

To Accept or to Reject: The Effect of Framing on Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action¹

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Two experiments examined the effect of framing on attitudes toward an affirmative-action program of preferential treatment. Participants' attitudes were consistently more favorable toward the affirmative-action program presented in a positive frame—preferring a target group's applicant over a majority group's applicant—than when the very same program was presented in a negative frame—rejecting the majority group's applicant in favor of the target group's applicant. Similar effects were evident for 3 target groups in the context of higher education selection and personnel selection. Two theoretical explanations for the effect of framing on attitudes toward affirmative-action programs are suggested. The implications of this effect are discussed, and the challenges facing future research of this phenomenon are outlined.

Affirmative action is implemented by various programs in relation to various target groups, both in personnel selection and admission to institutions of higher education. Research on attitudes toward affirmative-action programs (AAPs) has investigated between-group differences in attitudes toward these programs and the variability of such attitudes among individuals as a function of different variables.

Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action

Between-Group Differences in Attitudes Toward AAPs

Different types of groups will have different attitudes toward AAPs. People who belong to a target group tend to be more supportive of AAPs than those who belong to the majority group (i.e., the non-target group),

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