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The Relationship Between Collective Action and Well-Being and Its Moderators: Pervasiveness of Discrimination and Dimensions of Action

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Abstract

Given the negative impact of perceiving gender discrimination on health (e.g., Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009), there is a need to develop interventions to attenuate this effect; collective action may be one such intervention. Study 1 (N = 185) used an experimental paradigm to investigate whether undergraduate women in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada perceived pervasiveness of discrimination would interact with their collective action-taking to predict negative mood and well-being. Results showed that among those perceiving pervasive gender discrimination, informing friends/family and informing the media led to greater well-being than doing nothing, whereas among those perceiving gender discrimination as isolated, doing nothing led to lower negative mood than taking action. In Study 2 (N = 105) undergraduate women in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada completed an online questionnaire to assess whether these patterns would be replicated and further moderated by the dimensions along which collective action is defined. Consistent with Study 1, among those perceiving pervasive discrimination, increased endorsement of informing the media predicted reduced symptomatology. Moreover, among those who defined collective actions as active, collective, public and high cost, increased endorsement of action predicted greater well-being. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, collective action, well-being, confrontation, coping

Introduction

Imagine entering university as a first year female student, and the student newspaper features a guide for male students on how to seduce the university's young promiscuous women. This article appeared in the university's newspaper (Weinberg, 2005) and led hundreds of students to sign a petition demanding an apology from the newspaper (Racine, 2005). The question remains however, whether taking such action against a discriminatory event would have helped to alleviate the students' distress. Some research outside the context of gender discrimination shows that collective action has a positive effect on well-being in U.K. samples (e.g., Cocking & Drury, 2004), but among women from the U.S., action appears to decrease well-being (e.g., Bergman, Lanhout, Palmieri, Cortina & Fizgerald, 2002). Given this inconsistency, the current research investigated potential moderators of the relationship between collective action and well-being, which can be operationally defined by mood (Diener & Diener, 1995), indicators of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and physical symptoms (e.g., Sherbourne, Allen, Kamberg & Wells, 1992).

The Rejection Identification Model (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999) provided the theoretical framework for predicting that women's definitions of the discrimination as pervasive or isolated would interact with collective action to affect negative mood and psychological well-being (Study 1). Coping research (e.g., Miller & Kaiser, 2001) provided the framework for further predicting that dimensions of collective action (e.g., private/public) would also interact with endorsement of action to predict psychological and physical well-being (Study 2).

Although the current studies only include Canadian samples, Canada and the US share many cultural aspects. For example, in any given week the majority of top 10 viewed television shows

by Canadians are U.S. content (BBM Canada, 2014). Canada is also the U.S.A's largest trading

partner (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), thus many aspects of their consumer cultures are also

shared. Research further shows that those from the U.S. and Canada have similar attitudes

toward religion, government and individuality (Grabb, 2010). Finally, the relationship between

experiencing discrimination and reduced mental and physical health is found internationally, for

example, in U. S., Canadian, Indian, and Spanish women (Borrell, Artazcoz, Gil-González,

Pérez, Pérez, et al., 2011; Foster, 2000; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Pillai, Patel, Vikram,

Cardozo, Goodman, Weiss, & Andrew, 2008). Thus, understanding whether collective action is

an intervention that may attenuate the negative health effects of discrimination could be

beneficial for a wide range of women. By examining when collective action will benefit well-

being, women may be encouraged to take actions that help both their group and themselves.

Background

Whereas most intergroup relations theories examine collective action as an outcome (e.g.

Runciman, 1966), Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM; Drury & Reicher, 1999) views

collective action also as predictor of empowerment, an important component of well-being (e.g.,

Ryff & Keyes, 1995). ESIM suggests when individuals are acting in solidarity against the

advantaged group oppressing them, they feel that their actions will be supported by those in the

ingroup. Rather than feeling like spectators, they feel like are affecting the outcome (Drury &

Reicher, 1999) and as such, empowerment increases. In support of this, field research in the

U.K. has shown that greater participation in collective actions (e.g., attending protest marches)

has predicted greater feelings of collective empowerment (e.g., Cocking & Drury; 2004; Drury,

Cocking, Beal, Hanson & Rapley, 2005). In experimental work, students in the Netherlands and

Germany were presented with threats from a dominant group (university or government) about issues that would affect their group. Those given the opportunity to sign a petition reported greater empowerment (i.e., group efficacy and positive emotion; Van Zomeren, Drury & Van der Staaij, 2012) and positive affect (Becker, Tauch & Wagner, 2011) compared to those who did not take action. Taken together, these studies suggest that collective action has positive consequences for components of well-being such as mood and empowerment.

