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Running head: COLORBLIND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND RACIST ATTITUDES

The Relationship Between Modern Racism, Color-Blind Attitudes,
and Attitudes

Towards Affirmative Action

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Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the relationship between modern racist attitudes, attitudes toward affirmative action, and colorblind attitudes. One hundred seventy two college students were given the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS), Modern Racism Scale (MRS), and Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action Scale (ATAAS). Results confirmed a positive correlation between modern racism and colorblind attitudes. In addition, modern racism was able to predict scores on the Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action Scale (ATAAS).

Since it is widely held that attitudes ultimately shape our behavior (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975), a comprehensive awareness of them is necessary to evaluate social perplexities. For instance, one may be perplexed because whites still hold nearly every one of the most powerful positions in the U.S. (Feagin, 2000). In addition, they continue to do so despite supposed affirmative efforts to reduce the effects of racial prejudice. Jones (1997) explains that racial prejudice in the workplace continues to exist, and it does so in many forms. Lastly, research has found that affirmative action benefits society (Little & Murry, 1998). So why, then, do many whites (Little & Murry, 1998; McConahay, 1983), especially males (Kravitz & Platanina; Jones, 1997; McConahay, 1983; Little, Murry & Wimbush, 1998) maintain negative attitudes toward affirmative action?

To answer this question, past research has examined factors that are thought to be precursors of attitudes toward affirmative action. Some of these precursors are: myths about affirmative action, symbolic racism, principled objectives, group interests, and discounting principles¹ (Kravitz & Platanina, 1998; Jones, 1997). These variables are perhaps the most widely studied precursors of attitudes toward affirmative action. While an exhaustive list of every precursor ever studied is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that several factors give rise to any given attitude. Therefore, measuring attitudes

¹ While colorblind attitudes and a modern racist ideology are also strong precursors to negative attitudes toward affirmative action, they were not included here because they were the other variables in the study.

can be a daunting task. Despite the challenge, however, different scales have been created to reliably assess different social attitudes. In sum, being aware of attitudes can explain hiring, firing, and promoting behaviors because attitudes underlie behavior. Much research has facilitated the establishment of many scales that are able to measure social attitudes.

Plous (1996) suggests ten myths that exist about affirmative action that may effect ones attitude toward it. Some separate myths include: feelings that affirmative action will inevitably lead to reverse discrimination, an assertion that equal opportunity exists between blacks and whites in the workplace, and an unmerited fear for the progress of whites as a group (Plous, 1996; Kravitz & Platanian, 1993).

The myth that a result of affirmative action is reverse discrimination is quickly diluted through a comprehensive essay by Plous (1996). He explains that discrimination is based on excluding individuals, and since affirmative action works to include minorities, without focusing any effort on reducing the numbers of whites, then, by definition, it does not discriminate. In addition to this, one may have negative attitudes toward affirmative action because equal opportunity now exists that allows for the withdrawal of programs assisting minority groups.

Two researchers who explored this notion of equal opportunity are Jones (1997), and Plous (1996). Jones (1997) explains that inherent in opposition of affirmative action is the

argument that blacks and whites now have an equal chance to succeed in the work place. After all, the argument goes, there are laws that ensure "equal opportunity". A critical evaluation of this assertion will reveal, however, a difference between equal opportunity and equal outcome. Jones (1997) explains that in basketball, there is equal opportunity. Specifically, a jump ball in basketball is designed to provide each team with an equal opportunity to gain possession of the ball. That is, assuming the referee makes a fair toss, no favor is given to a player. In this manner, they each have an equal opportunity to get the ball. The problem arises, however, when one player is a foot taller than the other. Then, equality of outcome becomes a problem. The player who is a foot taller will certainly prevail in most cases. In the job-place, whites are the taller players and blacks are the shorter ones. What causes the difference? Racial prejudice, as explained by Jones (1997). In other words, the difference in height illustrates how a job can offer equal opportunity, but not guarantee equal outcome because whites underestimate the role of racial prejudice in their behavior. Plous (1996) explains that unemployment rates, median household incomes, and college attendance are all useful means to explore the myth of a level playing field. Specifically, he stated that proportionally: (a) Unemployment rates of the African American community are double that of whites; (b) The median income for black families is half of their white counterparts; and (c) There are twice the amount

of white students in college than black students. Plous (1996) goes on to explain that "without affirmative action the percentage of black students on many campuses would drop below 2%" (p. 26). This myth was one of ten that Plous (1996) addressed; and it is joined with a myth that "a large percentage of white workers will lose out if affirmative action is continued" (p. 27).

