

**WHY ARE ALL THE
BLACK KIDS
SITTING TOGETHER
IN THE CAFETERIA?**

And Other Conversations
About Race

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The Complexity of Identity

“Who am I?”

THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY IS A COMPLEX ONE, SHAPED BY INDIVIDUAL characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I? The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether? As social scientist Charles Cooley pointed out long ago, other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves.¹

This “looking-glass self” is not a flat, one-dimensional reflection but a multidimensional one. Because a central topic of this book is racial identity in the United States, race is highlighted in these pages. Yet how one’s racial identity is experienced will be mediated by other dimensions of oneself: male, female, or transgender; young or old; wealthy, middle-class, or poor; gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual; able-bodied or with disabilities; Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, or atheist.

Abigail Stewart and Joseph Healy’s research on the impact of historical periods on personality development raises the question, Who is my cohort group?² Am I a product of the segregation of the 1940s and 1950s, or a beneficiary of the civil rights era? Did I come of age

as Barack Obama was entering the White House or after the election of Donald Trump? Did I ride the wave of the women's movement? Or cast my first vote for Hillary Clinton? Did I see the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center fall on 9/11? Am I the child of newly arrived immigrants from Africa, Asia, or the Middle East? Was I born before or after the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage is a legal right? What historical events have shaped my thinking?

What has my social context been? Was I surrounded by people like myself, or was I part of a minority in my community? Did I grow up speaking standard English at home or another language or dialect? Did I live in a rural county, an urban neighborhood, a sprawling suburb, or on a reservation?

Who I am (or say I am) is a product of these and many other factors. Erik Erikson, the psychoanalytic theorist who coined the term *identity crisis*, introduced the notion that the social, cultural, and historical context is the ground in which individual identity is embedded. Acknowledging the complexity of identity as a concept, Erikson writes,

We deal with a process "located" *in the core of the individual* and yet *also in the core of his communal culture*. . . . In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. This process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, "identity-consciousness."³

Triggered by the biological changes associated with puberty, the maturation of cognitive abilities, and changing societal expectations, this process of simultaneous reflection and observation, the self-creation of one's identity, is commonly experienced in the United States and other

Western societies during the period of adolescence.⁴ Though the foundation of identity is laid in the experiences of childhood, younger children lack the physical and cognitive development needed to reflect on the self in this abstract way. The adolescent capacity for self-reflection (and resulting self-consciousness) allows one to ask, "Who am I now?" "Who was I before?" "Who will I become?" The answers to these questions will influence choices about who one's romantic partners will be, what type of work one will do, where one will live, and what belief system one will embrace. Choices made in adolescence ripple throughout the lifespan.

Who Am I? Multiple Identities

Integrating one's past, present, and future into a cohesive, unified sense of self is a complex task that begins in adolescence and continues for a lifetime. The complexity of identity is made clear in a collection of autobiographical essays about racial identity called *Names We Call Home*.⁵ The multiracial, multiethnic group of contributors narrate life stories highlighting the intersections of gender, class, religion, sexuality, race, and historical circumstance, and illustrating that "people's multiple identifications defy neat racial divisions and unidimensional political alliances."⁶ My students' autobiographical narratives point to a similar complexity, but the less-developed narratives of the late adolescents that I taught highlight the fact that our awareness of the complexity of our own identity develops over time. The salience of particular aspects of our identity varies at different moments in our lives. The process of integrating the component parts of our self-definition is indeed a lifelong journey.

Which parts of our identity capture our attention first? While there are surely idiosyncratic responses to this question, a classroom exercise I regularly use with students and other adult audiences reveals a telling pattern. I ask them to complete the sentence, "I am _____," using as many descriptors as they can think of in sixty seconds. All kinds of trait descriptions are used—friendly, shy, assertive, intelligent, honest, and so on—but over the years I have noticed something else. Students

of color usually mention their racial or ethnic group: for instance, I am Black, Puerto Rican, Korean American. White students who have grown up in strong ethnic enclaves occasionally mention being Irish or Italian. But in general, White students rarely mention being White. When I use this exercise in coeducational settings, I notice a similar pattern in terms of gender, religion, and sexuality. Women usually mention being female, while men don't usually mention their maleness. Jewish students often say they are Jewish, while mainline Protestants rarely mention their religious identification. A student who is comfortable revealing it publicly may mention being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Though I know usually most of my participants are heterosexual, it is very unusual for anyone to include their heterosexuality on their list.

