Perceptions of Discrimination: Moving Beyond the Numbers of Representative Bureaucracy

Katherine C. Naff

Despite legal efforts to eliminate employment discrimination, lawsuits and demonstrations suggest that many federal employees believe they are subject to discriminatory practices. This article analyzes responses to a governmentwide survey of federal employees in order to understand such perceptions more fully. Propositions examined, and at least partially supported, include that minority groups hold identifiable, but structurally different, belief systems with regard to discrimination, and that there are identifiable factors correlated with these perceptions.

For over fifty years, a variety of executive orders, legislative actions, and judicial decisions have prohibited discrimination on the basis of race in federal employment. The Civil Service Reform Act, passed in 1978, went a step further, calling for a civil service that "reflects the nation's diversity" (5 U.S.C. 7201). Yet, recent allegations of employment discrimination have led to class action lawsuits filed by employees at several federal agencies, a congressional investigation at the National Institutes of Health; and a vocal demonstration at the Department of Commerce. Regardless of whether formal prohibitions have succeeded in eliminating discrimination against minorities in the bureaucracy, it is clear that perceptions of unfair treatment continue to pervade at least some federal agencies.

Do these new allegations of discrimination constitute a continuation of racial discrimination in the nation's largest employer, and, arguably, one with one of the best records in terms of racial and gender representation within its workforce (Kim, 1993; Murray, Terry, Washington, & Keller, 1994)? This question perhaps can be answered best by distinguishing between two components of discrimination—the "objective" element and the "subjective" element. As defined by Hopkins (1980), the former refers to discrimination that could be said to exist by an outside observer, while the latter is a perception by employees themselves that their own situations are discriminatory. If such perceptions are not understood, then remedies focusing solely on the "objective" component will be inadequate (Hopkins, 1980).

Subjective discrimination is important because it can affect employees' job satisfaction, motivation to perform at optimum levels, likelihood to remain with an organization, and health (James, Lovato, & Cropanzano, 1994). Employee motivation to perform is dependent on an expectation that such performance will lead to rewards, such as a promotion (Beyer, Stevens, & Trice, 1980). Such expectations are likely to be dampened if employees perceive their work environment to be discriminatory (Cox, 1993). Moreover, minorities who believe that their opportunities are limited are less willing to wait for something that may never come (Page, 1994). It also has been suggested that the extent to which employees believe diversity in the workplace is valued has an impact on employee job satisfaction and productivity (Pomerleau, 1994). When perceptions of discrimination find their outlet in lawsuits and demonstrations, which in turn are reported in the popular press, they can have an impact on the credibility of the government as an equal opportunity employer. It well may be that proportional representation of minorities is not sufficient to preclude discrimination, when discrimination is understood as the sum of objective and subjective parts. Yet, little research has attempted to understand the nature of subjective discrimination. This

article contributes to filling that vacuum by analyzing responses to a recent survey of over 20,000 federal employees conducted by the United States Merit Systems Protection Board.

Previous Research

Since the 1940s, the importance of a representative bureaucracy has been emphasized in much of the scholarly literature analyzing the role of bureaucracy in a democratic polity (Kingsley, 1944; Levitan, 1946; Long, 1952; Krislov, 1967, 1974; Krislov & Rosenbloom, 1981). One of the many benefits articulated is the symbolic role that a diverse civil service plays in demonstrating that various communities have access to the policymaking process through these representatives, thereby helping to secure the legitimacy the government needs to govern effectively.

According to Samuel Krislov (1967), a representative bureaucracy, like the legislature, is a funnel for divergent points of view that has the advantage of sharing and diffusing social responsibility and that leads to general acceptance of governmental programs and policies. When diverse groups in society are represented in the bureaucracy, presumably they also urge support for policies through their ties to these communities. A group that can identify with a regime and share in its benefits has a greater stake in it and is more likely to support it. Finally, the absence of members of a group in the bureaucracy, the nation's largest employer and the enforcer of its laws, can undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the political system.

Considerable scholarly research has attempted to discover the extent to which the goals of representative bureaucracy have been achieved, by examining either the percentage of minorities employed in the government by grade level, or by determining whether an employee's race influences his or her probability of promotion (Nachmias & Rosenbloom, 1973; Kellough, 1989; Kellough & Kay, 1986; Lewis, 1988). However, in focusing on the numbers of minorities in the bureaucracy, these analyses largely have ignored the question of whether minorities believe they are treated equitably within the bureaucracy—an issue that has ramifications for the legitimacy of the bureaucracy. As Krislov (1974, p. 64) notes, "It seems certain that long-term confidence in the pattern of decisions enunciated by a structure is closely related to its reputation for permeability."

Yet, few studies have examined the extent to which minority civil servants believe they are working within a discrimination-free environment and have an equal opportunity to advance within the bureaucracy. Those that have done so, however, indicate that there is at least some discontent. In a 1990 survey of Hispanic federal executives, 59% of respondents reported being confronted with the assumption that minorities can only fill certain types of positions, and 57% reported experiencing organizational norms that reflect no concern for the minority community (Sisneros, 1992). A survey in a regional office of an unidentified federal agency found that 79% of minority employees believe that minorities face obstacles to promotion, including a white male culture or network and stereotyping (Fine, Johnson, & Ryan, 1990).

