

# “Temporary Worker, Permanent Loser?”<sup>1</sup> A Model of the Stigmatization of Temporary Workers<sup>†</sup>

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*As organizations seek to increase flexibility and reduce costs, temporary work arrangements have increased. In this article, the authors argue that these workers can be the targets of devalued treatment. They develop a model of the individual and organizational antecedents and consequences of temporary worker stigmatization. Then, they articulate the implications of this model for research on workplace stigma and effective utilization of temporary workers.*

**Keywords:** *temporary work; temporary workers; contingent work; contingent workers; stigmatization; stigma*

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Time-honored notions of fairness are cast aside for millions of workers. Working temp or part-time often means being treated as a second-class citizen by both employers and permanent workers.

—Castro (1993: 44)

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Sometimes [being a temp] is demeaning. I cannot remember how many . . . times I have been referred to as “just a temp,” and that has a permanent effect on your ego.

—Feldman, Doeringhaus, and Turnley (1994: 54)

Every day, more than 2.5 million temporary employees go to work for one of the 90% of U.S. companies that use temporary staffing services (Berchem, 2005). These workers typically earn substantially less money than their permanent counterparts; are less likely to have health and pension benefits; and are disproportionately young, female, and African American or Hispanic (Current Population Survey, 2005; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000). Temporary work is characterized by uncertainty regarding continued employment, job location, job requirements, and what types of supervisors and coworkers there will be from one assignment to the next (Henson, 1996; Parker, 1994). Temporary workers are commonly employed in hazardous jobs (Kochan, Smith, Wells, & Rebitzer, 1994) or jobs of low complexity (Parker, 1994), but they can also be found in other professions, including law, teaching, and computing (Rogers, 2000; Smith, 1998).

In the mid-1980s, there were approximately 100 temporary-employment agencies in the United States. Today, there are more than 15,000 that hire more than 11 million individuals each year (Berchem, 2005). Temporary work is perhaps the most salient category of contingent work and is defined as any job for which the employee is hired via a temporary help agency and then placed into a client organization (Current Population Survey, 2005). Use of temporary workers has increased as organizations seek flexibility to deal with short-term external fluctuations in the business market (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Schilling & Steensma, 2001), to reduce costs associated with human capital (e.g., health insurance and pension benefits; Nollen & Axel, 1998), and to potentially enhance workforce knowledge (Matusik & Hill, 1998). Increased use of temporary workers has prompted concerns about treatment received in the workplace and the consequences of this treatment for their effective use (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). We seek to develop a model of temporary worker stigmatization and the consequences of such stigmatization. This model is an important contribution to management theory and practice as it can be used by organizations to critically evaluate temporary worker-related practices so as to ensure that the financial gains anticipated through the use of temporary workers are not offset by any negative consequences that result from these workers being treated in a stigmatized manner on the job. Although the model described below may apply to other types of contingent workers (e.g., seasonal workers, independent contractors), the specific focus of this article is on temporary workers placed in client organizations via temporary help agencies.

### *Existence of a Stereotype*

One key initial consideration is whether a stereotype of temporary workers does indeed exist. Crocker, Major, and Steele stated that the “single defining feature of stigma . . . [is] that stigmatized individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute . . . that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular context” (1998: 505). In the case of temporary

workers, work status is the attribute of focus. A stereotype is a set of beliefs about the characteristics of members of a particular social category (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981).

Stereotypic conceptions of temporary workers revolve around low skills, a lack of intelligence, a weak work ethic, and general inferiority (Martella, 1991; Parker, 1994; Rogers, 2000; Smith, 1998; Williams, 2001). Although it is certainly true that some portion of temporary workers would possess these attributes, the stereotype is often extended to individuals for whom the stereotype does not hold (e.g., those in highly skilled trades and professions; Marler, Barringer, & Milkovich, 2002; Marler, Milkovich, & Barringer, 1998). Evidence for the existence of this stereotype can be found in ethnographic studies of temporary workers (Henson, 1996; Parker, 1994; Rogers, 2000), online forums for temporary workers (*Tempzine*, *Temp Slave!*), popular media portrayals (Rybicki, 2003), as well as in the psychology and sociology literatures on stereotypes and social status (Christopher & Schlenker, 2000; Humphrey, 1985). For example, research on social role theory has shown that success in employment contexts is associated with positive agentic qualities and competence (Johannesen-Schmidt & Eagly, 2002).

### *Need for a Unique Model*

Despite the substantial literature on discrimination in the workplace, there are two reasons why stigmatization of temporary workers deserves a unique discussion beyond what has already occurred with respect to race, ethnicity, and gender. First, although much has been written to support the role of ascribed characteristics such as ethnicity and gender in personal identity formation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), a key and often superseding characteristic in the workplace is work status, which is due to the hierarchical nature of most organizations and the traditions of according privilege by organizational rank (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Because the stigma associated with temporary work is derived from a lack of status, the influences on whether an individual temporary worker is stigmatized are uniquely linked to status. Thus, because work status is inherent in how work is structured in many organizations, stigmatization based on this attribute may be more intractable than that based on attributes that are not automatically embedded in the structure and functioning of organizations.

Furthermore, attributes such as ethnicity and disability may connect to stigmatization in work and nonwork settings, whereas work status is of particular salience within the context of work, and hence, stigmatization based on this attribute can be assumed to be considerably less pervasive once individuals are removed from the context where the attribute defines identities. For this reason, stigmatization based on work status is a uniquely work-based phenomenon, whereas stigmatization based on other attributes is less tied to the work setting. Indeed, differentiation based on many stigmatized attributes in the workplace is prohibited by law or organizational policy; differentiation based on status is inherent in many organizational policies and practices.