Common across these examples is that in the areas where a person is a member of the dominant or advantaged social group, the category is usually not mentioned. That element of the person's identity is so taken for granted that it goes without comment. It is taken for granted by them because it is taken for granted by the dominant culture. In Eriksonian terms, the person's inner experience and outer circumstance are in harmony with one another, and the image reflected by others is similar to the image within. In the absence of dissonance, this dimension of identity escapes conscious attention.

The parts of our identity that *do* capture our attention are those that other people notice, and that reflect back to us. The aspect of identity that is the target of others' attention, and subsequently of our own, often is that which sets us apart as exceptional or "other" in their eyes. In my life I have been perceived as both. A precocious child who began to read at age three, I stood out among my peers because of my reading ability. This "gifted" dimension of my identity was regularly commented upon by teachers and classmates alike and quickly became part of my self-definition. But I was also distinguished by being the only Black student in the class, an "other," a fact I grew increasingly aware of as I got older.

While there may be countless ways one might be defined as exceptional, there are at least seven categories of "otherness" commonly experienced in US society. People are commonly defined as other on the

basis of race or ethnicity, gender (including gender expression), religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical or mental ability. Each of these categories has a form of oppression associated with it: racism, sexism, religious oppression / anti-Semitism,⁷ heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism, respectively. In each case, there is a group considered dominant (systematically advantaged by the society because of group membership) and a group considered subordinate or targeted (systematically disadvantaged). When we think about our multiple identities, most of us will find that we are both dominant and targeted at the same time. But it is the targeted identities that hold our attention and the dominant identities that often go unexamined.

In her essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," Audre Lorde captured the tensions between dominant and targeted identities coexisting in one individual. This self-described "forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two" wrote,

Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing.⁸

Even as I focus on race and racism in my own writing and teaching, it is helpful to remind myself and my students of the other distortions around difference that I (and they) may be practicing. It is an especially useful way of generating empathy for our mutual learning process. If I am impatient with a White woman for not recognizing her White privilege, it may be useful for me to remember how much of my life I spent oblivious to the fact of the daily advantages I receive simply because I am heterosexual, or the ways in which I may take my class privilege for granted.

Domination and Subordination

It is also helpful to consider the commonality found in the experience of being dominant or subordinate even when the sources of dominance or subordination are different. The pathbreaking psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller, author of *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, identified some of these areas of commonality.⁹

Dominant groups, by definition, set the parameters within which the subordinates operate. The dominant group holds the power and authority in society relative to the subordinates and determines how that power and authority may be acceptably used. Whether it is reflected in determining who gets the best jobs, whose history will be taught in school, or whose relationships will be validated by society, the dominant group has the greatest influence in determining the structure of the society.

The relationship of the dominants to the subordinates is often one in which the targeted group is labeled as defective or substandard in significant ways. For example, Blacks have historically been characterized as less intelligent than Whites, and women have been viewed as less emotionally stable than men. The dominant group assigns roles to the subordinates that reflect the latter's devalued status, reserving the most highly valued roles in the society for themselves. Subordinates are usually said to be innately incapable of being able to perform the preferred roles. To the extent that the targeted group internalizes the images that the dominant group reflects back to them, they may find it difficult to believe in their own ability.

When a subordinate demonstrates positive qualities believed to be more characteristic of dominants, the individual is defined by dominants as an anomaly. Consider this illustrative example: Following a presentation I gave to some educators, a White man approached me and told me how much he liked my ideas and how articulate I was. "You know," he concluded, "if I had had my eyes closed, I wouldn't have known it was a Black woman speaking." (I replied pleasantly, "This is what a Black woman sounds like.")

The dominant group is seen as the norm for humanity. Jean Baker Miller also asserts that inequitable social relations are seen as the model for "normal human relationships." Consequently, it remains perfectly acceptable in many circles to tell jokes that denigrate a particular group, to exclude subordinates from one's neighborhood or work setting, or to oppose initiatives that might change the power balance.

