

Affirmative Action in College admissions

Sociology 220
Prof. Pamela Oliver

Pamela Oliver Sociology 220

Using Race: Two Kinds of Pro Arguments which imply different interest groups & values

- Disadvantage: Students from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds are disadvantaged, deserve compensation
- Diversity: The school needs to be more diverse for the benefit of everyone
- These two kinds of arguments are different from each other in their policy implications and interests, values, rhetoric, relevant "facts"

Pamela Oliver Sociology 220

PRO-Diversity arguments

- Inherent educational value in a culturally mixed environment (Value)
 - Similar to wanting a diversity of majors, talents: you don't want all math majors or all violin players
- The majority benefits from diversity.
 - Everyone should learn how to function in a multicultural society. (Value)
- Implied Vision: Everyone has equal educational opportunity, but people are distributed across schools to make them all equally diverse

Pamela Oliver Sociology 220

Diversity debates

- Value of racial/ethnic diversity
 - As good in itself (value)
 - As promoting social integration (factual claim)
- Whether it is beneficial to the majority to experience diversity
 - As a value, and in itself
 - As factual claim, helps in business etc.
- ignores issue of competition for slots in selective schools
 - Issue of why & whether some schools are "better"
- Treatment of international students & non-disadvantaged minorities
 - Adds to diversity
 - Not counted in "disadvantage" considerations

Pamela Oliver Sociology 220

Go to college views, then return

Pamela Oliver Sociology 220

Disadvantage & UNDERREPRESENTATION

The diagram consists of two overlapping circles. The top circle is labeled 'Underrepresented Groups' and the bottom circle is labeled 'Individually Disadvantaged'. The overlapping area in the center represents the intersection of these two categories.

Pamela Oliver Sociology 220

Individual disadvantage argument

- Ignore race-ethnicity for now
- Individual disadvantage argument: your grades & school quality are affected by parents' education & income, obscures your true merit
- Educational system should not just perpetuate inequality but help to correct it.
- NOTE: Value claim.
 - Not everyone agrees.
 - Some think it is good for elites to be able to preserve their children's position in society.

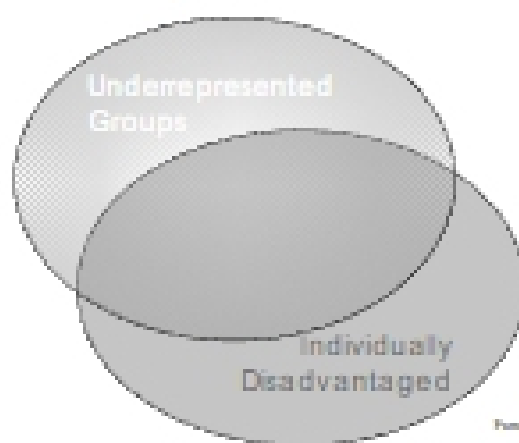
Peoria/Other Sociology 100

Language & rhetoric

- Should disadvantaged people or people from disadvantaged groups be given an advantage in college admissions?
- VS
- Should people from privileged groups be allowed to benefit from their privilege in college admissions?

Peoria/Other Sociology 100

Disadvantage & UNDERREPRESENTATION



Peoria/Other Sociology 100

Interest groups

- Advantaged members of advantaged groups
 - Especially affluent Whites from privileged educational backgrounds
- Disadvantaged members of disadvantaged groups
 - Especially Black, Latino, American Indian from poorer public schools (and U.S. Asians in 90)
- Disadvantaged individuals who are members of advantaged groups
 - Especially "first generation" and low income Whites
 - Also "first generation" and low income Asians
- Advantaged individuals who are members of disadvantaged groups
 - Especially Black, Latino, American Indian from advantaged families & neighborhoods
- Non-disadvantaged minorities
 - Especially Asians: concerns that college admissions favor Whites over Asians

Peoria/Other Sociology 100

Individual Advantage Issues - 1

- Two students, Alpha and Beta
 - both got a 28 on the ACT (or 1200 on the SAT), which is roughly 75th - 80th percentile,
 - both have GPA's of 3.8 with comparable courses at the same large public high school,
 - both have comparable activities,
 - both wrote adequate but not outstanding essays
- So Alpha and Beta are "the same" in qualifications
- (Assume they are the same race. We are just looking at qualifications.)