Second, one of the key tenets of the literature on stigmas is that, over time, contact can serve to reduce stereotypical conceptions of the stigmatized group (Allport, 1954). However,

a number of the necessary conditions for the *contact hypothesis* to unfold are unlikely to exist in situations involving temporary workers (see Brewer & Brown, 1998, for a review). First, institutional support for the harmony of the two groups must be explicit so as to promote norms of tolerance (Brewer & Brown, 1998). Many organizations have nondiscrimination policies for race, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities, but such policies in regard to temporary workers are likely nonexistent, and, as noted earlier, policies may exist that reinforce differentiation. Second, contact between specific members of the groups needs to be of sufficient frequency, duration, and closeness to permit the development of meaningful relationships (Cook, 1978). Because temporary workers' tenure in organizations is generally short, the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships is limited.

A third condition for stigmatization reduction is a decrease in the salience and existence of status differences. Cohen (1982, 1984) argued, and empirical evidence confirms (see Amir, 1976) that unequal status relationships between members of different groups promote existing stereotypic conceptions, especially insofar as the stereotypic conceptions revolve around the stigmatized group's inferior abilities. Although some temporary workers do work in high-skill and professional jobs, status differences are inherent in temporary work as evidenced by the lower pay, lack of pension and other benefits, and ephemeral nature of the temporary workers' employment relationship even in nominally higher status occupations. Thus, these optimal conditions that lead to group integration and lack of stigmatization are unlikely to exist to any extent in relation to temporary workers, suggesting the need for a specific management focus on the factors that contribute to and can ameliorate stigmatization of this group in the workplace.

### **A Model of the Stigmatization of Temporary Workers**

As noted, stigmatization involves being treated in a devalued manner because of possession of some key attribute—in this case, because one is a temporary worker. Yet, just because there is a stereotype associated with an attribute does not necessarily mean one will automatically be stigmatized in a given situation (Crocker et al., 1998). For example, Boyce, Ryan, Imus, Morgeson, and Hauer (2005) found that approximately one fifth of temporary employees in light industrial positions reported some level of stigmatization.

Although there is no single overarching theoretical model that explicates when stigmatization occurs, researchers have drawn on several different theories to propose factors that influence whether an individual will be stigmatized. Stigmatizing others can serve a variety of psychological functions for the perpetrators. Stangor and Crandall (2000) proposed that stigmatization arises from threats, both tangible and symbolic. For permanent workers, temporary workers may represent a threat to job security, indicating the organization can easily get someone else to do the same job. System justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) suggests that stigmatizing may also serve the function of legitimizing unequal group status in society, helping to maintain the stigmatizer's view of the world as just (Crandall, 1994). Stereotyping and devaluing temporary workers reinforces notions that in U.S. society, those who work hard can obtain permanent jobs. Social comparison and social identity theories suggest that derogating or discriminating against out-groups creates a downward comparison target that is worse off than the self or one's group (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Wills (1981) suggested that this downward comparison allows one to feel superior to the devalued target and thus enhances one's self-esteem. In this way, for example, a permanent worker may enhance his or her self-esteem by recognizing the fact that he or she has many advantages over the temporary workers, such as job security and health insurance, even though both workers might toil at monotonous jobs under less-than-ideal conditions. In addition, researchers have drawn on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of coping to suggest that individuals differ in how they respond to being stigmatized (see Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002, for a review).

Drawing from these foundational theoretical perspectives and specific theories related to stigmatization, we developed a model of how and why temporary workers come to be stigmatized, the outcomes of being stigmatized, and potential moderators of the relationships (Figure 1). Overt and covert stigmatizing treatment occupies the center of the model (in the dashed-line box). Factors that influence whether a given temporary worker might be stigmatized or devalued include characteristics of the worker, perceptions of the perpetrator, and characteristics of the work environment. Stigmatizing treatment, in turn, may lead to the perception of stigmatization on the part of temporary workers. There are several situational and personal factors that can moderate the relationship between covert treatment and perception of stigmatization. Perceiving that one has been stigmatized is proposed to influence affective, behavioral, and well-being outcomes. Moderators of the relationships between perceiving stigmatization and outcomes include work centrality and core self-evaluations.

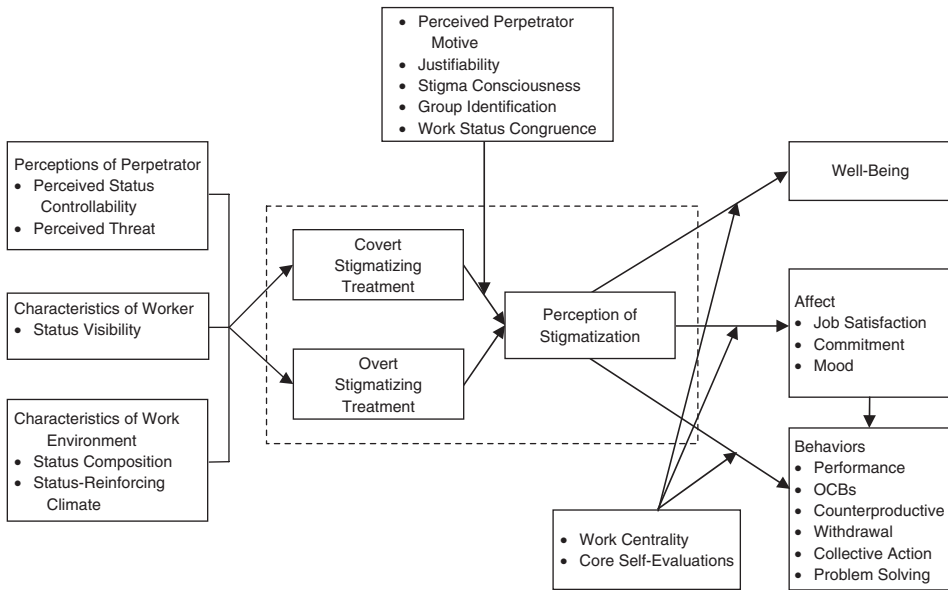
## Antecedents of Stigmatizing Treatment

