The relation between political ideology and attitudes toward affirmative action among African-Americans: The moderating effect of racial discrimination in the workplace

Yitzhak Fried, Ariel S. Levi, Steven W. Billings and Kingsley R. Browne

ABSTRACT
Survey data from two samples of African-American students supported the hypothesis that the association between political ideology and attitudes toward affirmative action (AA) is moderated by the experience of workplace discrimination. Specifically, ideology was associated with support for AA, but only among individuals who had not experienced discrimination. Among these individuals, egalitarians, who view fairness in terms of group equality, were more supportive of AA than were individualists, who view fairness from the perspective of the individual. Conversely, among individuals who had experienced discrimination, ideology was not related to attitude toward AA: support was high and approximately equal regardless of ideology. Findings were interpreted in terms of Referent Cognitions Theory (Folger, 1986).

KEYWORDS
affirmative action • attitudes • discrimination • egalitarianism • ideology • individualism • racial discrimination

Over the past 30 years, organizations have enacted affirmative action (AA) programs to remedy past discrimination and increase demographic diversity...
in their workforces. Affirmative action programs (AAPs) share the central feature of taking ascribed characteristics (i.e. race or sex) into account in employment practices such as hiring or promotion.

Ever since its inception, AA has been controversial. People generally agree with the primary goal of AA: that of improving the opportunities of historically disadvantaged groups. However, opinion has been sharply divided over the means by which AA attempts to achieve this goal. In particular, AAPs that entail the preferential hiring or promotion of target group members, i.e. minorities and women, often elicit disapproval, especially among nontarget group members, i.e. white males (e.g. Bunzel, 1986; Kravitz, 1995; Sniderman & Carmines, 1997; Tuch & Martin, 1997). Even target group individuals, who stand to benefit from such programs, tend to be ambivalent toward them (e.g. Barnes Nacoste, 1990; Carter, 1991; Tougas & Veilleux, 1988).

In organizational contexts, negative attitudes toward AA on the part of either nontarget or target group individuals can hinder the effectiveness of AA efforts. Recent attention has focused primarily on how white male resistance toward AA and diversity programs can hinder the success of these programs (e.g. Harrington & Miller, 1992; Mobley & Payne, 1992; Solomon, 1991). Much less attention, however, has focused on the attitudes of minorities and women toward AAPs (Sigelman & Welch, 1991; for reviews see Taylor, 1994, and Turner & Pratkanis, 1994). This is unfortunate, because target group members’ attitudes toward AA are likely to have a major influence on the effectiveness of AAPs. In particular, the association of AA with stigma and tokenism, on the part of both beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries (e.g. Barnes Nacoste, 1990; Carter, 1991; Clayton & Crosby, 1992; Heilman et al., 1992; Kossek & Lobel, 1996; Maio & Esses, 1998; Steele, 1990; Turner & Pratkanis, 1994), has been identified as a problem in the implementation of AAPs. Anecdotal accounts as well as systematic studies have shown that target group members frequently become disillusioned with AA and skeptical of its benefits (e.g. Gamson, 1999; Nazario, 1989; cf. Cose, 1993; Hochschild, 1993; Steinhorn & Diggs-Brown, 1999; Tougas & Beaton, 1992), presenting an obstacle to organizations attempting to increase demographic diversity in their workforces. Given the importance of attitudes toward AA, it is important to understand the sources and dynamics of these attitudes.

In the present study, we investigate the determinants of attitudes toward AA among African-Americans, who constitute one of the major groups affected by AA. We focus in particular on the relationship among political ideology, self-interest, and support for AA. Consistent with previous literature, we propose that ideology plays a key role in affecting attitudes
toward AA. However, we also propose that the link between ideology and attitude toward AA is more complex than has previously been suggested, and that personal experience of racial discrimination in the workplace plays a crucial moderating role in this link.

The importance of ideology as a potential predictor of attitudes toward AA has become particularly apparent in recent decades. The steady increase in the size of the African-American middle class has been associated with an increase in the diversity of political beliefs among this group. Although the majority of African-Americans identify with a politically liberal perspective, there has been a slow but steady shift toward political conservatism among a substantial minority of this group. Recent surveys indicate that approximately 30 percent of black Americans identify themselves as political conservatives (Tate, 1993). Black opposition to federal assistance for minorities has more than quadrupled, from 6 percent in 1972 to 28 percent in 1988 (Tate, 1993). Moreover, the shift toward conservatism has been more pronounced among younger than older blacks. As political pluralism among African-Americans grows, greater divergence in attitudes toward controversial social policies such as AA can be expected to increase (e.g. Conti & Stetson, 1993; Riley, 1995; Tuch & Martin, 1997).

In the following sections, we offer a theoretical rationale for the linkage between political ideology and attitudes toward AA, and summarize previous research on this linkage. Drawing on Referent Cognitions Theory (Folger, 1986), we propose a contingent relationship among ideology, personal experience of racial discrimination, and attitude toward AA. The results of our study help explain inconsistencies in previous research findings, and have implications for organizational implementation of AAPs.

