

The Unintended Consequences of the Stigmatization of Affirmative Action for Beneficiaries: A Review of the Literature

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Much of the psychological, social psychological and social neuroscience literature delves into the stigmatization of affirmative action for beneficiary groups such as women and underrepresented minorities. However, seldom, if ever, are these unintended consequences of affirmative action for beneficiaries a part of the discourse in public administration. The author provides a framework that explains the psychological antecedents of these ill effects, not only from the perspective of the majority, but through the lenses of members of beneficiary groups who are adversely impacted by them. Also discussed are the challenges of balancing the benefits of affirmative action while mitigating the negative effects of stereotyping and the policy implications for public administration if these shortcomings of the policy are not directly addressed.

The heated debates during the past 40 years over affirmative action have done more to generate acrimony than to settle attitudes about the policy. Proponents argue emphatically for the merits of affirmative action, without which, little, if any progress, might have been made (Bergmann 1996, Tien 1997, Crosby 2004, Anderson 2004, Soni 1999, Wise 2005). Critics assert to the rationale for affirmative action as an unsound measure (Leiter and Leiter 2002, Connerly 1995, Holmes 2000, Blum and Levin 2000; Rodriguez 2000, Steele 1988, 1991, 2006) that risks harming the American psyche in the process (Crosby 2004). While these debates have tended to fall within the for and against camps on affirmative action, little is known in the public administration literature about the effects of the policy on the psyche of its beneficiaries, namely, women and underrepresented minorities¹ although Von Bergen et al. (2002) discuss the demoralization of these effects in the context of diversity management.

Through a literature review, this article profiles how affirmative action, a public policy that was crafted to provide benefits in education and employment for protected groups, has re-

sulted in the unintended stereotyping of these groups. First, the aim is to understand the psychological antecedents that engender the support for or opposition against affirmative action and the resultant stigmatization of beneficiaries. Much of this evidence on the ill effects of affirmative action is found in the psychological, social psychological and social neuroscience literature and appears to be almost absent from public administration journals. Second, the author describes the conundrum between balancing the benefits of affirmative action against mitigating the unintended negative effects of stereotyping. Finally, the possible policy implications for public administration are explored if these negative effects are not directly addressed.

Importance to Public Administration

It is believed that affirmative action results in an unintended consequence, the stigmatization of beneficiaries that plays a role in how the recipient groups of the policy are either viewed and/or view themselves (Heilman and Blader 2001, Heilman et al. 1997, Heilman et al. 1992). These stereotypes often include perceptions of incompetence and inferiority, the very premise that opponents have used against affirmative action in citing the policy as compromising standards given preferential treatment for certain groups (Anderson 2004, Connerly 1995, Holmes 1997, Blum and Levin 1999). But, these stereotypes may also unwittingly cause the members of recipient groups not to take advantage of benefits under the policy to which they are legally entitled. This is an important issue because it is public administration that is charged with implementing affirmative action. Further, this speaks to representativeness, one of the fundamental tenets of representative bureaucracy in addressing the diverse needs of the polity. Affirmative action is one tool through which to achieve this goal in an effort to level the playing field for those who have been traditionally excluded from the process. Yet, although affirmative action and by extension representative bureaucracy "...is no guarantee of democratic decision-making, it carries some dependent and symbolic values that are significant for a democratic society" (Mosher 1968, 13). As such, public administration then becomes central to the discourse on affirmative action in helping to frame, formulate and implement the policy even as such debates remain unabated and in light of the inconsistent rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court about its application (Ricucci 2007). The dearth of research about the ill effects of affirmative action, however, not only suggests a void in public administration research but an equal void in public administration programs' curricula. Consequently, public administration scholars, practitioners and students are being deprived of invaluable research in the field as well as being informed about the lessons learned and lessons still yet to be learned about the policy.

The Need for Atonement: The Role of White Guilt

According to renowned scholar and theologian James Cone, America likes to think of itself as innocent (Bill Moyers Journal (PBS) November 23, 2007). Cone was referring to America's yearning to be redeemed of its past sins and the juxtaposition between the cross and the lynching tree, two powerful symbols of that past that serve as embodiments of good and evil. Pierce (2003) regards this obsession of white Americans as a "race for innocence" (54) that has always been a part of American history. This cursory attempt at atonement seems to have always been the premise behind which affirmative action has been justified; that is, it is

morally the right thing to do (Soni 1999, Sugrue 2001). President Richard Nixon proclaimed that affirmative action would “Bring Us Together” (Anderson 2004, 112). Swim and Miller (1999) allude to “white guilt” (500) as the rationale for white Americans’ search for redemption. Some refer to this need to make amends as liberal guilt (Ellison 1996), others as collective guilt, an act of social consciousness by whites for their misdeeds against minorities (C.S. Lewis 1940/1967). And Shelby Steele (1988, 1991, 2006) formalized the term white guilt to connote those feelings that so overwhelm whites for what they see as ill gotten gains that have sealed their fate and privilege. Blacks, on the other hand, are equally beset by anxieties given their inferior status, beliefs that in practice are consistently reinforced in society (Wise 2005). The feelings of both groups are thus caught in a vicious cycle; the feelings of one group serve to impugn the feelings of the other group; whites feel shame while blacks remain in judgment of whites as to the legitimacy of their gains in society.

Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence (Pratkanis and Turner 1999), himself experienced internal turmoil with these same bouts of guilt and was the first known to write about it. While Jefferson openly argued about the adverse effects of slavery on the slave owner as well as on his own children whom he feared would model the behavior of the slave owner and spoke about the immorality of the act by acknowledging enslavement as racism, for economic reasons, he owned from 175 to 200 slaves yet rationalized that he would free his slaves as soon as he was able to do so. But Jefferson is perhaps more infamously remembered for his longtime clandestine affair with Sally Hemmings, a slave, with whom he fathered seven children even as he found the Negro to be repugnant and less than a human being. In addition, President Abraham Lincoln, who is credited with emancipating the slaves, fervently believed in the superiority of the white race and argued passionately against social and political equality for blacks (Wallace 2003).

Frederick Douglas, a former slave, believed that it was the general consensus of the day by both blacks and whites that slavery was immoral (Pratkanis and Turner 1999). Douglas believed that even his former slave master’s children with whom he played as a child, sensed in their own way that the act was wrong although later as adults they became ardent supporters of the institution. Tatum’s (1994) account of white college students’ reaction on learning about the prevalence of racism signals the persistence of this contradiction. Students from a cross-section of institutions in a psychology course on racism began to exude strongly held feelings of white guilt once they learned of the extent to which racism exists in American society. Still, the inconsistency occurred when the students refused to learn more about racism. Apparently, these actions serve as defense mechanisms to inoculate the students from further exposure to a subject that would heighten their feelings of guilt. It is this level of white guilt that could potentially be used to determine either the level of support for and opposition against affirmative action (Swim and Miller 1999). However, racism on the part of members of the majority (whites) could also be so profound that despite experiencing high levels of guilt, individual members of the group do not see themselves as personally racist. Studies contradict this finding in that the more self-focused the emotions of inequality, the greater the likelihood of white guilt and the more likely the support for affirmative action (Iyer et al. 2003). Political ideology is also believed to play a role in whether or not policies like affirmative action will be supported (Swim and Miller 1999).

Psychological Antecedents for and Against Affirmative Action

Affirmative Action as Threat. The general need for atonement of white Americans is thereby in keeping with the American ideals for the pursuit of fairness (Crosby 2004, Bergmann 1996, Anderson 2004) and social justice (Wise 2005, Soni 1999). Affirmative action is, in a sense, a form of justice seeking for past discrimination that involves taking turns at fairness for those who have been harmed (Tomasson et al. 2001). This retribution is in turn viewed as good for what ails the perpetrators of such transgressions (Pratkanis and Turner 1999) but only as long as doing so does not threaten the economic and political power base of the majority (Renfro et al. 2006). Organizations that view affirmative action as threatening to their economic viability are less likely to support the policy (Kravitz et al. 2000). Like reactions are evoked with perceived low status or minority groups where, because of their increased presence, competition for already scarce resources become fierce (Blalock 1967, Frisbie and Niedert 1977). The same principle can be applied to women, or any minority or perceived low status group for that matter. For women, Kanter (1977) believes that moving beyond tokenism by achieving at least 15 percent in the representation of women in any occupation in the workplace is an imperative for gender equality. Below this number would render women invisible given their minority status and subject them to stereotyping (Kanter 1977, Reskin et al. 1999). As a consequence, women's job performance would also be undermined.

Thus, the increased presence of minority and/or perceived low status groups and the corresponding threat level would be proportional to the amount of discrimination that is levied against these groups (Blalock 1967, Frisbie and Niedert 1977, Renfro et al. 2006). Where such threats are seen as credible, opposition to affirmative action is strongest (Renfro et al. 2006). Similarly, any perceived threats to the majority's values and beliefs increases that group's likely opposition to affirmative action. Individual members of the majority who are high in racism are also high in negative stereotyping about minorities, are highly opposed to affirmative action (Steinbugler et al. 2006). This cohort is more likely to be the most conservative in political ideology and view policies like affirmative action as a threat to their economic and political well being (Frederico and Sidanius 2002a, 2002b). Support for affirmative action may well serve to reaffirm the need for such policies in light of visible signs of societal inequities that would demand the majority's intervention (Esses and Seligman 1996). But, support for affirmative action would be an admission of social injustice that portends to threaten the majority's societal standing.