These findings, while useful, are limited in at least two respects. First, they are confined to small groups of federal employees—Hispanics in one case, and minorities in one regional office in the other. Second, these studies suffer from a deficiency identified recently in literature examining attitudes in the African-American community (Green, 1970; Smith, 1987): They assume that "minorities" or "Hispanics" constitute uniform groups. With the growing recognition of the need to acknowledge and manage correctly "cultural diversity" within federal agencies (as in

other employment sectors), scholars are expressing concern over inattention to nonAfrican-American minorities (Kim, 1993; Rubaii–Barrett & Beck, 1993; Hughes, 1991–92; Affigne, Avalos, & Alfred, 1994). It has been suggested that the tendency for public policymakers to assume that "minority" means African American results in an attempt to meet the needs of all minority groups with one remedy (Pachon, 1988).

Studies outside the federal workplace have shown that race and ethnicity can affect the way employees view their work environment, and that such views can differ among various racial/ethnic groups. A study of a large corporation concluded that "black and white managers hold cognitively different theories to explain what happens in the organizational world around them" (Alderfer, Alderfer, Tucker, & Tucker, 1980, p. 148).

Moreover, another study of twelve corporations found that African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans differed substantially from each other in their perceptions of the treatment of minorities in the workplace. Native Americans and Asian Americans were not as critical of how minorities were treated as were African Americans and Hispanics (Fernandez, 1981). Fernandez (1981) suggests that Native Americans tend to avoid types of behavior that in white society are thought to be essential for succeeding in managerial and professional jobs (including criticism), while Asian Americans often are trained to be more deferential to authority. For these reasons, and because they are relatively small minority groups, Native Americans and Asian Americans are less likely to be seen as a threat by whites, and so may not experience as much discrimination. African Americans are the most critical of the treatment of minorities, at least in part, Fernandez (1981) argues, because they have faced dual liabilities of the stigma of slavery and color. Moreover, as the largest minority group, they present the greatest threat to whites and therefore are likely to have experienced the most discriminatory treatment.

While these studies don't exhaust all possible interpretations of the differences in opinion expressed by different racial and ethnic minority groups, the work by Fernandez (1981) and others certainly suggests that there is a diversity of views among minorities in the workplace rooted in a variety of factors that are worth exploring further. Research also has shown marked differences in the level of job satisfaction among minority groups, even when they work in similar environments (Moch, 1980; Rubaii–Barrett & Beck, 1993).

An extra layer of complexity is apparent within minority groups, as well as between them. Indeed, overgeneralizations about particular groups can lead to negative stereotypes (Zuckerman, 1990). Fernandez (1981) found the views of Native Americans who are less than one-quarter Native American to differ from those who are more than one-quarter Native American, as well as a diversity of perspectives among Hispanics and Asian Americans of various national origins. Adams and Dressler (1988, p. 762) found that even within a single southern African-American community, and even when dealing with a salient issue like discrimination, "an assumption of uniformity cannot be made." However, even while acknowledging a lack of uniformity, Adams and Dressler (1988) found that some generalizations could be made about how African Americans view racism; for example, there is a cultural belief system within the African-American community they studied that places racism within "white culture."

Once it is recognized that not all members of a minority group may perceive issues related to discrimination in the same way, the objective then becomes to identify the factors that predict which members of a group are more likely than the others to perceive a particular form of discrimination. Previous research has demonstrated that such factors can include demographic characteristics such as gender and age; socioeconomic characteristics such as income, education, and occupation; and

workplace-related variables such as ingroup proportions in the workgroup (Sigelman & Welch, 1991; Fernandez, 1981; Adams & Dressler, 1988; Schuman & Hatchett, 1974; James, Lovato, & Cropanzano, 1994). Sigelman and Welch (1991) also noted that some of these variables operate differently on the attitudes of whites and African Americans toward discrimination, suggesting that factors that predict perceptions of discrimination vary among racial or ethnic groups.

Propositions and Methods

The purpose of this paper is to explore differences in belief systems related to employment discrimination among African-American, Asian-American,[1] Hispanic, and Native-American federal employees, and to determine whether there are identifiable correlates with these perceptions within each group. Based on the work of Fernandez (1981), it is expected that African Americans will report experiencing the greatest degree of discrimination, while Native Americans and Asian Americans will report the least.

A second proposition is that within each racial or national origin group factors will emerge that demonstrate that there is an underlying structure to minorities' perceptions of discrimination that differs among the four groups in question. The lack of research in this area makes it difficult to hypothesize just what structures will emerge for each group; consequently, this analysis is purely exploratory. However, research on perceptions of discrimination does provide some clues as to what various dimensions of such belief systems may be.

For example, Crosby (1984) suggests that even when people recognize that discrimination exists in their organization, they often deny that they have been discriminated against personally. A related finding by Sigelman and Welch (1991) is that African Americans are more likely to perceive discrimination against African Americans as a group than against themselves personally. Thus, it would seem reasonable that for minorities in general, items that suggest personal discrimination would represent a different dimension of perceived discrimination than would those that suggest discrimination against one's group, or against minorities in general.

