

What makes affirmative action-based hiring decisions seem (un)fair? A test of an ideological explanation for fairness judgments

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Summary

Studies show that Whites tend to show the lowest level of support for affirmative action (AA) policies. Opponents of AA often argue that this is because it violates principles of meritocracy. However, self-interest (based on social identification with those adversely affected) could also explain their opposition. In three studies, we varied whether an Asian or White male is adversely affected by AA to test another explanation; namely, that Whites' fairness judgments are based on both the adversely affected person's race and the fairness evaluator's ideological beliefs. Although we found some support for the meritocratic explanation, this was not sufficient to explain why Whites view AA as (un)fair. Instead, we found strong support for our prediction that Whites who are opposed to equality perceive more unfairness when a White (vs. Asian) was harmed by AA, whereas Whites who endorse egalitarian ideologies perceive the opposite. This finding suggests that neither self-interest nor meritocratic explanations can fully account for Whites' opposition to AA. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Affirmative action (AA) is a policy designed to ameliorate historical injustices against women, ethnic minorities, and other disadvantaged groups. Its various applications have helped many racial minorities gain access to valuable resources such as admission to schools and hiring and promotion into jobs (e.g., Bowen & Bok, 1998). Still, despite evidence testifying to AA's effectiveness at diversifying organizations (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006), it is often criticized and resisted, mostly by those who do not benefit from it. Studies consistently show that White Americans in particular, who make up the largest non-beneficiary racial group in the U.S.A., have the most negative attitudes toward AA (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006). However, a relatively recent Gallup poll revealed that 44 percent of Whites also support this policy (Jones, 2005), indicating that Whites' beliefs and attitudes toward AA are not monolithic. The present research aims to examine possible sources of Whites' divergent reactions to the implementation of AA in organizations.

Negative reactions toward the use of AA in organizations typically arise from the perception that AA-influenced decisions are unfair (Kravitz, 1995). Most contentious are AA-influenced decisions in which a racial minority is hired or promoted over an allegedly more qualified White applicant. Such decisions are the impetus for many highly publicized legal challenges to AA on grounds that it constitutes "reverse discrimination." Among the most well known is the landmark case of *The Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the school's use of quotas for admission was unconstitutional. Pragmatically, it is important to understand the sources of fairness perceptions because such perceptions can affect diverse outcomes,

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such as legal actions taken against the organization, employee performance and job satisfaction, and the profitability of inter-organizational alliances (Gilliland, 1993; Greenberg & Cropanzano, 2001; Luo, 2005).

This paper aims to contribute to the AA literature and to our understanding of fairness in organizations by examining what factors influence White Americans' fairness perceptions in an AA context. Answering this question is both timely and relevant because the controversy surrounding the usage of AA for hiring and promotion decisions has raised questions about whether the policy should be abandoned. If managers and other organizational stakeholders view the achievement of fairness between groups as an important goal and wish to gain public support for the use of AA to achieve these goals, it seems prudent to understand the conditions under which people are more (rather than less) likely to view its application as fair.

Multiple theories (e.g., political view, self- and group interest, and meritocracy belief) have been proposed to explain how people evaluate AA-influenced decisions, but a noticeable gap in the literature is that there is limited research integrating and comparing these theories (Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006). In a review of the AA literature, Crosby et al. point out that one difficulty with integrating theoretical perspectives is that many of their key constructs are related (e.g., political orientation may determine the weight placed on group interest and merit) and therefore often make similar predictions. In the present research, we test hypotheses in which three widely applied theories—meritocracy, social identification, and ideology—lead to competing predictions regarding Whites' reactions to AA, thereby allowing us to assess the relative importance of variables associated with each theory.

A factor that logically leads the three theories to make competing predictions and that has not been examined before is the race of the *non*-beneficiary in an AA-influenced decision. Extant research examining the perceived fairness of AA in the organizational behavior literature has generally portrayed the non-beneficiary as White (e.g., Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Stewart & Shapiro, 2000) or ignored the non-beneficiary's racial status entirely. In the latter case, there are reasons to suspect that most people assume that the non-beneficiary is White, because White males comprise the largest group of AA non-beneficiaries.

However, as some scholars (e.g., Kang, 1996; Wu, 2002) have pointed out, in practice, certain non-White ethnic groups generally do not benefit from AA and, in fact, are often more adversely affected by it than Whites. For example, Espenshade and Radford (2009) found that in order to have the same chance at private college admissions in the U.S.A., Asian students need to score 140, 270, and 450 points more than Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks, respectively, in SAT exams (maximum 1600 points). Similarly, the U.S. Education Department's Office of Civil Rights is currently investigating Ivy League universities such as Harvard and Princeton regarding possible discrimination against Asian-American applicants, some of who were rejected admission despite high academic records (Golden, 2012). Examining other minority groups (such as Asians) provides an opportunity to test whether Whites' perceived fairness of AA-influenced decisions differ as a function of the non-beneficiary's race or other factors associated with the three theoretical perspectives we mentioned earlier. By doing so, we are able to compare the relative predictive power of the three theories, hereafter referred to as the *meritocratic*, *social identification*, and *ideological* perspectives. This is because they make competing predictions regarding how White Americans will evaluate AA-influenced decisions where the non-beneficiary is White as opposed to non-White, assuming both are equally qualified.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Theorists who endorse the meritocratic perspective argue that many Whites oppose AA because it violates a principle that many people in democratic societies endorse; namely, that the most qualified person should get the job or the promotion (e.g., Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998; Sowell, 1984). It has often been argued by critics of AA that organizational decisions construed as "reverse discrimination" ignite such strong passions among critics of AA because they violate this principle and not because those who oppose the policy are racist or sexist. The meritocratic perspective originates from the idea of principled conservatism

(Sniderman & Carmines, 1997), which maintains that opposition to AA derives primarily from race-neutral values such as deservingness, self-reliance, and fairness. From the viewpoint of principled conservatism, people who have negative reactions to AA do so because they embrace the traditional American ideal of meritocracy more so than those who support it.

An alternative explanation for Whites' reactions to AA is the *social identification perspective*. Based on social identification theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), this perspective assumes that many Whites have negative attitudes toward AA because of self- or collective-interest concerns (Bobo, 2000). According to social identification theory, people are motivated to favor their in-group (Turner, 1999). Consequently, it is not surprising that Whites in general are more likely to oppose AA than members of other racial groups. This is because the former believe it will hurt the interest of their in-group members (e.g., Shteynberg, Leslie, Knight, & Mayer, 2011), whereas the latter are more likely to support AA because it will benefit theirs. From a social identification perspective, the explanation for why some Whites support AA is that they are less influenced by in-group favoritism because they identify less with their racial group (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Alternatively, they may adopt a more expansive definition of what constitutes their in-group (i.e., all of humanity; McFarland, Webb, & Brown, 2012).

Finally, the *ideological perspective* suggests that Whites' reactions to AA are influenced by beliefs about social dominance (Federico & Sidanius, 2002a; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). Specifically, Whites who accept the inevitability and functional advantages of group-based dominance hierarchies, a belief that is captured at the psychological level by the construct of *social dominance orientation* (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), oppose AA because it attenuates the existing status hierarchy in which Whites currently occupy the most privileged position. In contrast, Whites who desire equality among social groups (i.e., Whites low in SDO) are more supportive of AA because it moves society closer toward this goal (Federico & Sidanius, 2002b).

What might these different theories predict will happen when people evaluate the fairness of a case in which a member of their racial in-group (vs. a different racial group) is adversely affected by AA? More precisely, will Whites judge the fairness of an AA-influenced hiring decision that adversely affects a White candidate differently from one that adversely affects a non-White (i.e., Asian) candidate, assuming we hold the beneficiary (i.e., an African-American) constant? Each of the theories reviewed earlier makes different predictions in this particular case.

