

Effects of Inequity Framing on Support for Inequity-Mitigating Policies

A thesis submitted by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Psychology

Tufts University

August 2018

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## Abstract

Across two studies, we investigated how the framing of inequity (inequity frame) and the framing of a policy designed to mitigate this inequity (outcome frame) influenced participants' support for this policy. In Study 1, we were unable to replicate Lowery et al.'s (2012) results; we found no effect of framing on support for race-based affirmative action. Extending this paradigm to gender-related affirmative action, we found that participants were significantly more supportive of a policy that would benefit women compared to one that would harm men, regardless of participant gender. Support was also significantly associated with lower levels of hostile sexism, higher levels of benevolent sexism, greater support for meritocracy, lower group esteem for men, and less perceived legitimacy of the gender hierarchy for women. Change in the political landscape since Lowery et al.'s study is discussed as a primary explanation for inconsistent results.

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### Effects of Inequity Framing on Support for Inequity-Mitigating Policies

The United States was founded on the principle of equal opportunity for all. Although this ideal managed to coexist alongside slavery and the treatment of women as second-class citizens, the U.S. has made enormous progress working toward this ultimate goal. However, despite the historic presidential elections of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which Barack Obama was elected as the first Black president and Hillary Clinton was nominated as the first female presidential candidate, inequity in America remains widespread.

Disparate and unjust treatment of individuals not only occurs between various demographic groups but also across a variety of domains. Some of the most prevalent and widely recognized disadvantage occurs across race and gender. For example, racial inequity is evident within the criminal justice system in which Black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as White men (Pew Research Center, 2013). Unfair treatment of Blacks is highlighted by the fact that, despite similar usage rates, Blacks are twice as likely to be arrested for drug crimes as Whites (Pew Research Center, 2016). Significant levels of gender inequity are particularly apparent within the workplace. Women on average earn 80% of what men earn, and this number shrinks to a staggering 64% in some states (Miller, 2017).

### **Perceptions of Inequity**

If we wish to address and mitigate inequity in the United States, it is important that we collectively agree that unearned advantage and disadvantage continue to exist, and that addressing these issues is a priority. Indeed, perception

of inequity increases support for policies designed to reduce it, such as affirmative action (Tuch & Hughes, 1996).

Unfortunately, major discrepancies exist across demographic groups with regard to identifying inequity. For example, while women continue to see gender discrimination as a major issue, men believe that there is little difference in the way that men and women are treated in society today (Bosson, Vandello, Michniewicz, & Lenes, 2012). We see similar patterns with regard to race. Black Americans perceive more racial discrimination than White Americans and are more likely to perceive the discrimination as rooted in institutions, not just individual attitudes (see Carter & Murphy, 2015a, for review). Whites, on the other hand, believe that anti-Black discrimination has decreased over time while anti-White discrimination has increased, and currently rate anti-White discrimination as more significant (Norton & Sommers, 2011). Interestingly, people appear to be aware of this discrepancy between Blacks' and Whites' perceptions of racial inequity as they believe that Blacks see society as less fair than Whites, but that both groups' evaluations deviate from reality (Salter, Hirsch, Schlegel, & Thai, 2015).

### **Inequity Framing**

One explanation for why people vary in their perceptions of inequity is that they evaluate present levels of inequity differently. For example, while Whites tend to judge present levels of racism based on how far society has come (relative to historical levels of racism), non-Whites judge racial progress on how far we need to go (relative to an ideal future) (Carter & Murphy, 2015b). Thus,



depending on whether racial discrimination is compared to the past or future may influence individuals' evaluations.

In addition, individuals may differ in how they see racial progress for Blacks influencing the treatment of Whites. For example, Whites see racism as a zero-sum game in which a reduction in anti-Black discrimination necessitates an increase in anti-White discrimination (Norton & Sommers, 2011). As a result, Whites may be motivated not to perceive or address anti-Black discrimination. Hence, the way in which individuals frame inequity provides valuable insight into how they may perceive and evaluate current levels of discrimination within our society.

#### **Privilege versus discrimination.**

In addition to evaluating relative levels of discrimination (either historically or compared to another group), inequity framing may differ based on whether individuals frame it as privilege or discrimination. That is, inequity may be framed as an advantage for one group (i.e., White privilege) or as a disadvantage for another group (i.e., anti-Black discrimination). While these perspectives are two sides of the same coin, the way in which people perceive inequity as either one or the other or both may influence their attitudes toward equity-related policies.

Previous research has manipulated inequity framing and primarily focused on its effects on White participants in the context of racial inequity. Racism framed as White privilege (versus anti-minority discrimination) is perceived as more threatening and leads to more feelings of collective racial guilt (Lowery,

Chow, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2012; Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007).

Moreover, it leads individuals to demonstrate less racism (Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005). Given these outcomes, it is not surprising that White privilege framing also leads to greater support of policies that mitigate inequity (Lowery et al., 2007).

Lowery et al. (2012) were interested in how inequity framing and framing of a policy designed to mitigate this inequity might interact to influence Whites' willingness to support the policy. Indeed, they found a significant interaction between these two variables such that individuals were significantly more likely to support a policy framed as harming Whites if they had first read about inequity framed as White advantage as opposed to minority disadvantage. In contrast, when participants evaluated a policy framed as helping minorities, policy support did not differ based on inequity frame.

The authors also explored potential mechanisms for this effect. In an earlier study, Lowery et al. (2012) found that White guilt did not explain Whites' willingness to support a policy framed as harming Whites. Thus, in this study the authors examined White collective self-esteem (W-CSE) as a potential mediating variable. W-CSE is a measure of group esteem that examines how much Whites value their racial ingroup. They found that participants' willingness to support policies framed as harming Whites was mediated by W-CSE, with lower collective self-esteem leading to greater support for White-harming policies. Lowery et al. (2012) suggest that when participants read about White advantage (as opposed to minority disadvantage), this insinuates that Whites are benefiting

from *unearned* advantage, thus threatening their group esteem and prompting them to lower their group's position to alleviate the threat.

### **The Current Study**

The current study aimed to gain a better understanding of whether dominant group members' willingness to support inequity-mitigating policies framed as harming their ingroup applies to identities beyond racial inequity. Specifically, we were interested in whether this applies to gender inequity in employment (Study 1). In addition, we were curious whether participants' attitudes toward women, meritocracy, or support for the existing gender hierarchy may be related to their support for policies designed to alleviate gender inequity (Study 2). Together, these studies tested whether inequity framing may affect participants' support for inequity-mitigating policies beyond race and sought further clarification on the mechanism behind this effect.

