

# When Excuses Don't Work: The Persistent Injustice Effect among Black Managers

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In this paper, we examine the underlying dynamics of the differences between blacks' and whites' responses to social accounts—explanations or excuses for negative actions and events. Across four studies we found that when black respondents observed unjust behaviors toward a hypothetical black victim, social accounts had a weak impact on perceptions of injustice, confirming the presence of what we call the “persistent injustice effect.” We also found that social accounts have a weaker impact on perceptions of injustice than on disapproval of the harm-doer and posit that the persistent injustice effect results from a combination of in-group identification with the victim and the respondent's personal experiences with injustice. These two factors, we theorize, combine to create greater empathy for the victim.●

There has been a growing recognition of the impact of social accounts—explanations for negative actions—on organizational justice. Beginning with the work of Bies and Shapiro (Bies and Moag, 1986; Bies, 1987; Shapiro, 1991), a well-established literature documents the impact of accounts on perceptions of justice (Brockner et al., 1990; Konovsky and Folger, 1991; Conlon and Ross, 1997). In areas such as negative pay decisions and layoffs, researchers have found that a well-constructed account that explains what happened and why can reduce perceptions of injustice and anger. By identifying which types of accounts work best, this literature provides guidance about how best to construct an effective social account.

What has been missing from this literature is a consideration of the characteristics of the receiver of the social account (Bies, 1987), as well as his or her relationship with the parties in a dispute. In particular, individuals from social groups that have faced many injustices may not be so responsive to causal accounts; perceptions of injustice may persist despite the use of an account, producing what we call the “persistent injustice effect.” In this paper, we present a theory of persistent injustice. We test our predictions in four experiments that include black managers to see whether they respond differently to social accounts than white managers.

## Social Accounts

According to Bies (1987: 294), “a social account is a verbal strategy employed by a person to minimize the apparent severity of the predicament or convince the audience that the wrongful act is not a fair representation of what the actor is ‘really like’ as a person.” Social accounts are attempts to return a harm-doer to social acceptability (Schlenker, 1980, 1982) and are motivated by the harm-doer's desire to avoid the negative outcomes that result from being blamed for an injustice. According to Goffman (1952), a social account is an activity intended to prevent an attack on one's social identity, and according to Scott and Lyman (1968), an account restores a violator of a social norm to good standing by reassuring the victim that the perpetrator does in fact know the basic principle that was broken. At both the micro level (Leary and Kowalski, 1990) and the macro level (Sutton and Callahan, 1987; Elsbach, 1994), accounts follow events that threaten the image of the individual or group and are given

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● We thank Joel Brockner, Don Conlon, Len Greenhalgh, Bruce Barry, William Smith, Mary Dieterich, and Yu Shyr for their careful comments and criticism of earlier drafts of this paper, and participants at seminars at Vanderbilt University, Dartmouth College, Northwestern University, MIT, Washington University, and Cornell University for their feedback and insights. We also thank Keith Murnighan, and three anonymous *ASQ* reviewers for their helpful advice.

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to protect their legitimacy, influence, and resources. As Konovsky and Folger (1991: 632) put it, a social account is "aimed at extricating an actor from a social predicament."

The most common and well-researched type of account is a causal account or, more commonly, an "excuse." Causal accounts tell the audience that one had no choice in the matter: the real cause of one's actions was not one's own preferences and intentions, but external pressures. Causal accounts affect moral outrage because evaluations of the damage caused by an action are altered, depending on whether an observer or victim believes that the damage was intended (Bies, 1987). Other types of accounts include ideological accounts, such as appeals to superordinate goals, referential accounts (explanations that others were treated worse), penitential accounts (apologies), and rational justifications (Bies, 1987).

The effectiveness of social accounts is well documented. Accounts help to reduce perceptions of injustice among observers of unjust acts (Bies and Shapiro, 1987), loss of organizational commitment among layoff survivors (Brockner et al., 1990), the tendency to complain and reduce support for a leader following a denial of a request for resources (Bies, Shapiro, and Cummings, 1988), and employee theft after pay reductions (Greenberg, 1990). Accounts are also noteworthy for their relative simplicity. As Sitkin and Bies (1993) pointed out, the tactic of explaining why an action was taken is much more readily available and commonly used than other conflict management techniques.

Recent attention has focused on when and how accounts are more effective and which type of account is appropriate for different contexts (Brockner et al., 1990; Shapiro, 1991). This work demonstrates that the perceived adequacy of the account is critical to its influence, as is the perceived sincerity of the account giver. What has not been explored, however, is the influence of audience characteristics on the impact of social accounts (Sitkin and Bies, 1993).

**Incorporating the account receiver.** Many fields recognize that the meaning of communications is affected as much by the person who receives the message as by the intentions of the message sender. In the sociological study of culture, Griswold (1987: 1078) explained that the meaning of cultural objects is determined not just from the object itself, but also from "the social context of reception." Meaning is constructed out of the interaction between the person and the cultural object. Jauss (1982), for example, argued that interpretation of literary works is affected by the reader's literary history, which creates a "horizon of expectations" that shapes what the reader sees. Griswold (1987) has documented this pattern, showing that when the same novels are described by book reviewers in the U.S., Britain, and the West Indies, each sees concerns that are dominant within their own societies: American reviewers focus heavily on racial themes in these novels, while they are barely mentioned by British or West Indian reviewers.

Social psychological research also documents that existing frames of reference heavily influence perceptions. Sherif and Hovland (1961) found that the influence a communication

has on someone is affected by the receiver's initial attitude. A communication is likely to influence the receiver if it is relatively close to the receiver's preferred position on an attitude scale, while it is less likely to influence the receiver if it is far from that point. Lord, Ross, and Lepper (1979) showed proponents and opponents of the death penalty several research articles on the effectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent to crime. Each group ignored the data against its position and incorporated into their views the data supporting its position, so that, in the end, the two sides were driven farther apart after seeing the same information. Fiske and Taylor (1991) reviewed additional literature suggesting that prior experiences affect the information that is seen as salient and cognitively processed. Meaning is not determined by the communication alone, but also by the receiver and his or her experiences, expectations, and biases. Shapiro (1991) suggested that managers cannot construct accounts if they do not know what is effective. But what is effective for one audience may not be effective for another audience.

**Impact of race of account receiver.** Social justice research has typically treated account recipients as a homogenous group, which may not have been inappropriate, since research participants, often college or MBA students, are fairly homogeneous with respect to economic opportunity. As Martin (1993: 301) pointed out, however, this methodological bias may be highly consequential for studies of equity or organizational justice: "If participants had come from populations where middle-class levels of prosperity were virtually unattainable, the results of these studies might have been different."

The study of social justice has essentially ignored the possibility that minority group members (such as African-Americans), as well as others in traditionally less-powerful groups, might interpret accounts and react to injustices in ways that are systematically different from others. Since members of these groups are likely to have more experiences with past injustice and expectations about future injustices, their "horizon of expectations" with respect to justice, as Jauss (1982) put it, may also differ in meaningful ways. The experience of African-Americans is well documented in terms of bias by teachers, even for very young school children (Rist, 1970; Pedersen, Faucher, and Eaton, 1978; Contreras and Lee, 1990), access to jobs (Bielby, 1987; Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990), evaluations and promotions (Dipboye, 1985; Ilgen and Youtz, 1986; Schreiber, Price, and Morrison, 1993), and ability to interact comfortably in organizations (Irons and Moore, 1985; Thomas, 1989; Ibarra, 1993). These problems are a source of frustration for many minorities, as is documented in numerous books about their experience in corporate America (Irons and Moore, 1985; Dickens and Dickens, 1982; Davis and Watson, 1982; Driscoll and Goldberg, 1993).

Minority group members are more likely to face, and have faced, events that might be deemed unjust. Thus, they are a highly relevant group for the study of organizational justice, especially if experience of past negative events affects their responses to social accounts. Making this group even more important to consider is the fact that the existing U.S. legal environment protects minorities from discrimination and pro-

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vides special avenues for redress. As a result, organizations may be especially concerned with their perceptions of injustice and any differences between their reactions and those of whites.

