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Belief in a Just World and Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action

Vicky M. Wilkins and Jeffrey B. Wenger

The effect of identity, as socially constructed by race and gender, on social policies has been widely examined in policy analysis. Policy analysis would be improved by a wider discussion that includes the influence of social-psychological constructs on social provision. We fill this gap by drawing on the theory of the "belief in a just world" and link this theory to attitudes toward the support of controversial government programs. We argue that this theory is a critical antecedent to the previous research on social construction. We hypothesize that citizens who perceive that the world is just and that opportunities are equal between groups are much less likely to favor government interventions altering market outcomes. We find that after controlling for race, sex, and political ideology, respondents who believe that luck is the primary determinant of success (low belief in a just world) are more supportive of preferential hiring programs for African Americans and women.

KEY WORDS: deservingness, affirmative action, belief in a just world, social construction, policy

> Some people may say that it was . . . good luck that brought to us this gift of fifty thousand dollars. No, it was not luck. It was hard work. Nothing ever comes to one, that is worth having, except as a result of hard work. Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*

The development of social policy is, at its foundations, an expression of beliefs about who and why people deserve help. Citizens and policymakers have long debated who is deserving and undeserving, with these debates occasionally spilling over into violent acts or repressive policies. Skocpol argues that debates over who is deserving "run like fault lines through the entire history of American social provision" (1995, p. 149). However, most scholars treat desert as peripheral to the design and development of social policy. In this paper, we fill this gap by clarifying the role of deservingness[1] and illustrating the importance of desert in policymaking. We develop a theoretical model that explains how notions of deservingness are reflected in people's beliefs about justice. In turn, these shape attitudes toward programs designed to benefit groups, which ultimately are reflected in the design, implementation, and administration of U.S. policies.

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Clearly, notions of desert inform our opinions about policy; however, where do our beliefs about desert come from? In American political culture, our most widely held and salient modern values are those related to justice and the opportunity to succeed. We see this reflected in the stories we tell (most notably by authors such as Horatio Alger), but also in the long-standing arguments about the role of government, and who deserves benefits. Rarely are these arguments articulated in the language of desert and equal opportunity, instead they are masked in discussions of the role of government. Cast in this new light, the argument is that when the world is just, and opportunities are equal, the legitimate role of government is circumscribed.

In this paper, we argue that citizens who perceive that the world is just and that opportunities are equal between groups are much less likely to favor government interventions altering market outcomes based on group identities (e.g., sex, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic class). Most importantly, we argue that two other mechanisms are at work: (i) By accepting that equal opportunity exists, differential outcomes by group are part of a fair process that is socially just; and (ii) those who believe that the world is just are also more likely to believe that different groups deserve their observed outcomes as a result of their choices, abilities, and attitudes.

We argue that contemporary beliefs in a just world and conceptions of desert drive our assessments of groups. We hypothesize that those who believe the world is just will judge groups as undeserving of differential benefits. In this paper, we adapt Lerner's (1980) belief in a just world (BJW) theory and how it influences views on public policies designed to improve labor-market outcomes for women and African Americans. Using data from the General Social Survey and Census, we test whether an individual's BJW predicts attitudes toward affirmative action programs for women and African Americans in the workplace. We find that a generalized BJW correlates negatively with attitudes about preferential hiring for women and African Americans.

The framework we present is important because it offers new insights through the examination of public perceptions of desert, into policy formulation and implementation. Political scientists in the social construction tradition offer a framework for understanding how policy creates target populations and transmits messages about which citizens are deserving (and which are not) of government benefits (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). However, previous work concludes that individuals employ "desert heuristics" to make decisions about the causes of inequality (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sniderman, Hagen, Tetlock, & Brady, 1986) and support for social programs (Cook & Barrett, 1992). Recent work in evolutionary psychology links attitudes toward welfare policies to a deservingness heuristic that focuses on whether the welfare recipient is perceived as unlucky or lazy (Petersen, 2012; Petersen, Slothuus, Stubager, & Togeby, 2011; Petersen, Sznycer, Cosmides, & Tooby, 2012). However, to date, there has been little empirical research that ties notions of desert to systematic evaluation of attitudes toward social policy. This theoretical development, if borne out empirically, will have important implications in the design and administration of public policy. We contend that only by putting a theory of desert at the center of our policy debate, and understanding the linkages of desert, eligibility, and coverage, are we likely to understand the forces that are shaping policy outcomes.

