Affirmative Action and Stereotypes in Higher Education Admissions

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1 Motivation

2 Stereotypes and Admissions
   - A Simple Model of Admissions
   - An ACT Example
   - Eliminating Stereotypes

3 Other Values in Admissions
   - Equal Treatment
   - Equal Treatment, and Equal Representation

4 Other Stereotypes
Critiques of Affirmative Action:

- Harm to Non-Recipients
  - Discrimination
- Harm to Recipients
  - Mismatch
  - Stereotype or Stigma

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We examine the claim:

- Affirmative action in admissions discriminates against non-recipients. It also harms recipients because it results in a negative stereotype against them. Therefore, schools should adopt group-blind admissions.
Defining Stereotypes

- Rational view of stereotypes provides the best case for this claim
- Stereotypes as statistical discrimination
  - Differences in the academic outcomes of students from different groups
  - Arrow (1972), Phelps (1972), Coate and Loury (1993), Fang and Moro (2011)
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Justice Thomas’s concurring opinion in Fisher v. Texas (2013):

Blacks and Hispanics admitted to the University as a result of racial discrimination are, on average, far less prepared than their white and Asian classmates. In the University’s entering class of 2009, for example, among the students admitted outside the Top Ten Percent plan, blacks scored at the 52d percentile of 2009 SAT takers nationwide, while Asians scored at the 93d percentile. Brief for Richard Sander et al. as Amici Curiae 3–4, and n. 4. Blacks had a mean GPA of 2.57 and a mean SAT score of 1524; Hispanics had a mean GPA of 2.83 and a mean SAT score of 1794; whites had a mean GPA of 3.04 and a mean SAT score of 1914; and Asians had a mean GPA of 3.07 and a mean SAT score of 1991.\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Ibid.}
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4 Other Stereotypes
**Assumptions**

- 2 groups $A$ and $D$ in proportions $\theta_A$ and $\theta_D$
- School maximizes expected score subject to admitting fraction $K$ of students
- Scores $s_A$ and $s_D$ distributed continuously with common support on $[s, \bar{s}]$ according to $F_A(s)$ and $F_D(s)$
- Likelihood ratio $\frac{f_D(s)}{f_A(s)}$ decreasing in $s$

**Definition 1**

A group $D$ experiences a *negative stereotype* in relation to $A$ if $F_A(s) \leq F_D(s) \ \forall s$
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A Simple Model of Admissions

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**Definition 1**

A group $D$ experiences a *negative stereotype* in relation to $A$ if $F_A(s) \leq F_D(s) \ \forall s$
Definition 2

An admission policy consists of (i) student characteristics \( \{X\} \), (ii) a score \( s(x) \), and (iii) a probability of admission \( q(s) \).

Definition 3

An admission policy is group blind with respect to \( D \) and \( A \) if
\[
\langle X_D, s_D(x), q_D(s) \rangle = \langle X_A, s_A(x), q_A(s) \rangle.
\]
Definition 2

An *admission policy* consists of (i) student characteristics \( \{ X \} \), (ii) a score \( s(x) \), and (iii) a probability of admission \( q(s) \).

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An admission policy is *group blind* with respect to \( D \) and \( A \) if
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Proposition 1

If the likelihood ratio \( \frac{f_D(s)}{f_A(s)} \) is weakly decreasing in \( s \), admitted students from \( D \) experience a negative stereotype under any group-blind admission policy.
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Other Values in Admissions
- Equal Treatment
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Other Stereotypes
An ACT Example

ACT Distribution by Race

- B (17%)
- W (83%)

B Mean (17.1)
17th Pctl W

W Mean (21.8)
92nd Pctl B

MLRP
An ACT Example

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An ACT Example

**maxE [s]**

Admit 60%

B (5%)
W (95%)

B Mean (22.3)
37th Pctl W

W Mean (24.2)
88th Pctl B
Motivation

An ACT Example

\[ \max E \left[ s \right] \]
Admit 60%

B (5%)  
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- Stereotypes and Admissions
- Other Values in Admissions
- Other Stereotypes
- Conclusion

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4 Other Stereotypes
maxE $[s]$
Admit 60%
Eq Mean
B (3%)
W (97%)
Eliminating Stereotypes

$maxE \ [s]$
Admit 60%
Eq Mean

B (3%)
W (97%)
A No Stereotype policy solves:

\[ \max E [s] \quad \max \{q_D(s), q_A(s)\} \quad \frac{1}{K} [\theta_D \int_s s q_D(s) f_D(s) ds + \theta_A \int_s s q_A(s) f_A(s) ds] \]

Admit K
\[ \phi_D \theta_D + \phi_A \theta_A = K \]

Eq Dist
\[ \frac{q_D(s) f_D(s)}{\phi_D} = \frac{q_A(s) f_A(s)}{\phi_A} \quad \forall s \]

Sum
\[ \phi_D = \int_s q_D(s) f_D(s) ds, \quad \phi_A = \int_s q_A(s) f_A(s) ds \]

Prob
\[ 0 < \phi_D \leq 1, \quad 0 < \phi_A \leq 1 \quad \forall s \]

\[ 0 \leq q_D(s) \leq 1, \quad 0 \leq q_A(s) \leq 1 \quad \forall s \]
A No Stereotype policy solves:

\[
\max_{E[s]} \max \{q_D(s), q_A(s)\} \frac{1}{K} \left[ \theta_D \int s q_D(s) f_D(s) \, ds + \theta_A \int s q_A(s) f_A(s) \, ds \right]
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\phi_D \theta_D + \phi_A \theta_A = K
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Eq Dist

