

# Proximal and Distal Outcomes of Equal Opportunity Climate Perceptions

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to examine a model of proximal and distal outcomes of equal opportunity (EO) climate perceptions for United States Army personnel. EO climate perceptions were confirmed as a significant predictor of work group cohesion, job strain, as well as organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

## Introduction

EO climate refers to employee perceptions of the degree to which discrimination and harassment were likely to have occurred in the workplace (Dansby & Landis, 1991). EO climate is concerned specifically with discrimination and harassment surrounding legally protected class (i.e., race, religion, age, disability).

To date, little empirical research has been conducted to assess the process through which EO climate perceptions affect important work attitudes. For an exception, see McIntyre et al. (2002) who found support for a model linking EO climate to perceptions of work group efficacy, job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

We address this gap in the literature by examining EO climate as a predictor of perceptions of work group cohesion and outcomes including job strain, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Figure 1 displays the proposed conceptual model.

EO climate represents equal opportunity (EO) fairness perceptions. Where fair treatment is perceived (i.e., a positive EO climate) employees are theorized to be more willing to sacrifice self interests and cooperate with workgroup members because positive fairness perceptions lead one to develop a stronger social identity with the group and offer reassurance that contributions to the group will be compensated with fair rewards. Thus, employees reporting positive EO climate perceptions should also report higher levels of cohesion among work group members.

**Hypothesis 1: EO climate is positively related to perceived work group cohesion.**

Research has shown that work group is positively related to job satisfaction and commitment among work group members (Oliver, et al., 1999; Wech, et al., 1998), and Griffith and Vaitkus (1999) argue that cohesion serves as a resource similar to social support which may directly reduce job-related strain. Positive effects of cohesion are apparent whether measured at the individual level or aggregated to the work group (Gully et al., 1995).

**Hypothesis 2.a.: Perceived work group cohesion is positively related to job satisfaction.**

**Hypothesis 2.b.: Perceived work group cohesion is positively related to organizational commitment.**

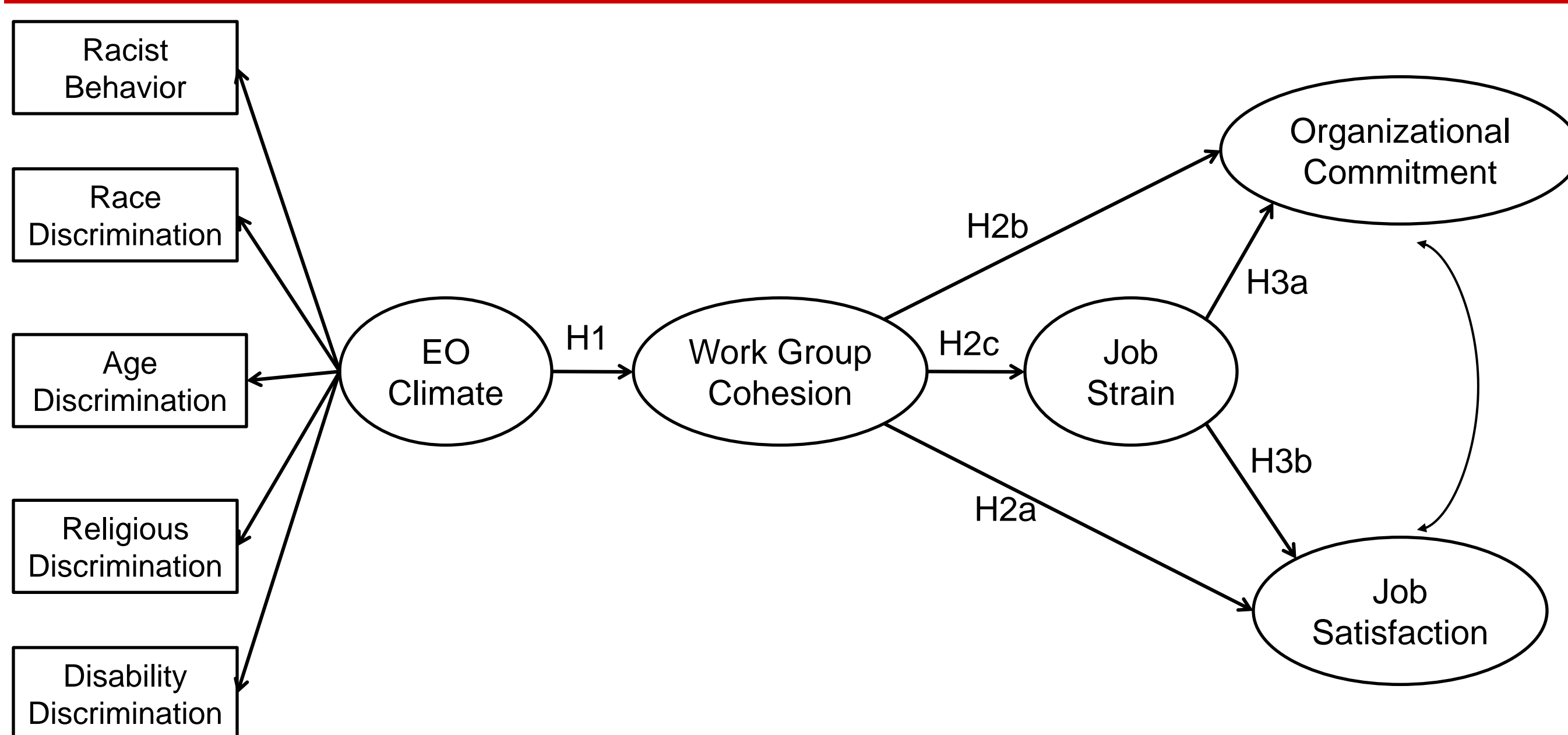
**Hypothesis 2.c.: Perceived work group cohesion is negatively related to job strain.**

