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Beliefs About Affirmative Action and Diversity and Their Relationship to Support for Hiring Policies

Christopher L. Aberson*
Humboldt State University

Sarah C. Haag
Humboldt State University

Two hundred seventy-three White undergraduates participated in an investigation of how beliefs relate to support for affirmative action (AA) policies. Beliefs included belief in the fairness of AA, belief in merit, and belief in the value of diversity. Analyses predicted support for a general affirmative action policy, a tiebreak policy, and a policy using banding from beliefs and individual-level variables such as future benefit from AA and demographics. For the general policy, each belief predicted support for AA. Fairness and value of diversity predicted support for a tiebreak policy. Value of diversity predicted support for aptitude testing. Individual characteristics improved prediction for AA in general but not for tiebreak policy or aptitude testing. We discuss predictions and results in terms of procedural and distributive justice, fairness heuristic theory, and models of support for AA.

Affirmative action policies began in the United States in 1965 with Executive Order 11246. Since that time, affirmative action (AA) has become a near constant source of controversy. Despite the controversy, AA remains federal law, meaning that many organizations must implement such policies. Unfortunately, reactions to affirmative action policies are often negative.

This article explores factors influencing support for affirmative action. We add belief in merit and valuing of diversity to a model of support for AA proposed by

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christopher L. Aberson, Department of Psychology, Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA 95521 [e-mail: cla18@humboldt.edu].

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Kravitz and Klineberg (2000). This model includes beliefs relevant to affirmative action such as the fairness of AA, and self-relevant beliefs such as how one is personally affected by AA and demographics.

We assessed reactions to a general, undefined AA policy and two specific hiring policies. The first policy utilized a tiebreak procedure favoring African Americans over Whites with equal qualifications. The second policy portrayed the use of aptitude testing. All applicants achieving a specific score (or higher) on a job skills test received employment offers regardless of ethnicity. This policy is a form of banding wherein all the applicants in the top band are considered equally qualified.

Affirmative Action Beliefs and Policy Support

Kravitz and Klineberg (2000) proposed a model of support for affirmative action that guides many of our predictions and analyses. Two major categories, beliefs relevant to affirmative action and individual characteristics, comprised the model. Beliefs included perceived fairness of policies, prevalence of discrimination, and anticipated actions taken by affirmative action policies (i.e., how policies work). Individual characteristics included beneficiary status (i.e., recipient or not), personal variables such as political orientation and experiences with discrimination, and demographic characteristics such as age, education, and gender. Our primary contribution to this model was the addition of beliefs about merit and the value of diversity.

Affirmative Action Beliefs

There are a number of beliefs that justify support for and opposition to affirmative action. Crosby (1994) presented perceived need for AA, effectiveness, and fairness as sources of opposition. Plous (1996) suggested several affirmative action myths. These include beliefs that AA is not necessary or useful; that AA is a failure and is no longer supported; that affirmative action policies (AAPs) require hiring of unqualified candidates (i.e., oppose merit); that AAPs are damaging to minorities, and minorities should be able to succeed without AA; that policies discriminate against and hurt Whites; and that policies serve a political agenda. Edley (1996) proposed correcting effects of past discrimination, preventing future discrimination, and increasing diversity as justifications for AA, and unfair discrimination against Whites and a compromised value of merit as justifications for opposition.

Based on this list, we chose to examine three beliefs associated with AA: belief in the fairness of AA, belief in merit, and belief in the value of diversity. The first question addressed by this research was whether items designed to measure these beliefs comprise three relatively independent constructs. More centrally, we

examined the relationship between these proposed beliefs and support for AA in general, tiebreak policy, and aptitude testing (banding).

It is important to distinguish between beliefs about policy actions and general beliefs. Anticipated policy actions, in terms of ratings of the likelihood of specific actions under affirmative action (e.g., causing employers to hire unqualified applicants) and evaluations of the desirability of these actions, relate to AA (Bell, Harrison, & McLaughlin, 2000; Kravitz & Platania, 1993). When individuals believe undesirable policy actions are common to AA, support for AA is reduced. Although anticipated actions do predict support, we did not include these in our study.