Whether stigmatizing treatment will occur is affected by a number of factors. In this section, we focus on several specific perceptions of the perpetrator, characteristics of the worker, and characteristics of the work context likely to influence the treatment of temporary workers.

### *Perceptions of the Perpetrator*

*Perceived status controllability.* Perceived controllability refers to the degree to which observers perceive the stigmatized individual to be responsible for his or her condition (Crocker et al., 1998). As suggested by attribution theory, there is a tendency for members of one group to attribute negative outcomes and behaviors of the out-group to stable and dispositional causes (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979; Weiner, 1985). Observers are more likely to dislike, reject, and harshly treat people whose stigmas are perceived as more controllable than those with uncontrollable stigmas (e.g., Crandall, 1994; Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). Furthermore, the "dominant ideology" of Americans (Kluegel & Smith, 1981, 1986) encompasses a variety of beliefs and values, all focused on personal responsibility, freedom, and the power of individuals to work autonomously and achieve their goals. Crandall and Eshleman (2003) suggested that attribution-based justification strategies comprising the dominant ideology allow individuals to view stigmatization of others as appropriate because individuals are seen as responsible for their fate. For example, "belief in a just world" (Lerner, 1980) supports the notion that stigmatized individuals

**Figure 1**  
**Model of Temporary Worker Stigmatization**



get what they deserve and deserve what they get. The Protestant work ethic rests on the notion that hard work and determination lead to success (Katz & Hass, 1988). Subscribing to these dominant ideologies will lead to seeing stigmatized individuals as responsible for their societal status (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003).

Because these are dominant ideologies in the United States, we would expect that many individuals would typically see work status as controllable. However, there are factors that could lead others in the workplace to view an individual's work status as uncontrollable. For example, a temporary worker's self-disclosures regarding why one is not working in a permanent position (e.g., by choice, because of a layoff) may influence perceptions of controllability, as would general economic conditions and previous temporary employment by permanent workers. Thus, stigmatizing treatment will be greater to the extent to which permanent workers perceive work status as controllable. Compared to many well-researched stigmas (e.g., ethnicity, gender), there is likely greater variability in perceptions of controllability for work status of temporary workers and, hence, greater variability in whether stigmatizing treatment will occur.

*Perceived threat.* Realistic group conflict theory (Campbell, 1965) holds that when group interests are incompatible, less tolerance and more hostile behavior will occur (Sherif, 1966; Sherif, White, & Harvey, 1955). Based on this, perceived threat has been suggested to be a contributor to stigmatizing treatment (Crocker et al., 1998; Stangor & Crandall, 2000). An

organization's strategy regarding the externalization of work may affect the extent to which permanent workers perceive temporary workers as a threat. Temporary workers may be employed to (a) offer flexibility in dealing with fluctuations in demand (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Kalleberg, 2003), (b) allow an organization to reduce costs (Matusik & Hill, 1998; Wong, 2001), (c) add expertise or knowledge to the organization (Matusik & Hill, 1998), or (d) enable an organization to more effectively screen workers and then hire (for permanent jobs) the "best" temporary workers (Feldman et al., 1994; Hulin & Glomb, 1999). The underlying motive and strategy for employing temporary workers is likely to influence the extent to which permanent workers perceive these workers as a threat. For example, Kraimer, Wayne, Liden, and Sparrowe (2005) found that permanent employees who attributed the organization's use of temporary workers to cost control efforts, as opposed to efforts to increase organizational flexibility, perceived the temporaries as a greater threat. Using temporary workers to expand organizational expertise might also be viewed as a threat. For example, in the software industry, employing temporary workers with specific programming skills lacking in the organization can be viewed as indicating permanent employee obsolescence, leading to perceptions of threat. The strategy of using temporary workers on a trial basis for a permanent position within the organization, however, seems less likely to be perceived as threatening. Thus, we propose that perceptions of threat will lead to greater devaluation of temporary workers.

In comparison to models of stigmatization of other groups, perceived threat may exhibit more variability and play a greater role in the stigmatization of temporary workers. Although individuals may feel threatened by certain stigma (e.g., AIDS; Lee, Wu, Rotheram-Borus, Detels, & Guan, 2005), those attributes are less directly intertwined with one's work situation and hence may not elicit feelings of threat to one's job security to the same degree as temporary workers.