**Study 1 hypotheses.** Study 1 attempted to replicate Lowery et al.'s (2012) Study 3 looking at how framing racial inequity in employment impacts Whites' support of policies designed to combat it, and also extended this work by examining whether similar results could be shown when looking at gender inequity in employment using the exact same paradigm. In line with Lowery et al.'s (2012) findings, we hypothesized that participants evaluating racial inequity who read a passage describing the inequity as White (dominant group) advantage would be more willing to support a policy framed as harming Whites than one framed as helping minorities. In contrast, those who read a passage describing inequity as minority (subordinate group) disadvantage would show the opposite

pattern. Participants' support of White-harming policies would furthermore be mediated by W-CSE such that lower W-CSE scores would predict greater support for the policy.

Men who read about gender inequity were expected to show a parallel pattern to that described above, with men being the dominant group and women being the subordinate group. Thus, men evaluating inequity framed as male advantage would be more willing to support policies framed as harming men than those framed as helping women, whereas the opposite would be true for men who evaluate inequity framed as female disadvantage. Male collective self-esteem (M-CSE) would mediate support for male-harming policies. We predicted that although these results would mirror the racial inequity pattern, support for inequity-mitigating policies overall would be lower because sexism tends to be more explicitly accepted in society than racism.

In contrast, women who read about gender inequity were expected to support policies framed as helping women more than those framed as harming men, regardless of whether the inequity was framed as male advantage or female disadvantage. This is because women's collective self-esteem (F-CSE) would not be threatened by any unearned advantage, and thus they would tend to support inequity-mitigating policies framed as helping the subordinate group rather than harming the dominant group.

**Study 2 hypotheses.** Based on unexpected results in Study 1, Study 2 sought to explore the mechanism behind participants' support for gender inequity-mitigating policies. Specifically, Study 2 compared men and women's support for

gender-based affirmative action policies and examined whether perceived legitimacy of the existing gender hierarchy, attitudes toward women, and support for meritocracy were related to this support. We hypothesized that the pattern of results would be similar to Study 1, but examined the mechanisms in an exploratory fashion. Therefore, no a priori hypotheses were put forth.

## Study 1

### Method

**Participants.** A total of 337 White participants (53% men, 46.7% women, 0.3% prefer not to say) with ages ranging from 20 to 67 years old ( $M = 36.13$ ;  $SD = 11.25$ ) participated in the study through Mechanical Turk, an online recruitment platform. Only participants who lived in the United States, were over 18 years old, and were at least half-time employed were recruited to ensure that they had experience in the American workforce (81.7% full-time, 18.3% half-time). Political affiliation varied, with 48.3% identifying as Democrats, 24.3% as Republicans, 23% as Independents, and 4.4% as other or no preference. Participants were paid \$.50 for taking part in the study.

**Procedure.** The study consisted of a 2 [inequity focus: race vs gender] x 2 [inequity frame: dominant group advantage vs subordinate group disadvantage] x 2 [policy outcome frame: benefits subordinate group vs harms dominant group] between-subjects design.

Participants followed a link to a Qualtrics survey to begin the experiment. After completing a brief pre-screening survey, they were told that the task of interest involved measuring social attitudes. First, participants read a description

about recent economic research describing inequality as either subordinate group disadvantage (minority disadvantage for racial inequity/female disadvantage for gender inequity) or dominant group advantage (White advantage for racial inequity/male advantage for gender inequity). Next, participants completed a measure of CSE (for their ethnic group when evaluating racial inequity/for their gender group when evaluating gender inequity). They then read a description of research indicating the results of a redistributive policy framed either as helping the subordinate group or harming the dominant group. Finally, they indicated their attitudes toward this policy.

#### **Materials and measures.**

*Prescreening survey.* During a brief pre-screening survey, participants were asked about several demographic variables. The purpose of this was twofold; to ensure that only participants meeting our requirements were recruited (White, full- or half-time employed, consistently indicated the same gender at various time points), and to gather information about their political attitudes that may be related to their responses to the survey of interest. Participants were asked to indicate their liberalism on a scale from 1 (*extremely conservative*) to 7 (*extremely liberal*).

Next, participants who passed the prescreening completed the study of interest. The following descriptions were taken directly from Lowery et al. (2012, p. 328-329) with modifications for the gender inequity condition indicated with square brackets.

***Inequity frame.*** The description of the research described racial [gender] inequality framed as either White [male] advantage or Minority [female] disadvantage. Participants in the *White [male] advantage* condition read:

Prior research has led most social scientists to agree that, even today, Whites [men] in America continue to enjoy undeserved advantages that minorities [women] do not, particularly in the realm of employment. Below are some ways in which Whites [men] are advantaged, compiled from economic research.

- Relative to equally qualified minorities [women], being White [a man] increases the chance of being hired for a prestigious position.
- Whites [Men] receive higher salaries than equally qualified minorities [women].

Participants in the *minority [female] disadvantage* condition read:

Prior research has led most social scientists to agree that, even today, minorities [women] in America continue to suffer from undeserved disadvantages that Whites [men] do not, particularly in the realm of employment. Below are some ways in which minorities [women] are disadvantaged, compiled from economic research.

- Relative to equally qualified Whites [men], being a minority [woman] decreases the chance of being hired for a prestigious position.
- Minorities [Women] receive lower salaries than equally qualified Whites [men].

***Perceived magnitude of inequity.*** To measure participants' perceptions of the magnitude of inequity, they were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement, "Differences in status between ethnic [gender] groups are the result of injustice" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

***Esteem for the ingroup.*** After reading the description of racial [gender] inequality and indicating its magnitude, participants were asked to complete a measure of group esteem. Participants' esteem for their racial [gender] group was measured using the Private Regard subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem scale (CSE; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The Private Regard items measure how much Whites [participants] value their racial [gender] group: "I often regret that I belong to my racial/ethnic [gender] group" (reverse scored); "In general, I'm glad to be a member of my racial/ethnic [gender] group"; "Overall, I often feel that my racial/ethnic [gender] group is not worthwhile"; (reverse scored), and "I feel good about the race/ethnicity [gender] I belong to" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

***Policy description.*** Following the esteem measure, participants read about the effects of policies designed to remedy racial [gender] inequality. All participants read, "In order to reduce the discrepancy between Whites [men] and minorities [women], the U.S. government has implemented a number of policies, often known as affirmative action policies."

***Outcome frame.*** Next, participants were administered the outcome frame manipulation. In the Minority [female] help condition, participants read that, "Research has shown that implementation of these policies has resulted in greater



economic opportunities for minorities [women].” In contrast, in the White [male] harm condition, participants read that, “Research has shown that implementation of these policies has resulted in fewer economic opportunities for Whites [men].”

***Support for affirmative action.*** After reading about the effects of affirmative action policies, participants were asked, “Based on the information given above, how much do you support affirmative action policies?” (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly support*).

