

# 1 Academic Ideals: What Keeps Some Out of Reach?

What are our academic ideals? Faculty, students, and members of the public agree that an ideal college or university provides a space that promotes and secures six central virtues: a search for truth, the freedom to explore all ideas, a respect for knowledge and expertise, a valuing of creativity and innovation, a commitment to meritocracy, and a willingness to open its doors to all groups in society.

Despite this consensus, some people perceive actual institutions of higher education as bastions of elitism or irrelevance. For them, colleges and universities have failed to live up to one or more ideals. At the same time, others fiercely defend the relative success of academic institutions in safeguarding those virtues. Ideas about the six academic virtues, and their relative importance, have varied over time and in different locations, and the depth of commitment to them varies in different kinds of institutions. We believe that these virtues are nevertheless valued in all institutions of higher education, including community colleges, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive universities, and research universities; in an important sense, they define our ideal academic culture.

How those different institutions address these virtues varies, though. For example, new ideas and the freedom to discuss them are important in all of these institutions, but only some of them are in a position to provide faculty and students with resources to generate new scholarship and innovations as well as to learn about them. Finally, we recognize that colleges and universities could do a better job of showing or explaining why it is necessary to pursue and teach about some kinds of scholarship that may appear unnecessary or difficult to understand. While there is less consensus about many details, there is also long-standing shared agreement on the part of everyone from novelists to former students to faculty themselves

about the academic virtues. For that reason we review both precisely how people generally understand these virtues and why we fall short of realizing some of them.

We will sometimes discuss these virtues as they apply to both students and faculty, but we note that it is the faculty in our institutions of higher education who are responsible for ensuring that these virtues are realized. Because faculty are the stewards of the institutions, and the actors who ensure that in the day-to-day operation of classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and meeting rooms we are doing our best to live up to these ideals, it is the faculty who are the focus of our attention throughout this book.

This chapter first reviews all six of the ideal academic virtues and what makes some of them hard to achieve, including constraints on our ability to judge or evaluate “merit,” so critical to attaining a true meritocracy. The rest of this book concentrates on the last two ideals: meritocracy and inclusion. It is here that institutions of higher education—despite their clear intention to live up to all of the ideals—too often fall short. And in failing to live up to those ideals, the academy makes the other ideals harder to achieve.

Although there are no longer laws against the full participation of everyone in society in the academy, we will show that actual colleges and universities can do more to approximate the ideals of meritocracy and inclusiveness with respect to faculty. The standards for merit are too vague and still too saturated with inherited or unearned qualities, like the social class of our families. Individuals from different demographic groups are still insufficiently included or rewarded when they are inside the borders of academia. Moreover, the ideals of inclusion and merit are often perceived as in tension with one another—that is, that inclusion of all groups will risk or dilute merit, and that demanding merit will require exclusion of some groups, thereby limiting inclusion.

Like most of our colleagues in academic higher education, we are firmly committed to merit as the only basis for inclusion and recognition of faculty. At the same time, we reject the notion that these two valued virtues are opposites or even in necessary tension. In short, we believe that it is possible to attain a genuinely meritocratic *and* inclusive academic world. We also recognize that higher education is substantially more meritocratic and inclusive than it once was. Our hope, in writing this book, is that we can help speed up the process of change, allowing us all to operate within

institutions that are more inclusive and meritocratic in the future than they are now. That is, we hope both to show why it can be difficult to actualize our commitments to meritocracy and inclusion on the ground and to provide specific remedies for some of those difficulties.

## The Academic Virtues

### Search for Truth

In the ideal academic setting scholars have the time and resources to search for truths within their fields. Among scientists, developing theories that will explain how the world works is a fundamental part of that search for truth. In other fields, there may be skepticism about whether there are capital-T Truths to be discovered. But most academics in the United States would agree with some of the views expressed by the German Nobel Prize-winning novelist Hermann Hesse in his post-World War II novel *The Glass Bead Game*, or *Magister Ludi*, celebrating a well-ordered intellectual world protecting knowledge against chaos and threat. For example, he wrote,

To sacrifice the sense of truth, intellectual probity and loyalty to the laws and methods of the spirit to any other interest is treachery. If, in the struggle of interests and slogans, truth is imperiled, devalued, mutilated and violated ... then it is our duty to resist and to rescue the truth, i.e., to persist in striving after truth—the highest canon of our faith. (Hesse, 1949, p. 325)

The ideal academic setting for many is one in which striving after truth is the first and most important responsibility of scholars. In fact, Hesse excoriates the “scholar who, as an orator, author or teacher, wittingly utters falsehood and supports lies and perjuries,” suggesting that such scholars are “of no use to [other] people whatever,” causing them “nothing but harm” (p. 325). The ethical standards guiding many disciplines, most university research offices, and many mission statements of academic institutions explicitly or implicitly articulate the centrality of striving after truth. It is unstated, but nevertheless accurate, that the search for truth is best served by having diverse seekers; an inclusive institution would help attain this goal.

### Freedom to Pursue All Ideas

Strongly related to the quest for truth is a second feature of the ideal academic setting: it is a space in which people are free to pursue *all* ideas—those that are popular and those that are unpopular, those that are familiar

and those that are novel, those that are probable and those that are improbable. Robert Hutchins, the visionary and controversial president of the University of Chicago, put it this way: “The claim of academic freedom is based on the high and serious calling of the academic profession. That calling is to think. *A university is a center of independent thought*” (Hutchins, 1953, p. 87; our emphasis).

Equally, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2013) states,

Academic freedom is the indispensable quality of institutions of higher education. As the AAUP’s core policy statement argues, “institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. *The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition*” (1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*; our emphasis).

There is, then, broad agreement that academic freedom, understood as the “free search for truth and its free exposition,” is an essential academic virtue. It is clear both that institutions must better explain why this is so important to the public, and that real tests of academic freedom arise when institutions are more inclusive.

### **Respect for Knowledge and Expertise**

In ideal academic institutions expert knowledge is valued and respected by both students and faculty. In her autobiography, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (2013) recalled feelings of respect and reverence for knowledge as she described her reactions as a new student to Princeton University’s library:

I reveled in the vastness of the main catalog room, riffling through the drawers full of cards, rows and rows of cabinets running almost the length of the ground floor. And above them, like cathedral spires, rose the stacks, shelf after shelf, carrying a book for every card below, books ranging in subject from the majestic to the comically arcane. Here, in one of the world’s greatest libraries, was my first exposure to the true breadth of human knowledge, the humbling immensity of what was known and thought.... (pp. 128–129)

Jonathan Cole, a professor and former provost at Columbia University, expressed similar feelings about Columbia College:

Traversing the tree-lined Columbia Walk, I thought of George Santayana’s possibly apocryphal observation that when he walked the ... campus he felt in the company

of great minds. There was something inspiring about looking up at the façade of Butler Library and seeing carved in stone the names of Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Virgil, and those of Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe, among many others whose work we would read in Columbia's required Humanities course. (Cole, 2016, p. ix)

Few would question that a deep respect for the "humbling immensity of what was known and thought" is at the core of academic institutions and must be preserved. At the same time, anxiety about the value of what Sotomayor characterizes as "comically arcane" research is almost always near the surface of statements valuing "majestic" knowledge and expertise. As a crucial counterpoint to this anxiety, Hanna Gray, a recent President of the University of Chicago, points out that *unquestioning* acceptance of traditional knowledge is not implied by the valuing of expertise in the contemporary university. Instead, there is a "focus on scholarly investigation and discovery, a wide embrace of all the emerging and newly created fields of knowledge...." (Gray, 2012, p. 43).