Miller points out that dominant groups generally do not like to be reminded of the existence of inequality. Because rationalizations have been created to justify the social arrangements, it is easy to believe everything is as it should be. Dominants "can avoid awareness because their explanation of the relationship becomes so well integrated *in other terms*; they can even believe that both they and the subordinate group share the same interests and, to some extent, a common experience."¹⁰

The truth is that the dominants do not really know what the experience of the subordinates is. In contrast, the subordinates are very well informed about the dominants. Even when firsthand experience is limited by social segregation, the number and variety of images of the dominant group available through television, magazines, books, and newspapers provide subordinates with plenty of information about the dominants. The dominant worldview has saturated the culture for all to learn. Even the Black or Latinx child living in a segregated community can enter White homes of many kinds daily via the media. However, dominant access to information about the subordinates is often limited to stereotypical depictions of the "other." For example, there are many images of White men and women in all forms of media, and while the presence of people of color on prime-time TV and in the movies has steadily increased, stereotypical portrayals persist, limiting the diversity in range of life experiences that are depicted.¹¹

Not only is there greater opportunity for the subordinates to learn about the dominants, but there is also greater need. Social psychologist Susan Fiske writes, "It is a simple principle: People pay attention to those who control their outcomes. In an effort to predict and possibly influence what is going to happen to them, people gather information about those with power."¹²

In a situation of unequal power, a subordinate group has to focus on survival. It becomes very important for the subordinates to become highly attuned to the dominants as a way of protecting themselves from them. For example, women who have been battered by men often talk about the heightened sensitivity they developed to their partners' moods. Being able to anticipate and avoid the men's rage was important to survival.

Survival sometimes means not responding to oppressive behavior directly. To do so could result in physical harm to oneself, even death. In his essay "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," Richard Wright describes eloquently the various strategies he learned to use to avoid the violence of Whites who would brutalize a Black person who did not "stay in his place."¹³ Though it is tempting to think that the need for such strategies disappeared with Jim Crow laws, their legacy lives on in the frequent and sometimes fatal harassment Black men and women experience at the hands of White police officers.¹⁴

Because of the risks inherent in unequal relationships, the subordinates often develop covert ways of resisting or undermining the power of the dominant group. As Miller points out, popular culture is full of folktales, jokes, and stories about how the subordinate—whether the woman, the peasant, or the sharecropper—outwitted the "boss."¹⁵ In his now-classic essay "I Won't Learn from You," Herbert Kohl identifies one form of resistance, "not-learning," demonstrated by targeted students who are too often seen by their dominant teachers as "others":

Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity. In such situations, there are forced choices and no apparent middle ground. To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject the stranger's world.¹⁶

The use of either strategy, attending very closely to the dominants or not attending at all, is costly to members of the targeted group. Not-learning may mean there are needed skills that are not acquired.

Attending closely to the dominant group may leave little time or energy to attend to one's self. Worse yet, the negative messages of the dominant group about the subordinates may be internalized, leading to self-doubt or, in its extreme form, self-hate. There are many examples of subordinates attempting to make themselves over in the image of the dominant group—Jewish people who want to change the Semitic look of their noses, Asians who have cosmetic surgery to alter the shape of their eyes, Blacks who seek to lighten their skin with bleaching creams. Whether one succumbs to the devaluing pressures of the dominant culture or successfully resists them, the fact is that dealing with oppressive systems from the underside, regardless of the strategy, is physically and psychologically taxing.

Breaking beyond the structural and psychological limitations imposed on one's group is possible, but not easily achieved. To the extent that members of targeted groups do push societal limits—achieving unexpected success, protesting injustice, being "uppity"—by their actions they call the whole system into question. Miller writes that they "expose the inequality, and throw into question the basis for its existence. And they will make the inherent conflict an open conflict. They will then have to bear the burden and take the risks that go with being defined as 'troublemakers.'"¹⁷

The history of subordinate groups is filled with so-called troublemakers, yet their names are often unknown. Preserving the record of those subordinates and their dominant allies who have challenged the status quo is usually of little interest to the dominant culture, but it is of great interest to subordinates who search for an empowering reflection in the societal mirror.