However, in those studies, the groups under threat were university students from Germany and the Netherlands respectively (Becker et al., 2011; van Zomeren et al., 2012) or U.K. activists protesting civic issues such as unwanted roads (e.g., Cocking & Drury, 2004). It could be argued that such social groups and the resulting acts of discrimination targeted at them are not necessarily chronic, but rather temporary. For example, university students will end their university career; road issues will get resolved one way or another and replaced by other community issues of concern. In contrast, gender is (usually) a permanent social grouping and as such, gender discrimination is often chronic and pervasive (e.g., Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Thus, responding to such widespread and chronic gender discrimination may be a particularly threatening experience.

In fact, some research has reported a negative impact of taking action against gender discrimination: greater reporting sexual harassments among U.S. women has been associated with increased distress (Bergman, et al., 2002) as well as increased health-related problems (e.g., more sick leave, medical treatment; Hesson-McInnis &Fitzgerald, 1997). Asian-American women endorsing direct confrontations of gender discrimination (e.g., "I directly challenge the person who offended me") have reported decreased life satisfaction (Wei, Alvarez, Ku, Russell

& Bonnett, 2010).   Further, Canadian women using both indirect and educational confrontations against gender discrimination have reported declining psychological well-being over a month (Foster, 2013). Thus, whether collective action against gender discrimination will be as positive for well-being as has been found in other contexts (e.g., Becker et al., 2011) is still in question. Two studies therefore used regression analyses to test how taking action against gender discrimination would interact with various moderators to predict well-being, defined as mood, psychological well-being and physical symptoms.

Study 1

One reason taking action has both positive (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2012) and negative (e.g., Bergman et al., 2002) consequences for well-being may be due to differences in the perceived pervasiveness of the discrimination. The Rejection Identification Model (Branscombe et al., 1999) states that those who experience discrimination but perceive it as pervasive across time (e.g., 'it's always been that way') and contexts (e.g., 'it's everywhere') experience greater social rejection and therefore, greater negative consequences than those who perceive isolated discrimination. At the same time however, there is also evidence to suggest that taking action may be a more positive experience for those perceiving pervasive versus isolated discrimination. First, among both U.S. and Canadian women, the more they perceive discrimination to be pervasive (Cronin, Branscombe & Miller, 2009; Foster, 2000), the more they support collective action. Diary research has also shown that Canadian women who perceive pervasive discrimination maintain their active coping responses over time, whereas those perceiving isolated discrimination decrease their active coping over time (Foster, 2009). Thus, collective action may be more likely for those perceiving discrimination to be pervasive.

Further, the RIM (Branscombe et al., 1999) states that perceiving discrimination as pervasive is also associated with greater identification with the group, which in turn provides important social support resources necessary for well-being. Given the inter-relationships between perceived pervasiveness, gender identity and collective action (e.g., van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008), perceiving pervasive discrimination may also provide important psycho-social resources to motivate collective action. In support of this, perceived pervasiveness is related to increased action among Canadian women low in hardiness (personality-based resilience), suggesting perceived pervasiveness may provide some necessary psycho-social resources to act for those who do not already have them (Foster & Dion, 2004). Further, the more U.S. women perceive discrimination to be pervasive, the more positively they feel toward an ingroup protestor, suggesting the social costs of action may be lower among those perceiving discrimination to be pervasive (Garcia, Schmitt, Branscombe & Ellemers, 2010). Thus, if perceiving pervasiveness increases participation in action and decreases its costs, then women who perceive pervasive discrimination may feel better acting than doing nothing.

To test this, the current study exposed Canadian university women to a real situation of gender discrimination, namely the sexist articles featured in their university's newspaper. Women were then randomly assigned to either a no-action control condition or to one of two collection action conditions: informing the media or informing their friends or family, both via email. These actions were chosen because university students frequently use these forms of communication, (i.e., social media; Sponcil & Gitimu, 2012). and would provide an ecologically valid means of manipulating collective action. The two actions are nevertheless different in that informing the media has been rated as a more public and risky form of action (Lalonde, Stroink

& Aleem., 2002) than informing friends/family in Canadian samples. It was expected that action and pervasiveness would interact to predict negative mood and well-being (**Hypothesis 1**). More specifically, given research showing that those perceiving discrimination as isolated are less active (e.g., Foster, 2009), inducing them to act in a way that is inconsistent with what they would normally choose to do (i.e., contra-preparedness; Seligman, 1970) would therefore likely increase negative mood and decrease well-being. As such, **Hypothesis 2a** states that among those perceiving isolated discrimination, taking either action would lead to greater negative mood and less well-being than doing nothing. **Hypothesis 2b** further states that, as the riskier action, informing the media was expected to lead to higher negative mood and lower well-being than informing friends/family among those perceiving isolated gender discrimination.