The meritocratic perspective predicts that Whites' perceived fairness of such a decision would be driven primarily by merit-related factors, such as the relative qualifications of the beneficiary compared with the non-beneficiary, and the extent to which an evaluator endorses the principle of meritocracy (Davey, Bobocel, Son Hing, & Zanna, 1999). The meritocratic perspective therefore predicts that Whites will perceive more unfairness when the non-beneficiary is more qualified than the beneficiary, and this effect should be particularly strong if the evaluator strongly endorses the principle of meritocracy. If meritocratic considerations truly underlie most Whites' objections to AA, then it follows logically that the race of the non-beneficiary *should not* influence their perceived fairness regarding an AA-influenced decision when the qualifications of the non-beneficiaries are identical and differ equally from the qualifications of the beneficiary.

The social identification perspective makes a different prediction, which is that Whites will perceive more unfairness in a situation where a White (vs. an Asian) is adversely affected by AA, even if these two adversely affected parties are equally qualified (Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003). The social identification perspective suggests that group membership will trump consideration of the relative qualifications of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries when evaluating fairness. In addition, when the non-beneficiary is White, those who identify more strongly with their ethnic group (i.e., Whites in the U.S.A.) will perceive the decision to be more unfair because they are more concerned about defending the interest of a fellow in-group member (Brewer, 1999) or because they will view the in-group non-beneficiary as more entitled to the job as a result of their in-group favoritism bias (Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, & Sacchi, 2002).

The prediction of the ideological perspective requires more deliberation. AA was designed to increase social equality, so to test this perspective, we focus on a dimension of SDO beliefs that is most germane to explaining people's preferences for equality enhancing policies: *opposition to equality* (OEQ; Jost & Thompson, 2000). OEQ captures the extent to which people resist the attenuation of status differences among social groups. In contrast

to both the meritocratic and social identification perspectives, an application of the ideological perspective predicts that high and low OEQ Whites will evaluate the fairness of AA-influenced decisions differently depending on the race of the adversely affected party.

One of the explicit mandates of AA is to increase social equality; hence, we expect high OEQ Whites, who oppose social equality, to evaluate an AA-influenced decision that adversely affects a White as being relatively *more* unfair than an identical decision that adversely affects an Asian. The reason is that in the former case, the application of AA threatens Whites' dominant position in society and reduces the gap in the outcomes of participation in labor markets between Whites and subordinate racial groups (Federico & Sidanius, 2002a, 2002b; Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius et al., 1996). However, because Asians and Blacks are generally viewed as minorities whose status is relatively lower than Whites within the U.S. racial hierarchy (Feagin, 2010), when the AA decision adversely affects an Asian, the "cost" of applying AA is borne by another racial minority. Thus, it poses a less obvious threat to the existing racial dominance hierarchy, and consequently, any judgments that AA is unfair in this case should be tempered by the fact that its application does not undermine the dominant position of Whites relative to other racial minority groups. In fact, one could argue that it actually strengthens their relative position by preventing another minority's entry into the labor force.

Alternatively, low OEQ Whites support policies that decrease inequality among social groups. Consequently, they should evaluate an AA-influenced decision that adversely affects an Asian as relatively *more* unfair than one that adversely affects a White, because the former harms a group that is relatively lower on the social hierarchy than Whites. As a result, overall social inequality between groups is exacerbated by pitting racial minorities against one another in a zero-sum competition for scarce resources. In contrast, low OEQ Whites' judgments about the unfairness of an AA decision that adversely affects a White should be tempered, even though it might violate the principle of allocating rewards based on merit, because it can be construed as serving the larger social purpose of reducing inequality between dominant and subordinate racial groups. This goal should be important to people low in OEQ. Note that we are not predicting that low OEQ Whites will necessarily view such a decision as fair (they may in fact acknowledge that it is unfair) but rather that whatever (un)fairness judgment they make will vary as a function of whether the adversely affected party is a member of a dominant (White) or subordinate (Asian) non-beneficiary group.

We are not aware of any previous studies that have tested the ideological predictions described earlier in the context of an AA-influenced decision. However, we find indirect support for these hypotheses in other research showing how political ideology affects moral judgments. Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, and Ditto (2009), using the classic trolley problem, found that when the man on the footbridge was Black (vs. White), politically liberal individuals endorsed less consequentialist justifications and judged the behavior of pushing the man off the footbridge to stop the trolley to be more unethical. Another study by Chambers, Schlenker, and Collisson (2012) showed that liberals are prejudiced against stereotypically conservative groups (e.g., Whites and wealthy people) whereas conservatives are prejudiced against liberal groups (e.g., civil-rights leaders, feminists). These two studies inform the present research because SDO has been shown to be reliably related to political liberalism and conservatism (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Moreover, OEQ in particular has been identified as a foundational principle underlying modern political conservatism (Jost et al., 2003), and thus, it seems reasonable to predict that OEQ should influence Whites' fairness judgments in the ways we hypothesized.

The predictions of the ideological perspective aligns with Greenberg and Jonas's (2003) contention that partisans on the political Left, who tend to endorse social equality, and the Right, who tend to oppose it, are both susceptible to violating a principle of fairness that many people in modern democratic societies publicly claim to endorse: Decisions about what resources people are entitled to receive from organizations and society should not be based on the color of their skin, but on the weight of their achievements.

Overview of studies and hypotheses

We tested the competing predictions of the meritocratic, social identification, and ideological perspectives in three experiments using a common paradigm. In this paradigm, participants were presented with an organizational decision

in which the application of AA adversely affected either a White or an Asian male (manipulated between-subjects) to the benefit of either an equally or less qualified African-American male. We chose a male as the adversely affected party because females can be beneficiaries of AA even if they are White. Indeed, White females as a group may have benefitted more from AA than any other historically disadvantaged group (Katznelson, 2005). We deemed an Asian male to be an appropriate theoretical foil to a White male for several reasons. First, Asians are considered a “model minority” (Ho & Jackson, 2001) and are widely perceived as being comparable to Whites in competence, educational attainment, and occupational success (Maddux, Galinsky, Cuddy, & Polifroni, 2008). Thus, participants are unlikely to assume that the achievements of an Asian male are undeserved. Second, Asian males, unlike their female counterparts, do not benefit from AA because of their gender (O’Brien, Garcia, Crandall, & Kordys, 2010; Wu, 2002). Finally, as we alluded to earlier, there is evidence that Asians as a group are also subject to reverse discrimination, although arguably as a result of overachievement than of beliefs about being undeserving. The hypotheses derived from the three theoretical perspectives we tested are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: (The Meritocratic Prediction): Whites will (a) evaluate an AA-influenced hiring decision that adversely impacts a White non-beneficiary to be as unfair as a decision that adversely impacts an equally qualified Asian non-beneficiary and (b) evaluate an AA-influenced hiring decision as more unfair when the beneficiary is less (versus equally) qualified than the non-beneficiary, and (c) this difference will be larger among Whites who strongly endorse the principle of meritocracy.

Hypothesis 2: (The Social Identification Prediction): Whites will (a) evaluate an AA-influenced hiring decision as more unfair when non-beneficiary is a White male than when he is an Asian male, even if the White and Asian males’ qualifications are identical, and (b) this effect will be larger among those who have a strong White racial identity.

Hypothesis 3: (The Ideological Prediction): Whites who are high in OEQ will evaluate an AA-influenced hiring decision as more unfair when the non-beneficiary is a White male than when he is an Asian male with identical qualifications; however, Whites who are low in OEQ will evaluate the decision as more unfair when the non-beneficiary is an Asian rather than White male.

We tested these predictions across multiple jobs—a university professor, a sales representative, and a police officer—to provide evidence for the robustness of our findings. In Study 1, we tested H1a of the meritocratic perspective and all of the predictions of the social identification (H2) and ideological perspectives (H3).

Study 1

Method

Sample and procedures

Caucasian undergraduates from a large university ($N = 127$) in the Northeastern U.S.A. participated for course credit (67 percent female; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.1$, $SD = 2.0$). Undergraduate students are an acceptable sample for testing our hypotheses because there is evidence that they do not differ from professional samples on perceptions of AA (e.g., Evans, 2003). Indeed, we used professional samples in Studies 2 and 3, and our results were essentially unchanged. Participants reported OEQ, ethnic identification, control measures, and demographics in an online survey 1 week before evaluating the fairness of an AA-influenced decision (Aquino, Stewart, & Reed, 2005; Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992). By measuring OEQ and ethnic identification independently of the decision evaluation, we reduced the likelihood that our results could be explained by a priming effect or hypothesis guessing by the participants.