***Framing manipulation checks.*** Participants were asked to identify how the inequity and policy outcomes were described in the passage they read. For the inequity description, they selected one of the following options: “Whites [Men] are generally advantaged and more likely to be hired for a prestigious position compared to minorities [women]”; “Minorities [Women] are generally disadvantaged and less likely to be hired for a prestigious position compared to Whites [men]”; “Racial [Gender] inequity is no longer a problem today.” For the policy description, participants selected that the policy was said to results in one of the following: “Greater economic opportunities for minorities [women]”; “Fewer economic opportunities for Whites [men]”; “No changes in economic opportunities for Whites [men] or minorities [women].”<sup>1</sup>

## **Results**

Participants who did not pass simple attention tests or who presented inconsistent demographic information between the pre-screening and the survey

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<sup>1</sup> Note: these manipulation checks were not included in Lowery et al.’s (2012) original study.

<sup>2</sup> We also conducted the analysis with only White participants (to match the sample collected in Study 1 and see if we might find a similar three-way interaction as in Study 1). Results did not differ so all subsequent analyses were conducting including participants of any race.

of interest were excluded from analyses. Thus, 317 participants were included in the following analyses.

**Preliminary analyses.** The continuous variables of interest were liberalism, perceived inequity, CSE, support for affirmative action, and age. CSE was calculated by averaging the four items in the scale, and was sufficiently reliable ( $\alpha = .856$ ). See Table 1 for the distributional properties of these continuous variables.

***Bivariate correlations between continuous variables.*** See Table 2 for a correlation matrix between liberalism, perceived inequity, CSE, support for affirmative action, and age. Liberalism was significantly positively correlated with perceived inequity and support for affirmative action. In addition, perceived inequity was positively correlated with support for affirmative action. CSE was negatively correlated with liberalism, perceived inequity, and support for affirmative action.

***Framing manipulation checks.*** Of the 317 participants, 206 correctly identified both the inequity frame and policy outcome frame. This was a difficult task given that participants read a similar message, just with slightly different wording. Independently, 262 participants correctly identified the inequity frame while 242 correctly identified the policy outcome frame. Only including participants who correctly identified the framings in the analyses did not reveal additional significant results, although some analyses were no longer significant, likely due to a loss of power. Thus, participants were included in analyses regardless of whether they correctly identified the framing.

Of those who did not correctly identify the framing, three failed to indicate that any inequity existed and six failed to indicate that the policy would result in changes in economic opportunities for the various groups. Results did not change when eliminating these individuals, so they have been included in all analyses.

***Effect of inequity frame on perceived inequity.*** In line with Lowery et al.'s (2012) work, we first tested the possibility that inequity frame affected the perceived inequity. Thus, we conducted an independent samples t-test examining the effect of inequity frame (dominant-group advantage versus subordinate group disadvantage) on participant ratings of perceived inequity. Consistent with previous findings, we found that participants who read about dominant-group advantage ( $M = 4.91$ ;  $SD = 1.695$ ) did not significantly differ in their perception of injustice compared to those who read about subordinate group advantage ( $M = 5.06$ ;  $SD = 1.879$ ),  $t(315) = -.783$ ,  $p = .434$ .

**Support for affirmative action.** In examining support for affirmative action, our main dependent variable of interest, we first tested the replicability of Lowery et al.'s (2012) findings regarding race-related inequity. Next, we examined the overall design, including both gender-related and race-related inequity. Finally, we examined the gender-related inequity in more detail, particularly focusing on the potential moderating effects of participant gender.

***Testing the replicability of Lowery et al. (2012).*** We first tested whether Lowery et al.'s (2012) findings regarding support for race-based affirmative action were replicated. We hypothesized that Whites would be more supportive of policies framed as harming Whites (versus helping minorities) when the inequity

was framed as White advantage, whereas this difference would not be present if the inequity was framed as minority disadvantage. As such, we conducted a two-way ANOVA examining support for race-based affirmative action as a function of inequity frame and outcome frame. Contrary to hypotheses, there was no significant interaction between inequity frame and outcome frame,  $F(1, 155) = 2.316, p = .130$  (see Figure 1). In addition, neither the main effect for inequity frame nor the main effect for outcome frame were significant,  $F(1, 155) = 1.394, p = .560$ , and  $F(1, 155) = .645, p = .423$ , respectively.

Lowery et al. (2012) also found that W-CSE mediated the relationship between inequity frame and support for affirmative action. However, given that inequity frame did not significantly affect W-CSE,  $F(1, 156) = 2.82, p = .095$ , or support for affirmative action (see above), we did not explore W-CSE as a mediating variable.

***Comparing gender inequity to racial inequity.*** We were also interested in whether the pattern of responses would vary based on inequity focus and participant gender. We hypothesized that men in the gender-focus condition would display a similar pattern of support for affirmative action as those in the race-focus condition. Thus, men would be more supportive of policies framed as harming their ingroup when the inequity was framed as dominant-group advantage, but this difference would not be present when the inequity was framed as subordinate-group disadvantage. Women in the gender-focus condition, on the other hand, would be more supportive of a policy framed as helping the subordinate group (women) regardless of inequity frame. One additional person

was excluded from this analysis because they did not indicate their gender, leaving a total of 316 participants.

To test our hypothesis, we ran a four-way ANOVA with inequity focus, inequity frame, outcome frame, and participant gender as our independent variables. We found a significant four-way interaction,  $F(1, 300) = 7.932, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .026$ . Although there were no other significant interactions, there were significant main effects of inequity focus, outcome frame, and participant gender. Contrary to hypotheses, participants supported gender-based affirmative action ( $M = 4.64; SD = 1.985$ ) significantly more than race-based affirmative action ( $M = 4.08; SD = 2.022$ ),  $F(1, 300) = 4.785, p = .029, \eta_p^2 = .016$ . This effect was in the opposite direction than expected. Participants also supported affirmative action significantly more when the outcome was framed as helping the subordinate group ( $M = 4.66; SD = 2.037$ ) rather than harming the dominant group ( $M = 4.06; SD = 1.962$ ),  $F(1, 300) = 6.523, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .021$ . Finally, women ( $M = 4.73; SD = 1.915$ ) supported affirmative action significantly more than men ( $M = 4.04; SD = 2.065$ ),  $F(1, 300) = 7.707, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .025$ .

Importantly, we did not find a significant inequity frame by outcome frame interaction as Lowery et al. (2012) did. In addition, we found an effect of inequity focus in the opposite direction than expected, with participants supporting gender-based affirmative action more than race-based affirmative action.

***Association between participant gender and support for gender-based affirmative action.*** We hypothesized that men and women would exhibit a

different pattern of results when focused on gender-related inequity (related to women's subordinate group status), but not when focused on race-related inequity (where all participants as White individuals were dominant group members).

