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NEGATIVE EVALUATIONS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION:  
THE PERSEVERANCE OF STIGMATIZATION

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts  
in  
Psychology

---

by  
Miriam Guadalupe Resendez  
September 1997

NEGATIVE EVALUATIONS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION:

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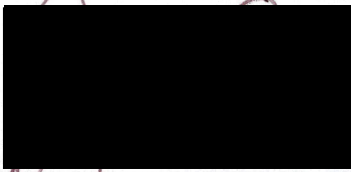
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by

Miriam Guadalupe Resendez


September 1997

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## ABSTRACT

Affirmative action has been under close scrutiny in recent years. Critics claim that affirmative action programs stigmatize their intended beneficiaries. The present study examined the pervasiveness of stigmatization. It was hypothesized that association with an affirmative action program would result in a negative evaluation of a minority group member, only when the job was one for which he was not very qualified for. Application materials of someone who was recently hired for a job were reviewed by 182 participants. The hiree was either a White male, Black male, or affirmative action Black male. The hiree was either moderately qualified or highly qualified. Dependent measures were assessed by a questionnaire. Participants were asked to rate the hiree in terms of competence, activity, potency, projected career progress, hiring due to qualifications, perceived early deprivation, and perceived difficulty in obtaining employment. Results showed that in the moderately qualified condition, the affirmative action black hiree was perceived less positively than the Black hiree who was perceived less positively than the White hiree. These results lend support to the discounting principle.

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## Introduction

Affirmative action programs have been implemented in order to remove barriers preventing underrepresented groups from opportunities to advance. These programs serve to increase the number of individuals from disadvantaged groups in schools and jobs in which they are traditionally underrepresented. However, such programs have yielded much controversy in recent years (Bender, 1991). Supporters of affirmative action programs state that such programs are needed because equal opportunities have been denied to minorities. Supporters further believe that affirmative action requirements force institutions to comply with civil rights laws (hooks, 1990). Although it has been found that minorities tend to be in favor of affirmative action programs (Arthur, Doverspike, & Fuentes, 1992), critics claim that beneficiaries of affirmative action programs might regard themselves with suspicion and lose confidence (Bender, 1991). In fact, it has been found that preferential treatment can have negative effects for women on self-perceptions (Heilman, Simon, & Repper, 1987). Other critics claim that affirmative action implies inferiority and that it stigmatizes its intended beneficiaries (Steele, 1990). It is the purpose of this study to investigate these claims. In particular, I examined the pervasiveness of the stigmas of affirmative action on incompetence, inactivity,

impotency, low expectations of career progress and of hiring without regard to qualifications even when contradictory information was presented.

For the most part, studies have shown that people react negatively toward recipients of preferential treatment in affirmative action programs (Heilman, e.g., 1993). These investigators found that when female participants had been chosen due to preferential treatment as compared to merit, female applicants were viewed as less competent. In another study conducted by Heilman and Herlihy (1984), females expressed greater job interest in a position only when they believed that other females had obtained the job because of merit. Furthermore, Heilman, Block and Lucas (1992), in study 1, documented that participants perceived females as less competent if they believed females had obtained a job because of affirmative action. Although these studies primarily dealt with females as recipients of preferential treatment, research results have shown that Whites are generally more supportive of preference toward women than toward ethnic and racial minorities (Clayton, 1992). Therefore the results may have been exacerbated if minorities had been the recipients of affirmative action. For instance, Garcia, Erskine, Hawn, & Casmay (1981) found that participants rated minority applicants to a graduate



school as less qualified when the school was committed to an affirmative action program.

These studies suggest that people under an affirmative action label may be perceived negatively. Attribution theory may explain the processes people go through to reach such conclusions. According to Kelley (1980 and Hewstone, 1983), when a person is confronted with information about an effect, he/she may make attributions according to the discounting principle: In the presence of other more salient and plausible causes, the role of a cause in producing an effect may be discounted. Thus affirmative action may provide a plausible cause to explain the hiring of a minority and therefore qualifications may be discounted. If qualifications are believed to be disregarded in the hiring process, a further assumption may be made: The hiree is incompetent, not active, lacks potency, and unlikely to move up in his/her career. Furthermore, these stigmas should result even when the job is one for which the individual is typically seen as qualified. This occurs because when qualifications are discounted as a basis for hiring, "this provides an impetus for negative evaluation, separate and distinct from that of ordinary stereotype-based processes" (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992, p. 537).

However, it is possible that participants will perceive earlier cultural deprivations as more salient and thus more

important than the effect of affirmative action policies in the hiring process. Kelley's (1980) augmentation principle explains this result. This principle states that "the extremity of an attribution based on one effect of an action will increase to the extent that causal factors are also present that would normally inhibit the action" (Linville & Jones, 1980, p. 690). In other words, a Black hiree may be perceived as more competent, active, potent, and more likely to move up in his career than a White hiree because he had more obstacles to overcome. Thus, a Black hiree's application may be viewed more positively and strongly than a White hiree's application.

Several studies have demonstrated the effects of the augmentation principle. For instance, Linville and Jones (1980) found that an extremely competent Black applicant to a prestigious law school was rated more favorably than the White applicant even when they had equal qualifications. Another study conducted by Dienstbier (1970) found that a Black target person with socially desirable values was liked more than a White target person.

Further support for augmentation effects comes from Linville and Jones' (1980) polarization theory. According to this theory, positive information leads to more favorable ratings of an out-group than an in-group member. Conversely, negative information will lead to more unfavorable ratings

of an out-group member. This is due to people having more complex schemas about their own groups because "the rich background of experience with the in-group generates a larger number of dimensions along which individual members may be characterized" (Linville & Jones, 1980, p. 691). Additionally, judgments based on a greater number of dimensions are more likely to be mixed and this, in turn, results in "evaluative moderation." On the contrary, people have more simplistic schemas regarding out-group members and thus perceive and evaluate them in global terms which results in "evaluative extremity." Therefore, out-group members are seen as either good or bad and in-group members are seen as good in some things and bad in others. Experimental evidence comes from Linville and Ross' 1980 study. They found that the out-group member was perceived more favorably than the in-group member when the application credentials were positive; however, when the application credentials were negative, that out-group member was perceived more negatively.

The present study extends previous research by Heilman, Block and Lucas (1992), who suggested that the tenacity of the stigma of incompetence be examined, and the research by Linville and Jones (1980). Heilman et al's study examined whether the stigma of incompetence is attributed to women associated with affirmative action. They had participants

review application materials of either a man, woman, or affirmative action woman for a position that was either sex-typed as strongly male or slightly male. As previously discussed, the affirmative action label appeared to make problems worse for women. Non-affirmative action women were viewed as less competent than men only for the strongly male sex-typed job. However, affirmative action women were viewed as less competent than men in both positions and less competent than non-affirmative action women.

In the present study, ethnicity was the factor for which individuals were hired under an affirmative action program. Furthermore, job qualifications were varied to assess the pervasiveness of stigmatization. In Linville and Jones (1980) study, participants reviewed applications from either a White or Black student applying to a prestigious law school. However, affirmative action was not made salient. In addition, weak and good credentials were examined. In the present study, affirmative action was made salient and moderate and high qualifications were varied.