Peoria/Other Sociology 100

Individual Advantage -2

- Alpha's parents have master's & PhD with professional occupations. Alpha took summer enrichment courses and took private test preparation courses that helped raise her score on the ACT/SAT.
- Beta's parents are a high school drop out & a high school graduate who hold blue collar jobs. Beta worked at Burger King summer & after school for four years and could not afford a test preparation course.
- Questions:
 - Who probably has a higher level of native ability & intelligence?
 - Who is more "deserving" in terms of merit and achievement?

Peoria/Other Sociology 100

Individual disadvantage - 3

- Proponents: overcoming disadvantage is, itself, a sign of merit in calculating "qualification".
 - i.e. you should get "points" for being disadvantaged.
 - Emphasis on opportunities for disadvantaged, assumes the advantaged will do OK anyway.
- Opponents: advantage has created true merit that should be rewarded (value)
 - OR "It's not my fault I'm privileged. Why should I have to lose my place?" (interest)
- Factual dispute: whether disadvantaged people have the capacity to do well in selective schools.
- Interests: do you think you personally will benefit or lose from a given scheme?

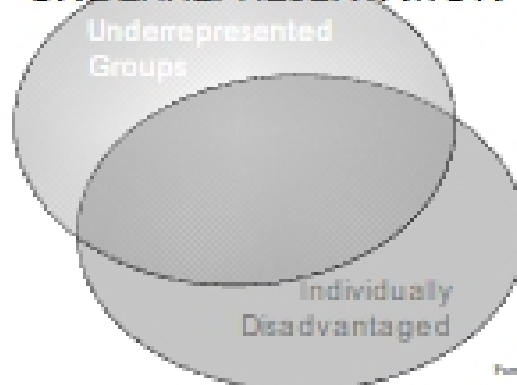
Paula Oliver Sociology 100

"Objective" admission criteria and interests

- Factors allocated by school of quality & merit
 - CPA
 - Class rank
 - # of AP, IB & enrichment courses taken
 - Being from a "good school" with a rigorous curriculum
 - Being a "school leader" or having an extracurricular of community service
- SAT or ACT scores
 - Tests that emphasize vocabulary or mathematical grammar that are easier for people whose parents speak "educated English"
 - Extent to which the rules of already privileged students for the tests
 - Ability to afford private test prep courses
- Factors allocated by personal advantage
 - International travel or other "broadening" experiences
 - Opportunity to develop advanced musical, athletic or other extracurricular talent in same area (Niche opportunities vary by year)
- Overcoming disadvantage
 - Being from a group that is not the potential of that school
 - An effective strategy may be to pursue education in high school for disadvantaged people to take their test scores & use admission preparation to be competitive for those from a disadvantaged people

Paula Oliver Sociology 100

Disadvantage & UNDERREPRESENTATION



Paula Oliver Sociology 100

Group interest examples

- Minority communities "need" more highly-educated people. This is a social good that goes beyond the deservingness of any particular individual.
 - Whites are very unlikely to provide medical, legal, business, educational services to segregated minority communities
 - The only way out of group disadvantage is to get more group members educated, able to benefit the whole community
 - Implies that individually advantaged members of disadvantaged groups are important assets to the group
- Majority-ness advantages gained when your language/culture is dominant

Paula Oliver Sociology 100

Group disadvantage arguments

- Factual claims about the reality of past & current discrimination & segregation against minorities
- Factual claims about context, e.g. Minorities (especially Blacks) of "the same" individual economic level tend to have poorer relatives & neighbors and worse educational facilities: due to segregation + history
- Value disputes about whether history/context ought to matter beyond individual factors
- Interests: do you think you will benefit or lose from a particular set of "rules"

Paula Oliver Sociology 100

Group disadvantage: opponents

- Group factors irrelevant: only individuals matter
- Cite examples of genuinely privileged people who received "minority" preference
- Factual disputes invoke reality of mixed-parentage and fluid boundaries (you can check the "minority" box even if you look & live White)
- Concerns about impact on their own interests

Paula Oliver Sociology 100