

**Indirect Influence of Prejudice: How and Why People Accommodate the Prejudices of
Others**

by

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Abstract

Research on social discrimination has traditionally focused on the direct influence of individuals' prejudice on their behavior toward members of minoritized groups. In this review, we highlight recent theory and research findings on the *indirect* influence of prejudice, which can produce discriminatory outcomes, even among low-prejudiced people, to accommodate the prejudices of others. Key to this process of prejudice accommodation is instrumental goals, which often derive from formal organizational roles. To illustrate the dynamics of prejudice accommodation, we focus on the context of hiring decisions with the potential to produce gender employment discrimination. When organizations focus on person-environment or cultural fit, personnel decisions become interdependent with the attitudes of relevant constituents, promoting the accommodation of those attitudes to fulfill instrumental goals. We discuss evidence for the centrality of instrumental goals associated with cultural fit among hiring professionals, and recent research connecting those instrumental goals to prejudice accommodation in hiring decisions that produce gender discrimination. We also review evidence suggesting that instrumental goals (rather than personal attitudes) underlie prejudice accommodation, creating a conundrum for decision-makers low in prejudice and/or highly motivated to respond in unprejudiced ways. In closing, we provide practical recommendations to counter the indirect influence of prejudice in hiring, including reframing decision-makers' goals to foster independence and educating people about the consequences of prejudice accommodation.

Keywords: diversity; discrimination; cultural fit; gender; person-environment fit; prejudice

Indirect Influence of Prejudice: How and Why People Accommodate the Prejudices of Others

Traditionally, research on social discrimination has focused on the direct influence of personal prejudice toward members of minoritized groups as the primary antecedent of discriminatory outcomes (Allport, 1954; Forscher et al., 2015; Kurdi et al., 2019). This focus has promoted a wealth of initiatives to “train away” prejudice and ameliorate its direct effects in organizations, often with mixed results (Chang et al., 2019; Devine & Ash, 2022; Devine et al., 2012; Leslie, 2019; Schmader et al., 2022). But prejudicial attitudes are distinct from discriminatory behavior that systematically disadvantages individuals based on their group membership. While prejudice against a group may generally lead to discrimination, whether a person discriminates against another person depends upon a range of factors beyond personal prejudice that either facilitate or inhibit discrimination in a particular context. Previous work has emphasized how discriminatory outcomes can arise in the absence of personal bias when individuals enforce unfair policies that perpetuate inequality (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2015). One practically and theoretically relevant process that has received less attention is how prejudice can produce discriminatory outcomes *indirectly* when people, even those relatively low in prejudice, construe their decisions as interdependent with the attitudes of others. In such contexts, an individual may accommodate the perceived prejudices of other people, discriminating on their behalf, for instrumental reasons. To broaden current understanding of this phenomenon, which plays a key but underappreciated role in social discrimination, we highlight recent theory and research on the instrumental accommodation of prejudice.

Prejudice accommodation, which is related to a broader psychological literature on the social transmission of bias (e.g., Crandall et al., 2002), takes place when an actor engages in

discriminatory behavior that is consistent with the inferred social prejudices of an interdependent third party—another individual or a group—instead of reflecting the actor’s own attitudes (Vial, 2024). Through this process, prejudicial attitudes can produce discrimination indirectly by shaping the behavior of other individuals who seek to satisfy instrumental goals. Although the phenomenon of prejudice accommodation applies to people generally, it may be particularly relevant, relative to other factors, for explaining discriminatory behavior by people low in prejudice (who, through social comparison, sometimes perceive themselves as “unprejudiced”), shedding light on how these individuals play a role in slowing progressive change by allowing others’ prejudices to proliferate. By “low” or “relatively low” prejudice in this context we refer to individuals who harbor low levels of prejudicial attitudes toward a given social group (as indexed by well-established prejudice measures such as the Modern Sexism scale; Swim et al., 1995) and/or who are strongly internally motivated to avoid behaving in a prejudiced manner (e.g., Monteith et al., 2016).

The phenomenon of prejudice accommodation has been examined most extensively in the context of gender employment discrimination (Fernandez-Mateo & King, 2011; Larwood et al., 1988; Vial et al., 2019a). This is the focus of our review, in which we describe how the common practice of hiring as “cultural matching” (e.g., Rivera, 2012) can inadvertently undermine gender diversity goals. We highlight most prominently the social psychological research in this area, although the indirect transmission of prejudice has also captured the attention of economists, political scientists, and management and organizational scientists, who examined prejudice accommodation processes in various contexts, including voting intentions (e.g., Bateson, 2020; Corbett et al., 2022; Lucas & Ossoff, 2021), venture capital funding (Liao et al., 2024), and resource exchange within entrepreneurial networks (Abraham, 2020). For

example, illustrating prejudice accommodation outside the context of personnel hiring, Abraham (2020) found that decision-makers were most apt to favor male contacts in exchanges involving a third party when considering whether to connect a contact in a male-typed occupation (compared to gender-neutral or female-typed occupations, or when a third party was not involved).