In this study, participants reviewed job descriptions and application materials on recently hired people and made judgments of the person. The hiree was either a White male or Black male. One Black male was associated with an affirmative action program while another was not. In addition, qualifications, from average to highly qualified,

varied among these hirees. It was hypothesized that individuals who were highly qualified would be perceived more favorably, i.e. more competent, active, potent, generate high expectations for their career progress, and believed they were hired because of qualifications as compared to those who were only moderately qualified. According to the augmentation principle and polarization theory, it was also hypothesized that non-affirmative action Black hirees would be evaluated more positively than White hirees but only in the highly qualified condition. Finally, it was predicted that association with an affirmative action program would result in a less favorable evaluation of a minority group member compared to a minority not associated with affirmative action in both qualification conditions. This may be due to people partly discounting qualifications when making their attributions about others who are associated with affirmative action.

Figure 1

Experimental Design			
	Black Affirmative Action Hiree	Black Hiree	White Hiree
High Qualifications	A	B	C
Moderate	D	E	F

According to figure 1, the following specific predictions were made:

Main Effects: 1.  $A + B + C > D + E + F$

The highly qualified hirees will be viewed more positively than moderately qualified hirees.

2.  $A + D < B + E < C + F$

The Black affirmative action hirees will be viewed less positively than Black and White hirees.

Simple Effects: 1.  $A < B$

The highly qualified affirmative action Black hiree will be viewed less positively than the highly qualified

Black hiree due to the discounting principle.

2.  $B > C$

The highly qualified Black hiree will be viewed more positively than highly qualified White hiree due to the augmentation principle.

3.  $A < C$

The highly qualified affirmative action Black hiree will be viewed less positively than the highly qualified White hiree due to the discounting principle.

4.  $D < E < F$

The moderately qualified White hiree will be viewed more positively than the Black hiree who will be viewed as more positive than the affirmative action Black hiree due to the discounting principle.

#### Methods

##### Participants

Participants consisted of 182 California State University San Bernardino students who were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses in order to fulfill a



course requirement. However, there was no selectivity on our part so anyone wishing to participate was able to do so. Because it was expected that no differences between female and male responses would be found since previous research has failed to find any significant gender differences (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992), males and females were not balanced in each condition. Black subjects were excluded from the study because of the possible confound their ethnicity could create. Black subjects may perceive the non-affirmative action Black hiree as a token hiree and therefore perceive him negatively. This is contrary to the augmentation and polarization principles. Therefore, in order to examine the hypothesis predicted by these principles, the effect of Black subjects had to be controlled. It is not expected that this effect will occur with other minority members; therefore their results were examined.

A total of 182 participants, 59 Hispanic, 85 Caucasian, 17 Asian, and 18 Other, was randomly assigned to 1 of the 6 conditions. Of these participants, 69 were male and 111 were female. The average participant was 25 years old, (See Appendix B). Participants gave informed consent to participate.

### Design

The design was a 2 (highly qualified, moderately qualified) X 3 (White hiree, Black hiree, Black affirmative action hiree) between group factorial design. No affirmative action White male was used since affirmative action programs are particularly associated with ethnic minorities and women. The dependent measures were assessed using a questionnaire. Participants were asked to rate competence, activity, potency, projected career progress, hiring due to qualifications, perceived early deprivation and perceived difficulty in obtaining employment on Likert-type scales.

### Measures

Participants were tested in their classrooms. Each subject was presented with application materials and a questionnaire. The questionnaire was similar to the one used in the Heilman et al study (1992). In the present study, activity and potency were measured using 7-point bipolar adjective scales while the other variables were assessed using 5-point Likert-type scales. In addition, interpersonal characteristics were not examined since Heilman et al's study did not find significant results. Two variables from Linville and Jones study were also used. In addition to having participants rate the applicant on 16 traits relevant to law school, these researchers explored

participants' perceptions of early deprivation and difficulty in obtaining admission. These two questions was slightly modified since this study used the employment process.

### Procedure

Participants were told they would be participating in a study investigating the personnel selection and placement process. They received a job description and application materials and were told that the individual on the application had been recently hired for a job. After reviewing the materials, participants were asked to answer questions about the hiree, the job, and their expectations of the hiree's performance. The participants were told that their predictions would be compared with the actual performance of the hirees.

The job description was in the form of a job announcement describing a job at Cyntel Inc., a telecommunications company. Included were the job requirements (M.B.A. in Finance or Accounting and 4 years experience), general work responsibilities, and information about the hiree's education, work experience, and general background. In all cases the hiree was depicted as being 30 years old. A photograph of the applicant was placed on the upper right-hand corner of the application. A space on the bottom was designated "for clerical purposes only". After

completing the questionnaires, participants were debriefed and the study was explained.

### Experimental Manipulations

Job Qualifications. Job qualifications were manipulated by varying the hiree's education and experience. In the highly qualified conditions, the hiree's education included having an M.B.A. in Management and Accounting from Harvard University, a very prestigious university. The hiree was also depicted as having 7 years experience and having exceptional computer skills. In the moderately qualified conditions, the hiree's education included having an M.B.A. in Finance from California State University, Los Angeles, whose reputation is not as prestigious as Harvard University. The hiree had 4 years experience and moderate computer skills.

Hiree. The hiree's race was manipulated by the photograph on the application. On the application, there was either a picture of a White male or Black male. In a previous study using these pictures, (Marriot, 1997) no difference in attractiveness between the Black and White males was found. Thus no effects should be attributed to the pictures themselves.

The affirmative action manipulation consisted of writing by hand saliently "affirmative action hiree" in the section on the application marked "for clerical purposes

only". The following appeared at the end of the job description in the affirmative action conditions: "CYNTEL Inc. is an Equal Opportunity Employer. In compliance with affirmative action guidelines, we do not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, or national origin."

### Dependent Measures

In order to examine perceived competence, participants were asked to respond to two questions on a 5 point scale: "How competently do you expect this individual to perform this job?" (1= very competently to 5 =not at all competently) and "How effective do you think this individual will be at doing this work?" (1 = very effective to 5 = not at all effective). The average score was taken as the perceived competence rating.

Activity and potency were also assessed using 7-point adjective scales. Each of these two items made a scale and the average scores of the items within the scale were taken as the scale rating. These scales were counterbalanced in order to reduce order effects.

To assess projected career progress, participants were asked the following: "How likely is it that the hiree will move up in the organization?" (1 = very likely to 5 = very unlikely) and "How quickly is a promotion likely to occur" (1 = very soon to 5 = not at all). Participants assessed hiring due to qualifications by answering the following: "To

what extent do you believe the hiree was hired because of his qualifications to do the job well" (1 = completely to 5 = not at all). The average scores were taken as the projected career progress rating and hiring due to qualifications rating.

In order to distinguish between early cultural deprivation obstacles and specific employment obstacles, participants were asked the following: "Do you think that it was easier or harder for the hiree to obtain employment than it would be for the average applicant?" (1 = easy to 5 = hard) and "To what extent did the hiree probably face obstacles in developing his potential in his early environment and prior schooling?" (1 = Very likely to 5 = Very unlikely). The average scores were taken as the early obstacles scale and employment obstacles scale.

#### Manipulation Checks

To determine whether the job qualification manipulation was effective, participants were asked "How qualified was the applicant?" (1 = very qualified to 5 = not at all). It was expected that participants in the very qualified condition would perceive the hiree as completely qualified while those in the moderately qualified condition would perceive the hiree as average.