### *Characteristics of the Worker*

*Visibility of work status.* Drawing on Goffman's typology of stigma (1963), Crocker and colleagues (1998) suggested that the stigmatizing treatment received by an individual depends on the degree to which the stigmatizing characteristic is visible or concealable (see also Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller, & Scott, 1984). Being a temporary worker is often a highly visible or publicly known state in one's immediate workgroup as coworkers and supervisors are aware that an individual is a temporary employee. Furthermore, many workplaces employ "status reinforcers" that visibly convey temporary worker status to those in the broader organization. One temporary worker noted, "As a temp, I was required to wear this humiliating badge at all times while on the job. I can still hear the snickers I would get when walking into a conference room" (Kelly, 1997: 133). In their investigation of temporary workers in the petrochemical industry, Wells, Kochan, and Smith noted that "contract workforces dressed differently, [and] used separate entrances" (1991: 95). In addition to badges and attire, many temporary workers lack their own working space, and their nomadic movement from one office to another, depending on which permanent employees are absent on any given day, also serves to mark their status as "temps" (Rogers, 2000). We propose



that the treatment of temporary employees in a stigmatizing manner will be greater in settings where work status is more visible than in settings where status is less visible.

In terms of visibility, temporary work status may have some unique properties in comparison to other stigmas. That is, although many stigmatized characteristics are not mutable in terms of their visibility (e.g., gender, race), those that are not typically visible afford the individual the choice of revealing the existence of the stigmatized characteristic (i.e., sexual orientation, a mental disability). However, temporary workers may have little say in whether their characteristic is made more or less visible. This is an antecedent of stigmatization that may be heavily influenced by management policy in the case of temporary workers, whereas visibility of other stigmas would be relatively uninfluenced by managerial actions.

### *Characteristics of the Work Environment*

*Status composition.* Relational demography theory (Kanter, 1977; Mowday & Sutton, 1993; Pfeffer, 1983) would suggest that the composition of workgroups has implications for the treatment of individuals with minority characteristics within the workplace. Deitch, Butz, and Brief reviewed the literature and concluded, "Individuals who are sole representatives of their social group tend to be viewed stereotypically and subjected to greater scrutiny than those who are not so isolated" (2004: 208). This phenomenon has been demonstrated across a variety of characteristics including age, gender, and sexual orientation (Ely, 1995; O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Specifically, Ragins and Cornwell (2001) found that a higher proportion of gay and lesbian coworkers is associated with less reported sexual orientation discrimination. Similarly, the sexual harassment literature shows that women are subject to more discriminatory treatment in predominately male workgroups (Goldberg, 2001; Niebuhr & Oswald, 1992). Thus, we propose that temporary workers will be subject to greater stigmatizing treatment in workgroups in which there is a smaller proportion of temporary workers than in workgroups in which there is a greater proportion of such workers.

*Status-reinforcing climate.* The role of status in the organization climate is another environmental factor that may contribute to temporary employees experiencing stigmatizing treatment. Researchers have established that the psychological climate of the workplace affects individual job performance, well-being, and withdrawal (Carr, Schmidt, Ford, & DeShon, 2003; Ostroff, 1993; Parker et al., 2003). This line of research has noted that climates can be categorized along three dimensions—*affective*, *cognitive*, and *instrumental* (Ostroff, 1993). The *affective* facet concerns the extent to which the organizational climate emphasizes mutual support, warmth, friendliness, and social rewards. The *cognitive* facet concerns the emphasis on skill improvement, autonomy, and intrinsic rewards. The *instrumental* facet concerns whether the climate focuses on hierarchy and going through channels, formality and rules and procedures, achievement, and extrinsic rewards.

A key determinant of the extent of stigmatization of temporary workers in an organization is the role of power and status in the organization's climate. A temporary employee in an organizational climate with a strong instrumental focus, in which individuals defer to one another based on their status in the organization, may be one in which the "lowest rung"



nature of temporary work is made particularly salient. The affective facet of climate may also contribute to whether the climate is status reinforcing. Organizations with a climate of mutual respect and civil treatment of others may be ones in which temporary workers, despite any status difference, would not be mistreated or demeaned by others because of organizational norms regarding civility. We propose that treatment of temporary employees in a stigmatizing manner will be greater in settings possessing climates that reinforce status and de-emphasize civility than in settings with climates that de-emphasize status and promote civility.

Although organizational climate may play a role in stigmatizing members of many groups, the status-reinforcing aspect of climates will have a greater influence on the stigmatization of temporary workers because of the direct link between this dimension of organizational climates and the basis of the stigma. Furthermore, climate is likely to affect whether devaluing treatment is more overt than covert because more blatant acts will occur when the organization's culture and policies allow for, or even create, pressure to treat members of an out-group unfairly (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004).

## Stigmatizing Treatment

Neuberg, Smith, and Asher noted that treatment of stigmatized individuals can range from "affective and behavioral dismissal . . . to hate and genocide . . . more commonly, however, our reactions to those we stigmatize take the form of moderate dislike and avoidance" (2000: 32). Models of discrimination in organizations have also distinguished overt and covert acts (Dipboye & Halverson, 2004). Stigmatizing treatment can be overt, which would include direct statements regarding inferiority linked to one's work status (e.g., temporary workers are lazy) or other explicit manifestations of the stereotype. Other stigmatizing treatment is more covert, such as nonverbal expressions of discomfort or dislike (e.g., avoiding eye contact or appearing anxious in social interactions; Devine, Evett, & Vasquez-Suson, 1996; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002), social exclusionary behaviors (e.g., physically avoiding the individual or not inviting him or her to social functions), and withholding resources or information. Sociological research shows that temporary employees are subject to both forms of stigmatizing treatment (Rogers, 1995; Vosko, 2000; Williams, 2001). Consider this example:

The nontemporary employees usually ignore her, but it is almost as common for them to actively create barriers of silence, space or regulations to prevent her from interacting with them. Supervisors make no contact with her beyond their initial cursory instruction, talking in low voices to the permanent workers on either side of her, holding meetings from which she is excluded, and posting notices in areas where she, as a temp, is not allowed to go. (McAllister, 1998: 227)

Whether an individual will engage in more covert or more overt stigmatization of another is influenced by social norms regarding acceptability (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Halcon, 2005; Racusen, 2004). In the case of temporary workers, the organizational climate in terms of tolerance of overt stigmatizing treatment will be the most direct influence on whether treatment is overt or covert. Furthermore, even though both overt and covert treatment may be seen as stigmatizing, research

suggests that there are moderators of whether covert treatment is seen as attributable to one's stigma, a point we will discuss in subsequent sections. Thus, although overt treatment will likely be perceived as stigmatization, the relationship between treatment and perception of stigmatization for covert acts varies, a point to which we now turn.