The AA-influenced hiring scenario was presented to participants in the business school's behavioral lab and included the experimental manipulations. Based on an actual event, the details of which were known to one of the authors of this paper, the scenario described how the biology department at a major American university hired a new assistant professor. The participants read the job description and reviewed two candidate profiles (side by side, with photos): one a Black male and the other a White or Asian male (manipulated between-subjects). It was explained that the criteria for hiring were the number of scholarly publications and teaching ratings, and based on these criteria (which were the same for the White and Asian males), the Black candidate was somewhat less qualified (i.e., he had two publications vs. three for the White/Asian, and his teaching rating was in the top 25 percent vs. the White/Asian's top 15 percent). It was also explained that the Black candidate had met the *minimum standards* for the position.

The participants then read that both candidates had successful campus interviews, and based on their credentials, the departmental search committee recommended hiring the White/Asian candidate. However, they were informed that the university had an AA policy where preference would be given to women and racial minorities "when the minimum job qualifications have been met." In consideration of this policy, participants were told that the department head decided to hire the Black candidate (see Appendix A for actual scenarios).

The type of AA policy used in this organization would be considered a *strong form* because it allows race or gender to be weighed more heavily than other selection criteria when making a hiring decision, provided the AA beneficiary meets the minimum standards of the job (Kravitz, 1995). We chose this form of AA because it is what people tend to assume when thinking of AA policies (Haynes & Heilman, 2007). Furthermore, this form of AA is likely to elicit strong unfairness evaluations (Evans, 2003; Kravitz, 1995) and thus was expected to produce variability in fairness judgments depending on whether people are likely to be ideologically supportive or critical of AA.

Measures

Unfairness judgment. Participants evaluated the fairness of the hiring decision on four 9-point bipolar adjective items (unfair/fair; good/bad; biased/objective; and justifiable/unjustifiable). The items were averaged into an unfairness score, with higher scores indicating greater perceived unfairness ($\alpha = .78$).

Opposition to equality. On a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*), participants completed eight items from Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) SDO instrument (e.g., "It's okay if some groups have more of a chance in life than others"). The items were averaged into an OEQ score, with higher scores indicating greater opposition to equality ($\alpha = .87$). Note that we also measured the second dimension of SDO, group-based dominance (GBD; Jost & Thompson, 2000), with eight items ($\alpha = .88$), which captures how justified people believe it is for dominant groups to use aggression against subordinate groups (e.g., "In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups"). We emphasize OEQ in this paper because it is more theoretically relevant to how people evaluate policies that seek to equalize outcomes among different social groups compared with GBD. Nonetheless, conducting our analyses with the full SDO scale (i.e., both SDO and OEQ) does not change our results in any of the studies.

Racial identification. Participants completed 12 items from Phinney's (1992) racial identity scale (e.g., "I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group") on a 7-point (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) Likert scale. The items were averaged into a racial identification score, with higher scores indicating stronger identification with Whites ($\alpha = .88$). To ensure that respondents responded to the scale with a White identity in mind, they were first asked to select their ethnicity from the following options: "African American," "Hispanic," "White," "Native American," "Asian," and "Mixed," immediately before completing the scale.

Control variables. We controlled for several variables that might potentially influence fairness judgments but that were not of direct interest in our study. We controlled for *political orientation* with a 9-point index (1 = *extremely liberal*, 9 = *extremely conservative*) because Liberals and Conservatives differ in their support for AA (Harrison et al., 2006). Note that this control makes our test more conservative because it forces OEQ to explain variance over and above a

known correlate of it. We controlled for *sex* because women favor AA more than men (Harrison et al., 2006). Participants' *knowledge about AA* might influence their general attitudes toward AA; thus, we measured it with a 9-point index (1 = *nothing at all*, 9 = *a lot*). Note that excluding these control variables from our analysis in any of the studies reported below does not change our results.

Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables.

Manipulation checks

We asked participants to indicate whether the university had an AA policy and how likely (1 = *very unlikely*, 9 = *very likely*) it was that AA had influenced the hiring decision. All participants reported that the university had an AA policy and they believed it influenced the hiring decision ($M = 8.38$, $SD = 1.09$). We also asked participants to report the candidates' races and qualifications (1 = *not at all qualified*, 9 = *very qualified*). All participants correctly identified the non-beneficiary's race (i.e., consistent with experimental conditions). The Black candidate ($M = 7.48$, $SD = 0.90$) was perceived as relatively less qualified than the White candidate ($M = 8.48$, $SD = 0.99$), $t(64) = 9.12$, $p < .001$. He was also perceived as less qualified ($M = 7.33$, $SD = 1.05$) than the Asian candidate ($M = 8.37$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(59) = 7.06$, $p < .001$. The White candidate was perceived as equally qualified as the Asian candidate ($p > .49$), supporting the efficacy of our manipulation. Finally, the participants in general judged the AA-influenced decision to be somewhat unfair ($M = 6.05$, $SD = 1.41$, higher than 5, the mid-point of the 9-point scale, $t(126) = 8.37$, $p < .001$) but not so unfair that we would be concerned about possible ceiling effects. It also suggests that the decision was not unambiguously perceived as unjust.

Hypothesis tests

Hierarchical regression analyses were performed on perceived unfairness to test H1a of the meritocratic perspective and all of the hypotheses based on the social identification and the ideological perspectives (see Table 2 for the predictors included in each step). Step 1 revealed a main effect of the adversely affected party's race ($p = .004$): Participants perceived a greater degree of unfairness when the Asian (vs. White) was adversely affected. This failed to support the meritocratic prediction (H1a) that fairness judgments should be invariant as a function of the adversely affected candidate's race. It also failed to support H2a of the social identification perspective. Step 2 revealed a significant interaction between race and OEQ ($\Delta R^2 = .11$, $p = .003$); however, the ethnic identification by race interaction was not significant ($p = .75$), nor was the ethnic identification by OEQ interaction ($p = .56$). These results failed to support H2b of the social identification perspective. Step 3 revealed that the three-way interaction involving

Table 1. Study 1 variable correlations and descriptive statistics.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived unfairness	6.05 (1.41)						
2. Gender	0.69 (0.47)	-.12					
3. Political orientation	4.88 (1.82)	.15	.00				
4. Ethnic identification	5.01 (0.90)	-.09	.13	.17			
5. AA knowledge	5.75 (1.65)	.23**	-.35**	.01	-.20*		
6. OEQ	2.87 (1.07)	.09	-.02	.15	-.26*	.06	
7. Non-beneficiary race	0.47 (0.50)	.23**	.03	.02	.04	-.13	-.18

Note: Gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; non-beneficiary race, 0 = White, 1 = Asian; OEQ = opposition to equality.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Study 1 regression results: Perceived unfairness.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Gender	-.12 (.28)	-.24 (.27)	-.25 (.27)
Political orientation	.09 (.07)	.07 (.07)	.05 (.07)
AA knowledge	.20* (.08)	.20* (.08)	.19* (.08)
Ethnic identification	-.10 (.15)	.05 (.22)	.13 (.23)
Non-beneficiary race	.75** (.25)	.83** (.29)	.83** (.29)
OEQ	.14 (.12)	.06 (.12)	.07 (.12)
Ethnic ID × race		-.10 (.31)	-.08 (.31)
Ethnic ID × OEQ		-.05 (.29)	.06 (.29)
Race × OEQ		-.89** (.24)	-.89** (.24)
Race × ethnic identification × OEQ			.38 (.25)
R^2	.14**	.25**	.26**
ΔR^2		.11**	.01
F	3.00	3.85	3.74
df	6, 110	9, 107	10, 106

Note: Unstandardized regression weights and standard errors (in parentheses) are presented. Gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; non-beneficiary race, 0 = White, 1 = Asian; AA = affirmative action; OEQ = opposition to equality. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

race, OEQ, and ethnic identification was not significant ($p = .13$), suggesting that the race by OEQ interaction was not moderated by ethnic identification.