Extant Literature

As mentioned above, researchers in political science have long studied the factors that influence policy design. Among these factors are goals, tools, rules, target populations, and notions of desert (Cook & Barrett, 1992; Linder & Peters, 1985; Ostrom, 1990; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991; Stone, 1988). Early on scholars developed models of heuristic processing to understand beliefs about deservingness and support for social programs. In heuristic processing, individuals may base their attitudes on the applications of rules of thumb and emotional cues (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Relying on heuristics offers lower processing costs for the individual. Sniderman et al. (1991) introduced the desert heuristic in order to explain the American voters' evaluation of government assistance to African Americans. They find that those who believe that African Americans have brought their problems upon themselves are against assistance programs, whereas those who believe that these people cannot be blamed for the hardship they encounter are in support programs that offer assistance. Sniderman et al. (1991) base their explanation on Weiner's (1980) attribution-emotion-action model of helping behavior. When someone is not blamed for the trouble he or she is in (attribution), pity is evoked (emotion), and people are inclined to help the one in trouble (action). When someone is held responsible for getting into trouble (attribution), this evokes anger (emotion), and people are not inclined to help this person.

Since the publication of Schneider and Ingram (1993), the lens of social construction is widely used by political scientists to examine the link between policy formulation and deservingness. Social construction focuses explicitly on the role of social processes in the construction of meaning. In other words, knowledge is generated by people interacting and collectively negotiating a set of shared meanings (Gergen, 1985). From the constructionist perspective, language serves as a method for producing meaning and generating knowledge rather than a representation of an objective "truth."

Under this framework, Schneider and Ingram argue, "the social construction of target populations has a powerful influence on policy makers and shapes both the policy agenda and the design of policy" (1993, p. 334). Ultimately, the policies adopted create the boundaries of target populations and signal which citizens are deserving of government resources. In their work, policy serves to construct target populations that can be positively construed as "deserving" or negatively construed as "undeserving." These constructions are reinforced by the language, metaphors, and stories we use to describe them and, ultimately solidified in the policy process, creating policy winners and losers. This framework posits that social constructions, like deservingness, are the product of some institutional action. Several scholars investigate how social constructions are translated into policy design (Bensonsmith, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2005; Schram, 2005). Most relevant to our work, Bensonsmith (2005) and Schram (2005) study how social constructions and stereotypes of African Americans influence welfare policy. In her work, Bensonsmith (2005) argues that these constructions initially worked to exclude African American

women from welfare rolls and then, once they were included, fueled reforms to restrict the program by redefining who is deserving.

However, research in political psychology offers a different perspective arguing that emotional or preexisting dispositions influence political attitudes, including beliefs about who is deserving of assistance. Westen (2007) finds that when respondents were asked whether President Clinton should be impeached, 85 percent of the variance in their responses was predicted by their emotional feelings about the political parties, Clinton, infidelity, and feminism as measured in those same respondents six to nine months earlier. When cognitive constraints were included in the model, the explanatory power only increased by 3 percent. Clearly the respondents had been exposed to a combination of pro- and anti-impeachment discourse, but their emotional *pre*disposition remained the most predictive of their attitudes.

Similarly, recent findings from evolutionary psychologists offer a slightly different view on the roots of perceptions of deservingness. Drawing on evolutionary psychology (Sell, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2009; Tooby & Cosmides, 2008; Tooby, Cosmides, Sell, Lieberman, & Sznycer, 2008), scholars offer evidence that humans have developed cognitive and emotional responses designed to provide solutions to ancestrally recurring problems dealing with social exchanges. Researchers (Petersen et al., 2012) posit that political support for welfare policies is shaped by emotions (anger and compassion) that are embedded in our logic of social exchange. Using data from studies carried out in Denmark and the United States, Petersen et al. (2012) examine the role of effort and deservingness. If welfare recipients are viewed as lazy, they are perceived as undeserving, whereas those viewed as unlucky victims of external circumstances are perceived as deserving (p. 397). This research suggests that beliefs about deservingness are automatic, stemming from emotions, operating below the surface of consciousness, and are often difficult for individuals to explain (Zak, 2007).

The work of Schneider and Ingram treats perceptions of desert as a product of previous policy design and implementation. They argue that notions of desert are fueled by institutional boundaries, rules, and structures. However, supported by the work of Petersen et al. (2011, 2012), Westen (2007), and Zak (2007), we contend that conceptions of desert are at least partly pre-institutional and tied to one's preexisting beliefs regarding justice. Given this, general perceptions (not tied to a specific groups) of deservingness are linked to the support of public programs that benefit specific groups. This implies that notions of desert are formed before any institutional interaction.[2] If beliefs about deservingness are automatic, tied to emotion, and subconscious, then theories of social construction and, in particular, the belief that social constructions are shaped by policy provisions, have reversed the causal argument, calling the effect the cause. Therefore, rather than treat these perceptions as exclusively endogenous factors that influence policy outcomes, desert should be treated as partly (and perhaps mostly) exogenous. The social- and evolutionary-psychology literatures have long recognized the role of pre-institutional (innate) preferences; our goal is to link an exogenous understanding of desert and discuss how this exogenous notion frames our beliefs about the formation, implementation, and evaluation of policies directed toward improving outcomes for groups.