For the purpose of avoiding demand cues, a separate questionnaire was given after the subject had completed the

primary data. This questionnaire was titled "Attitudes Towards Study." In addition to asking questions about how they liked the study and what they had learned, participants were asked to indicate the ethnicity of the hiree and whether the company was an affirmative action employer. This served as a manipulation check for race and affirmative action.

Additionally, participants were asked whether or not they agreed with the goals of affirmative action and if they believed that affirmative action benefits its beneficiaries (1 = yes; 2 = no) for exploratory reasons.

In addition to the manipulation checks, an analysis of whether the job was perceived differently in the affirmative action conditions than the other conditions was conducted. Ratings of the job itself were obtained on two 7-point scales (1 = boring to 7 = interesting; 1 = easy to 7 = difficult).

## Results

### Manipulation Checks

To determine that the manipulation of job qualifications was effective, an independent samples  $t$ -test was conducted. Analysis of the responses revealed a significant effect,  $t(179) = -7.48$ ,  $p < .05$ . The hiree with the MBA from Harvard ( $M = 1.41$ ) was rated more qualified



than the hiree from California State University, Los Angeles ( $M = 2.38$ ).

In order to assess whether a possible confound existed between job perception and hiree, an analysis of variance was conducted. The ANOVA indicated no significant differences between the Black affirmative action hiree ( $M = 5.07$ ), Black hiree ( $M = 5.13$ ) and the White hiree ( $M = 4.91$ ) on the job scale,  $F(2, 178) = .26$ ,  $p > .05$ . Therefore, the job was not perceived significantly differently simply because of the hiree's ethnicity and/or association with affirmative action.

Further analysis demonstrated that participants did fairly well in recalling whether the company was an affirmative action employer and the ethnicity of the hiree. Analysis showed that 74% of participants correctly reported whether the company was an affirmative action employer. The hiree's ethnicity was correctly remembered by 90% of the participants.

For exploratory purposes, participants were asked if they thought that affirmative action benefited its intended beneficiaries and if they agreed with the goals of affirmative action after they had completed the questionnaire. Analysis of variance were conducted in order to assess whether there were significant age, gender, and ethnic differences among the participants in responses to

the following questions: "Do you feel affirmative action benefits its beneficiaries?" ( $M = 1.16$ ) and "Do you agree with the goals of affirmative action?" ( $M = 1.24$ ).

Approximately 81% of participants agreed with the benefits question and 74% agreed with the goals question (See Appendix B). Male and female participants did not differ significantly in their responses to both questions,  $F(1, 165) = .00$ ,  $p > .05$ , and,  $F(1, 167) = 1.04$ ,  $p > .05$ , respectively. The participants' ages were categorized into four groups: 1 = Ages 18 - 20,  $n = 79$ ; 2 = Ages 21-29,  $n = 60$ , 3 = Ages 30 - 39,  $n = 24$ ; 4 = Ages 40 - 59,  $n = 17$ . There were no significant differences among the different age groups,  $F(3, 165) = .80$ ,  $p > .05$  for the benefits question, and,  $F(3, 167) = .65$ ,  $p > .05$  for the goals question. Ethnicity of the applicant did however reveal significant differences,  $F(3, 165) = 3.49$ ,  $p < .05$ , and,  $F(3, 167) = 4.50$ ,  $p < .05$ . A post hoc comparison revealed that Caucasian participants ( $M = 1.22$ ) disagreed more with the goals of affirmative action than did Hispanics ( $M = 1.05$ ),  $t(154) = 3.40$ ,  $p < .05$ . Furthermore, Caucasians ( $M = 1.35$ ) were more likely to believe that affirmative action did not benefit its beneficiaries than did Hispanics ( $M = 1.11$ ),  $t(153) = 2.73$ ,  $p < .05$ .

A post hoc analysis was conducted on the data in order to assess this possible confound of ethnicity. It was

hypothesized that the Caucasian participants are more likely to make attributions according to the discounting principle than minority participants. ANOVAS did not reveal significant differences among the dependent variables when ethnicity and affirmative action hiree versus non-affirmative action hirees was examined.

### Hypothesis Tests

A priori comparisons were conducted using SPSS 6.1 for Windows 95. A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted on the seven ratings that are the dependent variables in order to assess main effects. Overall, the multivariate  $F$  was significant for job qualification,  $F(7, 171) = 9.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , and hiree,  $F(14, 340) = 5.74$ ,  $p < .001$ . Overall, no significant differences were found among male and female participants, therefore, their data was treated in combination,  $F(8, 168) = .30$ ,  $p > .05$ . Univariate 2 X 3 analysis was then conducted to determine specifically on which dependent variables the effects were found. The condition means are presented in table 1.

Table 1

Means in Each Experimental Condition

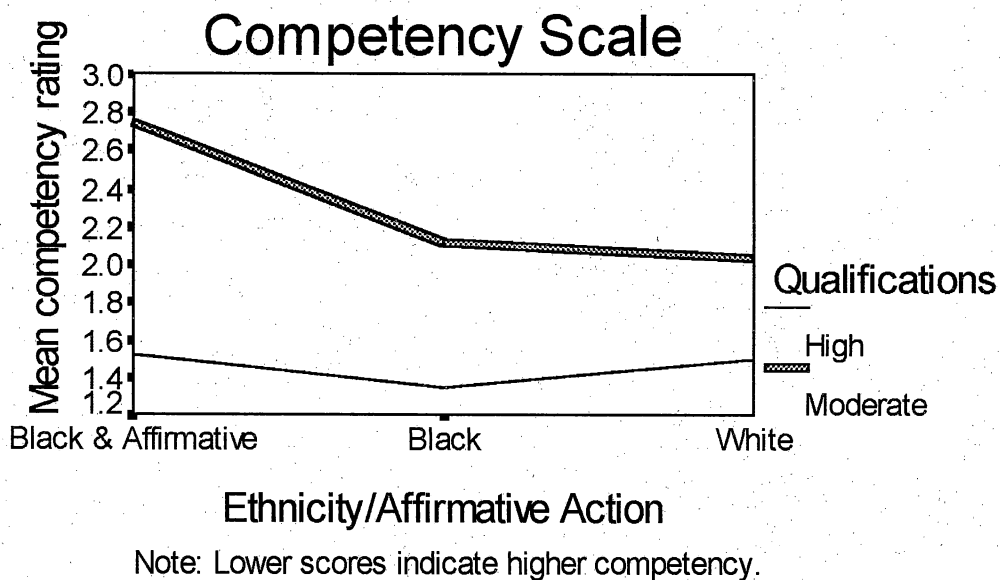
	n	Activity*	Potency	Competency*
Highly qualified				
Affirmative Action	30	3.21	4.51	1.52
Black Hiree	29	3.09	5.15	1.35
White Hiree	31	3.22	4.64	1.50
Moderately Qualified				
Affirmative Action	29	3.52	4.28	2.74
Black Hiree	31	3.31	4.37	2.11
White Hiree	32	3.23	4.33	2.03