Affirmative Action as Help. When taken as a helping behavior, support for affirmative action is likely to increase (Pratkanis and Turner 1999). This does not mean that help is forthcoming, only that help is being contemplated. This rationale may help to explain the often mixed and tentative support for affirmative action over the years. While the policy exists, its support is fleeting. Quinn et al. (2001) developed a conceptual model to explain when and what kinds of helping behaviors are appropriate in predicting support for affirmative action based on a perceived level of responsibility that is attached to the groups that are in need of help. When beneficiaries of affirmative action are perceived as causing the problem or providing a solution for their problems, support for a moral reason for the policy is increased though beneficiaries of such policies are perceived as too weak or incapable of finding so-

lutions to these problems. However, when beneficiaries are perceived as responsible for causing their problems yet are not held responsible for finding solutions to them, helping behavior assumes a more enlightened form. The solution requires intervention to help the person to see the error of his or her ways. When beneficiaries of affirmative action are seen as causing their own problems, even though they are responsible for finding solutions, helping becomes more compensatory in nature. Here, the person is viewed as deprived because of social circumstances. Finally, if beneficiaries are perceived as neither responsible for their problems nor are held accountable for solving them, then helping takes on a medical orientation. The person is seen as ill-equipped to resolve their problems. Hence, it is any one of these perceptions held by the majority that can determine whether or not affirmative action will be supported. So, when affirmative action is targeted for education and training as opposed to the reallocation of resources, it is more likely to be supported (Steinbugler et al. 2006).

In contrast, affirmative action may only be supported when certain conditions are met. First, the majority must believe that doing so is a matter of choice (Pratkanis and Turner 1999). This likelihood is decreased when doing so is perceived by the majority (donor) as inappropriate or when there is no perceived urgency for intervention, when the beneficiary is viewed as different from the donor or when the donor perceives that helping would lead to personal conflict. Second, the impetus to help is brought about for egotistical or benevolent reasons. For egotistical reasons, helping characterizes the donor as a superior and the recipient as an inferior (Pratkanis 2000). For benevolent reasons, the donor simply feels good about giving to improve the welfare of a fellow human being (Pratkanis and Turner 1999). Support for affirmative action may also be likely in how the decision to take action is made as well as in what form help is to be delivered. However, the backdrop in which the above occurs is key as such decisions are made in a culture of racism. This context only serves to reinforce the superior-inferior relationship. Lastly, others point out that because affirmative action was created by the majority, the law was inherently designed to serve only their interests, not those of protected groups (Law 1999). So, one should neither be surprised nor be deluded by the marginal gains of affirmative action (Aguirre 2000).

Taken together and whether or not affirmative action was promulgated out of white guilt and the need for atonement on the part of white Americans, the above encapsulated the psychological antecedents that are believed to be the rationale for supporting and opposing the policy. Yet, the analyses up to now have been taken from that of the majority, not from beneficiary groups for whom the policy was enacted. The evidence shows that there have indeed been gains for these groups as a result of affirmative action (Crosby and Downing 2003, Bergmann 1996, Crosby 2004, Anderson 2004, Soni 1999, Wise 2005, Kalev et al. 2006). But there have also been unintended costs to beneficiaries as the glass ceiling (GAO 2003, Mani 2001, Naff 2001, AAUP 2006), wage disparities (Holzer and Neumark 2000, Kalev et al. 2006, Crum and Naff 1997, Riccucci 2002) and job segregation (Guy and Newman 2005). Moreover, rarely, if ever, are these unintended consequences mentioned in public administration research. For this reason, the succeeding section will highlight the stereotypes and the effects on beneficiaries. Equally important, this section will examine the extent of negative stereotyping from what is believed to be the position of the beneficiaries of affirmative action.

Stigmatization: An Unintended Consequence of Affirmative Action

According to Crosby and Clayton (2001), affirmative action was launched because the groups that have been victimized could not on their own see themselves as being marginalized by discrimination or by a legal system that has been ineffective for the aggrieved (Katznelson 2005). Affirmative action was enacted to address these systemic challenges before they careened out of control. It is this recognition that affirmative action is deemed necessary (Crosby and Clayton 2001). But, it is also this helping role, or the notion that beneficiaries lack the capacity to care for themselves, that some members of underrepresented minority groups find objectionable as well as the stereotypes that reinforce this stigma of helplessness. Some high profile members of these groups have even called for the dismantling of affirmative action altogether given the prevailing stigma (Connerly 1995, Steele 1988, 1991 and 2006, Heilman et al. 1997, Carter 1991, Pincus 2003).

Ward Connerly (1995) views affirmative action as unfair, especially with regard to preferential treatment for certain groups. Shelby Steele (1988, 1991, 2006) believes that although it is white guilt that facilitated affirmative action, such policies cast beneficiaries as victims who cast aspersions upon themselves to take advantage of the system. Stephen Carter (1991) charges that affirmative action functions to reaffirm stereotypes. Carter believes that failure by any member of the beneficiary groups maligns all members of those groups simply by association. Linda Chavez rejects the use of racial preferences in education (Pincus 2003) while Margaret Heilman (1996) contends that affirmative action results in detrimental costs to society such as experienced by those who are unfairly bypassed because of group preference, not qualifications. And, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who has benefited from affirmative action, revealed that it is the stigma of incompetence that he most abhors about the policy (Dolin 2007).

