A Generalized Personal/Group Discrepancy: Testing the Domain Specificity of a Perceived Higher Effect of Events on One's Group Than on Oneself

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Studies on the personal/group discrimination discrepancy show individuals to perceive higher levels of discrimination directed at their group as a whole than at themselves personally. The authors hypothesized that the discrepancy is not restricted to the domain of discrimination. Research participants in Studies 1 and 2 completed questionnaires asking them to rate the degree to which they personally, their close friends, their gender group, and the general population (in Study 2, the average person in these groups) were affected by events in eight domains, including gender discrimination. In both studies, participants rated group levels of affectedness higher than personal levels, demonstrating a generalized personal/group discrepancy. Study 3 showed that this discrepancy also extends to positive events, thus arguing against a denial hypothesis and perhaps supporting an availability heuristic interpretation.

In a number of unrelated studies on discrimination, it was found that minority group participants perceived a higher level of discrimination directed at their group as a whole than at themselves as individual members of that group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). This finding, since called the personal/group discrimination discrepancy (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990), was first encountered by Crosby (1982, 1984a) during a study of working women. Other researchers also encountered this phenomenon, although all reported it was not an intended outcome of their research (Guimond & Dube-Simard, 1983; Taylor, Wong-Rieger, McKirnan, & Bercusson, 1982).

The first experiment designed specifically to test the personal/group discrimination discrepancy was conducted by Taylor et al. (1990). In this study, two groups of Canadian immigrants—Haitian and Indian women—were asked about their perceptions of both personal and group discrimination within Canadian society. The findings demonstrate that, indeed, these women did perceive higher levels of discrimination being directed at their group as a whole than at themselves personally.

Taylor and his associates (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, in press; Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1994) have reported on a series of experimental attempts to identify the best explanations for the personal/group discrimination discrepancy. The evidence suggests that we can discount some of the more mundane explanations, such as the possibility that a systematic bias may have excluded the members of the minority group in question who were actually the recipients of discrimination and the possibility that subtle clues in the wording of the questions were leading subjects to respond in a certain way. To rule out these possibilities, Taylor et al. (1990) conducted an analysis of their participant pool to search for a sampling bias and found none, and they tested numerous variants

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of wording on their questions and found no significant difference in response patterns. Participants have also been shown to be able to correctly identify the actual level of personal and group discrimination present in a situation, and so the personal/group discrimination discrepancy does not necessarily occur because of a lack of ability to make reality-based assessments of discrimination (Taylor, Wright, & Ruggiero, 1991).

The most compelling explanations of the personal/group discrimination discrepancy have been judged to be, first, a denial of personal discrimination and, second, an exaggeration of group discrimination (Crosby, 1984a, 1984b; Taylor et al., 1994; Zanna, Crosby, & Loewenstein, 1986). The first of these has been viewed as particularly convincing, because the psychological literature suggests a number of strong reasons why individuals may be motivated to deny discrimination against the self (Taylor et al., 1994, p. 238). For example, research on positive illusions suggests that an unsubstantial optimism, an excessively positive self-image, and an overestimated sense of control contribute to the well-being of individuals, particularly when they are exposed to negative events (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

A central assumption made by researchers attempting to unravel the motivational basis of the personal/group discrimination discrepancy has been that the phenomenon is specific to the domain of discrimination. But an alternative and conceptually more interesting possibility is that there exists a generalized personal/group discrepancy, involving a tendency for individuals to rate the effect of a phenomenon as lower on themselves than on their group irrespective of the domain. A number of reports from surveys support such an interpretation. For example, a national survey among school superintendents and principals showed research participants perceived a 39% increase in school violence in their own districts but a 63% increase in neighboring districts and a 97% increase in the nation's schools as a whole (Boothe, Bradley, Keough, & Kirk, 1993). In a survey conducted in Germany of perceptions of the economic recession, whereas only 39% of research participants reported their personal situation to be "not so good" or "bad," 87% reported the situation for the general population to be in this poor state (Stimmungsumschwung in Ostdeutschland, 1994).

To assess the viability of a generalized personal/group discrepancy, we decided to ask research participants about their experiences in eight different domains. These were selected through a pilot study (Rothgerber, Smith, & Lipp, 1992) and included domains such as the economy, the threat of AIDS, and discrimination. Also, to achieve a more sensitive differentiation between personal and group discrepancy, we decided to include three levels of group: (a) close friends, (b) gender group, and (c) the population in general. Incorporating three levels of group would allow for a more refined assessment of an additive model and would test it against a categorical model.