## **Perception of Stigmatization**

“Virtually every person has experienced the alienation, rejection, exclusion, embarrassment, and feeling of separateness that comes from being different, devaluated, and demeaned” (Crandall, 2000: 6). Yet such perceptions do not automatically follow from poor treatment, as there must be a connection between the treatment and possessing an attribute (e.g., temporary work status) to feel stigmatized. We separate stigmatizing treatment (the actions of the stigmatizer) from the target's perception of stigmatization (attributing treatment to prejudice against one's group and feelings of the stigmatized in response to that treatment). That is, individuals do not always attribute treatment as relating to prejudice against their group, and therefore, treatment does not always lead to negative outcomes (see also Major et al., 2002, for a review). In instances where the stigmatizing treatment is overt and blatant, the treatment will be perceived as stigmatizing (see Major, McCoy, Kaiser, & Quinton, 2003, for a review; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). However, whether covert devaluing treatment by others leads temporary workers to attribute it to prejudice against their group or to something else is influenced by the factors discussed in the following sections.

### *Perceived Perpetrator Motive*

Crocker et al.'s (1998) discussion of stigmatization notes the important role of attribution in feelings of stigmatization. That is, one would not feel stigmatized if one attributes a perpetrator's behavior to something unconnected to the stigma. Crocker et al. (1998) stated individuals treated poorly may be unable to determine whether the treatment results from the perpetrator's prejudice or from other sources (e.g., perpetrator personality, contextual factor), and thus variability across individuals in attributions to prejudice arises. This attributional ambiguity influences whether a worker feels stigmatized. For a temporary worker, if devaluing treatment is attributed to something other than one's work status, the treatment would not be viewed as stigmatization. Note that blatant or overt acts of hostility will not produce attributional ambiguity regarding whether they are due to prejudice, but covert acts will lead to more varied attributions.

### *Justifiability*

The literature on stigma presents justifiability as a moderator of the relationship between experiencing covertly devaluing treatment and perceiving it as connected to a stigma. Major, Gramzow, McCoy, Levin, Schmader, and Sidanius (2002) noted that to see an event as stigmatizing, it must be perceived as unjust *and* due to group membership. Crocker and Major

(1994) noted that individuals might attribute treatment to one's social identity but not attribute that to prejudice. For example, a temporary employee might note that he is excluded from an office birthday celebration but sees that exclusion as appropriate treatment, rather than as stigmatization. Although exclusion from a birthday party may be interpreted as due to permanent workers' view of temporary workers, it may also be interpreted as due to the necessity of having someone working while the other employees are away. Thus, a temporary worker might view differential treatment as justified for reasons of maintaining organizational efficiency and effectiveness and not view such treatment as stigmatization. Note that overtly hostile treatment is likely to be seen as unjustified, whereas covert treatment may be viewed with varying degrees of justifiability.

One influence on whether treatment is seen as justified is the endorsement of status-legitimizing ideologies (Major, Gramzow, et al., 2002), which we mentioned earlier in the context of why individuals would stigmatize others. Major, Gramzow, et al. (2002) found that when faced with ambiguous discrimination, individuals who endorsed legitimizing ideologies were less likely to blame the rejection on prejudice relative to individuals who did not endorse legitimizing ideologies. Temporary workers who see status as an important differentiator in society will be less likely to see differential treatment of a covert and ambiguous nature as indicating stigmatization but will view it as justifiable treatment on the basis of status. Thus, we propose that temporary workers who interpret differential treatment as justified will not feel stigmatized.

Once again, we note that temporary workers may have some unique considerations relative to other groups that may be stigmatized in the workplace, in this case because justifiability is often reinforced by organizational policy. That is, it may be much easier to see poor treatment of a temporary worker as justified because many organizations operate on principles of differentiating by status (and they do not do so on the basis of other stigmas such as ethnicity, orientation, disability). Justification or legitimization of differential treatment of temporary workers is often made explicit by managerial policy and practice.

### *Stigma Consciousness*

To experience stigmatization, individuals must be aware of the negative stereotype others hold (Crocker et al., 1998). Pinel (1999) labeled the chronic awareness of one's stigmatized status and the perception that it regularly taints social interactions as an individual difference called *stigma consciousness*. Pinel has shown across a variety of stigmatized groups that individuals high in stigma consciousness see more discrimination directed at them personally and tend to interpret ambiguous negative feedback as due to prejudice (Pinel, 1999, 2004). Thus, being conscious of one's temporary status as a source of stigmatization will moderate the relationship between covertly stigmatizing treatment and perceptions of stigmatization, such that highly conscious individuals will be more likely to perceive stigmatization than those low in stigma consciousness. In addition, stigma consciousness can lead to perceptions of stigmatization when no stigmatizing treatment has occurred. Researchers have demonstrated that the expectation of attribution to stigmatization is greater for those high in stigma consciousness (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002;

Pinel, 2004), suggesting that temporary workers high in stigma consciousness may see coworker and supervisor behavior as stigmatization when others would not.

