

# An Examination of Social Equity and its Dimensional Emphasis in the Public Administration Literature

LaShawn D. Moore  
*Old Dominion University*

John C. Morris  
*Old Dominion University*

---

*The concept of social equity is central to the study and practice of public administration and has received a great deal of attention from scholars over the years. Using Stone's (1988) typology of equity (items, recipients, and process) as our basis, the authors examine the extant literature related to social equity to determine how it has defined equity. Using content analysis, they find that all three of Stone's dimensions of equity are in the literature, and that definitions related to process issues are the most common in it.*

---

The New Public Administration movement turned over its reign as the presiding paradigm some decades ago, yet many of its contributions remain central to the field nearly forty years later. To be sure, many of the issues the movement championed were not new. Still, the novelty ascribed symbolized a refreshed dedication to social change (Campbell 1976; Cooper 2004; Ingraham and Rosenbloom and Edlund 1989).

Subsequently, a significant percentage of goods and services distributed in the United States became increasingly reliant on public decision-making (Chitwood 1974, 29). Due to the New Public Administration's ethical offerings, administrative actors' concerns began to center on issues of "distributive justice" (Frederickson 1990; Lucy, Gilbert, and Birkhead 1977; Nalbandian 1989; Stone 1988). To legitimize administrative practice, concerns were compounded with the wave of diversity initiatives in the 80s and 90s and have continued to grow in importance, making them even more relevant in the 21st century.

The United States has long projected a self-identity as the land of opportunity. As an immigrant nation, its proliferating demographics necessitated countless social changes to maintain this image throughout history. In the 1980's, the "valuing

differences” mantra emerged to guide many government programs and activities aimed at amending social structures (Golembiewski 1998, 8). Within the locus of valuation was the requisite to quantify. As one nation under God the country is indivisible. Yet, divisions socially validated through the ascription of differences continue to present public administration with multiplying challenges in trying to establish “liberty and justice for all.”

From the normative position that all persons are created equal in the eyes of the Creator (Golembiewski 1998), the ethical teachings of the New Public Administration charged administrative actors to uphold this principle in the allocation of limited resources to a diverse public. The values of freedom, property, and equality embedded in American culture have repeatedly attracted scholars’ attention because they impose a concern for “distributive justice” on the ethical component of all professional activity (Rohr 1976, 301). More commonly termed *social equity*, distributive justice is central to the field of public administration. In this research, we have sought to discover the degree of definitional clarity present in the extant public administration literature. Furthermore, we evaluated the journal literature to determine the prevailing perspective from which scholars address social equity. Although attention to diversity seems to have waned with the close of the twentieth century, the underlying concern with social equity remains. We must note that our purpose was not to unify the apparent definitional diversity in the literature in pursuit of a single definition. As Stone (1988) demonstrated, the concept of equity may carry multiple meanings; moreover, these meanings add clarity and depth to the literature. Rather, we have sought to determine whether the three dimensions of equity (process, items, and recipients) that Stone (1988) identified provide a useful framework through which to view the relevant literature on social equity.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Whereas policymakers determine the ends to which distribution occurs, administrators execute these decisions. The distributive agent inherent in the democratic structuring of American government prompted notable views related to the diversification of the nation to blossom over the past few decades. Scholars opting to narrow their focus to public administration to locate influences on government decision-making have produced several distinct, but not wholly dissimilar, perspectives. To guide the administrative decisions made within the course of policy execution, three composite theories emerged: *representative bureaucracy*, *justice*, and *social equity*.

Often labeled a precursor to the theory of social equity, scholars offer the theory of representative bureaucracy as an instrument to resolve the conflict between democratic values and government administration (Ingraham, Rosenbloom, and Edlund 1989; Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard 1999; Nalbandian 1989; Oldfield 2003; Rosenbloom 1989; Selden, Brudney, and Kellough 1998; Wise 1990). First introduced in a study of English civil service by Donald Kingsley (1944), suggesting bureaucracy represent the “dominant forces” in society, this conception sparked a debate with mass appeal and reached scholars abroad (Subramaniam 1967, 1010). In 1943, David Levitan applied this idea to American public administration. Instead of suggesting bureaucracy represent any particular group, Levitan proposed representative bureaucracy as a mechanism to obligate administrative officials to democratic values.

A later development by Frederick Mosher (1968) directly challenged Kingsley's (1944) work with the proposal that representative bureaucracy should characterize the whole of society, not just the dominant groups. This would be accomplished through the exercise of both active and passive forms of representation (Meier 1975; Meier and Nigro 1976). For Mosher, representative bureaucracy constitutes either activity on behalf of aggregated members (active), or a compositional demographic directly reflective of the public it serves (passive) (Reh fuss 1986; Meier and Nigro 1976). Grounded in Jacksonian theory, the "moral commitment to keep public services in America open to, and representative of all sections and classes of the general public" is maintained through this strain of representative bureaucracy (Subramaniam 1967, 1011). It holds that if the attitudes of administrators are similar to the attitudes of the public, outcomes will generally be responsive to public interest and congruent with public values (Meier and Nigro 1976).

To complement efficiency and economy as the chief considerations of administrative thought and practice in 1968, H. George Frederickson (1990) proposed a theory of social equity. Intended to increase bureaucratic responsiveness and align with public interest, this "third pillar" of administration was more solidly anchored by John Rawls' (1971) work, *A Theory of Justice* (Frederickson 1990, 228; Rawls 1999). According to Rawls (1971), justice equates to fairness and encompasses two principles: the blanket guarantee of basic liberties to all people and the management of social and economic resources to benefit disadvantaged groups (Frederickson 1990; Hart 1974; Rawls 1999; Rohr 1976). Expected to endow equal opportunities for incumbency of society's offices and projected to regulate the ethical pulse of administrative action, justice was designated as the central value of all "basic structures" and "institutions of society" (Hart 1974, 5, 9).