An additive model suggests that the size of perceived discrimination will increase with the size of the group. Thus, the highest level would be for the general population, the next highest for the gender group, and the lowest for close friends. The scores for all three groups would be higher than those for the self. But if the process is categorical, the three groups will have the same scores, with ratings higher than those for the self. Thus, both the additive and categorical models predict the personal/group discrepancy will occur, but the former also predicts that there will be a differentiation of groups on the basis of their size.

We focused on the gender group in part because the personal/group discrimination discrepancy has its origins in research on perceived discrimination among women (Crosby, 1984a, 1984b), and the replication of the discrepancy for women on this issue would act as a reliability check for our procedure. We also expected women to report higher levels of sex discrimination than men, reflecting their experiences as a historically disadvantaged group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

STUDY 1

In Study 1, we tested three specific hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: A personal/group discrepancy will emerge for all eight varied domains included in the research questionnaire.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived discrimination will increase in an additive manner with the size of the social unit (self, close friends, gender group, general population).

Hypothesis 3: Women will perceive greater discrimination on the basis of sex.

Method

Research participants. Participants were 95 randomly selected undergraduate students (37 male, 58 female) from Georgetown University, Washington, DC. They were approached on the university campus and asked if they would be willing to complete a questionnaire.

Procedure and materials. Participants rated the extent to which they believed each of eight issues affected (a) themselves personally, (b) their close friends, (c) persons of their gender, and (d) the population in general. Following each question, the participants were asked to rate on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*to a great extent*) to what extent the social categories (a) to (d), referred to below as the four *levels*, were affected by each issue. For example, Question 1 read, "To what extent has the current economic recession affected: (a) You per-

sonally? (b) Your close friends? (c) Persons of your gender? (d) The population in general?"

The remaining seven questions were as follows:

2. To what extent have ecological issues (i.e., the Greenhouse Effect, global warming, etc.) affected: . . . .
3. To what extent has the threat of AIDS affected: . . . .
4. To what extent has the growing use of computers affected: . . . .
5. To what extent has sex discrimination affected: . . . .
6. To what extent have rising health costs affected: . . . .
7. To what extent has the end of the Cold War affected: . . . .
8. To what extent has racial discrimination affected: . . . .

Results

A repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant differences across the four levels (Level 1 = participant personally, Level 2 = friends, Level 3 = gender, and Level 4 = population in general) on each of the eight questions (see Table 1). Post hoc analyses revealed that for Questions 1 and 7 (economic recession and the end of the Cold War), scores increased between each of the four levels (see Table 1). On the remaining six questions, there was no significant difference between Level 1 and Level 2 (participant personally and friends, respectively); but differences between Levels 2 and 3 (friends and gender, respectively) and Levels 3 and 4 (gender and population in general, respectively) showed a significant upward trend.

A 4 (level) × 2 (gender) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for Question 5 (sex discrimination). A significant Level × Gender interaction was obtained, $F(1, 94) = 14.76$, $p < .01$. The effect of sex discrimination was reported by women to be higher for their gender group ($M = 7.76$) than for the general population ($M = 6.55$) but also higher for their gender group and the general population than for themselves personally and their close friends (Ms = 5.52 and 4.79, respectively). The effects reported by men were higher for their gender group and the general population (Ms = 4.17 and 4.16, respectively) than for themselves personally and their close friends (Ms = 2.38 and 2.59, respectively). The main effect for gender was also significant, with women (M = 6.13) reporting the effect of sex discrimination to be greater than for men ($M = 3.33$), $F(1, 94) = 46.13$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

In eight different domains, the effects of events were reported as being lower for the self personally, as compared with the participant's gender group and the population in general. This trend supports Hypothesis 1 and indicates that the phenomenon under study is more accurately described as a generalized personal/group discrepancy, not specific to the domain of discrimination. Consequently, the discussion of explanations should extend beyond the experience of discrimination and be concerned with perceptions of events more generally. The perceived increase of this effect with the size of the social group suggests that the process is additive.