Legislatures also frequently comment on what seems to them to be arcane and unimportant intellectual pursuits, thereby questioning whether it makes sense to "respect expertise" that does not make intuitive sense to those outside of academic institutions. Part of respecting expertise and valuing truth and knowledge for its own sake includes understanding that people cannot predict ahead of time what might turn out to be an important discovery, and that we must protect the ability of scholars to pursue ideas that may seem improbable but *might* provide a crucial key to our understanding. Another part of valuing truth and knowledge is accepting that it is difficult to determine, in fields outside one's specialty, whether a particular line of research is promising.

Finally, all researchers know that even dead ends often teach the field something. It can be difficult to make these larger points within academia as well as outside it, but an important component of the system of higher education in the United States and other countries with similar systems is commitment to the free and open pursuit and exchange of ideas, with reviews by one's peers providing some constraints on the wildness of our speculations. Clearly these values are best served when the faculty is inclusive of a wide range of kinds of knowledge and expertise.

### **Embrace of Creativity and Innovation**

Today's ideal academic institution embraces creativity and innovation as much as it respects a secure grounding in past understanding. Hesse's vision included the idea that "we may under certain circumstances also be innovators, discoverers, adventurers, pioneers, and interpreters" (p. 324). As Gray argues, exposure to the liberal arts in the university is "liberating" because it frees

the mind from unexamined opinions and assumptions to think independently and exercise critical judgment, to question conventional doctrines and inherited claims to truth, to gain some skill in analysis and some capacity to deal with complexity, to embrace a certain skepticism in the face of dogma, and to be open to many points of view. (Gray, 2012, p. 43)

Students and faculty in all academic institutions are expected, then, both to respect acquired knowledge and to value the intellectual skills and gifts that enable individuals to challenge existing beliefs and develop truly new ideas and understanding. In chapter 2 we will see that creativity and innovation are fostered by inclusive diversity.

### **Merit**

In the ideal college or university, success is a function solely of someone's capacity and desire to do the work. Hesse's (1949) vision here is apt: "[A]ll the students, irrespective of descent and prospects, are on a completely equal footing: the hierarchy is graded entirely according to the aptitudes and qualities of the students, in respect of intellect and character" (p. 101). This meritocratic ideal posits that demonstrated "merit" (here, the aptitudes and qualities of the student), rather than inherited position or wealth, determines academic value. Admissions policies that emphasize evidence of past learning and the capacity for further intellectual growth reflect this meritocratic ideal, as do tenure and promotion policies that rely on evidence of intellectual accomplishment in teaching and research.

Nevertheless, colleges and universities have never been and are not now entirely meritocratic, either in the admission of students or in the selection and promotion of faculty (see Clark Kerr, 1963/2001). For example, many institutions give an advantage in admissions to students whose parents or other relatives are alumni; such legacy students are viewed in admissions as having a special kind of "merit" that students from different kinds of

families cannot access or demonstrate. Similarly, many faculty members prefer to hire colleagues with credentials from prestigious institutions, independent of their other qualifications (Karabel, 2005). Although faculty tend to think that merit is in one way like obscenity in the mind of Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart (*Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 1964)—they know it when they see it—there are frequent debates about what counts as merit. In later chapters we will consider the importance of the vagueness around our definitions of merit in enabling us to act on irrelevant preferences rather than judgments of merit. Although it is difficult to ensure that our academic institutions are truly meritocratic, that commitment is central to the ideal vision.

### Inclusiveness

Finally, and tightly related to the ideal of meritocracy, is the notion that academic institutions should be inclusive. That is, membership on the faculty or in the student body should not be reserved, as it once was, to a single group, whether defined by gender, race or ethnicity, religion, economic means, those without disabilities, or other personal characteristics. Instead, our ideal academic institutions are open to everyone and should include a wide range of kinds of people who share only their quest for knowledge and commitment to pursuing truth, creativity and innovation, and the other virtues of higher education. Jonathan Cole, while admiring Columbia's scholarly seriousness, also notes who was not present in his class of 600: "When I entered the college [in 1960], there were no women (Barnard was the women's college at Columbia), only two African Americans—both talented academics and athletes—and no Hispanics in my class."

In later years all institutions of higher education in the United States were challenged to be more inclusive. As Richard Rodriguez wrote, "When educators promised to open their schools [to those previously excluded], it was partly because they couldn't imagine another response; *their schools were rooted in the belief that higher education should be available to all*" (Rodriguez, 1981, p. 154; our emphasis).

Most people agree that the ideal college or university should not resemble the original institutions of higher education in America that refused to consider admission of women and other groups as a categorical matter. Women and advocates for women's education had to fight for the notion

that women should be able to demonstrate that they had the qualities of mind and knowledge that suited them for higher education. The “junior girls” of 1876 wrote a poignant letter to their successors 100 years later at the University of Michigan, expressing

[o]ur hope that the next Centennial may find in our University a larger band of girls than we: wiser for all the progress which the world will make in these hundred years to come, but still as enthusiastic and earnest as we are to whom the admission of women to colleges is a new thing and for whom it required some heroism to enter upon a university course. (Farrand & Marston, 1876)

Just as women were only grudgingly admitted to higher education, racial and ethnic minorities faced many obstacles to higher education, perhaps stemming in the United States from the spirit of pre-Civil War laws that prohibited teaching slaves how to read and write. In the wake of slave rebellions, several states passed laws fining those who might teach slaves to read and write, tacitly acknowledging the subversive potential of reading and writing. The ideal academic institution now takes a very different approach, repudiating all demographic limits on who is “fit” to be educated.

### **Realization of Academic Virtues**

Institutions of higher education worldwide, and perhaps especially in the United States, have a great deal to be proud of, in terms of their success at living up to the six ideals we have outlined. College and university campuses remain centers of a love of the search for knowledge and understanding, of freedom to pursue all kinds of ideas and insights, of respect both for acquired expertise and knowledge and for creativity and the capacity to innovate and produce new understanding and new knowledge. Each accomplishment has also been challenged. For example, academics who supported left-wing causes were persecuted during the McCarthy era (see, e.g., Karabel, 2005; Schrecker, 1986). The sixties and seventies saw demands for “relevance” (Gitlin, 1987). More recently, attempts to introduce inclusive terminology have met charges of “political correctness” (Bloom, 1987; Friedman & Narveson, 1995). Each change must be articulated and supported by evidence and argument in every generation of faculty, students, and administrators. In the main, we believe that most faculty and most students experience colleges and universities as living up to these ideals—especially the first four—more often than not. And we concur.



## How and Why We Fall Short of Our Ideals

### Differential Access and Failures of Inclusion

We know that higher education is not equally available to everyone who could benefit from it, and we know that some people who have access to it are sometimes alienated by it. Differential access, differential inclusion, and differential benefits have been documented over and over for both faculty and students, despite our best intentions and the progress we have made (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Fryberg & Martinez, 2014a; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012; Karabel, 2005). For example, 60% of the American high school sophomores in 2002 who came from the top socioeconomic quartile of families earned college degrees by 2012, compared to only 14% of the sophomores raised in families in the bottom quartile, and to only 29% of those in the middle two quartiles (Bowen & McPherson, 2016, pp. 37–38).