In contrast, because those perceiving pervasive gender discrimination take more action (e.g., Foster, 2009), inducing them to act will likely be consistent with their behavioral repertoire and may therefore enhance well-being compared to doing nothing. Further, given the psycho-social resources provided by perceiving pervasive discrimination (e.g., Foster & Dion, 2004), action-taking may benefit well-being among those perceiving pervasive discrimination regardless of risk. **Hypothesis 3** therefore states that among those perceiving pervasive discrimination, both informing the media and friends/family would lead to less negative mood and higher well-being compared to doing nothing. No differences were expected between the two actions. Hierarchical regressions were used to test all hypotheses, using standard procedures such that the main effects were entered first into the equation followed by the interactions (Aiken & West, 1991).

Method

Participants

Undergraduate women ($N = 185$; M age $= 18.37$, $SD = 1.61$; Range $= 17$-25) were recruited from the university's psychology department participant pool for course credit. Self-reported ethnicity was 84.6% White Canadian, 4.1% Asian (Japanese, Chinese, Korean), 2.6% East Indian, 1% Aboriginal, .5% Hispanic, 7.2% unknown. Self-reported majors were 21.5% Psychology, 12.9 % Science (e.g., Biology, Chemistry), 17.8% Business, 45.7% Arts (English, Sociology, History), 2.1% Music. There were no age or ethnicity differences across conditions, Fs < 1.30.

Procedure

In order to reduce demand characteristics, the cover story presented was that this was a study on 'post-decision feelings', i.e., how our feelings about a decision may change after making that decision. Specifically they were told that we were interested in how participants' feelings about choosing their university would be affected by hearing and responding to information about its strengths and weaknesses.

Discrimination prime. Participants were then told that although some groups would be randomly selected to hear about the university's strengths, their group had been randomly selected to hear about its weaknesses, thereby providing the impetus for the discrimination prime. They were then told that the university's newspaper has a long-term reputation for being sexist and were shown slides of three articles that had actually appeared in the newspaper throughout the years, consistent with the definition of pervasive discrimination (Branscombe, et al., 1999). The actual and complete newspaper articles were shown, including the dates, page number, headline and text. Certain sexist phrases in the article were highlighted in yellow so that participants would be directed more easily to the sexist content. In particular, in the article entitled, "A Misogynist

Speaks", the phrases "the weaker sex", and "To attempt to describe their mental faculties

(science says they have some) would be ludicrous" (Sutherland, 1953, p.21) were highlighted. In

the second article, entitled "Women in Business", the sentence "Women in general simply do not

possess two key motivational factors that must be present if they are to succeed: aggressiveness

and competitiveness" (van Dyke, 1980, p. 5) was highlighted. The final article entitled "A

gentleman's guide to getting laid at WLU" (Weinberg, 2005, p. 20) was an instruction guide on

how to seduce female students, concluding with the highlighted sentence: "Though I have had to

change my approach from year to year, there is one thing that has never changed: in one way or

another, [this University's] girls put out" (Weinberg, 2005, p. 21).

The slides were visible until participants had finished reading. Participants then completed a

short questionnaire assessing their opinions on this information; in reality, these questions were

the check of the discrimination prime and measures of perceived pervasiveness.

Action manipulation. Subsequently, participants who had been randomly assigned to the no-

action control condition (n = 52) were given the final outcome measures. Participants who had

been randomly assigned to the action conditions were told the researchers are interested in how

their reactions to the information they just heard could affect their post-decision feelings. Those

in the 'inform family/friends' condition (n = 64) were asked to write their reaction in an email

and send it to friends or family members. Those in the 'inform media' condition (n = 69) were

asked to write their reaction in an email and send it to a "public media database" that was

described as a standard database for the media to access non-anonymous student quotes about

university living. To maintain the cover story, participants were asked to include their contact

information in the emails so that the recipients of those in the 'inform friends/family' condition

would know who sent the email and that those in the 'inform media' condition could be

contacted by journalists. However, to protect participants, these emails were not sent, but instead

were re-directed back to a lab email account. Participants then completed well-being measures.

Measures

Discrimination prime check

To assess whether the discrimination was adequately portrayed, participants responded to the

questions "how sexist is the newspaper" and "how unfair is the newspaper to women" on a scale

ranging from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (6).

Pervasiveness

Using the same scale, participants responded to the question, "How much do you think this type

of incident is isolated to this student service, or is it widespread across all student services (i.e.,

academics, sports, campus life etc.)?"

