

A MATTER OF DIFFERENCE

Accounts of Inclusion (and Exclusion)

Bernardo M. Ferdman
Alliant International University



In our previous columns (e.g., Ferdman & Davidson, 2002a; Ferdman & Davidson, 2002b), **Martin Davidson** and I have written about the importance of engaging in dialogue to understand the nature and experience of inclusion. We point out that inclusion must be understood in the context of specific people and specific situations. To get a better sense of what inclusion looks and feels like for different people, we strongly advocate asking them. In the last few months, I've had the opportunity to ask that question—what does inclusion “look” and “feel” like?—of a number of groups, not only in the United States, but also in Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, and Puerto Rico. Later in this column, I report on some of the principal themes coming from those workshops and from *Dialogue on Diversity and Inclusion in Organizations: SIOP and Beyond*, the special session that Martin Davidson and I convened at the 2002 SIOP conference, where we asked participants to talk about what full inclusion might look and feel like at SIOP.

I would like to preface these summaries of conversations about inclusion with some reflections on exclusion and discrimination. Indeed, at many of the workshops, asking people to talk about their experiences of inclusion often triggered memories and descriptions of exclusion. It is quite difficult, if not impossible, to talk about one and not the other!

Last December, Senator Trent Lott—slated to become Senate Majority Leader in the next Congress—praised his fellow Senator, Strom Thurmond, in a way that seemed to support racial segregation, but without saying so directly. On the very same day that the furor was building (see e.g., Hulse, 2002; Luker, 2002) over Senator Lott's statements, *The New York Times* (Krueger, 2002) published an account of a research study (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2002) documenting the persistence of anti-Black bias in job hiring. Specifically, the study (conducted in Boston and Chicago) showed that employers were 50% more likely to call job applicants with White-sounding names (e.g., Kristen or Brad) for interviews than applicants with Black-sounding names (e.g., Tamika or Tyrone). While Senator Lott was being publicly pilloried for what appeared to many to be relatively overt support of discrimination, little was being said about the much more pervasive and widespread covert, more passive support for discrimination, not just among U.S. senators, but among all types of people in the country, such as that documented in part by Bertrand and Mullainathan's research. It is far too easy—and distracting as well—to focus on those who do or say something that

overtly supports discrimination, while paying no mind to the many more of us who systematically support and maintain discrimination and/or exclusion every day. We do this not necessarily by doing anything obviously negative but simply by going about our “normal” business. If we are truly to create and maximize inclusion across lines of difference that previously served as bases for invidious discrimination, I believe that we must be more attentive to these subtle, covert, and/or passive forms of exclusion and discrimination.

A few examples come to mind. One of these is the implicit and explicit propagation of theories and concepts of racial superiority as part of the standard I-O psychology curriculum and discourse. It is probably rare to find colleagues who explicitly teach their students that members of one race are naturally and genetically superior to those of another (though I have been told, recently, of some who do!). At the same time, it is relatively common in I-O psychology courses, conferences, and other venues to hear blanket statements about race differences in intelligence, with little or no consideration of the impact or implications of such statements or the sources or validity of the supporting data. Even more covert yet no less insidious is how we use (and abuse) the relatively unexamined concept of “merit.” In an incisive, award-winning article that deserves much wider dissemination among I-O psychologists and students, Haney and Hurtado (1994) thoroughly describe and analyze how the concept of “merit” has been used to prevent addressing systematic racial disparities in the U.S. and their structural causes and how “the concept of merit is employed to mediate between the belief in fair treatment and the reality of unfair outcomes by individualizing the effect of structural barriers to racial justice” (p. 225). They go further to show how “the use of standardized testing in the allocation of employment opportunities and rewards represents a psychological technology by which meritocratic assumptions are translated uncritically into employment decisions” and discuss “the role that this technology plays in preserving racial injustice” (p. 225). Haney and Hurtado argue as follows:

When selection and promotion systems that are based on standardized tests result in a disproportionately White labor force, and employers resist the requirement that such tests be validated or shown to be job-related, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the disparate outcomes simply confirm many employers’ implicit notions about the distribution of merit and relative deservingness of various groups. Otherwise, such disproportions would raise *prima facie* questions about the job-relatedness (and, therefore, the utility and wisdom) of the instruments themselves. To fully grasp this implicit assumption, imagine the reverse—that standardized instruments for the measurement of merit consistently resulted in opportunities and rewards being disproportionately allocated to minority group members at the expense of their White counterparts. Such an outcome surely would be regarded as anomalous—an occasion

for the most careful scrutiny of the instruments themselves, not to mention a reexamination of the wisdom of continuing to employ them in the absence of positively convincing demonstrations of their job relatedness (precisely what employers have resisted in typical employment testing cases). Indeed, absent implicit assumptions about relative group merit, rational employers who could not be certain that their employment screening and promotion instruments were job-related would not otherwise persist in using them. (p. 229, italics in original)