Fairness

The relationship between perceptions of the fairness of affirmative action policies and the level of support for AA is well established. Perceptions that affirmative action is unfair are associated with opposition to the policy (Kravitz, 1995; Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000; Taylor-Carter, Doverspike, & Alexander, 1995). Those who view affirmative action as unfair might do so because they perceive a violation of procedural justice principles (Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998). Procedural justice refers to perceptions of the fairness and consistency of procedures associated with decisions (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). If some groups (e.g., minorities, women) benefit from affirmative action whereas some are disadvantaged as a result (e.g., White men), a consistency violation is produced. Violation of consistency principles results in perceptions that procedures are unfair, leading to opposition to the policy.

Tiebreak policies often use ethnicity to break ties between equally qualified candidates. Respondents may consider the preferential selection of African Americans under this policy to be unfair (Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000). Tiebreak policies may violate procedural justice beliefs in that minority and/or gender status is an advantage for some groups but a disadvantage for others (Bobocel et al., 1998).

Our aptitude testing policy uses criteria unrelated to ethnicity. Because this policy does not violate procedural justice principles, we expect no relationship between fairness and support for aptitude testing.

> *Hypothesis 1*: Perceptions that affirmative action is fair relate positively to support for AA in general and tiebreak policy.

Merit

We define merit in terms of beliefs about the role that candidate abilities and qualifications should play in hiring decisions. Individuals who endorse merit believe that qualifications and ability should be the only deciding factors in hiring

and promotion. Belief in merit serves a distributive justice function. Distributive justice refers to perceptions of the fairness of the distribution of resources or outcomes (Adams, 1965). Related to affirmative action, distributive justice violations occur when opportunities are not allocated to the most meritorious (e.g., Nacoste, 1987).

Several studies have examined the role of merit in predicting support for AA and perceptions of AA beneficiaries. Stronger beliefs in merit (e.g., "people who do their job well ought to rise to the top") relate to opposition to affirmative action policies (Bobocel et al., 1998). Studies examining the reactions toward AA recipients indicate that recipients are perceived as less qualified than nonrecipients. For example, female employees that participants rated as likely to have received their current position because of affirmative action policies received poor competence ratings (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992), and minority graduate school applicants received worse evaluations when raters learned that the graduate program had specific AA goals for admissions (Garcia, Erskine, Hawn, & Casmay, 1981). Another study focused on reactions to different forms of affirmative action. Participants evaluated applicants hired under one of three AAPs and a merit-based policy. Participants rated the candidate as most competent when merit was the only hiring criteria (Heilman, Battle, Keller, & Lee, 1998, Study 2). The above studies suggest that individuals often view affirmative action as incompatible with merit.

Merit issues deal with qualifications. Both the tiebreak and aptitude testing policies portrayed in this study establish applicants as qualified. Examining tiebreak policies, Bobocel et al. (1998, Study 2) found no relationship between belief in merit and opposition to tiebreak policies, a finding that suggests that selection among equally qualified candidates does not violate distributive justice concerns (but see Heilman et al., 1998). Our tiebreak policy comprised a procedural justice violation but not a distributive justice violation; we did not expect merit to predict support for this policy. Our aptitude testing policy used objective criteria that are unrelated to ethnicity. This policy does not violate distributive justice, so we expected no relationship between belief in merit and support for aptitude testing.

Hypothesis 2: Belief in merit relates negatively to support for AA in general.

Value of Diversity

Individuals may support affirmative action because they believe the outcomes of AAPs, such as increases in diversity, are valuable. A concern for increased diversity may reduce concerns about procedural and distributive justice violations. Here the focus is on outcomes, irrespective of the selection process or qualifications.

Research from organizational and educational settings indicates that experiences with diversity are valuable. Organizational diversity can improve the

creativity and quality of work-group decision making (McGrath, 1984) and provide competitive advantages for organizations dealing with a diverse clientele (Perloff & Bryant, 2000; Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994). In addition, in educational settings, interactions with ethnic minorities lead to increased personal growth and intellectual development among White students (Suinn, 2001).