The Role of the BJW

A common theme in public policy is that an individual's gender and racial attitudes may influence policy outcomes. Less well understood is the relationship between notions of deservingness and attitudes toward social provision to groups. BJW theory posits that individuals have a social psychological need to believe in a world where individuals get what they deserve. This belief helps us derive meaning from our experiences, even when events are at odds with our belief that the world is just. Although the existence of a just world is demonstrably false, people maintain this belief in varying degrees. Individuals who have a strong belief that the world is a just place are more likely to accept as reasonable the bad outcomes that happen to people and believe that the ill-fortuned deserve their lot. In cases where events clearly violate an individual's BJW, policy may offer sensible and rational responses—restitution and prevention. Many public agents recognize this purpose and work to reduce the devastating effects of unjust suffering. In general, those who receive benefits are perceived as deserving of assistance. However, there are times when restitution and prevention are not possible. In these cases, people often use psychological defenses such as denial, withdrawal, or reinterpretation of the event to maintain their BJW.

In the 1960s, Melvin Lerner began a series of experiments to determine how people would react when faced with an innocent victim, whom they could not help. Observing and participating in hospital staff interactions with mentally ill patients, Lerner observed sessions when the therapist would aggressively question patients about their efforts to find employment in the local community. Many patients were frightened at the prospect of leaving the hospital and did not actively search for work and regularly missed interviews. However, they were aware that the staff wanted them to become employed. In the sessions, the therapist would push and prod the patients with questions about their search and interviews until, cornered, the patient admitted their lie—they had not searched or interviewed. The patients subjected to this treatment ended the sessions dejected and degraded as a result of the confrontation. At weekly staff meetings hospital staff discussed how to get rid of the "manipulators" who would not seek work. Lerner questioned how trained professionals could treat vulnerable patients in such a cruel way. Epithets such as "manipulator," "burnt-out schiz," and "old crock" were regularly used.

Lerner's hypothesis was that this dysfunctional and cruel behavior was a defense mechanism "needed for anyone to be able to function for so long with so many people who were suffering, hurt, and would stay that way for a long time" (1980, p. 2). Lerner argued that people (including the hospital staff) had a fundamental need to believe that the world was a just place and that these mentally ill patients were a constant threat to that belief. It general, it is easy to see that some BJW is necessary. In the absence of a just world, routine activities such as planning, savings, investing would be constantly called into question.

Lerner theorized that people would go out of their way to avoid threats to their just world beliefs. He argues that there are certain "rational strategies" for dealing with injustice. First, people will seek to prevent injustice from happening. In the

event that prevention is impossible or impractical, then people seek restitution for the harm done and thereby restore some semblance of justice. Second, people deal with injustices by accepting the limits on what they can do. As resources are limited and finite, people set priorities that "take into account the nature of the relationship to the victims, the effectiveness of one's resources, and the potential risks or costs to be incurred in comparison with the probable benefits to others" (Lerner, 1980, p. 19). Finally we have a set of "nonrational" responses to threats in our BJW. First, we have denial and withdrawal. In this case, people are selective about exposing themselves to particular types of information. When faced with an injustice one option is to withdraw. With the passage of time and some distractions the unjust event will be forgotten. Perhaps the most interesting set of the nonrational responses consist of *reinterpreting the event*. These strategies include reinterpreting the outcome, or the cause, or the character of the victim. In a set of classic experiments, Lerner demonstrated that all three of these effects took place when people witness injustice happening to an innocent victim whom they are unable to aid.

Earlier we argued that when the world is believed to be a just place, where people get what they deserve, individuals would disavow any legitimate claim on the state. Under this condition, women and minorities may be seen as less deserving of government help; not only did they have just circumstances, but they made imprudent decisions that nullify their desert claims. If this theory is correct, then we should see that beliefs about justice shape notions of deservingness, which are directly observable in perceptions of group benefits, like affirmative action.

However, we expect that an individual's assessment of a particular group's deservingness for social benefits will vary across different types of groups (minorities, women, the poor, children, and elderly). It is likely that our prior experience and ongoing interaction with a group influences our evaluation of the group's deservingness. Previous studies reveal that some social groups are more likely to be tolerated than others (Franco & Maass, 1999; Hagendoorn, 1995). Researchers theorize that the social distance between groups is an important predictor of support for policies that target members of a group that is distant from your own (Hagendoorn, 1995).

Indeed, studies of the general population's support for affirmative action policies demonstrate that programs designed to assist African Americans are more strongly opposed than are plans to assist women and persons with disabilities (Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Clayton, 1992, 1996; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Drout, 1994; Smith & Kluegel, 1984). These studies suggest that the group membership of a policy recipient has an impact on whether affirmative action is viewed as acceptable. Beaton and Tougas (2001) contend that these differences in support are tied to a respondent's identity and concern for social justice. In their analysis of affirmative action programs designed for women, visible minorities, or disabled persons, they found that women were more likely to support the idea of affirmative actions, regardless of the target group. In addition, they found that programs designed for racial minorities garnered significantly less support than those for women and disabled person (Beaton & Tougas, 2001).