Conversely, government statistics reveal that even if every unemployed African American person replaced a white worker, only two percent of whites would be affected (Plous, 1996). This analysis revisits the imbalance of diversity in the American workplace. Furthermore, this is an important illustration because it negates an argument which can contribute to negative attitudes toward affirmative action. Plous (1996) addressed eight other myths that exist about affirmative action, and a review of how each can affect attitudes is also provided. In addition to myths that lead to negative attitudes toward affirmative action, symbolic racism works to restrain its effectiveness.

Bobo (1998) reported four variables that predicted negative attitudes toward affirmative action: Symbolic racism (Sears 1997), principled objectives (Sniderman, 1993), group interests (Bobo, 1998), and discounting principles (Maio & Essess, 1998). These hypotheses, due to rigorous testing, seem to be sound predictors for the presence of negative attitudes toward affirmative action. Continuing research to test these hypotheses

will be very valuable; as will research that explores the attitudes of all Americans (Kravitz & Platanina, 1993).

Perhaps the most studied of these variables is symbolic racism. Symbolic racist sentiments play a role in how whites view affirmative action (Kravitz & Platanina, 1993; Kluegel & Smith, 1983). Symbolic racism contributes to negative attitudes toward affirmative action differently than blatant racism (Bobo, 1998). According to Bobo (1998), it is "more subtle than the course racism of the Jim Crow era" (p. 988). In other words, it is an underlying form of racism. Bobo (1998) and other researchers (Jones, 1997; McConahay, 1983; McConahay, 1986) go on to say that symbolic racism is based around a very Westernized ideology; more specifically, an Americanized ideology. Symbolically racist individuals tend to deny the potency of racism and discrimination in society (Sears, 1998; Jones, 1997). In addition, individuals who score high on measures of symbolic racism also tend to "share a basic antiblack sentiment and endorsement of traditional U.S. values" (Jones, p. 125). Bobo (1998) states that symbolic racism is joined by principled objectives as explanations for the root of negative attitudes toward affirmative action.

According to Sniderman et. al (1993), one reason whites oppose affirmative action is because of principled objectives. More specifically, whites often feel that it is unjust for a nation "built on equality"² to assist groups based on skin color; and because the world is a just place (Lipkus, 1991), people get

² The notion that we live in an equal society is an example of a traditional American value mentioned above.

what they deserve (Bobo 1998). In addition to principled objectives, the discounting principle (Maio & Esses, 1998) gives rise to white people's attitudes toward affirmative action.

Maio and Esses (1998) insightfully point out that when there are two explanations (i.e. skill and affirmative action) about why an individual may have received a job or a promotion, inevitably, less weight will be assigned to each. Hence, each explanation is discounted.

Considering that these crucial misperceptions give rise to negative attitudes toward affirmative action, it becomes evident how feelings of reverse discrimination can surface. The principled objectives and discounting principle are joined by evidence that whites have negative attitudes toward affirmative action because of an interest for the group. In other words, whites want their group to succeed. In addition to being closely tied with Plous' (1996) argument, there is an interesting enigma contained in this argument. What is the difference between whites wanting success for their group, when many other races and ethnic groups do the same? For instance, many Jewish individuals are openly ethnocentric, and some whites feel that their own ethnocentric views should be looked at as equal to that of a member of the Jewish society.

All in all, the goal of the current research is to measure attitudes toward affirmative action by using the Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action Scale (Kravitz & Platania, 1998). An analysis

of how white individuals view affirmative action, compared to their minority counterparts will be the basis for all hypotheses of the current study. Research in this area is valuable because it examines possible reasons for negative attitudes toward affirmative action. The current study examined how modern racism and colorblind attitudes are related to attitudes toward affirmative action. Future research should be interested in examining other factors that give rise to negative attitudes toward affirmative action, such as unmerited concern for the group, symbolic racism, principled objectives, and antiblack sentiment. Accounting for every reason whites oppose affirmative action is a very daunting task because most whites support the notion of equality they claim that they are the ones who want equality which seems plausible. It is a multifaceted problem with many obstacles that can only be dissected by understanding the root of its nature.