Before proceeding further we should be clear about our reasons for considering characteristics of the groups, not just the individuals, who are receivers of social accounts. First, as shown above, there is ample evidence that life experiences are highly correlated with social groups. Second, social identity groups are useful guides to action for organizational members. When one meets a new person, most Americans are likely to note immediately that person's race. This information may be used to stereotype the person negatively, but it may also be used to adjust one's behavior to different cultures or different expectations for social interaction. This is the basis of current calls for "celebrating" diversity. A reasonable person absorbs information about social identity as a first step in learning about that person. As Bourdieu (1979) put it, people act with some knowledge of "probability structures" based on their understanding of how society is organized. These probabilities are updated and checked for validity, but knowledge of social structure provides a starting point. Thus, as a manager dealing with a potential for perceptions of injustice, one might ideally like to know each individual's personal history, but lacking that, one might take information about social identity as relevant to making a guess about sensitivity to unjust acts and social accounts.

Third, the dominance of race for organizing social life is in most cases a brute fact in American society. This is not to say that education, religion, rank, organizational unit, or other categories are not also relevant. It is just that race is always present. This has been the case historically (Hacker, 1992) and has been reinforced by government rules and regulations since the 1960s. Whether or not any individual thinks in terms of race, it is likely that many people in organizations think in these terms. Lastly, as we discuss below, theoretical reasons suggest that group identities influence responses to social accounts. Group identities heavily influence whether one person considers another "in-group" to him or her. Race is not the only basis of defining in- or out-group relations, but it is a dominant element of social identity in U.S. culture. As Griswold (1987: 1081) explained: "While percipience is ultimately individual, influenced by particularities of biography and psychology, it will exhibit regular variations across social categories such as class, gender, occupation, generation, or nationality. . . . Thus, different categories of receivers may be expected to exhibit systematic differences in their perceptions and interpretations of the same object."

To understand the effects of receiver characteristics, such as race, on social accounts, we need to make a distinction between an observer's reaction to the harm-*doer* and his or her reaction to the harm-*receiver*. It is in the latter case that we expect the observer's characteristics to make a difference.

**Considering the harm-receiver.** The primary focus of causal accounts, as depicted in the previous literature, is to change

perceptions about the harm-doer. As Konovsky and Folger (1991: 632) put it, "social accounts are explanations aimed at extricating an actor from a social predicament." Causal accounts do this by managing perceptions of the harm-doer's intent. Bies (1987: 297) reported that "the severity of an injustice-created predicament" is affected by "the harm-doer's apparent responsibility for the action or outcome." To drive this point home, Bies (1987: 295) proposed the metaphor of the "intuitive jurist" as a way of thinking about perceptions of justice: people want to know "why an outcome discrepancy or improper action occurred" and whether the harm-doer is responsible for the action.

While this focus on the harm-doer's intent seems reasonable as a way to determine if a defendant should be punished or an apparent harm-doer blamed, it has less to say about the effects of the event on the harm-receiver. Greenberg (1996) pointed out that in only some cases do accounts reduce the actual harm done to the victim. When interpersonal injustices occur, such as when a manager shows no concern for employees during a layoff, an account reduces the harm, since the very act of making an account shows concern. In other cases, however, like those involving bodily injury or financial or opportunity loss, an account does not diminish the damage. For an observer concerned about the hurt done to the harm-receiver, the account should have no effect. Thus, when there is a high level of concern for the victim among observers of unjust acts, injustice may remain even after an account is provided. When there is less concern for the victim, perceptions of injustice may be largely determined by the perceived intent of the harm-doer and thus be more open to influence by a social account. As concern for the victim varies, so too should the effectiveness of social accounts on perceptions of injustice. To examine what factors might enhance or diminish concern for the victim, we turn to theories of empathy.

**Observing injustice and reacting empathically.** Batson (1991: 83) explained that empathy is an emotional response to a perceived need that is "a result of the perceiver adopting the perspective of the person in need." To take on this perspective involves not just dispassionate reflection on a person's plight but, rather, involves "imagining how the person is affected by his or her situation." Batson suggested that, first, having prior similar experiences helps to induce perspective taking. When this occurs, one can say, "I know just how you must feel" (p. 84). In two experiments, Batson and his colleagues (1996) found that women who had experiences similar to those of the victims they observed reported a greater degree of empathy for those victims (although this did not occur for men). Barnett, Tetreault, and Masbad (1987) found that women who had themselves been forced to have sex had stronger reactions when they heard of a woman being raped. Similarity of experience may be due to expected future experiences as well as actual past experiences. Sorrentino and Boutilier (1974) found that respondents devalued victims of experimental shock less if they anticipated a similar fate. From a social cognitive perspective, prior personal experience or expected future expe-

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rience may make more salient the plight of another in a similar situation (Fiske and Taylor, 1991).

Batson (1991) noted that the second major contributor to taking someone's perspective is the observer's attachment to the observed victim. A mother feels the pains and joys of her child due to a strong biological attachment. Attachments can also be due to personal contacts, or "cognitive categorization from personal contact, as seems to be the case with similarity-based attachments" (p. 85). Social categories act as a basis of attachment because people understand their own self-worth, in part, as a function of the characteristics of the group with which they identify (Sherif et al., 1961; Tajfel, 1981; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994), such as being black or white, male or female, Jewish or Catholic. In Batson's terms, interpersonal similarity, possibly on the basis of in-group categorization, affects both the ability to take another's perspective and the intensity of the emotion once perspective taking occurs. Thus, we expect that members of the same social group will have a greater tendency to take each other's perspective and will experience more empathy if that perspective taking happens.

Batson's work provides a way of thinking about when a person might show a greater degree of concern for the victim. Similar experiences make it possible for an observer to know how a victim must feel; they affect the ability to empathize with a victim. Social similarity increases concern for the needs of the victim; it enhances the motivation to empathize with a victim. Ability and motivation are foundational elements in other theories as well. In the persuasion literature, the elaboration-likelihood model suggests that a communication is processed only when its receiver has both the motivation and the ability to process the information (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In this model, the relationship is ordered: the receiver of information must first be motivated to listen; if that occurs, then those who have the ability to process the information do so. In the performance literature, as well, success is seen as a result of having both motivation and ability (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1994). Here, the relationship is multiplicative: those who are highly motivated succeed only when they are smart; those who are smart succeed only when they are motivated. Our expectation is that both ability and motivation must exist to activate perspective taking and empathy, however, we leave open the possibility that motivation may be a required first step, as occurs in the elaboration-likelihood model.

Observers who have the ability and the motivation to empathize with a victim should be critical judges of the adequacy of social accounts. While accounts may succeed in reducing feelings of anger toward the harm-doer, they may be less effective in reducing feelings of injustice when empathy for the victim is strong. Members of traditionally less powerful groups, such as women and minorities, are more likely to have had similar experiences with injustice, making them more able to empathize with victims. If the victim is in-group to them, they are also likely to be motivated to empathize with those victims. Individual minority group members who observe in-group victims, then, are more likely to empathize

with a victim than individuals in the dominant (white male) group. Considering both the ability and the motivation to empathize, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 1:** Social accounts will reduce perceptions that a harm-doer intended the harm and reduce reactions of disapproval of the harm-doer.

**Hypothesis 2:** Social accounts will reduce perceptions of injustice to the victim less when the observer is from a social group that experiences higher levels of injustice and the victim is from the same social group.

Friedman and Robinson (1993) reported research that is consistent with this hypothesis. They found that when union leaders (the traditionally less powerful group) observed unjust acts committed against a worker, a social account did not reduce perceptions of injustice, although it did reduce blame directed at the harm-doer. By contrast, the effects of social accounts remained strong for managerial observers (the traditionally more powerful group) and for union respondents observing managerial victims. The combination of union leader and worker victim was the one situation in which the observer (the union leader) had both the motivation and the ability to empathize with the victim; this explains why perceptions of injustice persisted for the victim only in this situation. We call this effect "the persistent injustice effect," and we expect that it will also appear for minorities. In this paper we present a more thorough examination of the effect in the context of minority (black) and majority (white) managers.

The focus of our study is on perceptions of injustice, not disapproval. We expect that social accounts will in all cases work to reduce disapproval of the harm-doer, because attributions of blame are affected by intent, even though in some cases perceptions of injustice will persist despite the use of an account. In this way, we are introducing a conceptual distinction that has not been made in previous studies. While existing studies (e.g., Bies and Shapiro, 1987; Shapiro, 1991; Conlon and Ross, 1997) have included questions about whether the person was treated unfairly, usually depicted as a measure of procedural injustice, as well as ones about whether the subject disapproved of the harm-doer, no concern has been expressed that there might be any reason to distinguish between these two dependent variables. In these articles, the general hypothesis was that accounts reduce perceptions of procedural injustice (of some form) and also reduce disapproval of the perpetrator. By contrast, we argue that the effects of accounts on these two dependent variables may be different. When there are reasons for the observer to empathize with the harm-receiver, the effects of accounts on injustice and disapproval may be different.