Affirmative Action Programs

Affirmative action measures were first established to fight racial discrimination. The federal government mandated affirmative action programs to redress racial inequality and injustice in a series of steps beginning with an executive order issued by President Kennedy in 1961. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made discrimination illegal and established equal employment opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, cultural background, color, or religion. Subsequent executive orders, in particular Executive Order 11246 issued by President Johnson in September 1965, mandated affirmative action goals for all federally funded programs and moved monitoring and enforcement of affirmative action programs out of the White House and into the Labor Department. These policies and the government action that followed were a response to the tremendous mobilization of African Americans and white supporters during the late 1950s and early 1960s pushing for integration and racial justice. Initially, affirmative action was a policy primarily aimed at correcting institutional discrimination that had a negative impact on people of color. However, in 1968, the same protections were extended to women. Affirmative action policies address and redress systematic economic and political discrimination against any group of people that are underrepresented or have a history of being discriminated against in particular institutions. Beneficiaries of these programs have included white women, people with disabilities, and poor and working class people, but their primary emphasis has been on addressing racial discrimination.

Throughout history, women and African Americans in the United States confronted an unfair disadvantages in the marketplace. Being a woman and/or African American constrains both career choice and earning potential. Sex and racial segregation is present in the labor market, with women and African Americans being excluded from prestigious and higher paying positions. In 1990, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported that women held just over 29 percent of all managerial positions, including mid-level and senior positions (EEOC, 2002). Sex discrimination charges accounted for 31 percent of all charges filed with the EEOC in the 1997 fiscal year. However, thanks in part to affirmative action programs, women have made great strides in certain labor sectors. In 2009, women accounted for 51 percent of all people employed in management, professional, and related occupations, somewhat more than their share of total employment (47 percent). Although problems still exist (the wage gap and lack of women in STEM fields), most would argue that the presence of affirmative action programs has played a significant role in the gains made by women in the workplace. However, the story is not as positive for African Americans. In 2005, African Americans only held 8.3 percent of all management, professional, and related occupations and made up only 2.6 percent of the corporate officers (EEOC, 2005). Similarly, the EEOC found that 29,627 African Americans were executive/senior level officials and managers out of a total workforce of 50,632,556 in 2008. Yet, 326,438 were considered first/mid-level officials and managers (EEOC, 2008).

Since its introduction, affirmative action received mixed reviews from the public. Scholars attempt to explain why some people approve of affirmative action,

whereas others show strong opposition to these programs (Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Tomasson, Crosby, Herzberger, & Simon, 1996). Kravitz and Platania (1993) contend that common misconceptions about affirmative action contribute to negative attitudes about the policy. The most common misconception involves the goals of affirmative action. Specifically, many individuals, most commonly Caucasians, tend to believe that affirmative action programs involve the use of quotas in hiring (Crosby & Cordova, 1996; Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003; Kravitz & Platania, 1993). This misconception, outlined in detail by Plous (1996), often gives rise to the notion that job placement is based on one's race or sex, instead of one's abilities. Thus, feelings of reverse discrimination often emerge. Although the results are somewhat mixed, race and sex are usually reliable predictors of attitudes toward affirmative action (Kluegel & Smith, 1983; Kravitz & Platania, 1993). Generally, the more discrimination a group experiences, the more positively they view affirmative action plans (Kravitz & Platania, 1993). Therefore, women traditionally have evaluated affirmative action more positively than men (Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Little, Murry, & Wimbush, 1998; Ozawa, Crosby, & Crosby, 1996), and minorities (African Americans and Latinos) hold more favorable views toward affirmative action than do Caucasians (Bobocel et al., 1998; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Little et al., 1998). It can be argued that Caucasian males tend to hold the most negative attitudes toward affirmative action because they are the least likely to be beneficiaries of affirmative action.

Beyond race, ethnicity, and sex, several other personality characteristics have been tied to support of affirmative action programs. Factors such as social dominance orientation (Federico & Sidanius, 2002), identification with one's racial group (Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007), conservatism (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996), individualism (Kemmelmeier, 2003), or a propensity to offer individualistic explanations for societal disparities (Kluegel, 1990) have been shown to explain variation in attitudes toward programs created to limit racial inequalities. Most relevant to our work is the study by Kluegel (1990) demonstrating that individuals who believe that the racial economic gap is tied to a lack of motivation in African Americans are far less likely to support government spending to narrow the economic gap between the races. Conversely, individuals who attribute economic and social disparities between African Americans and whites to discrimination show the greatest support for policies promoting racial economic equality. Given the previous research on attitudes toward affirmative action and our theory of deservingness, we posit that individuals who believe in a just world, where people get what they deserve (or earn), will be significantly less likely to support affirmative action programs that benefit women and African Americans.