Moreover, in this review we place emphasis on the accommodation of *gender* prejudice and resulting discrimination, which have received the most attention in this literature. However, the prejudice accommodation framework draws on processes of influence that have been applied in the study of racial and ethnic biases (e.g., Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) and is broadly applicable to prejudice transmission involving bias against a range of groups, including not only women but also members of racial and ethnic minoritized groups. Although our focus is on studies that examined the accommodation of *gender* prejudice and discrimination, relevant accommodation processes have been documented in the context of racial prejudice (e.g., Bateson, 2020; Brief et al., 1995; Corbett et al., 2022; Larwood et al., 1988), prejudice toward novel groups of which people hold no pre-existing attitudes (Vial et al., 2019b), and non-prejudicial preferences (Arvate et al., 2024).

A Theoretical Framework to Explain an Indirect Influence of Prejudice

The growing literature on prejudice accommodation is situated within a broader landscape of normative social influence theories, which articulate how norms can curtail or promote prejudice expression. People conform to social norms to prevent being evaluated negatively, avoiding prejudiced actions that are perceived to be socially unacceptable. Thus, anti-bias norms suppress the expression of individual prejudice to avert social disapproval (Crandall et al., 2002; Murrar et al., 2020; Paluck et al., 2021). Conversely, pro-bias social norms that signal that prejudice expression is tolerated can embolden individuals to express their own

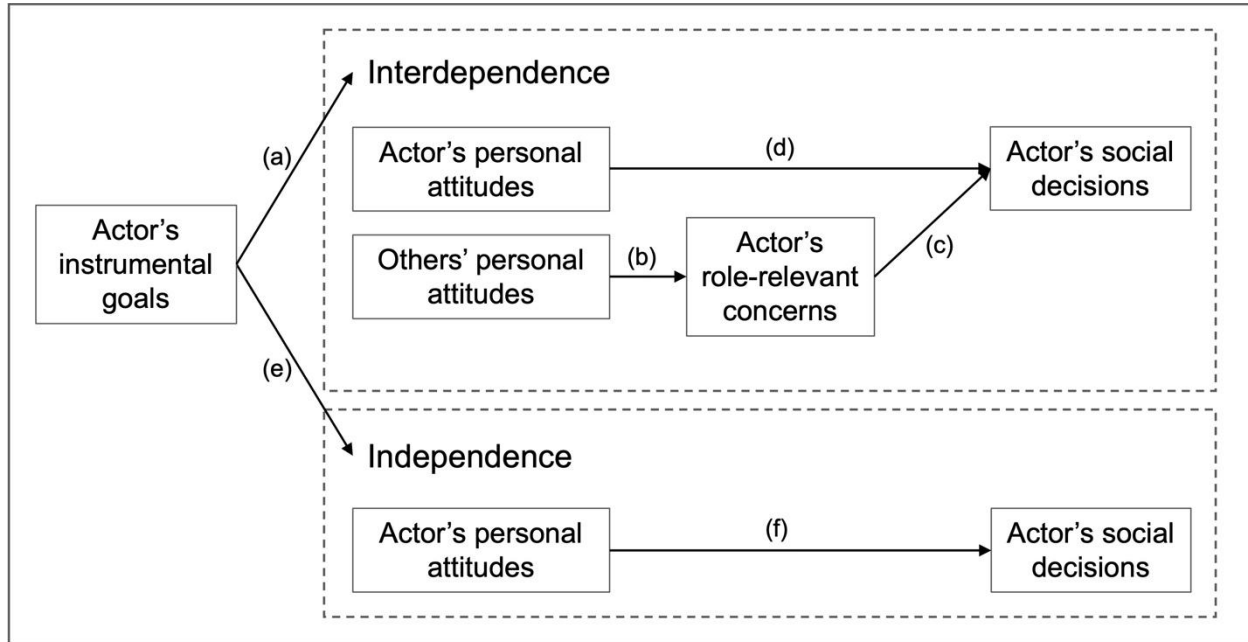
prejudices with minimal concern about being rebuffed (Brief et al., 2000; Corrington et al., 2023; Selvanathan & Leidner, 2022). This normative social influence framework is helpful to understand how the views and actions of other people regulate the direct behavioral expression of an individuals' own prejudice, by either blocking it or enabling it.