Moreover, prior research suggests that, even while African Americans have a diversity of opinion about the pervasiveness of prejudice, there is "something approaching consensus" among African Americans about positive prospects for the future (Sigelman & Welch, 1991, p. 65). Similarly, Alderfer, Alderfer, Tucker, and Tucker (1980) found that even when African Americans saw evidence of racism and were troubled about the quality of race relations, a high proportion believed that race relations had improved since they joined the company. It seems reasonable to propose that, at least for African Americans, items asking about recent progress will load on a separate factor than will items asking about the existence of discrimination.

That belief systems about employment discrimination differ among minority groups is suggested by recent studies confirming that African Americans are less likely than Hispanics and Asian Americans to believe they have equal opportunity with whites (Duke, 1994). The proposition suggested here is that correlations between perceptions of discrimination and a belief in organizational fairness will be greater for African Americans than for other minority groups.

A large, and perhaps more difficult, question is which factors might predict perceptions of discrimination for each minority group. The suggested hypothesis is that there is diversity not only among minority groups in their perceptions of discrimination, but also within each group. Thus far, few analyses have evaluated how various factors might affect differentially the attitudes of different minority groups

486

toward discrimination. Moreover, the success of such factors as predictors of perceptions depends on the precise nature of the perceptions that serve as the dependent variable. For example, Sigelman and Welch (1991) found that older African Americans were more likely than younger African Americans to view themselves as victims of discrimination, but that age had no effect on their perceptions of discrimination against African Americans generally or on the trend in antiAfrican-American sentiments. Similarly, highly-educated African Americans were more likely to perceive discrimination against themselves than were those with less education, but they were not more likely to perceive greater discrimination against their race in general. Thus, the hypothesis is that factors will be identified that correlate with perceptions of discrimination, and that those factors depend on the group in question. The effect of such factors will have to be explored.

This paper begins by examining whether there is a difference in perceptions of discrimination among the four minority groups. This is tested initially with a simple crosstabulation of various survey items asking federal employees how minorities in general, and members of their own racial or ethnic group specifically, are treated in their organization.

Next, responses to the survey are factor-analyzed to determine the multivariate structure of perceptions of discrimination in the federal bureaucracy. In order to test the hypothesis that belief systems will vary among the four minority groups, separate factor analyses were performed for each group.[2] The survey was administered by the United States Merit Systems Protection Board in January, 1993, as part of a study of workforce diversity issues. The sample was drawn to be representative of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics, as well as whites, by grade level, agency, and occupational category. About 13,300 employees returned completed questionnaires, for a response rate of 60%. Of these 13,300 employees, 1,856 were African American, 1,484 were Asian American, 1,681 were Hispanic, and 1,228 were Native American.[3] The survey included 22 items that were used to measure perceptions of discriminatory treatment within the respondents' organizations (see Table 2 for paraphrased versions of these items).

To determine whether there are factors that predict the likelihood that a minority employee will perceive discrimination, the next part of the analysis regressed various sociodemographic and work-related variables on an index comprised of the items that loaded highly on one factor common to each group. Separate models were specified for each of the four groups, to determine the correlates of perceptions of discrimination for each group.

Socioeconomic and demographic factors can be useful in predicting the attitudes of groups, but by no means will they predict all of the variance (Verba & Orren, 1985). This dataset also included items that can examine the impact that various "workplace experiences" have on employee perceptions. Examples of such experiences are the number of cash awards and noncash awards received, the experience of being turned down recently for a promotion, and having had a mentor. Identification of such work-related correlates of perceptions of discrimination would provide direction to agencies as to steps that may be taken to reduce the incidence of subjective discrimination.

Findings and Discussion

Differences Among Minority Groups

Table 1 reports the crosstabulation of three survey items by racial/ethnic group. As expected, there was a diversity of views. In particular, African Americans reported the greatest perceptions of discrimination against themselves, and against

Table 1
Percentage Responses to Survey Items by Racial/Ethnic Group

In your organization, to what extent do you believe that employees from [your racial/ethnic group] are subjected to *flagrant or obviously discriminatory practices* which hinder their career advancement?

	African Americans	Asian Americans	Hispanics	Native Americans
To a great extent	34.5	9.1	13.1	8.0
To a moderate extent	20.7	11.7	15.3	10.5
To a minimal extent	15.3	20.1	19.5	13.0
To no extent	14.5	30.7	25.3	37.6
Don't know/can't judge	15.1	28.4	26.9	30.9
N (weighted)	2040	448	693	261

$p < .001$

What is your general impression of the amount of progress [your racial/ethnic group] has made in moving into top-level positions in the federal government in the last 5 years?

	African Americans	Asian Americans	Hispanics	Native Americans
Considerable progress	6.7	10.3	6.0	9.9
Some progress	31.9	25.1	32.0	17.8
Minimal progress	46.3	31.7	37.6	35.8
No progress	15.1	15.5	12.2	23.4
Don't know/can't judge	—	17.4	12.1	13.1
N (weighted)	1995	451	702	266

$p < .001$

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In my organization, nonminorities receive preferential treatment compared to minorities."