I do not have the space here to reproduce fully Haney and Hurtado's penetrating arguments, nor do I wish to enter into the debate over standardized testing; my goal is to urge I-O psychologists and others to explore critically the concepts, systems, and practices that we typically take for granted yet which can have profound effects on our ability to achieve true inclusion.

Another example of subtle or covert exclusion is when students and junior faculty are told, in the guise of support and useful advice, not to write about or do research on diversity or diversity-related topics because that would hurt their prospects for academic employment or for tenure. A related example is that of luminaries in our field who are not in the least embarrassed when they say that they do not know much (and in some cases do not care to know) about diversity or international issues; this, when at least one-third of the U.S. population is comprised of people of color, and when future progress in I-O psychology demands much closer attention to the cross-cultural and international applicability of our traditional constructs and theories. Worse yet is when the same individuals remain quite comfortable not doing anything about their lack of knowledge. Although I do not believe that individual reactions such as this are necessarily, in and of themselves, exclusionary, they contribute to the perpetuation of ethnocentrism and depend on its privilege; when repeated over many people, they also function as a significant barrier that prevents our discipline from moving toward greater inclusion. [Interestingly, a recent international survey (RoperASW, 2002) to assess geographic literacy in the United States and around the world among young adults 18 to 24 years old found that almost one-third of U.S. respondents believed that the U.S. had a population of 1 to 2 billion people, and only one-fourth of respondents identified the correct range—150 to 350 million people—for the U.S. population. Although one cannot be certain, I imagine that such exaggerated beliefs about the position of the U.S. in the world can contribute to a perspective consistent with ignoring the rest of the world.]

I believe that multicultural and international issues are not only important to address but that it is time to make them core elements of I-O psychology (see also Chrobot-Mason & Ferdman, 2001). This will ensure not only that our theory, research, and practice are better aligned with inclusion rather than with the perpetuation of discrimination but also that we will not become irrelevant to a changing society and a changing world.

A cogent supporting argument for this, as well as some suggestions for initial steps, are provided in the American Psychological Association's (2002) *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists*, adopted in 2002 as APA policy by the APA Council of Representatives. It is quite possible that I-O psychologists may react to these new guidelines as we often have to other such APA documents, acting as if they are an imposition to our field. I believe, however, that if we—individually and collectively—do not heed the message that they contain, we run the risk of lining up with policies and practices better suited to Strom Thurmond's old view of a "better America" than with a vision appropriate to our 21st-century demographic and social realities.

The general themes that emerged at SIOP's 2002 *Dialogue on Diversity and Inclusion* can provide some clues about where we are and where we still need to go as an organization to address some of the challenges posed above. These themes were:

- Several barriers to inclusion exist. There are many who don't necessarily feel included. This is even true, sometimes, of long-time prominent members of SIOP.
- Some people who look like they are part of the "in" group to others may not experience it that way. Other people have a great feeling, knowing and/or being introduced to others, feeling that they are coming to conferences to see their friends.
- The organization is experienced differently by different people. To those who are "in" it may feel very inclusive—but those same behaviors and cues that indicate inclusion to those who are "in" are the signs and expressions of exclusion to others. Friendliness and informality are experienced by many, and yet can be seen as barriers by new members or those who are different in some way. Some report feeling invisible.
- There are important dimensions of difference in SIOP in addition to race and gender—including nationality, methodology, membership/affiliation type, sexual orientation, and so forth—that result in differential experiences and degrees of inclusion.
- There are both formal and informal aspects of inclusion and exclusion at SIOP. Formal aspects include membership procedures and criteria, processes for getting on the conference program, and so forth. Informal aspects include people's behavior at conferences, for example, using only 1st names at large sessions and assuming that everyone knows each other.
- One participant talked about feeling excluded as a practitioner and the difficulty in finding meaningful takeaways at the conference. Some of the more subtle aspects—for example, sitting in rows, PowerPoint presentations, few opportunities for interaction—can create barriers. Inclusion requires more proactive behavior. As this participant put it: *When I think of inclusion, I think of embracing people.*