Many of us are both dominant and subordinate. Clearly racism and racial identity are at the center of discussion in this book, but as Audre Lorde said, from her vantage point as a Black lesbian, "There is no hierarchy of oppression."¹⁸ The thread and threat of violence runs through all of the isms. There is a need to acknowledge each other's pain, even as we attend to our own.

For those readers who are in the dominant racial category, it may sometimes be difficult to take in what is being said by and about those

who are targeted by racism. When the perspective of the subordinate is shared directly, an image is reflected to members of the dominant group that is disconcerting. To the extent that one can draw on one's own experience of subordination—as a young person, as a person with a disability, as someone who grew up poor, as a woman—it may be easier to make meaning of another targeted group's experience. For those readers who are targeted by racism and are angered by the obliviousness of Whites sometimes described in these pages, it may be useful to attend to your experience of dominance where you may find it—as a heterosexual, as an able-bodied person, as a Christian, as a man—and consider what systems of privilege you may be overlooking. The task of resisting our own oppression does not relieve us of the responsibility of acknowledging our complicity in the oppression of others.

Our ongoing examination of who we are in our full humanity, embracing all of our identities, creates the possibility of building alliances that may ultimately free us all. It is with that vision in mind that I move forward with an examination of racial identity in the chapters to follow. My goal is not to flatten the multidimensional self-reflection we see of ourselves but to focus on a dimension often neglected and discounted in the public discourse on race.

SEVEN

White Identity, Affirmative Action, and Color-Blind Racial Ideology

*“Affirmative action was nice. It had its time.
Its time is over ”*

for

THE WORDS ABOVE COME FROM A PARTICIPANT IN WHITENESS PROJECT, an interactive investigation into how Americans who identify as White understand and experience their race.¹ He was not the only project participant to express the sentiment that affirmative action should be a policy of the past. Are they right? In 1996, when I was working on the first edition of this book, I knew that one of the topics I would need to write about was affirmative action. My students always wanted to talk about it. Even White students who supported the concept of expanding opportunity for historically disadvantaged groups worried that it would limit their opportunities, that they might become victims of what some called “reverse discrimination.” Many did not have a clear understanding of what affirmative action actually was, what was allowed by law, what was not. And so I included a brief overview in this chapter. Twenty years later, that overview is still needed, but the conversation about affirmative action has changed.

What is different today is the widespread belief among Whites (and some people of color) that racial discrimination has declined in the post-civil rights era and affirmative action programs are no longer needed. For some, the election of President Barack Obama (not once but twice),

the phenomenal success of Black celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, and the increased visibility of Black executives in corporate America are all evidence that the doors of opportunity are now wide open for those with talent and tenacity. We are now, they argue, well on our way to becoming a truly egalitarian society.

Findings from the 2015 American Values Survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) seem to reflect that thinking.² On the one hand, a majority of survey participants agree that Blacks (61 percent) and Hispanics (56 percent) face a lot of discrimination in the United States. On the other hand, they think enough has been done to address it. More than half (59 percent) of White Americans believe that the United States has made the changes necessary to give Blacks equal rights with Whites. Combining several questionnaire items together to form a “Racial Inequity Index,” the PRRI researchers found that a majority (54 percent) of White Americans perceive low levels of racial inequality, “believing that racial minorities today have equal opportunities as whites” do. White working-class Americans, in particular, hold that point of view (61 percent), compared to less than half (45 percent) of White college-educated Americans. By comparison, 66 percent of Black Americans perceive high levels of inequality, “believing generally that systemic discrimination against blacks and other minorities impacts racial inequality today,” while 17 percent perceive moderate levels of inequality and another 17 percent perceive low levels of inequality. Hispanic Americans were more evenly divided in their outlook: 45 percent believe that there are still high levels of racial inequality, 22 percent hold attitudes in the moderate range, and 34 percent perceive low levels of inequality, as measured by the survey.

