Social Equity in Public Administration: Past, Present, and the Future

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By 2018, the United States was (again) faced with a number of turbulent and divisive issues. In response, the Minnowbrook at 50 conference identified several critical areas of emphasis to advance social equity in research, teaching, and the practice of public administration. In this essay, we highlight these renewed efforts to describe its progress during the past five years (e.g., 2018–2023), as well as review the conceptual development of social equity in public administration prior to the Minnowbrook at 50 conference (e.g., pre-2018). We conclude with a re-examination of the future of social equity in public administration by upholding past principles, while encouraging new practices, pedagogy, and scholarship within the social equity domain (e.g., post-2023).

Keywords: Social Equity, Public Administration, Minnowbrook

Introduction

Since the Civil Rights era, the notion of social equity has been used across multiple disciplines and institutional settings, with public administration being no exception. The American Society of Public Administration (ASPA, 2023) broadly describes social equity as (1) the fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; (2) the fair and equitable distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy; and (3) the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy. Furthermore, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) formally adopted social equity as the fourth pillar of public administration in 2005—along with economy, efficiency, and effectiveness—to serve as the foundational cornerstones of our field (Gooden et al., 2023). Although the discipline has made progress during these past 60+ years to "incentivize tangible results by exploring, identifying, and disseminating social equity frameworks and metrics," much more remains to be done to "address the substantial social and economic disparities in 21st Century America" (NAPA, 2023). Therefore, this essay re-examines the Social Equity Manifesto established at the [2018] Minnowbrook at 50 conference—which identified several critical areas of emphasis to advance social equity in research, teaching, and the practice of public administration—by reviewing those "principles to assist scholars and practitioners move beyond rhetorical acknowledgement" (Blessett et al., 2019, p. 296), as well as identifying new areas of accent. However, before we address those current and future endeavors, a review of past efforts is provided across time.

This essay is organized as follows. First, we describe the conceptual development of social equity prior to the Minnowbrook at 50 conference to capture its first 60+ years in public

administration (e.g., pre-2018). Next, we then describe the discipline's renewed efforts since the Social Equity Manifesto's "call to action" to highlight its progress during the past five years (e.g., 2018–2023). Finally, we conclude with a re-examination of the future of social equity in public administration by upholding past principles, while encouraging new practices, pedagogy, and scholarship within the social equity domain (e.g., post-2023).

Social Equity in Public Administration: Past (Pre-2018)

The development of social equity as a pillar of public administration is akin to an epic (Wooldridge & Gooden, 2009). In the 2020s, it can be difficult to imagine a time when social equity was not an espoused pillar of the field. Despite the growing prevalence of social equity across journal articles, books, and conferences, the road to social equity becoming a pillar of the field has been far from smooth. This section charts the foundations and origins of social equity from before the public administration discipline's "founding" in 1939 until roughly 2018, when the last Minnowbrook conference convened.

The Context of Social Equity in Public Administration

Across history, societies have engaged in discourses on the meaning of fairness, especially concerning which groups should benefit from public policy and administration and which groups should not (Gooden, 2020; Johansen, 2019). These discourses are driven by different groups' power (high to low) and social constructions (positive to negative), with the most powerful and/or most positively socially constructed disproportionately experiencing the most extensive ability to influence societal discourses and, as such, to experience the greatest benefits of public policy and administration (Ingram et al., 2007; McCandless et al., 2022; Stone, 2011).

In the United States, discourses on fairness harken to a question linked to the preamble of the U.S. Constitution. The preamble begins with the oft-quoted words "We the People," yet the "We" in this phrase has changed massively over time (Gooden, 2015a). The Constitution as drafted in the late 1780s and as amended by the Bill of Rights in the early 1790s had several provisions implicating fairness for all, yet *who* benefited from public policy and administration has historically been quite narrow. The specific intersection of White, cis-gendered, heterosexual, property owning, and male has been privileged above all others. In the post-Civil War era until the Progressive Era of the 1920s, legal definitions of "We" expanded significantly, such as through the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 19th amendments to the U.S. Constitution, as well as statutory advancements at federal, state, and local levels. Despite these slowly building legal expansions of the meaning of "We," people and groups with historically marginalized identities continued to experience inequities, driven by policies and practices that perpetuated marginalization, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, zoning, unequal service by government agencies, intimidation, and many more (Gooden, 2015a).