Political ideology and attitudes toward AA

Attitudes toward AA are associated with race and sex, with minorities and women in general being more favorable toward AA than are white males (e.g. Arthur et al., 1992; Bobo & Smith, 1994; Fine 1992; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Kravitz et al., 1997; Schuman et al., 1997; Taylor, 1991). This is not surprising, and has often been explained on the basis of self-interest. However, because attitudes toward AA have been shown to vary significantly even within each race and sex (Taylor, 1991; Tougas & Velleux, 1989), other variables are likely to affect these attitudes as well.

Several researchers have suggested that attitudes toward AA are strongly influenced by whether AA is perceived as fair (e.g. Barnes Nacoste, 1990, 1992; Taylor, 1991). The perceived fairness of AA, in turn, is influenced by
political ideology, the system of beliefs and values concerning the relationship between the individual and society. Ideology can be represented along a continuum ranging from individualism to egalitarianism (e.g. Rasinski, 1987; Taylor, 1991). Individualism, which is consistent with political conservatism, views fairness from the perspective of the individual. In this system, equal opportunity and the principle of rewarding individuals according to their merit take precedence. Individualists believe that the government’s role should be limited to ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunity, whether or not this results in equal outcomes.

Consequently, as Crosby (1994: 34) has stated, AA ‘poses a threat’ to the ideal of individualism. Individualists would tend to view AA as unfair on two counts: first, because it is perceived to treat people as members of categories or groups rather than as individuals; second, because it is perceived to emphasize equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity.

Egalitarianism, which is consistent with political liberalism, views fairness from the standpoint of group outcomes and the collective good of society. The allocation of outcomes according to equality or need is important in this system. Egalitarians tend to believe that ensuring formal equal opportunity is insufficient to offset the effects of prior discrimination and inequality in the distribution of resources. Therefore, it is legitimate for the government to promote equality of outcome by intervening on behalf of disadvantaged groups. Consequently, egalitarians should support AA as a means of ensuring greater equality between privileged and disadvantaged groups (cf. Wildavsky, 1991).

Given the foregoing, it seems reasonable to expect a linear relationship between ideology and attitude toward AA, such that the stronger the belief in egalitarianism, the more favorable the attitude toward AA, and the stronger the belief in individualism, the less favorable the attitude toward AA. Empirical support for this relationship, however, has been mixed. Arthur et al. (1992), for example, found no significant association between ideology (individualism–collectivism) and perceived fairness of AA in several racial-ethnic groups (African-Americans, Hispanics, East Asians and whites). Similarly, Kravitz (1995) found that ideological variables (i.e. belief in access to opportunities in the USA, belief in individual causation of success, belief in system causation of success) were unrelated to general attitudes toward AA in samples of African-American, Hispanic and white students.

Sniderman and Piazza (1993) reported that among white survey respondents, attitudes toward government policies for ‘ensuring fair treatment of blacks in employment’ were not correlated with a cluster of values associated with individualism (i.e. valuing excellence, competition and making money; being self-defining and original).
In contrast, Kluegel and Smith (1986) found that stratification beliefs (e.g. that America is a meritocracy) among whites were a good predictor of attitudes toward AA. Sidanius et al. (1996) found that support for AA was higher among self-identified liberals than conservatives and among Democrats than Republicans. Similarly, Taylor (1991) found that ideology (liberalism–conservatism) was associated with attitudes toward AA, with liberals being more favorable toward AA. However, the strength of this association differed across groups, being stronger among white males than among African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians. Using national election survey data, Kinder and Sanders (1996) found that although egalitarianism was associated with support for government help in ending discrimination and in spending funds to improve the conditions of blacks, it was not associated with attitudes toward preferential AA policies.

In a survey study, Sniderman et al. (1991) found that respondents who identified themselves as liberals were more favorable toward AA than were those who identified themselves as conservatives. Interestingly, liberals and conservatives did not differ in the value they placed on the goal of AA, helping minorities. Instead, the link between political ideology and attitude toward AA was accounted for by differences in liberals’ and conservatives’ general beliefs about the proper role of government. Conservatives disapproved of AA primarily because they perceived it to be an excessive and unwarranted intrusion of government into the private sphere. A more recent set of survey studies supported this interpretation (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997).