Condition	Career*	Early Obstacles	Employment Obstacles	Qualification*
Highly qualified				
Affirmative Action	1.85	2.07	2.50	1.80
Black Hiree	1.85	2.54	2.54	1.40
White Hiree	1.71	1.39	3.32	1.50
Moderately Qualified				
Affirmative Action	2.93	2.41	2.41	2.97
Black Hiree	2.57	3.00	2.52	2.18
White Hiree	2.25	2.07	3.17	2.11

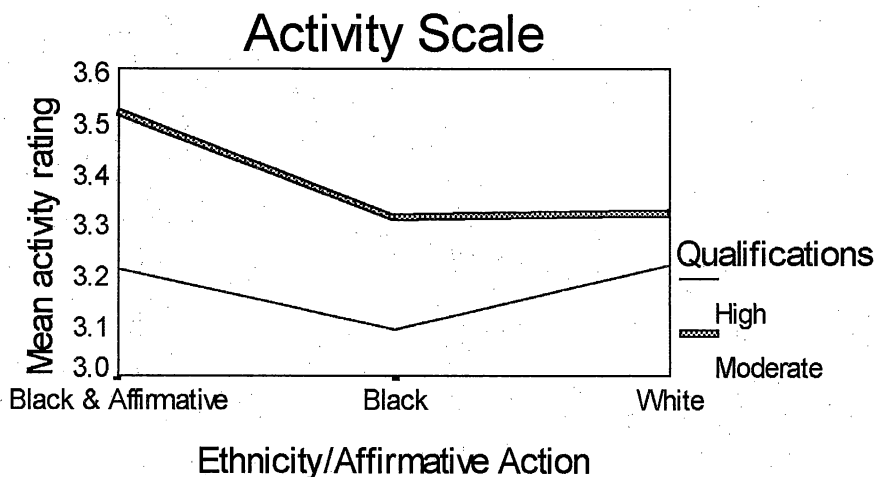
\*Note: The lower the mean, the more favorable the rating.

Competence. Analysis of variance revealed a main effect for hiree,  $F(2, 176) = 3.79$ ,  $p < .05$ , indicating that the hirees were perceived differently on the competence scale. Examination of the main effect revealed that the affirmative action Black hirees ( $M = 2.13$ ) was judged less competent than the Black hirees ( $M = 1.73$ ),  $t(179) = 2.11$ ,  $p < .05$ , and White hirees ( $M = 1.77$ ),  $t(179) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ . In addition, a main effect for job qualifications was also found,  $F(1, 176) = 41.80$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that the highly qualified hirees ( $M = 1.45$ ) were viewed as more competent than the moderately qualified hirees ( $M = 2.30$ ).

Two-tailed pre-planned t-tests were conducted in order to assess the meaning of the main effects, i.e. specifically whether both moderately and highly qualified conditions showed the hiree effect. Consistent with the discounting principle, the t-tests revealed that in the moderately qualified condition, association with affirmative action did result in the participants perceiving the affirmative action hiree as less competent than the non-affirmative action black hiree,  $t(176) = 2.77$ ,  $p < .01$ , and the white hiree,  $t(176) = 3.16$ ,  $p < .01$ . Analysis did not produce significant results in the highly qualified condition,  $t(178) = .469$ ,  $p > .05$ . Thus, there were no significant differences between the affirmative action highly qualified hiree and the non-affirmative action highly qualified hirees.



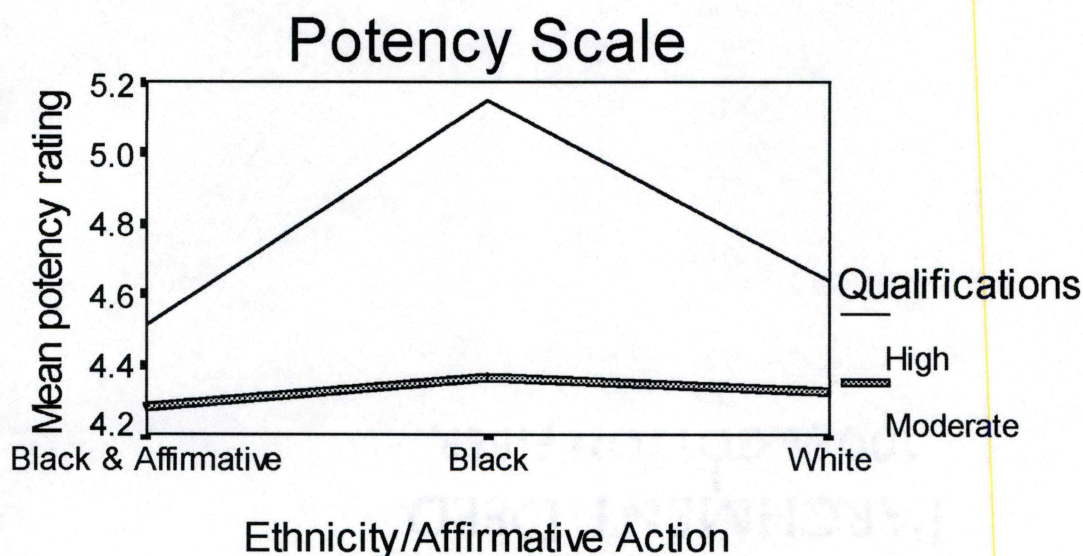
Activity. The analysis of variance found a main effect on the activity scale for job qualifications,  $F(1, 176) = 7.27, p < .01$ , indicating that the highly qualified hirees ( $M = 3.17$ ) was perceived as more active than the moderately qualified hirees ( $M = 3.38$ ). However, there was no main effect for hiree,  $F(2, 176) = 1.44, p > .05$ . Two-tailed  $t$ -tests revealed that the moderately qualified affirmative action hiree was perceived as marginally less active than the non-affirmative action hirees,  $t(178) = 1.71, p < .10$ , supporting the discounting principle. However, analysis showed that in the highly qualified condition, the affirmative action hiree and the non-affirmative action hirees did not differ significantly,  $t(178) = .45, p > .05$ .



Note: Lower scores indicate higher activity.

Potency. Analysis of variance for the potency scale indicated a main effect for qualifications,  $F(1, 176) = 5.31, p < .05$ . Thus, the highly qualified hirees ( $M = 4.77$ )

were viewed as more potent compared to the moderately qualified hirees ( $M = 4.32$ ). A nonsignificant result was found for hiree,  $F(2, 176) = 1.27, p > .05$ . Again, t-test comparisons were. Consistent with the discounting principle, it was found that the Black highly qualified hiree was perceived as marginally more potent than the affirmative action Black highly qualified hiree,  $t(176) = -1.89, p < .10$ . All other hypotheses were not supported.

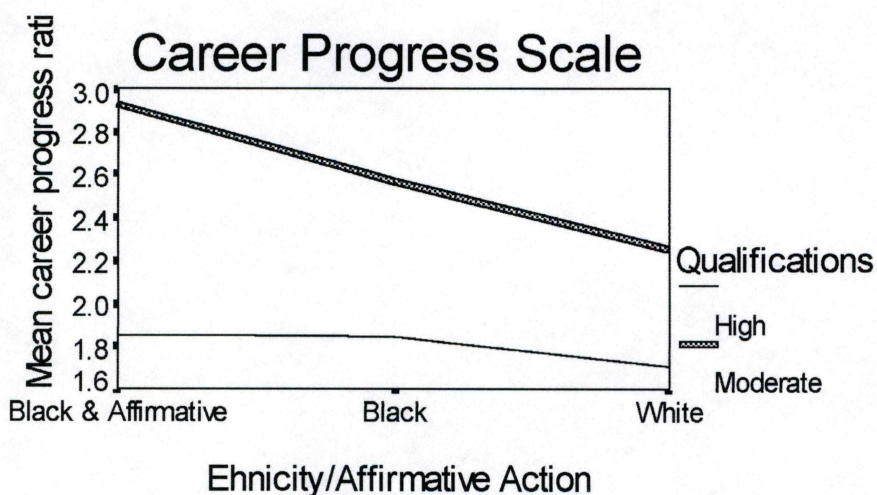


Note: High scores indicate higher potency.

