

Americans' Support for Workplace Interventions for Combating Racial and Gender Bias: The Impact of Policy Justifications and Inequality Beliefs

OVERVIEW

Decades of research by organizational scholars informs our understanding of how specific organizational policies and practices for making decisions about hiring, pay, and promotion *create and sustain* workplace gender and racial inequality (e.g. Nelson and Bridges 1999, Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 1999, Reskin 2000, Castilla 2008, Castilla and Benard 2010). A more recent and growing line of research contributes to our understanding of the prevalence and effectiveness of a range of organizational interventions for *minimizing* racial and gender bias and promoting diversity (e.g. Bielby 2000, Holzer and Neumark 2000, Kalev and Dobbin 2006, Kalev et al. 2006, Baron et al. 2007). Yet apart from polling of Americans' views on "affirmative action" and "goals and preferences," we know remarkably little about *public opinion* regarding *specific workplace practices* designed to address workplace racial and gender inequality (see the meta analysis by Harrison et al. 2006).

Bridging this knowledge gap is important for several reasons. *First*, in the U.S. the formulation and implementation of specific policies to combat discrimination are largely left to individual employers, with very limited government guidance and oversight. Absent effective external oversight, companies often engage in "symbolic management," implementing practices that are viewed as appropriate and legitimate to both internal and external stakeholders but which place little real constraint on managerial discretion (Edelman 1992, Kelly and Dobbin 1998, Edelman et al. 2011). Yet there is no empirical basis for knowing which specific policies are truly embraced or opposed by the American public, especially those such as accountability structures that are less frequently implemented yet shown to be effective in reducing racial and

gender inequality, and those such as diversity training that are widely implemented yet shown to be at best ineffective and at worst creating greater workplace racial and gender inequality (Kalev et al. 2006, Harrison et al. 2006). Moreover, research shows that the normative context in which interventions are implemented matters. Some studies find that antidiscrimination interventions are more effective in minimizing bias when they are justified as reflecting a mandate with a broad social consensus (Bartlett 2009, Albiston et al. 2012). Accordingly, we are proposing a general population experiment of Americans' attitudes towards *specific antidiscrimination/diversity workplace practices* that vary from ones that focus on changing individual behavior with minimal constraint on managerial discretion (e.g. proactive recruitment and voluntary diversity training) to those that focus on changing organizational structures and restricting managerial discretion (e.g. establishing organizational units with oversight responsibility regarding equal employment opportunity and diversity). In addition, for each organizational intervention, our study *experimentally manipulates the rationale for intervention*: whether it is justified as an effort to overcome discrimination, as an exercise in managing diversity, or not justified at all. This allows us to *test whether the normative context (legal compliance versus diversity) has any impact on how specific workplace interventions are evaluated by Americans (Hypotheses H1 and H2, Table 1)*.

Second, nearly all extant research focuses on policies to remedy *racial* discrimination and promote racial diversity at work; there are hardly any studies on attitudes towards workplace policies that target *gender* (Kane and Whitley 2009). We study *gender as well as race* with a design that experimentally manipulates the policy target in order *to test whether the basis of opposition and support for specific workplace practices depends on the intended beneficiaries* and we *test the tentative conclusion of Kane and Whitley that gender attitudes are less*

consequential than racial attitudes for opinions about workplace antidiscrimination/diversity interventions (Hypotheses H3, Table 1). Our research also addresses a significant limitation of their study, which was constrained by a lack of measures of beliefs about gender inequality that are comparable to those used in studies of race and policy interventions. Measures of beliefs about gender inequality we have developed parallel in content and form the ones we use for beliefs about racial inequality (which in turn are based on measures used in prior research). Note that these measures about beliefs about racial and gender inequality are *not* experimentally manipulated, and we will use supplemental funding to include these measures on the survey (because these measures are not to be supported by TESS we describe them in Table 2 rather than in the body of this proposal).