Of interest with regard to temporary worker stigmatization is how stigma consciousness develops and is maintained. Research on this topic has indicated this is a fairly stable individual difference but that it is influenced by experiences during one's life as a member of a stigmatized group (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pinel, 1999). However, one's status as a temporary worker can be quite short-lived (e.g., a stop gap employment while in-between jobs held for many years), and hence, such consciousness may not develop. For this reason, tenure as a temporary worker may come into play as an indirect influence on perceptions of stigmatization, through its effects on moderators such as stigma consciousness.

### *Group Identification*

Research on social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that the extent to which a group is important to an individual's self-definition and to which an individual feels attached influences social perception and behavior. Stigma researchers have found that highly identified individuals interpret ambiguous prejudice cues as discrimination (Operario & Fiske, 2001) as they rely to a greater extent on group-relevant domains for establishing their self-esteem (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Highly group-identified individuals will use their temporary status as a lens for event interpretation more often than those less identified. Thus, those for whom temporary status is a core part of their self-definition will be more likely to perceive stigmatization than those who do not feel strongly or positively about their temporary status. For example, research on boundary-less careers has noted that some individuals relish their identity as one independent from traditional work arrangements (Arthur, 1994).

Overt and blatant stigmatizing acts, however, will be labeled as stigmatization regardless of group identity because their intent is obvious; the moderating role of group identity comes into play for covert acts because of the attributional ambiguity of such treatment.

### *Work Status Congruence*

Another influence on whether stigmatization is experienced is work status congruence or the fit between an individual's preferred work status and actual work status. A key distinction in the literature on temporary employees is between boundary-less and traditional contingent employees (Marler et al., 2002). Research has established that whereas most temporary workers would prefer *not* to work as temporary workers, there is a boundary-less cluster who prefer temporary work and who also generally tend to be more skilled, earn higher wages, and have another income source. These individuals are sometimes referred to as "voluntary" temporaries (Ellingson, Gruys, & Sackett, 1998; Morrow, McElroy, & Elliott, 1994). Our model proposes that work status congruence may serve as a moderator of whether stereotypic treatment results in feeling stigmatized. Those temporaries who are boundary-less or voluntary temporary workers will have greater work status congruence and thus may be less likely to be concerned about workplace inclusion and the need to be accepted by permanent employees, making any devaluing treatment less of a concern.

Work status incongruence has also been highlighted in studies of temporaries with possibilities of permanent employment at their assignment or in temp-to-perm positions (Bauer & Truxillo, 2000; Sinclair, Radwinsky, & Brubaker, 2003). For example, Smith (1998) described how temporary workers seeking permanent status with an organization expressed anxiety about being associated with “bad” temporary workers, would not internalize the label of transient and untrustworthy workers, and emphasized their commonalities with permanent workers. This type of response is similar to an individualistic response to prejudice described by Branscombe and Ellemers (1998), where individuals distance themselves from a group as a means of coping with prejudice (Arndt, Greenberg, Schimel, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 2002; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Thus, temporaries seeking permanent positions at an assignment may have strong feelings of work status incongruence that affect their perceptions of treatment as stigmatizing.

## Consequences of Stigmatization

Perceiving stigmatization affects well-being and job-related affect and behaviors. We now consider these relations in addition to potential moderating effects.

### *Well-Being*

The well-being (i.e., psychological health) of those who have been stigmatized has been a focus of a great deal of research (for reviews, see Crocker, 1999; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002). Researchers have demonstrated that negative effects of being stigmatized on well-being can occur (McCoy & Major, 2003; Sheppard, 2002), but there has been considerable debate among stigma researchers regarding when these effects occur (for opposing views, see Crocker & Major, 1989; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). To clearly indicate that negative effects do not always occur, our model separates treatment and perception. Major, Kaiser, and McCoy (2003) suggested that attributing one’s treatment by coworkers to prejudice will protect well-being more than attributing the treatment to stable qualities of oneself, but not more so than if one could attribute the treatment to something purely external (Major, Kaiser, et al., 2003; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Thus, the effects of *perceiving stigmatization* on well-being is more negative compared to if the treatment is attributed to external causes. However, it is not as negative as if the treatment had been attributed to an internal cause. Consequently, if the treatment is perceived as stigmatization, well-being is affected.

### *Affective Outcomes*

Theory on job-related affect suggests that job events can influence affect-laden attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as well as more transient mood states (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Recent research suggests that coworkers are often the source of affective events at work (i.e., the source of happiness or frustration; Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002; Morgeson, 2005) and can influence job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Fisher, 2002). Three recent studies of stigmatized groups demonstrate that perceptions of discrimination

and exclusion are related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment for ethnic minorities and temporary workers (Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001; Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Donaldson, 2001; Williams, 2001). As these studies indicate that affect-laden attitudes are influenced by perceptions of stigmatization, we propose that treatment affects job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and mood through its effect on perceptions of stigmatization. Thus, perceptions of stigmatization will lead to lower job satisfaction and commitment to an organization and more negative mood states.

### *Behavioral Outcomes*

Behaviors of interest to organizational researchers include task performance, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), counterproductive behaviors, and withdrawal. Task performance would be successful completion of assigned duties, whereas OCBs would be engaging in assistance and cooperation beyond the role requirements. Counterproductive behaviors would include taking unwarranted breaks, purposeful dereliction in performing duties, theft, sabotage, and other forms of deviance (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). A temporary worker may withdraw through terminating the assignment prior to its official end, being unwilling to return to the same work location for another assignment, or being absent from the assignment. Researchers have acknowledged that task performance, OCB, and counterproductive behavior often have common antecedents, although there is some debate regarding how intercorrelated these behaviors are (Sackett, 2002; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000).