Complementing this view, theory on prejudice accommodation is primarily concerned with the *indirect* manifestation of prejudice by proxy, helping explain how the prejudicial beliefs of one person (or group) can become instantiated in the behavior of another person, including by an individual relatively low in prejudice. To avoid disapproval and conflict, individuals often do not challenge others' prejudice (Hunt et al., 2021; Mallett & Melchiori, 2019). Beyond failing to confront others' prejudice, however, research on prejudice accommodation demonstrates that low-prejudiced individuals (who may sometimes think of themselves as unprejudiced) may actively incorporate others' prejudice in their own actions for instrumental reasons, effectively spreading prejudicial beliefs that they do not espouse (Vial, 2024). The theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 1. When instrumental goals stemming from choice structure or from role requirements make a decision interdependent with the views of other people, attending to those prejudices may seem like the rational course of action (e.g., Larwood et al., 1984). Although decision-making is not a purely rational process (Kahneman, 2003), instrumental goals that *seem* rational can produce biased outcomes. While instrumental goals may influence people generally, it is particularly helpful to explain the discriminatory behavior of people low in prejudice. Among people high in prejudice, personal biases and other expressive goals (e.g., in-group favoritism) may, along with instrumental goals, also motivate discrimination. By contrast, for individuals low in prejudice, instrumental goals are often the primary operative motivation, even when individuals desire to act in an unbiased way. Prejudice accommodation theory focuses on

this instrumentality to illuminate the process by which prejudice can, as we highlight in the current review, produce discriminatory actions by people low in prejudice.

Figure 1

The Prejudice Accommodation Framework



Note. When an actor's instrumental goals create an interdependent decision context (path a) (e.g., a focus on hiring for cultural fit), others' personal attitudes (e.g., gender prejudice) influence the actor's social decisions (e.g., whether to hire a woman) by activating actor's role-relevant concerns (paths b and c) (e.g., interpersonal and task-focused concerns related to candidate fit), independently from the actor's personal attitudes (path d) (e.g., the actor's gender-egalitarian beliefs). When an actor's instrumental goals create an independent decision context (path e), the actor's social decisions directly reflect the actor's personal attitudes (path f).

Instrumental Goals and Prejudice Accommodation

Instrumental goals, which we define here as the objective of an individuals' action in a particular context (Locke et al., 1981), are central in prejudice accommodation theory (Larwood et al., 1984; Vial, 2024). Beyond a desire for social approval, an individuals' behavior and social decisions are typically informed by context-specific objectives, which often derive from formal

roles (e.g., an individual's organizational position). People usually behave in ways that conform to the priorities of their formal roles, and which enable them to satisfy instrumental goals associated with those roles (Bosak, 2018; Stryker, 2008; Tubre et al., 1985). Key to prejudice accommodation theory, role-relevant instrumental goals can make the outcome of an individuals' behavior interdependent with the beliefs or values of other people (Figure 1, path a).

Interdependent (or relational) decision contexts are those in which effective decision-making involves coordination with other people and decisions can be successful only by integrating their views (Correll et al., 2017). Thus, when decisions are made in interdependent contexts, the perceived preferences (including social prejudices) of relevant others are influential even when these are not initially included as relevant criteria on which to base the decision (Arvate et al., 2024). Primary elections in the United States are a clear example of an interdependent decision context, as primary voters' ability to meet their political goals depends on the choices and biases of the rest of the polity (indeed, this is a context in which prejudice accommodation has been documented; Bateson, 2020; Corbett et al., 2022; Lucas & Ossoff, 2021). In contrast, in independent contexts, decision-makers have instrumental autonomy (Figure 1, path e) and the success of a decision rests on factors other than the attitudes of third parties.

To illustrate the dynamics of prejudice accommodation in a comprehensive way, although the phenomenon has been investigated in various contexts of practical importance (e.g., Abraham, 2020; Corbett et al., 2022; Liao et al., 2024), our focus in this review is on the behavior of people whose roles entail personnel decisions (e.g., hiring managers, human resources professionals) with the potential to result in gender discrimination. The responsibilities and duties that role occupants associate with these roles—how they construe the role—informs the instrumental goals that they seek to satisfy when making a hiring decision involving female

job candidates (Vial et al., 2021). Crucially, personnel selection roles are sometimes construed in highly interdependent ways that implicate not only the evaluations of the person in charge of the decision, but also the views of relevant constituents (e.g., existing employees). Such interdependent framing can arise when decision-makers evaluate job candidates with a focus on person-environment fit or “cultural fit” (the compatibility between individuals and the work environment or between individuals and the organizations’ values and work culture, respectively), which are central concepts in research in organizational psychology (e.g., Edwards et al., 2006; Rivera, 2012). The practice of hiring for cultural fit has been criticized for its potential to compromise organizational diversity by reproducing a homogenous workforce (Balasubramanian, 2022; Rivera, 2012). Other forms of fit, such as person-job fit, focus on the extent to which a candidate’s skills and qualifications match the requirements of the job (van Vianen, 2018), which can also contribute to inequality if the job-related criteria are unfairly influenced by stereotypes (e.g., Heilman, 1983).

