

Who Really Benefits From Diversity Programs?

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Here are some highlights from this week's *On Hiring and Diversity* newsletter. If you'd like to subscribe, [sign up here](#).

Diversity programs aren't just for black people.

My father once told me that the genius of Social Security is that it's inclusive: Every working American — regardless of socioeconomic class or skin color — pays into the system and is entitled to financial benefits. That's why it's popular. I didn't know it then, but my father was describing "interest convergence," a theory put forward by [Derrick Bell](#), who said that white people support minority rights only when it's in their self-interest. Bell's theory might also explain why affirmative-action and campus-diversity programs that seem to focus narrowly on minority groups might stigmatize those groups further and breed resentment among whites who believe others are getting special treatment. But a provocative [NPR piece](#) by David Shih, an associate professor of English at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire, suggests that we've been looking at those diversity initiatives all wrong. He asks, What if those programs actually help white people?

It turns out they do. For starters, they're essential to the economic well-being of many colleges, which rely heavily on tuition from international students and stand to lose far "more than prestige" if they're seen as "unwelcoming or even hostile to students of color," he says. What's more, "diversity skills" are a hot commodity in the working world, Mr. Shih notes. And, ironically, the main beneficiaries of affirmative action are white women, according to a 2006 [study](#) by the Columbia University law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw.

At a time when many white people are on edge and are holding up recent student protests at UC-Berkeley, and Middlebury and Claremont McKenna Colleges and elsewhere, as a sign that campus-diversity initiatives have gone too far and that PC culture (read: black interests) is "not only ascendant on college campuses but absolutely oppressive," it might be wise for colleges to ditch the vague arguments about diversity being in people's "compelling interest" and point out that white students and faculty benefit economically as much, or more, from those initiatives as do their minority peers, Mr. Shih writes. "Had affirmative action been consistently measured on similar

merits, [how much white people benefit from it](#) would be common knowledge,” he concludes.

Speaking of protests and how far is too far ...

A recent *Chronicle* [article](#) (for subscribers) considers whether Pomona College students are justified in arguing that a young sociologist’s controversial book, which some say reinforces negative stereotypes about black people, should preclude her from working there.

How to be an ally to new minority scholars.

Last week, I pointed to an [article](#) about how important it is for managers to mentor people who are not like them. It turns out it’s just as essential to the success of minority scholars for white scholars to step up and do the same, especially given the dearth of minorities in senior faculty ranks, notes W. Brad Johnson in an [advice column](#) in *The Chronicle*. Mr. Johnson, a psychology professor at the U.S. Naval Academy and a faculty associate at the Johns Hopkins University, points out that only a fraction of new minority faculty members are even able find a mentor among colleagues at their own institution, [according to the researchers](#) Wanda J. Smith and Steven E. Markham at Virginia Tech. That’s partly because potential mentors worry that “only a person of color can successfully mentor a person of color,” he suspects. To white faculty members who want to reach across racial lines and be an ally to a minority scholar, he says: Don’t assume they will want to focus on race and culture — “either as a faculty member generally or in the context of the mentorship specifically”; just be prepared “to listen and learn about [their] experiences as a minority member in the academy,” he adds. For more tips, click [here](#).

What do you mean there aren’t enough female scientists?

A new study suggests that successful female scientists are being passed over as presenters by conference organizers, an [article](#) on ZME Science reports. Robyn Klein, a Washington University professor of medicine, neuroscience, pathology and immunology, conducted the study. When a postdoc in her lab noticed that a mere 13 of 93 people on a preliminary list of speakers for an international neuroimmunology conference were women, Ms. Klein wondered why, she told Alexandra Gereia, a writer for the site. When she asked conference organizers about it, they said “there weren’t enough accomplished, senior-ranked female neuroscientists to invite,” she recalled. Finding that hard to believe, Ms. Klein decided to investigate, and so the study was born, she told Ms. Gereia. Ms. Klein said she asked peers to submit names of female neuroimmunologists who would be good speakers. Once she had 29 — enough for gender parity at the conference in question — she compared and contrasted the number and quality of the publications of the women on her list with those of the male invitees. She discovered that the men and the women had an equal number of publications in high-impact journals, though far more of the women than the men had articles in second-tier journals. What’s more, 21 percent of the men had no publications in the past two years that met her criteria, as opposed to just 5 percent of the women. Her conclusion? *Myth busted*, to borrow a phrase from the popular [TV show](#).

While the study focused on neuroimmunology, few women reading this will be startled by the outcome. Ms. Klein hopes, however, that they’ll take away something else from it: That is, how essential it is to call out gender disparities when they see them, she told Ms. Gereia, noting that the conference organizers asked for a copy of her list of forgotten female neuroimmunologists and invited several of them. “They ended up doubling the number of female speakers at their conference, and that raised the quality of the conference,” she said in the article.

Short Takes

Does financial literacy betray racial bias?

A compelling paper published in the [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review](#) suggests that colleges’ financial-literacy programs tend to overlook racial wealth disparities and perpetuate the misplaced notion that low-income borrowers, many of whom are black and Latino, might struggle less if they made better choices, an [article](#) in *The Chronicle* reports (for subscribers).

How does it feel to be fired?

According to researchers in Britain, getting sacked can be more emotionally crushing than losing a spouse to death or divorce, an [article](#) in *Bloomberg* reports.

Diversity watch

The proportion of people of color or women among Harvard University's tenured faculty rose from 30.8 percent to 39.2 percent over the last decade, according to the Office of Faculty Development and Diversity's annual report, an [article](#) in the *Harvard Crimson* reports. While that's definitely a step in the right direction, at the rate things are going, it'll take another six decades for Harvard's faculty to look like America, the president of the New Hampshire Institute of Art [observed](#) on Twitter.

Meanwhile, the University of Missouri School of Medicine could lose its accreditation next year if it doesn't bring in more minority students and faculty, an [article](#) on STATNews reports.

There is a place for women in science and technology. It turns out it's in Russia.

According to an [article](#) by the *BBC News*, Britain and the U.S. could learn a thing or two from the former Soviets about encouraging women in STEM.

Questions, Comments?

Have a suggestion for the newsletter or a tip or story idea to share? Send it to me at gabriela.montell@chronicle.com or [@GabrielaMontell](https://twitter.com/GabrielaMontell).