Also relevant to outcome-related evaluation is fairness heuristic theory (e.g., van den Bos, Wilke, Lind, & Vermunt, 1998). Fairness heuristic theory suggests that a focus on outcomes affects procedural and distributive justice concerns. For example, van den Bos, Vermunt, and Wilke (1997) found that participants' perceptions of justice depended on when they learned about procedures and outcomes. When participants learned about selection procedures first, they rated accurate employee selection procedures (i.e., procedurally justified) and the distribution of outcomes (i.e., distributive justice) resulting from these procedures as more fair than inaccurate procedures. However, when favorable outcome information preceded information about procedures (e.g., participants learned they were selected before they learned about procedures), participants did not differ in their ratings of the fairness of procedures or outcomes between the accurate and inaccurate conditions. Fairness heuristic theory further suggests that procedural information and distributive information are most important when outcome information is absent (Lind, Kulik, Ambrose, & de Vera Park, 1993). When outcomes are favorable, it seems that individuals care less about procedural or distributive deficiencies. Evidence such as this indicates that concern for outcomes can override justice-based concerns.

We suggest that belief in diversity focuses individuals on affirmative action outcomes, namely, increases in diversity. As such, support for favorable outcomes in terms of increased minority hiring should be consistent across policy evaluations. Regardless of policy, those individuals who recognize the potential benefits of diversity should indicate greater policy support.

> *Hypothesis 3*: Valuing diversity relates positively to support for AA in general, tiebreak policy, and aptitude testing.

Additional Beliefs

Belief in the prevalence of discrimination is central to support for AA. Those who do not believe that discrimination exists do not support policies designed to remedy discrimination (Jacobson, 1985; Kluegel, 1985; Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000; Kravitz et al., 2000).

> *Hypothesis 4a*: Belief in the prevalence of discrimination relates positively to support for AA in general.

In the evaluation of support for specific policies, perceptions about whether the company described is discriminating are likely to be more relevant than general

beliefs regarding the prevalence of discrimination.

Hypothesis 4b: Perceptions that the company portrayed is discriminating relate positively to support for tiebreak policy and aptitude testing.

Individual-Level Variables

Experience of Discrimination

Whites with experiences as targets of discrimination are more likely to oppose affirmative action policies (Kravitz et al., 2000). Other studies, however, found that personal experiences of discrimination were unrelated to support for general and specific affirmative action programs for White respondents (Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000). In both studies, participants answered questions about their experiences as targets of workplace discrimination (e.g., not receiving a job offer or promotion). Perhaps more relevant is whether participants attributed the discrimination to affirmative action. Only when Whites perceive discrimination as resultant from AA should the discrimination experience relate to opposition to AA.

Hypothesis 5: Individuals who believe that they have experienced discrimination resulting from affirmative action support AA in general, tiebreak policy, and aptitude testing less than individuals who have not experienced discrimination.

Future Benefit

Individuals who believe that they can benefit from affirmative action in the future indicate greater support for AA (Kravitz, 1995; Summers, 1995). Although Whites often perceive less benefit from AA than minorities do in terms of increases in job opportunities, Whites may perceive benefits in terms of job satisfaction and general happiness. Whites who recognize benefits related to job satisfaction and happiness indicate greater support for affirmative action (Aberson, in press). Similarly, when evaluating specific AAPs (e.g., banding), individuals who thought that they would benefit from the policy indicated greater support for it (Truxillo & Bauer, 1999).

Hypothesis 6: A perception of future benefit from affirmative action relates positively to support for AA in general, tiebreak policy, and aptitude testing.

Political Orientation

Liberals are more likely to support affirmative action policies than are conservatives (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996).

Hypothesis 7: Liberals support AA in general, tiebreak policy, and aptitude testing more than nonliberals.

Gender

There is some evidence that women support AAPs more than men (e.g., Kravitz & Platania, 1993). Given the focus of this study on race-based policies, we provide no predictions regarding gender. We include gender in our analyses to provide information about the relationship between gender and support for race-based policies.

Comparing Support Across Policies

We expect support for AA in general to differ from support for tiebreak policy and aptitude testing. Opposition to AAPs is greater when policies are vague and unjustified, but lessened when the policy is more specific and justified (Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Drout, 1994). Additionally, those who view AA as involving a quota system that requires hiring of minorities regardless of qualifications show less support for AA (Golden, Hinkle, & Crosby, 2001). Both policies in this study provide a specific affirmative action plan and make explicit that only qualified applicants receive employment offers. Following from these findings, we predict:

Hypothesis 8: Support for tiebreak policy and support for aptitude testing both exceed support for AA in general.