We anticipate that stigmatizing treatment will affect these behavioral outcomes through two paths—directly in response to attributing treatment to prejudice (i.e., perceiving stigmatization), but also indirectly through an influence on affective outcomes. With regard to the first path, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), leader-member exchange research (Hofmann, Morgeson, & Gerras, 2003), and psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1995) would suggest that individuals will be less willing to put forth effort in situations where they feel they are not being treated as they deserve (i.e., the social exchange is imbalanced or the psychological contract is unfulfilled). Furthermore, there is direct evidence to suggest that stigmatization affects the behavior of those stigmatized in terms of self-fulfilling prophecies (Jussim, Palumbo, Chatman, Madon, & Smith, 2000). For example, perceiving one is stigmatized in relation to a stereotype about intellectual competence relates to subsequent academic performance (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Because the cultural stereotype associated with temporary workers pertains to competence and motivation, fulfilling the stereotype would involve performing poorly. Models of stigmatization that build on a stress and coping framework also note how disengagement can be a behavioral response to stigmatization (Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Miller & Major, 2000). For example, researchers have demonstrated that withdrawal from stigma-related stressors is a response to sexual harassment or sexist treatment (Pinel, 1999). Thus, temporary workers who perceive they have been stigmatized may behave in ways to balance the social exchange or psychological contract or in a self-fulfillment of the prophecy of the stereotype.

With regard to the second path, affective events theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) suggests that performance decrements will be pronounced when negative emotions occur at

work and those emotions interfere with meeting one's job demands. The negative emotions associated with feeling stigmatized would use up resources needed for job performance and/or lead to responses incompatible with job demands. Thus, temporary workers who feel stigmatized are likely to have decreased performance because of their negative emotional state and the connections between job satisfaction and performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). Similarly, research has connected negative mood to absence (George, 1989) and AET would suggest direct connections to other immediate, work withdrawal behaviors. Recent research has also indicated that affect is an important predictor of both helping and counterproductive behaviors at work. Temporary workers, as well as permanent workers, who have positive attitudes toward the place where they are currently working, are more apt to perform organizational citizenship behaviors (Liden, Wayne, Kraimer, & Sparrowe, 2003; Moorman & Harland, 2002; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). Lee and Allen (2002) found that self-ratings of negative emotions at work contributed to the prediction of both coworker-rated OCBs and counterproductive work behaviors. Thus, temporary workers who perceive stigmatization will be more likely to show performance decrements, withdrawal behaviors, and counterproductive behaviors and less likely to engage in OCBs than those who do not experience stigmatization because of the relationships between affective outcomes and behaviors.

The stigma literature and the preceding discussion focus predominately on negative behavioral outcomes, but there is some investigation of engagement coping, whereby the individual attempts to either change the situation or adapt to the stressful event (Major, Quinton, McCoy, & Schmader, 2000; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). Pursing an engagement strategy of individual problem solving such as attempting to address treatment concerns with one's supervisor (Miller & Myers, 1998) is an example of more proactive coping behaviors. However, the literature on sexual harassment has shown that individuals are much more likely to engage in avoidance-denial or social coping types of responses than confrontation or advocacy seeking (Paetzold, 2004). Furthermore, Major et al. (2000) noted that targets will be less likely to invest in engagement strategies when the duration of the expected relationship with the perpetrator is brief, as is the case for many temporary work arrangements. Thus, it is likely that engagement responses would be less prevalent than disengagement responses among temporary workers.

### *Work Centrality*

Research based on social identity theory has indicated stigma is more stressful for people who see a threat to one's personal identity (Crocker & Quinn, 2000; Major & Kaiser, 2005; Major, Quinton, et al., 2002). Work centrality refers to the beliefs that individuals have regarding the degree of importance that work plays in their lives (Paullay, Alliger, & Stone-Romero, 1994). For temporary workers in jobs that provide little opportunity for the expression of skill, work may be less central, as Saunders (1981) has indicated that work is less central for those in stigmatized occupations. If a temporary worker derives much of his or her personal identity from work, however, stigmatization will have a greater impact on well-being, affect, and behavior than if work is not an important aspect of identity.



Deciding work is less central to identity can also be a coping response to stigmatization. Schmader and Major (1999) demonstrated that stigmatized individuals may selectively devalue domains on which they or their group fare poorly relative to others. For example, students coping with negative stereotypes related to their ethnicity are more apt to blame assessment tests as the reason for this difference and also devalue the importance of academic success (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). However, Schmader and Major (1999) also noted that low-status groups may not engage in this self-protective strategy because the domains of focus may be ones that are associated with important rewards in society. Hence, it may be interesting to explore when and why certain temporary workers may view work as less central to their identities.

### *Core Self-Evaluations*

Judge, Locke, and Durham (1997) developed a theory of core self-evaluations (CSEs), defined as basic conclusions about oneself and encompassing the traits of self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and neuroticism (see also Judge & Bono, 2001b). Support for the theory is derived from factor analytic and meta-analytic work that details the influence of one's CSE on subjective well-being, job satisfaction, and job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001a; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoreson, 2003). In addition, a recent study by Marcus and Schuler (2004) demonstrates a negative relationship between a similar construct, positive self-concept, and counterproductive behaviors and job dissatisfaction. Our model incorporates CSE as a moderator of the links between perceiving stigmatization and outcomes. Possessing a more positive self-evaluation will serve as a buffer for any negative effects of stigmatization on well-being, job satisfaction, and performance.

