supervisors perceived significantly more types of discrimination than did men, White employees, and those with same-sex supervisors, respectively. None of the interactions were significant. Thus, the effects proposed here appear more pertinent to the prevalence than to our makeshift proxy of the severity of perceived discrimination.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to shed some light on demographic (both absolute and relational) predictors of the prevalence of perceived workplace discrimination. Based on prior theory and research, we anticipated perceived discrimination would be more prevalent among members of traditionally subordinate groups and those in contexts wherein their group was less represented. The results showed perceived sex discrimination was significantly more prevalent among women than men and perceived racial/ethnic discrimination was significantly more prevalent among Black and Hispanic employees than among White employees. Perceived sex-based discrimination was also significantly less prevalent among those with a greater proportion of same-sex coworkers. This effect, however, held only for female participants. Finally, whereas having a racially/ethnically similar supervisor also related negatively to the prevalence of perceived race/ethnicity-based discrimination, this finding was conditional for Black and White employees. For Black employees, racial supervisor–subordinate similarity corresponded to lower prevalence of perceived race-based discrimination when employee–community racial similarity was higher. The opposite was true for White employees.

## Implications

*Research.* Perhaps the most significant research implication of our findings is that context matters in predicting the prevalence of perceived discrimination. Those surrounding us significantly influence the probability that we will perceive discrimination. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to determine if employees' perceptions of discrimination are indicative of actual discrimination. Our significant Race  $\times$  Supervisor–Subordinate Racial Similarity  $\times$  Employee–Community Racial Similarity interaction,

however, suggests our effects are more about perceptions than reality. For instance, we hypothesized similarity to those in one's residential community would serve as a cognitive framing mechanism for the effects of workplace similarity on perceived discrimination. Specifically, we anticipated higher racial similarity to the residents of one's community would make race more salient to Black employees in the workplace, whereas lower employee–community racial similarity would make race more salient to White employees. This increased salience, in turn, was predicted to strengthen the effects of workplace racial similarity on perceived discrimination, which indeed was the case. This occurs not because anything objective is necessarily different in the workplace based on employees' residential community characteristics but rather because the employee is primed to view situations in racial terms. Extrapolating this logic, our results imply workplace similarity acts as a framing cue that either increases or decreases the attention paid to a particular characteristic (e.g., sex or race). In short, some types of workplace dissimilarity heighten salience, which triggers a greater propensity to interpret events using a group-based frame (Friedman & Davidson, 1999), thereby making employees more likely to perceive discrimination.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that not any type of workplace dissimilarity corresponds to a higher prevalence of perceived discrimination. For example, the key referent group responsible for heightening workplace sex salience was one's coworkers, whereas it was one's supervisor for race/ethnicity. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the fact that relational demography researchers commonly propose conceptually similar processes for sex- and race-based workplace dissimilarity (Tsui & Gutek, 1999). At least where perceived discrimination is concerned, it appears future scholars should focus more attention on employee–coworker sex similarity and supervisor–subordinate racial/ethnic similarity.

On a related note, it is informative that sex dissimilarity did not predict the prevalence of race/ethnicity-based perceived discrimination and vice versa (for the most part). In their recent study on workplace harassment (a particular type of discriminatory treatment), Berdahl and Moore (2006) encouraged further examination of the interplay between race/ethnicity and sex in predicting perceptions of discriminatory treatment. Here, we might have anticipated that dissimilarity in any regard would heighten the attention employees paid to potentially discriminatory treatment. Nonetheless, this does not appear to have been the case. Instead, dissimilarity of a specific type (i.e., sex or racial/ethnic) seemed to increase primarily the salience of perceived discrimination related to that particular characteristic. Thus, not all dissimilarity appears relevant to any specific form of perceived discrimination.

Finally, our results suggest perceived discrimination may mediate the effects of relational demography on outcomes such as satisfaction and commitment. Riordan et al. (2005) stated the following:

The majority of relational demography research has focused on secondary or more distal outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment of the person that is different, rather than examining more proximal outcomes such as perceptions of discrimination. (p. 48)

Thus, such a path model, as suggested by Riordan et al., was purely speculative. We found employment discrimination was

perceived less often when similarity was greater between an employee and his or her coworkers and supervisor. Others (e.g., Ensher et al., 2001; Sanchez & Brock, 1996) have shown perceived discrimination to affect satisfaction and commitment. Thus, a relational demography → perceived discrimination → attitudinal outcomes path model wherein dissimilarity relates to more perceived discrimination, which corresponds to less satisfied and committed employees, seems plausible. Future research examining this suggested path model would be useful.