Method

White undergraduates ($n = 273$) enrolled at a state university ($n = 187$) or a private college ($n = 86$) participated either in groups or individually in exchange for extra credit. The sample was predominantly female (71.1%) and traditional college age ($Mdn = 20$).

We first assessed reactions to affirmative action in general. Instructions directed participants to think generally about the policy called affirmative action. The instructions provided no policy details and indicated that even though many policies affect women, the participant was to respond in terms of opinions regarding race-based AAPs. A single item that asked participants to indicate agreement with AAPs (1 = *disagree completely* to 7 = *agree completely*) served as the support measure. We developed an 11-item affirmative action and diversity belief scale to measure beliefs about the fairness of AA, the role of merit in AA decisions, and the value of diversity. Participants indicated agreement with items on a 7-point scale (1 = *do not agree at all* to 7 = *agree a lot*).

The belief in the need for affirmative action measure (discrimination) was a single item stating that "Affirmative action may have been necessary 30 years ago, but the playing field is fairly level today" (1 = *do not agree at all* to 7 = *agree a lot*).

We included two measures of AA impact. The first item asked if the participant believed that he or she was ever denied opportunity because of AA (experienced discrimination). The original variable included three response categories: yes, no, and do not know. These categories were coded into a new variable (0 = *no/don't know,* 1 = *yes*). The second impact variable (future benefit) asked respondents to indicate how much they felt they could benefit from AA in the future (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a lot*). Although both items measured self-relevance, we analyzed them separately because participants may perceive future benefit or harm resulting from AA regardless of whether they experienced discrimination attributable to AA.

One item asked participants to indicate political leanings (1 = *liberal*, 2 = *conservative*, 3 = *middle of the road*, 4 = *other*). Those respondents classifying themselves as liberal were compared with all others in the regression analysis (0 = *not liberal*, 1 = *liberal*). Gender was measured with a single item (0 = *men*, 1 = *women*).

A subset of participants (n = 185) evaluated a tiebreak policy and an aptitude testing policy. Each policy included a short description and indicated that the policy succeeded in increasing minority representation. The tiebreak policy used ethnicity to break ties between equally qualified candidates, with African American candidates receiving preference. To ensure that participants associated each policy with AA, instructions indicated that each description was of a recently implemented AA program. We counterbalanced presentation of the policies so that 89 participants rated tiebreak policy first and 96 participants rated aptitude testing first. The full description of the tiebreak policy read as follows:

> Company X was compelled by a court order to increase African American representation in its sales force. As of 1997, the sales force included only 1% African Americans employees. Candidates were ranked according to their qualifications. From this pool of applicants, the company was instructed to use race as a "tiebreaker." If two candidates were equally qualified, then the company was to offer the job to the African American applicant. In no situation was the company compelled to hire unqualified applicants. As a result of these hiring procedures, African Americans now comprise 22% of the sales force.

The aptitude testing policy used an objective test to measure relevant skills, with job offers made to all applicants attaining a specific minimum score on the test. Despite the portrayed effectiveness of the aptitude testing procedure, this approach may not achieve goals of increasing minority representation, as minorities often score lower on standardized tests unless results are race normed (Sackett & Wilk, 1994). The description of the aptitude testing policy follows:

> In 1996, Company Y, a large accounting company, was compelled by a court order to implement an affirmative action program. Prior to program implementation, nearly 30% of all applicants for positions were African American; however, only 2% of the applicants hired were African American. The company argued that most of the African American candidates were not qualified. In response to this claim, the court ordered the company to implement aptitude testing and accounting accuracy and problem-solving tests for each applicant. Candidates were to be hired based exclusively on test results. For every set of

applicants, the top 25% of scorers on the tests were offered jobs. Applicant race was not a consideration in hiring decisions. In 1999, as a result of the new hiring procedures, the percentage of African American employees at the company had risen to 20%.