Perhaps not surprisingly, early public administration scholarship contained generic references to issues of fairness, if mentioned at all. Wilson (1887), for instance, while decrying the seemingly "unphilosophical bulk of mankind" asserts that [t]o know the public mind of this country, one must know the mind, not of Americans of the older stocks only, but also of Irishmen, of Germans, of negroes" (p. 209). Perhaps not surprisingly, Wilson's work across his careers demonstrates extensive racism and prejudice (O'Reilly, 1997). Relatedly, some early public administration scholarship contained references to "fairness." For instance, Taylor (1911) discussed the need for workplaces to foster fair work and compensation. Willoughby (1927), commenting on workplace fairness, noted that government "should be empowered to prevent removals for racial, religious, or political reasons" (p. 327), yet he also commented that "[a]s a general rule women do not have the experience or other qualifications

fitting them for the more responsible positions and particularly those coming from within the class of directing personnel" (p. 286).

Early, meaningful references to fairness and justice are found in the works of Progressive era White female authors, such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Frances Perkins, and many others (Burnier, 2022; Stivers, 2000; Shields, 2022). To Burnier (2008; 2021), the works of these women have historically been marginalized within the canon, yet their writings in tandem with work in the Progressive and New Deal eras in general constitute somewhat of a "lost legacy" of social justice in the field.

Another voice marginalized in the canon has been Frances Harriet Williams, a Black female civil servant whom Gooden (2017) termed an unsung social equity pioneer. Williams (1947) wrote "Minority Groups and the OPA" for *Public Administration Review*, analyzing discrimination against race in U.S. government policies, especially in the then-extant Office of Price Administration. As summarized by Gooden (2017), "long before the Minnowbrook I conference convened in the 1960s to discuss the importance of fairness in the provision of public services, Williams successfully promoted values of social equity and racial fairness within public administration scholarly and practitioner communities" (p. 777).

In short, discussions of fairness in the pre-1960s public administration literature were often scant. As Moloney and Lewis (2023a; 2023b) caution, it has often been in other disciplines and with figures writing outside of the U.S. academy that one can find far more extensive discussions of equity and justice than what was evident in the early public administration canon.

The Minnowbrook Legacy

While discussions of equity and justice in the public administration literature pre-date the 1960s, former ASPA president and social equity champion Philip Rutledge "[traced] the 'invention' of social equity as a practical tool in public administration to the Minnowbrook conference convened by Dwight Waldo, George Frederickson, and a group of Young Turks in the 1960s" (Rutledge, 2002, p. 391). The first Minnowbrook conference was held in 1968 under the auspices of Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and was led by Dwight Waldo (Gooden et al., 2022). Reflecting on the state of the field, especially growing interest in civil rights and racial equality, this group of scholars—especially through the work of H. G. Frederickson—advanced a so-called "new public administration," which included arguing that government should be fair for all, or socially equitable (Frederickson, 1971; 1974), and scholarly interest in social equity grew steadily from that time (Frederickson, 1990; 2005).

Further Minnowbrook conferences followed. From the 1960s onward, it became more common to find discussions of representative bureaucracy (Meier & Nigro, 1976), which is critical to social equity as a pillar but not the entirety of it (Gooden & Portillo, 2011). Still, as reported by Guy (1989), social equity was far less discussed in the Minnowbrook II conference, yet as documented by Gooden and Portillo (2011), the Minnowbrook III conference led to far more wide-ranging discussions of social equity in the field, especially on the need for conceptual clarity and meaningful action to advance fairness for all.

