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## Diversity at Work: Building an Agenda for Future Research

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*Arthur P. Brief, ed., Diversity at Work (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). 388 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9780521860307; \$36.99 (paper), ISBN: 9780521677639; \$30.00 (e-book), ISBN: 9780511401190.*

**T**he topic of diversity in the workplace is hardly a new theme in public administration scholarship and practice. What is well understood by even the casual observer is that racism, sexism, and other various forms of discrimination still persist within organizations. What is not well understood is exactly why and when such negative outcomes occur. Using a multidisciplinary approach, this volume's contributors address the ways in which organizations can take an innovative approach to thinking

about diversity and how they can achieve workplace equality.

In the introductory chapter, Dolly Chugh and Arthur P. Brief examine race and gender diversity coverage in peer-reviewed psychology and sociology journals, revealing that a growing amount of social science research covers the topic. When Chugh and Brief conducted a similar search in the *Academy of Management* journals, however, they found that only 5 percent of organizational research addressed diversity topics. The authors then claimed that most organizational scholarship was carried out as if no persons of color work in organizations. The problem with this analysis is that they overlooked scholarly pieces by public organization scholars who have concerned themselves

with topics related to representative bureaucracy (e.g., Meier and Nigro 1976; Selden 1997), affirmative action in public service organizations (e.g., Broadnax 1999), gender issues (e.g., Kellough 1990; Wilkins and Keiser 2006), the usefulness of diversity research for public sector managers (e.g., Wise and Tschirhart 2000), and several other topics concerning diversity (e.g., Pitts 2005; Riccucci 2002; Selden and Selden 2001; Soni 2000). The ever-growing research theme of diversity in public administration and public management would indeed enrich some of the theories put forth in this volume, leading to greater understanding of the complexity of diversity and discrimination in organizations. Chugh and Brief note that “literatures on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are numerous, deep, and complex, and no one is a master of it all” (5). The inclusion of existing research in public administration would enhance the multidisciplinary aspect of the literature that these authors examine and provide a more comprehensive assessment.

In chapter 2, Susan T. Fiske and Tiane L. Lee go into great detail on the formation of stereotypes and prejudice and how they incite workplace discrimination. The authors take a nuanced approach in addressing the topic of stereotypes, even arguing that they can be convenient at times and serve cognitive and social purposes. When we meet a new person, they write, we do not have enough information about whether the individual is a “friend or foe,” and in certain situations, stereotypes are useful in giving first impressions and allowing us to determine whether to approach or avoid the individual. This may be a controversial assertion, though the attention they give to the various types of inaccuracies associated with prejudice (e.g., stereotypic, valence, and dispersion) demonstrates their attempt to explore the issue from all angles.

Chapter 3, authored by William T. Bielby, addresses the challenges and solutions of promoting racial diversity in the workplace. This chapter is notable for its examination of the similarities and differences between practitioners’ and social scientists’ conceptions of racial bias in the workplace and the policies and practices in place to minimize it. This is a worthy point of distinction. Bielby believes that similarities exist between the two, but mostly because “real world,” equal employment opportunity managers “generate practical knowledge consistent with the findings of social scientists, although practitioners are increasingly turning to the work of social scientists for insights” (59). It appears that the relationship here is becoming increasingly synergistic, with great potential to promote diversity and provide more efficient and effective organizations.

In chapter 4, Jeffrey T. Polzer and Heather M. Caruso present readers with the concept of identity negotia-

tion processes, or rather, the cognitions people have about themselves (self-views) and the cognitions they have about others (appraisals). Their chapter is devoted to establishing a framework that “maps the interpersonal terrain of diverse social interaction and by describing how specific identity group concerns lead people to travel together down particular paths” (91).

Chapter 5, authored by Karen A. Jehn, Lindred L. Greer, and Joyce Rupert, presents a review of theory and findings on group processes and performance, the areas of diversity research that have yet to receive much attention, and, ultimately, they provide the first review (to their knowledge) that specifically links the concepts of diversity and conflict. They propose five new directions for future research: (1) examining perceived versus actual diversity and fault lines, (2) placing an emphasis on the role of subgroup status, (3) researching intra-subgroup and intergroup processes, (4) researching the influence of diversity beliefs, and, finally, (5) continued research on group composition and team learning.