Research on prejudice accommodation provides a theoretical framework for understanding how a focus on hiring for cultural fit can have deleterious effects for organizational diversity. By signaling the importance of considering organizational values and norms during hiring, the goal of maximizing candidate fit with the social environment casts the hiring decision as interdependent with the attitudes (and prejudices) of existing organizational members. When cultural fit is emphasized, a hiring decision can ultimately be successful insofar as a new hire is interpersonally accepted and supported by others in the organization. If existing organizational members are prejudiced against the new hire’s social group, the new hire is unlikely to relate to them interpersonally or succeed in the job—cultural fit may be perceived as weak, influencing hiring with potentially discriminatory outcomes.

Before delving into how a focus on cultural fit can go awry, it is critical to understand why cultural fit is often an important instrumental goal in the hiring process. Feeling like one does not fit in with coworkers is associated with reduced performance, lower job satisfaction, and worse mental health (Elfenbein & O'Reilly, 2007; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Rubin et al., 2019). Conversely, hiring people who fit well with an organization's current members or values results in positive work attitudes, better performance, and reduced turnover (van Vianen, 2018). Reflecting these perceived benefits, there is ample evidence that prioritizing cultural fit is central to how people construe the hiring manager role. In a survey of over 1,000 professionals and hiring managers across the UK (Robert Walters, 2018), 98% of employers and 97% of hiring professionals agreed that cultural fit is an important consideration, and 46% of companies engaged recruitment firms to identify the qualities required for cultural fit. Over 80% of hiring managers believed that candidates who are a good cultural fit will perform better at their job or will be less likely to leave the organization.

From the perspective of prejudice accommodation theory, to the extent that a workplace culture is hostile to women (e.g., Berdahl et al., 2018), decision-makers may—irrespective of their own gender attitudes—hesitate to hire women, informed by the perception of prejudiced attitudes toward women in that organization. Such perceptions could be misguided, given that people tend to underestimate the extent to which others care about gender equality (*pluralistic ignorance*; De Souza & Schmader, 2022; Prentice & Miller, 1996). For example, Corbett et al. (2022) found that people tend to underestimate the likelihood that other voters would support a female presidential candidate. Nevertheless, regardless of their accuracy, the perceived prejudices of relevant others can be influential. In the context of personnel selection, hiring a woman to work with sexist employees could be viewed as detrimental (for instance, it may

disrupt workplace efficiency), contradicting instrumental goals for organizational decision-makers (Larwood et al., 1984). Accommodating others' perceived prejudice in this context (by not hiring a woman) allows decision-makers to meet goals related to cultural fit, but the result is an indirect form of gender discrimination.

Evidence of Prejudice Accommodation

Empirical evidence that decision-makers accommodate others' prejudice in hiring and recruitment due to cultural fit concerns has been growing. In a field study, the sociologists Fernandez-Mateo and King (2011) examined a prejudice accommodation phenomenon (which they labeled *anticipatory gender sorting*) among staffing consultants. Staffing firms create an initial pool of candidates that is later shared with clients, and they only make a profit if a client ultimately hires from that shortlist. Thus, shortlisting decisions are highly interdependent with the perceived views of other parties: The success of staffing consultants' choices—their ability to meet instrumental goals associated with their jobs—depend on how well those choices fit with the preferences of others (their clients). Indeed, qualitative interviews indicated that staffing consultants actively tried to anticipate clients' preferences to minimize the risk of rejection. One consultant reported that, “whatever we do, it has to be aligned with the clients' goals” (Fernandez-Mateo & King, 2011; p. 1005).

Fernandez-Mateo and King (2011) examined all stages of the hiring process involving 20,000 job applicants. Staffing consultants' shortlisting choices revealed patterns consistent with a prejudice accommodation process. The make-up of their shortlists reflected an underlying assumption that clients looking to fill high-paying positions would be biased against female job candidates—consultants systematically funneled women into candidate pools for lower-paying jobs. These findings are indicative of decision-makers' attempts at coordinating their decisions

with the possible attitudes of others (in this case, clients) to meet role-relevant instrumental goals, resulting in gender discriminatory shortlisting practices.

The results of the large field study by Fernandez-Mateo and King (2011) align with early social psychological experiments showing that people strategically consider others' potential biases when making personnel decisions (Larwood et al., 1988; Sz wajkowski & Larwood, 1991). More recently, studies have shown that hiring professionals accommodate the preferences of third parties, and that the goal of maximizing cultural fit drives this process. For example, Vial and colleagues (2021; Study 2) asked hiring managers to imagine that they were in charge of filling a new job vacancy for a client company. The new hire would report directly to "John," the company's CEO—a third party whose views the hiring manager might want to consider from the perspective of cultural fit. Half of the participants learned that John was known for his sexist beliefs about working women. The rest did not receive this information. Crucially, the researchers also assessed hiring managers' instrumental goals related to cultural matching (e.g., how much they thought it is a hiring managers' job to hire candidates who will fit in with the existing organizational culture and its members). Participants who felt that ensuring cultural fit was an important part of their job were less likely to hire a woman when the CEO was described as sexist. When this was not the case, hiring managers gravitated toward hiring a woman—which denotes gender progressive views. These progressive views, however, did not exempt hiring professionals from accommodating another's perceived sexism. As we elaborate in the next section, decision-makers' own attitudes do not predict their tendency to accommodate others' attitudes. A correlational study (Vial et al., 2021; Study 1) further found that, irrespective of their own attitudes, hiring professionals who more strongly believed that ensuring candidate fit is a

top priority viewed a hypothetical hiring manager's decision to accommodate prejudice against women as more acceptable and "common sense".