Building on Rawlsian theory, "justice as fairness" (Cooper 2004), Frederickson (1990) later composed the Compound Theory of Social Equity, which strayed from strict reliance on theories of distributive justice to become an anticipated multidimensional standard for policymaking. Frederickson thus rejected Woodrow Wilson's (1887) exemplar of a neutral public administration clearly delineated from politics. According to Frederickson (1990), administration is a form of politics. As such, the suggestion of social equity as a guiding tenet of administration is, if not an ethical or moral imperative, a political one given the administrative rationale for social equity is responsiveness to a diverse population (Pops and Pavlak 1991).

Rather than limit social equity to a singular understanding, Frederickson (1990) advocated a pluralistic view. For him, the simultaneously "democratic and just" society achieves equity through the application of three competing notions of equality: *individual equalities*, *segmented equalities*, and *block equalities*. The first, individual equalities, pertains to one category of equals essentially defining equality as the same for all. An obvious example of this system is the democratic "one-person one vote" rule. Segmented equality, fundamental to all hierarchical systems, is a mechanism of internal alignment and denotes a structure of inequality between individuals to correspond to differing conditions. Conversely, block equalities or proportional equality deviates from focus on the individual and indicates equality between subclasses or segments of society (Chitwood 1974; Frederickson 1990; Wise 1990).

To date, the formal concept of social equity bears the imprint of decades of evolution. The composite theories of representative bureaucracy, justice, and social

equity each serve multiple purposes: to guide the deliberations and practices of a decisively political administration, reconcile previous administrative practice, and impress a future directive of equitable resource distribution. These theories can easily yield an in-depth discussion in and of themselves; however, for the purpose of this analysis it is best to limit them to a cursory handling. Nonetheless, because “discourse has social force and effect not inherently, but to the extent that it comes to be integrated within practices” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 62), it is crucial to explore the scholarly literature grounded in these theories to examine how they are interpreted and applied to the field of public administration.

### **Dimensions of Equity**

The debate centering on the basic character of social equity begs the empirical question: What interpretation of social equity dominates the recent literature? The literature in public administration concurs unanimously in designating social equity as a primary theory of government and goal of the bureaucracy (Frederickson 1990). However, the literature available on equity also demonstrates a lack of agreement regarding the attendant explanation and the dimensional application of social equity theory. In light of the fact that no agreed upon definition of equity exists, one must acknowledge where scholars position themselves in the discussion is a function of their respective worldview. In this retrospective, we have sought to sort through published public administration journal literature by adopting a framework that binds the literature using a complementary set of themes.

Having noted the inextricable relationship between politics and administration, the heuristic of political science is used to investigate the scholarly applications of social equity as an administrative tenet. Deborah Stone (1988), a political scientist who subscribes to the description of her discipline as Harold Lasswell (1936) defined it, “the study of who gets what, when, and how” recognizes equity as a distinctly “distributive conflict” (30). In chorus with Frederickson, Stone acknowledges equity entails a variety of definitions, most of which in fact define conditions of inequality. Along with this acknowledgement, her work declares that equity has its constants. Borrowing from the research of Aaron and Lougy (1986), Stone’s work connects the defining aspects of her chosen field with the dimensions of equity these authors espouse.

According to Stone (1988), every act of distribution requires at least three elements: the recipients (who), the item (what), and the process (how). Within the context of each dimension there exist several paradoxical issues and dilemmas. Nevertheless, these three dimensions represent the various positions from which to view distribution, and they are used here to highlight the perspective of authors opting to emphasize the aspect(s) of social equity they believed to be most useful. In recognition of the broad range of definitions assigned to equality, we sought to employ the three dimensions of equity espoused by Stone (1988) in our analysis to address the question: What is the dominant dimensional emphasis of social equity in the public administration journal literature?

### **Methods**

The process began by reviewing articles about social equity appearing in public administration journals between 1996 and 2006. We then examined the bibliographies of

these articles to identify important works published prior to this period. We identified and reviewed a total of fifty-two articles.

We then conducted a content analysis of each work to ascertain how Stone's (1988) three dimensions of equity were captured in the article's working definition(s) of equity. Most of the works evidenced more than a single dimension of equity, and were coded as such. The results of the content analysis were recorded in a table (see Table 1). The table indicated whether each piece contained evidence of each dimension. Finally, we examined the data to determine whether one dimension of equity received greater emphasis than others; if this was the case, we indicated it in the table. The content analysis revealed that several of the works treated different dimensions equally; those works without a shaded 'X' we judged treated the various dimensions equally.

Using this prescribed structure in order to unpack the literature and make inferences about perceptions of importance, we intended to identify ways in which scholars chose to cover social equity. Understandably, each author's vocabulary served to classify their discourse. For example the recipient dimension identifiers included but were not limited to words such as who, minority, disadvantaged, impoverished, and references to gender, race, social class, or disability. Second, the items or what dimension were determined by mentions of services, nutrition, health, funding, benefits, employment, and goods. Finally, emphasis on process was determined by the express usage of the word process or signaling terms such as policy, method, means, and activities.

### **Recipients**

The majority of political conflicts are propagated by problems of distinguishing donors from beneficiaries. In revision of the administrative empirical interrogatory of "who gets what, the normative question adds who ought to get what" (Campbell 1976, 556). Although the recipient dimension of equity does not dominate the collective body of literature, it does receive ample consideration. Much as in the Constitution, the concept of social equity is unquestionably prefaced in consideration of "the people." In reviewing the initial reasoning associated with efforts toward successful service management and delivery, Frederickson (1990) raised the following questions: "Well managed for whom? Efficient for whom? Economical for whom?" (228).