Further, even if we limit the analysis to those students who *begin* a course of study at four-year colleges and universities, college completion within six years is accomplished by only 27% of those students whose parents did not attend college, while the completion rate is 42% for those students whose parents did (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011). There are parallel differences by race and ethnicity. For example, over 40% of White and Asian American first-year students completed college in six years, while only 26% of Latinos, 21% of African Americans, and 17% of Native Americans did. As we will see in detail in later chapters of this book, the same kinds of patterns apply to faculty: women, racial and ethnic minorities, and other groups do not advance to faculty positions in numbers proportionate to their presence in the population, or even among those with substantial higher education. Why do some groups of students and faculty have better educational outcomes than others?

### The Problem of Belonging

One might imagine that not entering the institutions is one problem, and not completing a degree is another. Both problems are the result of many factors we will explore, but both are exacerbated by the sense of “not belonging” that some individuals expect to experience in those institutions, and actually do experience if they get to them. Certain kinds of students anticipate that they will fit in when they get to college: students

whose families have attended college in the past and whose life experiences before higher education suggested to them that they have a right to be in educational settings. First-generation college students, students from poor and working-class families, racial-ethnic minorities, some women, students with disabilities, and immigrants are all less likely to have experiences that lead them to expect to fit in, or to actually fit in, at these institutions. And members of those groups are then less likely to become members of the faculty in those same institutions. When we differentially exclude groups from participating as students, we set up a situation that will also exclude them as faculty.

One powerful account of feeling like an “outsider” as a student is provided by an Asian American immigrant to the United States (quoted in Xiong & Tatum, 1999). The experience of not belonging is what is meant when people talk about the importance not only of “access” (the door is open), but of “inclusion” (a sense of full participation and belonging). Mai’s story shows how important experiences of not belonging and exclusion—including observing the even greater exclusion of others—can be:

I was one of a few Asian students in my school for a long time. And then there were more and more Hmong refugees coming in.... But during that time, my English was getting better and their English was still different from mine.... So my classmates distinguished the difference between [my cousins] and me. Even though they discriminated against me, it was a different kind of discrimination that they had against my cousins.... I thought if they hate me why do they hate my cousins more? (p. 234)

This student, Mai, struggled in high school. She said,

I knew I could do better in school. I just had so many questions and just never felt comfortable. I mean now I understand.... you never had Asian American studies and I always thought, “why aren’t we in the book?” ...I just always felt uneasy.... And when we studied world history we never got to Laos and I just felt really bad about it. So I just had a very difficult time. (p. 235)

Interestingly, Mai did go to college, and there she found some help:

I met professors who were activists.... And I was really inspired by that... and then learning about race issues in this country. And all that made sense to me.... Now there are words for how I was feeling.... Before I was just feeling things and I didn’t have any words to describe it. (p. 237)

In the end, although Mai articulates how little she felt she belonged, she also points out that education was a powerful tool that helped her articulate

her experience better. Thus, this is in part a story of how higher education can be successful and can provide people with solutions to their problems. But it also points to some of the structures and processes that make it hard for that success to happen for everyone.

### **Social Stratification and Access**

As both the data we have outlined and Mai's story show, the larger U.S. population is itself not merely diverse and heterogeneous, but is also stratified in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, social class, immigration status, disability status, and other forms of privilege and disadvantage that map onto the acquisition of the kind of expertise that is necessary to gain access to higher education. This broader social stratification means that some groups have more rapid, automatic, and complete access to information and other forms of social capital that help create a meritorious record, and hence have a greater likelihood of inclusion in selective institutions. Because social capital is accumulated beginning early in life and throughout every life stage, unequal distribution of resources tends to be replicated across generations despite the reality of some social mobility for some individuals. Thus, structures of sex segregation in the workplace (Blau, Gielen, & Zimmerman, 2012; Kmec, McDonald, & Trimble, 2010; Roth, 2004), of residential and educational racial-ethnic segregation (Reskin, 2012), and of income and wealth inequality (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011) are all reproduced in every generation (Smeeding, Erikson, & Jantti, 2011).

These larger social structures create unequal access to the high-quality preschools and primary and secondary educations (to say nothing of world travel, art, music and language lessons, and leadership opportunities) that are prerequisites to higher education and the broad range of career choices associated with that education (Alon, 2009; Borman & Dowling, 2010; Mayer, 2010).

Richard Rodriguez (1981) famously criticized practices he felt were inaccurately labeled as "affirmative action" because they ignored the requirement that affirmative action should only be taken when individuals are qualified for a given position or admission, and because they failed to address appropriate attention to class and race-based inequalities in preparation. He argued that this institutionalized inattention to inequalities in students' actual situation—despite recognition of those students' potential—constituted cruelty:

The conspiracy of kindness [among well-intentioned faculty and administrators] became a conspiracy of uncaring. Cruelly, callously, admissions committees agreed to overlook serious academic deficiency.... [A]mong those students with very poor academic preparation, few completed their courses. Many dropped out, most blaming themselves for their failure. One fall, six nonwhite students I knew suffered severe mental collapse. None of the professors who had welcomed them to graduate school were around when it came time to take them to the infirmary or to the airport. And the university officials who so diligently took note of those students in their self-serving totals of entering minority students finally took no note of them when they left. (pp. 154–155)

There is, then, no substitute for serious attention to the unequal preschool, primary, and secondary educational systems that left Mai feeling she didn't belong and couldn't succeed, despite her talent and eagerness to learn. Higher education cannot rapidly or easily rectify the inequalities in preparation that are the result of earlier inequities in schooling. It can, however, get better at recognizing talent when it presents itself in people who have not had certain kinds of advantages that are indicators of relative prosperity and privilege rather than the capacity to learn. It can also take steps to reduce the likelihood that students feel that the inequities in their background education and exposure render them unsuitable for educational opportunities and can never be overcome or addressed.

### **Impact of Social Stratification on Academic Experience**

Many of the practices of de facto segregation by gender, race and ethnicity, and social class are replicated within all educational institutions, making it less likely that students will aim to be included in colleges and universities, and less likely that they will feel accepted if they do get there. For example, the phenomenon of relatively low teacher, parent, and peer expectations held for girls in math and science (Eccles, 2011), and for African Americans in school more generally, depresses academic performance, beginning at an early age (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004).

Students who internalize low expectations often fear that others will view them through the lens of those expectations. That anxiety interferes with their performance, creating a vicious cycle of anxiety, lower performance, confirmation that they are not talented, and lesser confidence (Steele, 2011). These phenomena help ensure that school is widely perceived as a domain for Whites and Asians/Asian Americans, and math and

science as reserved for White and Asian/Asian American men, while athletics are reserved for African American men.

Justice Sotomayor outlined the corrosive effect of these expectations for her and other Latino students at Princeton:

*The Daily Princetonian* routinely published letters to the editor lamenting the presence on campus of “affirmative action students,” each one of whom had presumably displaced a far more deserving affluent white male and could be expected to crash into the gutter built of her own unrealistic aspirations. There were vultures circling, ready to dive when we stumbled. The pressure to succeed was relentless, even if self-imposed out of fear and insecurity. For we all felt if we did fail, we would be proving the critics right, and the doors that had opened a crack to let us in would be slammed shut again. (p. 145)

Contrast her account of feeling under surveillance, and not belonging, with the recollection of American playwright Arthur Miller (1953) when he attended the University of Michigan in the 1930s. Miller came from an east coast family of modest means and had a weak academic record (“I had flunked algebra three times in my Brooklyn high school.” [p. 68]). Some combination of his personal drive and confidence, and perhaps his status as a White man, led him to apply to the university *three times* (overcoming two rejections), despite that record. Once he got there, he felt he was in the right place. He wrote that he found himself very much “at home”:

I loved the place ... because it was just big enough to give one the feeling that his relative mediocrity had real meaning, and yet not so big as to drown one in numbers.... It was a little world and it was man-sized. My friends were the sons of die-makers, farmers, ranchers, bankers, lawyers, doctors, clothing workers, and unemployed relief recipients.” (p. 70)

Miller viewed the world he found at Michigan as diverse, felt he fit in, and didn’t particularly miss the presence (for example) of women at the University. In contrast, Mai didn’t feel “at home.” But it was enormously helpful to her to learn how to articulate and understand her experience, and she was lucky to find professors in college who helped and inspired her, after years of having teachers who made her feel left out.