As mentioned earlier, from the perspective of prejudice accommodation theory, the key problem with the instrumental goal of cultural matching is that it grounds hiring decisions in the attitudes of other people (rather than a candidate's qualifications), which can create a tendency to cater to another person's preferences (and prejudices). Decisions in interdependent contexts do not result in discrimination when there are clear signals suggesting that the relevant constituents do not approve of discrimination (e.g., Sz wajkowski & Larwood, 1991). Importantly, emphasizing other goals that do not frame hiring decisions as interdependent (Figure 1, path e) can eliminate prejudice accommodation. For example, in one experiment (Vial et al., 2019b, Study 4), participants in a hypothetical hiring manager role were more likely to select female job candidates when the role emphasized diversity goals, even when the participants learned about the sexist views of existing employees. Unlike the goal of cultural matching, a diversity goal makes the hiring decision *independent* from the attitudes of others, and more likely to reflect the decision-maker's own attitudes (Figure 1, path f). Thus, reframing decision-maker's goals to foster independence (rather than interdependence) is a promising intervention to curtail the spread of prejudice.

The indirect influence of sexism on hiring decisions via prejudice accommodation is by no means negligible—meta-analytic estimates across several studies with thousands of participants (college students and working adults) found evidence for a medium effect, such that decision-makers were less likely to select a woman by $d = 0.46$ when there were cues suggesting that relevant third parties were sexist (Vial et al., 2019a). This effect has also been generalized to third parties that were in high status (e.g., CEO) and lower status organizational roles (e.g., a

prospective co-worker), and in the same or a different organization as the decision-maker (Vial et al., 2019a, 2019b). Moreover, attesting to the pervasiveness of pressures to accommodate prejudice, the hiring professionals in the studies by Vial et al. (2021), who were based in the United States (Study 1) and in the Republic of Ireland (Study 2), reported frequent requests from clients to avoid hiring workers from certain demographic groups (e.g., women), even though this practice is illegal in both countries. Hiring managers in Ireland estimated that 30% of clients make such discriminatory requests. In the United States, 46% of the hiring professionals reported receiving these kinds of requests from clients.

Given how common these requests are, it is unsurprising that hiring managers sometimes think it is appropriate and acceptable to accommodate clients' prejudices (Larwood et al., 1988; Vial et al., 2021). Especially when doing so aligns with what these professionals see as the responsibilities of their job as a hiring manager—including prioritizing cultural fit—which creates an interdependent decision context in which instrumental goals cannot be met without accommodating prejudice. As one of the hiring managers who participated in the study by Vial et al. (2021) explained,¹ “I have found in my 23 years of HR experience, that the most important attribute from a candidate when hiring, is very simply... the ‘fit’!” Perhaps most worrisome is that, even in the absence of direct discriminatory requests, recruiters often spontaneously assume that a client has biased preferences. In the U.S., 52% of hiring professionals reported having made such inferences (Vial et al., 2021, Study 2).

In line with prejudice accommodation theory's focus on role-relevant instrumental goals, there is evidence that inferences about the biases of others influence hiring decisions because they trigger concerns that reflect the focus on hiring as cultural matching (Figure 1, paths b-c).

¹ This and other participant comments included in this review are not quoted directly in Vial et al. (2021); however, all participant open-ended responses are available upon request.

Several studies with students and working adults recruited online have uncovered such concerns and how they relate to decision-makers' hiring choices (Vial et al., 2019a; 2019b; see also Arvate et al., 2024). Two broad types of role-relevant concerns have been documented: Interpersonal concerns, which involve socioemotional considerations focused on maintaining smooth relations between coworkers, and task-focused concerns, which entail performance considerations focused on the ability of an employee to excel at their job.

Both types of concerns can be exacerbated in the context of a hiring decision when decision-makers have reasons to suspect that existing employees are prejudiced. Across several experiments (Vial et al., 2019a; Vial et al., 2019b; Vial et al., 2021), when there were cues to suggest sexist attitudes on the part of current organizational members, participants faced with a hiring task were more likely to agree that a female job candidate would not get along with existing employees or would not be respected by them (an interpersonal concern). They were also more likely to agree that a female job candidate would have difficulties performing at a high level (a task-focused concern). Attending to these concerns (by accommodating prejudice) enables decision-makers to meet instrumental goals associated with hiring for cultural matching.