In this regard, Hypothesis 2 also received some endorsement. In two of the eight questions (1 and 7), the size of the effect showed a significant increase with group size: A participant's close friends were affected more than the participant; persons of the participant's gender were affected more than the participant's close friends; and finally, the population in general was more affected than persons of the participant's gender. In the other six questions, there was no significant difference between Levels 1 and 2 (participant personally and friends, respectively), but the differences between the remaining levels indicated a significant upward trend. A simple comparison of individual mean scores for the four levels of each of the eight questions shows that these group-level values were not obtained as a result of several greatly varying outlying scores but instead as a result of a persistent phenomenon: Approximately 90% of the individual participants showed a pattern of increase across levels, whereas only 10% showed no increase or a decrease across levels.

Hypothesis 3 is supported by the tendency of women to see the effect of sexual discrimination to be higher than men. However, it is interesting that the personal/group discrepancy was replicated for both women and men. Thus, although women reported the effect of sexual discrimination to be higher overall, both men and women perceived the effect to be less for themselves personally than for their gender groups and for the population in general.

STUDY 2

The inclusion of three levels of groups in Study 1 allowed a better highlighting of an additive process, identified as a strong tendency for the size of an effect to be reported as increasing with the size of the group. But if participants were consciously adopting an additive strategy, we wondered if they would set aside this strategy when asked explicitly to report on the effect of various negative events on the average member of different groups, as well as on the self personally. Earlier studies suggest that incorporating the term *average* will not change response patterns (Taylor et al., 1994), but this may have been because participants had not received explicit enough directions to think of a group average when making their ratings.

In addition to testing the additive model in this way, another goal of Study 2 was to replicate the generalized

TABLE 1: Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) of Perceived Affectedness for Self and Groups, Study 1

Question Topic	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*	*Level 4*	*F(1, 122)*
1. Economic recession	4.01_a	4.45_b	5.61_c	7.03_d	84.96**
	(2.10)	(1.79)	(1.54)	(1.10)	
2. Ecological issues	4.40_a	4.31_a	4.81_b	5.84_c	34.82**
	(2.16)	(1.93)	(1.73)	(1.75)	
3. Threat of AIDS	5.18_a	5.43_a	7.16_b	7.64_c	58.98**
	(2.61)	(2.26)	(1.67)	(1.34)	
4. Use of computers	6.27_a	6.20_a	6.47_b	7.33_c	15.86**
	(2.19)	(2.00)	(1.67)	(1.54)	
5. Sexual harassment	3.99_a	4.15_a	6.36_b	6.22_b	67.83**
	(2.43)	(2.10)	(2.51)	(1.55)	
6. Rising health costs	3.79_a	4.12_a	5.85_b	6.98_c	103.41**
	(2.58)	(2.25)	(1.60)	(1.45)	
7. End of the Cold War	3.82_b	3.53_a	4.39_c	5.85_d	78.83**
	(2.34)	(2.06)	(1.91)	(1.73)	
8. Racial discrimination	4.11_a	4.33_a	5.35_b	6.76_c	66.52**
	(2.44)	(2.21)	(1.92)	(1.62)	

NOTE: Level 1 = participant personally; Level 2 = friends; Level 3 = gender; and Level 4 = population in general. Mean scores could range from 1 to 9; higher numbers indicate person/group affected to a greater extent. Within each row, means with different subscripts differ at the .05 level of significance.
**$p < .01$.

TABLE 2: Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) of Perceived Affectedness for Self and for Average of Groups, Study 2

Question Topic	*Level 1*	*Level 2*	*Level 3*	*Level 4*	*F(1, 122)*
1. Economic recession	3.14_a	3.72_b	5.20_c	6.17_d	151.41**
	(1.83)	(1.68)	(1.52)	(1.30)	
2. Ecological issues	4.41_b	4.20_a	4.46_b	4.59_b	2.57*
	(2.19)	(1.88)	(1.64)	(1.65)	
3. Threat of AIDS	4.74_a	5.09_b	6.23_c	6.46_d	41.38**
	(2.50)	(2.13)	(1.69)	(1.61)	
4. Use of computers	6.61	6.36	6.44	6.50	1.10
	(1.94)	(1.71)	(1.47)	(1.57)	
5. Sexual harassment	3.62_a	3.96_b	5.39_c	5.28_c	42.64**
	(2.53)	(2.20)	(2.45)	(1.51)	
6. Rising health costs	3.21_a	3.62_b	5.44_c	6.39_d	174.14**
	(2.18)	(1.81)	(1.52)	(1.45)	
7. End of the Cold War	3.75_a	3.51_a	4.02_b	4.53_c	18.24**
	(2.39)	(1.97)	(1.77)	(1.88)	
8. Racial discrimination	3.59_a	3.91_b	4.80_c	5.57_d	58.04**
	(2.36)	(2.17)	(1.77)	(1.58)	

NOTE: Level 1 = participant personally; Level 2 = friends; Level 3 = gender; and Level 4 = population in general. Mean scores could range from 1 to 9; higher numbers indicate person/group affected to a greater extent. Within each row, means with different subscripts differ at the .05 level of significance.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

personal/group discrepancy. Specifically, three hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1: The generalized personal/group discrepancy will be replicated.