Action manipulation check

To reduce demand characteristics, the action conditions were previously piloted ($N = 47$) to

ensure participants believed these emails would be sent to the correct source. Those participants

indicated, "how many people other than the researcher will see your reaction" using a scale from

no one will see this (0) to *this will be widely available to people via the internet* (6).

Negative Mood (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1994).

Participants were asked to indicate how they feel "at this moment, right now" using a scale

ranging from *I don't feel this way at all* (0) to *I definitely feel this way* (6). Negative mood

comprised the mean of the 23 items in the Basic Negative Emotion scales (e.g., afraid sad; α =

.88).

Psychological Well-being

Well-being (e.g., "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situations in which I live") was assessed using a 24 item short-form scale (Cheng & Chang, 2005), which assess various indicators of psychological functioning: autonomy purpose, ,environmental mastery, growth, personal relations and self-acceptance. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent these statements applied to their life "generally or overall" using a scale ranging form *"strongly disagree this applies to my life generally"* (-3) to *strongly agree this applies to my life generally"* (3). The mean across the 24 items was used as the overall well-being score ($\alpha = .89$). Higher scores represented stronger well-being.

Results

Discrimination check

For the priming of discrimination to have been successful, it was desirable for participants to report scores above the midpoint of the scale (3) on perceived sexism (higher scores representing higher perceived sexism), below the midpoint on perceived unfairness (lower scores representing higher perceived unfairness) and for the degree of perceived sexism and unfairness to be the same across action conditions. The scores for both sexism, $M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.63$, $t(184) = 8.76$, $p = .0001$ and unfairness, $M = 1.75$, $SD = 1.69$, $t(184) = -10.08$, $p = .0001$ were significantly higher and lower, respectively than the midpoint of the scale, indicating participants considered the newspaper to be sexist and unfair. There were no differences across the action conditions for perceived sexism, $F(2,182) = .53$, $p = .59$ or perceived unfairness, $F(2,182) = .39$, $p = .70$. Thus, discrimination was successfully primed.

Action manipulation check

A t-test showed a significant difference between those in the 'inform friends/family' condition ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.03$) and those in the 'inform media' condition ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.32$), $t(44) = -4.27$, $p = .0001$, indicating participants believed their responses were being sent to more people when in the media condition than when in the friends/family condition.

Main analysis

Means, standard deviations and regressions are summarized in Table 1. In addition to the results reported below, several analyses were conducted that are not reported here due to space considerations. First, additional outcomes were assessed: positive mood and self-esteem. Results for positive mood were non-significant and results for self-esteem showed the same pattern as well-being (reported below). Second, all analyses reported below were also conducted using neuroticism and self-esteem as covariates, given their relationship with well-being. The patterns of results were the same as those reported below, namely without the covariates. All analyses are available upon request. Tests of multicollinearity indicated that assumptions were not violated; VIFs ranged from 1.0 to 1.4.

Negative Mood

To assess hypothesis 1 (i.e., an interaction between action and pervasiveness), a hierarchical regression analysis using the standard guidelines of Aiken & West (1991) was conducted; centered pervasiveness and dummy coded actions were entered on the first step and their multiplicative products were entered on the second step. The main effects predicted variance in negative mood, $F(3,180) = 4.57$, $p = .05$, but, were qualified by the significant interaction between pervasiveness and action, $F(2,178) = 18.99$, $p = .0001$, as hypothesis 1 predicted.

  To test hypotheses 2 and 3, the simple effects (Aiken & West, 1991) of action on negative

mood were conducted by centering pervasiveness at one standard deviation above and below the

mean and computing their multiplicative products with the dummy coded actions to compare: 1)

the no-action control condition with inform friends/family, 2) the no-action control condition

with inform media and 3) inform friends/family with inform media. Consistent with hypothesis

2a, among those perceiving low pervasiveness, those in the no-action control condition reported

significantly lower negative mood than those in the 'inform friends/family' condition (β =.28, p

= .005) and significantly lower negative mood than those in the 'inform media' action condition

(β = .31, p = .01). However, hypothesis 2b was not supported; there were no significant

differences between the two action conditions (β = .04, p = .53).

 Consistent with hypothesis 3, among those perceiving high pervasiveness, those in the no-

action control condition reported significantly greater negative mood than those in the inform

friends/family (β = -.63, p = .001), and inform media conditions (β = -.57, p = .004). As

expected, there were no differences between the two action conditions (β = .05, p = .23).

Psychological Well-being

 Another hierarchical regression analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) was conducted to assess the

interaction between action and pervasiveness on psychological well-being (Hypothesis 1). The

main effects marginally predicted additional variance in well-being, $F(3,180) = 5.21, p = .01$, but

again, these were qualified by a significant interaction between pervasiveness and action,

$F(2,178) = 5.84, p = .01$, consistent with hypothesis 1.