Two items served as the support measure for each policy. Participants indicated agreement with each policy (1 = *disagree completely* to 7 = *agree completely*) and how likely they would be to support this type of policy (1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *very likely*). We combined items for each policy to produce measures of support for the tiebreak policy ($\alpha = .93$) and aptitude testing ($\alpha = .93$). Another item asked participants to rate how typical each portrayal was of AA (1 = *not at all typical* to 7 = *very typical*).

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis examined whether the 11 items from the affirmative action and diversity belief scale fit the three proposed factors: fairness of AA, belief in merit, and value of diversity. The analysis eliminated three cases due to missing data and identified five cases as multivariate outliers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), leaving 263 cases. Table 1 presents the items' wording, means, standard deviations, and correlations. An oblique model fit the data well, confirming the proposed factor structure, $\chi^2(38) = 79.6$, $p < .001$; χ^2: $df = 2.1$,CFI = .97, GFI = .95, RMSEA = .06. This result suggests that our 11 items measured three distinct, but correlated, factors.

For each factor, we constructed a composite variable by adding scores on each indicator together. Each subscale was adequately reliable. We referred to these composite variables as fairness (4 items; $\alpha = .90$), belief in merit (3 items; $\alpha = .76$), and value of diversity (4 items; $\alpha = .78$). Table 2 presents correlations between these composites and the other predictors.

Predicting Support for General Affirmative Action

A two-step hierarchical regression analysis predicted support for affirmative action from the belief variables (step 1) and the individual variables (step 2). Table 3 summarizes the results of the regression analysis. Support for AA correlated positively with the perceptions that AA is fair and diversity is valuable, and negatively with belief in merit. These findings are consistent with Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Hypothesis 4a received mixed support: Prevalence of discrimination and support for AA were not related in the regression analysis; however, the variables produced a significant negative zero-order correlation.

The second step in the regression analysis entered the individual-level variables. These variables significantly improved prediction; however, the incremental

Table 1. Affirmative Action and Diversity Belief Scale Items, Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Items

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. A larger percentage of White workers will lose out if affirmative action is continued.	3.8	1.7										
2. Affirmative action is unfair to Whites.	3.9	1.8	67									
3. Affirmative action gives an unfair advantage to minority groups.	3.9	1.8	60	76								
4. Affirmative action punishes White job candidates.	3.3	1.8	68	77	68							
5. People should be hired based exclusively on ability.	6.0	1.2	27	37	35	35						
6. Race doesn't affect how people do their jobs so it shouldn't affect hiring.	5.2	1.8	23	37	46	34	37					
7. It is unfair to base hiring decisions on any factor other than merit.	5.5	1.6	38	46	51	47	63	61				
8. Employers benefit from diversification of historically segregated jobs.	4.8	1.7	−35	−34	−36	−39	−20	−27	−27			
9. Employers may benefit from hiring ethnically diverse candidates through affirmative action.	4.9	1.5	−37	−38	−49	−43	−20	−28	−36	62		
10. Minority individuals have abilities that may differ from nonminority individuals. Because abilities and experiences differ, minority employees can be very valuable to employers.	4.7	1.6	−26	−33	−38	−32	−14	−16	−23	41	56	
11. Contact with individuals of different ethnicities is a valuable experience.	6.1	1.3	−27	−25	−32	−36	−15	−12	−18	43	44	39

Note. Decimals omitted in table for correlations. All correlations above .12, $p < .05$. All correlations above .15, $p < .01$.

change in R^2 (.06) was small in relation to the R^2 for the full model (.50). When the steps were reversed, the individual-level variables explained considerably more variance, $R^2 = .31$. This result suggests that the belief variables mediated most of the influence of the individual variables (also see below). Past experiences of discrimination correlated negatively with support for AA, and perceptions of future benefit related positively to support—findings that are consistent with Hypotheses 5 and 6. A positive correlation between liberalism and support is consistent with Hypothesis 7. Women showed more support for AA than men did.