### **Impact of Social Stratification on De Facto Segregation**

Other practices—like the tendency for groups to form around social identities—lead to segregation in the lunchroom, at recess, in study halls, and in locker rooms by race and ethnicity and gender, thereby limiting

cross-group contact (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Tatum, 2003). Add to that the well-known practice of “tracking” in U.S. public schools, which starts ever-earlier in a child’s school experience, and the likelihood that even children attending “diverse” schools will ever really know children quite different from themselves is very low (Mickelson & Everett, 2008).

Within universities, we see the same patterns of group-based segregation of activities, and, even more problematic, differential distribution into fields by gender and race and ethnicity of both faculty and students. Though some argue that “preference” dictates some of these differential patterns, some fields with very similar academic content (e.g., nursing and premedicine) nevertheless show quite different patterns of “choice” by men and women. We discuss choice at greater length in later chapters.

### **Impact of Social Stratification on “Role Models”**

Social science evidence makes clear that students’ choices are constrained by what they have observed as possible in the world and by what others encourage them to be, as well as by their own talents, interests, and accomplishments (Eccles, 2011). As Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor pointed out,

When a young person, even a gifted one, grows up without proximate living examples of what she may aspire to become—whether lawyer, scientist, artist, or leader in any realm—her goal remains abstract. Such models as appear in books or on the news, however inspiring or revered, are ultimately too remote to be real, let alone influential. But a role model in the flesh provides more than an inspiration; his or her very existence is confirmation of possibilities one may have every reason to doubt, saying, “Yes, someone like me can do this.” (p. 178)

Dasgupta (2011) has labeled this phenomenon “stereotype inoculation” and argues that the presence of experts who come from your social group and affirm your talent inoculates you against the group-based stereotype that people like you cannot do well in that field. Consistent with this idea, women in a political psychology class were more likely to view women, and themselves, as potential leaders if they participated in sections where examples of women leaders were included along with examples of men, rather than in sections with the conventional nearly exclusive focus on the activities of men leaders (Rios, Stewart, & Winter, 2010).

One of us read books as a child in a series on the childhoods of famous Americans. Her parents bought her these books, which included both

women and men. The other was often encouraged by her mother to complete school assignments like “write about a great New Yorker” by learning about an accomplished woman. Those experiences probably contributed to our belief that we could aspire to an education and life that our parents had not had.

Gender, racial and ethnic, and class segregation also operate across generations. Mentors and teachers are most likely to encourage and support children who appear to fit their ideas about who is academically successful (Rosenthal, 1992). This tendency leads to the development of “old boys’ networks” known to underlie the far greater social capital of some (usually White male) students who attended prestigious undergraduate institutions (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002; Gamba & Kleiner, 2001). Teachers and mentors, sometimes without even knowing they are doing it, elevate those students’ chances over others’ by calling on their networks of connections on their behalf. Interestingly, some academic practices (like issuing formal job advertisements) arose as higher education became somewhat more diverse. As a result, the reliance on old boys’ networks has been reduced.

When women, minorities, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities rarely see faculty like them in front of the classroom, it is not unreasonable for them to conclude that they are unlikely to end up there themselves. Indeed, in a rare experimental study of the impact of taking an introductory math course from a female versus a male instructor, researchers were able to randomly assign men and women to particular sections (Carrell, Page, & West, 2010). They found not only that women were more likely subsequently to take more math courses if they had a female instructor, and were more likely to major in math or science fields, but that men were unaffected by the gender of the instructor. Thus, for the women students this early exposure to a situation in which they could see themselves made a big difference, and it did not harm the men, who presumably were not in doubt.

Similarly, when the overwhelming majority of people whose work is discussed in courses, or whose achievements are mentioned, are affluent White men, it is easy for everyone (faculty and students of all backgrounds) to conclude that the stratification of accomplishment by gender, race, and class that they observe is inevitable and “natural,” rather than the result of certain social processes.

### Naturalization of the Status Quo and Belonging

The combination of forces that we have just described results in “naturalization of the status quo.” That is, it leads some people to believe that the current situation arose “naturally,” that they have “a place” that is preordained, and that their job in school is to prepare to take up that place. It also leads both the privileged and their less privileged counterparts to believe that other groups do not particularly fit in or “belong” in that place. Considerable research demonstrates the powerful impact of the feeling of “belonging” or “not belonging” on students’ and faculty members’ capacity to thrive in our institutions (Dasgupta, 2011; Ostrove, Stewart, & Curtin, 2011; Walton & Carr, 2012; Walton & Cohen, 2007).

One ingenious study created an intervention designed to increase students’ feelings of belonging on a selective college campus (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Students read survey data indicating that uncertainty about belonging was common and short-lived at that campus. The students then wrote and orally presented an essay in which they described their own experiences pertaining to that evidence. As predicted, African American students were deeply affected by this intervention, showing not only a greater sense of belonging three years later, but also a significantly higher grade point average than comparable control students. In contrast, there were no effects for European American students exposed to this intervention, presumably because the issue of belonging was much less salient and fraught for them.

It is impressive that this relatively brief and modest intervention made such a difference, but evidence also shows that even the inanimate objects in an environment can signal either that you belong or that you don’t. In a remarkably straightforward study, psychologists found that substituting “neutral” objects in a classroom (a nature poster, phone books) for objects that were stereotypically associated with men (a Star Trek poster, video games) shifted women’s interest in computer science from well below men’s to equal (Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele 2009). In the presence of cues of “ambient belonging,” the women developed an interest in this masculine stereotyped field that they did not develop in the absence of those cues. Male students were unaffected by the different cues. Colleges and universities are filled with cues that some students and faculty belong—in general and in particular places—while others do not. Crucially, those who feel they do belong rarely even notice them. We will return to this issue in later chapters.



Naturalization of the status quo—the creation of expectations that the academic world is and always will be dominated by certain kinds of people—in turn leads to unintentional reproduction of that very status quo. The tendency toward institutional inertia—that things remain as they are rather than changing—is very strong in the absence of a compelling pressure or reason for change. As noted above, the presence of a more heterogeneous student population motivated substantial changes in higher education. In describing the history of America’s flagship public universities, Tobin (2009) noted,

As universities actively recruited women, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and other ethnic minorities, faculties responded with the introduction of multi-disciplinary courses in African American, women’s and ethnic studies. Institutions responded to the growth of undergraduate enrollments with support services to address the needs of first-generation college-goers and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. (p. 258)

Thus, changes in the student body resulted in changes in academic institutions: in their curricula and the services they offered (see Stockdill & Danico, 2012). And, of course, a different curriculum requires a different faculty. So there has been change in the demographic makeup of the American professoriate: slower than the change in the student body, but change nonetheless.