Hypothesis 2: The insertion of the term *average* will not influence the additive trend across group levels.

Hypothesis 3: Women will report greater effects of sex discrimination, replicating Study 1.

Method

Research participants. Participants were 123 undergraduate students (50 male and 73 female) sampled from the same population, and recruited in the same manner, as in Study 1.

Procedure and materials. The procedure was the same as for Study 1, with one exception: The word *average* was inserted into questions concerning close friends, gender group, and the general population (e.g., "The *average* person of your gender"). Participants received explicit oral and written instructions to think of a group average when making their ratings for Levels 2 to 4.

Results

A repeated measures ANOVA was used to make comparisons across the four levels for each of the eight questions. There were differences across the four levels on seven of the eight questions (see Table 2), the nonsignificant result being for responses on Question 4 (use of computers). Post hoc tests revealed that on Question 1 (economic recession), Question 3 (threat of AIDS), Question 6 (health costs), and Question 8 (racial discrimination), scores increased between each of the four levels. The remaining questions showed varying upward trends, including a difference between Levels 1 and 2 in all but two cases.

A 4 (level) × 2 (gender) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for Question 5 (sex discrimination). The interaction pattern generally replicated Study 1, $F(1, 94) = 16.04$, $p < .01$. The effect of sex discrimination was reported by women to be higher for their gender group ($M = 6.77$) than for the general population ($M = 5.44$) but higher for their gender group and the general population than for themselves personally and their close friends (Ms = 4.34 and 4.36, respectively). The effect reported by men was higher for the general population ($M = 5.03$) than for their gender group, their close friends, and themselves personally (Ms = 3.93, 3.49, and 2.83, respectively) but also higher for their gender group than for themselves personally. The main effect for gender was also significant, with women ($M = 5.48$) reporting higher effects of sex discrimination than men ($M = 3.80$), $F(1, 94) = 19.59$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 received strong support through a replication of the personal/group discrepancy in seven of the eight domains (the domain of use of computers

being the exception), with effects of phenomena being perceived as less for the participant personally than for the gender group and the general population.

The insertion of the term *average* did not prevent an additive pattern from emerging; thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported. Indeed, an additive pattern is even more evident in this second study. In four of the eight questions, the size of effect showed a step-wise increase across the three group levels: A participant's close friends were affected more than the participant, persons of the participant's gender were affected more than the participant's close friends, and finally, the population in general was affected more than persons of the participant's gender. Three of the remaining four questions showed varying upward trends across levels. Also, unlike in Study 1, differences between participant personally and close friends were consistent, the former being seen as less affected in six domains.

A simple comparison of individual mean scores for the four levels of each of the eight questions shows that these group-level values were not obtained as a result of several greatly varying outlying scores but instead as a result of a persistent phenomenon: Approximately 82% of the individual participants showed a pattern of increase across levels, whereas only 18% showed no increase or a decrease across levels.

Hypothesis 3 received strong endorsement as a result of women reporting sex discrimination as having greater effects. In general, the results from Study 2 are similar enough to those of Study 1 to indicate that the inclusion of the word *average* does not make any difference, despite our attempts to make the insertion very explicit.

The confirmation of a hypothesized gender difference on sex discrimination, with women reporting greater effects, encouraged us to further explore gender differences post hoc. Our analyses revealed that in Studies 1 and 2, eight questions (with four levels each) showed either a gender effect or a Gender × Level interaction. Next, 32 means were broken down by gender and compared. In 24 of the 32 cases, women were higher than men in their ratings of affectedness for all levels. This suggests an intriguing role for gender in the generalized personal/group discrepancy. It is possible that women are simply more sensitive to the impact of world events, in part because of their power minority status (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Having less power may mean that women actually are affected by events more than men (Eagly, 1987), and this may in part lead them to give higher estimates of the extent to which events impact themselves as well as others.