Table 2. Ranges, Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Predictor Variables

	Range	*M* (%)	SD	1	2	3	4	5a	5b	6	7	8
1. Fairness of AA	4–28	17.1	6.2									
2. Belief in merit	3–21	16.6	3.9	−52**								
3. Value of diversity	4–28	20.4	4.7	51**	−34**							
4. Belief in the need for affirmative action	1–7	3.3	1.7	−45**	39**	−42**						
5a. Is tiebreak company discriminating?	0 = No 1 = Yes	45		43**	−29**	48**	−34**					
5b. Is aptitude testing company discriminating?	0 = No 1 = Yes	55		18*	−25**	31**	−17**	21**				
6. Experienced discrimination?	0 = No 1 = Yes	16		−31**	13*	−22**	11	13	11			
7. Future benefit?	1–7	2.4	1.5	38**	−34**	26**	−26**	17*	09	−20**		
8. Liberal	0 = No 1 = Yes	35		32**	−19**	23**	−19**	17*	02	−02	05	
9. Female	0 = No 1 = Yes	71		20**	−08	21**	−10	17*	09	−05	23**	06

Note. Decimals omitted in table for correlations. Descriptive statistics based on sample of $n = 265$, except for 5a and 5b ($n = 175$). Here we present individual significance values as *n*s differ between correlations. Percentage values correspond to percent indicating a yes response.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression of Support for General Affirmative Action and Two Portrayals of Affirmative Action on Predictors

	General Policy		Tiebreak		Aptitude Testing	
	β	r^a	β	r^a	β	r^a
Fairness of AA	25**	60**	24**	53**	12	20*
AA opposes merit	−23**	−52**	−04	−34**	06	−12
Diversity valuable	13*	45**	17*	50**	26**	33**
Belief in the need for affirmative action	−06	−39**	−09	−40**	−02	−18*
Is company discriminating?	n/a	n/a	28**	51**	29**	36**
R^2 change	44**		41**		19**	
	(19**)[b]		(29**)[b]		(21**)[b]	
Experienced discrimination?	−13**	−31**	−02	−16**	07	−03
Future benefit?	22**	46**	−03	20*	−05	04
Liberal	07	25**	05	25**	−13	−04
Female	−03	13*	03	19*	−06	02
R^2 change	06**		00		02	
	(31**)[b]		(13**)[b]		(00)[b]	
R^2 model	50**		42**		21**	

Note. Decimals omitted.
[a]Zero-order correlation. [b]R^2 values with steps reversed. General policy, $df(8, 256)$. Tiebreak and aptitude testing, $df(9, 165)$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Mediation Analyses. To examine the presence of mediation effects, we conducted a path analysis, utilizing the individual-level variables as predictors and the belief variables as mediators. This analysis yielded several estimates. The first estimate is the total effect of the predictor on the dependent variable. The total effect is analogous to the zero-order correlation between the predictor and the dependent measure. For this analysis, the total effect refers to the independent relationships between support for AA in general and each of the predictors. The presence of a total effect indicates a relationship between the individual-level variable and support for AA. As shown in Table 4, there were significant relationships between support and future benefit, experienced discrimination, and liberalism. The second estimate is the direct effect of the variable. The direct effect is analogous to the standardized regression weights (betas) found in a hierarchical regression analysis. A significant direct effect indicates that the variable made a significant contribution to prediction within the model. The final estimate is the indirect effect. The indirect effect tests for mediation. A significant indirect effect means that the belief variables significantly mediated the relationship between the individual-level variable and support for affirmative action.

The belief variables significantly mediated the relationship between support for AA in general and each of the individual-level variables producing significant total effects. Future benefit and denied opportunities produced significant direct paths, indicating that the belief variables only partially mediated these relationships. For liberalism, the direct effect was not significant, indicating that

Table 4. Mediation of Individual-Level Variables Presented Through Effect Decomposition

	Total	Direct	Indirect
General AA			
Experienced discrimination?	−26**	−15**	−11**
Future benefit	41**	22**	18**
Liberalism	23**	07	15**
Gender	02	−03	05*
Tiebreak AA			
Experienced discrimination?	−17**	−04	−13**
Future benefit	14**	−03	17**
Liberalism	25**	05	20**
Gender	14**	03	11**

Note. Decimals omitted.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

the variable's impact on support for AA was almost completely mediated by the belief variables.