Although we planned these analyses, it is important to note that we did not have equal numbers of men and women per cell, and therefore the number of participants of each gender per condition ranges from 15 to 25 people.

In line with our hypotheses, a three-way ANOVA examining support for race-based affirmative action as a function of inequity frame, outcome frame, and participant gender demonstrated a significant effect of participant gender ( $M_{\text{men}} = 3.74$ ,  $SD_{\text{men}} = 2.135$ ;  $M_{\text{women}} = 4.48$ ,  $SD_{\text{women}} = 1.827$ ),  $F(1, 150) = 4.682$ ,  $p = .032$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .030$ , but no three-way interaction,  $F(1, 150) = 2.291$ ,  $p = .132$ . In contrast, a three-way ANOVA examining support for gender-based affirmative action as a function of inequity frame, outcome frame, and participant gender revealed a significant three-way interaction,  $F(1, 150) = 6.243$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .040$  (see Figures 2 and 3). Follow-up analyses revealed a significant two-way interaction between inequity frame and outcome frame for men,  $F(1, 77) = 4.580$ ,  $p = .036$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .056$ , but not for women,  $F(1, 73) = 2.030$ ,  $p = .159$ . When men read about inequity framed as women being disadvantaged, they supported affirmative action significantly more when the policy was framed as benefiting women ( $M = 5.55$ ;  $SD = 1.469$ ) rather than harming men ( $M = 3.45$ ;  $SD = 2.282$ ). When they read about inequity framed as men being advantaged, however, there was no difference in support for affirmative action as a function of outcome frame ( $M_{\text{Benefit women}} = 4.38$ ,  $SD_{\text{Benefit women}} = 1.996$ ;  $M_{\text{Harm men}} = 4.04$ ,  $SD_{\text{Harm men}} = 1.567$ ). There was also

a main effect of outcome condition such that men were more supportive of a policy framed as benefiting women ( $M = 5.03$ ;  $SD = 1.797$ ) compared to one framed as harming men ( $M = 3.78$ ;  $SD = 1.917$ ),  $F(1, 77) = 8.718$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .102$ . Women's support for affirmative action did not differ based on inequity frame nor outcome frame.

## **Discussion**

Study 1 examined whether Lowery et al.'s (2012) results regarding the effect of inequity frame and outcome frame on support for race-based affirmative action could be replicated, whether these effects would be different when examining gender- versus race-based affirmative action, and whether the pattern of responses to gender-based affirmative action would differ based on participant gender. Lowery et al.'s (2012) findings were not replicated in this study. Instead, we found null effects with regard to race-based affirmative action. In addition, inequity frame did not affect W-CSE nor did W-CSE significantly predict support for affirmative action.

There are several potential explanations for why we did not replicate Lowery et al.'s (2012) findings. Overall, it appears that the present participants were less sensitive to framing effects than they were in Lowery et al.'s study. Perhaps this difference reflects political changes that have taken place between data collection points. Whereas Lowery et al. collected their data in the middle of Barack Obama's first term as president, the current study was completed in 2018, a little over a year into Donald Trump's first term. While Obama's presidency was seen as a step toward racial progress, Trump's presidency has been

accompanied by an increase in racial hate crimes, normalization and acceptance of White supremacist groups by the president, and increased reference to Whites as the victims of unfair treatment and reverse racism (Google Trends, 2018; Gray, 2017; Miller & Werner-Winslow, 2016). At the same time, discussions about race have been propelled to the forefront of public debate, and terms such as “White privilege” have become more mainstream (Google Trends, 2018b).

This new political climate may have made people less sensitive to framing in this experiment, particularly to the framing that Whites are advantaged. Compared to the original study, participants in this current experiment may have been more familiar with the concept of White privilege, and therefore may have been less likely to be threatened by it or react to it in a way that would harm their ingroup. In addition, Whites may feel emboldened by the acceptance of pro-White rhetoric by people in power, and therefore may have been less threatened by the idea that Whites are advantaged. As a result, Whites may feel less compelled to compensate for their advantaged position by supporting a policy that would decrease inequity but harm their ingroup.

If Whites are more comfortable with references to their advantaged position as proposed above, we may also expect that their group esteem would be less threatened. Indeed, we see major differences in W-CSE across conditions for participants in the current study compared to the original study. Whereas Lowery et al. observed mean W-CSE values of 1.06 ( $SD = .88$ ) (White advantage condition) and 1.47 ( $SD = .87$ ) (Minority disadvantage condition) with a measure reliability of  $\alpha = .61$ , we observed much higher values in the current study. The



mean W-CSE values in the current study were 5.43 ( $SD = 1.36$ ) (White advantage) and 5.74 ( $SD = 1.10$ ) (Minority disadvantage) with a measure reliability of  $\alpha = .86$ . Given that W-CSE is on a scale from 1-7, this is a drastic increase in group esteem across conditions.

After establishing that we did not replicate previous findings regarding race, we assessed the data across inequity focus conditions. Examining both the race and gender focus conditions, we found that overall participants supported policies framed as helping subordinate groups more than those framed as harming dominant groups, and women were more supportive of the policy than men. In contrast with predictions, participants supported gender-based affirmative action more than race-based affirmative action.

As predicted, the pattern for gender-based affirmative action was different for men versus women. While inequity frame and outcome frame did not affect women's support for affirmative action, men tended to support affirmative action more when the policy outcome was framed as benefiting women rather than harming men. In addition, men were more supportive of the policy framed as helping women (versus harming men) when the inequity was framed as a disadvantage for women, whereas there was no difference in support when the inequity was framed as an advantage for men.

These results regarding how men versus women evaluate gender-based inequity are particularly interesting because they illustrate how dominant versus subordinate group members may differentially respond to the framing of injustice. While subordinate group members seem to be universally supportive of inequity-

mitigating policies, dominant group members seem to be affected both by how the inequity is framed and by how the outcome of the policy is framed. When the inequity is framed as subordinate group disadvantage, dominant group members tend to support it more when the policy outcome is framed as helping the subordinate group than when it is framed as harming the dominant group.

Given that CSE was not related to the relationship between inequity frame, outcome frame, and support for affirmative action, we can merely speculate as to why men may differ from women in their evaluations of gender-based inequity. Perhaps the evaluation of inequity depends on individual difference variables such as attitudes toward women, support for meritocracy, or support for the existing gender hierarchy. Study 2 examined the relationships between these variables and participants' support for affirmative action.

## **Study 2**

### **Exploration of Individual Difference Factors**

Given that we did not find the pattern of results that would suggest that CSE predicted policy support in Study 1, we sought to explore other individual difference variables that may potentially explain participants' support for affirmative action in Study 2. In particular, we were interested in exploring variables that would have explanatory power with regard to gender-based affirmative action. As such, we identified three constructs that may be related to support for gender-based inequity-mitigating policies: ambivalent sexism, support for the existing gender hierarchy, and support for meritocracy.