Institutional responses by government paralleled and influenced social equity advancements in the public administration literature. As noted by Gooden (2015a), constitutional amendments, case law, and statutory law helped expand notions of "We" in the United States. When considering those advancements in the context of the history of public administration as a field, that is from 1939 onwards, several legal advancements (space belies mentioning more) at the federal level are noteworthy, such as the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ruled that public school segregation was unconstitutional, the *Civil*

Rights Act of 1964, which outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin, Supreme Court rulings that provided greater protections for women (e.g., *Roe v. Wade*, 1973; *United States v. Virginia*, 1996), and a succession of Supreme Court rulings that provided greater protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer plus (LGBTQ+) individuals (e.g., *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 2020; *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015).

Centering Social Equity in the Field

Despite these advancements, the place of social equity as a pillar of the field was far from guaranteed. This steady growth in interest in social equity likely would not have happened were it not for Phillip Rutledge (Frederickson, 2008; Frederickson, 2010; Gooden, 2005). As summarized by Gooden (2015a), "[w]hile Frederickson was theorizing and conceptualizing social equity and its linkages to public administration," it was "another giant in the field, the late Philip Rutledge [who] was fervently working to advance social equity's applied dimension. Much of his lifelong legacy involved holding our field's professional associations accountable to social equity" (p. 215). Further, "[w]hat emerges from Frederickson and Rutledge is the present-day notion of the "we" of public administration as all inclusive" or "public administration scholars, practitioners, and students" (p. 215).

In fact, Rutledge was foundational in NAPA developing a working definition of social equity, adopting social equity as a pillar of the field, incorporating social equity in its strategic plan, and creating a standing panel (Gooden, 2015a; Gooden et al., 2023). Indeed, it is the cornerstone definition of social equity as advanced by NAPA that is often now a starting point for understanding social equity in the field: "The fair, just, and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract, and the fair, justice and equitable distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy, and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy" (Gooden, 2015a, p. 219). Parallel to these advancements in NAPA, in 1984, ASPA adopted its first ethics code, adopting revisions in 1994 and 2013, each of which had growing commitments to social equity (Svara, 2014, p. 565).

Toward Greater Conceptual and Operational Clarity

Concomitant with social equity advancements in law and in the profession, the public administration literature from the mid-1970s until 2018 saw rapid growth in social equity scholarship. As noted by Gooden (2015a) in the 1980s and 1990s, the literature was focused on answering the question of how much inequity exists. From the early 2000s until the 2010s, the focus on determining how much inequity exists remained but was extended to the question of why social inequities persist. From the 2010s and beyond, the question extended to how accountability for social equity is achieved. However, until the 2010s, social equity remained somewhat of a so-called "niche" topic in the canon. As an example, Gooden (2015b) examined the prevalence of social equity articles throughout the then-extant volumes of *Public Administration Review (PAR),* finding that less than 5% of articles focused on social equity.

Still, several now classic works advanced social equity conceptually, theoretically, and empirically. For instance, Johnson and Svara's (2011; 2015a) edited volume *Justice for All: Promoting Social Equity in Public Administration* shaped understandings of social equity priorities in policy areas running the gamut of all public service, from housing to policing. These authors also discussed a four-part framework for understanding social equity still in use today, namely that social equity can be understood in terms of questions of access, procedural fairness and processes, quality of services, and outcomes of services (Johnson & Svara, 2015b; 2015c). Johnson and Svara (2015c) articulated several steps of what it means for public service agencies to foster accountability for social equity, including the need for agencies to admit their culpability in creating inequities, taking equity seriously, measuring success, reaching out to and with historically marginalized communities, and ensuring seats at the table.

Relatedly, Gooden (2014) published the modern classic *Race and Social Equity: A Nervous Area of Government*, which articulated the need to examine racism in U.S. society and to take accountability for fostering racial equity. This book also forwarded the notion that administrators and policy makers must better understand and admit equity issues, understand how they come about and who and what are responsible for creating social inequities, and to take meaningful steps to claim, or remedy, inequities. The list of social equity works—whether articles or books—are far too numerous to list here, but across the literature, the interest in social equity rapidly increased.