Predicting Support for Tiebreak Policy and Aptitude Testing

Regression analyses similar to those that predicted support for the general policy also predicted support for each affirmative action policy. Fairness related positively to support for the tiebreak policy, a finding that is consistent with Hypothesis 1. There was a significant negative zero-order correlation between belief in merit and support for the tiebreak policy. However, this relationship disappeared when entered into the regression analysis. Participants endorsing the value of diversity showed greater support for both policies, a finding that supports Hypothesis 3. The perception that the company discriminated against African Americans also associated with greater support for each policy, a finding that is consistent with Hypothesis 4b.

The second step entered the individual-level variables. None of these variables significantly improved prediction in the regression analysis; however, several significant zero-order correlations existed. Support for tiebreak policy related negatively to experiences of discrimination, and positively to future benefit and liberalism—findings that partially support Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7. However, experiences with discrimination, perceptions of benefit from AA in the future, and liberalism were unrelated to support for aptitude testing—findings that are contrary to Hypotheses 5, 6, and 7. Women showed greater support for the tiebreak policy, but not for the aptitude testing policy. In both cases, when steps were reversed, the belief variables explained more variance than did the individual-level variables.

Mediation Analyses. For the tiebreak policy, we performed the same path analyses as outlined in the previous section with one addition. The belief variables

in this analysis also included perceptions of whether the organization was discriminating. The belief variables significantly mediated the relationship between support for the tiebreak policy and each of the four individual-level variables. For each variable, no significant direct effect remained after controlling for the belief variables. We did not perform this analysis for the aptitude testing policy, because there were no significant zero-order correlations between the individual-level variables and support for aptitude testing, indicating that there was no effect to mediate (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Comparison of Policies

A MANOVA using Bonferroni-adjusted mean comparisons indicated that support differed between policies, Pillai's $F(2, 176) = 53.0$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$. Support for the general policy ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 1.6$) did not differ from the tiebreak policy ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.6$), $p = .98$, a finding that is contrary to Hypothesis 8. The aptitude testing policy ($M = 5.3$, $SD = 1.4$) received greater support than the general policy and the tiebreak policy, ps $< .001$—findings that are consistent with Hypothesis 8. Ratings of typicality of the two policies revealed that participants viewed the tiebreak policy ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 1.3$) as more typical of AA than aptitude testing ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.9$), $t(177) = 4.2$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$.

To examine the influence of order of presentation on support for tiebreak policy and aptitude testing, we conducted a 2 (policy) $\times$ 2 (order) MANOVA with repeated measures on the first factor. A significant order effect emerged, indicating that support for policies was higher when tiebreak policy preceded aptitude testing, $F(1, 176) = 5.3$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .03$. No interaction between order and support existed, $F(1, 176) = 2.2$, $p = .14$, $\eta^2 = .01$. The absence of an interaction indicates that order effects did not differentially influence support for policies.

In light of the order effects above, we reevaluated the analyses of support for the tiebreak and aptitude testing policies. For both analyses, we added four variables representing order and the two-way interactions between order and the primary belief variables (fairness, belief in merit, and value of diversity). The first step of the regression analysis included order and the three interaction variables, followed by the belief variables in the second step and the individual-level variables in the final step. Neither order nor any of the interactions produced significant beta weights. Although order did influence support for policies, order did not differentially influence prediction in the regression analyses.

Discussion

We examined the relationship of belief in the fairness of affirmative action, belief in merit, belief in the value of diversity, and individual-level variables to support for AA in general, tiebreak policy, and aptitude testing policy. We found

belief in the fairness of AA and belief in merit to be relatively independent. This division reflects a broader distinction between procedural justice and distributive justice issues. Fairness refers to procedural justice concerns such as equal treatment for members of all ethnic groups (e.g., Leventhal, 1980). Belief in merit may enact concerns regarding distributive justice such as providing unearned opportunities or opportunities that are out of line with qualifications (e.g., Beugré & Baron, 2001).

Individuals who perceived affirmative action as fair supported AA in general and tiebreak policy more than individuals who perceived AA as unfair. This result is consistent with research on fairness perceptions and support for AA (e.g., Kravitz, 1995; Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000; Kravitz et al., 2000; Taylor-Carter et al., 1995). However, fairness did not predict support for the aptitude testing policy. Aptitude testing involved objective selection, suggesting that addressing issues of procedural justice reduces opposition to hiring policies. Respondents rated aptitude testing as the least typical of affirmative action. The increased support and lower typicality ratings found for the aptitude testing policy suggest that objective criteria may increase support for policies, but these criteria are not often associated with AA.