The increase in inclusiveness and breadth of opportunity shows that change has happened and therefore is entirely possible. But the progress has been slow, and that slow development can be (incorrectly) taken as evidence that faculty of color and faculty from other traditionally excluded groups have yet to demonstrate their excellence (Fryberg & Martinez, 2014b). The implication is that the slow rate of change is the result of deficiencies in those most subject to exclusion rather than due to institutional features that discourage and devalue those individuals. As such, talk of “slow progress” can demoralize the very people who already feel marginal in the institution.

Making matters worse is that the hopeful message of slowly increasing diversity in faculty demographics in universities is often undermined with a not-so-subtle suggestion that excellence may be at risk if change were to happen more quickly. This false opposition of diversity and excellence is not only a brake on motivation for change among the dominant groups in academic institutions, but it erodes the sense of belonging and institutional value among those who represent “diversity” (see also Sekaquaptewa, 2014).

## Individuals and Institutional Structures

In this book, as in the accounts we have offered to this point, we will focus on this perceived tension between meritocracy and inclusion, a tension that can slow change in realizing the ideals of meritocracy and inclusion and result in the wide variation we see in how inclusive different institutions actually are. In examining how this tension has become so important in slowing change, we will examine two broad kinds of factors: features of human psychology that make it difficult for us as *individuals* to make good judgments of merit and to be inclusive and features of our *institutions* that reflect and even exaggerate those human frailties, giving them greater force through convention and policy. Although we use the term “institution,” we use it broadly, to include those institutional features that may attach not only to an entire college or university but also to a department, committee, research center, laboratory, or other unit within a larger institution.

It is sobering to recognize that there are important internal individual and external institutional obstacles to achieving our ideal academic institutions, and that both kinds of obstacles enhance the view that two of our cherished academic virtues are mutually exclusive. However, we believe that examining the power of the perceived tension between two valued goals will help motivate us to adopt new practices and policies that both mitigate some unfortunate psychological tendencies *and* avoid setting them in institutional stone. In short, our experience has made us optimistic that change in institutions’ policies and procedures to make them more inclusive is possible.

### Judging Merit: Critical to Meritocracy

As just outlined, we argue that there is an important and unrecognized role for flawed, error-prone cognitive processes in the many evaluations, or judgments of merit, that are at the center of our academic institutions. We will describe these individual psychological processes and their impact throughout this book.

If these processes are indeed flawed in systematic ways, then the fact that our institutions are not strict meritocracies is the result not only of individual psychological processes, but of the institutionalized acceptance and solidification of those processes. In the second part of this book we argue

that flawed individual judgments are at the core of college and university processes of hiring and promotion of faculty, as of admission and graduation of students. Those judgments are structured into our selections and into our reward systems at every level of the institution. We do not claim that either individual judgment or institutional process is “primary”; both operate and they reinforce each other.

We need, then, to begin by thinking about both how the judgments are made and what problems might arise in making them. We also need to understand how those flawed judgments are structured into our institutions in ways that create, cement, and reproduce inequities instead of ensuring what we’re after: merit. Once we have examined the individual judgment processes that are a part of our assessments of merit, as well as the obstacles to inclusiveness, we will turn to institutional processes that establish, reflect, and enhance them.

In admitting students and hiring faculty, evaluating them at transition points, and promoting and advancing them, over and over we judge their work. We judge individual products and overall records of accomplishment. When we make these gatekeeping judgments, we are generally quite confident that we know excellence when we see it, and that our estimates of excellence are reliable and accurate (Thorngate, Dawes, & Foddy, 2009). Subjectively, we rarely doubt our capacity to separate wheat from chaff in the domain of academic achievement.

One academic told ethnographer Michèle Lamont that there was no need for “special training” for people to do peer review, because “It’s the kind of stuff we do all our lives. Teaching, criticizing other people’s work, reading articles for courses.... I mean, all we do is criticize and pick apart people’s arguments...” (Lamont, 2009, p. 44). As this faculty member points out implicitly, faculty members’ subjective confidence grows over the course of a career. In our experience, new faculty often feel less certain than more experienced ones about what an “A” paper looks like when compared with a “B” and also feel less certain than senior colleagues about which job candidates meet “our standards.” But senior faculty grow ever more certain of their ability to make accurate evaluations.

Cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman pointed out that experts are very confident of their opinions (and academics are experts in our fields), but that expert intuition is not always reliable. Specifically, expertise “works” intuitively (to make accurate, quick, nondeliberative judgments) when the

expert has had a chance to learn about errors in a “high-validity” environment—that is, when the expert gets rapid feedback about the correctness or incorrectness of the judgment.

Kahneman contrasts anesthesiology and radiology. When a patient is in surgery, there is rapid feedback from the various instruments that monitor the patient’s body’s responses about whether dosage and delivery of anesthesia are going well. In contrast, in radiology, the accuracy of interpretation of images may never be assessed in the form of feedback to the radiologist (Kahneman, 2011, chapter 22). We suggest that faculty predictions about job candidates’ long-term success are rarely evaluated in terms of actual long-term outcomes. Searching for colleagues is more like radiology than anesthesiology in this respect.

The evidence from students of cognition like Kahneman is that our confidence is unrelated to our accuracy. All human beings, including academic faculty and administrators, are prone to some common kinds of errors in making judgments. At the same time, our extensive academic training and experience build our confidence and make it very unlikely that we will worry about those potential errors or take steps to overcome the well-known but faulty conclusions we are prone to drawing.

Kahneman suggested not only that “we are often confident when we are wrong,” but that we can “improve the ability to identify and understand errors of judgment and choice, in others and eventually in ourselves, by providing a richer and more precise language to discuss them.” He suggests that “an accurate diagnosis may suggest an intervention to limit the damage that bad judgments and choices often cause” (Kahneman, 2011, p. 4). We provide a brief outline of Kahneman’s three paradigmatic kinds of errors in order to examine how they may be crucial elements blocking the attainment of the truly ideal university we seek (see also Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Thorngate, Dawes, & Foddy, 2009, for other accounts of how difficult it is for us to judge merit accurately).

### **Decision-making Strategies**

Some key experience-based strategies we use for solving problems and making decisions (sometimes called *heuristics* in the literature) were first identified in Tversky and Kahneman’s (1974) paper about making judgments under conditions of uncertainty. They pointed out then, and decades of research cited in Kahneman’s book have confirmed, that these strategies

enable us to convert complex decision-making tasks into relatively simple judgments—judgments that reflect “thinking fast” or in a relatively non-deliberative manner. As Kahneman notes, the problem is that “these heuristics [or strategies for making judgments] are quite useful, but sometimes they lead to severe and systematic errors” (p. 419). The three key strategies rely on *representativeness*, *availability*, and *anchoring and adjustment*. Each strategy is both useful and dangerous in the core processes of evaluating faculty and students in the academy.

It is important to note that the strategies we will discuss apply to our estimates of the likely weather, of the riskiness of a drive along a highway without a guardrail, and of how many marbles are in a jar, as much as they apply to our judgments of other people. They are used not because we are motivated to make bad decisions about people, but because we are motivated to make lots of different kinds of rapid decisions based on the evidence at hand—not to spend too much time on judgments that must be rapid, or may not be consequential, or in which we cannot easily obtain further evidence. Moreover, we don’t keep a running tally of our judgments in order to assess how accurate they were in retrospect. As a result, we can mistakenly rely on such strategies under conditions that *are* consequential and where they can lead to seriously biased outcomes. These outcomes then contribute to a highly stratified status quo that is experienced as natural and as reflecting some kind of underlying true merit.

