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Reports

How believing in affirmative action quotas affects White women's self-image

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ABSTRACT

Believing that affirmative action entails quotas may both help and hurt White women's self-image – contingent on whether they perceive themselves as beneficiaries of affirmative action. Consistent with research on the affirmative action “stigma of incompetence” (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992), White women who think of themselves as affirmative action beneficiaries may report a more negative self-image the more they believe that affirmative action entails quota procedures. Conversely, White women who do not think of themselves as beneficiaries of affirmative action may report a more positive self-image as a function of quota beliefs, consistent with research suggesting that non-beneficiaries can derive self-image benefits from maintaining the belief that affirmative action entails quotas (Unzueta, Lowery, & Knowles, 2008). Two studies provide evidence for the benefits of quota beliefs on White women's self-image, but no support for the stigma of incompetence perspective. The lack of support for the stigma of incompetence perspective suggests that self-stigmatization may occur only under operationalizations of affirmative action that explicitly inform beneficiaries that they were selected on the basis of demographics and not merit. Absent such an operationalization, the affirmative action self-stigma may not emerge.

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Introduction

Affirmative action is a collection of social policies intended to promote the inclusion of members of discriminated against groups into the workplace and institutions of higher education (Turner & Pratkanis, 1993). Groups typically protected by affirmative action include African-Americans, Latino/as, Native Americans, and women of all racial groups (Holzer & Neumark, 2006). Contrary to the way it is often depicted (e.g., Connerly, 2000), affirmative action is not a single, monolithic policy. In fact, affirmative action can take many different forms (see Crosby, 2004). For example, common forms of affirmative action include policies designed to diversify applicant pools, policies that allow the consideration of demographic group membership as a “plus factor” in making hiring or admission decisions, and policies that designate resources specifically for members of underrepresented groups (e.g., mentorship programs).

One form of affirmative action absent from the list of examples above is a policy that entails the use of strict hiring or admissions quotas. Such a policy would require that an organization hire or admit a specific number of racial minorities or women in a given

hiring or admissions cycle. A potential problem with such a policy is that in order to fulfill the strict numerical requirements established by the quota, managers and admissions officers might hire or admit individuals from beneficiary groups solely for the purpose of fulfilling the quota. In turn, better-qualified non-beneficiaries (e.g., White men) may be turned down simply because they cannot be counted toward the fulfillment of the quota requirement. And although these concerns may be legitimate, they may be much ado about nothing given that quotas have been illegal since 1978 (“Newman, 1989; Regents of the University of California v. Bakke”, 1978; Spann, 2000) and other evidence suggesting that present-day affirmative action policies tend not to entail the use of this controversial procedure (Dale, 1995; see also Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003).

The persistence and psychological function of quota beliefs

Past research has documented the persistence of the belief that affirmative action entails quotas (Kravitz & Platania, 1993). Recent research suggests that the persistence of this belief may be due to the fact that believing in quotas serves a psychological function for those who are not direct beneficiaries of affirmative action. Specifically, Unzueta, Lowery, and Knowles (2008) found that believing that affirmative action entails quotas for White men is tantamount to perceiving discrimination against their group. In turn, the authors suggest that perceived discrimination via quota beliefs allows White men to retroactively augment past successes and dis-

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count past failures (Kelley, 1973). That is, believing in quotas allows White men to reason that their accomplishments (e.g., getting admitted to a selective college) were attained *despite* the influence of discriminatory quotas and that their failures (e.g., not getting admitted to another selective college) occurred *because* of the influence of discriminatory quotas. Such retroactive augmentation of successes and discounting of failures may provide a benefit to White men's self-perceived competence. In support of this idea, Unzueta and his colleagues (2008) found that by either measuring or manipulating the belief that affirmative action entails quotas, White men who endorsed this belief were impervious to self-image threatening feedback concerning their intelligence. Thus, the authors suggest that the belief that affirmative action entails quotas may persist among White men because this belief serves an important psychological function for members of this group.