Highlighting the causal role of role-relevant concerns as the psychological mechanism that underlies prejudice accommodation (Figure 1, paths b-c), both interpersonal and task-focused concerns predict a lower preference for a female job candidate (Vial et al., 2019a; 2019b; Vial et al., 2021). An upper-level HR manager with 5 years of experience in recruitment who participated in the experiment by Vial et al. (2021) explained her decision to accommodate a sexist CEO quite eloquently with reference to interpersonal and task-focused concerns: "As a recruiter, I would not want someone to work in an environment where they would be constantly fighting an uphill battle and not be successful within their job due to prejudices within the

company.” Experiments have further revealed that the influence of others’ prejudice is substantially smaller when decision-makers have reason to expect that sexist employees will not let their prejudices interfere with collegial work relations, countering interpersonal concerns (Vial et al., 2019b, Study 5), or that female candidates are likely to excel despite others’ sexism, countering task-focused concerns (Vial et al., 2019a, Study 4). Research additionally indicates that decision-makers accommodate prejudice as a result of these interpersonal and task-focused concerns rather than as an expression of their own prejudice, as we describe next.

Reluctantly Instantiating Others’ Biases in One’s Own Decisions

Whereas personal attitudes directly influence decisions (Figure 1, paths d and f), studies have repeatedly shown that they do not moderate the tendency to accommodate others’ attitudes (e.g., Vial et al., 2019a; Vial et al., 2019b; Vial et al., 2021). Indeed, a key aspect of the theoretical framework of prejudice accommodation—which distinguishes this framework from other theories of normative influence—is that decision-makers do not merely use the ostensible prejudices of others as an excuse to express their own biases, which means that people often accommodate prejudices that they do not personally endorse (Vial, 2024). In fact, it is when a decision-maker *does not* share someone else’s prejudice that the process of prejudice accommodation primarily (relative to other influences) can lead a person to discriminate. On this point, prejudice accommodation departs from other theories of normative influence such as the justification-suppression model (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; White & Crandall, 2017), which articulates how the prejudices of others can sometimes encourage prejudiced people to express their own attitudes by providing a cover of plausible deniability (e.g., Brief et al., 2000). From the prejudice accommodation perspective, expressive and instrumental goals align for high-

prejudiced individuals making decisions that are interdependent with someone else whom they perceive as similarly prejudiced (see Forscher et al., 2015).

In contrast, the phenomenon of prejudice accommodation is primarily impactful on the discriminatory actions of individuals who are *relatively low in prejudice*, as it entails acting in line with others' attitudes that deviate from one's own for instrumental reasons. When making interdependent social decisions, low-prejudiced decision-makers face a conundrum between meeting instrumental goals by accommodating others' prejudices, and expressing their own, more egalitarian preferences. Empirical evidence highlights this conundrum and indicates that instrumental goals take priority, promoting decisions that satisfy those goals, albeit begrudgingly. Participants in prejudice accommodation studies report feeling less able to make a choice freely when there are cues to third-party prejudice, particularly if they belong to the group that is the target of prejudice (e.g., Vial et al., 2019a, Study 5). Moreover, after accommodating prejudice, people often express feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse, an emotional pattern that is especially apparent among those who have internalized egalitarian attitudes (Vial et al., 2019a; see also Monteith et al., 2016). These patterns suggest that prejudice accommodation stifles rather than aids self-expression goals, highlighting the conflict experienced by individuals low in prejudice.

Further suggesting instrumental (rather than self-expressive) reasons for prejudice accommodation, people have been found to accommodate prejudice against novel groups about which they had no pre-existing attitudes (Vial et al., 2019b, Study 1)—an effect that would not emerge if reciprocity to others' biases were predicated on agreement with such biases. Similarly, experiments (Vial et al., 2019a; Vial et al., 2019b) have consistently found accommodation of prejudice against women among participants who scored relatively low on well-established measures of sexist attitudes, including Hostile and Benevolent Sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and

Modern Sexism (Swim et al., 1995), or who scored low on a measure of gender stereotyping (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Moreover, hiring professionals in the correlational study by Vial and colleagues (Vial et al., 2021) evaluated a hypothetical hiring manager's decision to accommodate someone else's prejudice as more acceptable when they adhered more strongly to the role demand to prioritize cultural fit irrespective of their own social dominance orientation, which denotes a tolerance for social inequality (Kteily et al., 2011). Across these studies, although individual endorsement of sexist views or tolerance for inequality predicted a lower preference to hire women or increased leniency toward others who accommodate sexism (which highlights the direct influence of prejudice, e.g., Kteily et al., 2011; Masser & Abrams, 2004), these variables did not moderate the tendency to accommodate others' sexist views or to condone this behavior. Thus, strong personal prejudice is not a requirement for accommodating others' prejudices, nor does scoring low on prejudice measures reduce this behavior. Finally, although people usually favor individuals from their in-group versus out-groups (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014), past research has revealed that people accommodate prejudice against their own social groups. Women across 10 different studies were no less likely than men to accommodate a sexist organizational member (Vial et al., 2019a; 2019b).