The social equity literature prior to 2018 began to evince paired dynamics, namely linking social equity to related concepts and drawing from other fields. On the first dynamic, scholarly works began linking concepts of diversity, cultural competency, inclusion, methodologies and philosophies of knowledge, representative bureaucracy, and emotional labor to equity issues, noting that these concepts were all necessary, albeit not sufficient, conditions for understanding and fostering fairness for all (see Guy & McCandless, 2012; Guy et al., 2008; Norman-Major & Gooden, 2012; Riccucci, 2010; Riccucci, 2015; Riccucci & Van Ryzin, 2017). On the second dynamic, scholars in public administration began drawing more often from other literatures, whether explicitly or implicitly, in other fields to bring new analytical tools to the field, especially regarding feminism and queer theory (Swan, 2004), critical race theory (Alkadry & Blessett, 2010; Gaynor, 2018), theories of justice (Federickson, 2010; Rawls, 1971), and intersectionality (Blessett, 2018; Love et al., 2016).

It is in the pre-2018 public administration pedagogical literature that rapid growth in interest in social equity is particularly noticeable. Norman-Major (2011) argued that a key dimension of creating social equity is defining and measuring it, and a related dimension is ensuring that public administrators are educated in the meaning of social equity and in centering it as a priority. Simply put, if equity is to be made a priority, it must be taught across the curriculum (Norman-Major, 2011).

Prior to 2018, academic journals like the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* (*JPAE*) had a steadily growing number of pieces on social equity education. Gooden and Myers (2004b) guest edited a *JPAE* social equity symposium. This symposium featured numerous now-classic social equity pieces. For instance, Svara and Brunet (2004) reviewed public administration textbooks, finding that social equity is often not defined and, when discussed, largely focused on human resources management. Rice (2004) argued that given rapid demographic changes in the United States, public administrators must be educated to better understand diversity, and classes themselves must examine who works within public service agencies, management of such agencies, and who are recipients of public services. Gooden and Myers (2004a) provided advice for weaving social equity impact analyses into both MPA and MPP curricula, arguing that students need skills in understanding historical grounding of problems, examining numerous policy areas, gaining community knowledge and interaction experiences, preparing faculty, and recruiting and enrolling a diverse group of students.

In response to arguments made in this special issue, Rosenbloom (2005) questioned if social equity had value (and factual correctness) as an umbrella term for fairness, due process, and more, and argued that social equity definitions were tautological, not rooted in constitutional jurisprudence, and tantamount to scholars imposing their beliefs on others. Svara and Brunet (2005) disagreed and responded by forwarding the basis of an operational definition of social equity consisting of procedural fairness, distribution and access, quality, outcomes, and related responsibilities of guaranteeing all a place and the table being both proactive and affirmative to involve citizens, all of which are skills in which administrators must be educated.

Indeed, from this time up until 2018, *JPAE* in particular saw a steadily growing number of social equity pieces on a wide range of topics, including teaching social equity in human resources management (Gooden & Wooldridge, 2007), as a standalone course (McCandless &

Larson, 2018), in terms of human rights (Alvez & Timney, 2008), teaching about racism in the classroom (Lopez-Littleton et al., 2018), in terms of service learning (Waldner et al., 2011), in terms of transgender competence (Johnson, 2011), a social equity, diversity, and identity symposium (see Rivera & Ward, 2018), and many others too numerous to list in full. The next section continues this dialogue and captures the discipline's renewed efforts since this timeframe when the last Minnowbrook conference was convened to highlight its progress during the past five years.