 Simple effects analyses showed that, consistent with hypotheses 2a, among those perceiving

low pervasiveness, women reported significantly greater well-being in the no-action control

condition compared to those in the inform friends/family condition, (β = .21, p = .008) and

marginally more than in the inform media condition, ($\beta = .13$, $p = .08$). Contrary to hypothesis 2b, there were no differences between the two action conditions, ($\beta = .11$, $p = .10$). Consistent with hypothesis 3 however, among those perceiving high pervasiveness, those in the no-action control condition reported significantly lower well-being than those in the 'inform friends/family' ($\beta = .40$, $p = .008$), and inform media conditions ($\beta = .25$, $p = .02$). Also as expected, the two action conditions did not differ ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .23$).

Discussion

Although past work had shown collective action to increase components of well-being such as collective empowerment (e.g., Drury et al., 2005; Van Zomeren et al., 2012) and positive mood (Becker et al., 2011), research within a gendered context suggested taking action would decrease well-being (e.g., Bergman et al., 2002). Thus, the present study examined whether perceived pervasiveness would moderate the effect of collective action on negative mood and psychological well-being. As expected, taking action had positive consequences for well-being among those perceiving discrimination to be pervasive. Thus, ESIM's (Drury & Reicher, 1999) prediction that collective action can have positive consequences holds even in a gendered context, but only for those perceiving discrimination to be pervasive.

Also as expected, among those perceiving pervasive discrimination, both informing the media and friends/family had the same positive impact on well-being compared to doing nothing. Despite past work showing that informing the media is a riskier behavior (Lalonde et al., 2002), it appeared to be as beneficial for well-being as the safer option i.e., informing friends/family. This is consistent with the notion that perceived pervasiveness may provide psycho-social resources that make collective action more likely (e.g., Foster & Dion, 2004; Garcia et al., 2010)

in that for those women, a risky behavior is as beneficial as a safe behavior.

In contrast, among those perceiving discrimination to be isolated, taking either action was worse for negative mood and well-being than doing nothing, as expected. Indeed, taking action when the problem is considered to be isolated may be more of a hassle than something that makes us feel good. However, the hypothesis that informing friends/family would be better for mood and well-being than informing the media was not supported. This finding is more consistent with Garcia et al. (2010) which showed that when discrimination is considered isolated, those who protest it are less well liked by others. Thus, perhaps this group was anticipating negative social costs for either action.

Overall, the current study showed a positive causal effect of informing others (both media and friends/family) on well-being within a gendered context, unlike past experimental studies conducted on other types of social injustice (e.g., Becker et al., 2011). Further, this study used ecologically valid forms of collective action, to show that the social media actions young women use every day can have a benefit for them individually, not to mention the collective benefit of spreading information. Thus, initiatives such as The Everyday Sexism Project (everydaysexism.com) whereby people use Twitter to inform others of their experiences with sexism may not just have informational benefits, but psychological benefits as well.

Study 2

Because Study 1 only examined one moderator, namely how the discrimination itself was defined Study 2, was designed to assess a wider variety of moderators, namely how the collective action was defined. In particular, Lalonde and colleagues (e.g., Lalonde, et al., 2002) have investigated the multidimensional nature of collective action, showing that collective action

can vary along dimensions of assertiveness, individuality and normativeness. Each of these

overarching dimensions have been further characterized by underlying definitions of action:

active/passive, individual/collective private/public and non-normative/normative, cost, formality,

preparation, effectiveness and risk. Behaviors that were defined as more normative, preparatory

(i.e., requiring more preparations), low in cost and risk were also behaviors that were more

preferred. Thus, how an action is defined has implications for the extent to which it is endorsed.

Whereas different definitions of action have been examined with respect to preference (e.g.,

Lalonde et al., 2002), they have not been examined in relation to well-being. It may not be that

the most preferred definitions of the action also predict greater well-being; indeed something that

we like to do (e.g., eat junk food) may not necessarily be good for us. This is consistent with

coping research which suggests that coping strategies involving greater engagement in the

problem may indeed be more difficult but are nevertheless associated with better psychological

outcomes (e.g., Miller & Kaiser, 2001). Although Lalonde (et al., 2002) did not explicitly

classify the dimensions of collective action in terms of engagement/disengagement, Miller and

Kaiser (2001) refer to confrontational responses to discrimination as a form of engagement

coping because they involve approaching the problem versus avoiding it. Collective, public

actions may indeed require greater engagement than individual, private actions because they

involve more contact with others also involved in the issue; high-cost, risky and formal actions

likely involve greater engagement than low-risk, safe and informal actions because they require

greater investment by the actor. Indeed, an action such as a community group protest, which is a

more confrontational response than a signing a petition likely requires greater engagement in that

it requires more active collective, public and formal participation and potentially more risk.

