

Education doesn't increase support for affirmative action among whites, minorities

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Highly educated whites and minorities are no more likely to support workplace affirmative action programs than are their less educated peers, according to a new study in the March issue of *Social Psychology Quarterly*, which casts some doubt on the view that an advanced education is profoundly transformative when it comes to racial attitudes.

"I think this study is important because there's a common view that [education](#) is uniformly liberalizing, and this study shows—in a number of cases—that it's not," said study author Geoffrey T. Wodtke, a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan.

Titled, "The Impact of Education on Intergroup Attitudes: A Multiracial Analysis," the study analyzes the effects of education on racial attitudes among whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians using data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality 1992-1994, which interviewed adults in Boston, Atlanta, Detroit, and Los Angeles, and the 1990-2010 waves of the nationally representative General Social Survey.

Wodtke's study finds that while being better educated does not increase the likelihood that whites and minorities approve of affirmative action in the workplace, it does increase the probability that they support race-targeted job training. "The distinction between those two policies is that one is opportunity enhancing and the other is outcome equalizing," Wodtke said. "I think that some of the values that are promoted through education, such as individualism and meritocracy, are just much more

consistent with opportunity enhancing policies like job training than they are with redistributive or outcome equalizing policies like affirmative action."

Still, Wodtke, a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow, said he was surprised to find that better educated blacks and Hispanics are no more supportive of workplace affirmative action programs than are their less educated [peers](#). "This surprised me because it's thought that highly educated [minorities](#) are most likely to benefit from affirmative action programs," he said.

According to Wodtke, there could be a couple of reasons why more educated blacks and Hispanics are no more likely to support affirmative action in the workplace than are their less educated peers. "One possibility is that affirmative action programs may have the unintended effect of stigmatizing people who have benefited from them," Wodtke said. "As a result of this stigmatization, people who have seemingly benefitted from affirmative action may just lose faith in the efficacy of these programs to overcome racial discrimination in the labor market."

Another possibility is that people with more advanced educations, regardless of race, become socialized in such a way that their own support for more radical social policies is somewhat diluted, Wodtke said. "The data suggest that one ideological function of the formal educational system is to marginalize ideas and values that are particularly challenging to existing power structures, perhaps even among those that occupy disadvantaged social positions," Wodtke said.

The study also finds that while whites, Hispanics, and blacks with higher levels of education are more likely to reject negative racial stereotypes than are their less educated peers, this pattern does not hold true for Asians. In fact, education has no effect on negative stereotyping among Asians, and many Asians at all levels of education hold negative views

about blacks and Hispanics.

"It may have something to do with Asian's social position relative to other racial groups in the United States," Wodtke said. "Some posit that Asians and to a lesser extent Hispanics occupy a 'racial middle ground' between whites and blacks. So, it's possible that the non-effect of education on negative stereotyping among Asians is related to their self perceived risk of downward assimilation and their efforts to avoid this outcome."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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