	African Americans	Asian Americans	Hispanics	Native Americans
Strongly agree	33.2	11.2	15.4	7.4
Agree	24.8	23.3	24.6	18.4
Neither agree nor disagree	14.5	23.6	20.9	16.4
Disagree	11.1	24.0	21.2	23.3
Strongly disagree	5.1	5.6	8.1	16.4
Don't know/can't judge	11.3	12.1	9.8	18.0
N (weighted)	2064	450	707	265

$p < .001$

Source: 1993 Merit Systems Protection Board survey of federal employees.

minorities in general. But, while Native Americans and Asian Americans were the least likely to report discriminatory practices against their own group or against minorities in general, a larger percentage of Native Americans (23%) than any other group said that their group has made no progress in moving into top-level government positions in the last five years. Despite their pessimistic appraisal of the continuation of discrimination within the government, African Americans and Hispanics were the most likely to report progress in moving into top-level positions: 39% of African Americans and 38% of Hispanics said their group had made at least some progress in moving into these positions.

Overall, the findings support Fernandez's (1981) proposition that perceptions can be related to the numerical strength of a minority group. Those groups that are greatest in number (i.e., African Americans and Hispanics) are the most likely to experience discrimination, but as a result of their greater visibility they also are more likely to be aware of an increase in their own ranks in senior positions. More importantly, for the purpose of this paper, this bivariate analysis supports the hypothesis that there is a diversity of views among the minority population of federal employees, and that these perceptions are multidimensional in nature.

Dimensions of Perceptions of Discrimination

Principal axis factor analyses with varimax rotations were used to uncover the dimensions along which perceptions of discrimination are held by each of the four groups (Table 2). In all cases, the factors together explained about 50% of the variance. As hypothesized, the factors that emerged were configured somewhat differently for each group. For African Americans and Hispanics, five factors emerged; for Native Americans and Asian Americans, six emerged, although the sixth factor for Native Americans consists of a single item. Since there are similarities among these factors, they have been given the same labels for clarity of presentation (although, as will become apparent, this presents some problems of oversimplification). These factors are: (1) discrimination against my group, (2) management commitment to equal employment opportunity (EEO), (3) progress in achieving top-level positions, (4) organizational trust, and (5) additional obstacles faced by minorities.

There were differences in survey items loading on each of the factors. Surprisingly, the greatest similarity was found between Asian Americans and Hispanics, while African Americans showed the greatest dissimilarity from the other three groups. Table 2 displays the high factor loadings for each factor by minority group.

Each group had a factor that represents the extent to which its members thought flagrant or subtle discrimination had affected their own racial or ethnic group (Discrimination Against My Group). For African Americans, the extent to which African-American men and women are subject to subtle barriers was a factor all by itself, while for other groups additional items were correlated with this concept. For everyone else, a perception that their group is also subject to flagrant or obviously discriminatory practices was linked to this construct. Also, for everyone but African Americans, linked to this factor was the extent to which one's own motivation had suffered as a result of the way people from their group had suffered. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported that discrimination against one's group would represent a different dimension than discrimination against oneself personally.

For Hispanics and Asian Americans, discrimination against their group also correlated with the belief that discrimination against minorities in the government had

increased in the last five years, although the correlation was weak. The extent to which stereotypes based on their race/national origin have affected adversely how they are treated in their organizations also was linked to this factor for Hispanics and Asian Americans; for Native Americans, the adverse effect of stereotypes was correlated only weakly, but emerges as a factor by itself. This suggests that Native Americans see discrimination against Native Americans as separate from the effect that stereotypes about Native Americans may have in the workplace. For Asian Americans and Native Americans, playing down their own ethnic or cultural customs is linked to this factor; for Hispanics and African Americans it is not. This suggests that Asian Americans view discrimination against Asian Americans as an attack on their culture, while African Americans separate cultural concerns or concerns about stereotypes from perceived discrimination against their group. The relationship among culture, stereotypes, and discrimination for Hispanics and Native Americans is less clear.

Table 2[4]
Dimensions of Perceptions of Discrimination by Minority Group—High Factor Loadings

	African Americans	Asian Americans	Hispanics	Native Americans
Factor 1: Discrimination Against My Group				
Men from [your RNO group][5] subject to subtle barriers hindering advancement?	.806	.852	.747	.879
Women from [your RNO group] subject to subtle barriers hindering advancement?	.782	.760	.755	.850
Employees from [your RNO group] subject to flagrant discrimination?		.701	.611	.654
Job motivation has suffered because of treatment of RNO group.		.574	.558	.541
Stereotypes adversely affected your treatment?		.637	.525	
To advance career, I must play down ethnic customs.		.551		.421
More or less discrimination in government now than 5 years ago?		.293	.350	
Factor 2: Management Commitment to EEO				
Management acts to stop subtle barriers hindering advancement of women of [your RNO group]?	.892	.831	.814	.847
Management acts to stop subtle barriers hindering advancement of men of [your RNO group]?	.796	.937	.872	.888
Management acts to stop flagrant discrimination against [your RNO group]?	.520	.570	.579	.696
Factor 3: Progress In Achieving Top-Level Positions				
Progress by minority women moving into top federal positions in last 5 years?	.708	.658	.591	.737
Progress by minority men moving into top federal positions in last 5 years?	.706	.856	.703	.628
Progress by [your RNO group] moving into top federal positions in last 5 years?	.680	.372	.299	