To interpret the pattern of the race by OEQ interaction, we conducted a regions of significance test using the Johnson–Neyman technique (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). This technique allowed us to identify the ranges of OEQ values within which the effect of the adversely affected candidate's race on perceived unfairness was and was not significant. It provides an accurate overview of exactly how OEQ moderated the influence of race on perceived fairness and is therefore more informative than examining simple slopes at certain arbitrary values of OEQ (e.g., one standard deviation (SD) above and below the sample mean; Blanton & Jaccard, 2006). The results revealed two Johnson–Neyman points of OEQ (i.e., the values at which the simple effects of race on perceived unfairness were just significant): 3.13 (0.21 SD s above the mean of 2.87, simple slope $B = 0.49$, $SE = .25$, $t = 1.98$, $p = .05$) and 4.85 (1.85 SD s above the mean of 2.87, simple slope $B = -1.04$, $SE = 0.52$, $t = 1.98$, $p = .05$). These two points divided the range of OEQ values into three significance regions: In the first region, where OEQ ranged from 1 (the minimum value of OEQ) to 3.13, the simple effects of adversely affected candidate's race on perceived unfairness were all significantly positive, indicating that participants low in OEQ perceived significantly more unfairness when an Asian (vs. White) was rejected. In the second region, where OEQ ranged from 3.13 to 4.85, the simple effects were not significant, indicating that race did not influence perceived unfairness. Finally, in the third region, where OEQ ranged from 4.85 to 6.25 (the maximum value of OEQ), the simple effects of race on perceived unfairness were all significantly negative, suggesting that the participants high in OEQ perceived more unfairness when a White (vs. Asian) was rejected. It can be seen that this pattern of results (Figure 1 Study 1) fully supports the ideological perspective (H3).

Discussion

Study 1 found no support for the pure meritocratic perspective. According to H1a, Whites should have perceived the same level of (un)fairness when the White versus the equally qualified Asian candidate was rejected because they have identical qualifications. However, we found a main effect of the rejected candidate's race such that the people thought the rejection of the Asian was more unfair than the rejection of the White. Although one should be cautious about interpreting main effects in the presence of higher-order interactions, this effect does not support a preference for merit (over race). One explanation for this main effect may be that the widely held stereotype of Asians as being

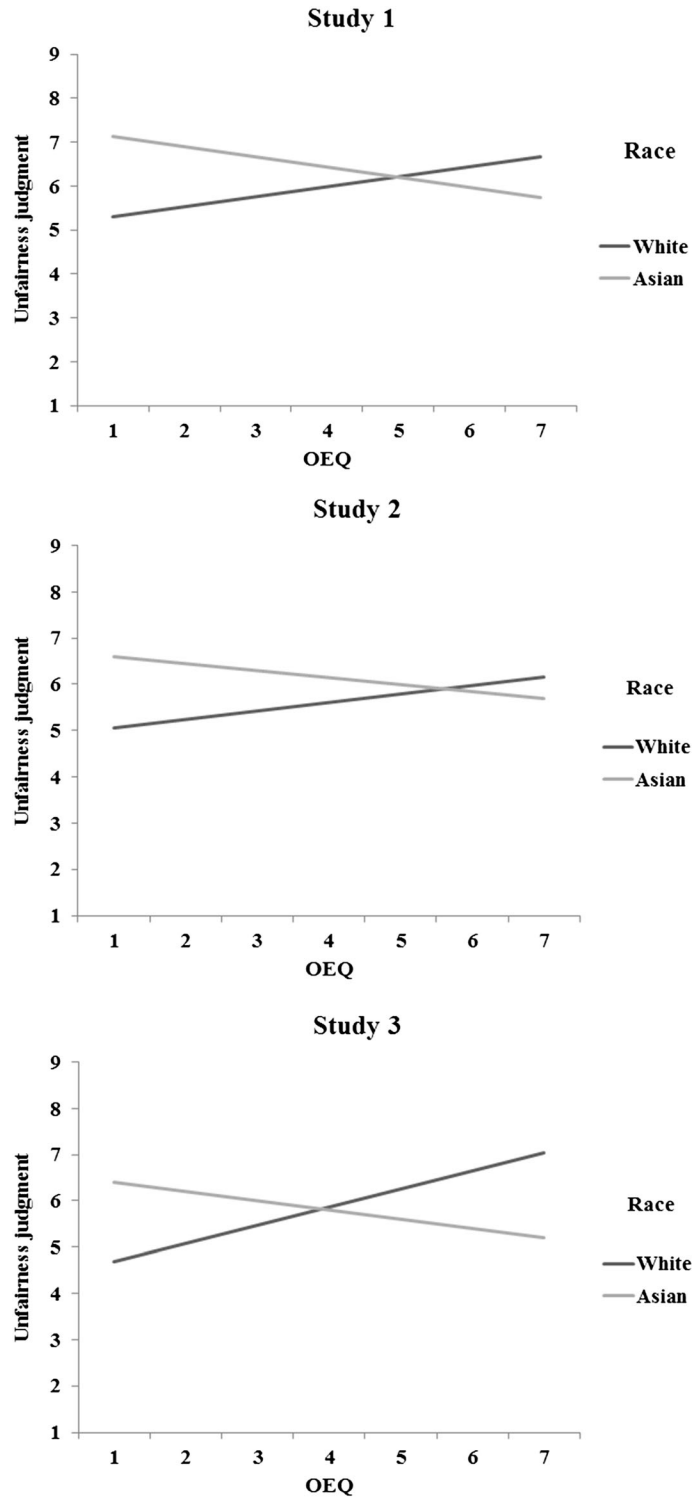


Figure 1. Opposition to equality (OEQ) × race interactions

intelligent and hardworking (Ho & Jackson, 2001; Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske, 2005) and suitable for technical professions (Sy et al., 2010) led participants to anticipate that the Asian candidate would be a more effective biology professor. The social identification perspective was also not supported because Whites perceived more unfairness when the Asian (vs. White) was adversely affected, which failed to support H2a, and there was no significant interaction between participants' racial identification and the rejected party's race, which failed to support H2b. In contrast, Study 1 provided full support for the ideological perspective because fairness judgments were influenced by the combination of the rejected candidate's race and the evaluator's OEQ beliefs, in precisely the manner predicted in H3.

Despite finding support for the ideological perspective, Study 1 had some limitations. First, the design does not permit a direct test of how merit might influence fairness judgments, because merit was not manipulated. Although our results failed to support H1a, it could be argued that the meritocratic perspective was not given a fair test because the study design did not allow us to conclusively infer that merit does not matter; we were essentially predicting a null effect with H1a. Second, the job that was being filled was a high status job (i.e., university professor), which might have made it easier to find support for the ideological perspective than the other perspectives because prior research suggests that OEQ influences AA attitudes more strongly in high status jobs (Aquino et al., 2005). However, we note that we also replicated the race by OEQ interaction ($B = -0.38$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .14$, $p < .001$) in a separate sample of business students ($N = 152$) using a lower status job (i.e., university dormitory counselor; results available from the authors). To address these limitations, we conducted Study 2.

Study 2

This study was designed to test H1a, H1b, H2a, and H3. To directly test H1b, we manipulated the beneficiary's merit (equally or less qualified than the non-beneficiary). In this design, if Whites' fairness judgments are fully explained by merit, we should observe only a main effect of this factor on fairness judgments. However, if fairness judgments are driven by ideological beliefs, we should observe the pattern predicted in H3 and supported in Study 1. Finally, H2a suggests that White participants should report greater perceived unfairness when a White versus an Asian candidate is adversely affected.

In addition to testing the effects of merit, Study 2 also enabled us to test whether the ideological prediction would be supported for a less extreme form of an AA-influenced decision. In addition to the *strong preferential treatment* decision (Black less qualified) in Study 1, Study 2 also included conditions where participants evaluated the fairness of a *tiebreak* decision (Black equally qualified). This is a weaker form of AA where preference is given only to beneficiaries with *equal* qualifications as non-beneficiaries (Kravitz, 1995). Like strong preferential treatment, tiebreak decision rules also advance the goal of reducing social inequality, and therefore if the ideological prediction is supported, OEQ should have the same effect on Whites' fairness judgments regardless of which form of AA is used.

