

# **Too Rich For Diversity: Socioeconomic Status Influences Multifaceted Person Perception of Latino Targets**

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*Understanding racial categorization processes has implications for how affirmative action policies are implemented. Two studies examined how socioeconomic status (SES) functions to predict support for application of affirmative action and other perceptions of Latino targets. SES emerged as a powerful predictor, over and above the influence of ancestry, on person perception (minority categorization, sociocultural cues) and support for affirmative action among both White (Studies 1 and 2) and minority (Study 2) perceivers. In conjunction with ancestry, SES influenced sociocultural impressions, such as perceptions of discrimination (Study 1 and Study 2) and cultural practices (Study 2), which informed support for implementation of affirmative action policies. Furthermore, the joint influence of SES and ancestry on affirmative action policies persisted even when controlling for general attitudes towards affirmative action (Study 2). Results suggest that SES is an important factor in person perception, and that perceptions of discrimination play a strong role in how “deserving” a target is of affirmative action.*

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Too Rich For Diversity: Socioeconomic Status Influences Sociocultural Impressions of Latino Targets

Affirmative action policies, or “voluntary and mandatory efforts undertaken by federal, state, and local governments; private employers; and schools to combat discrimination and to promote equal opportunity in education and employment for all” (*Affirmative action: Who benefits?*, 1996), have been used at the institutional level to promote diversity, decrease inequality, and redress the historical underrepresentation and devaluation that has plagued many minority groups in the United States. Though these policies have been used since 1961, the form, function, and implementation of affirmative action is varied, and these policies continue to incite debate at all levels of society decades later (Liptak, 2014). Despite these reservations, affirmative action policies are widely used and successful at increasing the representation of racial and ethnic minorities (minorities<sup>1</sup>) in education, government, and business (for a review, see Crosby & Clayton, 2001; Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003; Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006). Discussion around these policies, and the policies themselves, rest on the assumptions that all minorities are easily distinguishable, and that all individuals from a minority group will be categorized in their respective minority group to the same degree. However, the burgeoning multiracial and multi-ethnic populations, coupled with an increased focus on intersectional identities, raises important questions about whom may be eligible for affirmative action policies. Specifically, these questions concern whom is considered minority enough to be benefit from affirmative action policies that are in place to promote the equality of racial and ethnic minorities. Thus, an exploration into the minority categorization process is important in both basic and applied contexts.

### What Makes Someone a Minority?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the response to this question is quite complicated, and that racial cues such as ancestry and enactment can inform racial categorization. For example, during the 2008 U.S. presidential election cycle, many media and public sources questioned if Barack Obama, who has biracial White/Black ancestry, was “too White” to be considered as the nation’s first Black

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper the term “minority” is used to jointly denote ethnic and/or racial minorities. Race is a term often used to describe characteristics, such as skin color, that can be used to differentiate groups who share cultural similarities. Ethnicity is a term generally used to describe these groups who share cultural similarities. There no agreement about whether a Latino identity constitutes a racial or ethnic identity, or both (Sanchez, Shih, & Wilton, 2014). Thus, though ethnicity and race refer to two separate aspects of identity, in the context of perceiver categorization, and most especially in the context of Latino targets, the literature benefits from considering them in tandem.

president. This line of questioning was further complicated due to discussions of the ways in which Obama either enacted Black identity, such as by explicitly self-identifying as Black, or did not enact Black identity, such as through high academic achievement that is often at odds with Black stereotypes (Gaither, Wilton, & Young, 2013; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Similarly, public figures have been thought of as “not Latino enough” for minority hires, despite their heritage, due to their inability to speak Spanish (Wedge, 2012). These situations highlight the complicated nature of perceiving minority status, specifically when considering the visibility of minority individuals in public office and education.

Research supports a multifaceted and intersectional view of minority categorization in everyday contexts. In contrast to the concept of swift and definite racial and ethnic categorization, work on biracial and ambiguous targets suggests that the process of racial and ethnic categorization can be deliberate (Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008; Sanchez, Good, & Chavez, 2011) and can incorporate racial/ethnic enactment, such as racial identity (Young, Sanchez, & Wilton, 2013). In addition, work on intersectional identities suggests that aspects of an individual that are not directly related to their race or ethnic identities, such as gender, can interact with their race/ethnic identities to influence person perception (Carpinella, Chen, Hamilton, & Johnson, 2015; Goff, Thomas, & Jackson, 2008; Johnson, Freeman, & Pauker, 2012). Taken together, this evidence suggests that perceivers can and do use multiple cues when engaging in racial/ethnic group categorization. Furthermore, this work demonstrates that even cues that are not directly related to racial/ethnic group membership can influence minority categorization.

The current research focuses on the role of socioeconomic status (SES), a cue entwined in minority group stereotypes (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), in multifaceted person perception and affirmative action support. Though substantial research demonstrates the role of ancestry in both person perception (e.g., Ho, Sidanius, Cuddy, & Banaji, 2013; Ho, Sidanius, Levin, & Banaji, 2011; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008) and affirmative action policy support (e.g., Sanchez & Bonam, 2009; Sanchez et al., 2011; Wilton, Sanchez, & Chavez, 2013), less is known about how SES operates in this process. However, SES may be particularly relevant to decisions to use affirmative action policies as low SES is associated with low academic achievement and curtailed professional opportunities. Additionally, some scholars argue that SES, and not racial or ethnic identity, should be the primary determinant in affirmative action allocation (Darity, Deshpande, & Weisskopf, 2011; Sander, 1997). Thus, this research utilized an intersectional perspective to explore the impact of socioeconomic cues and ancestry in minority categorization and affirmative action allocation processes.

### **SES, Minority Identity, and Affirmative Action**

The content of cultural stereotypes about Latinos overlaps with cultural stereotypes about low SES groups. For example Latinos, poor Blacks, poor Whites, and welfare recipients share similar stereotype content (Fiske et al., 2002). Particularly relevant to this analysis, in a free response listing of current cultural stereotypes about Latinos, attributes related to SES, such as “poor” and “uneducated” were common, with “poor” listed the most frequently of all attributes (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). Thus, having low SES is seen as prototypical of Latino groups.