The inconsistencies among these studies’ findings may be explained in part by differences in the sampling of subjects and the selection and measurement of variables (Sniderman et al., 1993). For example, although the different measures of ideology in these studies generally tapped the central individualism–egalitarianism dimension, several of them also included other dimensions that may have obscured the link between this central dimension and attitudes toward AA. In addition, comparison of the findings across studies is difficult because in several cases (e.g. Sidanius et al., 1996; Sniderman et al., 1991; Taylor, 1991) categorical measures of ideology (e.g. liberal vs conservative) or of proxies for ideology (e.g. Democratic vs Republican party preference) were used, rather than continuous measures. Nevertheless, when associations between ideology and AA attitudes have been found, egalitarianism has always been associated with greater support of AA than has individualism. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: Among African-Americans, political ideology (individualism–egalitarianism) will be associated with attitudes toward AA, with egalitarianism being associated with higher support for AA.
Main and moderating effects of experienced racial discrimination

Discussing the weak associations between ideology and attitudes toward AA, Schuman et al. (1997) suggested the need to explore attitudinal or individual difference variables that might moderate the effects of ideology. In this regard, one potential explanation for the inconsistent findings described above is that the effects of ideology may be overridden by sense of deservingness. Specifically, when target group individuals see themselves as deserving to benefit from AA, they may support AA regardless of their ideology (cf. Arthur et al., 1992; Graves & Powell, 1994). This sense of deservingness, in turn, is likely to be strongest when the individual has been discriminated against in the workplace. Thus, Eberhardt and Fiske (1994) suggested that blacks may be more favorable to AA to the extent that past discrimination has led them to feel entitled to policies that protect their civil rights or remedy the effects of discrimination. This reasoning follows from Referent Cognitions Theory (RCT: Folger, 1986), which specifies the conditions under which resentment, sense of grievance, and related emotions will arise. Briefly, RCT asserts that individuals are sensitive to both distributive and procedural justice, and will become resentful when they believe that they would have received more favorable outcomes if the reward allocator had followed the procedures he or she should have followed.

Personal experience of racial discrimination in the workplace leads to precisely this ‘would/should’ condition, and is thus likely to elicit resentment and a sense of deservingness. Specifically, African-Americans will experience resentment if they believe that employment discrimination has prevented them from obtaining the career outcomes they would have obtained – and therefore deserve – had discrimination not occurred.

In addition, it is not uncommon for individuals who have been discriminated against to generalize their experience to the group level. Thus, minority individuals may view their personal experiences as representative of what other members of their group experience in society at large (Dion, 1986; Tougas et al., 1991). Consequently, for those who have experienced discrimination, AA will be viewed as fair because it promises to restore victims and their groups to their ‘referent’ outcomes - the outcomes they would have obtained in the absence of discrimination. Therefore:

Hypothesis 2: Among African-Americans, experience of racial discrimination will be positively related to support for AA.

We further propose that the effect of African-Americans’ ideology on attitude toward AA will be contingent on the experience of racial
discrimination. Among egalitarians, experience of discrimination is likely to provide additional support for their prior tendency to support AA. Among individualists, experience of discrimination is likely to reduce their prior tendency to view AA as unfair, thereby increasing their support of AA. Consistent with RCT, insofar as individuals view AA as a mechanism aimed at restoring outcomes that they deserve and would have attained had they not been discriminated against, they will perceive it as justified. Therefore, those who have experienced racial discrimination, regardless of their ideology, are more likely to support AA. In support of this argument, Tougas et al. (1991; cf. Tougas & Beaton, 1992) found that women managers and professionals who were initially opposed to preferential AA policies came to support these policies after they had experienced discrimination or ineffective AA programs in their work organizations.

In contrast, African-Americans who have not experienced racial discrimination in the workplace are likely to have a lower sense of deservingness. Under these conditions, differences in political ideology should be more strongly related to attitudes toward AA. Thus we expect the following two-way interaction effect:

Hypothesis 3: Among African-Americans, the association between ideology and attitude toward AA (higher egalitarianism relating to higher support for AA) will be stronger among those who have not experienced racial discrimination in the workplace than among those who have experienced such discrimination in the workplace.

Method
Sample and procedure

The sample consisted of two separate samples of employed African-American students attending a large midwestern university located in a major industrialized urban area. The students were employed by a wide range of organizations in the metropolitan area.

The study was part of a larger project on perceptions of, and attitudes toward, AA and diversity programs in organizations. Over the previous two and a half years, surveys were distributed to students enrolled in 21 different university courses. Surveys were completed during class sessions. Although the university is known for its attempt to recruit African-American students, both the percentage and absolute number of such students is still relatively small, requiring a relatively long period of time to collect sufficient data for the study. Although students of all ethnic backgrounds received surveys, several items were specifically relevant to, and were answered only
by, African-Americans. Respondents were assured that their responses would be anonymous and confidential.

The two samples differed in the timing of survey administration and in the academic background of the students. Data from the first sample (N = 59) were collected during the first year of the two-and-a-half-year data collection period; data from the second sample (N = 76) were collected during the following one and a half years. The first sample consisted of students who majored in either management or psychology. In contrast, the second sample consisted of students majoring in a wider variety of disciplines, including management, management information systems, marketing, accounting, finance, labor/industrial relations, law, instructional technology, political science, psychology, public administration, nursing administration, pharmacy, criminal justice, and education. In the first sample, 37 of the respondents were undergraduate students, 20 were graduate students, and 2 did not provide information on their major. In the second sample, 55 were graduate students; the remaining 21 were undergraduates.