Method

Sample and procedures

A total of 435 Caucasian working Americans (49 percent female; $M_{\text{age}} = 30.7$, $SD = 11$, $M_{\text{working experience}} = 11.4$ years, $SD = 10.2$) completed an online survey in a single session for monetary compensation. Participants were recruited through Qualtrics, a professional research survey service provider that helps researchers build panels targeted at specific populations (Albaum & Smith, 2006). Similar to Study 1, participants evaluated the unfairness of an AA-influenced decision involving a sales representative position at a major American corporation. The non-beneficiary's race (White vs. Asian) was again manipulated through candidate profiles (with photos). We also

varied the Black candidate’s qualifications, making this a 2 × 2 between-subjects design (cell sizes range from 102 to 120). Participants were randomly assigned into each condition. Qualifications were manipulated by varying candidates’ scores in an aptitude test and in their working experience. In the *less qualified* condition, the Black candidate scored 75th percentile in the test and had 3 years of working experience, whereas in the *equally qualified* condition, he scored 85th percentile and had 5 years of experience. The non-beneficiary’s qualification was held constant at 85th percentile in the test and 5 years of working experience in all conditions. It was always made clear that the Black candidate has met the minimum requirement of scoring 65th percentile in the aptitude test. Similar to Study 1, after the interview, the recruiter wanted to hire the non-beneficiary, but the department manager made a decision based on the corporation’s AA policy to hire the Black candidate. The other measures and control variables were identical to those used in Study 1. The unfairness judgment and OEQ scales were reliable ($\alpha = .85$ and $.91$, respectively).

Results

Table 3 shows the means and SDs of fairness judgment in the experimental conditions as well as the descriptive statistics and correlations among variables.

Manipulation checks

The same manipulation check questions as those in Study 1 were used. All participants identified that the company had an AA policy and they believed it influenced the hiring decision (1 = *very unlikely*, 9 = *very likely*; $M = 7.58$, $SD = 1.74$). They also correctly identified the non-beneficiary’s race. In the *less qualified* condition, the Black candidate ($M = 7.26$, $SD = 1.54$) was perceived as less qualified (1 = *not at all qualified*, 9 = *very qualified*) than the non-beneficiary ($M = 7.94$, $SD = 1.49$), $t(221) = 8.1$, $p < .001$. In the *equally qualified* condition, the Black candidate ($M = 7.74$, $SD = 1.77$) was perceived as equally qualified as the non-beneficiary ($M = 7.83$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(210) = 1.58$, $p = .12$. In addition, the White candidate was perceived to be equally qualified ($M = 8.06$, $SD = 1.29$) as the Asian candidate ($M = 7.82$, $SD = 1.47$), $t(433) = 1.75$, $p = .08$, confirming the effectiveness of our manipulations. Consistent with Study 1, the participants in general judged the AA-influenced decision to be unfair ($M = 5.9$, $SD = 1.87$, higher than 5, the mid-point of the 9-point scale, $t(434) = 10.05$, $p < .001$).

Table 3. Study 2 descriptive statistics.

		Non-beneficiary’s race					
		White			Asian		
Beneficiary’s qualification	Lower Same <i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived unfairness	5.90 (1.87)						
2. AA knowledge	5.68 (1.94)	.23**					
3. Political orientation	4.58 (2.25)	.13**	.06				
4. Gender	0.49 (0.50)	-.07	-.03	-.06			
5. Merit	0.49 (0.50)	-.21**	-.01	-.19**	-.02		
6. Non-beneficiary race	0.51 (0.50)	.19**	.05	.05	-.06	-.06	
7. OEQ	2.63 (1.27)	.07	-.04	.21**	-.09	-.04	.03

Note: Means and standard deviations of perceived fairness in experimental conditions (top) and variable correlations and descriptive statistics (bottom). Gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; non-beneficiary race, 0 = White, 1 = Asian; merit, 0 = Black less qualified, 1 = Black equally qualified; AA = affirmative action; OEQ = opposition to equality.

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

Hypothesis tests

Hierarchical regression analyses on perceived unfairness (Table 4) were conducted. Step 1 revealed a merit main effect ($p < .001$): Participants perceived more unfairness when the Black candidate was less (vs. equally) qualified, which supported H1b. We also found a race main effect ($p = .001$) such that participants perceived more unfairness when the Asian (vs. White) was rejected, replicating a result in Study 1 and failing to support both H1a and H2a. This race effect was qualified by a significant race and OEQ interaction ($\Delta R^2 = .03, p = .006$). The other two-way interactions were non-significant ($ps > .42$). The three-way interaction between merit, candidate race, and OEQ was also non-significant ($p = .10$), indicating that the race \times OEQ interaction does not differ as a function of the candidate's merit.

A regions of significance test revealed two Johnson–Neyman points of OEQ: 3.11 (0.38 SDs above the mean of 2.63, simple slope $B = 0.36, SE = 0.18, t = 1.98, p = .05$) and 4.87 (1.77 SDs above the mean of 2.63, simple slope $B = -0.68, SE = 0.35, t = 1.98, p = .05$). These two points divided the range of OEQ values into three significance regions: In the first, where OEQ ranged from 1 (the minimum value of OEQ) to 3.11, the simple effects of rejected candidate's race on perceived unfairness were all significantly positive, indicating that participants low in OEQ perceived significantly more unfairness when an Asian (vs. White) was rejected. In the second region, where OEQ ranged from 3.11 to 4.87, the simple effects were not significant, indicating that race did not influence perceived unfairness. In the third region, where OEQ ranged from 4.87 to 5.38 (the maximum value of OEQ), the simple effects of race on perceived unfairness were all significantly negative, indicating that the participants high in OEQ perceived more unfairness when a White (vs. Asian) was rejected. This pattern (Figure 1 Study 2) replicated what we found in Study 1 and supported H3.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 provided some support for the meritocratic perspective (H1b) because participants perceived more unfairness when the beneficiary had lower as compared with equal qualifications relative to the non-beneficiary. However, the race \times OEQ interaction showed that differences in merit were not sufficient to *fully* explain fairness judgments. Instead, our results were once again more supportive of the ideological perspective (H3). Furthermore, the race \times OEQ interaction effect was not moderated by the merit manipulation, suggesting that the ideological predictions apply across AA programs of different strengths. Finally, H2a was not supported because our White participants again

Table 4. Study 2 hierarchical multiple regression results: Perceived unfairness.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
AA knowledge	.20** (.04)	.18** (.04)	.18** (.04)
Political orientation	.05 (.04)	.04 (.04)	.03 (.04)
Gender	-.14 (.17)	-.17 (.17)	-.15 (.17)
Merit	-.74** (.18)	-.81** (.17)	-.82** (.17)
Non-beneficiary race	.59** (.17)	.58** (.17)	.59** (.17)
OEQ	.06 (.07)	.06 (.07)	.08 (.07)
Merit \times race		-.28 (.35)	-.26 (.35)
Merit \times OEQ		-.06 (.14)	-.06 (.14)
Race \times OEQ		-.48** (.14)	-.48** (.14)
Merit \times race \times OEQ			.46 (.27)
R^2	.13**	.16**	.16**
ΔR^2		.03**	.006
F	11.98	9.79	8.86
df	6, 408	9, 405	10, 404

Note: Unstandardized regression weights and standard errors (in parentheses) are presented. Gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; merit, 0 = Black less qualified, 1 = Black equally qualified; non-beneficiary race, 0 = White, 1 = Asian; AA = affirmative action; OEQ = opposition to equality.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

perceived that it was more unfair when the Asian (vs. White) candidate was rejected. Of course, this main effect of candidate race is qualified by its interaction with OEQ.

Study 2 had several limitations. First, although we conducted a more direct test of the meritocratic perspective by manipulating evaluators' perception of job candidates' qualifications, a more complete test of the hypotheses derived from this perspective requires testing whether this effect would depend on how strongly the evaluator endorses meritocratic principles (H1c). Second, although H2a was again tested and not supported, the social identification perspective was arguably not fully tested in Study 2 because we did not measure ethnic identification, and thus, we were unable to directly test H2b as we did in Study 1. Third, we presented pictures of the job candidates in this study and in Study 1, which might lead a skeptical reader to question whether their physical appearance might have influenced fairness judgments more than their race. We note, though, that this explanation cannot account for the race by OEQ interaction because there are no theoretical or empirical reasons to believe that the influence of the candidates' appearance on fairness judgments should depend on the evaluator's OEQ. Study 3 was designed to address these limitations and to extend our inquiry into a different profession to demonstrate that the OEQ \times race effect does not depend on job type.

