

## How Negative Bias and Positive Bias Affect Faculty Members' Professional Lives on Daily Basis

“Individuals that have been assigned a positive stereotype will receive substantial hidden profits that advance them on a cumulative basis in both traditional and *non-traditional* settings. Those assigned a negative stereotype will be dealt extra penalties, taxes, and glass ceilings that will hamper their advancement on a cumulative basis.” (38)

Below is a compilation of common advantages and disadvantages accrued by members of positively and negatively stereotyped groups respectively.



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(adapted from Moody, J. (2012). *Faculty Diversity: Removing the Barriers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp. 40-54). New York, NY: Routledge)

Disadvantage

•Those perceived with a negative bias often have to spend precious time and energy deciphering the complex psychological dynamics and possible micro-aggressions unfolding between them and some of their majority students, colleagues, and administrators.

Advantage

•Those perceived with a positive bias tend to save time and energy by not being overly concerned about these dynamics.

Example

•*Did the dean just insult me or was that merely a canned joke she trots out for every new assistant professor? Is this just a typical technical snafu, or is this a sign that they really don't want me here? Why was I not consulted before that report was sent off—doesn't my opinion count around here?* (45-46)

Disadvantage

•A quota system will often block the faculty hiring of those affected by a negative bias. Some departments, already having one member from a disfavored group, are likely to subscribe to the "one is sufficient" policy.

Advantage

•Majority job candidates do not face such a quota barrier and thus enjoy improved chances of being hired.

Example

•"People ask me 'Why do I speak English so well? ... They've already superimposed on me that I don't belong here.... I used to think it was a harmless little question but now I feel that the message that I've received is that I don't belong. I don't look like I belong.'" (44)

Disadvantage

•Because those affected by negative bias are typically underrated and treated as outsiders, they often need *visible and formal affirmative action programs* in order to have the chance to prove themselves. But a backlash is often involved.

Advantage

•Those perceived with a positive bias are often overrated, treated as insiders, and given privileged access to set-aside benefits. Thus, they enjoy *de facto and invisible affirmative action* on a continuous basis. There seems to be no backlash.

Example

•"When under-represented women and non-immigrants are hired on predominantly majority campuses... many of them... will be characterized as political hires or affirmative action hires. Either characterization can be translated in this way: they are actually under-qualified for their posts." (48)

Disadvantage

•A negatively stereotyped faculty member often has to deal with an uninviting territory in academe where there is little or no mentoring, inside information, or introductions to valuable connections and networks. Such deprivation is likely to hamper professional growth and satisfaction.

Advantage

•A positively stereotyped faculty member in an accepting academic climate will receive numerous benefits that speed along professional achievement and satisfaction.

Example

•“Usually as a *rule* rather than an exception, *majority insiders* anointed with a positive bias find that their backpack is filled with mentors and allies, roadmaps, a compass, emergency numbers to call, and other valuable contents—rather than a backpack containing extra taxes and penalties.” (50)

Disadvantage

•A faculty member affected by negative bias is often thought to represent his/her whole group, and, as such, has to worry that his/her behavior or performance can open or close doors of opportunity for an entire generation.

Advantage

•A faculty member benefiting from positive bias has far more latitude and tends to worry only about him/herself.

Example

•“If a minority person does something magnificent, then it’s an exceptional event. But if a minority person does something awful, then it’s a typical event for ‘those people!’” (51)

Disadvantage

•Faculty with an assigned negative bias are often unfairly constrained in their choice of scholarly pursuits and in fact face a brown-on-brown taboo.

Advantage

•Faculty enjoying a positive bias can set themselves up as scholars of almost anything and expect fair evaluation of their scholarship.

Example

•“...Any kind of... scholarship, if undertaken by Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, is viewed as intellectually *inferior* by most members of their departments. If the scholarship focuses on minority issues, then the value of that research shrinks *even more*. But then an incredible shift of valuation happens: if European-Americans undertake research on minority issues, the value of that investigation *rises* dramatically.” (52)

Disadvantage

•Because faculty with a perceived negative bias are likely to be treated as both super-visible and invisible, depending on the circumstances, they will have to cope with psychological dissonance. When deemed super-visible, they will be overloaded with student advising and academic committee work. When deemed invisible, their opinions will be ignored.

Advantage

•Majority faculty escape this psychological dissonance, the work overload from service and student advising, and the demoralization associated with being voiceless.

Example

•“...Tokens suffer from high *visibility* because they are a very few ‘Os’ greatly outnumbered by ‘Xs’; from artificial *contrast*, because the dominant group members tend to exaggerate... the differences between themselves and the tokens; and from rampant *stereotyping* because the dominant group tends to deny the token any individuality and uniqueness and instead fits the token to the group stereotype.” (53)