A question not addressed by Unzueta and his colleagues (2008) concerns how quota beliefs relate to the self-image of White women. White women are an interesting group to study in the context of the effect of quota beliefs on self-image because they may perceive themselves as beneficiaries of affirmative action (because of their gender) or as non-beneficiaries (because of their race). As such, it might be that White women's self-image can both suffer and benefit from believing that affirmative action entails quotas depending on whether they perceive themselves as beneficiaries of such a policy.

The affirmative action stigma of incompetence

Past research has uncovered a negative relationship between beneficiaries' beliefs about the role affirmative action policies play in selection decisions and their self-image – a relationship commonly referred to as the affirmative action “stigma of incompetence” (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992). For example, Heilman, Simon, and Repper (1987) found that women selected for a leadership position based solely on their gender reported more negative perceptions of their leadership ability, took less credit for successful outcomes, and indicated less interest in continuing in the leadership role relative to women selected solely for their leadership skill (see also Heilman & Alcott, 2001). Similarly, other research has found that informing women that they were selected for a leadership role based solely on their gender led to impaired performance on a brainstorming task (Turner & Pratkanis, 1993) and a test of analytic ability (Brown, Charnsangavej, Keough, Newman, & Rentfrow, 2000, Study 1). Thus, it appears that affirmative action beliefs can, in some circumstances, hurt the self-image of those who directly benefit from affirmative action.

However, the research cited above tends to operationalize affirmative action by explicitly informing participants that they were benefiting from policies that selected them solely on the basis of gender and not merit. Under these conditions, female participants were made to unambiguously perceive themselves as beneficiaries of aggressive (and illegal) affirmative action policies (see Evans, 2003 for a discussion of legal vs. illegal forms of affirmative action); subsequently, these participants reported self-image decrements as a function of these manipulations. In these studies, however, it is unclear whether, absent the explicit manipulation of beneficiary status, White women would self-perceive as beneficiaries of affirmative action. Further, the design of these studies does not allow one to assess the effect of affirmative action beliefs on women who do not believe that they benefit from such policies. It may be that absent the operationalization of affirmative action used in the studies described above, White women's self-perceived beneficiary status may be more ambiguous. Specifically, when left to their own devices, White women may see themselves as non-beneficiaries of affirmative action. Given this possibility, it might

be that some women actually derive psychological benefits from believing that affirmative action entails quotas.

The present research

The present research examines the relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived beneficiary status and White women's self-image. White women are an interesting group to study in the context of quota beliefs and self-image because they, unlike White men, are historical beneficiaries of affirmative action. Starting with executive order 11375 (issued in 1967), women of all racial groups have been protected by affirmative action policies (Holzer & Neumark, 2006). In fact, some research has shown that in terms of obtaining previously unattainable opportunities, White women have been the group that has benefited most from the implementation of affirmative action policies (Hartmann, 1996).

Self-perceived beneficiary status is an important variable to consider because it may moderate the relationship between quota beliefs and White women's self-image. Specifically, White women who do not consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action may, like the White men in Unzueta et al.'s study (2008), experience a positive effect to their self-image as a function of quota beliefs. Conversely, White women who do consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action and who also believe that affirmative action entails quotas may experience a negative self-image effect (Heilman et al., 1992). Given this logic, self-perceived beneficiary status may be a critical moderator in determining whether White women's self-image is helped or hurt by quota beliefs.

Overview of studies

Study 1 explores the relationship between White women's quota beliefs and their self-image by measuring White women's quota beliefs, their self-perceived beneficiary status, and their self-perceived competence. Study 2 experimentally manipulates both quota beliefs and self-perceived beneficiary status in order to assess the causal relationship between these variables on a different self-image measure – state self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991).

Study 1

Study 1 examines if the relationship between White women's quota beliefs and their self-perceived competence is moderated by self-perceived beneficiary status. Specifically, and consistent with past work on the stigma of incompetence (Heilman et al., 1992), we expect to find a negative relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence among White women who consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action. Conversely, consistent with recent research uncovering a positive relationship between quota beliefs and non-beneficiaries' self-image (Unzueta et al., 2008), we expect to find a positive relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence among participants who do not consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action.

Method

Participants

Sixty-nine self-identified White women were recruited from a participant database maintained at UCLA. This database is composed primarily of undergraduates and university staff members. Participants were paid \$3 for completing this internet survey. Age ranged from 18 to 62 ($M = 26.38$, $SD = 12.48$).