**Ambivalent sexism.** Prejudice against women could serve as one explanation for why participants may support gender-based affirmative action to a greater or lesser degree. More specifically, we were interested in whether hostile and benevolent sexism are differentially predictive of policy support. According to Glick and Fiske (1996), hostile sexism refers to prejudice in the traditional sense in which individuals feel antipathy towards women in the form of social distancing and ascription of negative stereotypes. Benevolent sexism also involves stereotyping women, but typically these stereotypes are viewed as positive in the eyes of the perceiver and are often accompanied by prosocial behavior. For example, a man unprompted offering to help a woman lift her suitcase may reflect his stereotype that women are weak but is also accompanied by helping behavior. These stereotypes are often in the social-emotional realm rather than agentic, and thus women are often perceived as being kind but incompetent.

Glick and Fiske (1996) argue that the relationship between men and women is unique in the intergroup realm because the two groups are so intimately connected. Men hold structural power, and yet are dependent on women for sexual gratification, child bearing, and emotional support, thus leading to protective attitudes toward women. In any case, both hostile and benevolent sexism share the common assumptions that women are weaker, should be limited to domestic roles, and that men's structural power is justified. Importantly, this theory posits that men may genuinely hold both positive and hostile feelings

toward women, and that the desire to protect an egalitarian self-image is not necessarily salient (as it often is with racist attitudes).

Previous research has investigated how benevolent and hostile sexism predict attitudes toward equal employment opportunities. Feather and Boeckmann (2007) specifically examined how benevolent and hostile sexism predict participants' reactions to promotion opportunities in the workplace for men versus women. They found that higher levels of hostile sexism, and to a lesser extent benevolent sexism, predicted reactions to the promotion of women that reinforced male advantage in the workplace. For example, sexism predicted less perceived male advantage in hiring, less male responsibility and guilt associated with the gender gap in promotions, and less resentment for a man being hired over an equally qualified woman, while predicting greater perceived female advantage in hiring, greater female responsibility for the gender gap in promotions, and greater resentment when a woman was hired over an equally qualified man. Hideg and Ferris (2016) examined attitudes specifically toward employment equity and found that benevolent sexism led to greater support for an employment equity policy, but that this was only true when concerning traditionally feminine (rather than masculine) fields. Thus, benevolent sexism predicted greater support for employment equity for women, but in a way that simply reinforced occupational gender segregation.

Based on these two studies that demonstrate that benevolent and hostile sexism can be predictive of reactions to promotion opportunities and equal employment policies, it is likely that they may also be associated with support for

gender-based affirmative action policies. More specifically, we were intrigued by the idea that this relationship may be moderated by either the inequity frame or outcome frame. Thus, we chose to explore ambivalent sexism as a potential predictor of attitudes toward gender-based affirmative action.

**Perceived legitimacy of the existing gender hierarchy.** Another potential predictive variable of interest was how much participants perceived the existing gender hierarchy as legitimate. Given that men have traditionally been the primary breadwinners and occupied positions of power within the workplace, gender-based affirmative action may threaten this existing hierarchy by introducing more women. Thus, the degree to which individuals perceive the existing hierarchy as legitimate may influence their support of affirmative action. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Glick and Whitehead (2010) found a moderate positive correlation between support for the gender hierarchy and both benevolent and hostile sexism. Thus, these constructs may be related, but it is important to pinpoint which one is most closely associated with participants' attitudes toward inequity-mitigating policies.

**Support for meritocracy.** Another individual difference variable that may be related to attitudes toward affirmative action is meritocratic beliefs. The Preference for the Merit Principle (PMP) (Davey, Bobocel, Son Hing, & Zanna, 1999) specifically measures the degree to which an individual supports the idea that when resources are being allocated amongst people, those who contribute most should obtain the highest outcomes or benefits. PMP predicts opposition to affirmative action described as including preferential treatment for certain groups

but not to affirmative action described as benefiting all employees (Davey et al., 1999). Thus, it is possible that it may predict varying levels of support for an affirmative action policy depending on how the policy and its outcome are framed. As such, we wanted to explore it as a predictive variable in Study 2.

### **Method**

**Participants.** A total of 347 participants (50.7% women, 49.3% men; 67.1% White, 7.2% Black, 6.3% Asian/Asian-American, 4.6% Latino/a, 14.8% multiracial, other, or prefer not to say) with ages ranging from 19 to 74 years old ( $M = 34.84$ ;  $SD = 10.11$ ) participated in the study through Mechanical Turk, an online recruitment platform. Only participants who lived in the United States, were over 18 years old, and were at least half-time employed were recruited to ensure that they had experience in the American workforce (77.2% full-time, 22.8% half-time). Political affiliation varied, with 46.4% identifying as Democrats, 29.4% as Independents, 20.5% as Republicans, and 3.7% as other or no preference. Participants were paid \$.50 for taking part in the study.

**Procedure.** The study consisted of a 2 [inequity frame: male advantage vs female disadvantage] x 2 [policy outcome frame: benefits women vs harms men] x 2 [participant gender: men vs women] between-subjects design. The procedure was exactly the same as the gender focus conditions of Study 1 except participants completed additional measures after indicating their support for affirmative action. These measures were presented in the following order.

***Preference for the Merit Principle (PMP) (Davey, Bobocel, Hing, & Zanna, 1999).*** This scale measured participant support for the notion that, when

resources are allocated to individuals, those who contribute the most should also receive the best outcomes. It consisted of 15 items measured on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included: “*The effort a worker puts into a job ought to be reflected in the size of a raise he or she receives*”; “*People ought to be able to get away with poor quality work under some circumstances*” (reverse scored); “*Qualifications ought to be given more weight than seniority when making promotion decisions.*”

***Short Version of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) (Glick & Whitehead, 2010).*** This scale consisted of six items measuring hostile sexism and six items measuring benevolent sexism, on a scale from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items of hostile sexism included: “*Women exaggerate problems they have at work*”; “*Many women get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.*” Sample items of benevolent sexism included: “*Women should be cherished and protected by men*”; “*Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.*”

***Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy (Glick & Whitehead, 2010).*** This scale consisted of six items measuring how much participants view the existing gender hierarchy as legitimate on a scale from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included: “*By far the most important reason that men, on average, make more money than women is that men and women tend to choose different career paths.*”; “*Overall, our society currently treats women less fairly than it treats men*” (reverse-coded).

## Results

Participants who did not pass simple attention tests or who presented inconsistent demographic information between the pre-screening and the survey of interest were excluded from analyses. Thus, 309 participants were included in the following analyses.