Projected Career Progress. The analysis of variance found a main effect on the career scale for job qualifications,  $F(1, 176) = 48.10, p < .001$ , and hiree,  $F(2, 176) = 4.49, p < .05$ . The highly qualified hirees ( $M = 1.80$ ) was expected to progress in his career sooner than the moderately qualified hirees ( $M = 2.58$ ). The hiree main effect indicated that the White hiree ( $M = 1.98$ ) was



expected to progress in his career sooner than the affirmative action Black hiree ( $M = 2.39$ ),  $t(179) = 2.57$ ,  $p < .05$ . The Black hiree ( $M = 2.20$ ) did not differ significantly from the other hirees. Follow-up t-tests were conducted to clarify the meanings of the main effects. These comparisons revealed that the affirmative action moderately qualified Black hiree was perceived as significantly less likely to be promoted and move up in the organization than the White moderately qualified hiree,  $t(176) = 3.50$ ,  $p < .001$ . Analysis did not produce significant results in the highly qualified condition,  $t(178) = .44$ ,  $p > .05$ . Thus, only the hypothesis concerning the moderately qualified hirees were supported.



Note: Low scores indicate greater likelihood of career progress.

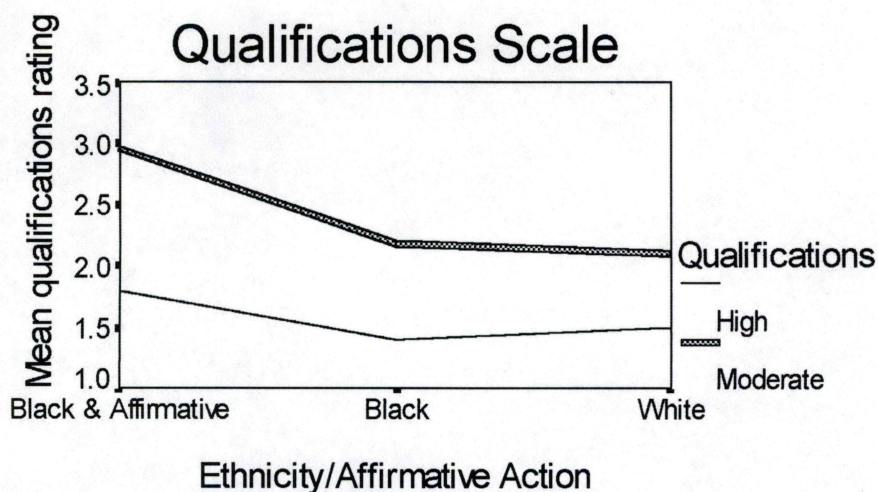
Hiring Due to Qualifications. Analysis of variance of the qualifications scale showed a main effect for job

qualifications,  $F(1, 176) = 51.32$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that the highly qualified hirees ( $M = 1.57$ ) were expected to have been hired more because of qualifications than the moderately qualified hirees ( $M = 2.42$ ), and a significant difference for hiree,  $F(2, 176) = 10.68$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Examination of the hiree main effect indicated that the affirmative action Black hiree ( $M = 2.38$ ) was not expected to have been hired due to qualifications compared to the Black hirees ( $M = 1.79$ ),  $t(179) = 3.44$ ,  $p < .05$ , and White hirees ( $M = 1.80$ ),  $t(179) = 3.42$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Planned t-tests revealed findings consistent with the hypothesis. The affirmative action highly qualified hiree was perceived as less likely to have received employment because of qualifications than the non-affirmative action highly qualified Black hiree,  $t(176) = 1.93$ ,  $p = .05$ . T-tests also revealed that the moderately qualified Black affirmative action hiree was expected to have been hired because of qualifications less than the non-affirmative action Black hiree,  $t(176) = 1.93$ ,  $p = .05$ , and the White hiree,  $t(176) = 4.17$ ,  $p < .001$ , thus supporting the discounting principle. All other hypothesis were not supported.

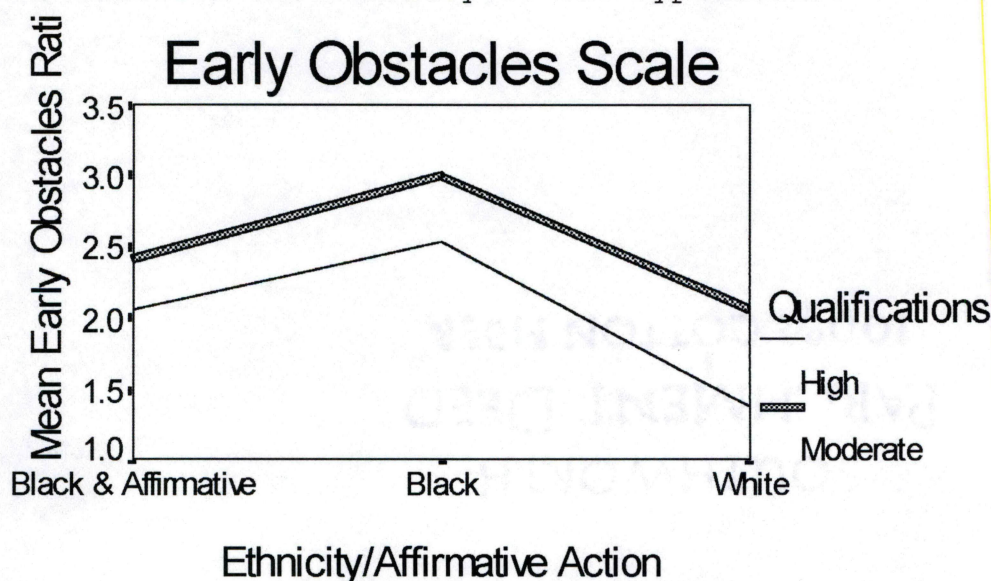




Note: Low scores indicate a more qualified applicant.

Early Obstacles. With regard to the early obstacle scale, which measured the extent to which the hiree had faced obstacles in his early environment and prior schooling, analysis of variance revealed a strong main effect for job qualifications,  $F(1, 174) = 16.73$ ,  $p < .001$ , and hiree,  $F(1, 174) = 24.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . The main effect for qualification indicates that the highly qualified hirees ( $M = 2.00$ ) were viewed as having faced more obstacles than the moderately qualified hirees ( $M = 2.49$ ). Analysis of the hiree main effect showed that the White hiree ( $M = 1.73$ ) was perceived as having faced more obstacles than the Black hirees ( $M = 2.77$ ),  $t(177) = -3.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , and affirmative action hirees ( $M = 2.24$ ),  $t(177) = 3.32$ ,  $p < .001$ . In addition, the affirmative action hiree was perceived as having faced more obstacles than the Black hiree,  $t(177) = 6.84$ ,  $p < .001$ .