Of particular relevance to a discussion of affirmative action are the results regarding White beliefs about discrimination against White people. “Although only one-quarter (25 percent) of the public believe that whites face a lot of discrimination in America today, a significantly larger number express concern about the existence of so-called ‘reverse discrimination’ against whites. More than four in ten (43 percent) Americans say that discrimination against whites has become as big a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities.”³

Not surprisingly, when those results are broken down by race, there are significant differences between groups. Half (50 percent) of White Americans agree that discrimination against Whites has become a problem equivalent to that against people of color. That percentage is even higher among working-class Whites (60 percent), with 39 percent of working-class Whites disagreeing. Among White college-educated Whites, the percentages are almost exactly reversed. Only 36 percent of that group agrees that discrimination against Whites is equal to discrimination against people of color, while 63 percent of college-educated Whites disagree. Among Blacks and Hispanics, there is widespread disagreement (74 percent and 70 percent, respectively) with the idea that discrimination against Whites is as big a problem as discrimination against people of color, yet there are some who do agree with that statement (25 percent of Blacks and 29 percent of Hispanics).

Of course, the survey doesn’t tell us why the participants hold the views that they hold, only that they do. It is puzzling to look at the survey results against factual data about racial gaps on measures of social or economic well-being. Whether we consider measures of housing, education, the labor market, the criminal justice system, the media, politics, or health care, Whites as a group fare better than just about every other racial/ethnic group in the United States on measures of access, participation, and success.⁴ I reviewed some of the information about disparities in housing, education, the criminal justice system, and politics (voting) in the prologue of this book. Drawing on data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bell and her colleagues highlight labor market patterns:

For example, the highest-paying occupational categories in management, professional, and related occupations are dominated by whites (39%) and Asians (50%) compared with Blacks (29%) and Hispanics (20%). At the lower end of the occupational ladder, we see the reverse: Latinos are overrepresented in lower-paying fields of agriculture (50%), grounds maintenance (45%), and maids and housekeeping (44%), while Blacks are slotted into jobs as aides in nursing, psychiatric, and home health care (36%), bus drivers (27%),

and security guards and gaming surveillance officers (27%). Asians make up a majority of manicurists, pedicurists, skin care specialists, barbers, and cosmetologists (57%), as well as 29% of software developers, and 22% of physicians and surgeons. Whites are at the top of the occupational pyramid, accounting for 96% of farmers, ranchers, and agricultural managers; 93% of construction managers; and 91% of chief executives.⁵

Only 3 percent of executives, senior-level officials, and managers in the US are Black. Only 4 percent of doctors and 5 percent of attorneys are Black.⁶ Additionally, a 2016 analysis of federal government data by the Pew Research Center finds that Blacks are, on average, at least twice as likely as Whites to be poor or to be unemployed; in 2014 the median White household income was \$71,300 while the median Black household income was \$43,300. Little has changed in twenty years. Back then the median Black household income was about \$37,800, compared to \$63,600 for the median white household. In terms of median net worth, white households are about thirteen times as wealthy as Black households—a gap that has grown wider since the Great Recession.⁷

Though these data leave me wondering why so many White people are worried about discrimination against them, I am reminded of the tendency that Americans of all backgrounds have to overestimate how many people of color there are in the United States. Though demographics are changing, they are not changing as fast as the average person thinks they are. In 2013, the Center for American Progress (CAP), an independent, nonpartisan policy institute, joined with other non-profit organizations (Policy Link, Latino Decisions, and the Rockefeller Foundation) to “assess how Americans view issues of rising diversity and policy proposals to better integrate these communities into the mainstream of American society and its economy.” The resulting study is one of the largest of its kind, based on nearly three thousand interviews with a very diverse group of Americans. Researchers found that “when asked to estimate the current percentage of the U.S. population that is composed of racial and ethnic minorities, Americans are considerably off

the mark. The median response—49 percent—indicates that the typical American thinks we are nearly a majority-minority nation already; the actual percent of the nation that is a minority is about 37 percent.” Respondents were wrong about the future as well, estimating that the population of color in 2050 will be 62 percent, considerably more than the Census Bureau projection of 53 percent.⁸

Though the researchers concluded that there was general openness about the increasing diversity, particularly among younger and college-educated respondents, they also found that one of the greatest concerns respondents had about rising diversity was job availability. Fifty-four percent agreed with the survey statement, “There will not be enough jobs for everybody.” Consistent with the 2015 American Values Survey, a significant percentage (42 percent) expressed fear that discrimination against Whites will increase as the diversity of the population increases. This anxiety was particularly prevalent among White conservatives (61 percent) and White respondents ages sixty-five or older (56 percent).⁹

The concern expressed by White respondents about discrimination being directed against them also reminded me that our tendency as human beings is to focus on the “micro” rather than the “macro” when it comes to our own lives. Even if only 3 percent of executives nationwide are Black, if you are White and one of them happens to get the job you thought was yours, you may feel your worry about discrimination against White people has been validated. Such an explanation might ease the pain of your disappointment, even as it might fuel your racial resentment.

Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild offers further insight into the mind-set of White working-class Americans, who were the most likely (60 percent) to say that discrimination against Whites has become as much of a concern as discrimination against people of color. In her book *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, she describes White working-class men and women who feel as if they have been waiting in line for the promise of the American Dream of intergenerational progress to be fulfilled for a long time. Instead of moving forward, they feel as if they are moving backward, with stagnant wages, the loss of jobs in manufacturing and other areas, and the

growing threat of globalization. And yet, they see others getting ahead. It feels like something has gone painfully wrong in the world. Hochschild calls this the “deep story,” and it sounds like this:

Look! You see people *cutting in line ahead of you!* You’re following the rules. They aren’t. . . . How can they just do that? Who are they? Some are black. Through affirmative action plans, pushed by the federal government, they are being given preference for places in colleges and universities, apprenticeships, jobs, welfare payments, and free lunches. . . . And President Obama: how did *he* rise so high? The biracial son of a low-income single mother becomes president of the most powerful country in the world; you didn’t see that coming. And if he’s there, what kind of a slouch does his rise make you feel like, you who are supposed to be so much more privileged? Or did Obama get there *fairly*? How did he get into an expensive place like *Columbia University*? How did Michelle Obama get enough money to go to *Princeton*? And then *Harvard* Law School, with a father who was a city water plant employee? You’ve never seen anything like it, not up close.¹⁰

In this narrative, it is not just Black people who are cutting in line, it is other groups too—like women, immigrants, and refugees—and it is the line-cutter-in-chief who has been helping them. Psychologically speaking, the deeply internalized racial hierarchy that has White men at the head of the line has been set askew, and that by itself is unsettling for some. This “deep story” helps explain why, despite the actual data about opportunity in America, the perception of discrimination against Whites is so widely expressed in the survey responses.

What is clear is that, whether the result of collective anxiety driven by demographic overestimates, individualized and specific job concerns, or the election of a Black president, in the context of the survey results, the debate about affirmative action is destined to continue for some time. For a moment, let’s step back from these survey results and take a brief overview of affirmative action.

What Is Affirmative Action?

The term *affirmative action* was introduced into our language and legal system by Executive Order 11246, signed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 and later amended by Presidents Nixon and Clinton. This order, as amended by subsequent presidents, obligates all contractors who employ more than fifty people and who conduct more than \$50,000 of business with the federal government to “take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.” As set forth by this order, contractors were to commit themselves to “apply every good faith effort” to develop procedures that would result in equal employment opportunity for historically disadvantaged groups. The groups targeted for this “affirmative action” were White women and men and women of color (specifically defined by the federal government as American Indians / Alaska Natives, Asian or Pacific Islanders, Blacks, and Hispanics). Later legislation broadened the protected groups to include persons with disabilities and veterans.¹¹

There has been much public debate about affirmative action since its inception, with little attempt to clarify concepts. The interchangeable use of the terms *affirmative action* and *quotas* by politicians and in the media has contributed to the confusion. The term *quota* has a repugnant history of discrimination and exclusion. For example, in the early part of the twentieth century, quotas were used to limit how many Jews were admitted to prestigious institutions of higher learning.¹² But despite common public perceptions, affirmative action programs do not involve quotas.

Quotas, defined here as fixed numerical allocations, are *illegal*, except in those rare situations when a court has ordered them as a temporary remedy for a well-documented, proven pattern of racially motivated discrimination.