The lack of research dedicated to attitudes that Latino Americans, Asian Americans, and other minorities, have toward affirmative action is another obstacle (Bobo 1998). Observing group interests is important because it will allow researchers to fully assess how America, as a whole, views affirmative action-a program that helps reduce the effects of well documented racial discrimination, especially against African Americans.

One thing most politicians, researchers, and lay people agree with is that affirmative action is controversial. In fact,

it is so controversial that there have been many steps to abolish it. Individuals who oppose it inherently believe that a colorblind attitude should replace one that says race matters (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Brown, 2000). Furthermore, Bobo (1998) explains that individuals who support abolishing affirmative action are politically sophisticated, and they are aware that conservative attitudes lead to racism. The individuals who do much hiring and promoting across America, however are not politically sophisticated, and therefore may not be aware of this. Thus, if a color-blind approach to hiring and promoting were implemented, it would have detrimental effects on the number of African Americans in the work force because of the underlying symbolic racist sentiments many whites possess.

Some argue that a color-blind approach (elimination of affirmative action) is the only way to create equality. On the surface, this seems like a laudable idea. Taking a colorblind disregards the true nature of race relations in the U.S. (Jones, 1997; Neville et.al, 2000). Jones describes three reasons the colorblind approach, or a feeling that race does not and should not matter, is faulty.

First, it takes away from cultures by demeaning the unique experience gained by being part of a different culture. Another shortcoming of the colorblind view is that differences between cultures will exist, which makes everyone's perception of the world different (Jones, 1997). Finally, grouping people according

to skin color is not sufficient to understand their struggles/successes. An anecdote by Sue (1997) supports this notion.

Derald Sue (1997), suggested that when people think of Asian Pacific Americans, they automatically think of a race which has "made it". Unfortunately, this is far from true. Because the term "Asian Pacific Americans" encompasses thirty different cultures, it hardly distinguishes one from another. Moreover, "the higher educational attainment of Asian Indians, Chinese, and Japanese does not take into account the lower rates among Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Native Hawaiians" (p. 2). Because of this major deficit, some groups in need of assistance are overlooked because they belong to a group in which they share skin color. Thus, a color-blind approach will further blend groups together instead of distinguishing them. In the past, America was known as a "melting pot" which was expected to accept individuals from anywhere around the world, and blend them together to make one entity. A new and better term currently being used to describe America's diversity is "salad". Due to what we, as Americans, have learned about race, racism, and cultures, this term better describes the goals of antiracism.

Colorblind attitudes promote sameness across cultures which is not desirable nor beneficial to anyone (Neville, 2000). Bigfoot (1997), for example, argues that a color-blind society strips ethnic identity from diverse groups. She uses an anecdote

of American Indians who were sent to boarding schools in order to become more "civilized" for evidence. Bigfoot (1997) explains that the boarding schools required Native Americans to speak English, forbade them to speak their native language, and even forbade them to practice their own religion. Eventually, the Native American culture became degraded and disappeared. The government had succeeded in its goal to "civilize" Native Americans, but failed to promote freedom. Bigfoot (1997) argues that a color-blind attitude in all regards, including affirmative action, repeats the mistake we already made when we attempted to homogenize America.

Those who adopt a color-blind attitude toward racial issues score higher on measures of racism (Neville et al., 2000). Holding colorblind racial views, however, does not suggest direct negative feelings of persons of color. Colorblind attitudes do "imply embracing an inaccurate....view of not only racial and ethnic minorities but also race relations. Similar to individual racism, the.....consequences of color-blind racial attitudes, however, may unwittingly promote racial discrimination" (Neville et. al, 2000, p. 68). In other words, people who hold this attitude, may be unaware of their racist feelings. Further empirical evidence that color-blind attitudes are related to racial prejudice is almost nonexistent due to the fact that a scale to measure individual colorblind attitudes was created just a short time ago (Neville, et al., 2000). Much research is

needed to support the notion that colorblind attitudes are associated with racism. Such findings will greatly impede the progress of those arguing for things like the abolishment of affirmative action.

