

## Achieving Diversity: Hidden Assumptions

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Juxtaposition of the lead articles in the March 2001 and April 2001 issues of the *American Psychologist* raises several questions about the prevailing orthodoxy in psychology. In "Sociopolitical Diversity in Psychology: The Case for Pluralism," Richard E. Redding (March 2001) argued that psychologists have a responsibility to examine the ways in which their political biases guide their research, policy advocacy, and professional practice. He noted that because most psychologists are politically liberal, a "liberal zeitgeist" (Redding, 2001, p. 206) pervades psychological science, with conservative views essentially absent. In "High-Stakes Testing in Employment, Credentialing, and Higher Education:

Prospects in a Post-Affirmative-Action World," Paul R. Sackett, Neal Schmitt, Jill E. Ellingson, and Melissa B. Kabin (April 2001) provided a thoughtful discussion of different strategies for achieving racial/ethnic diversity in decisions regarding education, jobs, licensure, and certification without using minority preferences and without compromising the predictive accuracy and content relevancy of cognitively loaded tests used to identify selected individuals. Sackett and his colleagues prefaced their discussion with the observation that "most" of the "many organizations and institutions of higher learning" that use such tests experience "considerable" tension between two values—performance and diversity (Sackett et al., 2001, p. 303). That is, whereas these tests do commonly aid in selecting higher performing student bodies, firefighters, teachers, and so forth, they may not result in the racial/ethnic diversity sought by those (i.e., unnamed individuals in unidentified organizations and institutions of higher learning) who believe that "academic experiences [and] workplace effectiveness are enhanced by exposure to diverse perspectives" (Sackett et al., 2001, p. 303).

My intent here is not to fault the strategies that Sackett and his colleagues presented. Rather, I wish to point up the way in which the belief that intellectual diversity is equivalent to racial/ethnic diversity exemplifies what, according to Redding (2001), philosophers call the naturalistic fallacy, wherein one derives a "moral 'ought' from an empirical 'is' by conflating values with 'scientific facts'" (p. 212). The notion that intellectual diversity can be achieved through an emphasis on ascriptive characteristics assumes that applicants of a specific race/ethnicity ipso facto possess a unique shared intellectual perspective grounded in a common set of life experiences. For those whose scientific ethos rests on the belief that considerations of merit should be the sole criterion for judging performance, the notion that academic experience or workplace effectiveness is enhanced by a diversity in ascribed characteristics is an empirical matter grounded in psychological science (see, e.g., Webber & Donahue, 2001).

Moreover, this notion prompts a number of unaddressed questions. For instance, can those making selection decisions with an intent toward maximizing a diversity in perspectives really guess what life experiences applicants have had on the basis of their ethnicity or skin color? What is the exact nature of the underlying mechanism by which racial/ethnic diversity is tantamount to a diversity in ideas and val-

ues? If, as psychologists claim, every person is unique, can actions taken at the associational (i.e., group) level to reduce subgroup measurement differences actually achieve a diversity in the knowledge bases and perspectives of individual applicants? How exactly does the supposition that, as a group, members of different racial/ethnic classifications share a set of common attributes differ from the negative stereotyping that underlies racial profiling? Why are people asked to avoid such an offensive practice in law enforcement yet encouraged to endorse it in selection decisions? Does the countenance of a presumed determinism based on racial/ethnic characteristics undermine psychology's scientific credibility with policymakers and the public? Finally, Redding (2001) has observed that "psychology celebrates diversity" (p. 205). Yet, in the post-affirmative-action world that Sackett and his colleagues wrote about, should the focus be on applicants as embodiments of the racial/ethnic groups to which they belong or on their merits as unique individuals? Psychologists' answers to these and similar questions will help determine whether psychology in the future is to be a partisan rather than a scientific endeavor.

#### REFERENCES

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