It is then this supposition of helplessness that some members of beneficiary groups see as most destructive. Some go as far as to couch affirmative action as fraudulent in its intent (Bolick 1996). Whereas others prognosticate that the policy has become a crutch that forces employers to patronize minorities by expecting less of them and causes minorities to expect less of themselves (Loury 1992). This strategy negates the primary reasons for affirmative action by failing to advance the causes of minorities. Affirmative action is therefore seen as perpetuating the problem of helplessness for minorities. Similar statements have been echoed by policy analysts (Nacoste 1990) and others like Murray (1994) who was chastised for claiming that the policy would develop into a stigma hypothesis because the “evil of preferential treatment...[is that it] perpetuates the impression of inferiority” (207). And, it is the stereotyping of beneficiary groups under affirmative action that determines how the debates and decisions on behalf of the policy are pursued (Salinas 2003). In this vein, the stereotyping of groups becomes a political tool in helping to frame the issue.

It is thus a well established view that affirmative action results in the stigmatization of beneficiary groups. The body of empirical work in psychology, social psychology and social neuroscience supports that this phenomenon exists (Frederico and Sidanius 2002a, 2002b, Appiah 2000, Coate and Loury 1993, C.S. Steele 1997, 1998, Dar-Nimrod and Heine 2006, Leyens et al. 2000; Heilman et al. 1997, Heilman et al. 1992, Heilman and Blader

2001). Likewise, these stereotypes are believed to reinforce beliefs that are important in shaping ones identity (Appiah 2000).

The Role of Self Doubt: A Product of Trauma. The need for affirmative action and the ensuing hostilities that the policy has provoked in non beneficiaries is believed to fuel some level of self doubt among beneficiaries of the policy. W.E.B. Dubois' seminal work on *The Souls of Black Folk* put it best into context on what it is like for blacks to be perceived as a problem (as cited in Pratkanis and Turner 1999). This burden leads blacks to question their two separate but yet to be reconciled selves – as Americans and as African-Americans. According to DeGruy Leary (2005), slavery has exacted such a traumatic toll on its descendants that still today these stressors are visibly at play in African American life. Post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) wreaks havoc in African Americans and is especially enduring because these stressors were imposed by human beings.

Women and underrepresented minorities are purported to experience this sense of devaluation because of affirmative action (Tommason et al. 2001, Von Bergens et al. 2002) in that they view themselves as pawns of society. For example, knowing that ones selection for an opportunity was based on preferential treatment is likely to lead a person to question his or her ability to secure like opportunities (Nacoste 1990). It is speculated that this self doubt is more likely to be experienced among college students than in older adults (Crosby and Downing 2003). Self doubt is attributed to the low maturity level and self confidence of college students although other studies have found that the greater the racial and/or ethnic identity of college students, the less the self doubt and low self confidence among them (Schmermund et al. 2001, Elizondo and Hu 1999, Sax and Arredondo 1999). These studies have also demonstrated that with greater racial and/or ethnic pride comes a higher support for affirmative action (also see Synder et al., 2006) although Asian-Americans, like whites, are the least likely to support such efforts (Sax and Arredondo 1999). But when it is shown that college students have feelings of self doubt, poor academic performance is likely to be present (Brown et al. 2000). In earlier work by Heilman et al. (1987), women who were told that they were selected for leadership positions not based on their skills but solely because of their gender felt that they were being devalued. As a result, the women no longer expressed an interest in pursuing positions of leadership. Heilman and Alcott (2001) also found that when females were told that they were selected for a task based on preferential treatment, they were more inclined to believe that the confederate in the study thought negatively of their abilities to perform. The females became uncertain about their qualifications and the thought that the confederate had negative expectations about them negatively influenced their performance.

A survey showed that an increasing level of economic insecurity is experienced by middle class African American respondents who were alleged to feel undeserving of their positions and commensurate compensation (Hochschild 1995). Even high level blacks hired under affirmative action were rumored to experience this self doubt. And, although two-thirds of the respondents believed that their job selections were based on their qualifications, approximately three-fifths viewed that adverse effects were associated with being hired under affirmative action. More recent evidence find that blacks tend to respond negatively to these programs because of the perceived stigmatization, doubt that such programs are as fair as recipients are led to believe and that being hired under affirmative action may

result in a backlash (Slaughter et al. 2005). Such negative effects tend to elicit negativity to increase negative stereotypes about oneself and one's group (Ric 2004).