Jones (1997) demonstrates three reasons that a color-blind attitude cannot be sensitive to group differences. The first reason is because of the way people react to interpersonal (racial) differences. In 1979, researchers conducted an experiment which tested how Cleveland police officers viewed one another. This study first isolated individual traits within the officers. Those who were high performers on the job tended to be overall confident, outgoing, and heterosexual (Jones, 1996). Next, the study asked the officers, as well as their supervisors, to rate each other. Blacks were consistently rated lower by their peers than whites-even when they possessed the traits associated with high performance on the job (Jones, 1996). In this manner, people react to racial differences between themselves and others very differently.

Also, a self-fulfilling prophecy becomes of concern to Jones (1996). This already widely held belief was further demonstrated in a creative study at Princeton University. In short, students interviewed black and white peers to be part of an academic team. During these interviews, cues were identified that signified racism. These cues included "sitting relatively far from.....a Black subject, and looking away instead of looking the

subject.....in the eye" (Jones, 1996, p. unknown). Next, the interviewers were instructed to interview white males, treating some as white and some as black, according to the aforementioned cues. The interviews were videotaped and shown to judges who consistently rated the interviewee's performance worse when they were treated as if they were black (i.e. by the use of cues) than those treated the way whites usually are. This was a blind study in which the judges did not know who was picked to be interviewed as a "black" person. This serves as evidence that poor performance (in this case, during an interview) may result from an expectation to do poorly.

Jones (1997) goes on to say, that society should not adopt a color-blind attitude is because different situations tend to be viewed differently by different groups (Jones, 1996). This is supported by a study conducted at New York University. The study asked the subjects to rate words as either positive or negative. Before each word flashed on the computer screen, a subliminal image was flashed on the screen. The image was either a black person or a white person. White participants consistently judged the words which followed a subliminal picture of a black person to be negative; and the opposite was true for the black participants (Jones, 1997). This is evidence that we are not colorblind. Furthermore, our society is very racialized, and efforts to achieve a colorblind society erroneously ignore this fact (Jones, 1997).

Revisiting the example that Sue (1997) provides, a negative effect of a color-blind attitude is when people view Asian Pacific Americans not as a separate cultures, but as one. A colorblind approach to attenuate racism has not worked in the past; and many researchers feel that it will not work in the future. According to Carr (1997), the colorblind approach to attenuate racism is simply a new racist ideology. He goes on to say that legal segregation and the notion of evolutionary racial differences are outdated (although evolutionary racial differences does still surface once in a while), but racism is not. It is simply different now. Furthermore, Carr (1997) reports, a colorblind attitude is positively correlated with a racist attitude. Much research on this topic is both necessary and beneficial to society.

An overall feeling that Whites are simply *better* than Blacks is a sort of "old fashioned" racism (Thompson, 1999). Although groups like the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist groups exist, that form of blatant racism is much less common, and even thought of as less harmful to Blacks than modern racism (McConahay & Hough, 1976). These feelings are less harmful because compared to modern racism, they are nearly obsolete. McConahay (1986), goes on to explain, however, that although most blatant forms of racism (e.g. slavery and segregation) no longer exist, racism continues to cripple and oppress minorities, mainly African Americans.

Some studies have linked a positive correlation between negative feelings toward AA, high scores of colorblindness, and high scores on modern racism measures (McConahay, 1983).

The idea of modern racism is widely held and widely established. Specifically, modern racism endorses views that (a) racism toward Blacks is simply part of the past; (b) that Blacks are "too pushy and demanding of their rights" (Neville, 2000, p. 59); (c) that a result of the "pushiness", is unfair treatment toward whites, which leads to; (d) the feeling that since Blacks made gains at the expense of others, that those gains are undeserved.

In sum, modern racism is related closely to symbolic racism. The difference lies in the cause of the underlying racist ideology. But they are both sublime, and they both work to oppress African Americans (Jones, 1997).