Social Equity in Public Administration: Present (2018–2023)

Fifty years after the initial Minnowbrook conference in 1968, a leading group of social equity scholars met at the Minnowbrook at 50 conference—the latest of four Minnowbrook conferences since its inception—to review the past developments of social equity within the field of public administration (Blessett et al., 2019). Like their predecessors before them, the country was (again) faced with tumultuous social and cultural changes (e.g., *#MeToo* and *#BlackLivesMatter* campaigns, just to name a few). During their discussions, a dominant theme emerged: "as a discipline and practice, we have not adequately anchored social equity to the foundation of public administration, and thus a call to action is warranted" (Blessett et al., 2019, p. 283). As a result, this call to action also included the Social Equity Manifesto, a list of seven principles "that can guide public administration toward making social equity an embedded value and practice in the field, with the goal of emphasizing action" (p. 296) (see Table 1). This section will identify those activities that have responded to this call up through present day, as well as those state, executive, and judicial actions that have ignored these fundamental principles. Due to space considerations, this discussion will only highlight significant outcomes.

First, the scholarly community has (again) responded to the call and embraced these principles. For example, in the proceeding 5 years post-Minnowbrook at 50, numerous public administration journals have continued to publish stand-along articles, as well as sponsored special issues, on a myriad of social equity topics in response to *#MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #StopAsianHate,* and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to address the social, economic, and health inequities in public service (e.g., *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, *American Review of Public Administration*, *Public Administration*, *Public Personnel Management*, *Public Integrity*, *JPAE*, and *Public Management Review*). However, three public administration journals have gone over and beyond these crucial yet individual articles or special issues. They are *PAR*, *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs* (*JPNA*), and *Journal of Social Equity in Public Administration* (*JSEPA*).

To begin, as the leading professional journal in public administration research, theory and practice, *PAR* partnered with the *Consortium of Race and Gender Scholars* (CORGES) in 2020, an informal group of 50+ scholars to address the disconnect between the intensity and urgency of social concerns and the state of scholarship in public policy and public administration relevant to race and gender, the two primary axes of social inequity (Hall, 2022; Pandey et al., 2022). Although *PAR* has a long history supporting social equity scholarship (e.g., symposia and notable essays), they admit to entering a 40-year "dark period" where continued focus and effort at defining or redefining social equity had lapsed (Hall, 2022). Thus, the partnership with CORGES led to PAR's own re-emergence whose "primary ambition [was] to reimagine and rejuvenate social equity scholarship" under the guest editorships of several senior social equity scholars (Hall, 2022, p. 385). This contemporary body of work can be found in Volume 82, Issue 3 (2022) and contains a broad collection of social equity topics and discussion.

Next, the publishing outlet of this essay (*JPNA*), one of the very few open access journals in the field of public administration, launched a new Social Equity Section in 2021 to tackle

Table 1. Social Equity Manifesto: Principles

1	*Social equity is a foundational anchor, not just a (separate) pillar, of public administration.* There is a responsibility to promote social equity in our roles as researchers, teachers, and practitioners. This promotion should not be siloed, but rather intersecting with other foundational components of the field.
2	*Our commitment to the field of public administration requires us to stand up for good governance, social equity, and strong communities.* As scholars and practitioners, we must be open to professional development opportunities that challenge conscious and unconscious bias, be willing to engage in difficult conversations with colleagues and constituents, and commit ourselves to be life-long learners as a way to incorporate the values of social equity and cultural understanding as part of our daily process.
3	*A goal of social equity is to eliminate inequalities of all kinds.* This requires a commitment to structural, institutional changes and deep personal work on behalf of public administration scholars and practitioners. As academics, we support social equity in our instruction, in the hiring and promotion of our colleagues, in our research, and in our service to the field. As practitioners, we support social equity in the development, implementation, and evaluation of managerial practices and public policies.
4	*Research needs to be utilized as a tool for examining whether social equity goals are being realized.* As researchers, we can use equity frameworks, such as representative bureaucracy and intersectionality, to inform the questions we ask as well as broaden our methodological choices to incorporate more qualitative work. Representative bureaucracy can demonstrate the effectiveness of equity approaches to hiring and promotion.
5	*Violations of equity are contrary to democracy.* As researchers, we should be more conscious of the questions we ask, the paradigms/frameworks/ theories we use and propose, and the implications of our research as it pertains to equity. As practitioners, a democratically responsible administration includes passionate action that is equitable, inclusive, intentional, person-centered, and encapsulated by an ethos of care.
6	*As a whole, academic programs of public administration are not currently equipping or preparing the future of public administrators for the practical work of equity in public service.* Public administration programs need core courses focused centrally on equity that are not relegated to "special topics" courses or electives. In addition, equity concepts, processes, issues, and outcomes should be incorporated within every core class in public administration curricula.
7	*Practitioners are fundamental actors in extending democracy and promoting equity.* Administrators must be committed to and manifest the ideals of democracy, justice, and equity for all citizens through their actions, professional development, and engagement with all individuals and communities. As practitioners, the upper levels of management with promotion authority need to create pipelines to promote social equity at the higher levels of government.