Inferiority and Incompetence. In an early study, students were asked to rate employment files that included the applicants' photographs (Heilman et al. 1992). Students rated women selected as affirmative action candidates much harsher than those who were not selected under affirmative action. This points to an automatic association of affirmative action selection with inferiority and incompetence. In a second study using the same photographs, evaluators made the assumption that candidates selected under affirmative action were inferior to those who were not so selected (Heilman 1997) even when the affirmative action candidate was more qualified (Resendez 2002). In essence, knowing that candidates were selected under affirmative action served as a potent intervening variable for job evaluators to associate the selection with incompetence. Therefore, it is believed that despite an employer's efforts, if a candidate is believed to be an affirmative action hire, the stigma will persist. The same label was applied to simulated applicant admissions to graduate school (Heilman and Blader 2001). Additionally, the same rationale was given when workers subsequently learned that their co-workers were hired for affirmative action reasons, the opinions of their co-workers declined precipitously (Heilman 1992).

If applicants are deemed as affirmative action candidates they are rated inferior to those who were not. To Loury (1992), under affirmative action, government contractors may believe that in order to hire minorities, they will have to patronize minorities by not holding them to the same standards as other potential hires. Affirmative action hires may create skill differentials at the outset of employment for beneficiary groups that will continue throughout their tenure to result in sub optimization for these groups. This negative thinking reinforces the arguments that affirmative action opponents have made, that is, to be hired under the guise of the policy is to be considered compromised.

Stereotype Threat. Studies have shown the destructive nature of stereotypes in how people perceive certain groups as well as in how members of these same groups perceive themselves. This prevalence in American culture, especially in the media, only reinforces negative stereotypes about minorities and women. C.M. Steele (1997) coined the term stereotype threat to explain the frustration that protected groups experience that subsequently leads them to fail in particular domains like academic achievement. Stereotype threat is believed to manifest when, because of negative stereotypes about these groups, their performance on certain tasks or in given situations may be negatively impacted based upon the stereotypes that are held about them. The threat for these groups is overcoming the negative stereotypes by striving to accomplish the opposite or that which is unexpected of them to dispel the myth about them or their group. It is self doubt about oneself and one's group's ability to do something that poses as the threat. This stereotype is akin to Murray's (1994) stigma hypothesis. More importantly, as in PTSS, a sense of foreboding overcomes the victims (DeGruy Leary 2005). The frustration comes when these groups, believing that they are defined by others given the negative stereotypes, do all that they can to reverse what they do in an attempt to change the negative beliefs about them. Yet, what actually occurs given the stereotype threat is that members of these groups under perform in situations that they deem to be threatening, yet out perform in situations viewed to be non threatening.

Studies of kindergarten and first grade teachers found that teachers had a greater propensity to rate African American children as higher in behavioral problems and low in competency (Sbarra and Pianta 2001). Similarly, fifth grade teachers were more likely to rate African American children as adjustment challenged, less competent and attributed negative stereotypes to them than white fifth grade students (Pigott and Cowen 2000). Other studies confirm the negative stereotyping of certain groups in American society (Johnson and Rivera 2007, Smith 2001, Long 2002). This research, particularly at the kindergarten and primary levels of education, are all the more important because they serve as a gauge on how students from beneficiary groups reinforce the negative stereotyping of their groups and how they perceive themselves. By the time that these children reach the kindergarten level, they will already have become keenly aware of race (Law 1999). Both black and white children attach positive and negative values based upon race (Harris 1990, Mahoney 1995). Blacks, unlike whites, routinely use race when describing themselves (Harris 1990). Whiteness is conjured as normative of American society. To be white in America is the norm. According to deMello Patterson (2000) of Frankenberg (1993), white is a signal of such markers as dominance, the norm and privilege. Any race other than white describes an otherness akin to adjectives like “insubordination” and “marginalization” (104). These definitions imply that non white groups are deviant (Law 1999) as are women in the military (Ellefson 1998).

Van Laar and Levin (2000) and Aronson et al. (1999) suggest that stereotype threat might play a role in students’ overall performance. In Aronson et al. (1999), high scoring white males on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) were given a difficult mathematics test. However, the white male students were specifically told prior to taking the test that Asian students on average outperform whites on this test. The results showed that the white males underperformed on the mathematics test thus supporting C.M. Steele’s (1997) stereotype threat theory. However, the difference in this experiment was that the underperformance was by a racial group that has not historically suffered from stigmatization (Aronson et al. 1999). The researchers replicated the study to discern what it was about the first study that induced stereotype threat. In this second experiment, the stereotype about Asians outperforming white students was not mentioned. The results showed that when this information was omitted, the white students performed better. Incidentally, what both studies revealed was that when individuals personally identified with and/or cared enough to dispel particular stereotypes, they underperformed. This was evident when white males who did not feel personally vested enough to do well on the mathematics test performed moderately suggesting that it is the personal investment to do well coupled with the increased anxiety to dispel a stereotype that induced low performance. Because of stereotype threat, studies with beneficiary groups who underperformed simply reinforced historically based stereotypes that have been held about them.