The positive correlation between negative attitudes toward affirmative action, colorblind attitudes, and modern racism is telling. Since they are all related, it is reasonable to foreshadow that a decrease in one of the variables may lead to a decrease in another, or perhaps more than one. For example, if someone underwent a process that decreased their negative attitude towards affirmative action, it is reasonable to predict at least a small decrease in their racist attitude. An example of such a process is an effective diversity training program at work or, an informative class which leads to an increased appreciation

for another culture or subculture. Thus, a developed understanding of such programs is valuable and deserving of much attention for future research.

The current study will examine the relationship between attitudes toward affirmative action, colorblind attitudes, and modern racism. Specifically:

Hypothesis 1.

Modern racism will be positively correlated with colorblind attitudes.

Hypothesis 2.

Modern racism will be negatively correlated with attitudes toward affirmative action.

Hypothesis 3

Colorblind attitudes will be negatively correlated with attitudes toward affirmative action.

Hypothesis 4

Colorblind attitudes and modern racist attitudes will predict negative attitudes toward affirmative action.

Method

Participants

College students at Southern Illinois University Carbondale were the participants in the current study. Some of the students were required to complete twenty points of research experience for an introductory psychology course. Others received extra

credit in psychology courses for participating. The participants took approximately thirty-five minutes to complete the surveys relevant to the current study.

Instrumentation

Attitude Toward Affirmative Action Scale (ATAAS). The ATAAS (Kravitz, Plantania, 1993) was designed to measure attitudes toward affirmative action (AA). The ATAAS consists of six items scored with a five-point Likert scale. Responses range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The range of total scores for the ATAAS is 6 to 30. Higher scores indicate more positive feelings toward AA. The ATAAS is widely used to assess attitudes toward AA. A sample item includes (8) "Affirmative Action is a good policy". Cronbach's alpha was found by Kravitz et al. (1993) to be .86 in their study.

Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS). The CoBRAS was designed to assess the degree to which people overtly distinguish between different racial groups (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Brown, 2000). The CoBRAS is a twenty item scale that utilizes a six point Likert scale. Responses range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Thus total scores on the CoBRAS range from 20-120. A high score on the CoBRAS indicates a color-blind attitude.

A study dedicated solely to assessing the reliability and validity of the CoBRAS found that it has "acceptable internal

consistency...and ...acceptable split-half reliability and.....acceptable 2-week test-retest reliability" (Neville et.al, 2000, p. 67). A critical review by psychology professors and a computer program revealed that the content reliability of the CoBRAS is acceptable (Neville et.al, 2000). Some sample questions are: (3) "It is important that people begin to think of themselves as American and not African American, Mexican American, or Italian American." And, (6) "Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not."³ "

Modern Racism Scale (MRS). The MRS consists of seven items, and utilizes a five point Likert-type scale. The possible responses range from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Thus, scores range from seven to thirty-five. High scores on the MRS are indicative of racist attitudes. A sample question is: (4) "Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve". The MRS (McConahay, 1983) is widely used to measure racial attitudes and has a "good level of reliability" (McConahay, 1983 p.551). Cronbach's alpha for the MRS is reported to be .86 (McConahay, 1983). McConahay (1983) also demonstrated the construct validity of the MRS with a creative study assessing ambivalent feelings about members of different racial groups.

Procedure

When the participants arrived, they were supplied with a cover letter and an informed consent form. Then they were given

³ This item is reverse scored.

another packet that contained the MRS, ATAAS, the CoBRAS and a demographic form. When finished, the participants placed all forms face down, on a table and received a form which provided feedback. All efforts were made to ensure the participants remain anonymous.

Results

A multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses. Hypothesis one was supported due to a positive correlation between modern racism and colorblind attitudes ($r=.23$, $p<.01$). The ATAAS did not correlate with colorblind attitudes or modern racism. Therefore, hypotheses two and three were not supported. Hypothesis four was partially supported by the results because modern racism was able to predict attitudes toward affirmative action ($F[2,169]=2.98$, $p<.05$; multiple $-R=.18$, adjusted $-R=.15$) Colorblind attitudes were not, however, able to predict attitudes toward affirmative action, which is why hypothesis four was not supported.

