

Practical Implications of Affirmative Action Research



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Background

- Hundreds of studies on affirmative action have addressed such issues as:
 - Economic impact on organizations
 - Economic impact on target groups
 - Stigmatization of target groups by others
 - Self-stigmatization by targeted individuals
 - Attitudes toward affirmative action



Preview

- Based on a review of this research, I shall present several conclusions that can be drawn with confidence and shall mention some practical implications.
- I welcome questions and comments about other practical implications of this or other possible affirmative action research.



Versions of Affirmative Action Used in Research

- Descriptions of affirmative action vary from nonexistent to simplistic.
- Versions vary in strength
 - Elimination of discrimination
 - Opportunity enhancement
 - Tiebreak
 - Strong preferential treatment & quotas

Impact of Affirmative Action on Organizational Performance (1)

- Theoretical models demonstrate that the effect of affirmative action can be positive or negative, depending on
 - the extent of pre-existing discrimination.
 - how the affirmative action procedure (AAP) is implemented.
 - differences in human capital resources of majority and minority groups.

Impact of Affirmative Action on Organizational Performance (2)

- Research finds no consistent effect of affirmative action on performance.
 - When strong AAPs are used, some target groups have slightly lower educational credentials than White males in the AA organizations, but
 - there is no net effect on performance because AA organizations have superior HRM practices.

Impact of Affirmative Action on Organizational Performance (3)

■ Practical Implications

- Do not use strong preferential treatment.
- Eliminate discrimination and use opportunity enhancement procedures.
- Use HRM best practices in recruitment, selection, training, appraisals, etc.



Impact of Affirmative Action on Target Groups (1)

- Theoretical models show that even if all employment discrimination were eliminated, it could take decades for the mere elimination of discrimination to result in full employment equality.
- Employment of target groups is higher in firms that use “identity conscious” procedures than in those that use “identity blind” procedures.



Impact of Affirmative Action on Target Groups (2)

- Employment of target groups has grown more in federal contractors than in non-contractors.
 - The effects have varied in size across employment outcome, target groups, location, decade, and type of position
- Changes in target group employment correlate positively with AA goals.

Impact of Affirmative Action on Target Groups (3)

■ Practical Implications

- If underrepresentation exists to any great extent and you want to eliminate it, you need to do more than merely eliminate discrimination.
- Identity conscious procedures (AA) can improve the employment outcomes of target groups. Do not believe claims that AA does not and cannot work.

Stigmatization

- Refers to negative evaluations of individuals who are selected in the context of an AAP.
- The theoretical basis is provided by the discounting principle, which results in attributional ambiguity.
- This logic applies to others and to target group members themselves.

Stigmatization of Target Group Members by Others (1)

- Stigmatization has been observed in laboratory and (some) field research.
- This is limited to situations in which
 - affirmative action is implemented (or believed to be implemented) as strong preferences.
 - Evidence of the individual's solid qualifications and performance is not provided to the respondents.

Stigmatization of Target Group Members by Others (2)

■ Practical Implications

- If you do not use preferences, say so and provide details of how your AAP is implemented.
- If the selected individual has strong credentials, providing this information may decrease stigmatization.
- Do not say or imply that an individual was hired to satisfy AA goals.

Self-Stigmatization by Target Group Members (1)

- The effect has been observed:
 - In laboratory studies
 - of White female undergraduates
 - who are told that their selection was based solely on their gender
 - and are not given evidence of their qualifications or performance
- Initial self-confidence seems to be critically important.



Self-Stigmatization of Target Group Members (2)