Women, for example, under perform in threatening situations that test their ability in mathematics and science (Dar-Nimrod and Heine 2006). Relatively small manipulations in experiments such as adjusting the gender composition of groups can trigger this stereotype threat to cause these groups, about which the stereotypes are held, to under perform (Leyens et al. 2000). Even if members of these groups do not possess these stereotypes, they be-

come fearful that they will be identified as such by others. Derks et al. (2008) believe that stereotype threat can negatively affect more than just the members of the stereotyped groups' performance. This spill over effect might not only deter members of these groups to disengage from identification with certain domains altogether but will attempt to force them to compensate by excelling in other domains (Derks et al. 2006). These reviews then enlighten our understanding of how stereotype threat increases the activity in the brain to result in the decrement of overall cognitive performance (Derks et al. 2008).

A Question of Compromised Standards and Inefficiency. D'Souza (1991) berated the liberal elite for compromising educational standards by pushing ill prepared blacks and Hispanics through higher education in the name of diversity. Doing so, said D'Souza, is to infuse a culture of failure. Such observations should not be callously dismissed (Crosby 2004). Studies by Brown et al. (2000) and van Laar and Levin (2000) showed that blacks and Hispanics who were admitted to the Universities of Texas and California prior to the Hopwood et al. court ruling (Texas) and Proposition 209 (California) that severely curtailed the use of race and/or ethnicity in the admissions process, black and Hispanic students either suspected or knew that they were admitted to their respective institutions under affirmative action and because of preferential treatment. In both studies (Brown et al. 2000, van Laar and Levin 2000), under further examination, these same students possessed lower GPAs than white and Asian students who were not admitted to the universities. These studies are not isolated. Others on admissions within the University of California system yielded like results (Crosby 2004).

The aforementioned then calls into question whether or not the research is emblematic of efficiency or performance levels of protected groups in the workplace. According to Holzer and Neumark (1999), minorities employed under affirmative action tend to have lower educational achievement and fall below the formal educational requirements for the positions for which they were hired. Yet, despite this differential, women and minority employees do well thus disputing Loury (1992) who sees affirmative action as a counterproductive measure that lowers the skills of minorities who are attracted to employers that lower their standards to accommodate them. Other analyses, also by Holzer and Neumark (2000), suggest the opposite.

The data may support those of Loury's (1992) and others who say that employees hired under affirmative action are bound to under perform on the job compared to non minorities who are not so hired. And much of this information seems to suggest that affirmative action dilutes the quality of college admissions; results in the disparity of credentials and a lowering of standards between employees who are hired under affirmative action versus those who are not; and results in underperformance which over time restricts work productivity and efficiency for employers. It is then in these contexts that negative stereotypes attributed to women and underrepresented minorities can best be understood.

The Conundrum: Balancing the Benefits with the Unintended Negative Effects

It has thus been demonstrated that beneficiary groups can be burdened by the associated stigmatization of affirmative action. However, there are also a plethora of studies that cite the remarkable benefits of the policy. And, it appears that these benefits, though uneven, have had far reaching effects for all. For example, private sector organizations with 100 employees or

more sustain high incomes for all employee groups (i.e., women, underrepresented minorities, whites) (Pincus 2003). Even private sector organizations with less than 100 employees produce higher incomes for all employee groups. Still, more encouraging is that even white males benefit from the inclusion of all groups because of affirmative action (Crosby and Downing 2003, Pincus 2003). Additionally, studies show that had it not been for affirmative action, these improvements would not have been possible (Reskin 1998, Crosby 2004, Badgett 1999; Kalev et al. 2006). Further, had it not been for the direct intervention of the government, compliance to affirmative action would have been unlikely (Harper and Reskin 2005, Tomasson et al. 2001). It has also been speculated that the growth of the black middle class is in part to be attributed to affirmative action (Crosby 2004) as well as improving the economic status of beneficiaries overall. Perhaps most important and a positive yet unintended consequence of affirmative action is that the policy has helped to diversify the American workforce (Tomasson et al. 2001). The more diverse an organization's workforce, the greater its propensity for improved organizational performance (Carrell et al. 2000). A heterogeneous workforce helps to draw from the best of what society has to offer.

There is limited research though that shows a more sanguine picture even when members of beneficiary groups are told that they were the beneficiaries of affirmative action. One group of women of color said that they felt empowered, not undermined, that their employment selection was based on their gender and race (Ayers 1992). So, the fact that affirmative action has been met with mixed success coupled with the unintended consequences of negative stereotyping does not mean that affirmative action has either been ineffective, doomed to failure or should be dismantled (Tsang and Dietz 2001). Discrimination in the forms of the glass ceiling (GAO 2003, Mani 2001, Pynes 2009, Naff 2001, AAUP 2006), wage disparities (Kalev et al. 2006, Holzer and Neumark 2000, Crosby 2004) and job segregation (Guy and Newman 2005, Holzer and Neumark 2000) still persist for beneficiary groups. The conundrum lies in recognizing the need for affirmative action and establishing a balance between its benefits while mitigating the unintended negative effects of its stigmatization.