Study 3

Study 3 retained key elements of Study 2's design but introduced an alternative measure of ethnic identification to the one used in Study 1 to provide a second test of H2b. We also measured the endorsement of meritocratic beliefs. Thus, the design of Study 3 allowed us to test H1a, H1b, and H1c as well as all of the hypotheses derived from the social identification and ideological perspectives.

Method

Sample and procedures

A total of 242 Caucasian working Americans (57.1 percent female; $M_{\text{age}} = 30.8$, $SD = 11$, $M_{\text{working experience}} = 11.2$ years, $SD = 9.9$) participated through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online marketplace that enables researchers to obtain quality data from American adult subjects efficiently (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Similar to previous studies, participants evaluated the unfairness of an AA-influenced decision involving a police officer in a police station. To manipulate job candidates' ethnicities, we named the Black candidate "LaMarr Washington," the White candidate "Todd Mueller," and the Asian candidate "Todd Li." In addition, we also varied the student organization that the candidates participated in school (African-American Student Association, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, and Asian Student Association for the Black, the White, and the Asian, respectively). Similar to Study 2, we manipulated the Black candidate's qualification by varying his scores in an aptitude test (75th or 85th percentile) and his working experience (2 or 3 years). The non-beneficiary's qualification was held constant (85th percentile and 3 years). Thus, a 2×2 between-subjects design was used (cell sizes range from 49 to 80). Similar to previous studies, after the interview, the immediate supervisor wanted to hire the non-beneficiary, but the lieutenant of the police station made a decision based on the AA policy in the state police department to hire the Black candidate.

Measures

Ethnic identification. The 9-item group identification scale ($\alpha = .89$) developed by McFarland et al. (2012) was adapted (e.g., "How much do you identify with (that is, feel a part of, feel love toward, have concern for) your ethnic group?" 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). As in Study 1, the participants reported their ethnicity immediately before

completing the scale. The items were averaged into an ethnic identification score, with higher scores representing stronger identification with Whites.

Meritocracy preference. We used a 15-item scale ($\alpha = .79$) developed by Davey et al. (1999; e.g., “In life, people ought to get what they deserve.”) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). The items were averaged to create a meritocracy preference score, with higher scores representing stronger preference for the merit principle.

Results

Table 5 shows the means and SDs of fairness judgment in the experimental conditions as well as the descriptive statistics and correlations among variables.

Manipulation checks

Consistent with Studies 1 and 2, all participants identified that the company had an AA policy and they believed it influenced the hiring decision (1 = *very unlikely*, 9 = *very likely*; $M = 8.11$, $SD = 1.34$). They also correctly identified the non-beneficiary’s race. To test the efficacy of the merit manipulation, participants evaluated the qualifications of the beneficiary and the non-beneficiary on six 9-point bipolar adjective items (not at all qualified/very qualified, mediocre/exceptional, unacceptable/acceptable, incompetent/competent, doesn’t merit getting the job/merits getting the job, and incapable/capable). These items demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha s = .92$ and $.94$ for the beneficiary and non-beneficiary, respectively) and were averaged to form a beneficiary merit score and a non-beneficiary merit score. In the *less qualified* condition, the Black candidate ($M = 6.94$, $SD = 1.07$) was perceived to have less merit than the non-beneficiary ($M = 8.03$, $SD = 1.02$), $t(128) = 10.86$, $p < .001$. In the *equally qualified* condition, the Black candidate ($M = 7.88$, $SD = 0.91$) was perceived as equally qualified as the non-beneficiary ($M = 7.95$, $SD = 0.90$), $t(124) = 1.34$, $p = .18$. The White candidate was perceived to be as qualified ($M = 7.99$, $SD = 0.84$) as the Asian candidate ($M = 7.99$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(252) = 0.007$, $p = .99$. Finally, participants in general judged the

Table 5. Study 3 descriptive statistics.

	Lower Same <i>M (SD)</i>	Non-beneficiary’s race							
		White				Asian			
Beneficiary’s qualification		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perceived unfairness	5.95 (2.20)								
2. Gender	0.43 (0.50)	-.13*							
3. Political orientation	3.78 (1.96)	.21**	-.11						
4. Ethnic identification	2.60 (0.77)	.00	.08	.29**					
5. AA knowledge	5.95 (1.94)	-.05	-.08	-.06	.01				
6. Merit	0.49 (0.50)	-.24**	.07	.04	.04	.02			
7. Merit preference	5.12 (0.63)	.19**	.06	.08	.06	.27**	-.08		
8. OEQ	2.39 (1.17)	.18**	-.24**	.46**	.15*	.02	.00	-.11	
9. Non-beneficiary race	0.59 (0.49)	.22**	-.05	.08	.00	-.07	-.05	.03	.02

Note: Means and standard deviations of perceived fairness in experimental conditions (top) and variable correlations and descriptive statistics (bottom). Gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; non-beneficiary race, 0 = White, 1 = Asian; merit, 0 = Black less qualified, 1 = Black equally qualified; OEQ = opposition to equality.

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

AA-influenced decision to be somewhat unfair ($M=5.95$, $SD=2.20$, higher than 5, the mid-point of the 9-point scale, $t(253)=6.85$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis tests

Hierarchical regression analyses of perceived unfairness (Table 6) were conducted. Step 1 revealed main effects of merit, meritocracy preference, race, and OEQ. First, the decision was evaluated as more unfair when the Black candidate was less (vs. equally) qualified ($p < .001$), which supported H1b, and when the evaluator more strongly endorses meritocracy ($p = .002$). Second, participants perceived more unfairness when the non-beneficiary was Asian ($p = .004$), replicating Studies 1 and 2, and once again failing to support both H1a and H2a. Finally, the decision was evaluated as more unfair by those higher in OEQ ($p = .047$), which is qualified by a significant interaction reported later. Step 2 added all the theoretically meaningful two-way interaction terms, including three that test our hypotheses: ethnic identification \times race (H2b), merit \times merit preference (H1c), and race \times OEQ (H3). The regression revealed that only the race \times OEQ interaction ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p = .037$) was significant. The failure to find a significant ethnic identification \times race interaction failed to support H2b, and the failure to find a significant merit \times merit preference interaction failed to support H1c. A full regression model with all the two-way, three-way, four-way, and five way interaction(s) was also conducted, and it produced no additional meaningful information beyond the model we report. Step 3 revealed that the race \times OEQ interaction was not moderated by merit manipulation, meritocracy preference, or ethnic identification, as none of the three-way interactions were significant ($ps > .08$).

A regions of significance test revealed two Johnson–Neyman points of OEQ: 2.75 (0.31 SDs above the mean of 2.39, simple slope $B=0.55$, $SE=0.28$, $t=1.97$, $p=.05$) and 5.89 (2.99 SDs above the mean of 2.39, simple slope $B=-1.67$, $SE=0.84$, $t=1.97$, $p=.05$). These two points divided the range of OEQ values into three significance regions: In the first region, where OEQ ranged from 1 (the minimum value of OEQ) to 2.75, the simple effects of

Table 6. Study 3 regression results: Perceived unfairness.