Importantly, although research consistently shows that people accommodate others' prejudice even when it contradicts their own attitudes, this is not how the behavior is perceived by others. Reflecting a focus on the direct influence of prejudice (Forscher et al., 2015; Kurdi et al., 2019), people attribute prejudice accommodation to dispositional characteristics of those who engage in it. As a result, those who accommodate others' prejudices are perceived as highly prejudiced, too. In a recent set of studies (Vial et al., 2024), when a hiring manager accommodated a colleague's sexist attitudes, participants assumed that this hiring manager was

also sexist. These attributions are consequential: Participants tended to punish those who accommodated others' sexism by recommending that they be demoted or removed from decision-making roles.

Such dispositional attributions and punitive reactions illustrate how failing to recognize that prejudice can operate indirectly shifts attention to identifying and removing "bad actors," while leaving intact the structures that support the indirect spread of prejudice—the way that decisions are framed based on organizational goals that impinge on decision-makers' actions. The theory and research reviewed here underscores how structural factors (e.g., an organizational focus on hiring as cultural matching) can produce discriminatory outcomes despite decision-makers' minimal personal hostility toward members of stigmatized groups, and helps illuminate how structural biases are instantiated through individual-level processes (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). In the last section, we leverage existing evidence on the process of prejudice accommodation to provide recommendations for interventions, both at the structural and individual levels, that may help curtail the indirect spread of prejudice.

Future Research Directions on Prejudice Accommodation

Whereas the research to date has focused primarily on the influence of prejudice accommodation in gender employment discrimination (Fernandez-Mateo & King, 2011; Larwood et al., 1988; Vial et al., 2019a), the dynamics of this phenomenon are not exclusive to gender prejudice. Hiring professionals in the studies by Vial and colleagues (2021) reported pressures to accommodate not only clients' gender-based prejudices, but also prejudices related to race, ethnicity, age, and religion. Indeed, some early studies also found prejudice accommodation in personnel decisions involving racial minorities (Larwood et al., 1988). Moreover, outside the context of hiring, researchers have documented prejudice accommodation

processes in voting intentions that disadvantage not only women but also racial minority political candidates (e.g., Bateson, 2020; Corbett et al., 2022; see Vial, 2024 for a review). The theoretical framework of prejudice accommodation suggests that various prejudices (e.g., age bias, weight bias) may be accommodated to produce discrimination, a possibility that can be examined in future studies, with potential implications for organizational equality beyond gender diversity.

Additional research may also examine moderators of the tendency to accommodate prejudice, particularly factors that increase the strength of instrumental goals that make a decision interdependent with the views of others. With respect to hiring decisions, a focus on cultural fit would increase people's susceptibility to engaging in prejudice accommodation for job vacancies that entail extensive contact with existing employees (e.g., positions in which working collaboratively with others is fundamental). In these contexts, the relevance of candidate fit with the social environment might be heightened, increasing concerns about hiring someone who will not be accepted by others (due to their prejudices). These concerns might be less pressing when job vacancies entail more independent and less collaborative work, even if the goal of prioritizing cultural fit is salient. Investigating these possibilities would shed light on the kinds of hiring decisions that are most vulnerable to prejudice accommodation.

To further provide evidence for one of the central tenets of prejudice accommodation theory—that instrumental rather than self-expressive goals drive this behavior—future investigations may examine the role of decision-makers' implicit attitudes. Explicit prejudice (attitudes that people know they hold and can control deliberately) does not moderate the tendency to accommodate others' prejudice (Vial et al., 2019a; 2019b; Vial et al., 2021). However, given that implicit attitudes are more uncontrollable and often operate outside awareness, implicit negative attitudes may bubble up in contexts of third-party influence, such

that instrumental and self-expressive goals might align in those contexts for decision-makers who harbor more hostile implicit attitudes. Investigating these possibilities would illuminate the possible intersection between prejudice accommodation (Vial, 2024) and justification processes (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Moreover, whereas the research to date has focused on demonstrating the general effect of prejudice accommodation on discriminatory actions by people across different levels of personal prejudice, future research might examine distinct motivational pathways for high- and low-prejudiced individuals. We have posited that instrumental goals may serve as the primary motivation for prejudice accommodation among low-prejudiced individuals, whereas multiple motivations (including self-expression) may work in tandem for people who score relatively high on prejudice measures. Additional research may help to illuminate the relevant motivational processes that underlie the discrimination associated with prejudice accommodation by people high in prejudice compared to those low in prejudice.