Though it is unclear if the relationship between SES and minority categorization is due to racist stereotyping, classist stereotyping, or an intersection of stereotypes (for an exploration of this matter with Black targets, see Weeks & Lupfer, 2004), SES and minority status have been shown to mutually influence perceptions of the other. That is, SES can influence perceptions of minority status, and minority status can influence perceptions of SES. One study using a longitudinal, nationally representative sample demonstrated that not only did perceiver’s change their minority categorizations of an individual over time, but these categorization switches were influenced by SES (Penner & Saperstein, 2008). For example, experiencing a marker of low SES (e.g., incarceration, living below the poverty line) decreased the chance that an individual would be categorized as White, even if that same individual had been perceived as White the previous year. The visual signal of high (e.g., suit) or low SES attire (e.g., janitor uniform) has also been shown to increase categorization of visually ambiguous individuals as White or Black, respectively (Freeman, Penner, Saperstein, Scheutz, & Ambady, 2011). Conversely, skin color has also been shown to have a marginal influence on perceptions of SES, such that Latinos with darker skin were seen as lower in SES than Latinos with lighter skin (Wilton et al., 2013).

SES may also cue perceptions related to racial categorization, such as discrimination and cultural practice (e.g., Spanish fluency). In keeping with SES as a cultural stereotype cue, SES should also influence these perceptions. Indeed, previous research has shown a link between the cultural practice of Spanish fluency and racial identification and categorization in Latino targets (Sanchez & Chavez, 2010; Wilton et al., 2013). Despite this close relationship between minority stereotypes and socioeconomic status (Fiske et al., 2002; Telles, 2002), little research has systematically attempted to explore the effect of SES cues in racial categorization and affirmative action processes (see Sanchez & Garcia, 2012).

SES may also be an important cue in decision making for affirmative action policies that are specifically used to offset historical disadvantage. Prior work suggests that prototypically, or aligning with cultural stereotypes, can have a strong impact on support for using affirmative action policies (e.g., Good, Sanchez, & Chavez, 2013; Sanchez & Chavez, 2010; Sanchez et al., 2011). Given the actual

and perceived association of racial and ethnic minority status with low SES (Fiske et al., 2002; Penner & Saperstein, 2008; Wilton et al., 2013), SES should function as a prototype cue. Indeed, low SES minorities face intersectional discrimination due to both their ethnic minority status and their socioeconomic status (Fuller-Rowell, Evans, & Ong, 2012). For instance, Latino defendants with lower SES receive harsher punishments than Latino defendants with higher SES (Esqueda, Espinoza, & Culhane, 2008).

Through the cultural perceptions of discrimination and cultural practice, which have emerged as considerations in the application of affirmative action, SES may also indirectly influence affirmative action implementation. For example, perceptions of discrimination are tied to greater support of using affirmative action policies for Black college applicants (Good, Sanchez, & Chavez, 2013; Sanchez et al., 2011), and cultural practices such as Spanish fluency have been shown to increase support for use of affirmative action policies for individual Latino targets (Sanchez & Chavez, 2010; Wilton et al., 2013).

Despite the potential importance of SES in person perception, the joint role of socioeconomic status and ancestry remains underexplored in sociocultural impression formation and support for the use of affirmative action policies. The current research investigated how the cues of socioeconomic status and ancestry jointly impact support for the use of affirmative action policies for individual Latino targets directly and indirectly through the sociocultural impressions of perceived discrimination and cultural practice.

## Current Study

In two studies, we demonstrated the impact of SES cues and ancestry (biethnic, Latino/White; monoethnic, Latino<sup>2</sup>) in perceptions of Latino targets and the implementation of affirmative action policies. By experimentally examining the joint impact of ancestry and SES cues revealed in an academic context, a context where affirmative action policies are relevant, the current research expanded upon previous work in three ways.

First, we investigated the unexplored tandem roles of ancestry and SES in racial categorization of Latino targets in both White (Study 1) and minority (Study 2) perceivers. When considering ancestry information in minority categorization, perceivers categorize biracial individuals as *more* minority than White (Ho et al., 2011; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008), while simultaneously considering

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<sup>2</sup> The terms monoethnic and biethnic are used to reflect the complex nature of a Latino identity or label. Specifically, referring to ancestry as being reflected by parental ethnicity is in keeping with Latino's unclear status as a racial identity, and Markus and Moya's (2010) definition of ethnicity as, "a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that allows people to identify, or be identified, with groupings of people on the basis of presumed, and usually claimed commonalities, including [ . . . ] ancestry group" (p. 22)

people with biracial ancestry as *less* minority than individuals with monoracial ancestry (Good et al., 2013; Sanchez & Bonam, 2009; Sanchez et al., 2011). Socioeconomic status, independent of ancestry information, has been shown to influence minority categorization (Penner & Saperstein, 2008). Thus, we hypothesized that individuals with monoethnic ancestry will be seen as more Latino than individuals with biethnic ancestry (H1a). Similarly, SES, in addition to ancestry, is expected to serve as a cue that influences the minority categorization of Latino targets. Specifically, targets with lower SES would be perceived as more prototypically Latino than higher SES targets (H1b). As there is minimal extant research supporting SES as both an additive (Penner & Saperstein, 2008) and disambiguating (Freeman et al., 2011) cue, we did not have specific predictions about this pattern of results.

Second, we explored if SES cues multifaceted aspects of person perception related to affirmative action policy decisions such as discrimination (Study 1 and Study 2) and cultural practices (e.g., Spanish fluency, Study 2). Perceived experiences of discrimination and engagement in cultural practice would be greater for lower SES targets compared to higher SES targets (H2). Third, we tested if, beyond the influence of ancestry, SES directly and indirectly (Study 1 and Study 2) cues affirmative action implementation. Specifically, we predicted that SES will directly influence distribution of minority benefits. That is, lower SES targets would receive more support for affirmative action than higher SES targets (H3a). In keeping with previous research, perceivers would be more supportive of using affirmative action policies to benefit monoethnic than biethnic targets. We further predicted that SES would indirectly cue support for use of affirmative action policies through perceived experiences of discrimination and cultural practice (H3b).