The results of Studies 1 and 2, then, strongly suggest a generalized personal/group discrepancy. However, these results do not provide a clear test of whether this phenomenon is restricted to negative events. Thus, although results of Studies 1 and 2 may be interpreted as supporting a denial explanation, they also leave room for another highly plausible alternative—namely, an availability heuristic (Schwarz et al., 1991).

STUDY 3

The first two studies extend the domain of the generalized discrimination discrepancy beyond that of discrimination but do not directly test a denial explanation against an availability explanation. This is because in Studies 1 and 2, we used domains that could be interpreted as negative in effect. Thus, participants could have given lower ratings for the self so as to deny the impact of negative events. To provide evidence that could not be explained by a denial model, we needed to present participants with events that are perceived to have positive effects. Although a denial explanation is compatible with a personal/group discrepancy on negative but not positive events, an availability heuristic is compatible with such a discrepancy on both positive and negative events.

The availability heuristic implies that the effect of an event will be seen as greater when it is easier to cite examples of its impact (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Such examples could become more readily available as the target size increases. Consequently, events having an impact on an entire gender group would be more readily cited than if the target were an individual. For example, individuals may recall events as having a greater impact on their gender group than on themselves as a result of the information they receive from the media, particularly concerning the more sensational cases of gender discrimination (e.g., the case of the Mitsubishi plant in 1996). Thus, in the third study, participants were asked to rate the affect of perceived positive events on the self and the gender group. A denial hypothesis predicts that there would be no personal/group discrepancy because participants would not be motivated to deny the effects of positive events in their personal lives. On the other hand, a generalized personal/group discrimination discrepancy on positive events would be explained by an availability heuristic. Because the literature on the personal/group discrepancy has traditionally focused on two levels (personal and group), we decided to return to this format as another check on our experimental procedures. Also, although previous research has shown there to be no effect for the order in which questions for individuals and groups are posed (Taylor et al., 1994), we wanted to include this check in our study. Thus, we prepared two versions of the questionnaire, one asking about the effect of events on groups first and the other on individuals first.

Method

Research participants. Participants were 73 undergraduate students (31 male and 42 female), all recruited in the same manner and from the same population as in Studies 1 and 2.

Procedure and materials. Through a pilot study ($N = 68$), nine items were selected that were judged to be positive (rated > 7 on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all positive* to 9 = *very positive* in terms of their influence). Participants in the main study rated the effect of the nine positive items (improved power and efficiency of computers, improved international and domestic travel facilities, increased opportunities for learning foreign languages, creation of smoke-free public spaces, more advanced and more accessible physical fitness facilities, warm and supportive friends, modern labor-saving devices, increased access to information, creation of national parks and recreational areas) for "myself personally" and for "members of my gender group." Each of the participants was randomly assigned either Version 1 ($N = 37$; ratings for participant personally first, followed by gender group) or Version 2 ($N = 36$; question order reversed).

Results

A 2 (level: self, gender group) × 2 (Version 1, Version 2) repeated measures ANOVA, with level being the repeated measure, revealed differences across the two levels on each of eight issues (see Table 3). The only item for which level was not different was Question 6 (warm and supportive friends). There was no difference across the two versions, and an analysis of the means showed that the only item that did not follow the generalized discrimination discrepancy trend was Version 1 of item for warm and supportive friends.[1]

Discussion

The results of Study 3 show that positive issues are perceived to have more effect on the group than on the participant personally. We believe these results to be robust, first, because we replicated Study 3 using a different set of perceived positive events and a different sample ($N = 141$) from the same population,[2] and, second, because the items used had all been selected as positive in effect through a pilot study. We also checked for possible effects of the order in which questions were presented. The means indicate that the direction of the trend was supportive of our main prediction; the perceived effect of events was higher for the gender group than for the participant personally. A theoretical implication of these results is that a denial hypothesis is not sufficient to account for such a generalized personal/group discrepancy.