- What would people like in this regard?
 - A sense of being embraced when people approach me and say, “Welcome, we’re glad that you are here.” Being recognized in having a conversation with people (people you see year after year). Sessions that are not so stiff, and also informally including people in conversations.
 - Sessions structured to include questions/conversation.
 - “Less intimidating sessions” in which newer or less experienced investigators could present.
 - To be accepted and valued as a person, beyond what my vita indicates.
 - More diversity in methodology.
 - Have teaching be treated as valuable.
 - As one person put it: “Being exclusive and inclusive are not mutually exclusive.” Another had experiences at another conference that were also desirable at SIOP: “The ability to approach people. People learn and then remember my name from one year to the next. Don’t stare through you when you say hello. Remember me even if I didn’t publish in *JAP*.”
- Everyone has a responsibility with regard to creating and fostering inclusion, beyond what the organization does. Everyone has some power to make a difference. For example, the way we say hello to others, the way that we carry ourselves, what we choose to wear, and how we deal with these symbols in others, affects our overall experience in the organization and that of others.

At other workshops that I conducted in various countries in recent months, participants reported a number of elements in their experiences of inclusion. These included:

- Participating in and feeling part of a group or context with a variety/diversity of members/other participants.
- Some dimensions or goals were held in common with others in the situation, while different points of view and styles of thinking and expression are easily manifested.
- A learning stance is adopted (by the person as well as others in the situation).
- Feeling accepted, recognized, and respected as a person.
- Being respected *because* of differences with other people in the situation, who expressed genuine curiosity and interest and avoided stereotypes; being looked at, talked to; others focused on making the person feel good.
- Doing what the person wanted while continuing to be accepted; a sense of unconditional acceptance.
- Ability to be spontaneous and to express genuine thoughts and feelings.
- Space and invitations to speak; being listened to, heard, and allowed to participate, even across lines of authority and/or experience.
- A sense of joy; a sense of psychological and physical energy; the feeling of not having to argue or fight.

I also asked participants to talk about the consequences or outcomes of inclusion that they had experienced. Among those outcomes were the following:

- Improved productivity; fewer errors; a better-quality product.
- Greater self-confidence; more commitment to the organization; more satisfaction in one's work.
- More knowledge transfer.
- More group cohesion and more positive group climate; a better work environment.
- More customer satisfaction.
- Being able to better include others.
- Better able to accomplish organizational goals and purposes.

These lists begin to map the characteristics and products of inclusion. There is certainly more work to be done to fully describe and document inclusion and its antecedents and consequences. But it is clear that such experiences and their associated outcomes are certainly desirable and preferred over the perpetuation of exclusion and discrimination.

References

American Psychological Association (2002). *Guidelines on multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists*. [Available at <http://www.apa.org/pi/multiculturalguidelines>].

Bertrand, M. & Mullainathan, S. (2002). *Are Emily and Brendan more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago.

Chrobot-Mason, D. & Ferdman, B. M. (2001). Multicultural competencies for I-O psychologists: Why and how? *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 39(1), 69–74.

Ferdman, B. M. & Davidson, M. N. (2002a). A matter of difference—Diversity and drawing the line: Are some differences too different? (Or: who's in, who's out, and what difference does it make?). *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 39(3), 43–46.

Ferdman, B. M. & Davidson, M. N. (2002b). A matter of difference—Inclusion: What can I and my organization do about it? *The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 39(4), 80–85.

Haney, C., & Hurtado, A. (1994). The jurisprudence of race and meritocracy: Standardized testing and “race-neutral” racism in the workplace. *Law and Human Behavior*, 18, 223–248.

Hulse, C. (2002, December 12). Lott apologizes again on words about ‘48 race. *The New York Times*, p. A-1.

Krueger, A. B. (2002, December 12). Sticks and stones can break bones, but the wrong name can make a job hard to find. *The New York Times*, p. C-2.

Luker, R. E. (2002, December 12). Trent Lott, ‘segregationist of the heart,’ should resign. *San Diego Union-Tribune*, p. B-13.

Roper ASW (2002, November). *National Geographic—Roper 2002 Global Geographic Literacy Survey*. N. P.: National Geographic Education Foundation [available at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/geosurvey/download/RoperSurvey.pdf>].