In both samples the majority of respondents were female. Of the 59 respondents in the first sample, 47 (80%) were female; of the 76 participants in the second sample, 52 (68%) were female. The mean age of the respondents was 29.8 years (SD = 7.4) and 31 years (SD = 6.87) for the first and the second samples, respectively. A total of 38 of the 59 respondents in sample 1 (64%) worked full-time, 8 (14%) worked part-time, 11 (19%) were not working at the time but had worked before, and 2 (3%) failed to provide information in this category (although their responses indicated work experience).

In the second sample, 51 of the 76 respondents (67%) were working full-time, 13 (17%) were working part-time, and 12 (16%) were not working at the time, but had worked before. The mean length of work experience was 11.8 years (M = 10; SD = 9.5) and 12.9 years (M = 12; SD = 7.25) for the first and second samples, respectively.

With respect to the survey, the measure of experienced discrimination in the workplace differed between the first and second samples. In the first sample, this measure was dichotomous; in the second sample, it was continuous (see full explanation below). In addition, the order in which the political ideology and attitude toward affirmative action scales were presented differed between the two samples. In the first sample, the ideology scale was presented first; in the second sample it was presented second.
Measures

**Political ideology**

Ideology was measured by 11 items from Rasinski (1987), 2 items from Taylor (1991), and 2 items developed by the authors for this study. Each of these items stated a belief or value representing either the individualistic or the egalitarian ideology. Examples include: ‘Despite barriers to success such as discrimination, almost anybody can succeed if she or he tries hard enough’ (individualism); and ‘We need public policies to reduce inequality of income between talented and less talented people who try equally hard’ (egalitarianism). The full measure is presented in the Appendix. Responses to each item were on a 9-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree). Items were scored so that higher scores represented higher egalitarianism. Although Rasinski considered individualism and egalitarianism to be two separate but correlated dimensions, he also suggested that they could be treated as a single bipolar factor, as we did in this study. Coefficient alphas were .63 and .69, for samples 1 and 2, respectively.

**Experience of racial discrimination in the workplace**

In the first sample, we measured experience of racial discrimination in the workplace by the dichotomous item, ‘Have you personally ever been discriminated against at your workplace on the basis of race?’ Respondents could answer either no (scored 0) or yes (scored 1). A total of 30 respondents (51%) reported experiencing no racial discrimination at work while the remaining 29 respondents reported experiencing such discrimination. We subsequently modified this item to make it continuous. Thus in the second sample, experience of racial discrimination was measured by the item, ‘To what extent have you personally been discriminated against at your workplace on the basis of race?’ (1 = to no extent; 9 = to a very great extent). On this scale, 6 respondents (8%) reported not experiencing any racial discrimination, while the remaining 70 respondents (92%) reported experiencing some work-related racial discrimination (i.e. chose scale points 2–9).

Following the item on discrimination was another item requesting respondents who had experienced workplace discrimination to briefly describe the incident (or the most significant incident) of discrimination. The purpose of this latter item was to lead the respondent to respond on the basis of specific evidence of discrimination rather than on the basis of a general impression. Of the 29 respondents in sample 1 who reported experiencing racial discrimination, 18 (62%) described specific incidents of such discrimination. Similarly, of the 70 respondents in sample 2 who reported
experiencing racial discrimination (i.e. answered from 2 to 9 on the response scale), 45 (64%) described specific incidents as requested.

Interestingly, there was a strong association between respondents' rated severity of racial discrimination (on the 9-point scale) and their likelihood of describing specific incidents of discrimination. Respondents who indicated low levels of experienced racial discrimination at work were much less likely to describe any specific incidents of racial discrimination than were those who indicated high levels of discrimination. The percentage of respondents who described specific incidents of discrimination, according to their rating of the severity of discrimination, were: 0 of the 8 respondents who rated the severity as 2; 2 of the 7 (29%) who rated the severity as 3; 3 of the 6 (50%) who rated the severity as 4; 13 of the 15 (87%) who rated the severity as 5; 7 of the 8 (88%) who rated the severity as 6; 10 of the 13 (77%) who rated the severity as 7; 7 of the 8 (88%) who rated the severity as 8; and 3 of the 5 (60%) who rated the severity as 9.

Examples of reported incidents of racial discrimination in sample 1 were: ‘I was just as qualified as a white crew person who got the job’; ‘I was told I was not in line for a position because I didn’t fit the mold of the White Club’; ‘Promotion was delayed until a “black” position became available’; ‘White male manager with less seniority was paid more than I was for the same job description’; ‘I worked for a manager who made it very obvious that he didn’t like blacks. He would make sarcastic remarks’; ‘Racist remarks and attitudes by white clientele’.