## Study 1

In Study 1 we tested the influence of SES and ancestry on White perceiver's minority categorization, perceived experiences of discrimination, and use of affirmative action for Latino targets. In keeping with the general hypotheses for this paper, the hypotheses tailored for Study 1 were as follows:

*H1a: Targets with monoethnic ancestry would be perceived as more Latino than targets with biethnic ancestry.*

*H1b: Targets with lower SES would be perceived as more Latino than higher SES targets.*

*H2: Targets with lower SES would have more perceived experiences of discrimination compared to higher SES targets.*

*H3a: There would be a direct effect of SES on implementation of affirmative action such that more support for use of affirmative action policies will be present for lower SES targets than higher SES targets.*

*H3b: Lower SES would also indirectly cue more support for use of affirmative action policies through higher perceived experiences of discrimination.*

## Method

*Participants.* One hundred fifteen White participants (58.3% Female,  $M$  age = 18.57,  $SD$  = 1.22) enrolled in a large state university participated in this experiment in exchange for research credit.

## Measures and Materials

*Stimuli.* Participants were instructed to read a brief excerpt from a draft of a college application essay. This essay contained a few spelling errors and typos to increase believability and to leave room for variation in the evaluation (see the Appendix). In the essay, the target identified himself/herself (gender is not specified) as Latino, as having either monoethnic (both parents minority) or biethnic (one parent Latino, one parent White) ancestry. The applicant indicated his/her socioeconomic status by indicating that his/her parents went to college and he/she grew up in a wealthy neighborhood (higher SES/middle class) or his/her parents did not go to college and he/she grew up in a poor neighborhood (lower SES/working class).

*Categorization.* Participants indicated on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) the extent to which they considered the target to be White or Latino using four items, two measuring minority categorization, and two measuring White categorization. The items were as follows: “To what extent do you think of the applicant as (Latino; White)?” and “To what extent do you view this applicant as (Latino; White)?” (Sanchez et al., 2011). Subtracting minority categorization from White categorization created a relative measure of the perceivers’ categorization of the target such that higher scores reflected greater White categorization.

*Perceptions of discrimination.* Perceived experiences of discrimination was measured using a three-item scale using a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (Sanchez et al., 2011). These three items were, “In his lifetime, this student has likely been discriminated against”; “This student has likely experienced a lot of racial discrimination”; and “This student encounters a lot of racial prejudice” ( $\alpha$  = .96).

**Table 1.** Study 1 Means Presented by Ancestry and SES

		Racial Categorization M (SE)	Discrimination M (SE)	Affirmative Action M (SE)
Ancestry	Monoracial	-3.10 (0.17)	3.29 (0.19)	3.97 (0.21)
	Biracial	-0.25 (0.16)	3.27 (0.20)	4.18 (0.21)
	<i>F</i>	149.59***	0.003	0.465
	$\eta^2_p$	.59	.00	.00
SES	Middle Class	-1.27 (0.16)	2.76 (0.19)	3.86 (0.20)
	Working Class	-2.08 (0.17)	3.80 (0.20)	4.29 (0.22)
	<i>F</i>	12.06**	14.20***	2.12
	$\eta^2_p$	.11	.12	.01

*Note.* Racial categorization had a range from -4 (very much Latino/not at all White) to 4 (not at all Latino/very much White), all other measures had a range from 1 to 7. No interaction effects approached significance. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

*Implementation of affirmative action policies.* Participants indicated their support for the use of affirmative action policies for the target, in this case a merit scholarship to be awarded to ethnic minority students, on a three item scale with anchors of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Items were, “This student is eligible for a Diversity Scholarship”; “This student should be considered for a Diversity Scholarship”; and “I think this student should receive a Diversity Scholarship” ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

*Procedure.* Participants read one of four possible applicant essays in a 2 (Ancestry: biethnic White/Latino or monoethnic Latino) x 2: (SES: low/working class or high/middle class) design. Participants were told they would read a portion of a college application essay in order to answer several questions about what criteria are important to students for college admissions. They were instructed to form impressions of the writer based on the essay, and were told that they would be asked to recall details of the essay later in the session. Interspersed with several filler items, participants responded to the measures described previously.

## Results

For all Study 1 variables, means and standard deviations are presented by applicant ancestry and SES (Table 1), and correlations are presented by applicant SES (Table 2). We conducted individual 2 (Ancestry: monoethnic or biethnic) X 2 (SES: middle class or working class) Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) to test the influence of SES and ancestry on categorization (H1a, H1b), perceived experiences of discrimination (H2), and use of affirmative action policies (H3a). *F* values and effect sizes for the main effects of Ancestry and SES are indicated in Table 1. To test if the influence of SES on use of affirmative action policies



**Table 2.** Zero-Order Correlations for All Study 1 Variables

	1	2	3
1. Racial Categorization	–	–.39**	–.20
2. Perceived Discrimination	–.03	–	.35**
3. Affirmative Action	.31*	.29*	–

*Note.* Correlations for middle class targets are above the diagonal, working class targets are below. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

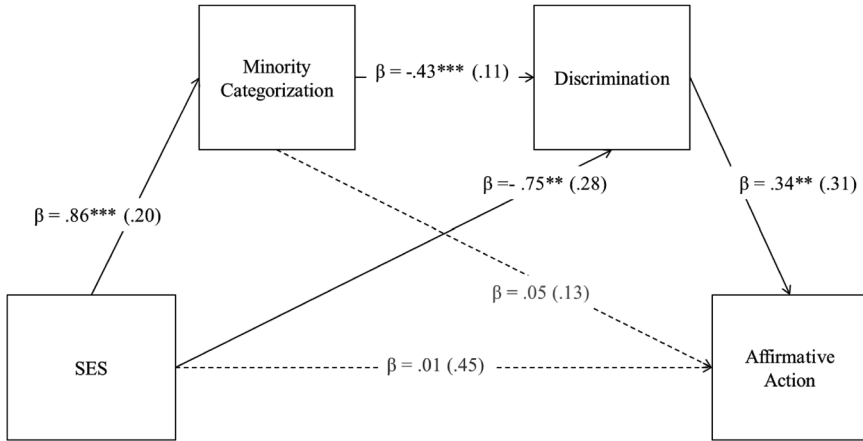
is explained by changes in sociocultural impressions (perceived experiences of discrimination), we turned to mediation analysis (H3b).