Table 2[4] (continued)
Dimensions of Perceptions of Discrimination by Minority Group—High Factor Loadings

	African Americans	Asian Americans	Hispanics	Native Americans
Factor 4a: Organizational Trust (1)				
Organization would resolve charge of RNO discrimination fairly.	.733	.796	.631	.537
Management would act against discriminating supervisor.	.655	.628	.523	.675
Awards go to most deserving.	.441		.460	.514
Supervisors who actively support EEO are rewarded.	.551		.412	.660
My organization only pays lip service to EEO.	.400		.412	.588
To advance my career, I must play down ethnic customs.	.572			
Job motivation has suffered because of treatment of RNO group.	.545			
Stereotypes adversely affected your treatment?	.534			
My organization is reluctant to promote minorities to supervisory positions.	.544			
Nonminorities get preference over minorities.	.436			
More or less discrimination in government now than 5 years ago?	.349			.288
Progress by [your RNO group] moving into top federal positions in last 5 years?				.308
Employees from [your RNO group] subject to flagrant discrimination?	.422			
Factor 4b: Organizational Trust (2)				
Awards go to most deserving.		.655		
Supervisors who actively support EEO are rewarded.		.495		
My organization only pays lip service to EEO.		.315		
Factor 5: Additional Obstacles Faced by Minorities				
Minority women face extra obstacles.	.482	.587	.490	.579
Top management positions held by minorities lose power and prestige.	.576	.621	.515	.443
Minority's view not heard until repeated by a nonminority.	.610	.688	.682	.794
Organization reluctant to promote minorities to supervisory positions.		.513	.405	.579
Nonminorities get preference over minorities.		.574	.537	.768
To advance career, I must play down ethnic customs.			.316	

Source:
    1993 Merit Systems Protection Board survey of federal employees.

For each racial or ethnic group there is a factor (Management Commitment to EEO) that includes items relating to the belief that management would take action against discriminatory treatment of members of one's own group. This was the one factor for which the same three items loaded on this factor for all four groups. It is important to note that an item asking more generally if management would impose appropriately strong disciplinary measures against a supervisor or manager who was found to have discriminated based on race or national origin loads on a different factor (Organizational Trust, as described below). This indicates that members of minority groups think differently of themselves as members of their own racial or ethnic groups than they think about themselves as "minorities" in general, at least with respect to discrimination. The factor called Discrimination Against my Group provides some support for this suggestion as well. With one exception, the items loading on that factor asked either about one's own race/national origin group or about the individual himself or herself. The exception is the item asking whether discrimination against minorities had increased in the government; this item also loaded on this factor, albeit weakly, for at least two of the minority groups.

The differentiation in treatment of minorities in general from one's own group does not hold when considering the progress made in moving into top-level positions in the government (Factor 3). For African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics, the progress made by minority men, minority women, and members of their own racial or ethnic group all represent the same construct. This suggests not only that minorities think about progress in advancement differently from discrimination, but that they think about it in a different way—perhaps less personally. However, Native Americans apparently differ in this respect—progress made by their own group does not load on this factor.

Another factor deals with more general trust of the organization and the fairness of its procedures (Organizational Trust). For Asian Americans, these items really form two factors: one dealing with whether discrimination complaints would be handled fairly, and one addressing more proactive actions on the part of the organization (Factors 4a and 4b). For African Americans, this is the largest single factor, including items concerning their own motivation, flagrant discrimination against their own group, the adverse affect of stereotypes, and other items that other groups associate solely with discrimination against their own group. Unlike other groups, African Americans seem to link the concept of discrimination more directly with their organization. African Americans and Native Americans associated increased discrimination in the federal government with organizational trust, although the loading is weak, whereas Asian Americans and Hispanics (also weakly) associate it with discrimination against their group.

The final factor (Additional Obstacles Faced by Minorities) includes items suggesting that minorities face additional obstacles in their work or to their advancement simply because they are minorities. For all groups but African Americans, this factor includes items addressing organizational reluctance to promote minorities to supervisory or management positions, and to give preferential treatment to nonminorities. For African Americans, these items were associated with the broader concept of organizational trust.

Thus, while there was some similarity in the constructs underlying each racial or ethnic group's perceptions of discrimination, the specific perceptions that each group associated with each construct were different. African Americans seem to have a greater tendency than other groups to associate how they are treated personally with a more general perception of organizational fairness. Asian Americans seem to view organizational action against discrimination differently than they view organizational

support for EEO, whereas other groups saw both sets of issues in terms of organizational fairness. Asian Americans also linked stereotypes and cultural customs to discrimination against Asian Americans to a greater extent than did other groups. African Americans associated such concerns with trust in the organization.