In trying to determine who should count as a member of the recipient class, the literature offers several perspectives that both shrink and expand the pool of candidates. Hart (1974) assigned John Rawls' theory of justice as a moral predicate targeted at basic institutional structures, which "exalts man over process" (9). Rawls posed the whole of society as recipients in the theory of justice (Hart 1974). However, the two principles of justice dictate that the collected effort of society is focused in favor of less advantaged segments. For Rawls, social parity is only desirable if disparity does nothing to improve the benefits available to least advantaged groups (Hart 1974). Following this position, Perry and Wise stated that "social equity involves activities intended to enhance the well-being of minorities who lack political and economic resources" (Ingraham, Rosenbloom, and Edlund 1989, 125).

Equitable intention dictates that distribution is based on need (Campbell 1976). While social equity is intended to benefit society at large, the recipient dimension of social equity generally refers to persons whom distributional balances disfavor. In 2003, Oldfield criticized public administration texts and teachings for historically emphasizing

race and gender while neglecting the impact of social class. Noting socioeconomic status correlates with the many other measurable social characteristics, Oldfield (2003) demonstrated how this narrow observance has resulted in inordinate limitations on policy options. Prefaced by the assertion race and gender have traditionally been the primary focuses in discourse on the topic of discrimination, Oldfield (2003) further challenged the concern for limiting social equity considerations with the assistance of Candler and Johnson (Oldfield, Candler, and Johnson 2005). The primary objective of their examination of social class, sexual orientation, and social equity scholarship was to demonstrate that narrowly focusing on race and gender minimizes other factors which contribute to discrimination and disadvantaged positions in society, namely social class and sexual orientation.

Whereas some authors have chosen to marginally add to the classifications of recipients by identifying specific conditions or factions suffering from disadvantage as a result of group memberships, Frederickson infinitely increased the domain of the recipient dimension. In response to the question posed as the title of his 1994 article, "Can public officials correctly be said to have obligations to future generations?" Frederickson (1994) offered an unequivocal "yes." He found public officials to have a philosophical, moral, and empirical obligation to implement policies which promote conditions of intergenerational equity. To advance intergenerational fairness, Frederickson drew on the moral teachings of Rawls (1971), the philosophical position of Golding (1981), and empirical logic of Hartshorne (1981) to support his compound theory of social equity. Using this method, Frederickson determined the most logical approach to questions of intergenerational equity is to view them from the perspective of block equalities, which calls for equality between groups. In this case, the groups represent present society and posterity.

**TABLE 1.** Dimensions of equity emphasized in the journal literature.

Articles	Recipients	Items	Process
Chitwood, January, 1974		X	
Harmon, January, 1974			X
Hart, January, 1974	X		
McGregor, January, 1974	X		X
Najjar, January, 1974	X		X
Porter & Porter, January, 1974			X
White & Gates, January, 1974	X		X
Meier, June, 1975	X		X
Meier & Nigro, July, 1976	X	X	X
Campbell, September, 1976	X	X	
Lucy, Gilbert, & Birkhead, November, 1977		X	
Carell & Dittrich, April, 1978	X	X	
Schaefer, December, 1978	X	X	X
Romzek & Hendricks, March, 1982			X
Chandler, 1984			X

Keeney & Winkler, September, 1985			X
Kolderie, July, 1986		X	
Regens & Rycroft, September, 1986			X
Reh fuss, September, 1986	X	X	X
Carroll, January, 1987	X		X
Hejka- Ekins, September, 1988			
Denhardt, March, 1989			X
Ingraham, Rosenbloom, & Edlund, March, 1989			X
Nalbandian, May, 1989	X	X	X
Weinberg, September, 1989		X	X
Frederickson, March, 1990	X	X	X
Perry & Wise, May, 1990	X		X
Kellough, September, 1990	X	X	
Wise, September, 1990	X	X	
McKinney & Collins, 1991			X
Paehlke & Rosenau, Winter, 1993	X	X	X
Frederickson, September, 1994	X		
Wicks & Backman, Fall, 1994	X	X	X
Dooley & Rice, Summer, 1995		X	X
Frederickson, May, 1996			
Hero & Tolbert, August, 1996	X	X	
Goss, October, 1996			X
Riccuccio, & Saidel, 1997	X	X	
Arekere & Rice, 1998	X	X	X
Bullard, 1998	X	X	
Selden, Brudney, & Kellough, June, 1998	X	X	X
Wooldrige, Summer, 1998			X
Downey, Summer, 1999			X
Mani, November, 1999	X	X	
Meier, Wrinkle, & Polinard, November, 1999	X	X	
Nalbandian, May, 1999			X
Oliver, Autumn, 1999	X	X	X
Weinberg, July, 2000	X	X	X
Oldfield, September, 2003			X
Cooper, July, 2004			
Frederickson, Winter, 2005	X	X	X
Oldfield, Candler, & Johnson, June, 2006	X		

### Items

Although social equity stems from a desire to address the injustices disadvantaged people experience, one stance taken during the early formative period of social equity theory was that questions of social equity ultimately focus on the distribution of goods and services (Chitwood 1974). In Chitwood's essay examining the productivity measures of services, he explains while efficiency and effectiveness standards supply valuable information to government participants, productivity measures fail to acknowledge social equity as an element of the distribution of public services. Traditional administrative questions

probed: “(1) How better services could be offered with available resources (efficiency)? Or (2) How to maintain a consistent level of services while spending less money (economy)? To this Fredrickson (1971) added the ‘New Public Administration’ question: Does the service enhance social equity?” (Hart 1974, 3).