*Categorization.* Analyses supported H1a and H1b. In keeping with previous research on ancestry and minority categorization, there was a main effect of ancestry such that Latino targets with two Latino parents were seen as more Latino than targets with one White and one Latino parent (H1a). There was also a main effect of SES (See Table 1). Targets with working class cues were seen as more Latino than targets with middle class cues (H1b). The interaction between ancestry and SES status was nonsignificant,  $F = 0.21$ ,  $p = .65$ , suggesting that the effects of ancestry and SES are additive.

*Perceptions of discrimination.* A main effect for SES emerged on discrimination. Working class targets were seen as more discriminated against than middle class targets, supporting H2. Though no prediction was made, it is surprising to note that there was no main effect of ancestry on perceptions of discrimination. The interaction between ancestry and SES was also nonsignificant,  $F = 1.25$ ,  $p = .27$ .

*Implementation of affirmative action policies.* Hypotheses 3a was not supported by analyses, as there were no significant effects of either ancestry or SES on awarding a diversity scholarship. Similarly, the interaction between ancestry and SES was also nonsignificant. However, correlational analysis (see Table 2) and a priori hypotheses lent support to SES having an indirect effect on use of affirmative action policy, so the proposed mediation analysis was conducted (Hayes, 2009).

*Mediation analysis.* A bootstrapped serial mediation was set up to explore whether SES indirectly influenced use of affirmative action policies by affecting categorization and perceived experiences of discrimination using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012). Specifically, we regressed support for use of affirmative action policies (DV) on SES (IV) in the PROCESS program, with categorization and



**Fig. 1.** Serial mediation showing direct and indirect paths between SES and affirmative action support controlling for ancestry in Study 1. Nonsignificant paths are indicated by dashed lines. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

perceived experiences of discrimination entered as the first and second serial mediators (see Figure 1). As there was a main effect of ancestry in ANOVA analysis, ancestry was entered as a covariate in the model. As predicted SES had a significant indirect effect of SES on diversity awards through categorization and discrimination, 95% CI =  $-0.68, -0.05$ . Both the complete hypothesized pathway (i.e., SES  $\rightarrow$  categorization  $\rightarrow$  discrimination  $\rightarrow$  affirmative action), 95% CI =  $-0.29, -0.05$ , and a shortened pathway (i.e., SES  $\rightarrow$  discrimination  $\rightarrow$  affirmative action), 95% CI =  $-0.59, -0.07$ , represented significant indirect effects. This suggested that both categorization and perceived experiences of discrimination mediated the relationship between SES and use of affirmative action policies over and above the impact of ancestry, however categorization did not, on its own, mediate this relationship. An alternate model investigating perceived experiences of discrimination as the first mediator was tested, and the key pathway (i.e., SES  $\rightarrow$  discrimination  $\rightarrow$  categorization  $\rightarrow$  affirmative action) was not significant, 95% CI =  $-0.04, 0.15$ . Path estimates for the hypothesized model are presented in Figure 1.

*Ancillary mediation analysis.* A secondary bootstrapped serial mediation was set up to theoretically replicate and extend findings from previous work suggesting that ancestry indirectly influenced use of affirmative action policies by impacting categorization and perceived experiences of discrimination (Sanchez et al., 2011). This model was identical to the previous mediation analysis, with the exception that ancestry was the predictor while controlling for SES. The total indirect effect of ancestry was not significant, 95% CI =  $-0.47, 1.06$ . However, individual

indirect pathways were significant in ways consistent with previous research. Both the complete serial mediation pathway (i.e., ancestry → categorization → discrimination → affirmative action), 95% CI =  $-0.82, -0.22$ , and a shortened pathway (i.e., ancestry → discrimination → affirmative action), 95% CI =  $.17, .92$ , represented significant indirect effects. As this mediation was not hypothesized and the total indirect effect was nonsignificant, this model will not be discussed further.

## Discussion

In summary, working class targets were seen as more Latino (supporting H1b), and as having more experiences of discrimination (supporting H2). However, SES cues had only an indirect effect on use of affirmative action policies (partially supporting H3a, supporting H3b). SES emerged as a strong influence on all of these sociocultural impressions, acting above and beyond the influence of ancestry. Indeed, in the case of categorization, SES acted as an additive cue to ancestry. Both monoethnic and biethnic Latino individuals who were middle class were seen as less Latino than their working class counterparts. SES also independently predicted perceived experiences of discrimination, while ancestry did not. Though ancestry has previously influenced perceived experiences of discrimination in Black targets (Good et al., 2013), it is possible that the ancestry prototype for Latino Americans is not as strong as the prototype for Black Americans. Surprisingly, SES did not have a direct effect on support for use of affirmative action policies. This may be due to the framing of affirmative action policies as a diversity scholarship. However, the hypothesized significant indirect relationship was found, such that working class targets received more support for use of affirmative action policy than middle class targets through two pathways. The relationship between SES and affirmative action was mediated by both categorization and perceived experiences of discrimination, though only discrimination emerged as an independent (i.e. nonserial) mediator. This suggests that while categorization links SES status to discrimination, it may not be a strong predictor in the pathway between SES and use of affirmative action.

## Study 2

Study 2 aimed to replicate and extend Study 1, so the substance of all hypotheses is similar (see Current Study for more details). However Study 2 expanded on Study 1 in three ways. First, to extend the results from Study 1 beyond majority (White) perceivers, we included both majority and minority perceivers in Study 2. Research on the impact of perceiver race/ethnicity on Latino categorization and sociocultural impressions has been mixed (Wilton et al., 2013), and we had no specific predictions regarding how participant race would influence results. However, we hoped to replicate the findings from Study 1 in a diverse sample.