Note: Adapted from Blessett et al., 2019, p. 296.

emerging social equity topics more quickly. Although *JPNA* has always been dedicated to publishing articles that address any number of inequities in the public and nonprofit sectors, the Social Equity Section is a supplemental and dedicated outlet for this important work to disseminate topics commonly discounted in government and nonprofit affairs scholarship, as well as emerging social equity issues (Carroll, 2021). Since its inception, articles in the new Social Equity Section have included topics such as expanding sick leave during a global pandemic (Rauhaus & Johnson, 2021), reintegration programs and services for Black female parolees in Alabama (Moorer, 2021), increasing access to public administration research for individuals with disabilities (Allgood, 2021), appropriate terminology usage for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual plus (LGBTQIA+) communities (Meyer & Milleson, 2022), a historical analysis of American constitutional values and democratic beliefs toward social equity progression (Trochmann & Guy, 2022), a call for political action on gun control by the professional sports industry (Thomas & Levine Daniel,

2022), digital inequities in community revitalization (Marshall, 2023), and understanding the "B" in *#Black Lives Matter* (Houston & Krinch, 2023). They represent a broad array of emerging topics and much-needed discourse in social equity and public administration scholarship.

Finally, the inaugural issue of *JSEPA* was launched in 2023, not only as the newest academic journal in the field of public administration but an open access source as well. Their road to implementation will not be fully rehashed here (see Gooden et al., 2023 for detailed narrative from vision to reality). However, its "mission is to provide a learning space, a journal of record, and a place of introspection and extrospection. Because social equity is a moving target, always evolving, the pages of this journal will reflect its course" (Guy & Williams, 2023). In addition, *JSEPA* (2023) "seeks to be the leading voice on social equity as it pertains to the pursuit of public purposes. It is the outlet for cutting edge theory, research, and commentary on matters of access, process, quality, and outcomes of administrative actions, policy decisions, and administrative law." Furthermore, *JSEPA* (2023) is "a voice for reconciliation, restoration, and remediation strategies," ensuring a dedicated and specialized outlet for social equity scholarship in the future.

Likewise, the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA, 2021)—the global standard in public service education—has also responded to the call by forming a 12-member ad hoc task force during the summer of 2020 to review background materials and propose a comprehensive framework for a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Action Plan to guide NASPAA's work on these important issues over the coming years. Like many of the [journal] special issues mentioned above, this task force was initiated in response to the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and a desire for NASPAA to move toward intentional actions to become a model for member institutions in the fight against anti-Black racism, discrimination, and inequity (NASPAA, 2021). This Action Plan was intentionally designed to be built upon over time as the organization makes progress to comprehensively integrate DEI goals in the following key areas: accreditation, teaching and learning, delivering diversity in NASPAA and our field, research and recognition, and annual conference planning (NASPAA, 2021). By the end of their mandate, the task force provided both strategic and tactical action items for the short, medium, and long term across these five key areas, as well as identify three priority areas for consideration. These priority areas would include training improvements, support for minority serving institutions, and revisions to NASPAA's data collection and assessment (NASPAA, 2021). While it appears the academic and publishing communities have responded in some form to the Minnowbrook at 50's call for greater attention to social equity issues, this cannot be said for the practitioner community as a whole, which informs our next group of significant outcomes during the past 5 years.