Data and Methods

We test the hypotheses that those with the strongest "just world" beliefs will be most opposed to affirmative action, by using data pooled from 1994 to 2006 (even years) of the General Social Survey (GSS).[3] The GSS is a nationally representative data set that gathers information on American social, economic, and cultural attributes

and characteristics. The GSS uses a probability sample design that is nationally representative for individuals aged 16–64.

Getting Ahead as a Proxy for BJW

We test the relationship between BJW and support for affirmative action for women and African Americans. Although the GSS does not have a multi-item measure of BJW, it provides a proxy for the degree to which the respondent believes the world is a just place. This proxy aligns well with previous research by Petersen et al. (2012) in that it distinguishes between luck and effort. In addition, other scholars (Benabou & Tirole, 2006) use this proxy in their analysis of support for the social welfare state.

Our measure of BJW consists of a single question: "Some people say that people get ahead by their own hard work; others say that lucky breaks or help from other people are more important. Which do you think is most important?" Respondents may choose among the following: hard work is most important, hard work and luck are equally important, or luck is most important. Individuals responding that hard work is the most important factor in getting ahead are likely to believe that people get what they deserve, and therefore would score high on the BJW scale. Conversely, respondents who answer that luck is the most important determinant in getting ahead are likely to score low on the BJW scale because lucky breaks happen to both the deserving and undeserving. Our data indicate that Americans are strong believers in hard work; just over two-thirds (67 percent, see Table 1) of our sample contends that hard work is the most important factor in getting ahead. Note that we analyze two samples: those who responded to the preferential hiring question for women and those who responded to the preferential hiring question for African Americans. This variable serves as the independent variable of interest in our analysis of the relationship between our BJW measure and views on affirmative action. Other socio-demographic characteristics include education, race, political ideology, sex, income, and age. Previous research on the relationship between age and support for affirmative action finds mixed effects; some studies have found a positive relationship (Fine, 1992; Lavin, 2007), whereas others have found a negative relationship (Hunt, 2007; Kluegel, 1990), and still others find no relationship (Oyinlade, 2013). Given these mixed findings, we include a squared term for age to test for a curvilinear relationship. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the independent variables of interest and control variables in our models.

Dependent Variables—Views on Affirmative Action for Women and African Americans

The dependent variable in our analyses is whether the respondent supports affirmative action programs that benefit women and African Americans. This measure is drawn from responses to the question, "Some people say that because of past discrimination, women [blacks] should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion of women [blacks]

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Preferential Hiring (Female and African American), Hard Work, and Other Controls

	Asked if They Support Preferential Hiring of			
	Women		African American	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Supports preferential hiring of women	29.0%	0.454		
Among women	*32.1%*	*0.467*		
Supports preferential hiring of African Americans			18.0%	0.384
Among African Americans			*45.5%*	*0.498*
Get ahead: Hard work	67.5%	0.468	67.5%	0.468
Women	*68.0%*	*0.467*		
African Americans			*61.7%*	*0.487*
Get ahead: Hard work & luck	22.7%	0.419	21.9%	0.414
Women	*22.7%*	*0.419*		
African Americans			*22.2%*	*0.416*
Get ahead: Luck	9.7%	0.296	10.6%	0.308
Women	*9.2%*	*0.290*		
African Americans			*16.1%*	*0.368*
Extremely liberal	3.4%	0.180	3.1%	0.174
Liberal	12.5%	0.331	13.2%	0.338
Slightly liberal	11.8%	0.323	13.4%	0.341
Moderate	37.6%	0.485	35.9%	0.480
Slightly conservative	15.6%	0.363	15.7%	0.364
Conservative	15.8%	0.365	15.3%	0.360
Extremely conservative	3.2%	0.177	3.4%	0.180
African American	14.7%	0.354	14.9%	0.356
Female	54.5%	0.498	54.9%	0.498
Education (years)	13.7	2.7	13.7	2.8
Annual income with imputations	16.4	5.2	16.3	4.8
Age	40.1	12.3	40.2	12.1
N	1,429		4,130	

Notes: All data are from the General Social Survey. Preferential hiring for women questions were asked in 1996, 2000–2006 (even years). Preferential hiring of blacks question asked in 1994–2006 (even years). Annual income is total family income (25 categories); category 16 corresponds to $30,000–35,000/year. Female subpopulation N = 779; African American subpopulation N = 615.

is wrong because it discriminates against men [whites]. What about your opinion—are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of women [blacks]?" Once the respondent indicates that she is for (or against) such policies, she is asked to place her support along a 4-point scale with 1 indicating strongly favor and 4 indicating strongly oppose. We then recode these responses into a dichotomous variable,[4] where 1 represents support for affirmative action policies for women (blacks) and 0 represent nonsupport. In our sample, 29 percent of respondents support preferences for women in hiring, whereas 18 percent of respondents support preferences for African Americans in hiring.