Further work is also needed that examines how prejudice accommodation may reduce the pace of progressive social change. The existing research clearly indicates that the presence of low-prejudiced individuals does not necessarily result in unbiased practices to the extent that those individuals instantiate the prejudices of other people by proxy. By allowing prejudiced attitudes to proliferate, prejudice accommodation may in fact actively contribute to creating a normative climate wherein expressing bias is perceived as acceptable. Given that people who accommodate prejudice are themselves perceived by others as prejudiced (Vial et al., 2024), this behavior may increase the perceived prevalence of prejudicial attitudes in a group. Moreover, just as high-prejudiced individuals are emboldened to express their prejudice openly when such expressions go unchallenged (Corrington et al., 2023; Selvanathan & Leidner, 2022), they may also be encouraged if they see that low-prejudiced people readily accommodate prejudicial

views. Researchers may examine these potential consequences by assessing whether witnessing someone (e.g., a hiring manager) accommodate prejudice might (a) influence the perceived prevalence of prejudice in the broader context (e.g., the whole organization), and (b) increase further expressions of prejudice in that context.

Finally, future work is needed to apply the insights from prejudice accommodation research by developing and testing interventions with the goal of increasing diversity in recruitment and hiring (e.g., Schmader et al., 2022). Next, we provide a few recommendations to reduce the indirect spread of prejudice through the decisions of people with relatively low levels of prejudice. Such efforts may be particularly important because people who are low in prejudice often perceive themselves as unprejudiced and thus often do not view anti-bias interventions as personally relevant to them (Dovidio et al., 2017).

Potential Solutions to Curtail Prejudice Accommodation

Insights from the theory and research reviewed here can be leveraged to reduce the indirect influence of prejudice. First, to the extent that the prejudice accommodation process unfolds when decisions are framed as interdependent with the attitudes of others, one major takeaway is that countering contextual factors that make decisions interdependent can help reduce prejudice accommodation (Vial et al., 2019a; 2019b; Vial et al., 2021; Vial, 2024). In organizational settings, given that a focus on cultural matching renders hiring decisions interdependent, the value of cultural fit needs to be weighted carefully with the value of organizational diversity, which can be a driver of innovation and growth (Galinsky et al., 2015). Diversity officers may apply the findings on the importance of role construal (Vial et al., 2021) by assessing whether the perceived duties of the hiring manager role in their organization emphasize decision interdependence in conflict with long-term diversity goals. Instead,

highlighting the goal of recruiting workers who bring something new rather than fit into the established culture can counter prejudice accommodation in hiring (Vial et al., 2019b; see also Larwood et al., 1988; Szwajkowski & Larwood, 1991).

Given that prejudice accommodation is predicated on the availability of information other than candidate qualifications (the perceived prejudices of other people), a second key takeaway is that previously identified strategies of *decision blinding* and *discretion elimination* (Greenwald et al., 2022) may be useful. In the context of hiring, decision blinding can be implemented by withholding information about the organizational location of a job vacancy (e.g., the specific work group), which may reduce hiring managers' reliance on the perceived attitudes of a job candidate's prospective coworkers. Similarly, discretion elimination, which may take the form of articulating from the beginning which aspects of fit are important (e.g., qualifications) and which aspects should not be part of the decision (e.g., culture fit), or eliminating demographic information as a basis for discretion, may interfere with the process of prejudice accommodation.

Finally, a third key takeaway from research on prejudice accommodation is that, given its focus on the indirect transmission of prejudice through the actions of low-prejudiced individuals, educating people about this process can complement other prejudice-reduction interventions focused on the direct influence of prejudice. In organizational contexts, initiatives designed to "train away" prejudice are increasingly popular, although they often produce mixed results (e.g., Chang et al, 2019). These initiatives are unlikely to move the needle for individuals relatively low in prejudice. However, making them aware of the psychological process that can lead unbiased people to discriminate on behalf of others is a promising direction. Although merely educating them about the phenomenon may not stop them from doing it (Bateson, 2020), raising awareness that a decision-maker's own personal reputation is at stake could be effective. People

reward decision-makers who do not accommodate others' prejudices and penalize those who do it, assuming that they are prejudiced, too (Vial et al., 2024). Although decision-makers typically feel that accommodating prejudice is justified given their instrumental goals (Vial et al., 2021), knowing that others may question their personal intentions might dissuade them.

Conclusion

Social input can produce a ripple effect, such that the prejudices of one individual or group can be enacted through the decisions of another person, including an individual who is personally low in prejudice. The theory and research on prejudice accommodation reviewed here articulates how and why this happens. This perspective complements well-established principles of normative influence that explain how social input can embolden prejudiced individuals to act on their attitudes. A focus on the instrumental goals that make low-prejudiced people susceptible to accommodating others' prejudice reveals a fuller picture. It also suggests new avenues of intervention to help diversify organizations focused both on changing structures (e.g., balancing organizational goals) and educating low-prejudiced individuals on the role they play in the proliferation of prejudice, and the reputational consequences they face for spreading it, even if reluctantly.

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