Rawls’ second principle of “justice as fairness” attempted to resolve the inequities of unearned social or genetic inheritance by focusing on the equitable distribution of social and economic goods (Hart 1974; Oldfield 2003). The equity in local service distribution, Lucy, Gilbert, and Birkhead (1977) discussed hinged primarily on administrators’ adoption of social equity as a philosophical and ethical guide of the New Public Administration. These three scholars defined public services as “a subset of social, economic, and political activities resulting in the distribution of benefits in society” (Lucy, Gilbert, and Birkhead 1977, 687-688), and subjected notions of equitable appropriation to normality, justification, and minimal status.

In review of the normal, justified, and minimal benefits and services produced and provided by the government, education and environmental protection are high priority obligations to future generations (Frederickson 1994). “To most people, public education means school run by the government” (Kolderie 1986, 288). Of the services provided to the public, few have received more attention and scrutiny than education. As the most important developmental service offering, equity in education is closely monitored because of its role as the major determinant of one’s life chances (Lucy, Gilbert, and Birkhead 1977; Oldfield, 2003). Because of its link to socioeconomic status and potential to intergenerationally redistribute life opportunities by enhancing prospects of upward mobility through employment, equity in education is a political imperative (Lucy, Gilbert, and Birkhead 1977). Accordingly, the judicial mandate for equity in the area of education is clearer than that of other public services (Campbell 1976).

Education, unquestionably one of the most commonly accepted domains of equality (Frederickson 1996), still encounters problems. While few policy contexts have received more attention over the course of the nation’s history than education, the reoccurring distributional question remains whether increased expenditures improve educational outcomes (Campbell 1976). Despite the fact the bulk of funding for public schools comes from local property taxes, states are large contributors to this policy area because education is typically a state’s largest solitary expenditure (Hero and Tolbert 1996). Furthermore, while state educational aid formulas are designed to minimize fiscal differences between localities, they are only capable of a fractional reduction. To produce fiscal equality from district to district, local tax rates would have to be unequally adjusted to provide equal resources, defeating equitable aims (Campbell 1976; Kolderie 1986).

Many scholars focus on resource inputs; however research has shown educational outcomes are more closely correlated to population characteristics than financial expenditures (Lucy, Gilbert, and Birkhead 1977). In their examination of state politics based on state populations’ racial/ethnic compositions Hero and Tolbert (1996) found overall educational outcomes are highest in states that are racially and ethnically homogeneous low minority populations. Conversely, states with bifurcated structures having both large minority and white populations have the lowest outcomes. These researchers further noted even though aggregate results are high, outcomes for blacks are significantly lower in homogenous states.

In the United States, race/ethnicity is significantly correlated with poverty. Currently, the number of students of color who graduate from high school, college, and graduate programs disproportionately diminishes compared to their white counterparts (Maruyama 2003). The Bush administration's No Child Left Behind Act emphasized equality and accountability in public education, but according to Maruyama (2003) its methods have failed to address the totality of preexisting disparities within student populations. To address the disparity of opportunity and outcomes, Maruyama (2003) highlights ways in which social scientists can contribute to social policies and practices. By investigating and citing the inequities at the local, state, and national levels of K-12 education based on impoverished conditions and racial/ethnic classifications, he outlined the conflict between the low educational achievement and values underlying public education. Maruyama observed that the social scientists' action research can diminish the challenges students of poverty and color face. This entails problem identification, planned interventions, accurate interpretive findings, and the redefinition of problems. Maruyama (2003) called upon researchers and practitioners to collaborate by marrying theory with practice to service the needs of economically disadvantaged students.

Scholars readily make connections between economic conditions and educational policymaking, but there has been an observed reluctance on the part of researchers to do the same with environmental justice issues (Arekere and Rice 1998). Arekere and Rice (1998) in observance of this paucity, referred to economic theory to explain the unequal distribution of environmental costs and benefits. Their reasoning follows the science of economics because environmental justice is partly grounded in the efficient allocation of limited resources. Like Bullard's (1998) investigations of the environmental justice paradigm which seeks to eliminate unfair, unjust, and inequitable environmental conditions and decisions, Arekere and Rice's study attempted to reveal suppositions influencing unequal protection. Primarily associated with theories of distributive justice, environmental justice highlights the fair allocation of natural resources and disproportionate man-made environmental hazards (Arekere and Rice 1998; Bullard 1998).

Over the past 30 years an increase in public attention to environmental protection concerns, such as water and air quality, ecological resource maintenance and sustainability, and habitat preservation have fed tensions between social equity aims and environmental programs (Frederickson 1994; Paehlke and Rosenau 1993). The second wave of the U.S. environmental movement began around 1987 and deviated from the first wave of the 1970s, which took a primarily regulatory approach to addressing environmental concerns. Two differing perspective grew out of public concern and fostered the centering on the compatibility of environmental agendas and social equity aims. One view is that environmental concerns span the boundaries of social segregation because air is something everyone indiscriminately consumes. However the other view, environmental disparity, is supported by studies (e.g., Bullard 1998; Paehlke and Rosenau 1993) suggesting there are significant differences in exposure to environmental hazards. Additionally, studies validate the perception of disproportionately distributed costs associated with environmental problems. According to Bullard, blacks and Hispanics are more apt to reside in areas with poor air quality than whites. Moreover, Paehlke and Rosenau report economically disadvantaged groups disproportionately bear the financial burden of environmental protection through lost jobs and other penalties transferred from industry costs (Paehlke and Rosenau 1993; see also Bullard 1998).