## **STUDY 1: PILOT STUDY**

Before running a complete study of black and white respondents, we conducted a pilot study with 19 African-American participants in an executive education program to test whether the core persistent injustice effect would occur for black respondents as it had for union respondents (Friedman and Robinson, 1993).

## **Method**

**Procedure.** We adapted the methodology used by Bies and Shapiro (1987) and Friedman and Robinson (1993). In those studies, respondents reacted to a case about a manager who appeared to take credit for an idea developed by someone else and received a bonus as a result. Each respondent was asked to assume the role of an arbitrator when reading the material. All respondents then received two brief reports on the incident from the supposedly unbiased observations of other managers. Half of the respondents also received a third report, which included a "causal account." This report explained that the manager took credit for the subordinate's ideas only after being advised during a coffee break that it was essential to present the idea as the manager's own if it was to get any serious consideration at all. The report containing the causal account is included in Appendix A.

In this pilot study, we used a repeated measures design in which respondents (1) were provided with the case and the two reports; (2) were asked to respond to a series of questions, the content of which is described below; (3) were provided with the causal account; (4) and responded to the same questions again. This approach seemed appropriate, given that it most accurately measures whether an individual respondent would react differently with the addition of a social account. Further, it was an economical design, considering the number of conditions we needed to include and the difficulties inherent in reaching large numbers of black respondents.

To allow us to manipulate the race of the person whose idea was "stolen," we changed the scenarios slightly. As in Friedman and Robinson (1993), the new idea concerned a process innovation in a factory. In half of the cases, the person whose idea was taken without proper credit was a black foreman; in the other half of the cases, the foreman was white. We distinguished between black and white by altering surnames (Washington vs. Winston) and educational background (Howard University vs. Brigham Young University). We did not want to state outright that the victims were black or white, since that would likely signal respondents that this was a study about race and potentially signal the respondent that the conflict was racial. Furthermore, experience with manipulating race in social cognition studies such as this (e.g., Davidson, 1997) has shown that identifying a character as black or white causes unintended reactivity in respondents. For example, debriefing of respondents revealed that both black and white respondents often interpreted the statement that a character is white as meaning that the character is a white supremacist (Davidson, 1997). We therefore used more subtle ways to signal race.

Since the default assumption in most cases is that characters are white, the main problem was signaling the black identity of the victim. Although we were confident that Howard University provided a strong signal of black identity for black respondents, looking ahead to study 2, we recognize that this manipulation may not have had its intended effect among all whites. We expected that most whites would recognize Howard as an historically black college but could not



verify this effect. We did not want to draw attention to the race of the supervisor (whom we named Mike Cushing) but anticipated that respondents would assume the character was white. Verifying perceptions of race when that information is not stated explicitly can generate high levels of reactivity, including refusal to answer the question and angry claims that such a question was intended to uncover racism (Davidson, 1997). We expected that such reactivity, especially in mail surveys (used in our later studies), would produce an unacceptably low response rate. Besides these changes designed to signal race of the harm-receiver, the logic and language of the story stayed the same as in the Bies and Shapiro (1987) and Friedman and Robinson (1993) studies, including the use of filler items and the amount paid as a bonus for the idea.

**Independent variables.** There were thus two independent variables for study 1: the race of the victim in our vignette, which was intended to create variation in in-group/out-group relationship between the observer and the victim, and the presence or absence of an account. In-group relationship was varied between respondents; accounts were varied within respondents (before and after).

**Dependent variables.** At the end of the story, and again after the social account was provided, respondents answered a series of questions that asked them to evaluate on 9-point scales what they had just read. One question was used as a measure of perceptions of injustice: "Do you feel that an injustice has occurred in this situation?" Three items asked about the actions of the boss, assessing disapproval. These questions matched previous studies (Bies and Shapiro, 1987; Friedman and Robinson, 1993). Scales used in this and later studies are listed in Appendix B. Table 1 displays means, standard deviations, and correlations among the measures.

Injustice and disapproval are highly correlated, both pre- and post-account, indicating that these two concepts are empirically similar, but there are differences in how effective accounts are at reducing disapproval (mean reduction = 1.71) and injustice (mean reduction = 1.07). This pattern also occurred in later studies, in which a larger subject pool allowed us to confirm that this difference was statistically significant. More importantly, even though they are highly correlated, the conceptual distinctions we drew led us to analyze the injustice and disapproval evaluations separately.

### Analysis and Results

A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) led to significant effects for social accounts for disapproval

Table 1

**Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3
1. Pre-account disapproval	6.62	1.95	(.90)		
2. Post-account disapproval	4.87	2.34	.36	(.85)	
3. Pre-account injustice	7.40	1.93	.83 <sup>***</sup>	.33	—
4. Post-account injustice	6.47	2.10	.43	.67 <sup>**</sup>	.56 <sup>*</sup>

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

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[means = 6.62 vs. 4.87;  $F(1,17) = 10.16, p < .01$ ] and injustice [means = 7.40 vs. 6.47;  $F(1,17) = 6.14, p < .05$ ]. The main effects for the race of the victim, and the interactions, were not significant. Table 2 displays the mean responses for each dependent variable for each condition. Although not significant, the pattern of the disapproval and injustice means is consistent with the persistent injustice effect. Based on these findings, we progressed to study 2, which included both black and white respondents, a larger sample, and additional variables.

Table 2

### Study 1: Comparison of Means for Black Respondents

	Black victim ( <i>N</i> = 10)	White victim ( <i>N</i> = 9)
Injustice		
Pre-account	7.40 (2.27)	7.67 (1.65)
Post-account	6.67 (2.11)	6.22 (2.17)
Change	.73	1.45
Disapproval		
Pre-account	6.57 (2.33)	6.67 (1.63)
Post-account	5.38 (2.38)	4.37 (2.31)
Change	1.19	2.30

## STUDY 2: BLACK AND WHITE RESPONDENTS

Study 2 was designed to provide a more extensive test of our predictions by comparing blacks' and whites' reactions to social accounts when the victims were black and white and thus was the first true test of our theory. In addition, to examine our assumption of differences between blacks' and whites' experience of injustice, we created a four-item scale (Past Negative) on past mistreatment in organizations. A sample item was "I have been unfairly denied a promotion" (see Appendix B for a list of questions). We also created a scale (Future Negative) that included items about expected future injustices at work, such as "I am concerned that I will be denied raises that I deserve."

Experience with past injustice and expectations of future injustice might also be revealed through generalized feelings of mistrust. To the degree that one has experienced bias, prejudice, or other unjust acts, it follows that that person would be less trusting of others. As Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) pointed out, trust is influenced by background, developmental experiences, and culture. But mistrust is more than just a measure of past negative experiences; it indicates that those experiences are influencing expectations about future interactions. If someone believes that others are likely to take advantage of him or her, mistrust is a natural consequence. Some evidence already exists of lower levels of interpersonal and generalized trust among blacks than among whites (Jeanquart-Barone, 1993; DeMaris and Yang, 1994; Davidson, 1997). To measure mistrust, we included items from an existing generalized mistrust scale, as explained below.

### Method

**Participants.** Respondents for this study were 97 black and white managers from two American business schools. Forty-

eight white managers from an executive MBA program responded to the survey in a classroom setting. Because a matching sample of black managers would be unlikely to convene in a such a setting, every American minority graduate from these two American business schools was surveyed by mail; the response rate was 54 percent. In the final sample, 51 respondents were black managers and 46 were white. There were no significant differences between the black and white samples in terms of age (mean = 34.6 years), job tenure (mean = 4.6 years), sex (25.8 percent female), job level, or size of company. The procedure was the same as described for study 1.

**Variables.** The race of the respondents was a new, third factor in this study. They responded to the same disapproval scale as the respondents in study 1, as well as to an injustice scale that included two more items, to increase reliability. We also added a two-item scale (Intentionality) that asked how much respondents believed the offending manager intended to steal credit for the idea. These items allowed us to ensure that any diminishing of the effects of an account on injustice did not occur because the account failed to change perceptions of the harm-doer's intent. This scale thereby provided a manipulation check for the account.

Respondents reacted to the past-negative and future-negative items after they completed the post-account disapproval, injustice, and intentionality items. They also completed a mistrust scale based on six of the eight items of Scheussler's (1982) "Doubt about Trustworthiness of People" scale. (The two items that were not included were somewhat outdated.) Confirmatory factor analysis showed that all items loaded onto the appropriate scales. Table 3 displays the correlations and Cronbach alphas; all items are included in Appendix B.