TABLE 3: Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) of Perceived Affectedness for Self and for Members of Gender Group, Study 3

Question Topic	*Level 1*	*Level 2*
1. Improved power and efficiency of computers		
Version 1	6.33 (1.62)	7.22 (0.99)
Version 2	7.28 (1.34)	7.53 (1.28)
2. Improved international and domestic travel facilities		
Version 1	5.64 (2.06)	6.64 (1.59)
Version 2	5.81 (2.04)	6.64 (1.66)
3. Increased opportunities for learning foreign languages		
Version 1	6.30 (1.85)	6.89 (1.02)
Version 2	5.58 (1.76)	7.08 (1.20)
4. Creation of smoke-free public spaces		
Version 1	6.24 (2.01)	7.05 (1.25)
Version 2	6.00 (2.54)	7.31 (1.45)
5. More advanced and more accessible physical fitness facilities		
Version 1	6.65 (1.74)	7.51 (1.30)
Version 2	6.58 (1.90)	7.50 (1.28)
6. Warm and supportive friends		
Version 1	7.92 (1.53)	7.41 (1.42)
Version 2	7.67 (1.64)	7.89 (1.17)
7. Modern labor-saving devices		
Version 1	7.65 (1.67)	8.32 (0.97)
Version 2	7.64 (1.33)	8.22 (0.96)
8. Increased access to information		
Version 1	7.32 (1.29)	7.84 (0.99)
Version 2	7.67 (1.39)	7.72 (1.09)
9. Creation of national parks and recreational areas		
Version 1	5.41 (1.64)	5.62 (1.38)
Version 2	5.47 (1.93)	6.19 (1.41)

NOTE: Level 1 = participant personally; Level 2 = gender. Mean scores could range from 1 to 9; higher numbers indicate person/group affected to a greater extent.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The main objective of this research was to test the domain specificity of a discrepancy found between how events affect the self and the group. Our findings, consistent across three studies with different samples from the same population, show the discrepancy to be generalized to a variety of both positive and negative events, rather than to the domain of discrimination specifically. Thus, the phenomenon seems more accurately described as a generalized personal/group discrepancy.

An interesting interpretation of the generalized discrepancy is that it represents a form of self-protective mechanism (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, in press), perhaps motivated by the same kinds of self-esteem protective mechanisms as described by Crocker and Major (1989). By denying the effects of negative events on the self, individuals may avoid the responsibility for negative outcomes for the self, and perhaps more generally for the

group. However, given our findings that the generalized discrepancy persists across both positive and negative events, we believe that a denial explanation is insufficient. A more plausible alternative is that an availability heuristic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973) is responsible for the generalized personal/group discrepancy.

The ease with which examples of the effects of events are brought to mind could vary with group size. Thus, the probability that one member of a group experiences an event is perceived to be lower for small groups than for large groups. Consequently, an individual may not recall such an event happening to a close friend but may be able to readily bring to mind examples from the gender group and even more readily from the general population.

This explanation does not require us to assume a motivational bias, such as motivational biases to deny effects on the self or to exaggerate effects on groups. Rather, according to a heuristic-based explanation, the discrepancy arises when participants fail to adjust for group size in making their estimates of effects. The finding in Studies 1 and 2 that the effect is seen to increase in an additive manner with group size—from close friends to gender groups to general population—is in line with such an explanation.

Just as in previous research (Taylor et al., 1994), the discrepancy persisted even when participants were asked to think about an average for the group. Other possibilities may be explored in future research, such as replacing the term *average* with the term *typical*, the latter more clearly implying a single group member. The focus on a single group member may lead to estimates of effects that are adjusted for group size, so that the personal/group discrepancy disappears.

The original personal/group discrepancy had been identified in studies involving minority group participants, such as women in the United States or visible minority immigrant women in Canada (Taylor et al., 1994). In this study, we have shown that the discrepancy also appears for majority group members (e.g., men). Even on the issue of sex discrimination, although men reported the effect to be lower than that reported by women, men still reported the effect to be higher for their groups than for themselves personally. Thus, the discrepancy is more generalized than had been assumed, in that it extends beyond the domain of discrimination and beyond minority groups.

In conclusion, then, what appeared to be a phenomenon specific to the domain of discrimination (Crosby 1982; Taylor et al., 1990), and perhaps to negative events more generally (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994; Taylor et al., 1994), has been shown to be pervasive across both positive and negative events. An availability heuristic seems best to explain this generalized personal/group discrepancy. Future research may attempt to explore limits to this discrepancy, perhaps by asking research participants to make judgments about typical group members or by using participants who may well report higher effects for the self than for the larger group (e.g., women in the navy reporting on sex discrimination experienced by the self, by other women in the navy, and by the larger group of women in general).

NOTES

1. In Table 3, degrees of freedom ranged from 1, 68 to 1, 70 because of missing data. Version was involved in one significant and another marginally significant interaction effect, but the direction of the means was in line with the generalized personal/group discrepancy trend.
2. Details of the findings are available from the first author.

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