Second, we adjusted the main outcome to directly address affirmative action policy support for the candidate, and to control for general attitudes towards affirmative action. Affirmative action in Study 1 was conceptualized as a scholarship, and we wanted to investigate if effects would hold in another domain, specifically that of affirmative action in an admission context. However, many individuals have preexisting attitudes towards affirmative action in the admissions process. Previous research has shown that general support for affirmative action impacts both perceptions of discrimination experiences and use of affirmative action for specific targets (Sanchez et al., 2011). In order to control for previous attitudes towards affirmative action, we collected a pre-experimental measure of attitudes towards affirmative action (ATAA). Finally, we added a measure to investigate another important sociocultural impression, the formation of cultural practice impressions. The cultural practice of speaking Spanish is an important marker of Latino prototypicality for both perceivers (Wilton et al., 2013) and individual's self-identity (Sanchez & Chavez, 2010). Furthermore, for monoethnic Latino applicants, professing Spanish speaking proficiency caused perceivers to view them as more appropriate recipients for affirmative action (Sanchez & Chavez, 2010). This may be due to both perceptions of cultural engagement as well as perceptions of discrimination experiences due to language ability. Thus, we hypothesized that SES will cue categorization, which will be linked to the cultural practice of Spanish fluency, which in turn will influence perceptions of discrimination and support for the use of affirmative action. In line with the general hypotheses for this paper, the hypotheses tailored for Study 2 were as follows:

*H1a: Targets with monoethnic ancestry would be perceived as more Latino than targets with biethnic ancestry.*

*H1b: Targets with lower SES would be perceived as more Latino than higher SES targets.*

*H2: Targets with lower SES would have more perceived experiences of discrimination and higher cultural practice compared to higher SES targets.*

*H3a: There would be a direct effect of SES on use of affirmative action such that more support for use of affirmative action policies would be present for lower SES targets than higher SES targets.*

*H3b: SES would also indirectly effect support for use of affirmative action policies through the sociocultural impressions of categorization, cultural practice, and perceived experiences of discrimination.*

## **Method**

*Participants.* 139 self-identified monoracial non-Latino participants (39.6% Female,  $M$  age = 19.37,  $SD$  = 2.40) participated in this experiment in exchange for course credit. In keeping with the diversity of the student body, 61.2% identified

as White, 25.9% identified as Asian, and 12.9% identified as African American. For analysis purposes individuals were coded as either White or minority.

## Measures and Materials

*Stimuli.* Participants read the brief essay excerpts from Study 1.

*Attitudes toward affirmative action.* The six-item ATAA was used to measure general attitudes towards affirmative action (Kravitz & Platanina, 1993). Participants responded using a seven-point scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Sample items include, “Affirmative Action is a good policy” and “Employees should be actively involved in attempts to improve the affirmative action conditions at their place of employment” ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

*Categorization.* Latino categorization was measured using the scale reported in Study 1. Recall that higher scores reflect less minority categorization.

*Cultural practice.* Relative language fluency was used to measure target engagement in cultural practices. Participants indicated their perceptions of the language the applicant spoke using a five-item scale. Participants responded using a five-point scale from “only Spanish language” to “only English language”; scale reliability was good ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Sample items from this scale are, “In general what language(s) do you think the applicant speaks”; “In what language(s) do you think the applicant thinks”; and “In what language(s) are the TV programs the applicant usually listens to.” Higher scores reflect lower engagement in cultural practice.

*Perceptions of discrimination.* Perceptions of experienced discrimination were measured using the scale reported in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

*Use of affirmative action policies.* Participants indicated support for the use of affirmative action to support the candidate’s admission to the university on a three item scale with anchors of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Items were, “To what extent would you support the use of affirmative action to help this applicant get into the University?”; “To what extent would you encourage the University to use affirmative action to help this applicant get into the University?”; and “To what extent would you want the University to use affirmative action to help this applicant get into University?” ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

*Procedure.* ATAA was collected online during a larger prescreen survey taken before coming into the lab. When arriving at the lab participants were directed into a private cubicle where they completed the experimental task on a computer. Participants read one of the four applicant essays used in Study 1.

Participants responded to the measures of categorization, sociocultural impressions, and support for affirmative action for this applicant.

## Results

*Preliminary analysis.* For all Study 2 variables, means and standard deviations are presented by applicant ancestry and SES (Table 3), and correlations are presented by applicant SES (Table 4). Preliminary analysis suggested that race of participant did not have any main or interaction effects on outcome variables, with the exception of support for use of affirmative action (see the Use of affirmative action policies section in the results for more details). The addition of participant race and ATAA did not substantially change results, however to best mirror the proposed mediation model all reported Study 2 analyses include participant race and ATAA as covariates. We conducted individual 2 (Ancestry: monoethnic or biethnic) X 2 (SES: high/middle class or low/working class) Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) to test the influence of ancestry and SES on categorization (H1a, H1b), perceived experiences of discrimination and cultural practice (H2), and use of affirmative action policies (H3a). F values and effect sizes for the main effects of Ancestry and SES are indicated in Table 3. To test if the influence of SES on use of affirmative action policies is explained by changes in sociocultural impressions, we turned to mediation analysis (H3b).

*Categorization.* In keeping with results from Study 1, there was a main effect of ancestry such that Latino targets with two Latino parents were seen as more Latino than targets with one White and one Latino parent (H1a). Similarly, there was a main effect of socioeconomic status (See Table 3). Targets with lower SES cues were seen as more Latino than targets with higher SES cues (H1b). There was no main effect for race of participant  $F(1,113) = 1.41, p = .24$  or ATAA,  $F(1,113) = 1.18, p = .28$ . Consistent with Study 1, the interaction between ancestry and SES status was nonsignificant,  $F = 0.64, p = .43$ .

*Cultural practice.* There was a main effect of ancestry such that monoethnic Latino targets were seen as speaking more Spanish than targets with biethnic ancestry. There was also a main effect of socioeconomic status. Targets with working class cues were seen as speaking more Spanish than targets with middle class cues (H2, See Table 3). There was no main effect for race of participant or ATAA and the interaction between ancestry and SES status was nonsignificant,  $F_s < 2, p > .10$ .