Belief in merit referred to beliefs that employers should base hiring decisions exclusively on ability. Belief in merit predicted opposition to AA in general but was unrelated to support for tiebreak policy or aptitude testing. Although it is tempting to suggest that the absence of a relationship between belief in merit and support for these policies resulted from making explicit that employers were not required to hire unqualified applicants, other interpretations are plausible. There was a significant correlation between belief in merit and support for the tiebreak policy, suggesting that overlap with other variables reduced the strength of this relationship.

Those who valued diversity indicated greater support for all policies. Although, to our knowledge, this result has not been empirically examined before, it dovetails with literature from the field of organizational psychology that highlights the benefits of organizational diversity (e.g., Chemers, Oskamp, & Costanzo, 1995). Belief in diversity may produce support for affirmative action in an "end justifies the means" manner. Diversity beliefs predicted support regardless of policy, suggesting that procedural and distributive justice did not influence the relationship between belief in diversity and support for the individual policies. A fairness heuristic theory interpretation suggests that individuals concerned with diversity may focus on AA outcomes rather than procedure or distribution. Future research should investigate the impact of diversity beliefs on predicting support for stronger and more controversial forms of preference (e.g., set-asides).

Individual characteristics predicted support only for AA in general and were weaker predictors of support than belief variables. Additionally, beliefs largely mediated the effects of the individual variables. The only important

individual-level predictors were those related to personal relevance (future benefit and past discrimination). Those who felt that they had lost opportunities in the past due to affirmative action and those who felt that they could gain less from affirmative action in the future indicated less support for AA in general. This finding suggests a central role for beliefs, but not for individual characteristics, in predicting support for AA.

Implications

Organizations may benefit from the consideration of beliefs that predict support for specific AAPs. For example, organizations utilizing tiebreak selection procedures could emphasize the importance of diversity to the organization and the selection of qualified applicants as strategies to improve support for the policy. Organizations using procedures involving aptitude testing could emphasize the importance of diversity and focus on the procedurally justified aspects of selection procedures such as the logic behind the test measurement (e.g., Truxillo & Bauer, 1999).

A focus on the fairness of procedures, stressing that only qualified employees are hired, and, again, addressing the value of diversity to organizations may enhance support for affirmative action in general. Although these factors differed from those related to specific policies, it is important to note that predictors of support for AA in general may also predict reactions to any AAP if the individual knows little about policy specifics (e.g., employment ads indicating the employer's use of affirmative action).

Limitations

An obvious limitation to this study is reliance on a college-student sample. Affirmative action concerns can be salient to students because many have experienced competitive college admission procedures. However, students' knowledge and experiences with AA may differ from those of a more general population. Further compounding this limitation is the fact that we did not specify whether participants should respond to questions in terms of employment opportunities, educational opportunities, or both. Several of the measures specifically addressed reactions to AA in employment; this is problematic because reactions to employment AA may differ from reactions to educational AA.

Ethnicity, social class, and age are important predictors of AA attitudes (e.g., Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000; Kravitz et al., 2000). The homogeneity of the current sample made inclusion of these items impossible.

Another limitation concerns the single-item measure of support for AA in general. This measure does not establish a reliable estimate of support. Future investigations should use a multi-item instrument.

Finally, although beliefs related to support for AA, it is important to recognize that only the fairness items specifically addressed affirmative action. Belief in merit referred to beliefs about hiring practices in general. Beliefs regarding the value of diversity referred to a general belief about the world. These different levels of abstraction (e.g., AA level, employment in general, societal) limit interpretation of the results. We, however, view these distinctions as important in informing attempts to influence support for affirmative action.

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CHRISTOPHER L. ABERSON is currently assistant professor of psychology at Humboldt State University. He earned his PhD at the Claremont Graduate University in 1999. His research interests include intergroup relations and interactive tutorials for teaching core statistical concepts.

SARAH C. HAAG is a Humboldt State University undergraduate. In fall 2003, she will begin a counseling psychology PhD program at the University of Iowa.