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Gender	-.30 (.28)	-.34 (.28)	-.34 (.28)
Political orientation	.16* (.08)	.14 (.08)	.13 (.08)
AA knowledge	-.10 (.07)	-.10 (.07)	-.11 (.07)
Ethnic identification	-.18 (.18)	-.03 (.18)	-.07 (.18)
Merit	-.96** (.26)	-.88** (.26)	-.90** (.26)
Merit preference	.70** (.22)	.71** (.22)	.74** (.22)
Non-beneficiary race	.78** (.27)	.69** (.26)	.64** (.27)
OEQ	.26* (.13)	.28* (.13)	.24* (.16)
Ethnic identification \times race		-.16 (.34)	-.04 (.35)
Merit \times merit preference		-.17 (.42)	-.08 (.43)
Merit \times race		.20 (.53)	.40 (.54)
Merit \times OEQ		.25 (.23)	.23 (.23)
Merit preference \times race		-.41 (.42)	-.45 (.42)
Merit preference \times OEQ		-.24 (.18)	-.25 (.17)
Race \times OEQ		-.70** (.23)	-.65** (.23)
Ethnic ID \times race \times OEQ			.51 (.29)
Merit \times race \times OEQ			.60 (.47)
Merit preference \times race \times OEQ			-.31 (.37)
R^2	.20**	.25**	.27**
ΔR^2		.05**	.02
F	7.34	4.98	4.49
df	8, 234	15, 227	18, 224

Note: Unstandardized regression weights and standard errors (in parentheses) are presented. Gender, 0 = male, 1 = female; non-beneficiary race, 0 = White, 1 = Asian; AA = affirmative action; OEQ = opposition to equality. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

adversely affected candidate's race on perceived unfairness were all significantly positive. In the second region, where OEQ ranged from 2.75 to 5.89, the simple effects were not significant. In the third region, where OEQ ranged from 5.89 to 6.5 (the maximum value of OEQ), the simple effects of race on perceived unfairness were all significantly negative. This pattern (Figure 1 Study 3) replicates Studies 1 and 2 and fully supports H3.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 again partially supported H1b of the meritocratic perspective; however, candidate merit did not interact with endorsement of meritocratic beliefs, as predicted by H1c, and participants again thought it more unfair when the Asian candidate was rejected, which failed to support H1a. As in our earlier studies, the significant race \times OEQ interaction showed that differences in beneficiary merit and evaluator's preference for meritocracy do not fully explain fairness judgments. Instead, OEQ and non-beneficiary's race explained fairness judgments over and above these factors, providing additional support for the ideological perspective (H3). Finally, we found no evidence to support H2a or H2b of the social identification perspective.

General Discussion

This paper tested hypotheses derived from the theoretical perspectives that have been most often invoked to explain Whites' reactions toward AA. We tested these hypotheses on an outcome variable—perceived fairness—that is arguably the source of much of the controversy surrounding the use of AA to make hiring decisions in organizations. Across three studies, we found the strongest support for the ideological perspective, some support for the meritocratic perspective, and no support for the social identification perspective. The pattern of results showed that a non-beneficiary's race influences fairness judgments but that the direction of the effect depends on the ideological beliefs of the person making the judgment. A meta-analysis of the effect sizes (Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981) across the three studies (.34, .16, and .18, respectively) revealed that the average standardized coefficient of the non-beneficiary's race \times OEQ interaction is .19, suggesting that the ideological effect is non-trivial, even after controlling for other theoretical predictors. Furthermore, we found this interaction effect using different experimental designs, subject populations (students and working adults), delivery methods (paper and pencil and online survey), and job positions. The effect thus appears to be robust and generalizable. The differences in our designs and samples may also explain why the effect sizes in Studies 2 and 3 are smaller than the effect size in Study 1.

We argued based on the ideological perspective that the endorsement of social equality should be logically connected to whether a person generally favors or opposes policies that seek to attenuate differences in the life circumstances and opportunities of dominant and subordinate groups. As predicted by this perspective, Whites who endorsed more egalitarian goals made fairness judgments in which the rejection of a White over a Black candidate was perceived as being relatively less unfair than the rejection of an Asian over a Black candidate. We interpret this finding as indicating that people who endorse egalitarian goals may not be as disturbed if AA adversely affects someone from a dominant racial group (even if they are members of that group), as compared with when AA adversely affects someone from a more subordinate racial group. This result provides one answer to why a fair proportion of Whites may not view a hiring or selection decision in which racial characteristics trump merit as necessarily unfair.

Collectively, our findings challenge a purely meritocratic account of why some Whites oppose AA by showing that ideological differences explained judgments of AA-influenced decisions above (Study 1) and beyond (Studies 2 and 3) merit. Furthermore, Study 3 showed that the ideological effects emerged even after controlling for evaluators' individual preferences for the use of the merit principle. Although we did not find that evaluators who strongly endorse meritocracy were more likely to be influenced by the relative qualifications of the beneficiary in Study 3, as the meritocratic perspective would predict, the meritocratic perspective was supported to some extent

in our studies. In accordance with the principled conservatism argument that many people who oppose AA do so because it violates the principle of meritocracy, we did find main effects of the beneficiary's qualifications relative to the non-beneficiary (Studies 2 and 3) as well as differences depending on evaluators' meritocracy preference (Study 3) on fairness judgments, showing that merit-related considerations have non-trivial predictive power independent of evaluators' ideological beliefs. These findings support Crosby et al.'s (2006) contention that multiple explanations are needed to fully account for people's reactions to AA, and based on our findings, both meritocratic and ideological variables appear to be among the most important predictors of these reactions.

Surprisingly, we found no support for the social identification perspective across our studies. In fact, White participants consistently perceived it more unfair when an Asian (vs. White) candidate was rejected, and their level of identification with Whites as a group did not influence fairness judgments. This finding is at odds with evidence in the literature showing that collective-interest concerns shape attitudes toward AA (Harrison et al., 2006). We are hesitant to dismiss the importance of social identification based on our findings alone. Thus, we do not claim that collective-interest concerns play no role in determining Whites' reactions to AA, only that they are not sufficient to explain responses to AA-influenced decisions in the specific situation presented to participants and on the particular dependent variable we assessed. One plausible direction for future research is to test whether the ideological effects found in our studies are independent of the influence of Whites' collective relative deprivation beliefs (general beliefs that Whites are chronically disadvantaged in the society) (Shteynberg et al., 2011). It is possible that it is these beliefs, and not social identification, that more strongly drive judgments about the fairness of AA policies.

The fact that low OEQ Whites consistently perceived it as more unfair when the AA-influenced decisions adversely affected an Asian (vs. a White) even when both had the same qualifications challenges previous research suggesting that people who adopt egalitarian goals are motivated to inhibit prejudice (e.g., Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998). In contrast, we show that strongly endorsing egalitarian goals could lead to a different kind of prejudice among Whites that reveals itself in the tendency to favor a minority over a White. Whether this prejudice is a conscious, principled decision or the result of an unconscious anti-White or anti-high status group bias is a question that should be explored in future research. We advance theory and research on SDO by showing that people who are low SDO do not only desire to attenuate social hierarchies based on race or group, they do so even against their own self-interest. Similarly, AA represents a case where pure principled conservatism is unlikely to explain both supportive and hostile reactions toward the policy. Only by integrating social dominance theory with principled conservatism do we begin to get a clearer picture of when and why AA is (not) seen as fair, advancing knowledge in the practical domain.

Our studies contribute to research on AA by showing the value of taking into account the race of adversely affected parties to fully understand how observers evaluate the fairness of AA-influenced organizational decisions. As discussed earlier, the majority of studies on AA have assumed that all minorities are beneficiaries of this policy, even though a handful of scholars have pointed out that in practice, some minority groups are as adversely affected by these racial policies as Whites (e.g., Wu, 1995). To fully explain people's reactions to race-based policies such as AA, future research should examine how people respond to organizational situations where racial policies designed to help some minority groups actually harm other minority groups. By introducing Asian males as a non-beneficiary group, our paper expands the conversation about the costs and benefits of AA to include people from groups other than those that have been traditionally associated with being disadvantaged by AA (i.e., Whites and males). Studies examining the impact of AA on Asians and Asian males are virtually non-existent in the organizational behavior literature. Given that Asians are often targets of resentment and hostility as a result of their economic and educational successes (Maddux et al., 2008) and evidence suggesting that Whites change their criteria for evaluating merit when judging Asians (Samson, 2013) by devaluing criteria on which Asians perform well, it seems worthwhile for future research to explore when and under what conditions people are likely to perceive social or organizational policies that are disadvantageous to Asians as more or less troubling than those that adversely affect other minority groups. Our studies suggest that at least some Whites (i.e., those who are high in OEQ) are not as disturbed by AA when its application adversely affects an Asian, which reveals a possible boundary condition to the backlash effect that perceptions of reverse discrimination can produce.