**Preliminary analyses.** The continuous variables of interest were liberalism, perceived inequity, CSE, support for affirmative action, Preference for the Merit Principle (PMP), hostile sexism and benevolent sexism (components of the Ambivalent Sexism Scale), Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy, and age. CSE, PMP, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy were calculated by averaging the items in each scale. CSE ( $\alpha = .869$ ), PMP ( $\alpha = .716$ ), hostile sexism ( $\alpha = .923$ ), benevolent sexism ( $\alpha = .896$ ), and Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy ( $\alpha = .868$ ) were all sufficiently reliable. See Table 3 for the distributional properties of these continuous variables.

**Gender differences in individual difference variables.** We first examined whether gender differences consistent with previous literature could be observed in our new predictor variables (see Table 4 for means). Indeed, a series of t-tests revealed that men displayed higher levels of hostile sexism,  $t(307) = 4.627$ ,  $p < .001$ , benevolent sexism,  $t(307) = 2.225$ ,  $p = .027$ , and Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy,  $t(307) = 2.248$ ,  $p = .025$ , than women. Women, on the other hand, had significantly higher levels of CSE than men,  $t(307) = 3.942$ ,  $p < .001$ . There were no significant gender differences in PMP,  $t(308) = .349$ ,  $p = .727$ .



***Bivariate correlations between continuous variables.*** See Table 5 for a correlation matrix between liberalism, perceived inequity, CSE, support for affirmative action, PMP, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy, and age. All significant medium to large correlations are reported in text here ( $r > .300$ ). Support for affirmative action was positively correlated with liberalism and perceived inequity while being negatively correlated hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Liberalism was additionally positively correlated with perceived inequity and negatively correlated with hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy. Perceived inequity was positively correlated with PMP and negatively correlated with hostile sexism. Hostile sexism was positively correlated with benevolent sexism and Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy. Benevolent sexism was positively correlated with Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy.

***Framing manipulation checks.*** Of the 309 participants, 160 correctly identified both the inequity frame and policy outcome frame. Independently, 216 participants correctly identified the inequity frame while 217 correctly identified the policy outcome frame. Performance was likely worse than in Study 1 because participants completed the individual difference measures in Study 2 before completing the manipulation checks, and therefore there was more time between the manipulations and the manipulation checks. Only including participants who correctly identified the framings did not reveal additional significant results, although some analyses were no longer significant, likely due to a loss of power.

Thus, participants were included in analyses regardless of whether they correctly identified the framing.

Of those who did not correctly identify the framing, 14 failed to indicate that any inequity existed and 13 failed to indicate that the policy would result in changes in economic opportunities for the various groups. Results did not change for our main analyses when eliminating these individuals, so they have been included. Slight differences in our regression analysis are noted below.

*Effect of inequity frame on perceived inequity.* Again, we tested the possibility that inequity frame affected the perceived inequity. Thus, we conducted an independent samples t-test examining the effect of inequity frame (male advantage versus female disadvantage) on participant ratings of perceived inequity. Consistent with Study 1, we found that participants who read about male (dominant-group) advantage ( $M = 4.94$ ;  $SD = 1.736$ ) did not significantly differ in their perception of injustice compared to those who read about female (subordinate group) advantage ( $M = 5.17$ ;  $SD = 1.574$ ),  $t(307) = 1.234$ ,  $p = .218$ .

**Support for affirmative action.** We conducted a three-way ANOVA on support for affirmative action as a function of inequity frame, outcome frame, and participant gender. There were no significant interactions<sup>2</sup>. However, there were significant main effects of outcome frame and participant gender. Participants who read about the outcome of the policy framed as benefiting women ( $M = 4.86$ ;  $SD = 1.945$ ) supported affirmative action more than those who read about the outcome of the policy framed as harming men ( $M = 4.21$ ;  $SD = 1.934$ ),  $F(1, 301)$

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<sup>2</sup> We also conducted the analysis with only White participants (to match the sample collected in Study 1 and see if we might find a similar three-way interaction as in Study 1). Results did not differ so all subsequent analyses were conducting including participants of any race.

= 8.723,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .028$ . In addition, women ( $M = 4.96$ ;  $SD = 1.925$ ) supported affirmative action significantly more than men ( $M = 4.11$ ;  $SD = 1.904$ ),  $F(1, 301) = 14.949$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .047$ .

***Exploratory analysis: which variables best predict support for affirmative action?*** We were also interested in exploring what individual difference factors might be related to support for affirmative action besides CSE. To analyze this beyond simple correlational relationships discussed earlier, we regressed support for affirmative action onto outcome frame, participant gender, CSE, PMP, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy, and the interaction terms between gender and each of these continuous variables. Outcome frame (dummy coded: 0 = benefits women; 1 = harms men) and participant gender (dummy coded: 0 = male; 1 = female) were included because an ANOVA previously demonstrated that they significantly influenced support for affirmative action. The other variables were included so that their predictive value could be compared within a single regression analysis.

The model overall accounted for 39.9% of the variation in support for affirmative action, and this value was significant,  $F(12, 296) = 16.404$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 6 for coefficients). Outcome frame, PMP, hostile sexism and benevolent sexism were significant predictors of support for affirmative action, regardless of participant gender. Reading about the outcome of the policy framed as benefiting women predicted more support for the policy than reading the policy outcome framed as hurting men. Higher scores on PMP and benevolent sexism

predicted greater support for affirmative action. On the other hand, higher scores on hostile sexism predicted less support for affirmative action.

While higher CSE for men predicted less support for affirmative action, this relationship was not present for women. This is unsurprising given that men were rating CSE for their male gender ingroup while women were rating CSE for their female gender ingroup. In addition, higher scores on Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy predicted significantly less support for affirmative action, but only for women<sup>3</sup>.

Given that PMP was a significant predictor of support for affirmative action and that different framings of affirmative action (e.g., as benefiting all individuals versus a select group) have been shown to affect the predictive value of the scale (Davey et al., 1999), we examined whether outcome frame influenced PMP. An independent samples t-test revealed that outcome frame did not significantly affect PMP,  $t(307) = .074, p = .941$ .

## **Discussion**

In Study 2 we again examined the relationship between participant gender, inequity frame, and outcome frame in predicting support for affirmative action. When just examining these three independent variables, we found that participants who read about the outcome of the policy as benefiting women were more supportive of it than those who read about it as harming men. In addition, women were more supportive overall than men. Inequity frame, on the other hand,

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<sup>3</sup> When participants who did not correctly identify the message of the passage (that, 1. Inequity exists between men and women, and 2. The affirmative action policy was designed to reduce differences in economic opportunities between groups) were eliminated, Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy was no longer predictive of support for affirmative action.

did not influence participants' responses. These results were in contrast to Study 1 in which we found that only men were affected by inequity and outcome frames. In Study 1, when the inequity was framed as a disadvantage for women, men were more supportive of the policy framed as helping women (versus harming men), whereas there was no difference in support when the inequity was framed as an advantage for men.