*Practical.* Our findings also have practical significance. Organizations stand to suffer considerable losses when employees perceive discriminatory treatment. Employee well-being, satisfaction, commitment, organizational citizenship, and performance tend to be lower, whereas withdrawal behaviors (e.g., absenteeism and intent to turnover) tend to be higher when discrimination is perceived (Goldman et al., 2006). Additionally, perceiving discrimination is a necessary, but not sufficient, prerequisite to an employee filing what could amount to a costly lawsuit (Felstiner et al., 1980–1981). It is, therefore, clearly in organizations' best interests to understand factors (e.g., demographic similarity) that promote or deter the prevalence of perceived discrimination.

Toward this end, our findings suggest a couple of things. First, the greater prevalence of perceived discrimination amongst women and minorities indicates many employees continue to perceive identity to be a potential help or hindrance to one's career prospects. If companies fail to address this situation, such discrepant perceptions are likely to result in demographic differences in job attitudes (e.g., satisfaction and commitment) and behavior (e.g., absenteeism and performance). Collectively, this would make it exponentially more difficult to capitalize on the prospective benefits of diversity. Companies seeking change in this regard might focus on demonstrating senior leadership commitment to diversity, holding personnel accountable for diversity goals, and making human resource management policies transparent to all employees.

Second, firms should pay particular attention to situations wherein employees are demographically dissimilar to a large portion of their peers or supervisor. Specifically, women in male-dominated settings and employees working for a supervisor of a different race or ethnicity are prone to be more attuned to sex- and race/ethnicity-relevant cues, respectively. In such situations, diversity training provided by competent diversity experts may prove especially valuable. This training may be used to heighten awareness amongst all parties of the potential for misunderstandings to be interpreted in group-based terms (i.e., sex- or race/ethnicity-based discrimination). Moreover, educating participants about procedural (i.e., process fairness) and interactional justice rules (i.e., fairness in providing information about how decisions were made and/or showing courtesy toward affected persons; Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005) should help to create a more objective and uniform standard for perceived discrimination for all employees.

Some practitioners might interpret our results to suggest (a) underrepresented employees should be clustered within organizations to diminish their likelihood of perceiving discrimination or (b) companies, unilaterally, should increase the representation of underrepresented groups in their workforces. We contend, however, that those advocating such approaches may miss the true significance of our findings. Creating segregated workplaces denies employees access to equal employment opportunities and

sends mixed messages to organizational stakeholders about the value of diversity within the organization (Avery & Johnson, in press). In fact, a recent discrimination suit filed against Bank of America alleges, "African-American employees in the bank and its investment division were largely partnered only with others of the same race" and "this practice has significantly and adversely impacted the job success, career, and income of plaintiffs and the class" (Kerber, 2007). Concerning the second tactic, merely increasing representation does not necessarily alter the diversity climate (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Kossek, Markel, & McHugh, 2003). Thus, instead of these approaches, we urge organizations to focus their efforts on facilitating more highly prodiversity work climates (for more on this, see McKay & Avery, 2005).

### *Limitations, Future Research Directions, and Conclusion*

There are four potential limitations that should be acknowledged here. Primarily, the majority of our data were self-reported, which introduces the possibility common method variance influenced our findings. However, Spector (2006) suggested concerns about common method variance often are overstated. Moreover, common method variance is an unlikely alternative explanation for higher order interactions such as those reported here. A related limitation involves our use of a cross-sectional design, thereby disallowing inferences of causality. Future examinations using longitudinal designs and multisource data could prove useful in alleviating these concerns.

Second, anytime response rates in an RDD telephone survey are less than 100%, it is impossible to rule out entirely the possibility of nonresponse bias. For nonresponse bias to occur, nonparticipation must be associated with the substantive variables of interest in our study (Groves et al., 2004). The profile of our weighted data, however, was very similar to the CPS demographic profile of the U.S. workforce, and the pattern of the weighted results is identical to findings without using the sample weights. Furthermore, recent research on nonresponse in RDD designs suggests concerns about bias impacting the results may be overstated. For instance, Keeter, Kennedy, Dimock, Best, and Craighill (2006) recently compared the data derived from two equivalent surveys, wherein data collection for one employed a number of tactics to ensure higher response rates, whereas the other did not. Although there was considerable difference in the quantity of nonresponse, there was little evidence of consequent bias. In fact, responses to 77 of 84 items were "statistically indistinguishable" (p. 759). Hence, our results should generalize well to the U.S. workforce as a whole.

Third, the measure of employee-coworker racial/ethnic similarity allowed only two options: mostly similar or mostly dissimilar. Consequently, participants could not select an option indicating the presence of racial/ethnic balance in their work settings. Although this dichotomous variable likely captured the general variance in this construct, it does not permit for more fine-grained analyses. For instance, Enchautegui-de-Jesús, Hughes, Johnston, and Oh (2006) recently observed a curvilinear relationship between employee-coworker racial/ethnic similarity and employee well-being such that psychological functioning was lower (i.e., lower job and life satisfaction, more psychosomatic symptoms, and lower well-being) among workers whose colleagues were highly similar or highly dissimilar in terms of race/ethnicity. Thus, we may have detected a similar effect on the prevalence of perceived

discrimination had we used a three-level instead of a two-level classification scheme for this variable.