Third, our research is designed to develop a more nuanced understanding of the consistent finding in public opinion research of the "principle/implementation" gap in Americans' attitudes towards antidiscrimination efforts -- the finding that that nearly all Americans endorse principles of racial inequality, while their support for specific policies to address racial inequality lags far behind (Krysan 2000). This line of research demonstrates that Americans' beliefs about the sources of social inequality generally ("individualist" versus "structuralist") affects support for antidiscrimination interventions (Bobo 2011). Our survey includes measures of individualist and structuralist stratification beliefs, drawn from prior research (see Table 2). *Some workplace interventions are designed to modify organizational structures and others to modify individual behavior. Accordingly, we anticipate that the size of the principle/implementation gap will depend on whether the intervention resonates more with structuralist or individualist beliefs as well as the justification for the intervention, and on the interaction between inequality beliefs and justification (Hypotheses H1 and H4, Table 1).*

While our study seeks to understand which workplace antidiscrimination interventions are favored and opposed and by whom among adult Americans, it has broader implications. The very efficacy of antidiscrimination efforts are influenced by their perceived legitimacy to stakeholders, and understanding where there is, is not, and could be a broad social consensus for intervention will help employers and policymakers devise new intervention and implementation strategies and navigate the often contentious debate over what works and why, over what enriches worklife and what doesn't, and over what kinds of practices are both effective in minimizing unlawful discrimination and are perceived as fair.

STUDY DESIGN

Our survey experiment asks respondents to report attitudes about interventions generally and about seven specific organizational interventions: active recruitment; voluntary and mandatory diversity training; mentorship programs, organizational accountability structures responsible for minimizing barriers; and numerical goals. The programs vary both in the degree of constraint they impose on managerial discretion and whether they are intended to modify individual behavior or organizational structure. And as noted above, they also differ in their effectiveness for reducing racial and gender inequality in the workplace. For each of the eight items there are three experimental conditions that vary the rationale for workplace intervention. These conditions are: (A) an "overcome discrimination" justification; (B) a "create diversity" justification; and (C) no justification. In addition, respondents will be randomly assigned to either a race focus (e.g. "...to overcome racial discrimination some companies actively recruit racial minorities...") or a gender focus (e.g. "...to overcome gender discrimination some companies actively recruit women..."). Thus, our experiment consists of eight items with a three

by two (justification by focus) experimental design. (See "Survey Items," questions E2.1R through E2.8R and E2.1G through E2.8G).¹

SAMPLE: With eight experimental items we are eligible for a maximum sample size of 3600, equally divided between whites, African Americans, and Latinos. Most past research and theory is about the opinions of whites, and a sample of 1200 is sufficient to examine their responses in detail (most of the hypotheses listed in Table 1 are based on research on whites' opinions towards affirmative action). Ours will be the first study to also explore how beliefs about inequality generally and racial and gender inequality specifically shape attitudes towards workplace EEO interventions among African Americans and Latinos.

Control variables include "profile" variables routinely supplied at no cost or low cost to TESS investigators: age, education, employment status, occupation, industry, household income, household size, marital status, MSA status, and region. We are requesting the Knowledge Networks measures of political attitudes, party identification, and presidential handling of racial issues in order to be able to assess how beliefs about workplace antidiscrimination interventions relate to contemporary debates about "principled conservatism" and modern racism and sexism (Sears et al. 1997, Feldman and Huddie 2005, Bobo 2011, Gainous 2012). (We are also including a question on presidential preference.) The complete list of control and supplementary variables to be included in our study appear at the bottom of Table 1.

¹We chose not to administer the gender focus and race focus questions to the same respondents in order to avoid consistency effects (Schuman and Presser 1996). Prior research shows that individuals who have been asked about support for policies benefiting women adjust their subsequent responses to questions about policies benefiting minorities in a way that reduces inconsistencies between the two, and vice versa (Wilson et al. 2008). Experimentally manipulating the focus with a between-subject design avoids this source of bias, while at the same time it allows us to assess whether the policy rationale affects the relative support Americans give to specific interventions designed to reduce racial and gender bias at work.

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TABLE 1: HYPOTHESES

H1. EFFECTS OF JUSTIFICATION FOR INTERVENTION, CONTINGENT UPON INEQUALITY BELIEFS. Interventions justified in terms of diversity will be evaluated more favorably than those justified by anti-discrimination or not justified at all. This will be more true among respondents subscribing to "individualist" views about the sources of workplace inequality than among those with "structuralist" views.

H2. INTERVENTIONS DESCRIBED GENERICALLY AND WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION WILL BE MOST STRONGLY AFFECTED BY RESPONDENT TRAITS AND BELIEFS. The impact of respondents' gender, race, stratification beliefs, and beliefs about racial and gender inequality will be greatest when no justification is provided and when interventions are described generically (i.e. question E.1R and E.1G). This is because absent a rationale and absent a clear statement of the intervention, respondents will make attributions about rationale and content based on their preexisting beliefs and interests (Harrison et al. 2006).