Only recently has the environmental movement begun to consider disadvantaged groups' unique political, economic, and personal interests (Paehlke & Rosenau 1993). This consideration has resulted in efforts to add civic and community-based perspectives to environmental policy (Kirlin 1996). Contrary to popular opinion, when examining the civic involvement of the economically disadvantaged in environmental politics, findings suggest only a modest difference between disadvantaged and advantaged peoples (Paehlke and Rosenau 1993). Less recognized for their activism, disadvantaged groups are engaged in the debate. Environmental protests incited primarily by blacks in rural Warren County, North Carolina resulted in 500 arrests, but also prompted the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice to produce the first national study, *Toxic Waste and Race* (1987). This report related waste facility location with demographic variables. Also building on principles of environmental and economic justice, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit of 1991 launched a multi-racial grassroots movement focusing on housing, transportation, public health, land usage, worker safety, resource distribution, and community empowerment through participation (Bullard 1998).

While the disparities in environmental justice are linked to traditional measures of occupational status such as income, the disparity in environmental civic engagement appears more closely associated with factors such as education and employment sector (Paehlke and Rosenau 1993). Whether citizens have equal access to public service benefits partially depends, in general, on public workforce composition (Selden, Brudney, and Kellough 1998; Wise 1990). Government is the leading employer in industrialized societies, and its employment policies and practices substantially contribute to the degree of economic and social equality present in a society (Wise 1990). Although government employment can be considered an item in and of itself, we further discuss it in the following process section.

### **Process**

In the pursuit of an equitable society, the formal expression of the New Public Administration movement at the Minnowbrook conference called for many major reforms to legitimize public service (Campbell 1976; Chitwood 1974; Cooper 2004; Hart 1976; Denhardt 1989; Ingraham, Rosenbloom, and Edlund 1989; Frederickson 1996; Najjar 1974; Porter and Porter 1974; White and Gates 1974). The reforms instigated were regarded as ways to redistribute political power and ranged from a general means of service production and provision to specific policies designed to facilitate equitable treatment (Ingraham, Rosenbloom, and Edlund 1989). At the point of convergence between the two main branches of public administration literature, development administration and the new public administration, lay the commitment to social equity and "the similarity of process that dominates their respective universes" (Najjar 1974, 586). In the effort to promote the concept of social equity, the changes of the New Public Administration movement targeted the largest part of permanent government, the bureaucracy. Because the division of items can be problematic, as in the case of jobs or employment, procedural equity was deemed paramount and significantly instrumental in ensuring fairness (Regens and Rycroft 1986).

In a society that values democratic procedures, a critical question is how to configure and staff government to increase prospects for coherent bureaucracy without

deflating popular control (Romzek and Hendricks 1982). One answer to which scholars have paid considerable attention is the processes of civil service recruitment, selection, and promotion. Concern for social equity in the civil service is crucial because as Wise (1990) emphasized, government jobs offer material rewards as well as a distinct combination of intrinsic benefits (Wise 1990). McGregor's (1974) essay on public service and social equity highlighted the conflict between "social equity" and the United States civil service merit system. Originally, merit meant religion and partisanship would be removed as grounds for employment and promotion in all positions except those designated for appointees (McGregor 1974). Under the Pendleton Act, merit was thought to foster competitive excellence. However, federal policy was not truly recognized for its attempt to promote the aims of social equity until the Ramspeck Act of 1940 rejected discrimination on the basis of race, creed, or color, (McGregor 1974). McGregor (1974) observed that the protection of due process and the increased help of judicial review have aided in the convergence of the constructs of equity and excellence, but they have yet to meet. To reconcile the values of excellence and equity McGregor (1974) offered the acknowledgement of assortments of excellence and their protection through the institution of multifaceted bases to make employment determinations.

The most referenced interpretation of what the courts consider equity in personnel selection is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in the workplace based on sex or race (McKinney and Collins 1991; Nalbandian 1989). Although the Supreme Court does not explicitly use the term "social equity," its interpretations of human resources policy often reflect this value (Nalbandian 1989, 41). The legal definition of social equity rendered in the precedent-setting *Griggs v. Duke Power* decision spawned affirmative action programs designed to counter the effects of discrimination and increase the bureaucracy's responsiveness to citizenry most impacted by agency decisions (McGregor 1974; McKinney and Collins 1991; Nalbandian 1989; Romzek and Hendricks 1982). The current debate surrounding affirmative action policies reveals the opinion affirmative measures are acts of reverse discrimination against whites (Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard 1999). This belief, among others, has caused public support for race- and gender-based affirmative action to wane. More recently, the judiciary has required states to present persuasive arguments in favor of their policies, thus demonstrating their ability to redress specific offenses and actions (Oldfield 2003; Nalbandian 1990).

When speaking of process and employment, the literature repeatedly returns to conceptions of representative bureaucracy. In addition to material and intrinsic rewards, civil service also offers substantial opportunities for political representation (Wise 1990). The dispute throughout the literature is whether representative bureaucracy is considered an end with affirmative action and testing a means. McGregor's (1974) treatise on civil service cites the importance of citizen participation and "representative bureaucracy" in achieving social equity, yet he admittedly ignored it in his discussion. Alternatively, Ruccucci and Saidel (1997) argued representative bureaucracy gives voice to "the preferences of a heterogeneous population...and assures everyone's views will be included in bureaucratic decision-making" (423). Because government administrators allocate resources amidst contentious political forces, they must use discretion to manage non-routine tasks (Meier and Nigro 1976; Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard 1999). The use of discretion combined with the ecology of politics yields what is characterized as political decisions and calls for a representative bureaucracy (Meier and Nigro 1976).