Fourth, some readers may consider our use of single-item indicators of perceived discrimination as the dependent variables to be a shortcoming. We should note, however, that Wanous and colleagues (Wanous & Hudy, 2001; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997) have shown single-item indicators to be acceptable when assessing simple, unambiguous constructs. We believe perceived discrimination fits this description although discrimination (in the objective sense) may be very ambiguous to courts and organizations. In fact, only 6 of the 1,252 study participants (less than 0.5%) responded, "I don't know" when asked if they had been discriminated against in the past 12 months. Consequently, we feel our measurement strategy was appropriate given our outcome of interest (i.e., prevalence of perceived discrimination).

One rather unexpected result identified a prospective opportunity for future research. We found employee-coworker racial/ethnic similarity significantly predicted the prevalence of perceived sex-based discrimination, such that greater similarity corresponded to *more* prevalent perceived discrimination. Although unexpected, this is not altogether surprising. In situations wherein there is greater representation of one's racial/ethnic group, other potential bases for perceiving discrimination could become more salient because race/ethnicity-related discrimination might be deemed unlikely. We should note, however, that this finding is in contrast to that of Berdahl and Moore (2006), who found employees in the workgroup numerical ethnic minority experienced significantly more sexual harassment. Subsequent inquiry might further explore possible explanations for these seemingly contradictory findings.

Because studies involving data from national surveys are fairly uncommon in our discipline, many readers of this article will likely wonder about the external validity of our findings across individuals and organizations. Unlike many previous studies of demographic differences, our oversampling of minorities provided relatively equal subgroup sample sizes, which enhances the robustness of between-groups comparisons. Although the sampling weights do not negate the fact that Black and Hispanic participants were overrepresented in our sample, they do take this disproportionate selection likelihood into account. In effect, the weights statistically control for the impact of the oversample on the study results, thereby producing relatively unbiased population estimates for the Black, White, and Hispanic U.S. workforce over the age of 18 (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999).

Although our results should generalize well across organizations, an interesting question involves how the findings might differ if studied in a single organization. Quite frankly, it likely depends on the composition of the organization. For instance, in a company predominantly comprised of minority employees, we might anticipate traditional power dynamics and perceptions thereof to be reversed. Consequently, perceived discrimination could be more prevalent among White employees in such an instance. It is also probable that the effects of dissimilarity proposed here would be influenced by the composition of the organization as a whole. In fact, Martins, Milliken, Wiesenfeld, and Salgado (2003) found stronger negative reactions to dissimilarity in homogenous than in heterogeneous settings. Accordingly, being the only woman in one's immediate work surroundings might have less of an impact on perceived discrimination in an organization

wherein there is a high overall presence of women. Finally, one could examine actual as opposed to perceived employee dissimilarity with regard to a number of referents (e.g., coworkers, supervisor, employees in a business unit) in a single organization. Though theory suggests perceptual similarity to the most proximal referents should have the largest impact (Tsui & Gutek, 1999), actual similarity to more distal referents could have an effect as well (Lawrence, 2006). These conclusions, however, are speculative and would benefit greatly from future research attention.

Limitations notwithstanding, this study has helped to extend our understanding of how demographics and demographic similarity relate to the prevalence of employees perceiving workplace discrimination. On the one hand, it may behoove minority and female job seekers to look for a presence of in-group members in prospective work settings to help them avoid perceiving inequitable treatment. On the other hand, organizations, particularly those lacking diverse representation, should pay close attention to their diversity climates to ensure that employees of all types perceive equal opportunity. Otherwise, a lack of similarity in an employee's workplace and surroundings could increase the odds of perceived discrimination.

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## Appendix

### Validation Survey Items

1. If you were told that a group was made up of mostly women, what percent of the group would you estimate was female?
2. If you were told that a group was made up of mostly women, what percent of the group would you estimate was male?
3. If you were told that a group was made up of mostly men, what percent of the group would you estimate was female?
4. If you were told that a group was made up of mostly men, what percent of the group would you estimate was male?
5. If you were told that a group was made up of an equal mix of men and women, what percent of the group would you estimate was female?
6. If you were told that a group was made up of an equal mix of men and women, what percent of the group would you estimate was male?
7. If you were told that a group was made up of mostly people of your race, what percent of the group would you estimate was of your race?
8. If you were told that a group was made up of mostly people of your race, what percent of the group would you estimate was of a different race?
9. If you were told that a group was made up of mostly people of a race other than yours, what percent of the group would you estimate was of your race?
10. If you were told that a group was made up of mostly people of a race other than yours, what percent of the group would you estimate was of a race other than yours?

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