Affirmative action attempts to narrow the gaps in education and employment between white men and women and between whites and underrepresented minorities. But the policy in no way promised complete equality (Tsang and Dietz 2001). Yet, without affirmative action, it is unimaginable to fathom what the current economic status of beneficiary groups would be. According to Tsang and Dietz (2001) and others like Aguirre (2001), it is discomfoting yet an imperative nonetheless to discuss affirmative action in order to illuminate the concerns of protected groups that still largely remain invisible to the majority as well as to address the negative stereotyping of beneficiary groups that make the existence of affirmative action important. It is the collective call to heed these issues and the need for the inclusiveness of beneficiaries that force the majority to listen (Aguirre 2001) and understand "how we are involved in the dirty process of racializing others" (Pierce 2003, 69) that continually informs us that the work of affirmative action is far from complete.

Dispelling the Myths while Highlighting the Truths about Affirmative Action. Perhaps the challenge in advancing affirmative action has been the associated myths about the policy. But part of the problem is historical because the policy was not well articulated from

the start (Anderson 2004). Further, the divisive debates (Bergmann 1996, Crosby 2004, Anderson 2004, Soni 1999, Wise 2005), tentative support by lawmakers and presidents (Anderson 2004, Naff 2001), inconsistency in the application of the policy (Anderson 2004) given mixed rulings by the courts (Leiter and Leiter 2002, Riccucci 2007) and the most recent attempt by many to frame the policy as diversity (Wise 2005), have together served to ensure the uncertain footing of affirmative action. Yet, according to Crosby and Downing (2003), it is the continual questions about affirmative action that reaffirms the importance of the policy.

However, there are strategies that can be employed to portray affirmative action in a more palatable light to increase the appeal of its acceptance. Education about the benefits of the policy is regarded as tantamount (Crosby and Clayton 2001). Acceptance of affirmative action is, to a great degree, how the policy is framed (Salinas 2003, Quinn et al. 2001, Golden et al. 2001). Note that when people believed that affirmative action was used as a monitoring mechanism, they were more likely to support the policy (Golden et al. 2001). But when they believed that the policy was analogous to a quota system, they were less likely to support it. The objective for increasing support for affirmative action is to dispel the myths about the policy (Plous 1996). Pratkanis and Turner (1996) believe that it is important to create an aura of inevitability about the policy to reduce the likelihood that it will be challenged as doing so forces organizations of "...in-group members to bring their attitudes in line with the new reality" (127). It is surmised that a primary reason for the continuing onslaught of attacks on affirmative action might be due to the tentative attitudes of advocates that have added to its precarious allure.

Hiring and placing the right people into positions to best explain the policy, for example, is another way of ensuring that all involved know the policy and expectations (Pratkanis and Turner 1996). It is important not to give credence to the misnomer that affirmative action is solely based on gender, race and ethnicity, not qualifications. It is as important to recognize the accomplishments of individuals from beneficiary groups and celebrate their contributions to organizational performance (Konrad and Linnehan 1995a, 1995b). Finally, it is critical to show how affirmative action benefits society as a whole through the individual and organizational benefits that have been derived from the policy (Gurin et al. 2004)

It has also been argued by Riccucci (2007) that given the inconsistent U.S. Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action over time, it is impractical for the Court to apply a strict scrutiny standard when it is the Court, by either reversing itself and/or leaving particular rulings with such girth that they can be subject to broad interpretations, that has contributed to this inconsistency. Riccucci calls for the abolishment of the strict scrutiny standard of affirmative action programs for Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is more flexible and less arbitrary in its application. In essence, it is the rule of law that should be the basis for affirmative action, not the letter of the law since the High Court has been unreliable in its application of these standards.

Conclusion

Affirmative action has been a topic of rigorous debate since its inception. The policy has been passionately supported by advocates and reviled by opponents. Calls for its dismantling

have been vociferous. Equally adamant have been the calls for strengthening the policy. But these fervent calls have rendered some members of beneficiary groups of affirmative action to believe that, even if they are entitled to assistance under the policy, they are made to feel, perceived or real, as political whipping tools of contention over the policy. However, seldom is the stigmatization of beneficiaries a part of the discourse in public administration. These negative effects that are well documented in the psychological, social psychological and social neuroscience literature are known to reinforce negative beliefs about oneself that is crucial in helping to shape ones identity. Consequently, many beneficiaries of affirmative action may have failed to take advantage of the benefits of the policy given the backlash.