*Perceptions of discrimination.* Similar to Study 1, there was a single main effect of SES. Working class targets were seen as more discriminated against than middle class targets (H2). There was a significant effect of ATAA,  $F(1,138)$

**Table 3.** Study 2 Means Presented by Ancestry and SES

		Racial Categorization <i>M</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Cultural practice <i>M</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Discrimination <i>M</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	Affirmative Action <i>M</i> ( <i>SE</i> )
Ancestry	Monoracial	-3.08 (0.17)	2.93 (0.08)	3.54 (0.14)	3.11 (0.15)
	Biracial	-0.20 (0.16)	3.39 (0.12)	3.36 (0.13)	3.07 (0.15)
	<i>F</i>	251.02***	35.09***	.87	0.05
	$\eta^2_p$	.61	.21	.00	.00
SES	Middle Class	-1.37 (0.17)	3.51 (0.08)	3.13 (0.14)	2.79 (0.15)
	Working Class	-1.82 (0.15)	3.03 (0.08)	3.77 (0.13)	3.11 (0.15)
	<i>F</i>	3.96*	17.08***	11.66***	8.61**
	$\eta^2_p$	.03	.12	.08	.06

*Note.* Racial categorization had a range from -4 (very much Latino/hot at all White) to 4 (not at all Latino/very much White), Cultural practice has a range from 1 to 5, all other measures had a range from 1 to 7. No interaction effects approached significance. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 4.** Zero-Order Correlations for Study 2 Serial Mediation Model Variables

	1	2	3	4
1. Racial Categorization	–	0.58**	–0.24*	–0.01
2. Cultural Practice	.44**	–	–.37**	–0.07
3. Perceived Discrimination	–0.13	–0.24*	–	0.58**
4. Affirmative Action	–0.05	–0.15	0.54**	–

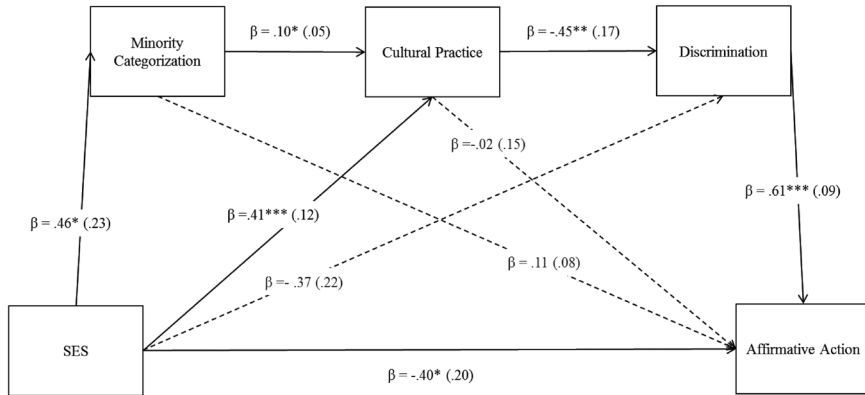
Note. Correlations for middle class targets are above the diagonal, working class targets are below.  
<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < .05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < .01$ , <sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < .001$ .

= 8.16,  $p = .005$ . The interaction between ancestry and SES and the main effects of ancestry and participant race were nonsignificant,  $F_s < 1$ ,  $p > .10$ .

*Use of affirmative action policies.* There was a significant main effect of SES on use of affirmative action. Participants indicated they supported the use of affirmative action policies more for targets with low SES than those with high SES, even when controlling for general attitudes towards affirmative action (H3a). There was also the expected significant covariate effect of ATAA,  $F(1,132) = 12.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . In keeping with Study 1, there was no main effect for ancestry, and the interaction between ancestry and SES was also nonsignificant,  $F_s < 2$ ,  $p > .1$ . Consistent with prior research on race/ethnicity and beliefs about affirmative action (Haley & Sidanius, 2006), a main effect of participant race such that White individuals were less likely to support the use of affirmative action ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ) than non-White participants ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ ),  $F(1,132) = 13.91$ ,  $p < .001$ .

*Mediation analysis.* As in Study 1, a bootstrapped serial mediation was conducted to determine whether SES indirectly influenced affirmative action use by effecting racial categorization, cultural practice, and perceived experiences of discrimination using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012). We regressed affirmative action policy support (DV) on SES (IV) in the PROCESS program, with racial categorization, cultural practice, and perceived experiences of discrimination entered as serial mediators (See Figure 2). To mirror previous analyses, the model also controlled for ancestry, participant race, and ATAA. In keeping with the preliminary analyses, SES had significant direct,  $b = -.40$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $t = -2.00$ ,  $p = .048$ , and indirect effects on use of affirmative action. Both the complete hypothesized pathway (i.e., SES → categorization → cultural practice → discrimination → affirmative action), 95% CI = –0.06, –0.002, and a shorted pathway through cultural practice and discrimination (i.e., SES → cultural practice → discrimination → affirmative action), 95% CI = –.27, –.03, were significant indirect effects. Path estimates for the model are presented in Figure 2.





**Fig. 2.** Serial mediation showing direct and indirect paths between SES and affirmative action support controlling for ancestry and ATAA in Study 2. Nonsignificant paths are indicated by dashed lines, significant indirect paths are indicated by dark lines. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

*Ancillary mediation analysis.* A secondary bootstrapped serial mediation was set up to theoretically replicate and extend findings from previous work suggesting that ancestry indirectly influenced use of affirmative action policies by impacting categorization and cultural stereotypes (Sanchez et al., 2011). This model was identical to the previous mediation analysis, with the exception that ancestry was the predictor while controlling for SES. The total indirect effect of ancestry was not significant, 95% CI = -0.37, 0.75. However, individual indirect pathways were significant in ways consistent with previous research. Both the complete serial mediation pathway (i.e., ancestry → categorization → language → discrimination → affirmative action), 95% CI = -0.24, -0.003, and a shortened pathway (i.e., ancestry → language → discrimination → affirmative action), 95% CI = -0.35, -0.01, represented significant indirect effects. As this mediation was not hypothesized and the total indirect effect was nonsignificant, this model will not be discussed further.

## Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended the effects demonstrated in Study 1. All hypotheses were supported, even when controlling for participant race and ATAA. SES had a direct impact on all DVs, such that targets with lower SES (working class cues) were perceived as being more prototypical than higher SES (middle class cues) targets. That is, working class targets were seen as more Latino (H1b), engaging in more cultural practice and experiencing more discrimination (H2) than middle class targets. In contrast to Study 1 results, SES had a direct effect on

affirmative action support for the applicant such that working class Latino targets were given more support for the use of affirmative action policies (H3a). This may be due to differences between how affirmative action was operationalized in each study, and how these different policies may be used. For example, there may be a general belief that affirmative action policies for admission (but not for scholarships) should be used for those who face disadvantage, and indeed the correlation between discrimination and affirmative action use is weaker in Study 1 when affirmative action was operationalized as a diversity scholarship compared to Study 2's affirmative action in admissions. It could also be due to the addition of minority participants to the sample, whom were found to be more likely than Whites to support the use of affirmative action for the applicant (Haley & Sidanius, 2006).

The hypothesized indirect relationship between SES and affirmative action use was also found, such that working class individuals received more support for affirmative action through higher minority categorization, deeper engagement in cultural practice, and higher perceived discrimination (H3b). However, cultural practice and discrimination emerged as stronger predictors of affirmative action use than minority categorization. This is convergent evidence that while categorization may play some role in this process (SES → affirmative action), it is not a central force. This supports the need for understanding how SES, independent of categorization, informs affirmative action policy use.

### General Discussion

Affirmative action policies, including scholarships or internships that are reserved for members of historically discriminated groups, present one way that racial and ethnic minorities can gain access to important prospect-enhancing opportunities and thus overcome challenges to parity in educational domains. Research and policy has not yet fully addressed how nonprototypical minority identities, such as a middle-class or biracial individuals, are considered in this process. Thus, the current study provides an important preliminary investigation into how nonprototypical Latinos are considered in affirmative action contexts. In addition, the intersection of ancestry and SES has largely been ignored in studies examining ancestry and racial categorization (e.g., Ho et al., 2013, 2011; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008) and affirmative action policy support (e.g., Sanchez & Bonam, 2009; Sanchez et al., 2011; Wilton et al., 2013). Across two studies, we provide evidence for the importance of considering SES in conjunction with that of ancestry in both applied (e.g., affirmative action) and basic (e.g., categorization and social impression) contexts.

Even though racial/ethnic categorization may rely on hypodescent, where an individual with *any amount* of minority ancestry will be categorized as minority (Banks & Eberhardt, 1998; Ho et al., 2013, 2011), there is mounting evidence that

mixed ancestry leads some minorities to be considered less minority than other minorities (e.g., Sanchez et al., 2011). The current research adds to this literature by suggesting that socioeconomic status indicators are also cues that influence perceivers to categorize some racial and ethnic minorities as less minority than others. In keeping with previous work suggesting that cultural stereotypes of Latino are tied up with low SES status (Fiske et al., 2002; Ghavami & Peplau, 2012; Wilton et al., 2013), a target with middle class cues was viewed as less Latino than a target with a working class cues. Interestingly, though ancestry and SES both contributed to racial categorization, these cues did not interact. Instead, in both studies SES and ancestry had an additive effect on racial categorization, such that a monoethnic, working class target was seen as the most Latino, and a biethnic middle class target was seen as the least Latino. This tendency to categorize working-class individuals as more minority than middle class individuals may be in keeping with patterns of self-identification and status indicators (see Sanchez & Garcia, 2012). Some research suggests that individuals with mixed-ancestry parents are more likely to identify as biracial/biethnic if they are from middle class, as opposed to working class, families (Townsend & Fryberg, 2012), and even if working class individuals identify as biracial/biethnic, they may not feel this identity is validated by others (Rockquemore & Brunson, 2002). Thus, perceiver categorization of middle-class Latino targets as less Latino than working-class Latino targets may reflect a reality of the relationship between SES and minority identification. Altogether, SES emerges as an important cue to consider in understanding the racial/ethnic categorization of targets with both monoethnic and biethnic ancestry.

SES also impacted sociocultural impressions known to influence affirmative action policy use, specifically the cultural practice of speaking Spanish and perceived experiences of discrimination. Middle class cues decreased perceptions of the cultural practice of speaking Spanish, a cultural cue that previous research demonstrates influences affirmative action policy use for both perceivers (Wilton et al., 2013) and targets (Sanchez & Chavez, 2010) perspective. Middle class cues also decreased perceptions of discrimination experiences. This perception may have been driven by participants' wish to acknowledge class-based discrimination. The association of low SES cues and more experiences of discrimination may reflect the reality of SES-oriented discrimination in general (Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011), and the more specific possibility of intersectional discrimination (Weeks & Lupfer, 2004). Unlike previous research, ancestry did not have a significant effect on perceptions of discrimination (Good et al., 2013; Sanchez et al., 2011). This may reflect a less firm cultural stereotype of discrimination for Latino (as opposed to Black) targets, or it may be due to study manipulations. Previous studies demonstrating a relationship between ancestry and perceptions of discrimination were set up to investigate many levels of ancestry (e.g., 1 White grandparent, 3 Black grandparents), while this study only compared monoethnic and biethnic parents. Regardless, SES predicted sociocultural impressions above

and beyond the influence of ancestry, such that targets from a working class background were perceived as engaging more in the cultural practice of Spanish fluency, and had higher perceived experiences of discrimination, than their middle-class counterparts.