Thus, if engagement strategies are good for well-being (e.g., Miller & Kaiser, 2001) then it could

be surmised that to the extent that an action involves engagement/approach versus

disengagement/avoidance, or the more participation in that action would increase well-being.

Study 2 therefore asked female students complete an online questionnaire assessing their

perceived pervasiveness of discrimination, definitions and endorsement of collective action and

well-being (psychological and physical). It was expected that the interaction between

pervasiveness and action on well-being found in Study 1 would replicate (**Hypothesis 1**). It was

further expected that dimension and action would also interact to predict psychological well-

being and mental and physical symptomatology (**Hypothesis 2**). In particular, if actions

involving greater engagement are better for well-being (Miller & Kaiser, 2001), then among

women who define actions in ways that reflect greater engagement in addressing the

discrimination (e.g., active, collective, public, high risk actions), greater endorsement of action

should predict increasing well-being and decreasing symptomatology (**Hypothesis 2a**). In

contrast, among women who define actions in ways that would promote greater disengagement

(e.g., passive, individual, private, low risk actions), greater endorsement of that action should

predict decreasing well-being and increasing symptomatology well-being (**Hypothesis 2b**).

Hierarchical regressions were used to test all hypotheses, using standard procedures such that the

covariate was entered first into the equation followed by the main effects, then interactions

(Aiken & West, 1991).

Method

Participants and Procedure.

Female students under the age of 30 (see Table 2 for demographics and variable means) were

recruited from both Wilfrid Laurier's campus and other schools. Those on campus were recruited

using the departmental participant pool and offered course credit. Those off-campus were

recruited by posters that had been posted around the city and emailed to community

organizations and offered a $10 gift card for their participation. All participants emailed the lab if

they were interested in participating and were provided with a password protected web-link to

the questionnaire.

Measures**.**

Social identity (Cameron, 2004).

Given the positive relationship between social identity and well-being (e.g., Branscombe et al.,

1999), social identity was included as a potential covariate to assess the relationship between

action and well-being independent of identity. Using a scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1)

to *strongly agree* (7), participants indicated their agreement with 12 statements about their

identification with women (e.g., In general, being a woman is an important part of my self-

image). Items were scored so that higher scores indicated higher identification. The mean was

used as the overall score (Cronbach α = .87).

Schedule of Sexist Events (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995).

To assess the degree to which participants perceived discrimination to be pervasive they

indicated using a scale ranging from *never* (1) to *almost all the time (6)* how often in the past

year they have experienced 19 types of discrimination (e.g., sexist jokes, inappropriate or

unwanted sexual advances). The mean was used as the overall score (Cronbach α = .88).

Collective action and Dimensions

The discrimination prime for this study depicted sexual harassment at work, also perceived as

discrimination (Foster, 2000):

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

Using a scale ranging from *definitely no* (1) to *definitely yes* (7), participants then indicated the

extent to which they would likely use 14 actions (Lalonde et al., 2002) to respond to this

situation and then rated each action along each of 9 dimensions (Lalonde et al., 2002) using a

seven-point scale (see Table 3). Higher scores represented the active, collective, normative,

public, high-cost, final, informal, ineffective poles of each action.

Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being was again assessed using the 24 item short-form scale (Cheng &

Chang, 2005), which assess indicators of psychological functioning: autonomy purpose,

environmental mastery, growth, personal relations and self-acceptance. Participants were asked

to indicate to what extent these statements applied to their life "generally or overall" using a

scale ranging form *"strongly disagree this applies to my life generally"* (1) to *strongly agree this*

applies to my life generally" (7). The mean across the 24 items was used as the overall well-

being score ($\alpha = .91$). Higher scores represented stronger well-being.

Symptomatology

Using the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth & Covi, 1974),

participants indicated on a scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (3) how much they have

been bothered by each feeling over the past week. The measure includes psychological

symptoms, namely depression (e.g., crying easily), anxiety (e.g., nervousness), obsessive-

compulsive (e.g., worried about sloppiness or carelessness), interpersonal sensitivity (e.g., your

feelings easily hurt), as well as physical symptoms (e.g., headaches).   The mean across all

symptoms was used as the overall scale (Cronbach α = .94).

Results

Although a benefit of a correlational design is the range of behaviors that can be assessed,

the risk of inflating experimenter-wise error rate by conducting too many analyses also exists. To

reduce error, only three actions were selected for analyses a priori, namely those actions used in

Study 1: Inform the media; Inform family and friends and Do nothing. As Table 3 shows, these

behaviors were polarized in terms of use and risk. Consistent with Lalonde (et al., 2002);

informing the media was both the least endorsed (along with doing nothing) and rated the most

risky among the three behaviors. Informing friends/family was the most endorsed action, and the

least risky compared to the other three behaviors.