A limitation of our study designs is that the AA beneficiary was always a Black male, and hence, our findings must be interpreted in light of this feature. The purpose of using all males in our scenarios was to ensure that we

presented participants with a situation that was consistent with the common perception of who benefits from AA and also to facilitate direct comparison between two non-beneficiary groups (Asian and White males). However, we acknowledge the possibility that evaluations of the AA-influenced decisions may also vary as a function of beneficiary ethnicity, sex, disability, etc., some of which may interact. In particular, because women now make up a large proportion of the workforce, future research could test the three theoretical perspectives using different AA beneficiaries (e.g., White female vs. Asian or African-American female) to see if the patterns we found in our data are replicated.

A second limitation of our studies is that they all rely on scenarios, which raises the question about their external validity. In our defense, the majority of studies examining people's reactions to AA rely on a similar methodology. It would be very difficult (perhaps impossible) to test our hypotheses in a field study. Thus, for testing theoretical predictions, an experimental scenario is an appropriate design, and we tried to enhance the external validity of our studies by using samples of working adults in two of our studies. A third limitation is that we examined only the reactions of Whites, largely because they tend to report the lowest support for AA. Future research should test whether people of different races who are either high or low in SDO would react similarly.

Our findings offer some practical implications for how organizations might implement AA. It is reasonable to assume that people are more likely to be supportive of AA if they view it as a fair process. We found that fairness perceptions can vary as a function of the race of the candidate who is disadvantaged by AA. If observers tend to assume that the non-beneficiaries of AA are largely members of the same group (e.g., White males), it might lead them to view the policy as unfair especially if they are strongly opposed to social equality. Our results suggest that one way to mitigate this perception is to provide observers with information showing that White males are not exclusively and negatively impacted by the policy. Indeed, our studies suggest that for those who are high in OEQ, making them aware that the "cost" of AA is borne by other minority groups might even make them more supportive of the policy. This approach suggests that it is important for organizations to communicate that the potential costs of AA are not borne exclusively by members of one particular group. At the same time, though, they must also communicate its potential to benefit all groups because organizational diversity is a valuable resource. Of course, the question of whether such a policy is fair or unfair regardless of who(m) it adversely affects is ultimately a moral and ethical one. Our recommendation is focused on how organizations might influence *perceptions* of fairness. We do not attempt to answer the ethical question about whether the use of AA is fair in any normative sense.

Our findings also suggest that merit does matter in shaping fairness judgments. Thus, when organizations make selection or promotion decisions based on AA, it seems particularly important for them to provide evidence that the beneficiaries possess the qualities that define merit in that organization. Our data suggest that conveying more specific information about candidates' qualifications and how they meet the relevant selection criteria for the positions can influence fairness judgments independently of ideological beliefs.

Finally, our results speak to the importance of tempering extreme views about both social inequality and equality. Our data showed that people who hold strong views on either side of this ideological divide exhibited judgments that deviated from what one might expect based on a purely objective consideration of candidates' merit but in different directions. Although people likely come to organizations already having formed beliefs about equality, it is likely that organizations either amplify or moderate these beliefs at least to some degree. One way this can be done is by creating climates in which diversity is valued and appreciated (Ely & Thomas, 2001), which can counter the orientation to maintain impermeable group hierarchies based on socially constructed status characteristics like race and gender. Meanwhile, to mitigate the adoption of extreme egalitarian beliefs, it is also important for organizations to make it clear that what ultimately matters in determining rewards and outcomes is performance. To the extent that organizations strike a balance between the two extremes of sustaining group-based dominance hierarchies based on arbitrary criteria and trying to completely eradicate differences that arise between groups regardless of whether such differences might be the result of actual performance and contributions, our data suggest that they may create an environment in which people may find it more acceptable to use AA to help increase diversity.

Taken together, our results suggest that an integrative model of how people react to AA, which has thus far been missing in the existing literature (Crosby et al., 2006), is both warranted and necessary. Our paper provides evidence of some key variables that should be included in such a model, including one that has not been studied in previous

research, namely, the race of those adversely affected by AA. We leave it to future studies to determine whether these variables also affect reactions other than fairness and how they relate to the host of other factors that have been shown to influence attitudes toward AA.

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Appendix A: Scenarios used in Study 1

1. The scenario where a White male was adversely affected.

THE FACULTY HIRING DECISION

Background Information

The biology department at the University of ____, a major public university, wanted to hire an Assistant Professor to conduct scientific research and teach introductory biology classes to undergraduates. The biology department has 25 faculty members, but *no minorities*. However, 15 percent of the students at the University

are minorities. The Department Head appointed a four-person Search Committee made up of department faculty to identify a suitable candidate. After reviewing over 100 applications, the committee recommended inviting two candidates for a campus interview. The names of the candidates were **Todd Rainey** and **James Randolph**.

Evaluation Criteria

The Search Committee used two criteria to assess a candidate's potential: (i) their ability to conduct scholarly research and (ii) their ability to teach effectively. The primary indicator of research potential is the number of scientific articles published in *top scholarly journals*. Teaching ability is generally assessed by looking at *student course evaluations* and by the candidates' ability to orally present their research during an on-campus interview.

The Candidates

Biographical profiles of Todd Rainey and James Randolph are presented on the following page. The information shows accomplishments of the candidates while they were in graduate school. Take a moment to carefully review their profiles. Try to recall as much information as you can about their qualifications as they relate to the **evaluation criteria** described in the previous paragraph, meaning, their publications, and teaching performance. Once you have reviewed their profiles, go on to the next page.

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILES

Name: Todd Rainey



Education: Todd, who is Caucasian, received his Ph.D. in biology from _____ University, which is ranked as one of the top five biology programs in the world by a leading scientific publication. He completed his undergraduate degree at a large public university on the West Coast.

Publications: Todd published three (3) scholarly research articles in top biology journals while he was in graduate school.

Teaching: Todd taught introductory biology courses to undergraduates while he was a graduate student. His teaching evaluations typically ranked in the top 15 percent compared with other instructors who have taught the same course at the same university from which he received his Ph.D.

Name: James Randolph



Education: James, who is African-American, received his Ph.D. in biology from the University of _____, which is ranked among the top 25 biology programs in the world by a leading scientific publication. He completed his undergraduate degree at a large public university in the Southeast.

Publications: James published two (2) scholarly research articles in a top biology journal while he was in graduate school.

Teaching: James taught introductory biology courses to undergraduates while he was a graduate student. His teaching evaluations typically ranked in the top 25 percent compared with other instructors who have taught the same course at the same university from which he received his Ph.D.

The Interview

Todd Rainey and James Randolph came to campus on different days to be interviewed by the biology department faculty. They made 45-minute presentations of their research. The interviews and presentations went well, and both candidates left campus very interested in the position and feeling confident that they would be offered the job

The Decision

The Search Committee carefully reviewed the research and teaching records of both candidates, the quality of their presentations, and the overall impression they made during their face-to-face interviews. After meeting as a group, the Search Committee unanimously recommended that a job offer be made to **Todd Rainey**.

As mentioned in the Background Information, there were no African-American faculty members in the biology department. It was well-known that a stated goal of the University of _____ was to increase faculty diversity through an Affirmative Action hiring policy. The policy as described in the University's hiring and promotion document is presented as follows:

The University of _____ is an equal opportunity employer and has an *Affirmative Action* employment policy. The University is committed to promote a fair distribution of employment opportunities, as well as to broaden the overall talent pool by actively seeking female and minority employees. When applicants are determined to have met the *minimum job qualifications*, the University gives primary consideration to hiring women and members of minority groups.

Guided by this policy, the Head of the biology department over-ruled the recommendation of the Search Committee and offered the job to **James Randolph**. James eagerly accepted the position. Todd was very disappointed when he heard that he did not receive the job offer because the University of _____ was his top choice. He eventually accepted a job at another university.

(End of scenario)

2. The scenario where an Asian male was adversely affected was identical to the scenario earlier except for the name, picture, and ethnicity description of the adversely affected person.

Name: Robert Chung



Education: Robert, who is Asian-American, received his Ph.D. in biology ...