### Representativeness

We use the *representativeness* strategy when faced with a decision about whether an individual (person or event) belongs in a particular group. It comes up when intelligence professionals try to decide how likely it is that a particular person is a terrorist, or when we try to decide whether a new neighbor is likely to become a friend, or (more relevantly for our purposes) when faculty try to decide whether a young scholar is likely to be a productive and collegial colleague. In making these decisions, we are in effect estimating the probability of a particular outcome, and it may make a difference—though we rarely think about it—to consider how common that outcome is. If the outcome is quite common, then the probability that *anyone* will have that outcome is inevitably higher than if the outcome is quite rare.

How might this matter in judgments of faculty who are applying for a job or of students applying for admission? First, evaluators rating applications

do not consider, generally, the frequency of a given outcome in the pool as relevant. Thus, in a pool of applicants for a position or in a pool of students for admission, we might ask first *how many of the people within that pool will become successful students or faculty somewhere, or at schools that are our peers?* It could be that only a few will be successful, in which case our careful consideration of whom to admit is appropriate and leads us to find the few “good ones” in the pool. However, it also could be that most of the applicants will be successful, and we are simply choosing from a pool that is very talented, in which most people will succeed. This is actually an empirically answerable question about our past pools of faculty applicants. But to our knowledge search and admissions committees do not generally begin with an expectation about how many people in the pool are likely to meet their standards, based on past outcomes.

If we learned that everyone that we considered seriously for a faculty position (i.e., that we “short-listed”) over the past ten years actually became successful in the field, we might wonder if our criteria for choosing the one person we chose really mattered.<sup>1</sup> Instead, we move immediately to the question of evidence in the record that the individual is similar to our idea of a successful faculty member (or is “representative” of a category we are interested in). When we do that, it is clear that one critical question is whether the evidence in the record is actually good evidence for making the judgment at hand or, as in Tversky and Kahneman’s examples, poor evidence that we nevertheless use simply because we have it. As we will see, to a surprising degree we rely on evidence that is not particularly good when we hire faculty—evidence that reflects institutional structures that are highly stratified, segregated, and the result of differential access.

Research has shown that when we move to considering “evidence,” we rely heavily on *representativeness*, or the degree to which a person appears to us to be similar to existing members of the relevant category (terrorists, friends, successful faculty). On the face of it, that seems logical. If the person shares characteristics of other members of a category, then the person must belong (or could belong) in that category. But in fact, as Kahneman details, similarity is not a particularly good predictor of probability, even though people heavily rely on it. Thus, for example, if most faculty in my department got their PhDs at a particular institution (and this is indeed common in higher education), I could conclude that getting a degree at that institution is an appropriate criterion for assessing whether a candidate

would make a good scholar/colleague. Obviously, some people trained at that institution might, but many people trained at other institutions also might. The fact that a person is similar to the people who are currently in my department in terms of that background may be reasonable evidence that they are likely to be successful in my department, but it is *not* good evidence that they will be more successful than people who have different training. I may draw that conclusion, anyway, in part because that criterion has become associated in my mind with that outcome, and I've lost track of the way in which it is a function of differential access and stratification processes, among other irrelevant factors.

Interestingly, when people are asked to make predictions about near-term success and more remote success, they tend to make identical predictions, based on the similarity of the outcome to a single current indicator (e.g., representativeness), even though the predictability of remote success from any current indicator is much lower than near-term success. Thus, the presence of a current record of having published research is a pretty good predictor of the likelihood of publishing more research next year, but is a less good predictor of whether the person will accumulate a tenure-worthy record several or many years from now. When events are far in the future—for example, the several years until a tenure decision—many factors will have contributed to someone's publication record, including events in both their personal and professional lives (will their parents or partners suffer illnesses or death? will they confront health challenges? will they pursue a novel line of research that gains acceptance only slowly or stick with the mainstream, contributing uncontroversial scholarship?) and in their lives in their institution (how rapidly their laboratory is built, whether they have collaborators or mentors who are supportive, whether their department is riven by factions, etc.).

Some departments focus on trying to predict outstanding accomplishments, like entrance into a national academy, or winning rare awards for exceptional achievement. Many people accumulate tenure-worthy records and indeed attain tenure. Only a few are ever awarded Nobel Prizes. Basing the prediction of common (tenure) or rare (outstanding prizes won) outcomes on the same data is clearly faulty reasoning.

We are also often misled by the illusion of the validity of the predictions we make based on faulty application of strategies. This arises because of our confidence in the apparent fit between current performance (inputs such as number of publications or presence of publications in first-tier journals)

and the hoped-for outcome (tenure worthiness or outstanding accomplishment 6 or 20 years from now). Exacerbating our reliance on poor evidence is our tendency to rely on redundant pieces of evidence (several good publications) rather than pieces of evidence from independent domains (e.g., good publications, impressive service, reports of good teaching), which produce higher quality predictions.

In this case, if we think that an important criterion for getting tenure is publishing in a particular journal in our field, then it may appear to make sense to assume that someone who has “already” (while in graduate school or a postdoc) published in that journal is a better bet for tenure than someone who has not yet published in that journal. But perhaps the person’s advisor was really the driving force behind the prestigious journal acceptance for one person, and another has not yet submitted a paper to such a journal but is building a strong research program that in fact will be publishable in that journal soon.

Equally plausibly, perhaps the individual’s research program is not particularly well suited to publication in that journal in the field. However, if we only assess the journal in terms of its “merit” (i.e., its quality), we may fail to notice that it has different standards for different areas of research. It may use one set for assessing research in areas already seen as important in the field because many senior people in the field work in that area and use another set for research in newly emerging fields in which women and racial-ethnic minority scholars may be interested. Seeing some similarity between someone’s current performance on a particular indicator and the outcome desired in the future is actually *not* a solid basis for prediction of future outcomes, but sometimes it feels like it is to us. Thus, if all of the tenured faculty in our department had published in the flagship journal of the discipline before tenure, that does not mean that every future faculty member must publish in that journal in order to get tenure, especially if we hire people whose work crosses interdisciplinary boundaries or breaks new ground. In short, our practice of relying on various forms of representativeness in making judgments leads us to risk low accuracy in our judgments.

### **Availability**

Let us imagine that one of the job applicants in a pile of applications is Native American. If my field is Native American Studies, then I can think of quite a few Native American scholars. If my field is Classics, I may never



have met a Native American scholar in my field, so it may be difficult for me to think of any exemplar of the category Classical Scholar who has a Native American background. In this case, because of the differential distribution of scholars with particular backgrounds in various disciplines, as well as the highly differentiated nature of our social networks (we tend to know people “like us” even within our fields, a phenomenon sometimes called “homophily”), *availability* of exemplars might differentially operate on our selection of faculty colleagues. Here we rely on the degree to which we can easily think of an example of an outcome (i.e., how quickly it comes to our minds or is “available”), or how easily we can think of reasons for an outcome in deciding how probable it is. Relying on availability can be sensible since more frequent events probably are often those that are more available, but it can also lead to well-documented biases or errors.