Results

We hypothesize that beliefs about deservingness shape attitudes about affirmative action for women and African Americans. We test the relationship between

Table 2. Marginal Effects after Probit Estimation: Supports Preferential Hiring

	Supports Preferential Hiring of			
	Females		African Americans	
	16–64 b/(se)	25–54 b/(se)	16–64 b/(se)	25–54 b/(se)
Get ahead: Hard work & luck	**0.0092**	**0.0210**	**0.0219*** **	**0.0178***
	(0.0170)	(0.0193)	(0.0084)	(0.0099)
Get ahead: Luck	**0.0809*** **	**0.0592** **	**0.0485*** **	**0.0571*** **
	(0.0242)	(0.0281)	(0.0115)	(0.0142)
Education (years)	**–0.0233*** **	**–0.0182*** **	**0.0030** **	**0.0079*** **
	(0.0027)	(0.0034)	(0.0012)	(0.0015)
African American	**0.2056*** **	**0.2069*** **	**0.3111*** **	**0.2973*** **
	(0.0209)	(0.0256)	(0.0131)	(0.0158)
Liberal	**–0.0140**	**–0.0397**	**–0.0406*** **	**–0.0224**
	(0.0394)	(0.0437)	(0.0147)	(0.0197)
Slightly liberal	**–0.0378**	**–0.0317**	**–0.0735*** **	**–0.0544*** **
	(0.0387)	(0.0441)	(0.0124)	(0.0173)
Moderate	**–0.0571***	**–0.0552**	**–0.1059*** **	**–0.1092*** **
	(0.0344)	(0.0391)	(0.0093)	(0.0133)
Slightly conservative	**–0.0165**	**0.0136**	**–0.1060*** **	**–0.0920*** **
	(0.0387)	(0.0466)	(0.0098)	(0.0145)
Conservative	**–0.1479*** **	**–0.1602*** **	**–0.1119*** **	**–0.0997*** **
	(0.0298)	(0.0317)	(0.0095)	(0.0143)
Extremely conservative	**0.0116**	**–0.0686**	**–0.1115*** **	**–0.1166*** **
	(0.0519)	(0.0520)	(0.0127)	(0.0175)
Female	**0.0533*** **	**0.0666*** **	**0.0066**	**0.0046**
	(0.0143)	(0.0170)	(0.0066)	(0.0079)
Annual income with imputations	**–0.0071*** **	**–0.0090*** **	**–0.0020*** **	**–0.0045*** **
	(0.0014)	(0.0018)	(0.0007)	(0.0009)
Age	**0.0067***	**0.0142**	**–0.0059*** **	**–0.0060**
	(0.0038)	(0.0087)	(0.0019)	(0.0049)
Age squared	**–0.0001**	**–0.0002**	**0.0001*** **	**0.0001**
	(0.0000)	(0.0001)	(0.0000)	(0.0001)
Year dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1,429	1,025	4,130	3,025

*$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$. Marginal effects are in bold.

Notes: All data are from the General Social Survey. The reference category for the "hard work" variable are individuals who respond that "hard work is the most important" factor in getting ahead. Omitted political ideology is "Very Liberal." Preferential hiring for women questions were asked in 1996, 2000–2006 (even years). Preferential hiring of blacks question asked in 1994, 1996–2006 (even years). Annual income is total family income (25 categories). "YES" indicates that dummy variables for the years were included in each analysis.

Lerner's construct BJW (as measured by the "get ahead" variable in the GSS) and whether an individual supports affirmative action for women or African Americans. In Table 2, we show marginal effects of probit regressions for the effect of an individual's belief about the role of luck and hard work on their support for affirmative action.[5] Respondents who "support" or "strongly support" preferential hiring of women (blacks) are coded as one, whereas those who "oppose" or "strongly oppose" were coded as zero. We find strong support for our main hypothesis. Survey respondents who believe that luck is the most important determinant of getting ahead are

much more likely to support preferential hiring of women and African Americans, relative to those who believe that hard work is the most important determinant of getting ahead. A belief that luck is the most important determinant of getting ahead raises the likelihood of supporting preferential hiring of women in the workplace by approximately 8.1 percent for the full sample (ages 16–64); this effect is significantly different from zero at the $\alpha = 0.01$ level. When we restrict the sample to prime-age workers (age 25–54), we find slightly smaller but statistically significant effects (column 2). Among prime-age workers, having luck is the most important determinant of getting ahead and is associated with a 5.9 percent increase in the likelihood of supporting affirmative action for women. This result is consistent across specifications where we alter the year controls and political ideology measures and add an age-squared measure. Additional controls for income such as piecewise linear spline functions and income squared do not alter our main finding. Interestingly, in the models examining support for preferential hiring of women, the effect of believing that both luck and hard work are important factors for getting ahead is not significant.

In columns 3 and 4, we present our findings for supporting preferential hiring of African Americans. We find that those who believe that luck is the most important determinant in getting ahead are significantly more likely to support preferential hiring of African Americans. Among all respondents, the belief in luck is associated with a 4.9 percent increase in the probability of supporting affirmative action. For prime-age workers believing in the importance of luck raises the probability of supporting preferential hiring of African Americans by more than 5.7 percent. We should note that in these models, the variable for the mix of hard work and luck is also positive and significant.