## **Implications**

The model presented has a number of implications. From a theoretical perspective, we have shown that many of the components of general stigmatization models are applicable to temporary workers—a group that has not previously been identified as stigmatized by researchers. We have also shown that certain organizational and structural factors in the work environment likely contribute to stigmatization of temporary workers. As a further contribution, we have explicitly discussed a set of important organizational outcomes not discussed in the stigma literature, positing when and how stigmatization of temporary workers may have organizational consequences via negative effects on worker attitudes and behavior. Finally, our model's uniqueness also lies in work status being both a stigmatizing characteristic and a fundamental organizer of life at work, indicating both greater potential intractability of this stigmatization because of the structures of organizations but also greater potential managerial influence on this type of stigmatization than on other stigmas less explicitly connected to the work setting.

Some elements of our model are likely applicable to better understanding how other stigmas (e.g., ethnicity, weight, sexual orientation) operate in the workplace. The central path of

the model (e.g., treatment to perception to outcomes) is likely to generalize to other workplace stigmas. However, the unique focus on work status as the stigmatized attribute and as a defining feature of identity in the workplace suggests that the role of certain variables and the strength of relationships would be unique to this workplace stigma.

Some areas for further research and expansion include considering the interplay of multiple stigmas, the role of time, and the generalizability of our model both cross-culturally and to other types of temporary workers. As we noted at the outset, temporary workers are more likely to be female and minority group members than permanent workers. Research on multiple stigmas has suggested that experiences are often a unique fusion of stigmatization based on multiple categories (Mecca & Rubin, 1999; Rush, 1998; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1995). A consideration of time might require adjustments to the model. For example, the extent to which detrimental effects occur as a result of stigmatization may be affected by employee tenure. We do not think tenure is a straightforward moderator because an employee might perceive stigmatization in even a short-term assignment and might have his or her affect, well-being, and behavior influenced by even short-term exposure to stigmatization (Santuzzi & Ruscher, 2002). It is possible that as a temporary worker's tenure within a *single* organization increases, interactions with permanent employees result in positive influences on some of the moderator variables in our model such as perceived perpetrator motive or justifiability. However, court cases involving coemployment issues related to temporary worker tenure (e.g., *Vizcaino v. US Dist. Court, 1999 citing Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co. v. Darden, 1992*) may lead organizations to implement policies limiting the tenure of temporary workers.

The model presented here may need refinement to be applicable cross-culturally and across other types of temporary jobs. The literature drawn on regarding stereotypes of temporary workers was largely United States based. Furthermore, the dominant ideology in cultures outside the United States is likely to differ and hence play a different role in perceptions of justifiability of stigmatization. Similarly, although this article and much of the literature on which it is based, focused largely on temporary workers hired via agencies, many other jobs, such as seasonal work, independent contracting, and even some types of consulting, are also characterized by the ephemeral nature of the job relationship but may differ in important ways (e.g., job level, pay, tenure) that require modification or expansion of the current model. Thus, we caution blind application of this model cross-culturally or to other types of jobs considered "temporary."

A final area for potential model expansion relates to engagement coping strategies as a behavioral response to stigma. As noted earlier, there is insufficient research on how stigmatization affects work behavior. In particular, although theories on affect and behavior at work would suggest some negative behavioral outcomes from stigmatization, there is a need to examine when a temporary employee might adopt a more proactive, problem-solving strategy in response to being stigmatized by coworkers. An examination of when temporary employees complain to supervisors or to agencies regarding treatment, when they attempt to directly confront stigmatizers, and when larger concentrations of temporary workers may engage in collective action in response to stigmatization are all areas awaiting exploration.

In terms of implications for practice, temporary agencies, client organizations, and managers have the power to alleviate or better manage some of the conditions that lead to the stigmatization

of temporary workers. Temporary agencies can raise client organization awareness of the consequences of stigmatizing treatment as well as help temporary workers cope with stigmatizing treatment in the workplace. Organizations can focus on removing unnecessary status-reinforcers that serve to make temporary workers' status more visible. Making explicit the organization's commitment to its core workforce will help to reduce any threat to job security perceived by permanent workers. Managers also can help to alleviate stigmatization by promoting civility and respect and investing effort into integrating temporary workers. Yet, attempts to reduce stigmatization via contact are unlikely to have the same effects for temporary work status that they might with other stigmatizing characteristics because status is an inherent differentiator in the workplace. Attention should be given to ensure that differential treatment of temporary workers is justified by clarifying boundaries of necessary differentiation versus acts of differentiation rooted in stereotypes that have no business justification. Furthermore, there are many forces that work to maintain stereotypes that are not under managerial control, including high levels of prejudiced attitudes (Sherman, Stroessner, Conrey & Azam, 2005), behavioral confirmation (Snyder & Klein, 2005), backlash (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), and interpersonal communication (Lyons & Kashima, 2003).

We proposed this model with the hope of spurring research on stigmatization of temporary workers specifically, but also more generally on the treatment of those of lower workplace status. We hope that the "permanent loser" label and devaluation of low-status workers receives greater public acknowledgment, and ultimately, greater organizational attention as an undesirable state of affairs.

## Note

1. "Temporary Worker, Permanent Loser?" is the original title of an article appearing in *Newsweek* (Rybicki, 2003).

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