Factors Predicting Perceptions of Discrimination

The next part of the analysis was designed to identify correlates of subjective discrimination within each group. Given the diversity among racial and ethnic groups, it also was expected that factors predicting the likelihood of individuals to perceive discrimination would differ among the groups. To test this proposition, regression equations were estimated for each group using an index composed of the three items loading on the Management Commitment factor as the dependent variable[6] (Factor 2, in Table 2). This factor is used because it was the one that all groups identified in the same way.

Each of these items was answered using a 4-point scale, ranging from "to a great extent" to "to no extent." Thus the index for each group had values ranging from a low of 3, indicating a lot of confidence in management commitment to EEO, to a high of 12, indicating no confidence in management's commitment.

Unfortunately, the hypothesis that likelihood to perceive discrimination could be predicted based on a combination of factors received only weak support. While each of the models was significant, the proportion of variance explained was low, ranging from 15% in the case of African Americans to 26% for Native Americans (Table 3). The hypothesis that the best model predicting confidence in management commitment to end discrimination would differ for each group also was supported. However, with so little of the variance explained, and with so few significant factors identified, one must exercise caution in drawing any firm conclusions from these models.

The findings suggest that all groups are influenced by the experience of having been denied a promotion for which they had applied within the last three years. However, among African Americans, nonsupervisory women appear to have less confidence in management than do men or supervisory employees, particularly if those women had not received any noncash awards (but had received cash awards), had not had a mentor, and had not had any diversity training. For Asian Americans, only being a nonsupervisor and having lost out on a promotion were statistically significant, with the latter being the more important factor. Among Hispanics, older employees in professional, administrative, or blue-collar jobs who lacked mentors were more likely to experience this form of subjective discrimination than were other employees. Native American perceptions were affected most strongly by the denial of a promotion, while not having received any cash awards and not having participated in diversity training also were important.

Thus, this analysis adds some (albeit limited) support to the suggestion that not only is there considerable diversity among minority groups, but there also is diversity within those groups. Certain characteristics, such as sex, age, and type of work, can have an impact on the likelihood that minorities will believe that management lacks a commitment to EEO, just as do certain experiences with promotions, awards, or training.

Table 3
Results of Regression Models Predicting Lack of Confidence in Management Commitment to End Discrimination

Factor	African American		Asian American		Hispanic		Native American	
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta
Denied promotion	-1.26	-.249[a]	-.955	-.190[b]	-.676	-.140[b]	-1.75	-.292[b]
Education	.022	.015	.138	.088	-.035	-.021	.017	.009
Noncash awards	-.279	-.191[a]	.122	.076	-.021	-.013	.246	.128
Mentor	-.462	-.104[b]	-.379	-.077	-1.00	-.206[b]	-.597	-.105
Diversity training	-.139	-.097[b]	-.079	-.040	-.193	-.109	-.385	-.199[c]
Age	.114	.056	.156	.084	.348	.161[b]	-.119	-.045
Sex	.481	.107[b]	.287	.057	.381	.079	.109	.019
Cash awards	.125	.079[c]	.037	.023	.037	.021	-.529	-.276[b]
Supervisory status	-.401	-.083[c]	-.747	-.162[c]	-.388	-.087	-.163	-.033
Blue Collar	.377	.055	-.823	-.141	.960	.152[c]	-.471	-.073
Clerical	.024	.004	-1.13	-.148	.753	.112	1.44	.165
Professional/ Administrative job	.063	.014	.222	.046	1.22	.245[b]	.536	.090
Constant	10.250		8.498		7.762		12.828	
R^2	.15		.13		.16		.26	

Notes:

All models were significant at the $p < .01$ level.
[a] $p < .001$; [b] $p < .01$; [c] $p < .05$.

Source:

1993 Merit Systems Protection Board survey of federal employees.

Conclusion

Any analysis of the government's success in achieving a representative bureaucracy will be incomplete without some assurance that citizens, and especially bureaucrats themselves, have confidence in the government as an employer committed to ending discrimination. When these perceptions are voiced in the popular press (Manegold, 1994; Jennings, 1993; Shen, 1993) the loss of credibility may extend to citizens as a whole. In addition, perceptions of discrimination often lead to turnover, lawsuits, impaired health, and other problems (James, Lovato, & Cropanzano, 1994). Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of such perceptions, the situations under which they are most likely to arise, and what steps may be taken to mitigate them.

This analysis has provided at least some preliminary indications of how members of minority groups view discrimination, and also that the underlying structure of such perceptions varies from group to group. While perceptions of discrimination break out into five or six different constructs related to trust in the organization, management's commitment to end discrimination, discrimination against one's own racial or ethnic group, the progress made by minorities in government, and additional obstacles faced by minorities trying to succeed in federal agencies, the specific manner in which these factors are constructed varies among racial/ethnic groups.