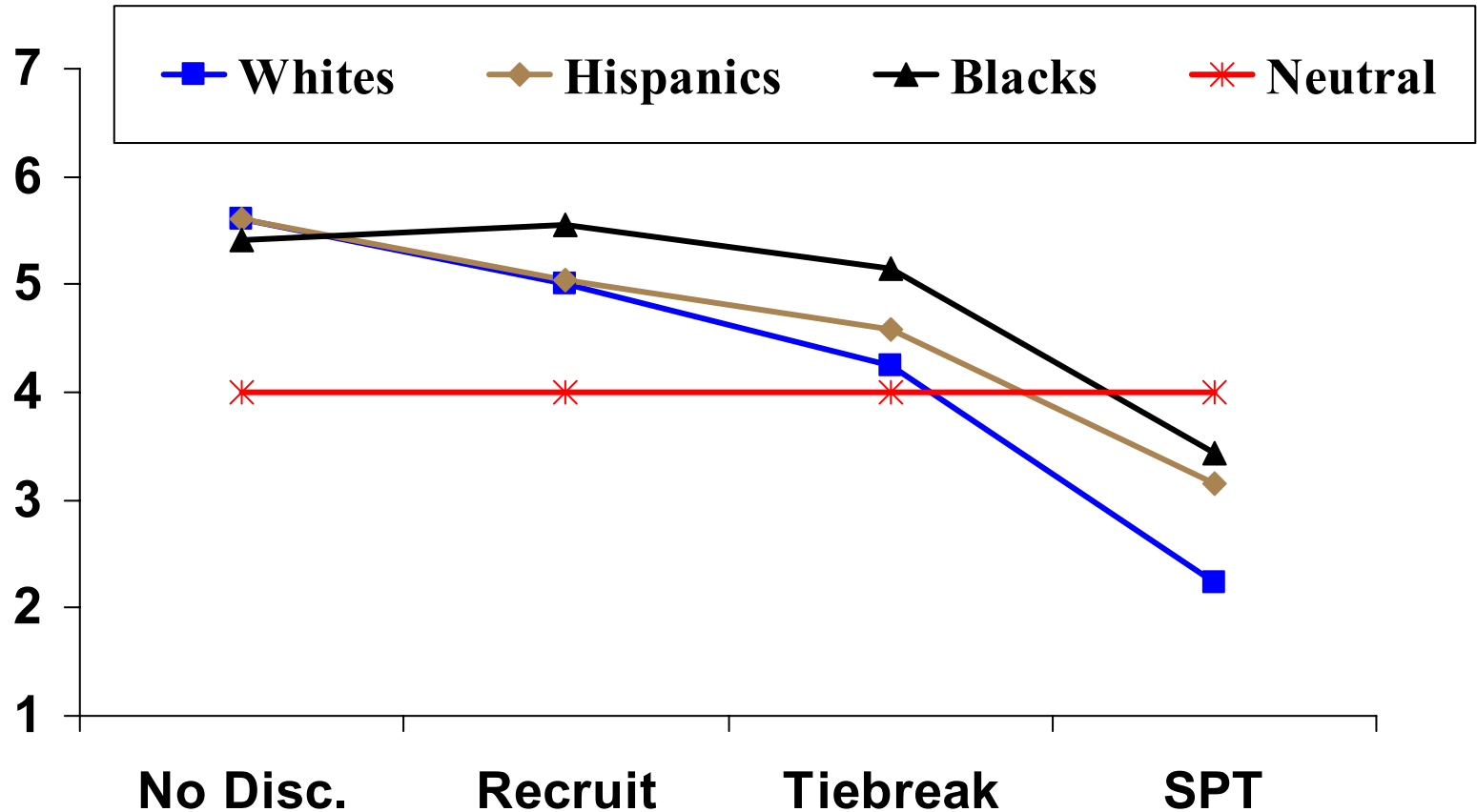
- The effect is ***not*** observed
 - among White males
 - in field research
 - among racial minorities
 - when selection is known to be based on a combination of merit and preferences
 - when subjects are given unambiguous evidence of their qualifications or performance

Self-Stigmatization of Target Group Members (3)

■ Practical Implications

- Inform everyone (truthfully) that your AAP does not involve preferences.
- Assure selected individuals that their selection was based on their credentials, not their demographic status.
- Increase their self-confidence by facilitating their performance through training, provision of resources, etc.

Attitude Vary with the Interaction of AAP Strength by Race (1)



Attitude Vary with the Interaction of AAP Strength by Race (2)