### Analysis and Results

Table 4 displays the means for all the variables in each condition. The three dependent variables (disapproval, injustice, and intentionality) were analyzed in a repeated measures MANOVA, followed by repeated-measures ANOVAs for each variable. The analysis included one within-subjects factor (social account) and two between-subjects factors (race of victim and race of respondent). The effect of race on past and

Table 3

**Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations\***

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Pre-account disapproval	6.90	1.77	(.79)								
2. Post-account disapproval	5.21	2.10	.40**	(.85)							
3. Pre-account injustice	7.67	1.35	.75**	.41**	(.77)						
4. Post-account injustice	6.60	1.81	.38**	.84**	.46**	(.81)					
5. Pre-account intentionality	6.20	2.32	.61**	.14	.54**	.15	(.90)				
6. Post-account intentionality	3.92	2.29	.24**	.64**	.21*	.50**	.26*	(.88)			
7. Mistrust	5.13	1.44	.17	.14	.24*	.07	.20*	.11	(.79)		
8. Past negative	4.77	1.96	.05	.02	.07	.03	.12	.17	.48**	(.75)	
9. Future negatives	4.39	1.85	.07	-.10	.02	-.09	.15	.06	.38**	.71**	(.86)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

\* Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal.

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future negative and mistrust scales were each assessed via *t*-tests.

The MANOVA revealed a significant within-subjects effect for account [Wilks' Lambda = .56;  $F = 23.75(3,91)$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. Separate ANOVAs showed that the social account led to a significant reduction in (1) sense of disapproval [means = 6.90 vs. 5.21;  $F(1, 94) = 60.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ]; (2) belief that the offending manager intentionally took credit for the idea [means = 6.20 vs. 3.92;  $F(1, 95) = 62.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ]; (3) and injustice [means = 7.60 vs. 6.60;  $F(1,95) = 41.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ].

To assess the differential impact of accounts on disapproval and injustice, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA that included measurement type as a second within-subjects factor. The interaction between type of measure (injustice versus disapproval) and account was significant [ $F(1, 94) = 16.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. The pattern of means indicates that an account reduced injustice less (mean change = 1.07) than it reduced disapproval (mean change = 1.65).

To test the persistent injustice effect, we analyzed the post-account injustice scores, controlling for the pre-account injustice scores, which represents the degree of change created by the account (Kessler and Greenberg, 1981). This analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) allowed us to conduct a planned comparison of the post-account scores, and thus of the degree of change, between the black-observer/black-victim condition and the remaining three conditions, testing whether the former was smaller than the latter. This contrast was significant [ $t(94) = 1.76$ ,  $p < .05$ ], indicating that perceived injustice in this condition was significantly less affected by social accounts than perceived injustice in the other three conditions. The same contrasts were not significant for disapproval [ $t(94) = .74$ ] or intentionality [ $t(94) = .14$ ]. These data, in concert with the lack of parallel effects for disapproval and intentionality, confirm that the effects of accounts on perceived injustice for the harm-receiver do not track perfectly the effects of accounts on disapproval felt toward the harm-doer. From these results, and those of the

Table 4

### Study 2: Comparison of Means

	Black Subjects		White Subjects	
	Black victim ( <i>N</i> = 29)	White victim ( <i>N</i> = 22)	Black victim ( <i>N</i> = 25)	White victim ( <i>N</i> = 22)
<b>Injustice</b>				
Pre-account	7.61 (1.32)	6.67 (1.68)	7.82 (1.16)	7.58 (1.33)
Post-account	7.00 (1.67)	6.28 (1.91)	6.55 (1.93)	6.44 (1.76)
Change	.6	1.4	1.3	1.1
<b>Disapproval</b>				
Pre-account	6.63 (2.13)	6.96 (1.61)	7.08 (1.68)	6.96 (1.53)
Post-account	5.31 (2.17)	5.23 (2.18)	5.27 (2.27)	5.04 (1.88)
Change	1.3	1.7	1.8	1.9
<b>Intentionality</b>				
Pre-account	6.05 (2.56)	6.43 (2.26)	6.18 (2.44)	6.22 (2.02)
Post-account	3.95 (2.42)	3.86 (2.30)	3.79 (2.10)	4.26 (2.49)
Change	2.0	2.6	2.4	2.0

pilot study, which are consistent with those of Friedman and Robinson (1993), we conclude that a persistent injustice effect does exist.

To test whether past negative experiences and perceptions of future vulnerability are higher for groups that exhibit the persistent injustice effect, we conducted independent sample *t*-tests on each of the four personal and career experience scales. Relative to white respondents, black respondents had significantly higher past-negative scale scores [means = 5.18 vs. 4.34;  $t(97) = 2.17, p < .05$ ], future-negative scale scores [means = 4.88 vs. 3.86;  $t(96) = 2.55, p < .05$ ], and mistrust of others [means = 4.66 vs. 5.27;  $t(96) = 2.28, p < .05$ ].

Our next step was to analyze the effects of these variables on change in perceived injustice. This required that we focus on the black-respondent, black-victim cell, since we expected that the persistent injustice effect would occur only when there existed both experience with injustice and in-group identification with the victim. As a result, we conducted a third study, designed to consider only the strong case, of black respondents observing black victims. Here, in-group identity is likely to be present, creating the motivation to empathize with the victim, so that variation in past injustice and vulnerability to future injustice may affect responses to social accounts.

### STUDY 3: INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL ANALYSIS

Study 3 was designed to test whether individual-level variations in past negative experiences and individual-level variations in in-group identification could account for variations in responsiveness to social accounts. This would complement the prior study and provide additional evidence for our theory of persistent injustice.

To conduct such a test, we focused only on black respondents observing black victims. We theorized that the persistent injustice effect requires *both* experience with past negative events (generating an ability to empathize with the victim) and in-group relationship with the victim (generating a motivation to empathize with the victim). For people who have had relatively little experience with injustice, responsiveness to social accounts should be less affected by in-group relationships. For people who do not see themselves as similar to the victim, responsiveness to social accounts should be less affected by past negative experiences. As a result, we expect that variation in experience with injustice and in-group identification with the victim will each correlate with variation in the effects of social accounts for black respondents observing black victims.

We measured past negative, future negative, and mistrust perceptions using the scales developed for study 2. In-group identity, by contrast, is typically inferred by researchers. In the classic social identity theory experiments, in-group relationship was created by virtue of assigning people to common group categories, such as meaningless letters or randomly assigned teams (Sherif et al., 1961; Hamilton and Gifford, 1976). We presumed in study 2, as have others (see Fiske and Taylor, 1991, for a review), that naturally occurring

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demographic categories create common group identities, but any individual's degree of identification with demographic groups may vary. As Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) have shown, among blacks there is significant variation in racial identification. Thus, racial identification can be a continuous as well as a categorical variable. Since in-group relationship with another person is defined as identifying with a group that includes the other as a member, variation in racial identification produces variation in in-group relationship with that other person.

Given our shift from a group-level to individual-level unit of analysis in this study, we needed to recast our predictions in terms of continuous measures and specify the boundary conditions within which the effects were expected. In the context of black respondents observing black victims, then, our model predicts that the effect of an account will vary as the intensity of these two factors (experience with past negatives and identification with the victim) vary:

**Hypothesis 3:** Social accounts will influence perceptions of injustice less for black observers of harm to black victims as observers' identification with their race increases or as the strength of their past negative experiences, future negative experiences, or mistrust increases.

## **Method**

**Participants and procedure.** Respondents for this study were minority graduates of an executive education program for entrepreneurs. They were drawn from the same population as study 1 and were contacted by mail. The response rate of 35 percent yielded a total of 36 respondents; 24 were black, 8 female, 16 male. We analyzed the responses of this set of 24. Their mean age was 44.3 years.

We used the same procedures as those of studies 1 and 2. Respondents read a scenario about an unjust act, provided their responses to that unjust act, received the account, and provided additional responses.

**Background variables.** Two of the background variables used in study 2 were retained: mistrust and past negative experiences. The future negative scale was not used in this study because most of the respondents were entrepreneurs and owners of their own businesses who had more control of their outcomes (e.g., they would not have had problems having their ideas "seriously considered in group meetings") than most managerial employees. We changed the past negative scale slightly, following an analysis that indicated that the scale would be more reliable if we eliminated one of the original four items. The main addition in this study was the use of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) racial identification scale (items are listed in Appendix B), which assesses the degree to which race is a significant part of one's identity. This scale allowed us to measure variation in the degree to which respondents perceived themselves to be in-group to the black victim. Means, standard deviations, and correlations are shown in table 5. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that all items loaded onto the appropriate scales.