However, in Study 2 we were also interested in examining additional individual difference factors as predictors of support for affirmative action. When regressing support for affirmative action on participant gender, outcome frame, and several individual difference factors, we found that lower values of hostile sexism, higher values of benevolent sexism, and higher values on the PMP predicted more support for affirmative action. Higher values of CSE predicted less support for affirmative action, but only for men. In addition, higher scores on Legitimacy of Gender Hierarchy predicted less support for affirmative action, but only for women.

Although it may seem intuitive that hostile sexism would predict less support for gender-based affirmative action, it is more difficult to predict how benevolent sexism may impact participants' attitudes. On the one hand, previous research has demonstrated that despite involving *positive* stereotypes, benevolent sexism nevertheless reinforces the structural gender hierarchy (Glick & Fiske, 1996). And yet, in this study we see that benevolent sexism predicted more support for affirmative action, a policy that challenges rather than reinforces the existing hierarchy. It is important to note, however, that while benevolent sexism

was a significant predictor in the regression when holding other variables constant, it was not significantly correlated with support for the policy by itself. Thus, the relationship may not be particularly robust.

Perhaps more surprising is the positive relationship between support for meritocratic ideals and affirmative action that was observed. One might assume that affirmative action has the connotation of being focused on equality rather than meritocracy, as equally qualified women may be advantaged over men. This view would likely imply that people who are more supportive of meritocracy would be less supportive of affirmative action. On the other hand, a more progressive view of affirmative action may actually paint it as more merit-based, as it simply enables deserving women to be successful in areas where the meritocratic balance may have previously been tipped towards men. Davey et al. (1999) established this distinction when creating the PMP scale, demonstrating that the scale was predictive of opposition to affirmative action described as including preferential treatment, but not to affirmative action described as benefiting all employees. Hence, this suggests that either our general understanding about affirmative action leans toward it being beneficial to all individuals or else the way in which affirmative action was described in our current study implies that it is beneficial for all. Given that the relationship between PMP and support for affirmative action was not moderated by outcome frame (described as either harming men or benefiting women), it is possible that participants view affirmative action as meritocratic in general rather than taking on this view as a result of the specific study materials.

### **General Discussion**

Across two studies, we investigated the effect of inequity framing and outcome framing on participants' support for inequity-mitigating policies. We found no effect of framing on support for race-based affirmative action and therefore were unable to replicate Lowery et al.'s (2012) results. Extending the paradigm to investigate attitudes toward gender-based affirmative action, we found that outcome frame did influence participant attitudes such that participants were less supportive of affirmative action when it was framed as harming men than when it was framed as benefiting women. In addition, exploratory analyses revealed that less hostile sexism, more benevolent sexism, and more meritocratic views predicted greater support for affirmative action. Greater perceived legitimacy of the existing gender hierarchy predicted greater support of affirmative action, but only for women. Additionally, higher gender-based group esteem predicted less support for affirmative action, but only for men.

### **Possible Explanations for Failed Replication**

There are several possibilities for why we were unable to replicate Lowery et al.'s (2012) work. First, the change in the political climate between data collection points (Obama's first term and Trump's first term) may have influenced how participants responded to different framings. With race at the forefront of the 2016 presidential election, participants may have become more accustomed (and therefore less sensitive) to terms such as "White privilege." In addition, Trump's focus on "the forgotten majority" White working class and his reticence to condemn White nationalist groups may also have made individuals

less threatened by the idea that Whites are advantaged in society. We see some evidence for this in the fact that inequity framing did not impact group esteem scores as it did in Lowery et al.'s study. In addition, group esteem scores were much higher in the current study across conditions. Ultimately, participants did not show different attitudes toward affirmative action depending on the inequity frame and outcome frame in this study.

These contrasting results may also be explained using alternative frameworks for understanding what motivates individuals to support inequity-mitigating policies, even when the policy may harm their ingroup. Chow, Lowery, and Hogan (2013) proposed that Whites may be motivated to support redistributive policies in order to appease dissatisfied subordinate group members, ultimately as a form of hierarchy maintenance. They found that Whites who are highly supportive of the existing social hierarchy were more likely to support affirmative action when racial minorities were perceived as having negative views of Whites and when the threat to the hierarchy seemed legitimate. Participants viewed supporting affirmative action as a way to quell negative attitudes toward Whites and potential unrest as well as a way by which they might stabilize the existing hierarchy.

If we interpret both Lowery et al.'s (2012) study and the current results through this lens of appeasement, this may also help explain discrepancies in the outcomes. At the time of Lowery et al.'s data collection, Whites may have perceived the Obama presidency as a threat to the existing racial hierarchy in the United States. As such, they may have been more willing to support White-



harming policies, particularly when the racial inequity was framed as White advantage rather than minority disadvantage. In contrast, in 2018 with Trump in the White House (and all of the pro-White rhetoric discussed earlier associated with his campaign), Whites may feel that the racial hierarchy is no longer experiencing the same threat. As a result, Whites may not feel the need to appease subordinate group members, even when inequity is framed as White advantage. This may also explain higher levels of group esteem for White participants now compared to the earlier study.

### **Exploring Attitudes Toward Gender-Based Affirmative Action**

We were also interested in whether attitudes toward gender-based affirmative action would be influenced by framing. Indeed, participants were more supportive of affirmative action when the outcome was framed as benefiting women than when it was framed as harming men. Counter to expectations, men and women did not differ in their pattern of responses (although women supported affirmative action more than men across conditions). However, this prediction was based on Lowery et al.'s (2012) framework that group esteem would mediate the relationship between inequity frame and policy support. Because we did not replicate Lowery et al.'s findings with regard to race, it is unsurprising that attitudes toward gender-based affirmative action did not fit with this original framework either.

The overall pattern that participants were less supportive of a policy framed as harming men as compared to one framed as benefiting women is in contrast to the null results we found for race-based affirmative action. The

explanation for this result may differ by participant gender. For men, they may feel more threatened by a policy framed as harming their gender group than their racial group because the threat may be more immediate. In a White majority nation, many participants likely do not live in a community with a large proportion of minorities, making the threat that their economic prospects will be harmed less immediate. In contrast, communities tend to be comprised of roughly 50% men and 50% women. As such, the threat of women harming men's economic prospects may be more immediate.

Women, on the other hand, may show this discrepancy between responses to race-based inequity and gender-based inequity for a different reason. Perhaps women are less supportive of policies that harm men because, within the context of traditional heterosexual relationships, women may actually suffer if their male partner's economic prospects are harmed. In contrast, racial groups are typically not as economically tied and therefore subordinate group members may be equally likely to support policies framed as benefiting their ingroup as those that harm the dominant group. Future research should test this hypothesis.

