

## Can Education Undermine Representation?

### Abstract:

Members of oppressed groups have sought access to educational institutions as a path to increasing their representation in politics, the media, academia, and other powerful institutions. These institutions are critical to the political decision-making process. Therefore, it is thought that the more diverse those elite institutions are, the greater the diversity of interest, opinions, and viewpoints that are being represented in the democratic process. In particular, an increase in 'descriptive representation' is thought to make for an increase in the likelihood that the perspectives of those who are oppressed will be heard. I will argue that education in elite institutions can negatively affect the representative function of members of marginalized and oppressed groups because access to and success in educational institutions often requires that one acquire and assimilate into the culture that dominates those institutions, namely, the culture of the dominant class. I rely on recent research from sociologists and social psychologists on the "cultural mismatch" between members of underrepresented groups—students from low-income predominantly Black or Latino communities—and selective educational institutions of higher education. I conclude that under conditions of severe injustice and educational inequality in which members of economically advantaged groups dominate and segregate into elite educational institutions, the path to positions of power through education is a double-edged sword for members of oppressed and marginalized groups.