Procedure

Participants were informed that the survey session consisted of two unrelated surveys. Survey 1 was described as a social policy questionnaire. This survey contained items assessing participants' quota beliefs and their self-perceived beneficiary status. Survey 2 was described as a survey of self-perceptions. This survey contained the self-perceived competence scale. Participants were then asked to report demographic information and were asked to read and indicate that they understood a written debriefing statement.

Measures

Quota beliefs. To assess participants' affirmative action quota beliefs, they were asked to complete a pair of slightly-modified items used in previous research (Unzueta et al., 2008): "Affirmative action at UCLA requires the university to grant admission to a specific number of beneficiary group members" and "UCLA's affirmative action policy involves quotas for beneficiary group members." Participants indicated their responses to these items on a 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely) scale, $r = .79, p < .01$.

Self-perceived beneficiary status. To assess self-perceived beneficiary status, participants were asked to respond to the following two items: "To what extent do you benefit from UCLA's affirmative action policy?" (1 = do not benefit at all, 7 = benefit a great deal), and "I have benefited from affirmative action in the past" (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree), $r = .66, p < .01$.

Self-perceived competence. To assess self-perceived competence, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which the following 12 adjectives were descriptive of themselves (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so): ambitious, hard-working, responsible, persistent, qualified, confident, smart, competent, skilled, intelligent, insightful, and stable ($\alpha = .88$). This scale has been previously used as a measure of self-perceived competence (Unzueta et al., 2008).

Results

Preliminary analyses

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1. A few findings from this table are notable. First, participants' belief in affirmative action quotas was above the mid-point of the scale ($M = 4.28$ on a 7-point scale). This relatively high quota belief is surprising given that affirmative action has been illegal in the University of California system since the 1996 passage of Proposition 209 – a voter-approved referendum that effectively ended affirmative action in the state of California by making it illegal to consider applicants' race and/or gender in public education, employment, and contracting (Karabel, 1999).

Recent research suggests that quota beliefs may persist because maintaining this belief benefits the self-image of those who do not directly benefit from such policies (Unzueta et al., 2008). Consistent with this idea, there was a marginally significant correlation between quota beliefs and self-perceived beneficiary status, such that the less participants perceived themselves to be beneficiaries of affirmative action, the more they believed the policy entailed quotas, $r = -.21, p < .10$. Moreover, there was a significantly posi-

tive correlation between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence, $r = .26, p < .05$. These correlations are consistent with the idea that quota beliefs may positively affect the self-image of self-perceived non-beneficiaries.

Main analyses

The purpose of Study 1 is to assess if the relationship between White women's quota beliefs and their self-perceived competence is moderated by self-perceived beneficiary status. To this end, we conducted a regression analysis in which self-perceived competence was regressed on beneficiary status, quota beliefs, and the interaction between these two variables. The independent variables were mean centered in accordance with the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991). This analysis revealed marginally significant main effects for both self-perceived beneficiary status, $B = -.10, SE B = .06, \beta = -.21, p = .09$, and quota beliefs, $B = .09, SE B = .05, \beta = .22, p = .07$. More importantly, however, this analysis uncovered a significant beneficiary status \times quota beliefs interaction, $B = -.07, SE B = .03, \beta = -.26, p < .05, R^2 = .15$.

To interpret this interaction, we conducted simple slope analyses at one standard deviation above and below the mean of self-perceived beneficiary status (Aiken & West, 1991). These analyses revealed that White women who did not consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action reported a positive relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence, $B = .19, SE B = .06, t = 2.90, p < .05$. Conversely, among White women who did consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action, there was no relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence, $B = -.01, SE B = .07, t = -.22, p > .05$.

Additional analyses

The self-perceived competence variable, although used in previous research as a single-factor variable (Unzueta et al., 2008), could be a multi-factor variable such that some items may assess effort (e.g., persistent, hard-working) while others may assess competence (e.g., smart, skilled). To address this possibility we conducted a factor analysis, which revealed an effort, a competence, and a single-item stability factor (see Table 2).