Discussion

It is interesting to note there was a relationship between all three variables, although not every hypothesis was supported. The implications of finding a positive correlation between scores on the MRS and CoBRAS are that individuals who feel that discrimination is part of the past, and that blacks are too pushy for their rights, also endorse more colorblind attitudes.

Therefore, the theoretical construct of modern racism is supported by the current findings.

A battle against affirmative action is currently being fought at the University of Michigan. This battle is important because if University of Michigan does not have the funds to win the court case, other schools will certainly fall. It is conceivable that if the court decides against affirmative action now, it will not be long before all institutions abolish it. The implications of the current study even reach this debate because the only alternative to affirmative action is a colorblind approach, which will only be taken by groups who endorse an overall colorblind ideology. If colorblind attitudes, however, are continually linked to modern racist attitudes, it becomes increasingly agreeable that colorblind attitudes are contributors of modern racism.

The non-racist scores on the MRS (mean of whites= 2.06 on a 5 point scale) were more likely due to the aforementioned combination than diminishing racist ideologies. For, one can interpret the scores on of two ways: either whites no longer hold modern racist views, or modern racism is now even less detectable than in the past. Considering much research suggests the persistence of racism, concluding from this study that modern racism has subsided would be highly erroneous. Therefore, the underlying and difficult detection of modern racism prevailed in the current study.

As its name suggests, modern racism is sensitive to time. Thus, as time passes it should become increasingly less detectable. Therefore, the time that has elapsed since the scale was created may have contributed to the overall low scores of whites. In other words, as time passes, individuals now find it increasingly unacceptable to report sentiments of racism. Furthermore, since 1983, people may have become more aware of racism, thereby accepting its existence. Knowing racism exists, however, does not ensure that an individual takes the necessary steps to decrease its effects. If we disregard low scores on the MRS we may disregard important information about possible changing properties of modern racism. Hence, if researchers attend only to studies that find significant results, they may be overlooking the very important underlying property of modern racism. Future research should still focus on the underlying, insidious nature of modern racism. And this focus should be the premise of research on affirmative action as well.

Overall, white participants did not report negative attitudes toward affirmative action. As with modern racism, this contradicts the hypotheses concerning modern racism. This finding, however, should not be overlooked for reasons similar to those of modern racism. We should continue to find ways to measure underlying attitudes, no matter how daunting the task.

Currently, University of Michigan is battling an important court case involving affirmative action. In short, a white

student from South Africa is suing the school because he feels he was discriminated against. This case is largely important because if the school loses the case, a colorblind approach will inevitably infest other schools. Basically, affirmative action, with regard to education may disappear because if Michigan does not have the resources to defend itself against this battle, other schools will inevitably fall. A colorblind attitude has only helped whites get ahead. Never in our country's history have people of color benefited from a colorblind society. It has not worked in the past, nor will it work in the future. Our society is too racialized to ignore the color of a person's skin. And trends in hiring, firing, and promotion behaviors strongly support this.

Progress will require that future research objectively explores all components that lead to negative attitudes toward affirmative action. Again and again research has supported that our attitudes shape our behavior. Individuals who oppose affirmative action do so, because in regard to what shapes behavior, either: a) do not know, or accept this; b) do accept this, but reject all of the research that confirms whites still hold negative attitudes toward affirmative action (colorblind attitudes, modern racist ideologies, etc.); or c) do know that attitudes lead to behavior, accept the research that illustrates the negative effects of racial prejudice, and still oppose the

only federal program aimed at reducing them; which is inherently racist. No further explanations remain.

Possibly the most important aspect of research in the field will be to examine the black-white paradigm, in regard to social attitudes. Exploratory research was conducted, and findings suggested that, in regard to the African American sample, that colorblind attitudes do not predict negative attitudes toward affirmative action, but they did in the European Americans. This finding is very representative of the importance of examining social attitudes of different groups of people. Without separating blacks and whites, we would only be able to conclude that a predictor of negative attitudes toward affirmative action is a colorblind attitude, when in fact, it is much more specific. For example, in this study, colorblind attitudes predicted negative attitudes toward affirmative action in whites, but not in blacks. Future research will benefit greatly by from examining how the same phenomenon affects different groups instead of combining all of the data.

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