H3: EFFECTS OF RESPONDENT TRAITS, RACE AND GENDER BELIEFS, AND RACE VERSUS GENDER FOCUS OF INTERVENTION. Whites and males will be less supportive of interventions than non-whites and females, and race will be more consequential for race-focused interventions, while gender will be more consequential for gender-focused interventions. Among whites there will be greater support for gender-focused interventions than for race-focused interventions. Those holding more progressive beliefs regarding race and gender will be more supportive of race-focused and gender-focused interventions, respectively.

H4: EFFECTS OF TYPE OF INTERVENTION, CONTINGENT UPON INEQUALITY BELIEFS. There will be greater support for interventions focused on changing individual behavior than for those that alter organizational structures and constrain managers' decisions. This will be more true among respondents subscribing to "individualist" views about the sources of workplace inequality than among those with "structuralist" views.

CONTROL VARIABLES:

Variables supplied at no cost with all TESS datasets: Age, education, employment status, household income, household size, marital status, MSA status, region.

Items from the Knowledge Network Core Profile: detailed occupation (ppcm0164), detailed industry (IND2),

Supplementary measures of political attitudes: liberal/conservative (pppa0012 Q11), political party affiliation (partyid7)

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTION OF MEASURES OF BELIEFS ABOUT INEQUALITY

Eight items assess individuals' *beliefs about structural versus individual sources of inequality*. Items S1 through S4 and I1 through I4 are adapted from General Social Survey measures assessing opinions about "why there are poor people in this country" which have been widely used to measure these beliefs (e.g. Kluegel and Smith 1972, Bobo and Kluegel 1993, Hunt 1996). These items are to be asked prior to questions about support for workplace interventions (with as much separation as possible between the two sets of questions).

Items R1 through R5, assessing Americans' *beliefs about sources of racial inequality*, are to be asked only of respondents assigned to the race focus condition,¹ and they are to be asked after the questions about workplace interventions. Adapted from four items used in the General Social Survey since 1977, the first assesses the degree to which respondents agree that discrimination is an important reason why African Americans lag behind whites in socioeconomic status,² and the remaining four items assess agreement that disparities are due to racial differences in skills, abilities, personal traits, and educational opportunities (Hunt 2007).³

Items G1 through G4, assessing American's *beliefs about sources of gender inequality*, are to be asked only of respondents assigned to the gender focus condition, and they are to be asked after the questions about workplace interventions. The items about discrimination, education, and training and jobs strictly replicate the corresponding items in the race focus condition. We added an item about career versus family focus because work/family tradeoffs figure prominently both in popular understandings of gender differences in socioeconomic inequality and in supply-side scientific explanations (Ridgeway 2012, England 2005).⁴

¹ We chose to administer items regarding beliefs about racial inequality only to those in the race focus condition and beliefs about gender inequality only for those in the gender focus condition in order to avoid consistency effects.

²The GSS prompt includes "housing" along with jobs and income. We omit this reference because of the workplace focus of our study.

³We have added a fifth item (R5) on training and experience in order to include a "supply side" factor that in principle applies in the same way to gender as to race.

⁴Work/family tradeoff is not a factor used to explain racial inequality, so this item is not included in the race focus condition. We do not include an item on differences in "in-born ability" because biological differences in ability to learn are rarely invoked as explanations for gender inequality (with the possible exception of careers in mathematical fields). In our judgment, attempting to achieve strict replicability in the specific measures of beliefs about race and gender inequality would sacrifice validity of our measurement of each of those constructs.

SURVEY ITEMS

EXPERIMENT: MANIPULATE (1) JUSTIFICATION FOR PROGRAM AND (2) RACE VERSUS GENDER FOCUS ON A SERIES OF QUESTIONS ABOUT WORKPLACE PROGRAMS THAT VARY IN DEGREE OF CONSTRAINT ON MANAGERIAL DISCRETION AND ON INDIVIDUAL VERSUS ORGANIZATIONAL EMPHASIS (TWO EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS)

RACE FOCUS CONDITION:

E2.1R. policies unspecified.

{A. In order to minimize racial discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more racial diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies implement policies to address racial inequality in the workplace. What is your opinion of these efforts?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
			neither			
strongly favor	favor	slightly favor	favor nor oppose	slightly oppose	oppose	strongly oppose

The following questions ask your views about specific programs things a company might implement.