The following are some incidents of racial discrimination described by sample 2, according to the respondents’ rating of severity on the continuous scale (1 = discriminated against to no extent; 9 = discriminated against to a very great extent). Low level: ‘I have been called racist names for no reason’ (extent 3); ‘Subtle questions regarding my capability. Blamed for things I did not do obviously based on race’ (extent 4). Medium level: ‘I was overlooked when it came to assigning leadership positions’ (extent 6); ‘No matter what I did, I had to perform twice as hard as whites to be considered a good worker’ (extent 6). High level: ‘I was laid off while a white boy with a poor attendance record, poor performance review, and less seniority than myself was allowed to continue his employment with the company’ (extent 8); ‘I was passed over for a promotion after returning early from maternity leave to fill in vacant position until a white less qualified person was hired’ (extent 8); ‘I was recently demoted because of race’ (extent 9).

**Attitude toward AA**

Attitude toward AA was measured by four items, three from Taylor (1991) and one developed for this study. The items tapped opinions on the efficacy
and fairness of AA as a general policy: (1) ‘Affirmative action promotes equal opportunity in hiring’; (2) ‘Affirmative action helps organizations by increasing the racial and gender diversity of their workforces’; (3) ‘In the long run, affirmative action will reduce tensions between racial groups and between gender groups’; (4) ‘On balance, affirmative action benefits society.’ Responses were on a 9-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree). Items were scored so that higher scores represented a more favorable attitude toward AA. Coefficient alphas for the scale were .69 and .57 for samples 1 and 2, respectively.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, estimates of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach alpha) and correlations among the variables for both samples. The descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicated similar ideological preferences in both samples (M and SD were 6.24, .94; 6.19, .94, for sample 1 and sample 2, respectively). However, sample 2 showed a significantly higher level of support for AA (M = 6.57; SD = 1.35) than did sample 1 (M = 5.95; SD = 1.78), t(133) = 2.32, p < .05.

Hypothesis 1 was supported, as indicated by the correlations of .22 (p < .05, one-tailed) and .37 (p < .05, two-tailed) between ideology and AA attitude in the first and second samples, respectively. These correlations show that, as expected, a higher level of egalitarianism was associated with a higher level of support for AA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among ideology, experienced discrimination, and attitude toward affirmative action (AA) for samples 1 and 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample 1</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ideology</td>
<td>6.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrimination</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA attitude</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 2</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ideology</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrimination</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA attitude</td>
<td>6.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Alpha reliabilities appear in the diagonal.
*p < .05, one-tailed; **p < .05 two-tailed.
The correlations also indicated partial support for Hypothesis 2. Specifically, experience of work-related discrimination and attitude toward AA were positively correlated ($r = .28; p < .05$, two-tailed) in the second sample. In the first sample, the correlation between the two variables ($r = .14$), though also positive, failed to reach statistical significance. However, this may be explained by the fact that in this sample, experienced racial discrimination was measured by a dichotomous scale, rather than a continuous scale, as in sample 2.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test for the interaction effect predicted in Hypothesis 3. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 2. After entering the main effects of ideology and experienced racial discrimination at the workplace at step 1, we entered the crossproduct (ideology x discrimination) at step 2. In both samples 1 and 2, there was a significant increase in $R^2$ at step 2 ($p < .05$) of 8 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

We examined the form of the ideology by experienced racial discrimination interaction for sample 1 by regressing attitude toward AA on ideology separately for the two groups (i.e. those who had reported experiencing racial discrimination at their workplace and those who had not) and plotting the regression line for each group. The resulting regression lines are presented in Figure 1.

Table 2  Summary of hierarchical moderated multiple regressions evaluating the moderating effect of experienced discrimination on the relationship between ideology and attitude toward affirmative action (AA) for samples 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor(s)</th>
<th>Sample 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Predicted $R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ Change</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>Unstandardized regression coefficient$^a$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ideology × discrimination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$0.0714^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.135*</td>
<td>.079*</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$-0.1106^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$0.1010^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>.234*</td>
<td>.070*</td>
<td>.202</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$-0.145^*$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Derived from the full moderated multiple regression equation.

*p < .05.
To illustrate the nature of this interaction for sample 2, following Cohen and Cohen (1983), we used the derived regression weights and constant from the full moderated regression equation obtained at step two to plot the regression of attitude toward AA on ideology at three representative levels of experienced discrimination: one standard deviation below the mean (-1 SD), at the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean (+1 SD). The resulting regression lines are presented in Figure 2.

As Figures 1 and 2 indicate, the results were consistent with Hypothesis 3. Specifically, Figure 1 shows a clear positive association between ideology and support for AA among those who had not experienced discrimination, such that the higher the belief in egalitarianism, the higher the support for AA. In contrast, among those who had experienced racial discrimination, ideology and support for AA were essentially unrelated, and support for AA was relatively high regardless of ideological preference.

Similarly, Figure 2 shows that the association between ideology and support for AA was strongest among those who had experienced the least discrimination, intermediate among those who had experienced an average level of discrimination, and essentially nonexistent among those who had experienced the most discrimination. Again, in the latter group support for AA was relatively high regardless of ideological preference.