To assess if these factors were differentially affected by quota beliefs and self-perceived beneficiary status, we ran separate regression analyses on each factor. The analysis on the self-perceived effort factor revealed a main effect of quota beliefs, $B = .13, SE B = .06, \beta = .27, t = 2.29, p < .05$, such that quota beliefs were positively related to self-perceived effort. Neither the main effect of self-perceived beneficiary status, $B = -.12, SE B = .07$,

Table 1
Study 1 means, standard deviations, and correlations among measured variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Quota belief	4.28	1.64		
2. Self-perceived beneficiary status	2.07	1.40	-.21 [†]	
3. Self-perceived competence (12-item scale)	5.98	0.66	.26*	-.20 [†]

[†] $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

Table 2

Factor analyses with varimax rotation of the self-perceived competence items from Study 1.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Eigenvalues	5.57	1.24	1.20
Percentage of variance	46.38	10.29	9.97
Ambitious	.759	.308	-.271
Hard-working	.834	.268	-.052
Responsible	.693	.218	.342
Persistent	.695	.147	.218
Qualified	.686	.496	.081
Confident	.630	.107	.319
Smart	.310	.705	.414
Competent	.485	.517	.343
Skilled	.240	.717	-.059
Intelligent	.150	.838	.283
Insightful	.185	.678	-.123
Stable	.113	.048	.874

Factor 1, self-perceived effort; Factor 2, self-perceived competence; Factor 3, self-perceived stability. Highest loadings per factor are in bold text.

$\beta = -.21$, $t = 1.72$, $p > .05$, nor the interactive effect, $B = -.07$, $SE B = .04$, $t = 1.64$, $p > .05$, attained significance.

The analysis on the self-perceived competence factor revealed no main effects of quota beliefs, $B = .04$, $SE B = .05$, $\beta = .10$, $t = .83$, $p > .05$, or self-perceived beneficiary status, $B = -.09$, $SE B = .06$, $\beta = -.19$, $t = 1.57$, $p > .05$. Importantly, and consistent with the analyses on the 12-item scale reported above, this analysis did uncover a significant quota beliefs \times self-perceived beneficiary status interaction, $B = -.09$, $SE B = .03$, $\beta = -.34$, $t = 2.85$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .14$. To decompose this interaction, we conducted simple slope analyses at one standard deviation above and below the mean of self-perceived beneficiary status (Aiken & West, 1991). These analyses revealed that, consistent with the results of the 12-item scale reported above, White women who did not consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action reported a positive relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence, $B = .17$, $SE B = .06$, $t = 2.66$, $p < .05$. Conversely, among White women who did consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action, the relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence did not attain significance, $B = -.09$, $SE B = .07$, $t = -1.38$, $p > .05$.

The analysis on the self-perceived stability factor revealed no main effects nor a significant interaction, all $t_s < 1$, $p_s > .05$.

Discussion

Study 1 provides initial evidence for the moderating role of self-perceived beneficiary status on the relationship between White women's quota beliefs and their self-perceived competence. Specifically, this study found a positive relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence for White women who did not consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action. Moreover, this effect was particularly pronounced on the subset of items that loaded on the self-perceived competence factor. These findings are consistent with recent work demonstrating a positive relationship between quota beliefs and White men's self-perceived competence (Unzueta et al., 2008). Thus, Study 1 suggests that White women who do not think affirmative action benefits them personally may derive a self-image benefit from believing that affirmative action entails quotas. Such a belief may enable White women to believe that their past achievements were attained *despite* the influence of discriminatory quota policies while their past failures occurred *because of* such policies.

Interestingly, this study found no evidence for the affirmative action stigma of incompetence using either the 12-item scale or the self-perceived competence subscale. However, the absence of a negative relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence for White women who do consider themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action may be due to the fact that the mean for self-perceived beneficiary status was relatively low ($M = 2.07$ on a 7-point scale). As such, the relationship between quota beliefs and self-perceived competence may be unobservable due to a floor effect on the self-perceived beneficiary status variable.