Our results also point to some interesting demographic effects for supporting affirmative action for women and African Americans. Being a woman significantly raises the probability of supporting preferential hiring for females, but has no statistically significant effect on supporting preferential hiring of African Americans. Conversely, being an African American significantly raises the support for preferential hiring of African Americans and women. Separate analyses (not shown) including a female/African American interaction term fail to support a separate effect for African American women, and the interaction term is not statistically significant in either the preferential hiring of females or African Americans models. Higher levels of education and income generally reduce support for the preferential hiring of women but raise the likelihood of support for preferential hiring of African Americans.

Political ideology is a significant predictor of support for preferential hiring of women and African Americans. We include dummy variables for the 7-point scale of political ideology (omitting extremely liberal) and find that "conservative" is associated with a significant reduction in support for affirmative action for both women and African Americans. The effect of being a conservative (relative to extremely liberal) is to reduce the probability of supporting preferential hiring of women by 15–16 percent depending on the specification. Relative to extremely liberal, those who are slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, conservative, and extremely

conservative are significantly less likely to support preferential hiring of African Americans. Separate tests of significance between moderates and conservatives indicate that there is no statistical difference between the two groups in their support of preferential hiring for African Americans; it appears that there is widespread lack of support for affirmative action for African Americans among the center-right in the United States.

As a final test of our hypothesis, we estimate our preferential hiring of African Americans model controlling for a range of racial attitudes (no similar set of variables is available for women) in Table 3. We include four separate racial difference variables in our model. In each case, the respondent is asked to answer "yes" or "no" to the questions about racial differences being due to: (i) discrimination, (ii) inborn disability, (iii) education, and (iv) lack of will. Multiple "yes" answers are permitted.

After controlling for racial attitudes, we still find a positive and statistically significant effect of hard work on support for preferential hiring for African Americans. Importantly, our results for racial attitudes are intuitively appealing. Those who believe that discrimination and lack of education are important determinants of racial differences are more likely to support affirmative action. Those who believe that lack of will is responsible for racial differences are less likely to support affirmative action for African Americans. Somewhat surprisingly, the effect of inborn disability being responsible for racial differences is associated with higher support for affirmative action. Finally, all political ideologies are less likely to support affirmative action for African Americans, as compared with extremely liberal. Once we control for discrimination the support among African Americans for affirmative action becomes negative and statistically significant—emphasizing the importance of controlling for racial attitudes.

It is likely the case that in our previous specifications race was acting as a moderating variable, in that controlling for racial attitudes moderates the effect of race on support of affirmative action. It appears that the beliefs that people hold for racial differences vary by race, and importantly, controlling for these alters the role of race on support of affirmative action. In general, racial attitudes are more important determinants of support for affirmative action than is being a racial minority. Once we control for the reasons for racial differences, we find that the effect size on race diminishes and becomes negative, whereas the effect of luck remains unchanged from the results presented in Table 2. Consequently, controlling for race seems to proxy for perceived need for affirmative action policies, whereas the reasons for racial inequality generate similar support (with the notable exception when the respondent believes that racial differences are due to a lack of effort).

Conclusion

In social policy, it has long been argued that target populations help shape support for government programs, especially those providing assistance (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Building on theories of deservingness, we present a new theory that places beliefs about desert at the center of policymaking and public support for

Table 3. Marginal Effects after Probit Estimation: Supports Preferential Hiring of African Americans, 25–54 years

	b/(se)	mean
Get ahead: Hard work & luck	**0.0236*****	0.218
	(0.0035)	
Get ahead: Luck	**0.0460*****	0.102
	(0.0048)	
Racial differences:		
Due to discrimination	**0.1419*****	0.374
	(0.0041)	
Due to inborn disability	**0.0836*****	0.074
	(0.0064)	
Due to lack of education	**0.1164*****	0.475
	(0.0040)	
Due to lack of will	**–0.0408*****	0.452
	(0.0027)	
Education (years)	**0.0042*****	13.9
	(0.0005)	
African American	**–0.0369*****	0.159
	(0.0065)	
Liberal	**–0.0623*****	0.129
	(0.0058)	
Slightly liberal	**–0.0944*****	0.141
	(0.0048)	
Moderate	**–0.0759*****	0.356
	(0.0054)	
Slightly conservative	**–0.0801*****	0.163
	(0.0054)	
Conservative	**–0.0798*****	0.146
	(0.0074)	
Extremely conservative	**–0.0033*****	0.035
	(0.0003)	
Female	**0.2237*****	0.546
	(0.0053)	
Annual Income with imputations	**0.0038**	16.7
	(0.0028)	
Age	**–0.0050*****	39.1
	(0.0017)	
Age squared	**0.0001*****	1,597.1
	(0.0000)	
Year dummies	YES	
Observations	2,745	