Examining gender-related inequity with male and female participants allowed us to observe how dominant versus subordinate group members respond to inequity framing. Although there appeared to be initial evidence of gender differences in Study 1, once we had adequate power to test for gender differences in Study 2, these differences were no longer significant. However, examining the overall pattern of the data across two studies, it does appear that women were less sensitive to framing than men. As a subordinate group member, perhaps any effort

to mitigate inequity will be supported, regardless of framing. Further studies are needed to clarify this relationship.

Exploratory analyses also revealed that benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, attitudes toward meritocracy, M-CSE, and perceived legitimacy of the existing hierarchy were related to support for gender-based affirmative action. The negative relationship between hostile sexism and support for affirmative action was not surprising as such policies aim to reduce discrimination against women. The positive relationship between benevolent sexism and affirmative action was in some ways contradictory to previous research, which has shown that benevolent sexism reinforces men's structural power, albeit to a less extent than hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Given that Hideg and Ferris (2016) found that benevolent sexism led to greater support for an employment equity policy in feminine (but not masculine) fields, perhaps the ambiguity associated with the lack of reference to a specific field as well as the other variables already accounted for in the regression of the current study can explain why greater levels of benevolent sexism predicted support for affirmative action.

Greater support for meritocracy was associated with greater support for affirmative action. This finding was somewhat surprising. Previous research has shown that support for meritocracy predicts opposition to affirmative action described as including preferential treatment for certain groups but not to affirmative action described as benefiting all employees (Davey et al., 1999). Yet, in the current study, support for meritocracy was predictive of support for affirmative action, regardless of outcome frame. This presents the possibility that

Whites have evolved in their thinking about affirmative action policies. Perhaps they are more accepting of the policies and may even view them as meritocratic. Indeed, given that affirmative action policies are implemented in response to systemic disadvantage that women have incurred over time, it is very possible that affirmative action may be seen as meritocratic as it attempts to give women more (rightfully earned) opportunities in the workplace. Given that the Davey et al. study was conducted in 1999 when women were even more marginalized in the workforce, this change in the relationship between preference for the merit principle and support for affirmative action seems plausible.

Interestingly, perceived legitimacy of the existing gender hierarchy was only predictive of support for gender-based affirmative action for women. Perhaps women are more sensitive to how legitimate their current position in society is when judging whether affirmative action policies are justified. Men, as dominant group members, on the other hand, may be less likely to relate the legitimacy of the hierarchy to their support for affirmative action. Instead, their views appear to be dictated more by their attitudes toward women as discussed above.

Men's CSE predicted less support for affirmative action whereas women's CSE had no effect. These results are in line with Lowery et al.'s (2012) theories regarding group esteem. When men's CSE is low, they may feel that their position as dominant group members in society is unearned, and therefore may compensate by supporting policies that promote equity. In contrast, women's CSE,

as subordinate group members, should not influence their support for inequity-mitigating policies.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The null findings regarding race-related inequity do not illustrate that framing has no effect on support for affirmative action, of course. To clarify whether inequity frame and outcome frame affect support for affirmative action, it may be useful to perform a similar experiment but with a stronger or more detailed framing. In the current study, framing was manipulated by making small linguistic modifications such as stating, “Minorities receive lower salaries than equally qualified Whites” compared to “Whites receive higher salaries than equally qualified Minorities.” Providing specific metrics to illustrate the discrepancies, such as the difference in annual income, may make the framing more noticeable. Making the outcome specific to the geographic area in which the participant lives may also make it more self-relevant. This may help combat participants’ increased familiarity with buzz words such as “White privilege” that has developed over the last eight years.

It remains unclear how the current political climate may have influenced the results. Future studies should probe in more detail why participants chose to support (or not) the policy, to what extent they agreed with or trusted the economic research describing the inequity, and how they saw the framing influencing their attitudes. In a political climate in which facts seem to have lost their value and political views are extremely polarized, gaining a more nuanced understanding of how participants are responding to the stimuli is vital. This is

likely an issue that is not isolated to this particular paradigm. Rather, much of the research related to social equity may display drastically different results if conducted today.

With regard to the effect of framing on attitudes toward gender-related inequity, there is very little existing research, and therefore this area warrants further study. Based on the current study, it appears that individuals may approach gender- and race-related inequity differently. Both dominant and subordinate group members appear less willing to support a policy that harms the dominant gender group (men). In contrast, we observed no difference in dominant group (White) support for the race-based affirmative action policy depending on inequity frame and have no evidence to suggest that subordinate group members (racial minorities) would necessarily differ. The reticence to inflict economic harm on dominant outgroup members may be unique to gender groups because men and women are so socially and financially interconnected in traditional heterosexual relationships. However, further studies are required to clarify whether other types of subordinate groups (e.g., racial minorities, gay or lesbian individuals, religious minorities) would indeed exhibit a different pattern of responses to a policy framed as harming the dominant group than we might see with women evaluating gender inequity.

Our exploratory findings relating benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, and preference for the merit principle to support for affirmative action also warrant further study. It would be interesting to examine whether referencing traditionally male versus female employment domains may influence how predictive benevolent

and hostile sexism are of participants' support for affirmative action. Examining different roles within those domains (e.g., entry level versus upper level management) may also be informative.

Our results regarding preference for the merit principle were particularly intriguing. Future studies should attempt to gain a better understanding of whether affirmative action is indeed seen as meritocratic as suggested by our current data, or if there is another explanation for why support of meritocracy predicted support for affirmative action. It would also be interesting to examine whether a similar relationship would be found with other redistributive policies such as social welfare policies. Perhaps views about what constitutes a meritocracy are changing in the United States. Cross-cultural research in socialist countries such as those in Western Europe may also be revealing on this topic.

### **Conclusions**

The political climate in America has changed rapidly over the last few years. Political change not only affects political attitudes, but may also influence the way people respond to experimental manipulations such as framing. In addition, the effects of framing on support for inequity-mitigating policies do appear to differ depending on the specific focus of the inequity (e.g., race versus gender). Further research is needed to understand the mechanism behind framing effects, how this might differ based on the focus of the inequity, and how a rapidly changing political climate may interact with these factors.

Ultimately, understanding how the presentation and framing of policy affects people's attitudes toward the policy is essential to promoting policies that

combat inequity. It is already an uphill battle to convince dominant group members to relinquish advantages they have in an effort to increase societal equity across groups. Gaining a more nuanced understanding of how individual differences may dictate responses to policy may provide valuable insight into how to most effectively communicate the need for a more equitable society.



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