Study 2

To address the floor effect limitation in Study 1, Study 2 experimentally manipulates self-perceived beneficiary status by explicitly telling White women that they either are or are not beneficiaries of affirmative action. Moreover, Study 2 manipulates quota beliefs to ensure that the effect of quota beliefs on self-image is occurring because of quota beliefs *per se*, and not because of some unobserved correlate of this variable. Finally, Study 2 assesses the effect of self-perceived beneficiary status and quota beliefs on a more established self-image measure – state self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991).

Method

Participants

Eighty-nine self-identified White women were recruited from a primarily non-student participant database maintained at UCLA. Participants were paid with a \$5 gift certificate to Amazon.com. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 58 ($M = 37.15$, $SD = 10.20$). The relatively high mean age reflects the fact that, unlike Study 1, Study 2 uses a primarily non-undergraduate sample.

Procedure

The study was described as consisting of two unrelated surveys. Survey 1 was described as a social policy questionnaire; vignettes manipulating participants' self-perceived beneficiary status and their affirmative action quota beliefs were presented here. Survey 2 was described as a survey of self-perceptions; the state self-esteem scale and demographic questions were presented here.

Manipulated variables

Self-perceived beneficiary status and quota beliefs. To manipulate self-perceived beneficiary status and quota beliefs, participants were randomly assigned to read 1 of 4 paragraphs ostensibly describing how affirmative action tends to operate in the workplace. Quota belief manipulations were based on materials used by Unzueta and his colleagues (2008). Participants in the non-beneficiary + non-quota condition read the following:

Most businesses utilize affirmative action policies that consider race among many attributes in determining whether to hire an applicant. These policies DO NOT permit the use of hiring quotas. In other words, businesses DO NOT set aside a specific number of hiring slots that can only be filled by racial minority applicants. Groups protected by the affirmative action policies include:

- African-Americans
- Latinos/Hispanics
- Native Americans

Participants in the non-beneficiary + quota condition read the following:

Most businesses utilize affirmative action policies that require a specific number of racial minority applicants to be hired every year. These policies permit the use of hiring quotas. In other words, businesses set aside a specific number of hiring slots that can only be filled by minority applicants. Groups protected by affirmative action quotas include:

- African-Americans
- Latinos/Hispanics
- Native Americans

Participants in the beneficiary + non-quota condition read the following:

Most businesses utilize affirmative action policies that consider gender and race among many attributes in determining whether to hire an applicant. These policies DO NOT permit the use of hiring quotas. In other words, businesses DO NOT set aside a specific number of hiring slots that can only be filled by women and racial minority applicants. Groups protected by affirmative action policies include:

- White women
- African-Americans
- Latinos/Hispanics
- Native Americans

Finally, participants in the beneficiary + quota conditions read the following:

Most businesses utilize affirmative action policies that require a specific number of women and racial minority applicants to be hired every year. These policies permit the use of hiring quotas. In other words, businesses set aside a specific number of hiring slots that can only be filled by women and minority applicants. Groups protected by affirmative action quotas include:

- White women
- African-Americans
- Latinos/Hispanics
- Native Americans

The following statement was presented under each of these vignettes: “Source: US General Accounting Office Report on Affirmative Action, 2003, p. 102.”

Participants were then asked to respond to manipulation checks. After this they proceeded to what they thought was Study 2, which contained the state self-esteem scale. Finally, participants completed a series of demographic questions and were presented and asked to indicate that they understood a debriefing statement explaining the way affirmative is legally allowed to operate in the workplace.¹

Manipulation checks. To verify that self-perceived beneficiary status was successfully manipulated, participants were asked to respond to the following items: “I belong to a group protected by affirmative action” and “I do NOT benefit directly from affirmative action” (reverse scored; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), $r = .40$, $p < .01$.

To verify that quota beliefs were successfully manipulated, participants were asked to respond to the following items: “Affirmative action requires that companies hire a specific number of beneficiary group members” and “Affirmative action involves quotas for beneficiary group members” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), $r = .72$, $p < .01$.