Representative bureaucracy follows a decision theory assuming if values are congruent, decisions will reflect this similarity (Meier 1975; Meier and Nigro 1976). However, even at the highest gradient of “representativeness” value congruence will not guarantee that all decisions will agree with public opinion because of inequalities of access to information (Meier 1975; Meier and Nigro 1976). Moreover, the critical and prominent issue is much of the literature suffers several shortcomings in supporting this proposition. The most duly noted weakness researchers (e.g., Meier 1975; Meier and Nigro 1976; Romzek and Hendricks 1982) identify is that while values are the base from which this theory is constructed, the literature’s standards of examination are almost exclusively limited to demographic characteristics. Demographic characteristics are not correlated to the value holdings due to a perpetual socialization process and therefore offer no explanations (Meier 1975; Meier and Nigro 1976; Romzek and Hendricks 1982).

Research has shown the whole of civil service is generally representative of the United States population; however, the impact of representation is greater at the “supergrade” level of federal government. John Rehfuss’ (1986) study of the ideological perspectives of senior-level California career executives found female and minority responses to open-ended questions were identical to the white male responses. Much like Meier and Nigro (1976) found, Rehfuss concluded agency affiliation was a stronger predictor of attitudes than social origins. Additionally, in their exposition of the conflict between representative and agency allegiance, Romzek and Hendricks (1982) found while some agencies may produce symbolic benefits through attempts at a representative bureaucracy, unless representation facilitates policy changes, it only contributes to skepticism and the dissatisfaction of represented groups and representatives alike (81).

Active participation in government is what truly empowers individuals (Ingraham and Rosenbloom 1989; Najjar 1974; Nalbandian 1999; Wise 1990). The debate over the relationship between demographic and active representation repeats throughout the literature. The results of Selden, Brudney, and Kellough’s (1998) research into how passive representation translates into active representation indicate the role of the representative significantly relates to “active representation” and not racial or ethnic membership. Although some would argue that demographic representation merely creates the appearance the political system is receptive and responsive to the public irrespective of individual differences, passive representation does have the ability to increase political responsiveness, albeit very limited (Wise 1990, 568).

### **Analysis**

The preceding discussion highlighted the divergence of definitional emphasis in the extant literature. From the information in Table 1, our content analysis reveals most writers focused on “equity as process,” with “equity as recipients” a close second, and “equity as items” a distant third. We might conclude from this finding the working definitions of equity found in the literature are thus grounded in either process or recipients. However, a second look at the table reveals a subtler finding. The most often emphasized dimension was “equity as process,” and this emphasis has remained reasonably consistent over time. Yet while “equity as recipients” appears more than “equity as items,” the latter was more often emphasized when two or more dimensions appeared in a single article. Moreover, there seems to be a slight shift over time away from an emphasis on the dimension of items toward the dimension of recipients.

The most important finding of this analysis is while there may be little agreement in terms of the dimension emphasized; the net effect of the presence of several dimensions is a literature rich in approach and theoretical traditions. Stone's (1988) distinctions are all reflected in the literature, yet the heavy emphasis on process stands out. In many ways this finding is not surprising given that the field of public administration has traditionally focused on questions of process. Even the New Public Administration, with its call for a new approach to the field, was fundamentally concerned with how to redefine the study of these processes to reflect a new (and broader) value set. Stone's (1988) typology is thus a useful tool to reach a broader understanding of this body of literature.

### **Conclusion**

The elevation of social equity as a fundamental element of government, as well as a moral and ethical guide of conduct within the bureaucracy, raises many questions about the perceived role of administration: for example, to whom is government responsible, for what is government responsible, and, most importantly, how will government will meet its obligations? In 1943, David Levitan noted the centrality of government's "procedural machinery" and the necessity of modifications to cope with social transformations and economic conditions to maintain the basic governmental principals' function (358). Disappointed with the status quo, Minnowbrook Conference attendees and leaders in the New Public Administration were motivated by a need for change. The conception of change was process oriented (Frederickson 1996, 264). By necessity, process employs configurations of diverse elements. Although process has proven the dominant emphasis, the domain of public life lends itself to a broad treatment encompassing additional emphases.

While there is voluminous literature which debates differing assumptions and definitions associated with social equity not covered in this review, the works reflected demonstrate the general acceptance of the theory and a widespread conclusion about the nature of administrative decision-making. The term "social equity" is more commonly equated with distributive justice to provide a more tangible understanding of an otherwise intangible concept (Nalbandian 1989; Stone 1988; Lucy, Gilbert, and Birkhead 1982; Frederickson 1990). This characterization alludes to a quantitative aim. Scholars have concurrently analyzed, dissected, and scrutinized decisions about whom, what, and how to distribute goods and services and the common aspiration is the decentralization of decision-making and redistribution of authority from elected and appointed officials to administrators and citizens.

From this review, it is evident that although scholars do not adhere to a single understanding of social equity, each perspective occupies a defensible place in the discussion. Given the overall parsed treatment of social equity throughout the literature, one observer might note social equity is not bound to the confines of any definite context. Another might remark that the inability of scholars to reach agreement also calls into question the utility of this pursuit. Perhaps if scholars expressly acknowledged that different definitions of social equity exist by explicitly defining the term each time it emerged as a central theme, it might lessen confusion.

The main issue stemming from social equity is distribution. However, the literature addressing each dimension points to decisively qualitative concerns in expanding the range of discussion. What equity is and what it means are questions as old

as the efforts to assign it operational meaning in concrete policy measures (Campbell 1976, 556). Using a multidimensional structure makes it clear social equity is more abstract than concrete; hence the observed disparities, lack of consensus, and statements of confusion (Harmon 1974; Hart 1974; Campbell 1976; Porter and Porter 1974; White and Gates 1974; Lucy, Gilbert, and Birkhead 1977; Ingraham, Rosenbloom, and Edlund 1989). While we note the prevalence of the process dimension in the literature, it is critical that we not abandon the other dimensions in a false pursuit of definitional harmony. The concept of social equity allows significant room for variation, which in turn allows it to grow along with the society it serves; the specific elements this entails is a question for future research.