In addition to furthering understandings of how ancestry and SES help form perceptions of minorities, this research uniquely forwards the importance of examining the joint effects of both ancestry and SES in the implementation of affirmative action policies. Previous research has suggested that minority ancestry can influence perceived suitability for affirmative action policies (Good et al., 2013; Sanchez et al., 2011; Wilton et al., 2013), but has overlooked SES as a vital piece in this process. In this study, SES cues both directly (Study 2) and indirectly (Study 1 and 2) influenced the use of affirmative action policies to support minority candidates. These results demonstrate that decisions about the eligibility for affirmative action are impacted by cues that are not directly related to minority ancestry or even minority categorization. Indeed, both studies suggest that categorization alone could not explain the relationship between SES and affirmative action policy use. Instead, it suggests that minority prototypicality, or aligning with cultural stereotypes, may have a greater impact on support for use of affirmative action. This research further demonstrates that the use of affirmative action policies is seen as more appropriate for minorities that are perceived to have experienced more discrimination. This finding is compatible with previous research demonstrating a link between supporting affirmative action and recognition of discrimination that minorities face (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006), and it may also reflect participant's desire to use affirmative action policies to specifically redress individual's disadvantaged circumstances. In other words, the connections between SES, ancestry, sociocultural impressions, and affirmative action are complex and require further consideration.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Though this research adds significantly to current understandings of the racial categorization process and its use in affirmative action policy use, it is not without limitations. As this study focused on how SES influenced the use of affirmative action policies for minority candidates in an academic context, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. For example, the use of SES in impression formation may only hold relevance in situations similar to those reproduced in the study (such as college applications) where initial impression formation does not necessarily include appearance. Without phenotype cues, an essay may create target ambiguity that increases reliance on social information, such as SES cues (Freeman et al., 2011). Since many everyday interactions, including affirmative action processes (e.g., college interview) may involve face to face interactions, it is important to establish the role phenotype plays. This study only investigates the ratings of a

single minority candidate, while most affirmative action procedures would likely involve several targets, both minority and White. However, it seems likely that when faced with evaluating several minority targets, relevant social cues such as SES may become more relevant for categorization and sociocultural impression formation. SES should be explored as a cue in a situations that involve rating more targets, and in multiple scenarios (e.g., job interviews).

Another limitation is the participant population. The participants in this study were drawn from a large university where over 80% of students receive financial aid, suggesting that many participants may be sensitive to lower-income needs, which may have influenced their reactions to target SES. Personal SES, not measured in this study, has the potential to influence views and stereotypes surrounding a target's SES. There is more support for affirmative action use in minority than White individuals, and an individual's SES could have similarly direct consequences for when and how an individual leverages SES in affirmative action decision making. Future studies should investigate if and how personal SES influences support for affirmative action policy use.

This research also suggests several new lines of inquiry. In addition to increasing the scope of understanding when and how SES generally influences use of affirmative action policies, individual differences in perceivers should also be explored. Lay beliefs about how racial groups are defined could play a significant role in using SES and ancestry cues in affirmative action policies. For example, essentialist racial beliefs (the belief that racial groups have inherent, unchangeable qualities) may impact the use of social cues such as SES. A person with strong biological essentialist beliefs may employ relatively more biological cues (such as ancestry) than social cues (such as SES) in forming impressions and determining use of affirmative action. Indeed, it may be those who hold social constructionist views who ironically penalize minority candidates with less stereotypical social racial/ethnic group cues in affirmative action contexts. Exploration into how different lay beliefs influence person perception can further illuminate the processes upon which stereotypes and biases are often mobilized.

Finally, this research raises important questions about how affirmative action is conceptualized, and who it is meant to serve. Though this study focuses on support for policy use in an individual basis, it may have consequences that extend into general policy attitudes. For example, over and above preexisting attitudes towards affirmative action, individuals showed less support for using affirmative action policies for Latino targets who do not align with Latino stereotypes. Thus, it is possible that when faced with individuals who do not fit the stereotype of who affirmative action should help (e.g., biracial or middle-class individuals), general support for affirmative action may also be reduced. Future research should explore how encounters with nonprototypical minority individuals influences beliefs in, and support of, affirmative action policies in general.

## Conclusion

By broadening understanding of the ways in which individuals evaluate minorities in the context of affirmative action, the present research contributes to discourse concerning whether, when, and why individuals qualify for affirmative action policies. Specifically, this research considers how both nonprototypical minorities (biracial individuals) and minorities at the intersection of other important categories (SES) are perceived in the context of affirmative action. Previous theorizing about affirmative action policies assume that all minorities are equally qualified for affirmative action, but the results of this study adds to previous evidence that this may not be the case. Thus, the present research provides important empirical data to inform how affirmative action is applied in a diverse world.

This research also contributes to larger dialogues concerning support for affirmative action policies more broadly. For example, there is growing resistance to affirmative action programs, especially as people see signs of racial progress (e.g., Obama's election; Kaiser, Drury, Spalding, Cheryan, & O'Brien, 2009). Nonprototypical minorities may also cue resistance to affirmative action, or at the very least narrow the scope of minorities who are perceived to be eligible for such policies. This may explain the decline of support for attitudes towards affirmative action among those who encounter stereotype inconsistent minorities. As this research suggests that individuals who do not align with cultural stereotypes about their minority group are perceived as less eligible for affirmative action, affirmative action policies should explicitly address how the growing multiracial population fits into the goals of affirmative action to ensure that the policies are implemented in ways that best serve these goals. Furthermore, policy makers and users should be cognizant that without explicit guidance, an applicant's SES may be used to inform the use of affirmative action policies.

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## Appendix

### Sample Essay

People have better opportunities if they go to college, especially because it is so hard to find a job today. Because my parents *never went to college* [both went to college], it is very important for me to get my college degree. They have always told me that I need to work hard and study. I want to go to \*\*\*University because it is a great school. Having a *Latino* [Biracial] background, I have always been interested in difference. Because my my *parents are Latino* [mom is Latino and my dad is White], I experinecd different cultures and groups from a young



age. I think this provides me with a different perspective. I was also aware of the differences between my community and others because I grew up in a *poor* [wealthy] neighborhood. So, I am interested in learning more about communities and how to help them. These experiences have made me curious about wanting to understand differences and being a part of making the world better. \*\*\*University would be the perfect place to do that.

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