Parker and Decotiis (1983) hypothesized that outcomes of job strain include decreased organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and others have provided empirical support for these relationships (e.g., Fogarty et al., 1999, Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984).

**Hypothesis 3.a.: Job strain is negatively related to organizational commitment.**

**Hypothesis 3.b.: Job strain is negatively related to job satisfaction.**

Figure 1. Conceptual model of proximal and distal outcomes of EO climate perceptions



## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The model was tested with data from 1,411 U.S. Army personnel in the spring of 2008 who were not currently deployed outside the continental U.S.

57.2% of the sample was White and 29.3% were Black. Most respondents were male (74.1%) and between 20 and 30 years of age (72.5%).

All participants completed the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS).

The DEOCS is deployed at the request of a military unit commander and is akin to an annual survey. It is available in both pencil-and-paper and web-based versions.

## Method (continued)

### Measures

Higher scores reflect high levels of each construct (items were recoded as necessary for all scales other than EO climate).

### EO climate.

EO climate was assessed as a latent construct comprised of five categories of discrimination and harassment. *Race discrimination* was assessed with four items while *racist behavior*, *age discrimination*, *religious discrimination*, and *disability discrimination* were measured with three items each (see Table 1 for example items). Participants evaluated each item in terms of the likelihood that each behavior could have occurred at their work location during the 30 work days prior to survey administration. All items were evaluated on a 5-point response scale ranging from "1" (*there is a very high chance that the action occurred*) to "5" (*there is almost no chance that the action occurred*).

### Work group cohesion.

Work Group Cohesion was measured with four items assessing individual perceptions of the social bond among work group members and how well group members come together to complete tasks (e.g., "My work group works together well as a team"). All items were answered on a 5-point response scale ranging from "1" (*totally agree with the statement*) to "5" (*totally disagree with the statement*).

### Job strain.

Job strain was examined with four items from Parker and DeCotiis's (1983) scale of work stress, specifically those items assessing anxiety-based job strain (e.g., "My job gets to me more than it should"). All items were answered on a 5-point response scale ranging from "1" (*totally agree with the statement*) to "5" (*totally disagree with the statement*).

### Organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment was assessed with five items assessing the bond and importance of the organization to the individual (e.g., "I am proud to tell others I am part of this organization"). All items were answered on a 5-point response scale ranging from "1" (*totally agree with the statement*) to "5" (*totally disagree with the statement*).

### Job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction was measured with five items assessing one's satisfaction with his or her job (e.g., "How satisfied are you with the job as a whole"). All items were answered on a 5-point response scale ranging from "1" (*very satisfied*) to "5" (*very dissatisfied*).

Table 1. Example EO climate items organized by factor

Item	Factor
A person told several jokes about a particular race/ethnicity	Racist Behavior
Offensive racial/ethnic names were frequently heard	Racist Behavior
A supervisor did not select for promotion a qualified subordinate of a different race/ethnicity	Race Discrimination
Members of a particular race/ethnicity were assigned less desirable office space than members of a different race/ethnicity	Race Discrimination
A younger person was selected for a prestigious assignment over an older person who was equally, if not slightly better qualified	Age Discrimination
An older individual did not get the same career opportunities as did a younger individual	Age Discrimination
A well-qualified person was denied a job because the supervisor did not like the religious beliefs of the person	Religious Discrimination
A supervisor favored a worker who had the same religious beliefs as the supervisor	Religious Discrimination
A worker with a disability was not given the same opportunities as other workers	Disability Discrimination
A supervisor did not appoint a qualified worker with a disability to a new position, but instead appointed another, less qualified worker	Disability Discrimination

## Results

The full sample was randomly split into two groups. The first group (n = 705) was used as a calibration sample to test the conceptual model, and the second group (n = 706) was used as a cross-validation sample.

All constructs were modeled as latent variables. The five factors served as indicators for EO climate and items served as indicators for remaining constructs.

The hypothesized model did not provide adequate fit to the data. Based on initial model testing we found that model fit could be significantly improved with the inclusion of direct effects of EO climate on job strain, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. These effects were included and the revised model demonstrated acceptable fit,  $\chi^2(218) = 715.10$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .05.

The model cross-validated well; the model developed using the calibration sample adequately fit the validation sample data,  $\chi^2(218) = 655.78$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .95, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .05.

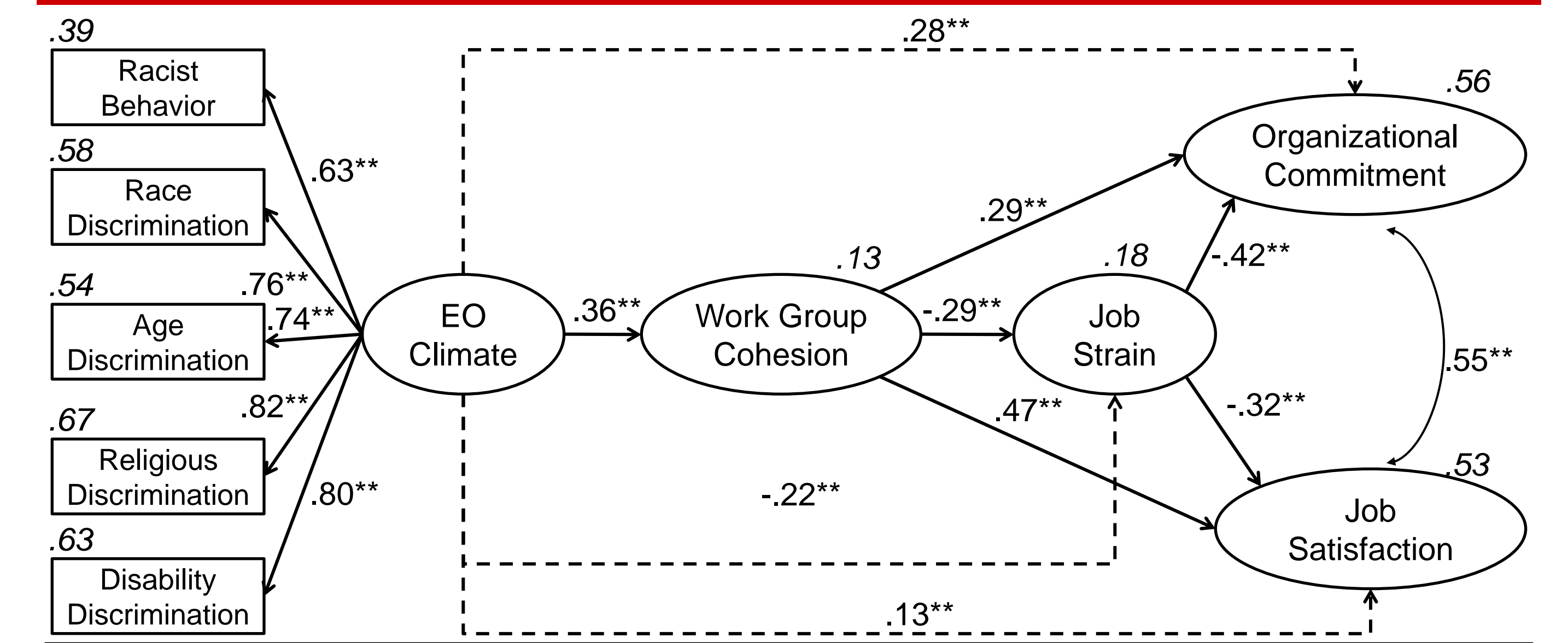
Standardized path estimates from the validation sample are presented in Figure 2. Hypotheses were supported as all relationships were consistent with expectations.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among variables