***$p < 0.01$. Marginal effects are in bold.

Notes: All data are from the General Social Survey. The reference category for the "hard work" variable are individuals who respond that "hard work is the most important" factor in getting ahead. Preferential hiring of blacks question asked in 1994–2006 (even years). Annual income is total family income (25 categories). "YES" indicates that dummy variables for the years were included in the analysis.

particular policies. To do this, we use beliefs about the role of hard work in getting ahead as a proxy for a BJW. We argue that people who perceive the world is just, have particular beliefs about who is deserving, in general. As a consequence, they will be less likely to support government policies targeted toward helping particular groups. Importantly, the perceptions of deservingness are based on beliefs about the world being just, which are largely determined prior to socialization—that is, we have an

innate capacity to discern between just and unjust outcomes. Using a measure of the BJW, we explore empirically how perceptions of desert (i.e., the role of hard work) affect attitudes toward preferential hiring of women and African Americans. We find a strong relationship between views on luck and support for preferential hiring. Those who believe that luck is the most important determinant of getting ahead are significantly more likely to support hiring preferences for women and African Americans, even after controlling for race, sex, education, income, and political ideology.

The results presented in Table 2 show that the reasons given for why some people get ahead (hard work or luck) predict attitudes about preferential hiring of women and African Americans. The results are robust to changes in specification. We note that the basis of support for preferential hiring differs significantly between women and African Americans. The role of luck is a much larger predictor of support for preferential hiring of African Americans than for women. Also interesting is the mixed finding on education: those with more education are less likely to support preferential hiring of women but more likely to support preferential hiring of African Americans—although the effect of education has a substantively small but statistically significant effect. Additionally, the moderate and conservative portions of the political spectrum do not support affirmative action for African Americans relative to the those who identify as very liberal. This raises interesting questions about affirmative action writ large. It suggests that the target population of the policy is an important determinant of who supports the policy—we infer that this is likely due to beliefs about who deserves special consideration.

These findings are the first to examine the social-psychological construct of BJW and its impact on social policy. Drawing on the theory of the "belief in a just world" (Lerner, 1980), our framework links this theory to notions of desert and ultimately attitudes toward controversial government programs. We argue that this theory is a critical antecedent to the previous research on social construction (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Although previous work establishes a link between the formulation of policy and the identification of target populations (and vice versa) (Bensonsmith, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2005; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Schram, 2005), we posit that notions of deservingness are precursors to policy. We argue and present considerable evidence to support this argument that just world beliefs are pre-institutional. It is critical to examine how notions of deservingness are "hard wired" providing us the capacity to make determinations about just and unjust outcomes. It is also the case that as we are predisposed to see the world as a just place, our decisions reinforce that belief, leading us to reinterpret events and resulting in biased policymaking.

These two facts—that we have an innate capacity for evaluating just outcomes and that we are predisposed to seeing the world as a just place—have profound implications for social policy. In particular, it raises questions about changes in support for affirmative action over time. If our support for affirmative action is based on an unalterable belief about the world being just, then the opportunities to increase support for affirmative action are limited. Second, because people use a variety of mechanisms to defend their beliefs in a just world, they are unlikely to change unless

confronted with overwhelming evidence that the world is unjust. This bias implies that individuals are more likely to wrongly *overestimate* equality of opportunity and provide less support for affirmative action policies than they would in the absence of a generalized BJW. It is interesting to note that support for affirmative action occurred at a time when it was nearly impossible to argue that the world was a just place for African Americans.

Finally, we note that our findings are also useful to scholars studying the support for affirmative action programs. Previous studies examine how individual factors (e.g., social dominance, individualism, and conservatism) beyond race and sex influence views on affirmative action. This research demonstrates the link between the propensity to offer individualistic explanations for societal disparities and attitudes toward programs created to limit racial and gender inequalities. Scholars working to understand views on affirmative action not only have to consider individual demographics, but also need to consider other social psychological pathways.

Vicky M. Wilkins is a professor and the associate dean in the School of Public Affairs and Department of Public Administration & Policy at American University. **Jeffrey B. Wenger** is an associate professor in the School of Public and International Affairs and Department of Public Administration & Policy at the University of Georgia.

Notes

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1. We use the terms deservingness and desert interchangeably throughout the paper.
2. Ideally we would have data to directly test this contention; however, this is a limitation of our data. What we can test is how beliefs about deserving influence support for assistance programs. However, there is considerable and growing evidence stemming from research on infants that pre-institutional mechanisms are at work in determinations of deservingness. See, for example, Hamlin, Wynn, Bloom, and Mahajan (2011).
3. The preferential hiring of women question was not asked in 1994 or 1998.
4. Estimates from an ordered probit produce similar results as those presented in Table 2. Given the nested nature of this question we think that the probit is the most appropriate model for these data.
5. Marginal effects are calculated as average marginal effects (AME), rather than marginal effects at the mean (MEM).

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