

# Misperceived Discrimination and Task Performance

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# Motivation

**Long-standing concern:** **Expected** discrimination **reinforces negative stereotypes** about productivity a discriminated group through effects on **effort**.

**Empirical evidence** is generally consistent with this worry. **However:**

- **correlational** research
- mostly **self-reported** job-related attitudes and behavior
- **non-incentivized** beliefs about discrimination

# Research Questions

- 1 Do minorities hold **overly pessimistic** beliefs about discrimination against their racial group?
- 2 Do minorities' **beliefs respond to information** about the actual extent of discrimination?
- 3 Does expecting **less** discrimination lead minorities to **try harder** and **perform better**?

# Related literature & Contribution

## Exogenous information provision

- Haaland and Roth, 2021; Haaland and Roth, 2020; Grigorieff, Roth, and Ubfal, 2020; Alesina, Miano, and Stantcheva, 2018; Lergetporer, Piopiunik, and Simon, 2017 ...

## Contribution 1

- study the existence of misperceptions among **racial minorities**

## Minorities' endogenous responses to discrimination

- **Gagnon, Bosmans, and Riedl, 2020**; Hengel, 2020; Kudashvili and Lergetporer, 2019; Alston, 2019; Fouka, 2019; Carlana, 2019; Glover, Pallais, and Pariente, 2017; Kang, DeCelles, Tilcsik, and Jun, 2016; Lavy and Sand, 2018 ...

## Contribution 2

- explore the **causal effects** of minorities' beliefs about discrimination on their effort

## Method and Sample

Large-scale **online** experiment in the US with a **representative sample of African Americans** ( $N \sim 2000$ ).

- Why this racial minority?
  - ▶ There is abundant research **evidence for existing and persistent discrimination** against African Americans (e.g. Bertrand, & Mullainathan, 2004; Edelman, Luca, & Svirsky, 2017; Quillian, Pager, Hexel, & Midtbøen, 2017)
  - ▶ African Americans **believe** that **racism is pervasive** in US society (Pew Research Center, 2019).

but

Do we know **how accurately** African Americans' perceptions of discrimination reflects the reality?

# Experimental Design

- 1) Description of a **previous survey** with **White** respondents
- 2) **Prior beliefs**: How many White respondents (out of 100) allocated *at least the same amount* to an African American person as to a White person?

**Control group**

No information

**Treatment group**

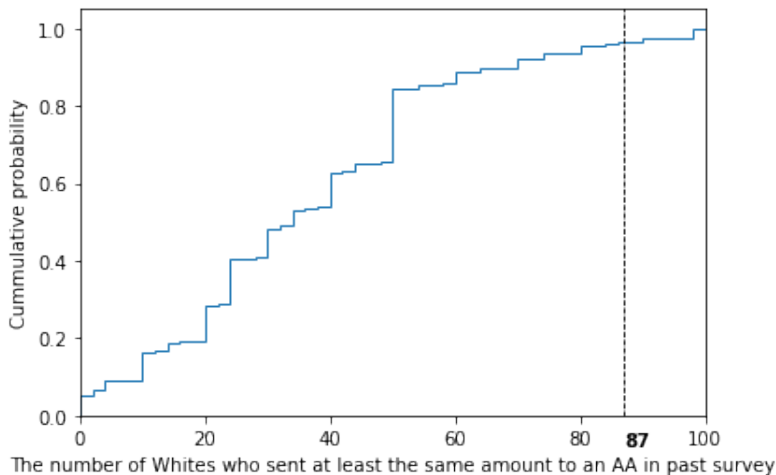
Information about the prevalence of discrimination against African Americans in the previous survey

Description of a real-effort task and payment scheme

**Outcomes:** performance/effort on the task, posterior beliefs, WTP for race-blind allocation of task earnings, decision to exaggerate own task performance

# Results

# Minorities **vastly overestimate discrimination** against their racial group.





## Information about discrimination against own racial group strongly affects minorities' beliefs.

	Posterior belief			
Treatment	17.85*** (1.07)	17.09*** (1.46)	14.67*** (1.86)	17.54*** (1.81)
Treatment × Male		1.68 (2.13)		
Male		-1.80 (1.57)		
Treatment × College			5.07** (2.26)	
College			-1.42 (1.69)	
Treatment × Democrat				0.47 (2.24)
Democrat				-0.63 (1.64)
Observations	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Covariates	yes	yes	yes	yes
Control mean	47.13	47.33	48.47	48.49

Minorities do **not** seem to respond to lower perceived discrimination with higher effort.

	Attempted problems		Correct problems	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment (a)	-0.30** (0.13)	-0.19 (0.18)	-0.18 (0.17)	0.18 (0.22)
Treatment $\times$ Male (b)		-0.25 (0.26)		-0.80** (0.35)
Male		0.51*** (0.18)		1.09*** (0.25)
Linear combination: a + b		-0.43** (0.18)		-0.62** (0.26)
Observations	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Covariates	yes	yes	yes	yes
Control mean	17.75	17.46	12.15	11.45

We find no evidence for **other** strategic responses of minorities to perceived discrimination.

	WTP for race-blind allocation	Extent of performance exaggeration
	(1)	(2)
Treatment	-0.008 (0.05)	-0.13 (0.15)
Observations	2,000	2,000
Covariates	Yes	Yes
Control mean	0	0.53

# Conclusion

Primarily, I fill the gap in literature

- by studying the **causal effects** of perceived discrimination on racial minorities' effort

Main findings

- Minorities hold predominantly **pessimistic** beliefs about discrimination against them.
- In response to **favorable news**, minorities **update** their beliefs but do **not raise** their **performance**. If anything, they decrease their effort.

Thank you!

If you have questions or comments,  
you could reach me at

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