Post hoc analyses of the other actions show similar patterns to what is presented below, but

due to space considerations are not presented; these analyses are available upon request.

To test hypothesis 1, namely that the pervasiveness X action interaction would replicate, a

hierarchical regression analysis was conducted for each collective action using the standard

guidelines of Aiken & West (1991). The centered covariate (gender identity) was entered on the

first step, followed by the centered main effects (pervasiveness, dimension, endorsement),

followed by the multiplicative two-way interactions (pervasiveness X endorsement; dimension X

endorsement) on the final step. Simple slopes were tested by examining the relationship between

endorsement of action and symptomatology at one standard deviation above and below the mean

of pervasiveness. Tests of multicollinearity for all regressions indicated that assumptions were

not violated; VIFs for the regressions ranged from 1.00 to 1.6.

As Table 4 indicates, the interaction between pervasiveness and action (hypothesis 1)

was supported for informing the media, but only for symptomatology ($ts > -2.19$, $ps < .01$).

Consistent with study 1, among those reporting pervasive discrimination, greater endorsement of

informing the media was related to lower symptomatology ($\beta = -.37$, $p = .01$). Among those

reporting isolated discrimination, greater endorsement of informing the media was related to

higher symptomatology ($\beta = .33$, $p = .04$). There was no support for the pervasiveness X action

interaction for the action, informing friends/family or doing nothing.

Consistent with hypothesis 2, namely that the definitions of collective action would interact

with endorsement of action, four dimensions interacted with two of the three actions to predict

well-being. The dimension, active/passive significantly interacted with doing nothing and

informing the media, to predict well-being. Simple slopes were tested by examining the

relationship between endorsement of action and well-being at one standard deviation above

(active) and below (passive) the mean of the active/passive dimension (Aiken & West, 1991).

Consistent with hypothesis 2a, among those who defined the behaviors as active, greater

endorsement of doing nothing ($\beta = .58$, $p = .01$) and informing the media ($\beta = .30$, $p = .01$) was

related to greater well-being. Consistent with hypothesis 2b, among those who defined these

behaviors as passive, greater endorsement of doing nothing, ($\beta = -.51$, $p = .01$) and informing the

media ($\beta = -.79$, $p = .001$) was related to lower well-being.

The individual/collective dimension also significantly interacted with doing nothing and

informing the media to predict well-being. Consistent with hypothesis 2b, simple slopes

analyses were tested by examining the relationship between endorsement of action and well-

being at one standard deviation above (collective) and below (individual) the mean of the

individual/collective dimension. Among those who defined informing the media as collective,

greater endorsement of it predicted greater well-being ($\beta = .29$, $p = .01$), but endorsement of

doing nothing was unrelated to well-being ($\beta = .11$, $p = .40$). Consistent with hypothesis 2b,

among those defining action as individual, greater endorsement of informing the media ($\beta = -.45$,

$p = .001$) and doing nothing ($\beta = -.74$, $p = .001$) predicted lower well-being.

The private/public dimension also significantly interacted with informing the media and

doing nothing to predict well-being. Simples slopes analyses were tested by examining the

relationship between endorsement of action and well-being at one standard deviation above

(public) and below (private) the mean of the private/public dimension. Consistent with

hypothesis 2a, among those who defined both actions as public, greater endorsement of doing

nothing, ($\beta = .34$, p $= .05$) and informing the media ($\beta = .33$, $p = .01$) predicted greater well-

being. Consistent with hypothesis 2b, among those who defined these actions as private, greater

endorsement was related to lower well-being for doing nothing ($\beta = -.50$, $p = .001$) and

informing the media ($\beta = -.62$, $p = .001$).

Finally, cost interacted with doing nothing and informing the media to predict well-being, as

expected by hypothesis 2. Consistent with hypothesis 2a, simple slopes analyses were tested by

examining the relationship between endorsement of action and well-being at one standard

deviation above (high-cost) and below (low-cost) the mean of the cost dimension. Among those

who defined action as high-cost, greater endorsement of doing nothing ($\beta = .37$, $p = .04$) and

informing the media (β = .54, *p* = .01) was related to greater well-being. Consistent with

hypothesis 2b, among those who defined these actions as low-cost, endorsing doing nothing (β =

-.67, *p* = .006) informing the media (β = -.68, *p* = .01) and was related to lower well-being.