In chapter 6, Robin J. Ely and Laura Morgan Roberts continue similar themes as they focus on team diversity research. The crux of their chapter is to reframe diversity research from a paradigm emphasizing difference to one that emphasizes relationships. They assert that difference, although a defining feature of diversity, is no longer the principal feature. Paramount importance is now given to intergroup dynamics that influence how people interpret and act on their differences. Merely pointing out a cultural, racial, religious, or gender difference, per se, does little to achieve a civilized climate of diversity. What we do with the obvious differences, the authors write, is how intergroup relationships will best be strengthened.

Chapter 7, authored by Naomi Ellemers and Manuela Barreto, examines perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of group-based disadvantage—how members of disadvantaged groups can often “perpetuate or exacerbate” their disadvantage. The authors write that members of disadvantaged groups often fail to see themselves as targets of discrimination, “especially in modern societies, where more old-fashioned and blatant expressions of prejudice are legally and socially sanctioned, giving place to more subtle and ambiguous forms of prejudice and discrimination” (213). Ultimately, Ellemers and Barreto point out that empirical evidence demonstrates that individuals may put down their own not only when they fail to see themselves as targets of discrimination, but also when they fail to report the discrimination that they do perceive. However, when examining this concept with regard to reporting by in-groups and out-groups, one would assume that the reporting of discrimination should not be left solely to the members of disadvantaged groups—this is probably well understood. If we

live in a modern society, by now some members of traditionally advantaged groups will also surely take it upon themselves to report acts of discrimination. If information on discrimination does not reach higher levels, the majority members are as much to blame as anyone.

The final part of the book—chapters 8 and 9—discuss expectations and potential directions for future research. Carol T. Kulik and Loriann Robertson focus in chapter 8 on the issue of diversity initiative effectiveness and highlight the use of the “business case” that was so prevalent in the organizational diversity literature in the late 1980s. It was used as a model to predict a range of benefits resulting from greater workforce diversity within organizations, or, in other words, organizations that made the best use of available talent in the labor pool would select a diverse group of employees, who would then be more effective at dealing with a diverse customer base. In the literature on representative bureaucracy in public organizations mentioned earlier (Meier and Nigro 1976; Selden 1997), the diverse employees would bring a greater range of perspectives in organizational decision making, and subsequently, organizational effectiveness would increase. Without attributing more detail is than necessary here, it may be well worth the effort to commence or revisit comparative issues of diversity between the public and private sectors (e.g., the “business model” versus representative bureaucracy). Results that may be negative on the business side may, in fact, find more validity in the public sector, and vice versa. Kulik and Robertson identify several gaps in the research, including the need to examine the impact of recruiting practices on the long-term behavior of job applicants, the effectiveness of skill-based diversity training, the outcomes of mentoring programs, and, finally, “the where, when, and why behind organizational diversity efforts” (303).

The final chapter of the volume, again by Dolly Chugh and Arthur P. Brief, largely summarizes and synthesizes the preceding chapters and illustrates the historical changes and monumental advances that have taken place since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The authors also add another agenda for future research.

*Diversity at Work* is a rich text, full of numerous important theories and concepts devoted to improving the climate of diversity in organizations. The ideas put forth here span many boundaries and have a wide reach, not only in terms of their real-world applicability, but also in terms of influencing future research. It is a volume that can benefit managers and researchers—whether they are seasoned managers and scholars or neophytes. The “disclaimer” offered at the beginning of the book regarding the difficulty

of compiling research that even slightly verges on the universal holds true. There are some holes. But they are somewhat insignificant, and if there happen to be additional gaps of significance in addition to those already identified, then the agenda for future research is only further augmented.

William Bielby, at the conclusion of chapter 3 writes, “if only someone would listen to our advice and follow it” (73). Though the remark shows a slight trace of despondence, it also reflects one of the innate aspects of studies in diversity. Discrimination and prejudice based on racial and gender bias, in or out of the workplace, are wicked problems—some of which we may assume have no foreseeable end in sight. *Diversity at Work*, however, is a collection of research that holds many of the answers—advice that should be listened to and followed. Though ever-so-slight weaknesses may manifest themselves throughout the book, it is merely an inborn trait among complex subjects, and the scholars who present their work therein acknowledge the difficulty of comprehensively assessing the topic. Brief and his colleagues have compiled a stellar volume that is probably as comprehensive as one publication alone can get. It is indeed a solid platform for future research and dialogue. The insights contained in the volume are astute and at times provocative, providing for good elements of discussion and debate. In sum, it is a must for anyone who is concerned with diversity issues in the workplace—the practitioner, the scholar, and the student alike—and it should be a consulted and ready reference for future research on the topic of diversity.

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