For example, for most minority groups the existence of subtle and flagrant discrimination forms a distinct construct separate from their confidence in organizational procedures. But for African Americans, subtle barriers are something different than flagrant discrimination, and the latter is related more closely to their confidence in their own organization. There is also some evidence that in thinking about discrimination, members of minority groups consider themselves as members of their own racial or ethnic group in ways different than how they think of themselves as "minorities" in general.

It is also important to understand that strategies for increasing the credibility of federal agencies as employers committed to EEO won't necessarily be effective for all groups. While this survey apparently was unable to measure adequately all factors that might account for differences in perceptions of discrimination, the data suggest that there are some work-related factors that agencies may be able to influence to increase employees' confidence that management is committed to EEO. It is important to understand, however, that strategies that are effective for one group may not be as effective for other groups. For example, while diversity training may increase Native-American and African-American confidence in management, there is no evidence that it has an impact on the perceptions of Hispanics or Asian Americans. Receiving even noncash awards apparently can increase the likelihood that African Americans will view management's commitment to EEO positively, but it is not clear that awards of any kind affect other groups' perceptions.

The road is a long one from formal passage of laws prohibiting discrimination to employee confidence that discrimination in fact has been eradicated. To achieve this ultimate step requires not only ensuring that discriminatory practices no longer exist, but that employees are confident the government is free from discrimination. To achieve that end, the nature, dimensions, and correlates of perceptions must be understood. At a minimum, it is important for organizations to understand that not all racial and ethnic groups think about discrimination in the same way. It is also important to understand the extent to which perceptions of discrimination are tied to confidence in the organization, which employees are most likely to perceive discrimination, and what the organization can do to mitigate such perceptions.

Future research should attempt to understand further perceptions of discrimination and the impact that these diverse perceptions have on the goals of eliminating discrimination and achieving a representative bureaucracy. This exploratory study has suggested that perceptions of discrimination are part of a multipart belief system that varies among minority groups. Greater efforts to understand the situations that are likely to trigger the various categories of perceptions can go a long way toward achieving the legitimacy sought from a civil service that "looks like America."

***

Katherine C. Naff is a senior research analyst with the United States Merit Systems Protection Board. She also is a Ph.D. candidate at Georgetown University, where she is completing her dissertation, entitled *Prospects for Achieving a Representative Federal Bureaucracy*.

Notes:

Data used in this article will be available from the National Archives Center for Electronic Records, in Washington, DC, in early 1996.

I would like to thank Diana Owen and Sue Thomas, as well as some anonymous reviewers, for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

[1] Federal employees were asked to self-identify by choosing one of the official categories for race/national origin as specified by the Office of Management and Budget (Black, not of Hispanic origin; Hispanic; Asian American/Pacific Islander; Native American; or White, not of Hispanic origin). In this paper, Asian American/Pacific Islander is abbreviated as Asian American. .

[2] While most items referred to discrimination in general, or to minorities in general, some items were specific to particular groups. All respondents were asked whether they believed there was discrimination against African-American men, African-American women, Hispanic men, etc. Since this analysis was designed to examine the structure of perceptions of each group separately, only the items specific to the group being analyzed were included in the analysis for that group. In other words, only items asking about discrimination toward minorities in general, and items asking specifically about Asian Americans, were included in the analysis of Asian-American responses.

[3] The analyses weighted the data so that responses reflect the population by race, agency, grade level, and occupational category. Although a response rate of 60% is not enough to rule out the existence of response bias, a comparison of demographic characteristics of respondents to those in the federal civilian population as a whole suggests that the respondents were representative by pay plan, gender, amount of experience, education, and age.

[4] In this table, survey items are paraphrased to conserve space. Exact item wording is available from the author upon request.

[5] Where "your RNO group" appears in brackets, separate items on the survey asked about each minority (or Race/National Origin) group separately (see note 2).

[6] The values of Cronbach's alpha for each group were above .85, indicating that the index was a reliable measure of this concept.

References

Adams, J. P., Jr., & Dressler, W. W. (1988). Perceptions of injustice in a black community: Dimensions and variation. *Human Relations, 41*, 753–767.

Affigne, A. D., Avalos, M., & Alfred, G. R. (1994). *Race and politics in the Americas.* Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1–4, 1994.

Alderfer, C. P., Alderfer, C. J., Tucker, L., & Tucker, R. (1980). Diagnosing race relations in management. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 16*, 135–166.

Beyer, J. M., Stevens, J. M., & Trice, H. M. (1980). Predicting how federal managers perceive criteria used for their promotion. *Public Administration Review, 40*, 55–66.

Cox, T., Jr. (1993). *Cultural diversity in organizations.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett–Koehler Publishers.

Crosby, F. (1984). The denial of personal discrimination. *American Behavioral Scientist, 27*, 371–386.

Duke, L. (1994, March 3). Blacks, Asians, Latinos cite prejudice by whites for limited opportunity. *The Washington Post*, p. A9.

Fernandez, J. P. (1981). *Racism and sexism in corporate life.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Fine, M. G., Johnson, F. L., & Ryan, M. S. (1990). Cultural diversity in the workplace. *Public Personnel Management, 19*, 305–319.