As predicted, examination of the t-tests showed that the affirmative action Black hiree was expected to have faced more obstacles than the non-affirmative action Black hiree in both the highly and moderately qualified conditions,  $t(174) = -2.20$ ,  $p < .05$ , and,  $t(174) = -2.79$ ,  $p < .01$ . The White highly qualified hiree was also perceived as having faced more obstacles than the highly qualified Black hiree,  $t(174) = 5.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , moderately qualified Black hiree,  $t(174) = 4.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , and highly qualified affirmative action Black hiree,  $t(174) = 3.26$ ,  $p < .001$ . These results are contrary to the hypotheses.



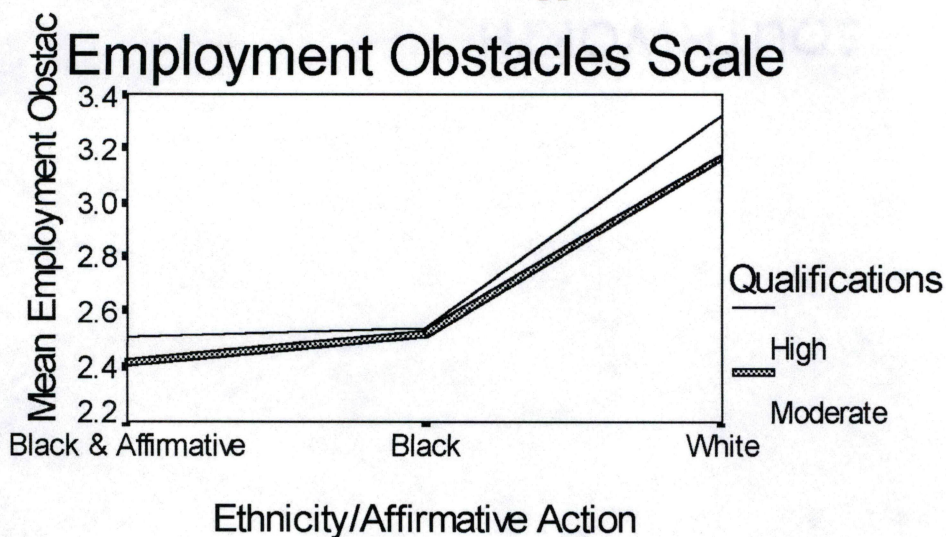
Note: High scores indicate lower likelihood of early obstacles.

Employment Obstacles. Analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect for hiree,  $F(2, 173) = 13.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not for job qualifications,  $F(1, 173) = .39$ ,  $p > .05$ . The main effect for hiree indicated that the White



hirees ( $M = 3.24$ ) were viewed as having faced more obstacles than the Black hirees ( $M = 2.53$ ),  $t(176) = -4.64$ ,  $p < .05$ , and affirmative action hirees ( $M = 2.46$ ),  $t(176) = -4.24$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Planned t-tests showed that the highly qualified White hiree who was viewed as having a harder time gaining employment than the highly qualified Black hiree,  $t(173) = -3.22$ ,  $p < .01$ , and the affirmative action Black hiree,  $t(173) = -3.42$ ,  $p < .001$ . Similarly, the moderately qualified White hiree was also perceived as facing more obstacles than the moderately qualified Black hiree,  $t(173) = -2.71$ ,  $p < .01$ , and the affirmative action hiree,  $t(173) = -3.08$ ,  $p < .01$ . The hypothesis stating that in both conditions the affirmative action hiree would be perceived as having faced less obstacles than the non-affirmative action black hiree was not supported.



Note: High scores indicate a harder time gaining employment.

## Discussion

As is shown in Table 1, the means generally, but not always, followed the trend predicted by the hypotheses. As predicted by the augmentation principle and polarization theory, it was hypothesized that the non-affirmative action Black hiree in the highly qualified condition would be perceived more positively than the White hiree. Specifically, it was predicted that participants in the non-affirmative action condition that examine highly qualified Black hirees should perceive these hirees as more competent, active, potent, have high expectations for their career progress, believe they were hired because of qualifications, having had a more difficult time getting the job, and more likely to have faced obstacles than the White hirees. It was also hypothesized that the Black hiree associated with an affirmative action program would be perceived more negatively than the Black hiree not associated with affirmative action because of the discounting principle. More specifically, it was predicted that association with affirmative action would lead to perceptions of the hiree being less competent, active, potent, likely to move up in his career, not being hired because of qualifications, having an easier time getting the job, and more likely to have faced obstacles compared to the non-affirmative action Black and White hiree. Analysis of the data generally



supported the predictions made by the discounting principle but not the augmentation principle. Therefore, participants discounted the role of qualifications and attributed the hiring of the applicant to their association with affirmative action but did not augment the role of early environmental deprivations.

The results showed that for the moderately qualified condition, the affirmative action hiree was perceived as being less active, less competent, not likely to move up in the organization or receive a promotion, not likely to have been hired because of his qualifications, and having had a relatively easier time getting employment relative to the non-affirmative action Black and White hiree. These results provide support for the discounting principle. Further support for the discounting principle comes from the finding that the highly qualified affirmative action Black hiree was perceived as less likely to have been hired because of qualifications. Therefore, participants discounted the role of qualifications as a basis for the affirmative action person being hired. For the variables of competency, activity, potency and projected career progress, the highly qualified affirmative action hiree was not perceived less positively than the highly qualified non-affirmative action hirees. Again, the trend did exist within the means but this was not significant. This result may have been due to



the limited small number of subjects. On the other hand, if future research demonstrates that this finding is true, i.e. highly qualified affirmative action hirees are not perceived as less competent and so on than non-affirmative action hirees, then this may provide one solution to the problem of stigmatization associated with affirmative action.

Employers can make it known that the hiree is indeed highly qualified, perhaps by making applications public with the consent of the hiree. Such a finding could be explained in terms of augmentation of qualifications and discounting affirmative action.

The augmentation principle and polarization theory were not supported by the results; the Black hiree was not perceived more positively than the White hiree. Although this trend did exist with the variables of potency, activity, competency, and qualifications, they were not significant. This result may reflect the recent backlash against affirmative action. Linville and Jones, on the other hand, published their study in 1980, when people were generally in favor of affirmative action programs.

The variable of early obstacles provided some interesting results. It was found that the White hirees in both conditions were perceived as having faced more obstacles in their early environment and prior schooling than the Black and affirmative action hirees. This is



contrary to the findings from Linville and Jones (1980) study in which they found that the Black applicant was believed to have faced greater earlier obstacles. One possible explanation is that participants were reacting to the previous question which had asked whether they thought the hiree had an easy or hard time gaining employment. Participants believed the White hiree had a harder time gaining employment than the Black hirees. When participants were presented with the next question regarding early obstacles, they may have responded extremely in order to justify why the White hiree had a harder time gaining employment. Another possible reason is that this study may have been affected by the historical times in which this study was conducted. Anti-affirmative action sentiment has been growing substantially recently. For instance, in 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209, an anti-affirmative action initiative. Thus, participants may have consciously or unconsciously believed that the White hiree would have a harder time obtaining employment because of reverse discrimination. Future research should address this question.