Discussion

Study 2 examined not only whether the pervasiveness X action interaction would replicate,

but also whether the definition of the action itself would serve as a moderator. Consistent with

Study 1, the interaction between action and pervasiveness was replicated, but, only for informing

the media, and only for symptomatology. In particular, among those defining discrimination as

pervasive, greater endorsement of informing the media was associated with lower

symptomatology. Thus, consistent with ESIM (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 1999), taking action

against gender discrimination can have positive implications for psychological well-being.

However, because the interaction did not replicate for doing nothing or informing friends/family,

it may be that pervasiveness only moderates the relationship between action and well-being for

certain actions. It may have been affected a social media action because such an action also has

the potential to be pervasive in that it can reach a wide audience. As such, those who think

discrimination is pervasive may be more likely to benefit from an action that can also have

pervasive effects.

The second purpose of this study was to examine how the definition of the action itself

would moderate the relationship between taking that action and well-being. As expected, among

participants defining doing nothing and informing the media as active, collective, public and

high cost, greater endorsement of those behaviors was associated with greater well-being. In

contrast, among those defining the behaviors as passive, individual, private, and low cost, greater

endorsement was associated with lower well-being. Thus, how both action and inaction are defined may be more important for well-being than endorsement of the action itself. This may have positive and negative implications. On the positive side, it provides a good starting point from which to understand how defining the action itself may help to enhance well-being of gender discrimination victims; by encouraging women to view actions as active, public and high risk, taking such actions can have psychological benefits. However, if defining inaction along such dimensions also has psychological benefits, then there is a risk to the social benefits; feeling good after not acting may ultimately decrease the likelihood of taking action. Future research will need to investigate how the psychological benefits of defining inaction as active, public and high risk may impact future social actions.

What these definitions of action may have in common is a greater tendency to engage with the stressor (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). Actions considered to be active versus passive; collective versus individual; public versus private, high-cost versus low-cost may be more able to alter the situation given the level of engagement required. In turn, if the discrimination situation is altered in that it is reduced or eliminated, well-being may ultimately increase. Although the current study did not assess the extent to which these dimensions actually involve engagement, they appear to be face valid measures of engagement in that one pole of the dimension requires greater involvement than the other. For example, collective behaviors such as protesting requires greater engagement than individual behaviors such as signing a petition. Nevertheless, future research will benefit from understanding whether engagement is indeed the underlying mechanism for these patterns.

General Discussion

Two studies attempted to clarify whether taking action against gender discrimination could positively affect well-being. Study 1 used an experimental paradigm to test how perceived pervasiveness of the gender discrimination may moderate the effect of taking action in the form of emails on well-being. Study 2 used a correlational study to examine a greater breadth of moderators, namely how the action itself was defined.

Both studies show that perceived pervasiveness of the discrimination moderates the relationship between action and well-being such that among those perceiving discrimination to be pervasive, doing nothing decreases well-being and informing the media enhances well-being. This effect occurred across two types of studies (experimental and scenario) and two types of discrimination (sexual stereotyping and sexual harassment). Interestingly, despite being an action that is perceived as risky (both in this and other work; Lalonde et al., 2002), informing the media nevertheless has psychological benefits among those perceiving discrimination to be pervasive. This may have important implications for creating subsequent patterns of behavior, especially in a generation for whom social media is so ubiquitous. Skinner (1971) notes that behavior followed by positive consequences is repeated whereas behavior followed by negative consequences is avoided. If we feel good immediately after participating in an action we may be more likely to repeat it again in the future, creating the beginnings of a pattern of collective action. Indeed, the world recently witnessed the effectiveness of social media in how social movements were mobilized in the Middle East. If informing others has positive consequences (i.e., feeling good), it may not be surprising how widely and often that behavior was repeated.

Neither study was designed to examine potential mediators of the action/well-being relationship, but instead to fill a gap in the research: to assess whether taking action against

gender discrimination would be beneficial for well-being. Thus, future research will need to examine the mechanisms by which action increases well-being. Although the RIM (Branscombe et al., 1999) would suggest identity is a likely moderator, Study 2 showed that action enhanced well-being independently of identity. As such, the benefits of action-taking may not lie in its association with identity. One possibility suggested by ESIM (e.g., Cocker & Drury, 2004) is efficacy; the more people feel they can affect their environments, the better they feel. Another possibility is emotional expression; Pennebaker and colleagues (e.g., Pennebaker & Chung, 2007) show that emotional expression benefits well-being. It may be that actions that involve greater engagement in the discrimination also allow for greater emotional expression.

Despite limitations, these studies suggest that acting out against gender discrimination can be psychologically beneficial, even when using high-risk actions. If collective action has personal benefits, then perhaps the political may more easily become personal.

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