Table 5

**Study 3: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations\***

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Pre-account disapproval	7.07	1.96	(.82)								
2. Post-account disapproval	5.27	2.49	.61***	(.91)							
3. Pre-account injustice	7.81	1.26	.75***	.58**	(.68)						
4. Post-account injustice	7.10	1.88	.68***	.72***	.61***	(.83)					
5. Pre-account intentionality	6.17	2.17	.60**	.65***	.61**	.41*	(.87)				
6. Post-account intentionality	4.46	2.49	.48*	.79***	.56**	.51**	.70***	(.94)			
7. Mistrust	5.19	1.58	.35	.32	.26	.42*	-.05	-.02	(.81)		
8. Past negatives	4.91	2.42	.40*	.33	.49*	.30	.60**	.31**	-.08	(.87)	
9. Racial identification	6.37	2.13	.65***	.57**	.51**	.67***	.57**	.52**	.03	.20	(.75)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

\* Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal.

### Analysis and Results

The appropriate regression model for predicting change (Kessler and Greenberg, 1981) is to make the post-account injustice score the dependent variable, controlling for pre-account injustice. This model specification is equivalent to the dependent variable being change in injustice. The higher the predicted post-account injustice score, controlling for pre-account injustice, the less there has been a change (lowering) in injustice as a result of the social account. The magnitude of the coefficients in the regression model indicate the degree to which the independent variable affects injustice change. A positive coefficient indicates less change. The results of the analysis are shown in table 6.

The pre-account injustice scales explained 38 percent of the variance of the post-account injustice (model 1). Adding racial identification (model 2) produced a significant increase in the  $R^2$  compared with model 1 ( $R^2$  increased to 53 percent), and the coefficient for racial identification was significant and positive. These results indicate that the stronger the racial identification of black respondents observing black victims, the higher their post-account injustice scores and thus the less they changed their sense of injustice as a result of a social account. By contrast, adding either mistrust (model 3) or past negative (model 4) did not lead to a significant increase in the variance explained in model 1. Adding all three variables together, however, significantly increased the  $R^2$  of the model (to .66) and revealed that mistrust and racial identification had significant effects on post-account injustice. This suggests that the stronger the mistrust experienced by black respondents observing black victims, the higher their post-account injustice scores and thus the less effect a social account had on their sense of injustice.

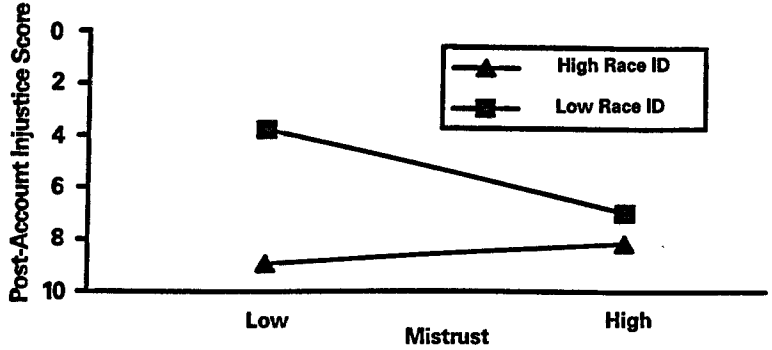
We investigated the effects of the interaction of high racial identification with past negative (model 6) and mistrust (model 7). Model 6 showed that the addition of the racial identification by mistrust interaction term added marginally to model 1's  $R^2$ , while the racial identification by mistrust interaction term led to a significant increase in model 1's  $R^2$  (to .75). To interpret these models, we calculated the predictions for the models for independent variable values one standard deviation above the mean (labeled "high") and one

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Figure 1. Study 3: Model predictions for pattern of scores for post-account injustice (low score is more change).

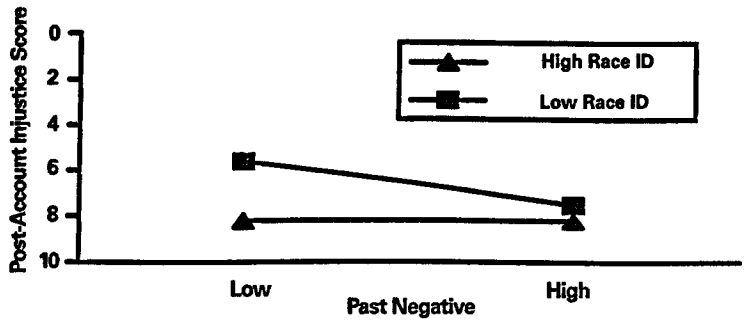
**MODEL 6**

		Mistrust	
		Low	High
Race ID	High	8.93	8.14
	Low	3.78	6.97



**MODEL 7**

		Past Negative	
		Low	High
Race ID	High	8.2	8.19
	Low	5.6	7.5



standard deviation below the mean (labeled "low"). These numbers, and corresponding figures, are shown in figure 1. Higher predicted results indicate less change. This analysis suggests that for black respondents observing black victims (where there is an in-group relationship with the victim and the observers have comparatively high levels of experience with injustice), responsiveness to social accounts is dampened by either stronger racial identification or by stronger experiences with injustice.

Table 6

Study 3: Analysis of Regression in Models of Injustice Change, with Injustice (Post-account) as Dependent Variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Injustice (pre-account)	.88****	.56**	.74**	.80***	.22	.47**	.53**
Racial identification		.42**			.48***	.81***	2.1****
Past negative			.16		.15	.77**	
Mistrust				.26*	.42**		2.1****
Racial ID x past neg.						-.09*	
Racial ID x mistrust							-.27***
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.38****	.52****	.41***	.43***	.66****	.60****	.75****
ΔF <sup>2</sup> (compare model 1)		.14**	.03	.05	.28***	.22**	.37****
ΔF <sup>2</sup> (compare model 2)					.14**	.07	.23****
ΔF <sup>2</sup> (due to interaction term)						.06*	.12***

\* p < .10; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .01; \*\*\*\* p < .001.



## STUDY 4: VARYING THE RACE OF THE HARM-DOER

Thus far we had studied the effects of the race of the observer and the victim without reference to the race of the harm-doer. We believed that participants, lacking any indicators of the harm-doer's race, would either ignore the race of the harm-doer or assume he was white (since the statistically typical manager would be white) but not focus on his status as a white. To enhance confidence in our previous findings and to assess the impact of the race of the harm-doer on perceptions of justice, we conducted a fourth study that explicitly varied the race of the harm-doer.

Adding information about the harm-doer's race can influence the observer's reaction both to the victim in the scenario and to the harm-doer. We address reactions to the victim first. Knowing the harm-doer's race defines the racial relationship between the victim and harm-doer and, in doing so, increases the possibility that the unjust act is perceived to be the result of racism when the harm-doer is white and the victim is black. The potential attribution of racism is especially likely among blacks; for example, Crocker et al. (1996) showed that blacks find much more credible than whites claims that there is a conspiracy against blacks by the U.S. government. When attributions of racism are more likely, we expect black observers to have increased empathy for black victims. Empathy increases because experiences of racism are common among blacks, making even more salient their common past experience of being a victim. Empathy also increases because a racist attack inherently raises the salience of group identity and, thus, the observer's and victim's common social identity. As a result, the persistent injustice effect should be especially strong when the race of the harm-doer is explicitly identified as white:

**Hypothesis 4:** The persistent injustice effect will be strongest when the observer and the victim are members of the same minority group and the harm-doer is a member of the majority group.

White observers' empathy for a black victim may also increase when harm-doers are white, but for somewhat different reasons that are peculiar to American cultural history. As Jones and Carter (1996) explained, whites may feel personally responsible for white injustices visited upon blacks and, as a result, may want to "do something" for blacks. Such "white guilt" may create greater empathy for black victims when the harm-doer is explicitly identified as white. Given this peculiarity of American race relations, we provide an additional hypothesis specific to observations of black versus white conflicts:

**Hypothesis 5:** When the race of the harm-doer is made salient, white observers may be highly concerned about the fate of black victims when the harm-doer is white and thus exhibit a persistent injustice effect.

Information about the harm-doer's race may also affect the observer's attitude toward the harm-doer, making it more or less likely that a social account is believed. As social identity theory has shown (Tajfel, 1981), people tend to rank the achievements and goodness of others higher if they are perceived as part of one's own group. Thus, an observer should be less willing to attribute bad intentions to the harm-doer if

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that harm-doer is in-group to the observer and more likely to accept the harm-doer's excuse:

**Hypothesis 6:** Social accounts will be more effective at reducing perceptions of injustice, disapproval, and intentionality when the harm-doer is of the same social group as the observer.