The questions regarding the participants' beliefs about affirmative action also produced interesting results. The general trend of the data showed support for affirmative action; Approximately 65% of Caucasians and 89% of Hispanics

agreed with the goals of affirmative action and 78% of Caucasians and 95% of Hispanics believed that affirmative action did benefit its beneficiaries. However, Caucasians were significantly more likely to believe that affirmative action did not benefit its beneficiaries and were less likely to agree with the goals of affirmative action compared to Hispanics. An analysis determined that this finding did not affect the results of the study.

In sum, these results strongly supported the discounting principle, despite support for affirmative action. When presented with a plausible alternative, in this case affirmative action, people tend to attribute a behavior to the alternative and discount the cause, in this case qualifications. The augmentation principle and polarization theory, however, were not supported.

Although this study produced strong results consistent with the discounting principles in the moderately qualified condition, several limitations exist. The most problematic aspect of the study is the limited sample size. This served to reduce the power of the study and therefore the ability to detect differences among groups. Generalizability is another issue of concern. Black subjects were excluded from the study in order to control for the confound they could create. In addition, this study was conducted with university students. Thus, questions can be raised about

whether these results would be found in organizational settings. Another limitation was that participants may have been reacting to the application materials and measurements. Social desirability may have existed among the participants; they may have responded in such way in order to appear favorable. In addition, the affirmative action manipulation may have been too salient and this may have caused demand characteristics. Participants may have discovered that affirmative action was being studied and they may have responded in such a way to confirm the hypothesis. That is, they may have rated the affirmative action hiree less positively in order to confirm the hypothesis.

Although this study provides more evidence for the prevalence of stigmatization for people associated with affirmative action programs who are only moderately qualified, further research is still warranted. For instance, further research should address the psychological processes involved in this phenomena. Moderating conditions, such as participant's ethnicity and prior experience with minority and female workers, should be examined. Field studies should also be conducted in order to assess whether results generalize to organizational settings. Furthermore, it has been shown that attitudes toward affirmative action programs also depends on the appropriateness and type of program (Taylor, Matheson,

Echenberg, Rivers, & Chow, 1994; Nacoste & Hummels, 1994) and the economic outlook (Citrin, Green & Sears, 1990; Idelson, 1995). Therefore, further research manipulating soft versus hard affirmative action programs while also examining stigmatization effects should be conducted.

In summary, our predictions confirmed the discounting of qualifications when the individual is moderately qualified and affirmative action is mentioned, despite general support for affirmative action. These findings have important implications in terms of the implementation of affirmative action programs. Methods to relieve stigmatization among the moderately qualified should be explored and applied. For instance, instead of taking the dramatic step of eliminating affirmative action programs altogether, governments and companies should have major advertisement campaigns giving accurate information about affirmative action programs in order to abolish the misconceptions that exist regarding these programs. It should be made known that only qualified applicants are being selected and that ethnicity is only being taken under consideration because of the discrimination and injustices that still occur toward minorities. In addition, as this study demonstrates, highly qualified individuals associated with affirmative action programs do not face stigmatization to the same degree as those who are moderately qualified.

Thus, another possible way to reduce stigmatization is to make the qualifications of a highly qualified hiree known. For instance, an employer may post the resume of a new employee or involve other employees in the selection process so that they may know that only qualified applicants are being hired. Interaction with such an individual will also no doubt allow stigmatization to dissipate. Steps such as these are needed to alleviate the stigmatization associated with affirmative action programs. Until then, the goals of affirmative action programs will not be met.

## APPENDIX A: Research Packet

### **Informed Consent for participation in research study**

The study in which you can now participate is designed to investigate the personnel selection and placement process. This study is being conducted by Miriam Resendez under the supervision of Dr. David Chavez, assistant professor of Psychology. This study has been approved by the Psychology Department Human Participants Review Board of California State University San Bernardino. The University requires that you give your consent before participating in a research study.

In this study you will first receive and carefully review a job description and application materials. You will then be asked to answer a questionnaire about the hiree, the job, and your attitudes toward this study. Your predictions will be compared with the actual performance of the hirees. Another short survey will then be handed out. The study will involve approximately 20 minutes of your time.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses. All data will be reported in group form only. At the study's conclusion, you may receive a report of the results.

The risks to you of participating in this study are minimal. At instructors' discretion, you may receive extra credit or fulfill a course requirement for your participation.

If you have any questions about the study, or would like a report of its results, please contact Miriam Resendez at (909) 880-5240.

Please understand that your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty, and to remove any data at any time during this study.

*By placing a mark in the space provided below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. By this mark, I further acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.*

Give your consent to participate by making a check or 'X' here: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date is \_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer all the following questions regarding the applicant.**

**NOTE:** For questions 1 through 6, rate the applicant in terms of the following adjectives by placing an X on the line that best represents the applicant's position.

**The applicant is..,**

1. 

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Hardworking					Lazy
2. 

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Persistent					Gives up easily
3. 

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sluggish					Energetic
4. 

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Weak					Strong
5. 

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Forceful					Timid
6. 

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Soft					Tough
7. How competently do you expect this individual to perform this job?  

1	2	3	4	5
Very competently				Not at all competently
8. How effective do you think this individual will be at doing this work?  

1	2	3	4	5
Very effective				Not at all effective
9. How likely is it that the hiree will move up in the organization?  

1	2	3	4	5
Very likely				Very unlikely
10. How quickly is a promotion likely to occur?  

1	2	3	4	5
Very soon				Not at all

- NOTE:** For questions 13 through 14, rate the job in terms of the following adjectives by placing an X on the line that best represents the job itself.

13. Boring \_\_\_\_\_ Interesting

14. Easy \_\_\_\_\_ Difficult



## Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions:

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
3. Ethnicity: ☐ Caucasian ☐ Hispanic ☐ African American  
☐ Asian ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Attitudes Toward the Study**

Please answer the following questions regarding the study.

1. Please check the ethnicity of the applicant.  
☐ Caucasian      ☐ Hispanic      ☐ African American  
☐ Unknown
2. Was the company an affirmative action employer? ☐ Yes      ☐ No
3. Do you feel affirmative action benefits its beneficiaries? ☐ Yes      ☐ No
4. Do you agree with the goals of affirmative action? ☐ Yes      ☐ No
5. Did you enjoy the study? ☐ Yes      ☐ No
6. What did you learn, if anything? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation.