State self-esteem. State self-esteem was measured using Heatheron and Polivy’s (1991) 20-item state self-esteem scale ($\alpha = .91$). Sample items include: “I am worried about what other people think of me” (reverse scored) and “I feel as smart as others” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Results

Manipulation checks

We conducted a 2 (beneficiary status: beneficiary vs. non-beneficiary) \times 2 (affirmative action type: quota vs. non-quota) analysis

¹ Participants were asked to read the following statement as part of the debriefing process: US Department of Labor affirmative action policy Information. Please note that the statement titled “affirmative action policy,” which may have indicated that businesses use affirmative action policies that permit the use of quotas, is not the official affirmative action policy required by the US Department of Labor. The statement below describes the US Department of Labor’s affirmative action policy: For federal contractors and subcontractors, affirmative action must be taken by covered employers to recruit and advance qualified minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and covered veterans. Affirmative actions include training programs, outreach efforts, and other positive steps. These procedures should be incorporated into the company’s written personnel policies. Employers with written affirmative action programs must implement them, keep them on file and update them annually. Executive order 11246, CFR 60–2.12(e), 60–2.30 and 60–2.15, specifically prohibits quota and preferential hiring and promotions under the guise of affirmative action numerical goals. In other words, it is illegal for employers to use quotas in hiring practices. For more information on the Department of Labor’s affirmative action policy, go to this web address: www.dol.gov/dol/topic/hiring/affirmativeact.htm. The “affirmative action policy” statement that you read in a previous screen may have contained fictitious information as part of this study on self-perception and individuals’ opinions of social policies.

of variance (ANOVA) on the manipulation check items. Results revealed a significant main effect of beneficiary status such that White women in the beneficiary condition were more likely to perceive themselves to be affirmative action beneficiaries ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.76$) than White women in the non-beneficiary condition ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.51$), $F(1, 88) = 45.50$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .35$. This finding suggests that Study 2, unlike Study 1, is not limited by a floor effect on the self-perceived beneficiary status variable.

The ANOVA on quota beliefs uncovered only a significant main effect of affirmative action type, such that participants in the quota condition were more likely to believe that affirmative action entails quotas ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.42$) relative to participants in the non-quota condition ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.79$), $F(1, 88) = 65.74$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .44$. No other main effects or interactions attained significance. In sum, it appears that the manipulations had the intended effects on White women’s self-perceived beneficiary status and quota beliefs.

Main analysis

The primary purpose of Study 2 was to assess the effect of self-perceived beneficiary status and quota beliefs on White women’s self-image. To this end, we conducted a 2 (beneficiary status: beneficiary vs. non-beneficiary) \times 2 (affirmative action type: quota vs. non-quota) ANOVA on state self-esteem. This analysis found no significant main effects, but it did uncover a significant interaction, $F(1, 88) = 5.09$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$ (see Fig. 1).

Specifically, differences in state self-esteem were found in the non-beneficiary condition, such that White women in the quota condition reported higher state self-esteem ($M = 5.14$, $SD = .96$) than White women in the non-quota condition ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .93$), $F(1, 37) = 6.28$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .15$. White women in the beneficiary condition, on the other hand, did not report any differences in state self-esteem as a function of quota beliefs (quota condition $M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.03$; non-quota condition $M = 4.97$, $SD = .89$), $F(1, 50) = .31$, $p = .58$.

A contrast analysis revealed that the non-beneficiary + non-quota condition, relative to the other three conditions, evoked the lowest reported levels of state self-esteem, $t = 2.39$, $p < .05$. No other contrasts attained significance.

Discussion

Study 2 suggests that beneficiary status and quota beliefs *per se* do, in fact, affect White women’s self-image. Specifically, among White women in the non-beneficiary condition, those who were led to believe that affirmative action entails quotas reported higher state self-esteem relative to those who were informed that affirmative action does not entail this controversial procedure. No difference in state self-esteem was found in the beneficiary condition. Thus, like Study 1, Study 2 provides evidence for the benefits of

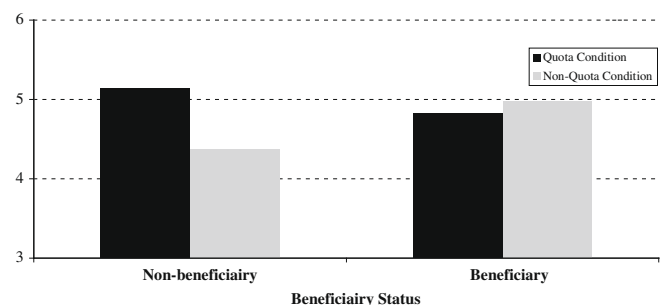


Fig. 1. State self-esteem as a function of beneficiary status and affirmative action beliefs.

quota beliefs on White women's self-image, not the stigma of incompetence perspective.