Perhaps the example of availability that is most obviously relevant to judgments of faculty candidates is familiarity, since examples that are familiar come more quickly to mind (are “available”). In addition, people estimate familiar groups to be larger than unfamiliar groups, regardless of the specific evidence they are given. Thus, we overestimate the size of groups that are familiar (White male applicants likely to be successful physicists in our pool of applicants) and underestimate the size of groups that are unfamiliar (African American female applicants likely to be successful physicists in our pool of applicants). We generalize from our own experience (familiarity) to the actual world. If we know a lot of people in a category we think there *are* a lot of people in that category. If we know few, we assume there really are few. Similarly, we overestimate the frequency of events (e.g., bombing, crime) if they have happened recently or we have recently observed them.

It is availability that is at the base of the well-known “implicit association test,” which measures the speed of our associations between distinct categories (gender and math ability or leadership capacity, race and intelligence; see Banaji & Greenwald, 2013, for a popular treatment, or Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009, for a review). The test assesses our “intuitive” or “fast” judgments, not our deliberative or slow views. When we make associations between unrelated categories rapidly—and we do that when exemplars of that association are very familiar, even if they are rare and not logically connected—we are particularly vulnerable to errors of judgment based on illusory correlation.

If these availability processes, like the representativeness processes, can lead to serious errors of judgment, why do we rely on them? Research has shown that in thinking of exemplars, and making connections or associations between two unrelated concepts (like gender and math), we rely on availability as a tool for rapid judgments. That tool, which is useful in increasing our speed and confidence, nevertheless only sometimes leads us to accurate judgments; its very speed may be part of its power to lead us astray (Kahneman, 2011, p. 427).

### **Adjustment and Anchoring**

Whoever we finally hire in the job search becomes our colleague and is in our department for several years. At the end of a few of those years, we have an opportunity, if we are tenured faculty, to evaluate them again for tenure and promotion. When we do that, we are vulnerable to the *adjustment and anchoring* heuristic. There is strong evidence that our second judgment is very likely “anchored” by our first judgment. That is, we begin—when we are estimating someone’s value as a scholar, teacher, and colleague (or their tenurability)—from a starting point and then make relatively little “adjustment” based on subsequent evidence. In the case of faculty hiring, this could also come up when a committee member believes, based on review of files, that it is a mistake to interview a candidate but goes along with the group decision to offer an interview (thus, her anchoring judgment is less favorable than others’). Even if she is influenced by the outstanding job talk to “adjust” her judgment, that adjustment will likely only be modest, anchored as it is by the first judgment, such that it is still less favorable than others’.

### **Fallible Cognition: How Much Harm Can It Do in Judging Merit?**

If errors of judgment are common, then how problematic could they really be? Moreover, aren’t faculty in colleges and universities less prone to making such errors than other people, given their extensive training in reasoning? The troubling and surprising answers to these questions, as we have seen, are that the errors are problematic not only because they are frequent, but because they are not random, and trained academic minds make errors when they are making judgments of people, perhaps more than when they are thinking about research problems. Most dangerous of all, those with specialized intellectual training and expertise have unwarranted faith in their judgments (Kahneman, 2011).

We propose that reliance on these common, but fallible, strategies leads academic evaluators to make individual judgments that are not merely inaccurate in a random way, but are inaccurate in ways that benefit the people we are used to seeing in certain roles. That is, our use of the strategies contributes to the continued presence of some kinds of people in our social environment in certain roles, and the absence of others. We are more likely to overestimate talent in people who belong to a group from whom we expect talent and to underestimate talent in people who belong to a group from whom we do not expect talent. This systematic bias in our errors means that we end up believing that we see more talent in people who have frequently been in positions of power, authority, and prestige, and less in people who have rarely been in those positions.

Thus, what appear to us to be sound judgments of individuals, based on good evidence, end up in fact being error-ridden judgments based on schemas, or ideas about groups. In this way our judgments of individuals are saturated with our expectations about groups, our own past experience, and the status quo. If unexamined, these judgments will lead us to reproduce what is: a norm of the faculty member who is White, male, at least middle-class, and likely also able-bodied and heterosexual, and a university that is most comfortable for people with those characteristics. We will outline in more detail how these common cognitive errors get in the way of evaluating individuals who come from some groups more than others. Before we turn to that issue, though, we need to consider a common set of psychological processes that impede not so much our judgments of merit, but our genuine *comfort* with diversity and *capacity* for inclusion, regardless of our avowed valuing of them.

### **Homophily and Diversity: Why It Can Be Difficult to Accomplish Inclusion**

The cognitive strategies just reviewed operate to make us likely to base our judgments of merit on our own past experience and on the status quo in ways that will lead us systematically to overestimate merit in some and underestimate it in others. Beyond that, there is considerable evidence that people tend to associate with others who resemble them, and they expect to be more comfortable when they do. Their experience thus leads them to greater familiarity not just with *some* groups, but with their *own* group. Of

course, we are members of groups defined in many different ways; according to one study, the dimensions on which resemblance is based include age, religion, education, occupation, and gender (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), among many others.

Which similarity feature feels relevant depends on where we are and what we are doing. When we are at a conference of psychologists, our subfield “group” comes to matter. When we are in another country, people who speak English seem more like us than people who do not. When we are discussing tenure or retirement, the faculty around us who are in the same career and at the same life stage are more often the people we want to spend time with.

Such variables also influence people’s long-term networks: who people’s friends are, who they confide in, who they have long-term romantic relationships with, who they exchange information with, and who they collaborate with. Race and ethnicity are other variables that affect the composition of someone’s network. People tend to marry others of similar age, social class, education, intelligence, and, to a lesser degree, attractiveness (see the summary in Zietsch, Verweij, Heath, & Martin, 2011).

### **Homophily in Academic Life**

Although similar principles operate in all networks, we are concerned here with professional networks—who talks to whom within a department or school or at meetings; who chooses to work with whom; who invites whom to give a talk or be on a thesis committee. In 2002, the then dean of engineering at MIT, Thomas Magnanti, wrote in the foreword to the school’s report on the status of women that part of his attraction to engineering as a child had been its promise that anyone with merit could succeed. He was disappointed to discover that, at MIT, that was not so (Boyce et al., 2002):

We learn, for example, about some of our women faculty colleagues, who despite their superb professional standing and despite the fact that they are highly valued by their faculty colleagues, have never been asked to serve on the Ph.D. committee of even one of their colleagues’ students in their own research area. Stunning.

Thus, “homophily”—or a preference for people we perceive to be similar to us—is a factor limiting inclusion in networks that in turn undermines our capacity to achieve meritocracy. Two of our institutional virtues or goals—meritocracy and inclusion—are closely linked as outcomes of both similar and separate processes.

Homophily seems “natural” and inevitable. Infants prefer individuals who speak the same language or have the same accent as their primary caretakers, even before they themselves are producing or understanding speech (Kinzler, Dupoux, & Spelke, 2007). These preferences for “similarity” are, of course, learned since we are not born knowing what similarities will matter in our social worlds. For example, nine-month-olds, but not six-month-olds, show more strongly differentiated reactions to same-race than other-race stimuli (Anzures, Quinn, Pascalis, Slater, & Lee, 2010). Infants’ preference for looking at faces of the same race develops as a function of familiarity; when younger infants see a mix of races in infancy they show no preference (see the review in Anzures, Quinn, Pascalis, Slater, & Lee, 2013; see also Hirschfeld, 2012). The development of same-race *preference* (independent of language) occurs even later, though before age five (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Kinzler & Spelke, 2011).