Green, V. (1970). The confrontation of diversity within the black community. *Human Organization, 29*, 267–272.

Hopkins, A. (1980). Perceptions of employment discrimination in the public sector. *Public Administration Review, 40*, 131–137.

Hughes, G. F. (1991–92). A categorized workforce. *The Bureaucrat: The Journal for Public Managers, 20*, 23–26.

James, K., Lovato, C., & Cropanzano, R. (1994). Correlational and known-group comparison validation of a workplace prejudice/discrimination inventory. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 24*, 1573–1592.

Jennings, V. T. (1993, August 10). Blacks describe how bias hurt their careers at NIH. *The Washington Post*, p. A1.

Kellough, J. E. (1989). The 1978 civil service reform and federal equal employment opportunity. *American Review of Public Administration, 19*, 313–324.

Kellough, J. E., & Kay, S. A. (1986). Affirmative action in the federal bureaucracy: An impact assessment. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 6*, 1–13.

Kim, P. S. (1993). Racial integration in the American federal government with special reference to Asian-Americans. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 13*, 52–66.

Kingsley, J. D. (1944). *Representative bureaucracy: An interpretation of the British civil service.* Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch Press.

Krislov, S. (1967). *The negro in federal employment.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Krislov, S. (1974). *Representative bureaucracy.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Krislov, S., & Rosenbloom, D. H. (1981). *Representative bureaucracy and the American political system.* New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.

Levitan, D. M. (1946). The responsibility of administrative officials in a democratic society. *Political Science Quarterly, 61,* 562–598.

Lewis, G. B. (1988). Progress toward racial and sexual equality in the federal civil service? *Public Administration Review, 48,* 700–707.

Long, N. E. (1952). Bureaucracy and constitutionalism. *American Political Science Review, 46,* 808–818.

Manegold, C. S. (1994, February 25). Judge approves a class action suit by blacks at the Immigration Service. *The New York Times,* p. A12.

Moch, M. K. (1980). Racial differences in job satisfaction: Testing four common explanations. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 65,* 299–306.

Murray, S., Terry, L. D., Washington, C. A., & Keller, L. F. (1994). The role demands and dilemmas of minority public administrators: The Herbert thesis revisited. *Public Administration Review, 54,* 409–417.

Nachmias, D., & Rosenbloom, D. H. (1973). Measuring bureaucratic representation and integration. *Public Administration Review, 33,* 590–597.

Pachon, H. P. (1988). Hispanic underrepresentation in the federal bureaucracy: The missing link in the policy process. In F. C. Garcia (Ed.), *Latinos and the political system* (pp. 306–313). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Page, P. (1994). African-Americans in executive branch agencies. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 14,* 24–51.

Pomerleau, R. (1994). A desideratum for managing the diverse workplace. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 14,* 85–100.

Rubaii–Barrett, N., & Beck, A. C. (1993). Minorities in the majority: Implications for managing cultural diversity. *Public Personnel Management, 22,* 503–521.

Schuman, H., & Hatchett, S. (1974). *Black racial attitudes: Trends and complexities.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Shen, F. (1993, November 11). NSA behind in hiring minorities. *The Washington Post,* p. J2.

Sigelman, L., & Welch, S. (1991). *Black Americans' views of racial inequality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sisneros, A. (1992). Hispanics in the Senior Executive Service: Continuity and change in the decade 1980–1990. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 12,* 5–25.

Smith, A. W. (1987). Problems and progress in the measurement of black public opinion. *American Behavioral Scientist, 30,* 441–455.

Verba, S., & Orren, G. R. (1985). *Equality in America.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zuckerman, M. (1990). Some dubious premises in research and theory on racial differences. *American Psychologist, 45,* 1297–1303.

Appendix
Survey Items Included As Independent Variables in Model Predicting Likelihood to Perceive Lack of Management Commitment to End Discrimination

---

Denied promotion	Have you applied for a competitive promotion in the last 3 years for which you were not selected? Responses coded Yes (1) or No (2).
Education	What level of education have you completed? Coded from less than high school (1) to doctorate (9).
Noncash awards and cash awards	During the last 3 years, how many cash and noncash awards have you received? Coded none (1) to more than 3 (5).
Mentor	Please respond to the following statements concerning mentors. Mentors are more experienced individuals who formally or informally help guide or counsel lower-graded employees about their careers. Responses coded as I have or have had at least one mentor (1) or have not had (0).
Diversity training	How much training have you received in the last year on cultural diversity or similar EEO-related topics? Coded none (1) to more than 5 days (6).
Age	How old are you? Coded in ranges from under 20 to 65 or older.
Sex	Are you male (1), or female (2)?
Supervisory status	Are you a nonsupervisor (1); first-level supervisor (2); or second-level (or higher) supervisor/manager (3)?
Blue collar	What is the pay plan of your current position? Coded 1 for wage grade; 0 for nonwage grade.
Clerical*	Job classification series coded as a clerical occupation (1) or not clerical (0).
Professional/ Administrative*	Job classification series. Coded as professional or administrative (1) or not (0).

Note:
  * Omitted category was technical classification of job series.