**Discussion**

The results help elucidate the relationship between ideology and attitude toward AA among African-Americans, and provide a parsimonious explanation of previous inconsistencies in the literature. Whereas some prior studies have found a link between ideology and support for AA, others have found this link to be nonexistent or weak. Consistent with some previous findings, in the present study we found weak (sample 1) and moderate (sample 2) correlations between these variables. However, our results suggest that the link between ideology and attitude toward AA is moderated by the intended beneficiaries’ experience of work-related racial discrimination, which should theoretically be associated with their sense of deservingness.

Specifically, the results show that in the two samples, ideology was associated with attitudes toward AA, but primarily among those individuals who had not experienced racial discrimination in the workplace. As expected, among these individuals, egalitarians were substantially more favorable toward AA than were individualists. However, the experience of being discriminated against appeared to override the effects of ideology.
Figure 1
Plot of the moderating effect of experienced discrimination on the relationship between ideology and attitude toward affirmative action (sample 1).

Legend:
- ■ No experienced discrimination (N = 30)
- ● Yes experienced discrimination (N = 29)

IDEOLOGY
More egalitarian
6.50
6.00
5.50
5.00
4.50
4.00

ATTITUDE TOWARD AA
7.00
6.50
6.00
5.50
5.00
4.50
3.50
4.50
8.00
Figure 2  Plot of the moderating effect of experienced discrimination on the relationship between ideology and attitude toward affirmative action (sample 2)
Among those who had experienced discrimination, ideology was not associated with attitude toward AA. Rather, support for AA was about equally high regardless of ideology (see Figures 1 and 2). As the Figures indicate, the support for AA among egalitarians was very high, suggesting the possibility of a ceiling effect in this group. Because ceiling effects make interactions more difficult to obtain, the observed current interactions are all the more impressive.

These results are consistent with RCT, which predicts that individuals' sense of grievance, and by implication deservingness, will be strongest when they have been harmed by unfair procedures. Although we did not measure sense of deservingness directly, it is reasonable to assume that experience of racial discrimination in the workplace will elicit or be closely associated with sense of deservingness. In fact, many of the respondents' descriptions of incidents of racial discrimination strongly implied a sense of deservingness. For example, several respondents described actions they had taken to mitigate or remedy the discrimination. For example, one respondent wrote that after his co-workers had made racist remarks to him in an effort to rattle him and disrupt his work, he had complained to his manager and requested that he 'rectify the situation'. Another respondent wrote that after he had applied for a promotion in the company, his boss denied him a raise because for racial reasons he wanted to 'keep him in his place'. The respondent filed a legal action and won. Such actions strongly imply a sense of deservingness on the part of the respondent — that some remedy or compensation is needed to 'make the respondent whole'.

To examine the association between experienced racial discrimination and sense of deservingness more systematically, we coded each description of discrimination according to whether or not it strongly implied a sense of deservingness. A description was coded as implying a sense of deservingness if: (1) it included an action taken by the respondent to remedy the effects of a discriminatory action in the workplace; or (2) it described a clear case of disparate and unfair treatment on the basis of race (i.e. a case in which a negative work-related outcome was given on the basis of race), and stated or strongly implied what a fair (i.e. nondiscriminatory) outcome would have been. An example of a description meeting the former criterion is contained in the previous paragraph. Examples of descriptions meeting the second criterion are: ‘A white male manager with less seniority was paid more than I was for the same job description’ and ‘I was more qualified for a managerial position but another crew person who was white got the job.’

Independently, the authors coded each description for sense of deservingness. Interrater reliability was high. The authors gave identical codings to 17 of the 18 descriptions given by the first sample of respondents, and to 41
of the 45 descriptions given by the second sample. Disagreements were resolved by discussion. Sense of deservingness was stated or implied by 67 percent of the descriptions given by the first sample, and by 62 percent of those given by the second sample.

To determine whether sense of deservingness tended to increase with the perceived severity of the discrimination, we divided the descriptions given by the second sample into ‘high’ (respondent rated discrimination as 6 or higher on the 9-point scale) versus ‘low’ (respondent rated discrimination as 5 or lower on the 9-point scale) perceived discrimination categories. The proportion of descriptions that stated or implied a sense of deservingness was 50 percent (9/18) in the low discrimination group and 70 percent (19/27) in the high discrimination group. This difference in proportion, though not statistically significant (chi square = 1.91), suggests that the greater the perceived severity of discrimination, the more likely that sense of deservingness will arise.

In RCT terms, victims of discrimination are likely to perceive that they have unfairly been allocated ‘below-referent’ outcomes – outcomes that are worse than those they would have received had fair procedures been used (cf. Folger, 1986). It follows that AA, a policy directed at remedying discrimination, would be viewed as fair, because it would restore to the victims of discrimination the outcomes that they perceive they deserve.