Although homophily is ubiquitous, the consequences of some forms of homophily are pernicious. One apparent consequence is segregation (Clark & Fossett, 2008; Schelling, 1971). Once segregation exists, it also raises the likelihood that it will increase some forms of familiarity and lessen others, thereby increasing segregation. It sets up a vicious cycle. A playable computer simulation based on Schelling’s work demonstrates that even a relatively small preference on an individual’s part to interact with like others will yield system-wide segregation (Hart & Case, n.d.). The simulation also demonstrates that segregation on one dimension can be reversed by exercising a relatively small preference for diversity on the same dimension. The message is clear: exercise a small preference for diversity over homophily to create a more diverse social environment. Recognition of these facts underlies affirmative action as a policy, even as it has been unevenly understood and implemented (see Walsh, 2014).

In academia, homophily, rather than a preference for diversity, can enter the picture at every point in the assessment of merit, from hiring to promotion to tenure. When members of a search committee say that a candidate is not “a good fit,” they may be expressing a homophilous preference. When symposium organizers plan whom to invite to participate, homophily can limit the range of people they think of. One example of homophily at a large research-intensive university comes from a survey of male and female scientists (Belle, Smith-Doerr, & O’Brien, 2014). The men’s and women’s networks of colleagues were similar in size, and they reported equal resources

and opportunities for collaboration. However, the networks differed in composition. Both groups had more men than women in their networks, presumably reflecting the fact that the natural sciences are male dominated; opportunity to have a gender-mixed network is limited. But men's networks had a higher proportion of men than women's networks did, and women's networks had a considerably higher proportion of women than men's networks did. The fact that women report having more women in their network than men do shows that it is possible for men to include more women. Although we know of no studies that examine homophily with respect to race or ethnicity in academia, we would expect the same phenomenon there. Again, the message is clear: if we examine the content of our networks, we are likely to observe a small homophilous preference that operates to limit their diversity, not the small preference for diversity that might lead to different outcomes.

### **Homophily plus Aversive Racism**

As with many preferences, homophily tends to operate outside awareness. One's own racism is so painful and socially costly to acknowledge (i.e., aversive) for professionals in general and academics in particular that they will create rationales to justify their preferences that have nothing to do with race or ethnicity, even when the data suggest that ethnicity is indeed the basis for their behavior. For example, White individuals are more likely to show a preference for Whites if they have previously been in a position where they made a token gesture that indicated support for a Black person. Individuals who said that they supported Barack Obama were more likely to then say that Whites were more suitable for a job than Blacks (Effron, Cameron, & Monin, 2009; Monin & Miller, 2001). It appears that simply announcing that one is progressive gives one more license to be less progressive than if one had not made such an announcement. Self-congratulation on one's good intentions and past "progressive" actions makes one freer to act at variance with those espoused beliefs.

Further, though it is counterintuitive, people's egalitarian goals, and their beliefs that they *are* egalitarian, can lead to their making nonegalitarian choices, again without realizing that they are doing so. For example, when participants—primarily White and Asian—are given false feedback telling them that they are progressing in becoming more positive toward Blacks, they then sit further away from Black individuals and closer to

White individuals than do participants who do not receive such feedback (Mann & Kawakami, 2012). Our knowledge of our high ideals has two effects: it fools us into thinking we live up to our ideals, and it frees us to live up to them less.

When Whites are given more rationales for not helping someone, they are less likely to help Blacks than they are to help Whites (Saucier, Miller, & Doucet, 2005). If, for example, helping someone would take time or involve risk, Whites can justify not helping on those grounds. But they are more likely to invoke such grounds to avoid helping Blacks than to avoid helping Whites. And, ironically, Whites sometimes distance themselves from Blacks because they are afraid of appearing racist in an interaction (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008). If, however, Whites see an interaction with Blacks as an opportunity to learn, rather than as a test they might fail, they are somewhat more likely to engage in interaction (Goff et al., 2008).

It is difficult for people to be aware of all the ways in which their behavior reflects their nonconscious beliefs and attitudes. One study with White undergraduate participants in conversation with White or Black confederates found that their *explicit* (expressed and conscious) attitudes predicted their verbal behavior, but their *implicit* attitudes (those outside of their awareness but reflected in preferences and comfort level) predicted their nonverbal behavior. Explicit attitudes were measured by a set of questions the participants answered; implicit attitudes were measured by how quickly they assigned value-laden adjectives (like smart, likable, and good; or stupid, unpleasant, and bad) to White or Black faces. Independent observers who did not know whether the student had interacted with a White or Black confederate assessed behaviors such as how friendly a participant was. The participants themselves could predict their verbal behavior, but not their nonverbal behavior (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002). This is one of several experiments suggesting that aspects of behavior that are outside conscious awareness reflect beliefs and attitudes we may not only be unaware of, but dislike.

What we have learned so far suggests that our intentions, and genuine egalitarian principles, are not enough to guide our behavior. The combination of small preferences for people like us—homophily—and trust in our good intentions yields behavior that isolates or marginalizes people who are not like us and impedes our capacity to create institutions that are diverse and inclusive. The good news, though, is that we will create more

diverse environments and teams—and benefit from that diversity—if we make a constant small effort in the direction of diversity and inclusion.

### **Overcoming Individual Tendencies That Limit Meritocracy and Inclusion**

In the cases of both meritocracy and inclusion, then, we are optimistic that we can mitigate the individual limitations that can lead to undesirable outcomes and unintentionally augment preexisting inequities. Awareness about how those limitations work is an important first step, and social science research has offered abundant evidence about that.

But mere knowledge of how we miscalculate and exclude others does not lead automatically to successful avoidance of such miscalculation and exclusion. Instead, we need to identify specific practices that will buffer the errors we might otherwise make and increase our use of our best capacities. Happily, these practices can make a difference even if they are not applied in all of the judgments we make. (It is probably impossible, and not even desirable, to completely shed our faulty cognitive strategies or our tendency toward homophily.)

If we identify the key gatekeeping judgments that are consequential in determining who enters and thrives in our institutions, then we can develop policies and practices that improve our judgments and limit the operation of our homophilous tendencies in creating the climate and culture of institutional settings like departments, research centers, laboratories, as well as the larger structure. (This strategy is well-illustrated in the legal system for prosecutorial decision-making by Carbone, 2013.)

In the next chapters we examine the benefits of diversity and of equity or reliance on merit, we discuss the operation of “schemas” as a special problem that combines reliance on cognitive strategies as well as homophily (or familiarity and experience) in further limiting our judgments of merit and our success at inclusion, and we consider alternate explanations for the lack of ideal levels of inclusion. In part II, we detail institutional policies and practices that can limit our reliance on faulty cognitive processes by prescribing good practices and proscribing risky or dangerous ones, bringing us closer to realizing our ideal of meritocratic, inclusive institutions. Many others have noted that it is only through examining and changing the core policies and practices of the institution that the institution is likely really to change (see,



e.g., Alston & Cantor, 2014; Plaut, 2014). Moreover, measuring and monitoring those changes provides us with crucial information about how successful we are in meeting our ideals. Finally, developing new practices can give us direct feedback that would allow us to change our faulty assumptions.

## Note

1. Our reasoning here assumes that people whom we do not select will have equally good opportunities elsewhere, which we realize is not always the case. For many reasons, a worthy candidate may have an opportunity that is worse, in the sense of not providing all the resources the person needs to do his or her best work. If we knew about the person's outcome, we might then falsely decide that we had made the right choice, failing to take into account the extent to which the environment contributed to that person's success.

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