For black observers of injustice, hypotheses 4 and 6 suggest that the effects of an account should be strongest when the harm-doer is black and the victim is white and weakest when the harm-doer is white and the victim is black. When the harm-doer and victim are both black, we expect a more neutral response, given the countervailing pressures of empathy for the victim and trust in the harm-doer. For white observers, hypotheses 5 and 6 suggest that similar countervailing pressures may exist in the black-victim/white-harm-doer condition, except that the very concept of white guilt assumes a white harm-doer.

## Method

In this study we used the same scenario, but in addition to varying the race of the victim and collecting data from black and white respondents (as in study 2), we also varied the race of the supervisor. This produced a 2 (account)  $\times$  2 (victim race)  $\times$  2 (respondent race)  $\times$  2 (harm-doer race) experimental design. Account was varied within-subjects, while the other factors were varied across respondents, producing variations in in-group relationship between the participant and both the victim and the supervisor and between the victim and the supervisor. Also, we identified race explicitly, despite our concerns that this might produce hypersensitivity to race and create assumptions that the conflict was racially based. We did this because of the awkwardness of trying to signal the race of multiple parties in the scenario and our desire to mimic a situation in which race has been made highly salient.

**Participants and variables.** All of the data were collected by mail. White respondents were MBA graduates of a top-10 MBA program. Black respondents were MBA graduates of two other top-10 MBA programs (imperfect records at both universities resulted in mailing lists that were smaller than the total number of black graduates from those programs). The response rate was 33 percent for blacks and 35 percent for whites; mean age was 39 for both black and white respondents; mean tenure in current company was 6.1 years for blacks and 5.9 years for whites. The dependent variables were perceived injustice, disapproval, and intentionality. Variable means and correlations are shown in table 7.

## Analysis and Results

We analyzed the three dependent variables (disapproval, injustice, and intentionality) in a repeated measures MANOVA, followed by repeated measures ANOVAs for each variable. The analyses included one within-subjects factor (social account) and three between-subjects factors (race of harm-doer, race of victim, and race of respondent).

Table 8 displays the means for all the variables in each condition. The MANOVA revealed significant between-subjects effects for race of harm-doer [Wilks' Lambda = .93;  $F = 5.23(3,222)$ ,  $p < .01$ ] and race of victim [Wilks'

Table 7

**Study 4: Variable Means and Correlations\***

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Pre-account disapproval	6.55	2.01	(.83)					
2. Post-account disapproval	4.53	1.10	.59	(.88)				
3. Pre-account injustice	7.24	1.56	.79	.54	(.75)			
4. Post-account injustice	6.03	1.79	.53	.79	.66	(.80)		
5. Pre-account intentionality	5.83	2.39	.61	.37	.54	.33	(.91)	
6. Post-account intentionality	3.47	2.01	.47	.68	.38	.52	.42	(.85)

\* All correlations are significant at the .001 level. Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal.

Lambda = .95;  $F = 3.71(3,222)$ ,  $p < .05$ ], as well as marginally significant effects for race of observer [Wilks' Lambda = .97;  $F = 2.46(3,222)$ ,  $p < .10$ ] and race of victim by race of observer [Wilks' Lambda = .97;  $F = 2.2(3,222)$ ,  $p < .10$ ]. It also revealed a significant within-subjects effect for an account [Wilks' Lambda = .41;  $F(3,222) = 102.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ], for an account by race of harm-doer [Wilks' Lambda = .96;  $F(3,222) = 3.00$ ,  $p < .05$ ], and for an account by race of harm-doer by race of observer [Wilks' Lambda = .96;  $F(3,222) = 3.2$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

To assess the differential impact of accounts on disapproval and injustice, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA that included measurement type as a second within-subjects factor, as was done in study 2. The interaction between type of measure (injustice versus disapproval) and account was significant [ $F(1, 224) = 177.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. The pattern of means indicates that an account reduced injustice less (mean change = 1.20) than it reduced disapproval (mean change = 2.01).

Separate repeated-measures ANOVAs for injustice, disapproval, and intentionality showed between-subjects effects for race of victim [respectively:  $F(1,233) = 7.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $F(1,233) = 3.21$ ,  $p < .10$ ; and  $F(1,233) = 7.2$ ,  $p < .01$ ], race of supervisor [ $F(1,233) = 14.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $F(1,233) = 12.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and  $F(1,233) = 5.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ], and race of observer by race of victim [ $F(1,233) = 6.76$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $F(1,233) = 6.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and  $F(1,233) = 4.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. These results indicate that in this study, unlike study 2, there may have been variation across conditions in reactions to the initial scenario. Initial levels of perceived injustice, disapproval, and intentionality were higher when the supervisor was white than black [means = 7.5 vs. 6.9,  $t(239) = 2.79$ ,  $p < .01$ ; 6.9 vs. 6.2,  $t(232) = 2.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ; 6.2 vs. 5.5,  $t(240) = 2.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ], and, for black observers (but not for the overall sample), initial levels of injustice were higher when observing black victims than white victims [means = 6.8 vs. 7.6,  $t(89) = 2.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Moreover, among black respondents, there was a clear hierarchy of sensitivity: initial levels of injustice, disapproval, and intentionality were highest when the victim was black and the harm-doer was white, next highest in the white-victim/white-harm-doer and black-victim/black-harm-doer conditions, and lowest in the white-victim/black-harm-doer conditions. This pattern matches those suggested by the combination of hypotheses 4 and 6, albeit applied to initial levels rather than degree of change in perceived injus-

Table 8

Study 4: Comparison of Means

	Black Subjects						White Subjects					
	White Harm-doer			Black Harm-doer			White Harm-doer			Black Harm-doer		
	Black victim (N = 18)	White victim (N = 22)	Black victim (N = 28)	White victim (N = 23)	Black victim (N = 33)	White victim (N = 44)	Black victim (N = 33)	White victim (N = 33)	Black victim (N = 33)	White victim (N = 40)		
Injustice												
Pre-account	8.31 (1.06)	7.39 (1.4)	7.27 (1.79)	6.42 (1.45)	7.11 (1.49)	7.74 (1.09)	7.25 (1.62)	7.74 (1.09)	7.25 (1.62)	6.84 (1.79)		
Post-account	7.33 (1.17)	6.29 (1.74)	6.44 (1.91)	4.94 (2.03)	6.27 (1.82)	6.17 (1.58)	5.75 (1.62)	6.17 (1.58)	5.75 (1.62)	5.52 (1.6)		
Change	.98	1.1	.83	1.48	.84	1.57	1.5	1.57	1.5	1.32		
Disapproval												
Pre-account	7.41 (1.76)	6.46 (2.05)	6.58 (2.3)	5.74 (2.06)	6.59 (1.96)	7.21 (1.47)	6.41 (2.21)	7.21 (1.47)	6.41 (2.21)	6.19 (1.99)		
Post-account	5.81 (1.88)	4.65 (1.92)	4.43 (2.57)	3.18 (1.81)	4.78 (2.34)	5.02 (1.88)	4.21 (1.86)	5.02 (1.88)	4.21 (1.86)	4.39 (1.81)		
Change	1.6	1.81	2.15	2.56	1.81	2.19	2.2	2.19	2.2	1.8		
Intentionality												
Pre-account	6.83 (2.0)	5.70 (2.60)	5.41 (2.54)	4.33 (2.67)	6.15 (2.19)	6.30 (2.37)	6.15 (2.1)	6.30 (2.37)	6.15 (2.1)	5.63 (2.29)		
Post-account	3.89 (2.1)	3.00 (2.06)	3.93 (2.5)	2.42 (1.92)	3.78 (2.3)	3.56 (1.60)	3.44 (2.5)	3.56 (1.60)	3.44 (2.5)	3.48 (1.56)		
Change	2.94	2.7	1.48	1.91	2.37	2.74	2.71	2.74	2.71	2.15		

tice. Contrasts predicting this hierarchy of effects were significant for injustice [ $t(87) = 3.77, p < .001$ ], disapproval [ $t(83) = 2.29, p < .05$ ], and intentionality [ $t(88) = 3.03, p < .01$ ]. Among white respondents, initial levels of reactivity were not affected significantly by the race of the victim.