A potential limitation in interpreting the results is that the variables were all measured by one method, self-report. This raises the possibility that common method variance could in part account for the results. In addition, there may be some conceptual overlap among the variables. In particular, egalitarians may be more aware of, more sensitive to, or simply more willing to report racial discrimination in the workplace than are individualists. However, the fact that ideology and experienced racial discrimination had an interactive effect on attitude toward AA suggests that any simple explanation based on monomethod bias or conceptual overlap of variables is likely to be inadequate. Similarly, because the order of presentation of the ideology and attitude toward AA measures was opposite over the two samples, any explanation of the relation between these two variables based on priming also appears to be inadequate.

Another important issue to consider is that the measure of attitudes toward AA does not explicitly define AA. In particular, the items do not specify the strength of AA (i.e. the extent to which ascribed characteristics are taken into account in employment decisions). However, we believe that our sample - African-American employees in a large metropolitan area - shared an understanding that AA entails a fairly large weight given to ascribed characteristics. This understanding is prevalent among the large
industrial firms that dominate the metropolitan area, and consequently employees’ perceptions of AA in the region. In addition, this understanding of AA has been reinforced by the media attention to AA during the 1990s, which generally assumes that AA entails substantial weight given to ascribed characteristics.

Another limitation of the study is the relatively small size of the samples. Nevertheless, two considerations bolster our confidence in the validity of the results. First, the data from the two samples were collected over a span of two and a half years, during which the salience of AA as a political issue varied considerably. Whereas the data from the first sample were collected well before AA became a prominent political and social ‘wedge issue’, most of the data from the second sample were collected after the 1994 Republican capture of Congress, which brought criticism of AA to the fore. In spite of the shift in political climate that occurred over the time span of the study, the pattern of results for both samples was very similar. This supports the robustness of the findings across time and context. Second, our confidence in the findings is further enhanced by the fact that the expected interactive effect of ideology and discrimination on attitude toward AA was supported in both samples despite the relatively small sample sizes, moderate reliability of the key variables, and sample-determined (as opposed to experimenter-determined) distributions (see, e.g., McClelland & Judd, 1993).

One difference between the two samples warrants examination: the different proportions of respondents indicating that they had not experienced racial discrimination at work. In the first sample, this proportion was 51 percent; in the second sample, only 8 percent. Two explanations may account for this difference. First, different response scales were used to assess racial discrimination in the two samples. In comparison to the dichotomous scale used in sample 1, the continuous scale used in sample 2 gave respondents a much wider range of options. Given a dichotomous scale, respondents who had experienced ambiguous or very minor incidents of discrimination may have chosen a response of 0. In contrast, given a 9-point scale, respondents who had had such experiences may have chosen a response of 2 or 3, rather than the scale endpoint (indicating no discrimination). In addition, respondents who could not clearly recall specific instances of discrimination may have been reluctant to use the scale endpoint. In such cases, a response of 2 or 3 would indicate that some discrimination had been experienced, even if its specifics could not be recalled or it had not resulted in identifiable harm.

This explanation is supported by the fact that few of the respondents who rated the severity of the discrimination they had experienced as low described any specific incidents of racial discrimination at work. Thus, none
of the people who selected 2 on the response scale, and only 29 percent who
selected 3, described specific incidents. In contrast, a substantial proportion
of respondents who rated the severity of discrimination as moderate or high
described specific incidents (75% or more of those rating the severity as 4 or
higher).

The second explanation pertains to the time during which the two data
sets were collected. As discussed above, the majority of the respondents in
sample 2 completed the survey when the merits of AA were being openly
deated in Congress and society at large. This debate may have raised the
salience of AA among African-Americans, who as a group have historically
benefited from AA. In an effort to symbolically justify support for a policy
under attack, the respondents may have been motivated to engage in a greater
effort to recall instances of racial discrimination. In addition, the increasingly
open criticism of AA by its opponents may have been interpreted by respon-
dents as revealing discriminatory intent, thus priming the retrieval of
instances of discriminatory behavior.

The possibility that the change in political climate over the span of the
study affected responses is supported by the fact that while ideological prefer-
ces were very similar in the two samples, sample 2 showed on average
greater favorability toward AA than did sample 1. This difference in degree
of support for AA is consistent with an increase in respondents’ desire to
‘rally’ in support of AA, a policy whose curtailment would almost certainly
be perceived as having negative implications for many African-Americans.

The results have some interesting implications for how organizational
AA programs will be received by their intended beneficiaries. First, to the
extent that the organization is perceived to have discriminated in the past, or
to currently engage in discriminatory practices, support for AA should be
high, and relatively unaffected by ideology. However, in organizations that
are perceived to be nondiscriminatory, ideology should play a stronger role.
As African-Americans tend to be more egalitarian than the majority popu-
lation (Taylor, 1991), they are likely to remain supportive of AA. However,
the growing range of ideological preferences among African-Americans (e.g.
Carter, 1991; Conti & Stetson, 1993; Loury, 1995; Tate, 1993) suggests that
opinion among this group will begin to diverge.

