

Affirmative action elicits bias in pro-equality Caucasians

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New research from Simon Fraser University's Beedie School of Business indicates that bias towards the effects of affirmative action exists in not only people opposed to it, but also in those who strongly endorse equality.

The study found that while Caucasians who are against [affirmative action](#) show bias towards whites, those with ideological beliefs in favour of it are actually biased against their own race.

The paper, What makes Affirmative Action-based hiring decisions seem (un)fair? A test of an ideological explanation for fairness judgments, was co-authored by Brent McFerran (SFU Beedie School of Business), Jun Gu (Monash University), Karl Aquino (University of British Columbia), and Tai Gyu Kim (Korea University).

It was published in the July 2014 edition of the *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*.

The researchers studied the reactions of nearly 1,000 Caucasians to a situation where a less qualified African-American candidate was hired over an Asian or Caucasian candidate, both equally qualified.

In order to ensure the results were not dependent upon contextual circumstances, three varied job types were used in the experiment: a university professor, a police officer, and a sales representative.

The results show that Caucasians who were ideologically opposed to affirmative action judged the hiring decision as less fair when the Caucasian candidate was passed over in favour of a less qualified black candidate than when a qualified Asian candidate was rejected.

Surprisingly, however, the study also revealed that Caucasians who strongly endorsed affirmative action judged it less fair when the Asian candidate was passed over for the job than when the Caucasian was rejected.

"The research shows that whites' reaction to affirmative action is not solely based on the principles of meritocracy, but also on the adversely affected person's race and the evaluator's ideological beliefs," says McFerran.

More information: Gu, J., McFerran, B., Aquino, K. and Kim, T. G. (2014), "What makes affirmative action-based hiring decisions seem (un)fair? A test of an ideological explanation for fairness judgments." *J. Organiz. Behav.*, 35: 722–745. [DOI: 10.1002/job.1927](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1927)

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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