E2.2R. not constraining, individual emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize racial discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more racial diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies actively recruit racial minorities to apply for job openings. What is your opinion of this practice?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
			neither			
strongly favor	favor	slightly favor	favor nor oppose	slightly oppose	oppose	strongly oppose

E2.3R. not constraining, individual emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize racial discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more racial diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies offer *voluntary* diversity training to their employees. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.4R. weakly constraining, individual emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize racial discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more racial diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies have *mandatory* diversity training of all employees. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.5R. weakly constraining, individual and organizational emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize racial discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more racial diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies provide minority employees with mentors who can assist them with job and career challenges. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.6R. moderately constraining, organizational emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize racial discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more racial diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies try to reduce subjectivity in their employment practices by relying on formal criteria for making decisions about hiring and promotion. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.7R. strongly constraining, organizational emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize racial discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more racial diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies have a special office or committee that identifies barriers to diversity and works to remove those barriers. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.8R. strongly constraining, organizational emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize racial discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more racial diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies establish numerical goals for increasing the number of racial minorities in jobs in which they have been underrepresented. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

GENDER FOCUS CONDITION:

E2.1G. policies unspecified.

{A. In order to minimize gender discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more gender diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies implement policies to address gender inequality in the workplace. What is your opinion of these efforts?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
			neither			
strongly		slightly	favor	slightly		strongly
favor	favor	favor	nor oppose	oppose	oppose	oppose

The following questions ask your views about specific programs things a company might implement.

E2.2G. not constraining, individual emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize gender discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more gender diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies actively recruit women to apply for job openings. What is your opinion of this practice?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
			neither			
strongly		slightly	favor	slightly		strongly
favor	favor	favor	nor oppose	oppose	oppose	oppose

E2.3G. not constraining, individual emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize gender discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more gender diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies offer *voluntary* diversity training to their employees. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.4G. weakly constraining, individual emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize gender discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more gender diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies have *mandatory* diversity training of all employees. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.5G. weakly constraining, individual and organizational emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize gender discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more gender diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies provide female employees with mentors who can assist them with job and career challenges. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.6G. moderately constraining, organizational emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize gender discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more gender diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies try to reduce subjectivity in their employment practices by relying on formal criteria for making decisions about hiring and promotion. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.7G. strongly constraining, organizational emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize gender discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more gender diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies have a special office or committee that identifies barriers to diversity and works to remove those barriers. What is your opinion of this practice? {same seven response categories}

E2.8G. strongly constraining, organizational emphasis.

{A. In order to minimize gender discrimination}{B. In order to create a workplace with more gender diversity}{C. [null]} {s}{s}{S}ome companies establish numerical goals for increasing the number of

women in jobs in which they have been underrepresented. What is your opinion of this practice?
{same seven response categories}

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: BELIEFS ABOUT INEQUALITY (NON EXPERIMENTAL)

(Structuralism-Individualism)

Here is a list of reasons some people give to explain why there are poor people in this country. Please indicate whether you feel each of these is very important, somewhat important, or not important in explaining why there are poor people in this country.

(Structuralist reasons)

- S1. Being taken advantage of by rich people.
- S2. Failure of society to provide good schools for many Americans.
- S3. Low wages in some businesses and industries.
- S4. Failure of private industry to provide enough good jobs.

(Individualist reasons)

- I1. Lack of thrift and proper money management skills.
- I2. Lack of ability and talent.
- I3. Personal irresponsibility, lack of discipline among those who are poor.
- I4. Lack of effort by the poor themselves.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: BELIEFS ABOUT SOURCES OF RACIAL INEQUALITY (RACE FOCUS CONDITION ONLY)

Here is a list of reasons some people give to explain why on the average, African Americans have worse jobs and income than white people. Please indicate whether you feel each of these is very important, somewhat important, or not important in explaining racial differences in jobs and income.

- R1. Because of workplace discrimination against African Americans.
- R2. Because most African Americans have less in-born ability to learn.
- R3. Because most African Americans don't have the same chance to get the education needed for good jobs.
- R4. Because most African Americans don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty.
- R5. Because most African Americans don't have the training and experience required for good jobs.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: BELIEFS ABOUT SOURCES OF GENDER INEQUALITY (GENDER FOCUS CONDITION ONLY)

Here is a list of reasons some people give to explain why on the average, women have worse jobs and income than men. Please indicate whether you feel each of these is very important, somewhat important, or not important in explaining sex differences in jobs and income.

- G1. Because of workplace discrimination against women.
- G2. Because most women don't have the same chance to get the education needed for good jobs..
- G3. Because most women don't have the training and experience required for good jobs.
- G4. Because compared to men, women focus more on family than on their careers.