■ Practical Implications

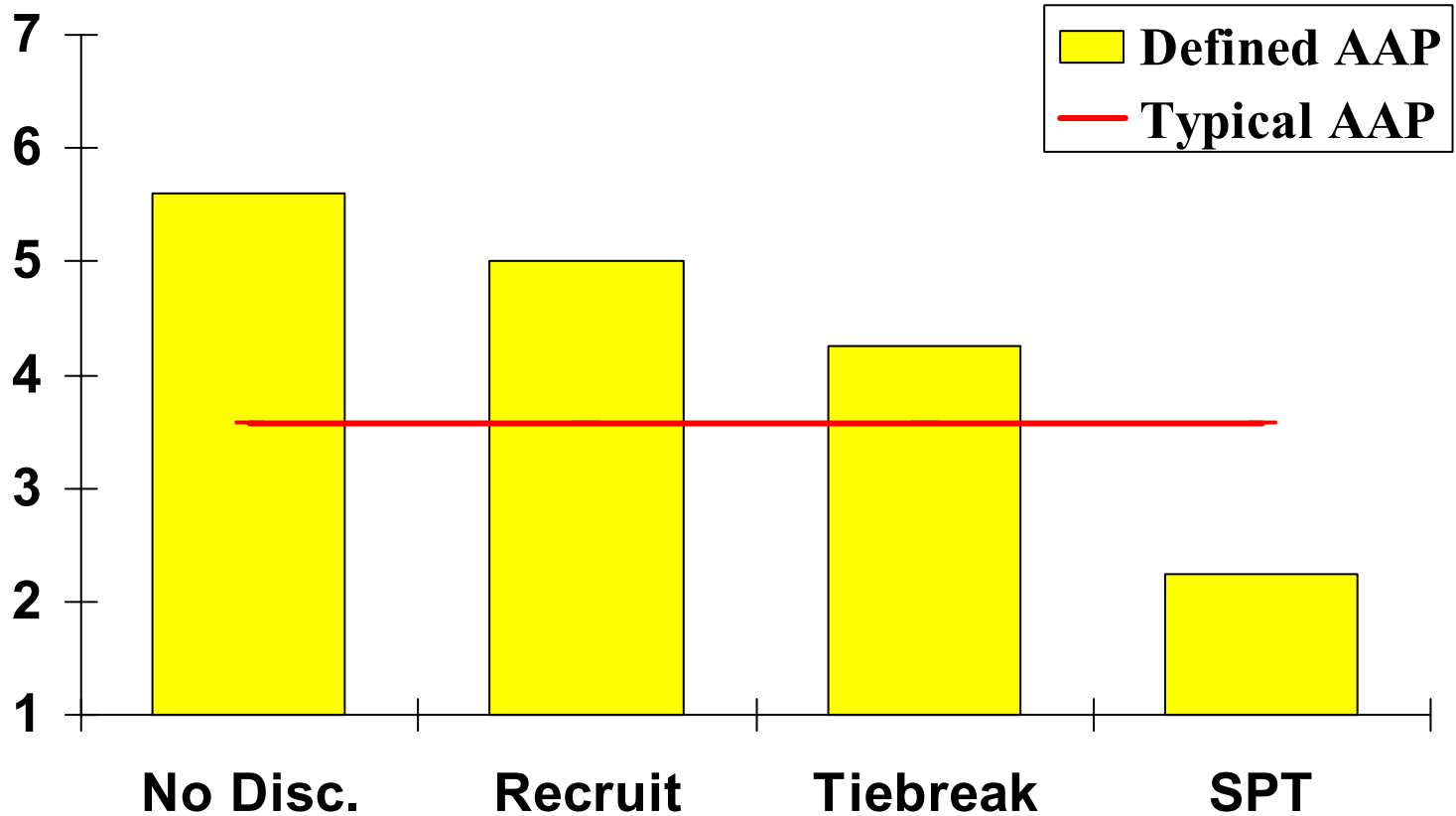
- Use the weakest version of affirmative action that will suffice.
- Avoid strong preferences and quotas, which will stimulate negative reactions and group conflict. Even Tiebreak will stimulate opposition by many.



Importance of Beliefs About Affirmative Action (1)

- We see that attitudes depend on details of the affirmative action plan.
- More generally, attitudes depend on the individual's beliefs about what affirmative action entails, regardless of the accuracy of those beliefs.

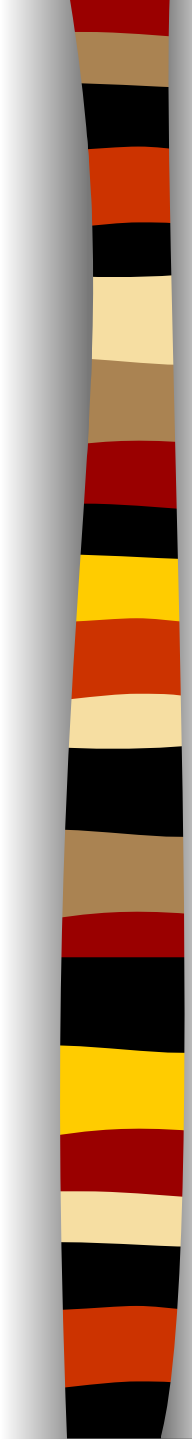
Importance of Beliefs About Affirmative Action (2)



Importance of Beliefs About Affirmative Action (3)

■ Practical Implications

- Assuming the AAP does not involve strong preferential treatment, let people know what it does involve.
 - This should decrease White opposition.
 - This should decrease conflict based on divergent assumptions about how the AAP is implemented.



Important Predictors (Partly) Under Organizational Control

- Rationale/Justification for the AAP
 - Referring to *underrepresentation* has a boomerang effect.
 - Referring to the need to *remedy past discrimination* has a positive effect.
 - Referring to the *value of increased diversity* has a positive effect.
- Anticipated effects on personal and group interests

Importance of Beliefs: Practical Implications

- To justify your AAP, emphasize the value of diversity.
- I would hesitate to justify your AAP by reference to past discrimination.
- Assuage concerns about negative implications for self-interest.
 - This should be less of a problem if the AAP does not involve preferences.

Final Thoughts:

Preferences are Bad

- In their paper on a “post-affirmative-action world” that stimulated this symposium, Sackett et al. (2001, p. 303) referred to “a growing trend toward bans on **preference-based** forms of affirmative action.”
- The research I have summarized today indicates that most of the problems associated with affirmative action are limited to the preference-based forms.



Final Thoughts:

Affirmative Action is Good

- Opportunity enhancement programs such as targeted recruitment, which should supplement the elimination of discrimination, offer the best ratio of benefits to costs.
- Publicize details of the AAP and emphasize the qualifications of target group members who are selected.