A second implication is that organizations should consider how their
justifications for their AA programs will be perceived by the intended ben-
cessaries. In particular, since the passage of the major civil rights legislation
in the mid-1960s, formal discrimination in the work place has declined (Thern-
strom & Thernstrom, 1997). As a result, the traditional compensatory justifi-
cation for AA – that AA is intended to remedy discrimination – may have
declined in effectiveness. This rationale, which served as the original basis for
AA, will remain plausible among those African-Americans who perceive
themselves to be victims of discrimination. However, for individuals who have
not experienced discrimination, the compensatory rationale for AA may be
less plausible or appropriate. In such cases, sense of deservingness – and there-
fore the perceived fairness of benefiting from AA – would be lower (cf. Barnes
Nacoste, 1992). Rather than providing a justified remedy for harm, AA may
simply be perceived as patronizing (cf. Carter, 1991). Although many indi-
viduals will accept a situation of overreward inequity (e.g. Greenberg, 1982),
such a state may elicit discomfort in others, especially those who hold an indi-
vidualistic ideology. For such individuals an alternative justification for AA
programs may be more acceptable. In particular, portraying AA as a means
to promote diversity, and thereby improve organizational effectiveness, may
be advisable. To be credible, however, this portrayal should realistically reflect
the likelihood that diversity will in fact improve organizational effectiveness

There are several issues that arise from the study, and that should be
addressed in future research. For example, it is important to examine atti-
dutes not just toward AA in general but toward specific versions of AA (e.g.
expanding recruitment versus strict goals and timetables). It is also import-
ant to empirically assess relevant internal constructs such as perceived deserv-
ingness. In addition, more objective measures of discrimination, to the extent
that they can be obtained, would be helpful in replications and extensions of
this study.

Finally, the replicability and generalizability of the current results
should be explored in larger samples of African-Americans with diverse back-
grounds. The current sample consists only of African-Americans with at least
two years of college education, representing a population with relatively high
political and social awareness. Previous research on political ideology has
found strong effects of education and socio-economic status on ideological
preferences (e.g. Sniderman et al., 1993). It would thus be useful to assess the
generalizability of the results among African-Americans with nonacademic
backgrounds and different levels of political and social awareness. Finally,
extending the sample to include other minority groups such as Hispanics
would be another fruitful extension of this research.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of this research by the Richard
J. Barber Fund for Interdisciplinary Legal Research, and the William and Flora
Hewlett Foundation.
References


Barnes Nacoste, R. Sources of stigma: Analyzing the psychology of affirmative action. Law and Policy, 1990, 12, 175–95.


Appendix

Political ideology

The response scale for the items presented below ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). Reverse scored items are denoted by (R).
1. All things considered, most people get just what they deserve out of life. (R)
2. Maybe it's not their fault, but most poor people were brought up without ambition. (R)
3. Most poor people don't have the ability to get ahead. (R)
4. Any poor people simply don't want to work hard. (R)
5. Those who are well off in this country should be obligated to help those who are less fortunate. (R)
6. If the government must go deeper in debt to help people, it should do so. (R)
7. We need public policies to reduce inequality of income between talented and less talented people who try equally hard. (R)
8. There are too many people getting something for nothing in this society. (R)
9. Anybody receiving welfare in this country should be made to work for the money they get. (R)
10. It is not right for people to go hungry in our country. (R)
11. Basic services such as health care and legal assistance should be provided to everyone by the government, free of charge. (R)
12. Compassion for others is the most important human value. (R)
13. Because of their greater economic power, the rich have an unfair advantage over the poor. (R)
14. Despite barriers to success such as discrimination, almost anybody can succeed if she or he tries hard enough. (R)
15. In this society, individuals’ failures are often the result of the unfairness of the economic, political, or judicial system.\textsuperscript{a}\textsuperscript{b}\textsuperscript{c}

\textsuperscript{a} from Rasinski (1987); \textsuperscript{b} from Taylor (1991); \textsuperscript{c} developed for this study.

\begin{quote}
Yitzhak Fried is Associate Professor of Management in the School of Business Administration at Wayne State University. His research interests include job and work design, stress and strain in organizations, performance appraisal, and diversity and affirmative action programs. He has published in Human Relations, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Organizational Behavior and Personnel Psychology.

[E-mail: aa4850@wayne.edu]

Ariel S. Levi is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Management in the School of Business Administration at Wayne State University. His research interests include judgement and decision making under uncertainty, the effect of cognitive, motivational and personality variables on risk perception, and determinants of attitudes toward organizational programs on affirmative action and diversity.

[E-mail: a.levi@wayne.edu]

Steven W. Billings is Consulting Project Manager at NCS London House in Rosemont, Illinois. He develops and implements customized assessments, surveys, and technology solutions for public and private sector organizations. His research interests include the use of personality assessment in organizations, competency modeling and job analysis, the measurement of job performance, and assessment equivalency under different administration modalities.

[E-mail: swbillings@ncs.com]

Kingsley R. Browne is Professor of Law, Wayne State University Law School. His research interests include employment discrimination and the intersection of law, biology and behavior.

[E-mail: aa2846@wayne.edu]
\end{quote}