For example, during the Trump Administration, federal and state legislatures began attacking DEI initiatives and curriculum throughout their domains. Although the Biden Administration rescinded Trump's "Equity Gag Order"—also commonly referred to as the "Trump Truth Ban" (i.e., Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020), which banned federal departments and agencies, contractors, and grant recipients from conducting training and programs that address systematic racism and sexism—with the passage of Exec. Order No. 13985 (2021), *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, a total of 16 states (to date) have signed into legislation bills restricting education on race in classrooms or state government agencies, with another 19 states actively considering similar bills or policies (Alfonseca, 2022). This attack, especially in higher education, have impacted the administration and curricula of public colleges and universities throughout the country. For example, Texas banned diversity offices in their institutions of higher education and Florida banned expending funds on any DEI program or initiative (e.g., curricula, student organizations, employment) at their public colleges and universities (Johnson, 2023). Instead of identifying pathways for ending hate, bigotry, racism, and all forms of discrimination derived from White supremacy, these bills will cause our nation to trend backwards, making

it increasingly more difficult to eradicate racism (The King Center, 2023). As of August 2023, four lawsuits have been filed against these censorship bills with one already being successful in its efforts to reverse the law (e.g., Arizona) (Pendharker, 2023).

Finally, the Supreme Court in a historic decision reversed decades of precedent on affirmative action by ending race-conscious admissions program at colleges and universities across the country, altering the landscape of higher education for years to come. In a decision divided along ideological lines, *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* (2023) invalidated the ability of admissions programs to consider race as one of many factors in deciding which of the qualified applicants to be admitted. However, the Court's decision is likely to cause ripple effects throughout the country, and not just in higher education, but also in selective primary and secondary schools (Totenberg, 2023). Eventually, the nation's economic, educational, and social dimensions, to include employment and promotion decisions in the workplace will be impacted. In essence, "It's going to open a Pandora's box across the country and cross institutions and industries" (Totenberg, 2023). Altogether, these negative outcomes will have lasting impacts in our pursuit for social equity and will need to be monitored carefully. As the United States contend with the possible upcoming judicial challenges against landmark decisions such as *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) (on same-sex marriages) and *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) (on employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity), social equity research will become even more paramount. The next section outlines our expectations for the future of social equity in public administration.

Social Equity in Public Administration: Future (Post-2023)

Looking forward to the future of social equity in governing practices, pedagogy and scholarship, the cloud of declining government distrust remains, encompassing negative views of both political institutions and government agencies (Brenan, 2023). Leaning into social equity may be key to improving government trust, enhancing more democratic principles, and achieving equitable outcomes. In order to envision the future of social equity in public administration, it is equally important to return to the fundamental basis of the politics-administration dichotomy to examine principles of social equity in an accurate perspective rather focusing mainly on politicized viewpoints and rhetoric of equity. To effectively dichotomize politics and social equity, it will be imperative to move beyond the stereotype that social equity and diversity compromise merit. Thus, representative bureaucracy will continue to be an important practice with a greater emphasis on all public servants having a heightened awareness of the importance of social equity and values of equity being embedded in public institutions and organizations. Highlighting the effectiveness of representative bureaucracy (and other social equity frameworks) and the successes of social equity will also be necessary in order to debunk the stigma that social equity minimizes merit.