Explicit knowledge of the race of the harm-doer appears to have had a strong impact on participants' reactions to the scenario, especially among black participants. To test whether this was the case, we focused on initial injustice levels for the four conditions that included a white harm-doer and thus matched study 2. Contrasts confirmed that these levels were higher for black observers of black victims than the other three conditions [ $t(113) = 2.68, p < .01$ ]. Since this pattern did not occur in study 2, we deduce that initial reactivity was amplified by adding an explicit statement that the supervisor was white. Even though we believe that respondents in study 2 assumed that the supervisor was white, that is not equivalent to stating that the supervisor was white, which makes race much more salient. In the real world, the race of the supervisor would always be clear, but whether this is treated as a background issue (as in study 2) or one that is the focus of attention (as in study 4) will vary, depending on the particular situation (Kramer, 1993).

Turning to within-subjects effects, social accounts led to a significant reduction in injustice [means = 7.24 vs. 6.03;  $F(1,233) = 165.52, p < .001$ ], disapproval [means = 6.55 vs. 4.53;  $F(1,224) = 241.78, p < .001$ ], and intentionality [means = 5.83 vs. 3.47;  $F(1,233) = 218.93, p < .001$ ]. For injustice, there were marginally significant within-subjects effects for race of victim [ $F(1,233) = 2.75, p < .10$ ] and for the three-way interaction between race of victim, race of harm-doer, and race of observer [ $F(1,233) = 3.21, p < .10$ ]. No additional within-subjects effects were found for disapproval, and, for intentionality, there was a significant effect of race of harm-doer on the effect of a social account [ $F(1,234) = 3.92, p < .05$ ].

To test hypotheses 4 and 5, we conducted planned comparisons of the post-account injustice scores, controlling for the pre-account injustice scores, as was done in study 2. First, as suggested by hypothesis 4, we tested whether change in perceived injustice as a result of a social account was less for black observers of a black victim hurt by a white harm-doer, compared with the other seven conditions: the contrast was significant [ $t(232) = 1.68, p < .05$ ]. To test hypothesis 5, we compared injustice under this condition (black-victim/white-harm-doer) with the other three conditions for white participants only: this contrast was also significant [ $t(145) = 2.5, p < .01$ ]. These results not only support hypotheses 4 and 5, they also provide strong support for the general nature of the persistent injustice effect.

To test hypothesis 6, that participants will be more accepting of an account made by a harm-doer who is in their group, we compared the post-account injustice, disapproval, and intentionality scores (controlled for pre-account scores) of the four in-group conditions (i.e., black observers of black harm-doers and white observers of white harm-doers) with the four out-group conditions. This contrast was not signifi-

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cant for injustice or intentionality but was marginally significant for disapproval [ $t(223) = 1.6, p < .10$ ], the one variable focused on evaluating the harm-doer. Based on the means shown in table 8, this effect appears to be driven by the responses of black participants. The same contrast, looking only at black respondents, was significant [ $t(84) = 2.27, p < .05$ ]. In addition, as discussed above, initial levels of injustice, disapproval, and intentionality were affected by an in-group relationship with the harm-doer among black participants, especially when the victim was white. It appears that in-group relations with the harm-doer does amplify the effect of a social account, but only for black participants.

## DISCUSSION

The pattern of responses across our four studies demonstrates what we have labeled the persistent injustice effect. In study 2, the effect of a social account on perceived injustice was less for black managers observing black victims than for black managers observing white victims or white managers observing either black or white victims. In study 3, which examined black managers observing black victims, the effect of a social account on perceived injustice was less when there was higher racial identification or higher levels of personal experience with injustice. Finally, in study 4 we found that (1) the effect of a social account was less when participants observed black victims hurt by white harm-doers, (2) a social account reduced disapproval more when the harm-doer was in-group to the observer, and (3) black participants perceived higher initial levels of injustice, disapproval, and intentionality when observing black victims hurt by white harm-doers. Account receivers' experience with injustice and relationship with the victim affected responses to social accounts.

The black managers in our samples had more experience with unjust acts than the white managers; they reported higher levels of past injustices, higher levels of expected future injustices, and greater mistrust. As Jauss (1982) put it, they began with a different "horizon of expectations" about injustice. While we cannot, and should not, claim that there are uniform experiences among blacks and whites regarding injustice, patterns of experience with injustice are strongly enough correlated with race to provide meaningful predictions based on group membership. This should not be surprising (e.g., Hacker, 1992; Cose, 1993). There is ample evidence that blacks and whites live in different experiential worlds: Crocker et al. (1996) showed consistent differences between blacks and whites regarding the possibility of government conspiracies against blacks, and the popular press is full of recent examples of how blacks interpret differently than whites reported mistreatment of other blacks (e.g., the Texaco tapes, the Rodney King and O.J. Simpson verdicts, and reports of CIA involvement in the spread of crack cocaine to inner-city communities). The persistent injustice effect is yet another example of how blacks and whites often live in different experiential worlds when it comes to perceptions of injustice.

We also recognize that there are differences among blacks with regard to both experience with injustice and strength of

black identification. These differences were significant enough to predict variation in responses to social accounts among blacks, as was shown in study 3. A model of race research that relies solely on comparing whites and blacks on particular dependent variables probably does not do justice to the conceptual complexities of race (Cox and Nkomo, 1990; Nkomo, 1992). By combining studies that look at within-race differences with ones that examine between-race differences, we have been able to extend the standard paradigm in race research and better clarify the underlying mechanisms of the persistent injustice effect.

**Broader applications.** Although our research has focused on blacks' responses to social accounts, our theory is applicable to a broader range of situations and is consistent with earlier studies (Friedman and Robinson, 1993) that found that social accounts were less effective at diminishing perceptions of injustice for union officials and female managers when the hypothetical victim was in-group to them. It appears that social accounts do not have the same effects for those who are in traditionally less-powerful social groups, observing in-group victims, as it does in other cases. Extant findings based on research using college or MBA students as subjects may therefore not be generalizable to these situations. This gap is particularly important given the degree to which some of the most common and persistent conflicts involve people in traditionally less-powerful groups, such as minorities, women, or blue-collar workers.

These results suggest some additions to social identity theory (Sherif et al., 1961; Turner, Brown, and Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel, 1981). Much of that research has focused exclusively on cognitive categorization processes. Thus, as the minimal group experiments show, it only takes a small degree of likeness to create in-group effects (e.g., being told that you and the other have a common preference for paintings by a certain artist). While these results have been found many times, there is an additional element that should be considered: the nature of the common experience that comes from being in the same group. If those common experiences include highly salient negative events, such as a sense of being marginalized or otherwise unjustly treated, then there may be some added impact from having an in-group relationship. In such cases, being in-group to another person may make it more likely that his or her mistreatment is personally understood and vicariously shared than if the common experience were neutral or positive. In the realm of justice and equity, the effects of social identity may be especially powerful for those who are, as a group, subjected to repeated injustices.

Our research has also suggested a distinction between injustice and disapproval. When people react to accounts, they respond both to the plight of the victim and to the actions of the harm-doer. Whereas these two were previously treated as if they moved in concert, an account can succeed at diminishing disapproval of the harm-doer while failing to diminish perceptions of injustice for the harm-receiver. Moreover, accounts are initiated by harm-doers' concern for their own reputations, rather than a concern for the harm-receiver. It would not be surprising, then, to find that accounts are better at changing perceptions of blame directed at the harm-

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doer than at changing perceptions of injustice for the harm-receiver.

In this paper we have only begun to tease apart these two effects empirically. At this point, we have still used the existing measures for disapproval and injustice, which are highly correlated. In the future, we need to develop scales that more accurately separate these two phenomena. Also, in all of the studies reported here, social accounts had much larger effects on disapproval than on injustice. There is good reason to believe that this distinction can be sustained empirically with further refinement.

**Invisible dynamics: The potential impact of persistent injustice.** If injustice and disapproval do not always move together, it presents some intriguing possibilities. Let us assume that account-givers initiate their attempts to manage perceptions of their actions because they want to avoid the negative repercussions that come from disapproval. Those impression-management efforts are likely to end as soon as feedback indicates that disapproval of their actions has subsided. They may even assume that perceptions of injustice have also subsided (in most cases, the two do go together). But there may be certain conditions, such as those identified in this paper, under which perceptions of injustice persist. The manager has then, as Smith (1989) would put it, focused only on the overt manifestation of the conflict, rather than its underlying source. The harm-doer may then falsely believe that the situation is settled and stop worrying about managing the conflict. In such a case, negative feelings would linger, and the manager would not be aware of it or, if the manager were aware, he or she might well be surprised that such feelings persist. When there is a persistent injustice effect, it is likely to be invisible to a manager who has succeeded in managing feelings of disapproval. The result, according to Smith (1989: 19) is that "'solutions' end up being partial and temporary, and the conflicts get driven underground, to incubate and surface again at some other time, in some other form."