**LaShawn D. Moore**, is a Ph.D, student in public administration and urban policy at Old Dominion University. Her research interests include social equity and public education. She can be contacted at lashawnd.moore@yahoo.com

**John C. Morris** is an associate professor at Old Dominion University. His research interests include public-private partnerships, federalism, and collaboration. He has published in journals such as *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Politics*, *Policy Studies Journal*, and the *American Journal of Evaluation*. He can be contacted at jcmorris@odu.edu.

### References

- Aaron, H.J. and C. M. , Lougy. 1986. *The comparable worth controversy*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution.
- Arekere, D. J., and M. F. Rice. 1998. Economics and environmental justice. *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy* 4 (2): 85-112.
- Bullard, R. 1998. Environmental and economic justice: Implications for public policy. *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy* 4 (2): 137-148.
- Campbell, A. K. 1976. Approaches to defining, measuring, and achieving equity in the public sector. *Public Administration Review* 36 (5): 556-562.
- Carrell, M R., and J.E. Dittrich. 1978. Equity theory: the recent literature, methodological consideration, and new directions. *The Academy of Management Review* 3 (2): 202-210.
- Carroll, J. D. 1987. Public administration in the third century of the Constitution: Supply-side management, privatization, or public investment? *Public Administration Review* 47 (1): 106-114.
- Chandler, R. C. 1984. The public administrator a representative citizen: a new role for the new century. *Public Administration Review* 44 (Special Issue): 196-206.

- Chitwood, S. R. 1974. Social equity and social service productivity. *Public Administration Review* 34 (1): 29-35.
- Chouliaraki, L., and N. Fairclough. 1999. *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press.
- Cooper, T.L. 2004. Big questions in administrative ethics: A need for focused, collaborative effort. *Public Administration Review* 64 (4): 395-407.
- Denhardt, K. G., and B.L. Catron. 1989. The management of ideals: a political perspective on ethics. *Public Administration Review* 49(2): 187-193.
- Dooley, C. E., and M.F. Rice. 1995. Embracing diversity in the public sector. *The Public Manager: The New Bureaucrat* 4 (2): 39-42.
- Downey, D. J. 1999. From Americanization to multiculturalism: Political symbols and struggles for cultural diversity in twentieth-century American race relations. *Sociological Perspectives* 42 (2): 249-278.
- Frederickson, H. G. 1990. Public administration and social equity. *Public Administration Review* 50 (2): 228-237.
- Frederickson, H. G. 1994. Can public officials correctly be said to have obligations to future generations. *Public Administration Review* 54 (5): 457-464.
- Frederickson, H. G. 1996. Comparing the Reinventing Government Movement with the New Public Administration. *Public Administration Review* 56 (3): 263-270.
- Frederickson, H. G. 2005. The state of social equity in American public administration. *National Civic Review* 94 (4): 31-39.
- Golding, M. P. 1981. Obligations to future generations. In *Responsibility to future generations*, ed. Earnest Partridge, 61-72. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Golembiewski, R. T. 1998. Process observer: Diversity as a shining goal or sham? Equifinality definitely does not apply. *Organizational Development Journal* 16 (8): 5-9.
- Harmon, M. M. 1974. Social equity and organizational man: Motivation and organizational democracy. *Public Administration Review* 34 (1): 11-18.
- Hart, D. K. 1974. Social equity, justice, and the equitable administrator. *Public Administration Review* 3 (1): 3-11.
- Hartshorne, C. 1981. The ethics of contributionism. In *Responsibility to future generations*, ed. Earnest Partridge, 103-108. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books

- Hejka-Ekins, A. 1988. Teaching ethics in public administration. *Public Administration Review* 48 (5): 885-891.
- Hero, R. E., and C.J. Tolbert. 1996. A racial/ethnic diversity interpretation of politics and policy in the states of the U.S. *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (3): 851-871.
- Ingraham, P. W., D.H. Rosenbloom, and C. Edlund. 1989. The new public personnel and the new public service. *Public Administration Review* 49(2): 116-126.
- Keeney, R. L., and R.L. Winkler. 1985. Evaluating decision strategies for equity of public risks. *Operations Research* 33(5): 955-970.
- Kellough, J. E. 1990. Integration in the public workplace: Determinants of minority and female employment in federal agencies. *Public Administration Review* 50(5): 557-566.
- Kincaid, J. 1990. From cooperative to coercive federalism. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 509: 139-152.
- Kingsley, J. D. 1944. *Representative bureaucracy: An interpretation of the British Civil Service*. Yellow Springs: Antioch Press.
- Kirlin, J.J. 1996. The big questions of public administration policy. *Public Administration Review* 56 (5): 416-423.
- Kolderie, T. 1986. The two different concepts of privatization. *Public Administration Review* 46 (4): 285-291.
- Laswell, H. 1936. *Politics: Who gets what, when, how*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levitan, D. M. 1943. Political ends and administrative means. *Public Administration Review* 3(4): 353-359.
- Lucy, W.H., Gilbert, D., and G. Birkhead. 1977. Equity in local service distribution. *Public Administration Review* 37 (6): 687-697.
- Mani, B. G. 1999. Challenges and opportunities for women to advance in the Federal Civil Service: Veteran's preference and promotions. *Public Administration Review* 59 (6): 523-534.
- Maruyama, G. 2003. Disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes: What do we know and what can we do? *Journal of Social Issues* 59(3): 653-666.