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Racist Behaviors	4.18	.89	(.86)								
2. Race Discrimination	4.61	.65	.49	(.86)							
3. Age Discrimination	4.49	.80	.44	.58	(.89)						
4. Religious Discrimination	4.57	.66	.55	.61	.63	(.79)					
5. Disability Discrimination	4.59	.70	.46	.59	.69	.66	(.87)				
6. Work Group Cohesion	3.99	.96	.36	.34	.30	.32	.26	(.92)			
7. Job Strain	2.67	1.16	-.31	-.25	-.28	-.29	-.22	-.36	(.87)		
8. Job Satisfaction	3.85	.88	.31	.33	.31	.33	.26	.58	-.46	(.85)	
9. Organizational Commitment	3.47	1.01	.41	.40	.39	.37	.32	.50	-.50	.63	(.85)

Note. Internal consistency reliability alphas are reported along the diagonal. N = 1,411. All correlations are significant at  $p < .01$ .

Figure 2. Model results from the validation sample



Note. Squared multiple correlations for endogenous variables are reported in italics. Omitted paths retained in the final model are indicated by dashed lines.

## Discussion

### General Discussion

Support was found for all hypotheses such that EO climate perceptions directly impacted work group cohesion, along with significant indirect effects on job strain, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. In addition to the hypothesized indirect effects, it was revealed that EO climate had significant direct effects on job strain, organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

The link between EO climate and work group cohesion is especially important within military samples due to its potential impact on mission readiness (King, 2006) as well as long term military success.

All told, these findings highlight the importance of assessing the impact of EO climate perceptions to ensure the military is perceived as providing an environment free of harassment and discriminatory personnel practices and further bolster the importance of developing a comprehensive understanding of organizational fairness practices.

### Limitations and Future Research

EO climate investigations have been concentrated to military-related samples (enlisted personnel or civilians employed by the Department of Defense). Future endeavors could assess our model of EO climate in the private sector.

Although consistent with previous conceptualizations of the construct (e.g., McIntyre et al., 2002), we conceptualized EO climate perceptions at the individual level. It will be important for future research to assess the manner in which EO climate perceptions operate at the work group or organizational level.

Our sample consisted of military personnel who were not currently deployed. However, given current global presence of the United States military validating the model in deployed personnel constitutes an important next step.

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The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the U. S. Department of Defense, the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, or any other federal agencies.

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