This blind spot may be exacerbated by the fact that harm-doers from some social groups (i.e., those that traditionally have greater degrees of privilege and control) will be less likely to have personally experienced the effect of retaining perceptions of injustice despite lowered feelings of disapproval. This makes it more likely that people from these groups (such as whites) will be unaware of the possibility that perceptions of injustice persist, despite the use of social accounts, and thus more likely that they will proceed, unaware of underlying tensions. The natural conclusion of such a dynamic is surprise and resentment by members of traditionally more powerful groups (e.g., whites) when others (e.g., blacks) express anger over issues that the account-giver thought had been resolved.

**Additional questions and limitations.** It would be intriguing to explore whether members of traditionally less-powerful groups are better at recognizing and managing perceptions of injustice by virtue of their greater ability to see the situation from the victim's perspective. These managers may have developed different approaches to managing conflict



and may be more sensitive to the need to differentiate their tactics based on their audience, although, as Kanter (1993) pointed out, these same managers may be under pressure to emulate the behaviors of those in the dominant group and avoid showing greater sensitivity to others in their identity group. More generally, it is important for all managers to recognize differences in their audiences and for scholars to take the receiver into account when studying social accounts or other forms of conflict management.

Another area that warrants further investigation is the effect of the size of the hurt done to the victim. We know that the effects of accounts are robust: they have been effective at managing feelings of outrage toward managers who take credit for others' ideas, toward managers who deny requests for resources, and toward companies that lay off employees. Thus, they work whether the effect is framed as a potential gain that is not given the person (e.g., they do not get added pay for a good idea) or a loss that is imposed on the victim (e.g., loss of job). There has been no research, however, to compare the effectiveness of accounts across unjust events of varying degrees of severity. The persistent injustice effect was studied here under conditions of relatively low severity. More severe injustices may reveal different patterns. On the one hand, a more severe event may trigger stronger perceptions of injustice, so that observers are more likely to focus on the victim's situation; in this case, a persistent injustice effect would occur more broadly. On the other hand, it may be that fewer people—even among those in traditionally less-powerful groups—have had similar experiences with such extreme events, so that it would be harder to understand how the victim feels; in this case, a persistent injustice effect would be less pronounced.

The present research extends and elaborates on the view that group and individual experiences influence the way people experience, make sense of, and respond to unjust acts. This research is limited, however, in several ways. First, our measures of injustice were survey responses. More powerful responses, and different responses, may be seen if we use behavioral measures of reactions to injustice. Second, respondents were put into the role of observer, not victim. This was done to replicate existing studies and also because it was necessary to test our theory, which focuses on identification with the victim and the distinction between injustice and disapproval, both of which require an observer. Furthermore, in many organizational conflicts, there are observers of the conflict whose reactions are central to how the conflict is resolved. Nonetheless, it is important to place respondents in the role of victim in future studies, not just the role of observer.

Third, by undertaking research that focuses on traditionally less-powerful groups, we are effectively limited by the size of the sample of respondents. One of the reasons that research with minorities is relatively sparse is that it is difficult to garner members of this group to be subjects. In the case of blacks, the numbers problem is exacerbated by African-Americans' mistrust of the research endeavor, especially on sensitive issues such as injustice and discrimination at work

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(Boykin, Franklin, and Yates, 1979). Thus, we are left with small samples or limited opportunities for replicating results. Lastly, while we have identified several groups in which the persistent injustice effect occurs, we do not know which other groups might have similar effects. We have made a case for the generalizability of the persistent injustice effect for African-Americans, and Friedman and Robinson (1993) made a similar case for union workers and women, but it is also possible that the effect may vary based on other factors, such as amount of experience with past injustice, culture, or other factors that vary across these social groups. Further research is needed to clarify the exact boundaries of the persistent injustice effect.

## **CONCLUSION**

Justice is a relational concept: perceptions of justice are derived from comparisons with others, the ability to be involved in decision processes, and the attitudes and level of respect indicated when decisions are explained (Bies, 1987; Greenberg, 1996). Actions, decisions, processes, and outcomes are all judged within a social context, including what others are getting, how they treat you, whether you are allowed to influence them, and whether they treat you appropriately. Yet few have taken the next step to ask: can we apply what is known about the structure of social life to perceptions of justice? A well-established literature suggests that society is stratified by race, ethnicity, class, and gender (e.g., Contreras and Lee, 1990; Hacker, 1992), that these group categories affect experiences in organizations (e.g., Nieva and Gutek, 1980; Irons and Moore, 1985; Ilgen and Youtz, 1986), and that attitudes and perceptions are shaped by any type of group categorization (e.g., Tajfel, 1981; Fiske and Taylor, 1991). It should therefore be natural to ask how these dominant elements of social organization shape justice perceptions.

We have offered one approach to bridge this gap. Integrating Batson's work on empathy with social identity theory, we have provided an explanation for why differences in level of perceived injustice might result from the group identity of perpetrators, victims, and observers of unjust acts. Both the past history of particular social groups and the relationships triggered by those histories affect perceptions of injustice and the degree to which social accounts can lessen those perceptions. Further supporting this research trajectory is recent cognitive research on justice (Stroessner and Huer, 1996), which shows that disapproval of harm-doers is affected by the numerical minority or majority status of the victim (due to the illusory correlation bias, people perceive higher levels of mistreatment of minorities, which then affects their response to the harm-doer). Justice-related motivations and cognitions both appear to be affected by who is being hurt and how they stand in relation to the dominant group. Future theories of justice, and theories of how managers can shape perceptions of injustice through social accounts, must be informed by an understanding of the social structure in which these conflicts take place.

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## **APPENDIX A: Report Containing the Causal Account**

### **Summary Notes from Plant Production Committee Meeting**

#### **Assistant Plant Manager**

The Sudsy production changes look very promising. The meeting itself was very interesting. When Mike introduced the plan, he mentioned his foreman's efforts and contribution. The meeting was slow and detailed as it began. At the coffee-break Mike talked to some of us about our reaction and those of his boss. He told us he wanted to present it well so his foreman could get appropriate recognition. We told Mike that he needed to change his approach to get the plant manager's approval. In the discussion after the break Mike got more excited and referred to it as "his plan." Based on our talk at the break I don't think he meant to claim credit by using those words, but wanted to demonstrate his support for and commitment to the plan. Mike tried to share the recognition, but the group brand director felt that Mike was just being humble. I don't think Mike intended things to happen this way. In any event, the new production plan was a good one.

## **APPENDIX B: Scale Items Used**

### **Studies 1–4: Disapproval Items**

- Do you approve or disapprove of the actions taken by Mike Cushing, the superintendent, in this situation?
- Do you feel that [James Washington, John Winston] was betrayed by Mike Cushing in this situation?
- Do you feel that Mike Cushing needs to be reprimanded in this situation?

### **Studies 2–4: Injustice Items**

- Do you feel that [James Washington, John Winston], the foreman, was treated fairly or unfairly by Mike Cushing in this situation?
- Do you feel the recognition that Mike Cushing received to be fair or unfair?
- Do you feel that an injustice has occurred in this situation?

### **Studies 2–4: Intentionality Items**

- Did you get the impression that Mike Cushing intentionally tried to gain the full credit for the promotion plan?
- Did you get the impression that Mike Cushing purposely took full credit for the new Sudsy production plan?

### **Studies 2 and 3: Past Negative Experiences Scale**

- I have been unfairly denied a promotion.
- People at work have taken credit for my ideas.

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I have been unable to gain access to informal networks at companies where I have worked.  
I have been denied raises to which I was entitled.

#### **Studies 2 and 3: Future Negative Experiences Scale**

I am concerned that I will be denied raises that I deserve.  
I am concerned I won't receive promotions commensurate with my skill.  
I am concerned I won't be able to gain access to informal networks at work.  
I am concerned my ideas won't be seriously considered in group meetings.

#### **Studies 2 and 3: Mistrust (Scheussler, 1982)**

Most people don't really care what happens to the next person.  
Most people can be trusted (reversed).  
There are few people in this world you can trust, when you get right down to it.  
Most people are fair in their dealings with others (reversed).  
It is hard to figure out who you can really trust these days.  
Too many people in our society are just out for themselves.

#### **Study 3: Racial Identification (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992)**

The racial group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.  
In general, belonging to my racial group is an important part of my self-image.