- McGregor, E. B. 1974. Social equity and the public service. *Public Administration Review* 34 (1): 18-29.
- McKinney, W. R., and J.R. Collins. 1991. The impact on utility, race, and gender using three standard methods of scoring selection examination. *Public Personnel Management* 20: 145-169.
- Meier, K. J. 1975. Representative bureaucracy: An empirical analysis. *The American Political Science Review* 69(2): 526-542.
- Meier, K. J., R.D. Wrinkle, and J.L. Polinard. 1999. Representative bureaucracy and distributional equity: Addressing the hard question. *The Journal of Politics* 61 (4): 1025-1039.
- Meier, K. J., and L.G. Nigro. 1976. Representative bureaucracy and policy preferences: A study in the attitudes of federal executives. *Public Administration Review* 36 (4): 458-469.
- Milliken, F.J., and L.L. Martins. 1996. Searching for common threads: Understanding the multiple effects of diversity on organizational groups. *The Academy of Management Review* 21 (2): 402-433.
- Modarres, A. 2003. The dialectic of development in US urban policies: an alternative theory of poverty. *Cities* 20(1): 41-49.
- Mosher, F. C. 1968. *Democracy and the public service*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mosher, F. C. 1982. *Democracy and the public service*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Najjar, G. K. 1974. Development administration and "New" Public Administration: A Convergence of perspectives? *Public Administration Review* 34 (6): 584-587.
- Nalbandian, J. 1989. The U.S. Supreme Courts "consensus" on Affirmative Action. *Public Administration Review* 49 (1): 38-45.
- Nalbandian, J. 1989. Nalbandian on the court and social equity [Letter to the editor]. *Public Administration Review* 49(3): 293-294.
- Nalbandian, J. 1999. Facilitating community, enabling democracy: New roles for local government managers. *Public Administration Review* 59(3): 187-197.
- Oldfield, K. 2003. Social class and public administration: A closed question opens. *Administration & Society* 35 (4): 438.

- Oldfield, K, G. Candler, and R. G. Johnson III. 2006 Social class, sexual orientation and toward proactive social equity scholarship. *The American Review of Public Administration* 36(2): 156-172.
- O'Kelly, C., and M.J. Dubnick. 2006. Taking tough choices seriously: Public administration and individual moral agency. *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory* 16 (3): 393-415.
- Oliver, T. R. 1999. The dilemmas of incrementalism: Logical and political constraints in the design of health insurance reforms. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 18 (4): 652-683.
- Paehlke, R., and P.V. Rosenau. 1993. Environment /equity: Tensions in North American politics. *Policy Studies Journal* 2 (4): 672-687.
- Perry, J. L. and L.R. Wise. 1990. The motivational bases of public service. *Public Administration Review* 5 (3): 367-373.
- Pops, G.M. and T.J. Pavlak. 1991. *The case for justice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Porter, D. O., and T.W. Porter. 1974. Social equity and Fiscal Federalism. *Public Administration Review* 34 (1): 36-43.
- Rainey, H. G. 1994. On paradigms, progress, and prospects for public management. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 4(1): 44-48.
- Rawls, J. 1971. *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. 1999. *A theory of justice*. Revised ed. England: Oxford University Press.
- Regens, J. L., and R.W. Rycroft. 1986. Measuring equity in regulatory policy implementation. *Public Administration Review* 46 (5): 423-431.
- Rehfuss, J. A. 1986 A representative bureaucracy? Women and minority executives in California Career Service. *Public Administration Review* 46 (5): 454-460.
- Rice, M. F., and D.J. Arekere. 1998. Environmental justice: An Introduction. *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy* 4 (2): 81-84.
- Riccucci, N. M., and J.R. Saidel. 1997. The representativeness of state-level bureaucratic leaders: A missing piece of the representative bureaucracy puzzle. *Public Administration Review* 57 (5): 423-430.
- Rohr, J.A. 1976. The study of ethics in P. A. curriculum. *Public Administration Review* 36 (4): 398-406.

- Romzek, B. S., and S. Hendricks. 1982. Organizational involvement and representative bureaucracy: Can we have it both ways? *The American Political Science Review* 76 (1): 75-82.
- Rosenbloom, D. H. 1989. Rosenbloom on the court's employment discrimination decisions. *Public Administration Review* 49 (3), 292-293.
- Schaefer, R. R. 1978. Democracy and leadership: Some Reflection on the political education of civil servants. *Southern Review of Public Administration* 2 (3): 345.
- Selden, S. C, J.L. Brudney, and J.E. Kellough. 1998. Bureaucracy as a representative institution: Toward a reconciliation of bureaucratic government and democratic theory. *American Journal of Political Science* 42(3): 717-744.
- Stone, D. 1988. *Policy paradox and political reason*. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman.
- Subramaniam, V. 1967. Representative bureaucracy: A reassessment. *The American Political Science Review* 61 (4): 1010-1019.
- United Church of Christ/Commission for Racial Justice. 1987. *Toxic waste and race: A national report on socio-economic characteristics of communities with hazardous waste sites*. United Church of Christ: New York.
- Weinberg, A. S. 2000. Sustainable economic development in rural America. *Annals of the American Academy of Political Social Science* 570 (1): 173-185.
- White, O., and B.L. Gates. 1974. Statistical theory and equity in the delivery of social services. *Public Administration Review* 34 (1): 43-51.
- Wicks, B. E.,and K.F. Backman. 1994. Measuring equity preferences: a longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Leisure Research* 26(4): 386-402.
- Wilson, W. 1997. The study of administration. *Political Science Quarterly* 2 (2): 197-222.
- Wise, L.R. 1990. Social equity in civil service systems. *Public Administration Review* 50 (5): 567-575.
- Wooldridge, B. 1998. Protecting equity while reinventing government: strategies for achieving a "fair" distribution of the costs and benefits of the public sector. *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy* 4 (1): 67-80.