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0 < \phi_D \leq 1, \quad 0 < \phi_A \leq 1 \quad \forall s
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\]

Admit \( K \) \[ \phi_D \theta_D + \phi_A \theta_A = K \]

Eq Dist \[ \frac{q_D(s)f_D(s)}{\phi_D} = \frac{q_A(s)f_A(s)}{\phi_A} \quad \forall s \]

Sum \[
\phi_D = \int_s q_D(s) f_D(s) \, ds, \quad \phi_A = \int_s q_A(s) f_A(s) \, ds
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Prob \[ 0 < \phi_D \leq 1, \ 0 < \phi_A \leq 1 \ \forall s \]

\[ 0 \leq q_D(s) \leq 1, \ 0 \leq q_A(s) \leq 1 \ \forall s \]
A No Stereotype policy solves:

\[
\max E [s] \quad \max_{\{q_D(s), q_A(s)\}} \frac{1}{K} \left[ \theta_D \int_s s q_D(s) f_D(s) ds + \theta_A \int_s s q_A(s) f_A(s) ds \right]
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Admit \( K \) \( \phi_D \theta_D + \phi_A \theta_A = K \)

Eq Dist \( \frac{q_D(s) f_D(s)}{\phi_D} = \frac{q_A(s) f_A(s)}{\phi_A} \forall s \)

Sum \( \phi_D = \int_s q_D(s) f_D(s) ds, \phi_A = \int_s q_A(s) f_A(s) ds \)

Prob \( 0 < \phi_D \leq 1, 0 < \phi_A \leq 1 \forall s \)

\( 0 \leq q_D(s) \leq 1, 0 \leq q_A(s) \leq 1 \forall s \)
A No Stereotype policy solves:

$$\max E [s] = \max \{q_D(s), q_A(s)\} \frac{1}{K} [\theta_D \int s q_D(s) f_D(s) ds + \theta_A \int s q_A(s) f_A(s) ds]$$

Admit K

$$\phi_D \theta_D + \phi_A \theta_A = K$$

Eq Dist

$$\frac{q_D(s) f_D(s)}{\phi_D} = \frac{q_A(s) f_A(s)}{\phi_A} \forall s$$

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\[
0 \leq q_D(s) \leq 1, \quad 0 \leq q_A(s) \leq 1 \quad \forall s
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Eliminating Stereotypes

No Stereotype Admission Policy

- $q_D^*(s) = \begin{cases} 
0, & s \in [s, s_L^*] \\
\frac{f_A(s)}{f_D(s)} \frac{\phi_D^*}{\phi_A^*}, & s \in [s_L^*, s_H^*] \\
1, & s \in [s_H^*, \overline{s}] 
\end{cases}$

- $q_A^*(s) = \begin{cases} 
0, & s \in [s, s_L^*] \\
\frac{f_D(s)}{f_D(s)} \frac{\phi_A^*}{\phi_D^*}, & s \in [s_L^*, s_H^*] \\
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\end{cases} \]
\[ \max E[s] \text{ s.t.} \]

Admit 60%

Eq Dist

B (1%)

W (99%)
Eliminating Stereotypes

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4 Other Stereotypes
Assumptions

- Admission policy is cutoff scores $c_A$ and $c_D$
- School’s preferences:
  $$U (c_A - c_D, E_A [s | s > c_A] - E_D [s | s > c_D])$$
- School optimizes subject to quota constraint (K)
**Assumptions**

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Proposition 3

Group-blind admissions are not optimal and $c^*_D > c^*_A$. 

No Stereotype          Equal Treatment

$\text{C}_A - \text{C}_D$
Other Preferences Over Equal Treatment & Stereotypes:

- Lexicographic preference for equality
- Linear Preferences
- Discontinuous Preferences at Equality
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  \[ U (c_A - c_D, E_A [s \mid s > c_A] - E_D [s \mid s > c_D], F_D (c_D) - F_A (c_A)) \]
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**Proposition 4**

Group-blind admissions are optimal only if marginal effects at equal treatment cancel out.
Does this explain the case for group-blind admissions? **Unlikely**

- Advocates of group-blind admissions rarely laud equal representation as an appropriate aim of admissions
- **Knife-edge case**
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Other Stereotypes

Conclusions are valid for any "stereotype" that:
1. Exists under group-blind admissions and
2. Decreases if admission standards are raised for disadvantaged students

Examples
- Biased stereotypes
- Stereotype threat (possible)
Other Stereotypes

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Conclusions are not valid for "stereotypes" that:

1. Only exist under affirmative action or
2. Do not decrease if admission standards are raised for disadvantaged students

Examples

- Stereotype is probability admitted through affirmative action
- Stereotype mediated through perceived fairness of process
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Conclusions

- Stereotypes can persist under group-blind admissions
- Eliminating stereotypes implies higher standards for disadvantaged students
- Requires third goal such as equal representation to overturn this conclusion
- When all three goals present, some affirmative action will usually be optimal
- Group-blind admissions best described by lexicographic preference for equal treatment
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