Another interesting, though unexpected, finding from Study 2 was that the non-beneficiary + non-quota condition evoked the lowest reported state self-esteem relative to the other three conditions. Such a finding suggests that giving up the belief that affirmative action entails quotas may be a painful experience for non-beneficiaries because giving up this belief is tantamount to giving up a belief that benefits these individuals' self-image. This may explain why the belief that affirmative action entails quotas persists despite the contemporary reality of affirmative action (Dale, 1995; Kravitz & Platania, 1993).

One possible limitation of Study 2 is that the self-perceived beneficiary manipulation may have been weak with regard to convincing participants that they were beneficiaries of affirmative action. Specifically, although the manipulation check was significant, a comparison of the means in each condition to the mid-point of the scale suggest that participants in the beneficiary condition did not express a particularly strong belief that they were beneficiaries of affirmative action ($M = 4.64$ on a 7-point scale). This asymmetry of the effect, which is consistent with the floor effect found in Study 1, might have contributed to the failure of the beneficiary condition to produce any negative consequences among those who were led to believe that affirmative action entails quotas. Future research should be conducted to address this potential limitation.

General discussion

The reported studies provide evidence for the idea that White women's self-image can benefit from affirmative action quota beliefs so long as they do not think of themselves as beneficiaries of such a policy. Interestingly, no evidence was found for the previously documented stigma of incompetence (Heilman et al., 1987). A possible explanation for the lack of support for the stigma of incompetence might be that self-stigmatization occurs only in specific circumstances – that is, under operationalizations of affirmative action that explicitly inform individuals that they benefited from a policy that selected them on the basis of demographics and not merit. Absent such an operationalization, the affirmative action stigma may not emerge, a point raised by others who have criticized the stigma of incompetence literature for lacking external validity (Crosby, 2004; Evans, 2003).

The finding in Study 2 that beneficiary status had no effect on state self-esteem may also suggest that beneficiaries may become defensive of their self-image when informed that they may have benefited from an affirmative action policy that entailed quotas. It is possible, for example, that beneficiaries of affirmative action may attempt to bolster their self-image when presented with descriptions of affirmative action that threaten to discount internal attributions for success. Thus, instead of falling prey to the stigma of incompetence, beneficiaries may become motivated to protect their self-image when presented with descriptions of affirmative action that threaten to discount their competence. Additional research is necessary to uncover the conditions under which self-image stigma vs. defense may occur.

Study 2 also found that White women in the non-beneficiary condition who were told that affirmative action does not entail quotas reported a particularly low state self-esteem. This finding is potentially important because it suggests that education about affirmative action may be met with resistance among non-beneficiaries because learning that affirmative action does not entail quotas may negatively affect their self-image. Thus, in order to convince non-beneficiaries that affirmative action does not entail quotas it might be necessary to self-affirm these individuals before

attempting to educate them about affirmative action (Steele, 1988). Such an intervention may reduce self-image concern as an impediment to learning about such policies.

Finally, organizations interested in creating and maintaining demographically diverse workforces or student bodies by utilizing affirmative action need to be exceedingly clear regarding the procedures that their affirmative action policies entail. The results of this paper and other recent research (Haley & Sidanius, 2006; Unzueta et al., 2008) suggest that non-beneficiaries (whether self-perceived as in the case of White women or actual as in the case of White men) may be motivated to believe that affirmative action entails quotas because this belief can benefit their self-image. Importantly, the consequences of believing in quotas extend beyond the self-perceived competence of non-beneficiaries. Past research suggests that quota beliefs are negatively related to affirmative action support (Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Unzueta et al., 2008; see also Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006) and to perceptions of beneficiaries' competence (Heilman et al., 1992; Unzueta et al., 2008). Thus, an accurate understanding of the way in which affirmative action operates in specific organizational settings would be a great benefit to all members of an organization, regardless of their beneficiary status.

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