Accordingly, engaging in innovative scholarship and pedagogical approaches that encourage public servants to think critically about public policy and public administration in changing communities with diverse needs is the first step in preparing for the future of social equity. Linking social equity as a solution to improved governance will be key. Dolamore and Whitebread (2022) suggest "recalibrating public service" by focusing on a new set of 4E's: engagement, empathy, equity, and ethics. By incorporating these new values to the traditional values in public service (i.e., economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity), practitioners and researchers can emphasize principles in democratic governance, where government not only looks like those they serve but seeks to understand the evolving needs of diverse groups (Norman-Major, 2022). However, "these 'new' 4E's are the pillars needed in a 21st century public administration that center care (empathy), meet people where they are (engagement), promote fairness for all (equity), and do so in ways to advance the public interest and public benefit (ethics)" (Meyer et al., 2022, p. 354). Training future public servants on the traditional

E's as well as the new E's will enhance public service to be equipped to approach challenging, dynamic wicked problems that continue to persist throughout communities, and that often plague under-represented groups. This is particularly true for the LGBTQ+ community, whom the Human Rights Campaign have declared a state of emergency (Schoenbaum, 2023). For example, as of June 2023, more than 525 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced in state houses throughout the country, with over 70 signed into law so far in 2023, more than double last year's numbers (Schoenbaum, 2023).

Likewise, concepts and lessons of social equity will need to be thread throughout public administration curriculum and beyond with an emphasis on adopting governing and public leadership approaches that center on equity. Heightening awareness of ethics, empathy, engagement, and equity among public servants and aspiring public leaders can lead to public servants acting with a new set of values that will equip them to succeed (or adapt) in a challenging environment. Adopting the new values in public service will also result in more representative policymaking that considers how policies will impact all groups and enhance government trust, as public leaders will consider the consequences, benefits, and implications of those in the community that they engage with and represent. As we grapple with the possible upcoming judicial challenges against landmark decisions such as *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) and *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), public leadership will be tested.

Despite these socio-political challenges, the concept of diversity is continually changing to be more inclusive and social equity approaches will also have to include ways to support traditionally under-represented, marginalized, or oppressed groups. More research on widening the scope of how diversity is defined and studied is much needed. For example, as mentioned previously, existing research in public administration using a social equity theoretical lens has explored primary forms of personal identity, such as race and gender; but there are many more socio-economic factors to consider when examining how public administration can be more equitable. Some of those under-studied factors include class and place inequities, disability, age, religious minorities, LGBTQIA+ persons, and other racial groups that are often overlooked such as Native American and Native Hawaiian persons, as well as the intersectionality of these factors with other primary forms of interacting personal identity (Blessett et al., 2019; Exec. Order No. 13985, 2021; Kagan & Ronquillo, 2019; Pandey et al., 2022; Trochman & Guy, 2022; Yu & Lee, 2023). Furthering research in social equity to extend beyond gender and race has the potential to enhance governing practices and public policy and will be essential in understanding how public administration can effectively provide more equitable and representative results. This recalibration of public service will ultimately highlight cultural diversity as well. In addition, widening the scope of equity calls for a widening view of diverse groups as definitions and criteria are also continually changing. To illustrate, individuals with disabilities are the largest minority groups both globally and in the United States and are often overlooked in scholarship and practice of public administration (Allgood, 2021; Chordiya et al., 2023).

Thus, future research agendas should explore these understudied personal identities or social factors, as well as settings in terms of governmental structures and types of public organizations. The future of social equity is tied to social justice and the process of how outcomes of social equity and justice are achieved or hindered in organizations (Stivers et al., 2023). Hence, public administration research needs to further link social equity scholarship to praxis, which indicates strengthening and supporting the fundamental pillars of public administration. Likewise, future research agendas should capture inclusive practices, which remain limited in social equity and public administration scholarship. Research suggests that inclusive workplace practices as opposed to diversity management and representation efforts have a higher impact for reducing workplace discrimination (Yu & Lee, 2023). Given the current divisive and political climate in the United States, it is critical that social equity remains at the forefront of public administration research, pedagogy, and practice. As a discipline, we must continue to "deliver [sustained] action" (Blessett et al., 2019, p. 297) so we

aren't grappling with these same issues at the next Minnowbrook conference. While the Social Equity Manifesto has made progress these past 5 years, much more (still) remains to be done.

Disclosure Statement

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