### **Debriefing Statement**

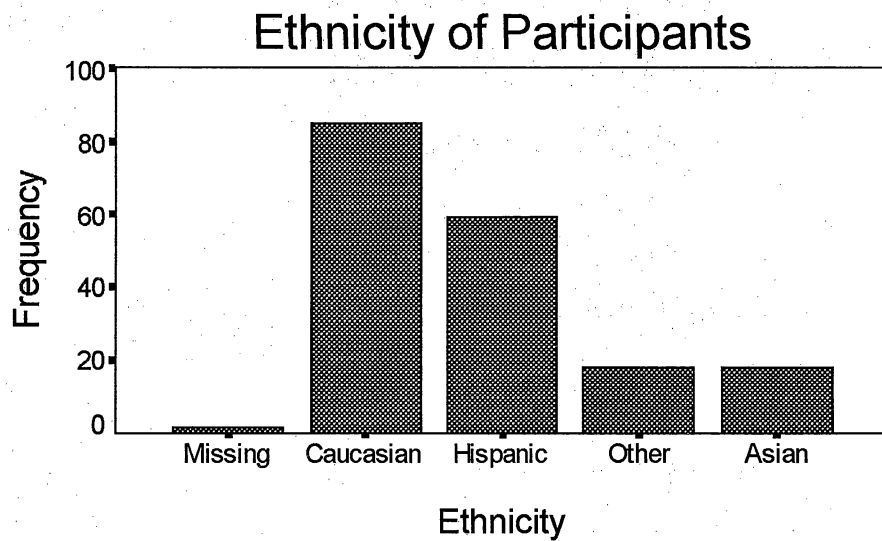
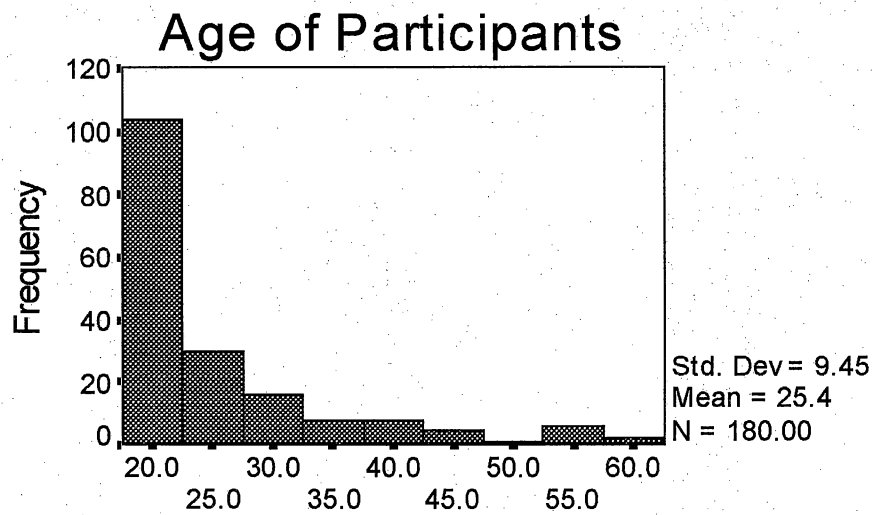
The true purpose of the study you just completed was to examine people's beliefs about candidates for jobs in the context of affirmative action.

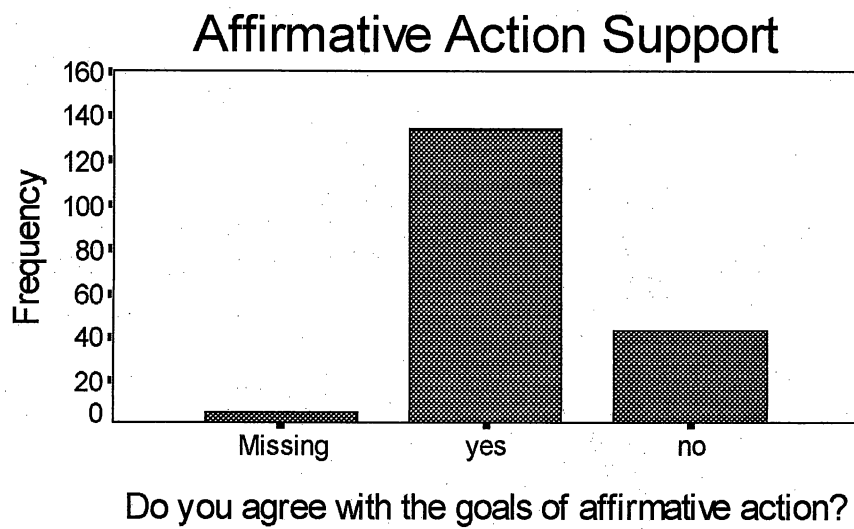
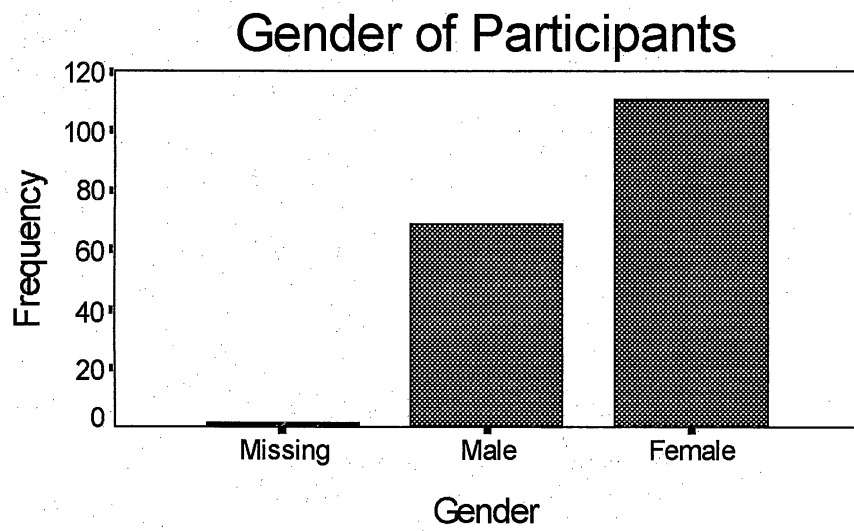
Please feel free to speak with the researcher, Miriam Resendez, regarding any undesirable responses you may presently have or the study in general. You may obtain the general results of the study by calling Miriam Resendez at (909) 880-5240.

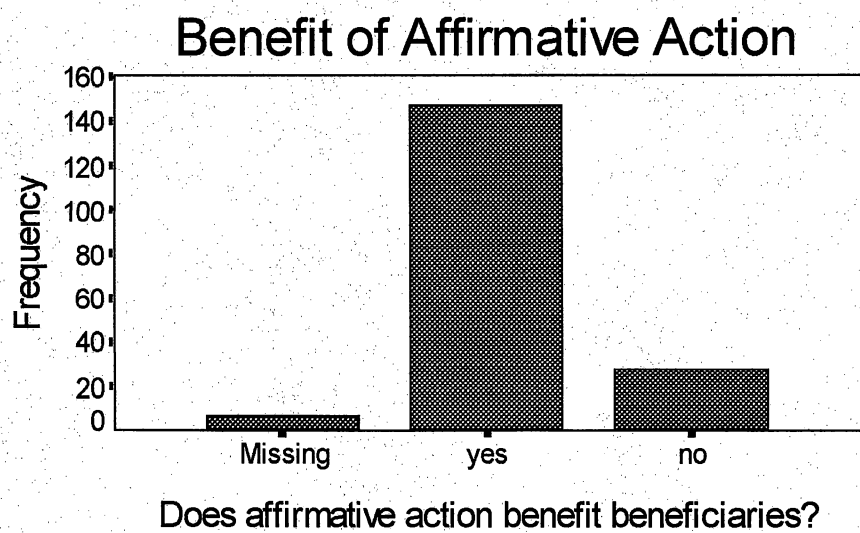
We ask that you please **not** discuss this study to other potential participants until the study has concluded.

Thank you for your participation.

## APPENDIX B: Descriptive Statistics







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