There are detractors of affirmative action who believe that these negative effects are purely incidental, are myths and should have no credible place in the general discussion about the policy. Some believe that to focus on the stereotypes of affirmative action is to lose sight of the broader positive effects of the policy. While this may be the case, the purpose of this article is to present an often overlooked aspect of affirmative action that is not currently part of the public administration discourse. Despite the many benefits of affirmative action, little is documented in the public administration literature about its ill effects. Psychological antecedents contribute to the support for or opposition against affirmative action. Support for or opposition against the policy is based upon whether or not the policy is perceived by the majority as a threat to economic security or as help if doing so neither poses a personal conflict or is helping a fellow human being. When help does follow, doing so is attributed to the majority's preoccupation with guilt in an attempt to atone for past wrongs against beneficiary groups. But much of this research has been taken from the standpoint of the majority, not from those of beneficiaries. Members of beneficiary groups are burdened with feelings of inferiority and incompetence; self doubt; stereotype threat that forces them to under perform and as beneficiaries of affirmative action, they are compromised. As a result, beneficiaries of affirmative action are perceived to draw from, not contribute to organizational performance.

The challenge for affirmative action is for policy makers and those in public administration not to deny the existence of stigmatization but address them directly while working concurrently to improve both the effectiveness and reputation of the policy. Researchers in other disciplines propose multiple strategies; primary among them education, to remove the myths about affirmative action, increase the policy's acceptance, and in doing so, help to mitigate the anathema of its negative effects for beneficiary groups.

Policy Implications for Public Administration. If certain segments of the polity perceive that a policy to which they are entitled amounts to a burden as highlighted by DuBois, rather than a benefit to them or to society at large, then steps should be taken to enlighten that polity to demonstrate how supporting policies like affirmative action, regardless of political ideology, is in keeping with America's ideals for equity, fairness and social justice, and how as a result, we as a democratic society remain the envy of the free world. Continual disparities for beneficiary groups warrant the existence of affirmative action as a form of redress. It is thus essential to assist organizations and beneficiaries to position themselves for increased acceptance and take advantage of the benefits that the policy has to offer as well as to capitalize on the wealth of talent of members of beneficiary groups. The above strategies

are in part one major way of confronting the problem head on. But, another pressing point speaks to the issue of strict scrutiny that the role of the High Court plays in establishing standards of review, that according to Riccucci (2007), amounts to an overall grade of “F” (138) in light of the frequent reversals of the Court’s own rulings on affirmative action. This author takes Riccucci’s argument one step further. It is the High Court to which society looks to determine the legitimacy of public policies like affirmative action. But, the U.S. Supreme Court has simply done a better job of confusing rather than educating society. And, regretfully, much of what the public has learned about affirmative action has been misconstrued.

Thus, the fallout from affirmative action has couched itself in such convoluted ways that the implications to public administration are uniformly harmful for beneficiaries who are caught in the chasm. Failure to reduce these associated negative effects and increase the education and representation of ordinarily disaffected groups will result in the failure to adequately represent the citizenry and ignore the continual marginalization of these groups. Public organizations must therefore find ways to leverage the inclusion of beneficiaries without excluding the majority by making the majority an integral part of the solution. This inclusiveness will not only help to increase the representation of traditionally marginalized groups but will help to diversify the public workforce with the buy in of the majority for the benefit of society. Further, frequent exposure to diverse populations serves as a conduit to continually educate the public and contribute to organizational performance. This move is even more palpable as the United States becomes increasingly diverse.

However, this concerted effort must occur in tandem with colleges and schools of public administration. Public administration scholars and in turn public administration programs can address these ill effects to beneficiaries as part of their programs’ curricula. Recruiting particularly women and underrepresented minorities to these programs will help to enlighten, if not establish the tone for discourse. Students at the masters level are disproportionately practitioners and so will be more likely to be influenced by concerns about the implementation of affirmative action whereas those at the doctoral level will be guided by the need to frame and formulate the policy for implementation. Both schools of thought are invaluable in that together they function to facilitate continuous discourse by the very discipline that is charged with its implementation. Programs’ curricula can prove effective if offered through a human resource management specialization, for instance, with sub specialties in affirmative action and/or as part of a broader sequence of coursework in employment law. This coursework can be so designed as to appeal to and as appropriate for the level of each degree. These programs can draw from a complement of fellow practitioners who administer affirmative action programs in the public sector, pracademics who now as scholars once served in similar capacities and other public administration scholars with wide ranging expertise in public administration as is currently practiced in many public administration programs. For especially students at the masters level, these subject matter experts bring much needed credibility to the classroom. Moreover, these efforts can be buttressed by utilizing the existing research from other disciplines about the ill effects of affirmative action to generate similar research in public administration. This endeavor could yield novel dimensions about affirmative action and broaden the existing scope of research from the psychological, social psychological and social neuroscience perspectives as well as unearth yet to be discovered

lessons about the public policy. To that end, public administration can play a pivotal role in helping to define the conditions for affirmative action, actively set the agenda for the public policy and help to chart the course for future debates. As it now stands, public administration is a bystander that simply reacts to decisions on affirmative action. Failure to engage in these more purposeful attempts to uphold this most basic tenet of representativeness through representative bureaucracy on behalf of the citizenry could amount to a missed opportunity for public administration in influencing affirmative action and likewise may jeopardize the loss of perceived legitimacy of public agencies.

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Notes

¹ Underrepresented minorities as African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans.