Public-sector employers may use quotas or preferences when a sufficiently compelling government interest has been established—that is, to remedy discrimination by the government entity itself. Even in these

cases, preferences are acceptable only if no reasonable demographically neutral alternative exists. And the preferences must be flexible, focused, limited in duration, and not overly burdensome to nonbeneficiaries. Federal government regulations explicitly prohibit private employers from utilizing quotas or preferences.¹³

Goals, on the other hand, are *essential*. Goals are not a fixed allocation meant to limit (as quotas did in the past). Instead, goals provide a necessary target for which to aim. As any long-range planner knows, goals are necessary in order to chart one's course of action and to evaluate one's progress. Goals are a fundamental component of effective affirmative action programs.

In practice, federal contractors are expected to monitor their own records to make sure they are employing qualified people from specified targeted classes—such as women or African Americans—in proportion to their availability in the workforce. If they find that there is a significant pattern of underrepresentation, they are expected to make a plan to address the discrepancy. Organizations that don't have federal contracts are not required to have affirmative action programs, but over the years many companies have adopted them voluntarily.¹⁴

Though much of what we have seen in the news about affirmative action is in reference to Supreme Court cases focused on admissions at public universities, in fact, most of the laws related to affirmative action are in reference to employment. Social psychologist and expert on affirmative action Faye Crosby points out that “affirmative action in employment affects many more citizens than does affirmative action in education. . . . Educators estimate that no more than half of the four-year institutions are selective. The rest admit everyone who applies. Thus, issues concerning college admissions relate, at most, to about 6 million Americans. In contrast, about six times as many people are affected by affirmative action programs in employment.”¹⁵ Employment-based affirmative action will be the focus of our discussion here.

Though Executive Order 11246 required affirmative action, it did not specify exactly what the action should look like. Given this lack of specificity, it is not surprising that there is great variety in the way

affirmative action programs have been developed and implemented around the country.¹⁶ The emphasis on action is apparent in this widely accepted nontechnical definition: “Affirmative action is the expenditure of energy or resources by an organization in the quest for equality among individuals from different, discernible groups.”¹⁷ These attempts can be categorized as either *process-oriented* or *goal-oriented*.

Process-oriented programs focus on creating a fair application process, assuming that a fair process will result in a fair outcome. If a job opening has been advertised widely, and anyone who is interested has a chance to apply, and all applicants receive similar treatment (e.g., standard interview questions, same evaluation criteria and procedures), the process is presumed to be fair. The search committee can freely choose the best candidate knowing that no discrimination has taken place. Under such circumstances, the “best” candidate will sometimes be a person of color, “too good to ignore.”¹⁸ In theory, such would seem to be the case, and because process-oriented programs seem consistent with the American ideal of the meritocracy, most people support this approach.¹⁹ At the very least, it is an improvement over the “old boy network” that filled positions before outsiders even had a chance to apply.

Unfortunately, research suggests that bias can enter into the selection process at the very start of the search process. For example, economists Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan conducted a study on hiring behavior in which they sent out close to 5,000 fictitious résumés in response to over 1,300 help-wanted ads in Chicago and Boston newspapers, for jobs in the sales, administrative support, clerical, and customer service categories. The résumés were similar except that half of them were assigned an African American-sounding name (Lakisha Washington or Jamal Jones, for example) and the other half had names more commonly associated with Whites (such as Emily Walsh or Greg Baker). Then they waited to see what the callback response would be. The results showed significant discrimination against the Black-identified résumés: White names received 50 percent more callbacks for interviews. The degree of discrimination was similar across job categories. Even federal contractors and employers with “Equal Opportunity Employer” listed in their ads showed the same level of discrimination

as other employers. The authors concluded, “A White applicant should expect on average one callback for every 10 ads she or he applies to; on the other hand, an African American applicant would need to apply to about 15 different ads to achieve the same result.”²⁰

In another study of hiring behavior, conducted in Milwaukee, sociologist Devah Pager sent paired testers to apply in person for jobs that required no experience, just a high school degree. White applicants were twice as likely to be called back for an interview as the matched Black applicants. Surprisingly, even White applicants who indicated that they had a criminal record received more callbacks (17 percent) than Black applicants *without* a criminal record (14 percent).²¹

In a subsequent study, this time in New York City, Pager and her colleagues fielded teams of White, Black, and Latinx testers to apply for real entry-level jobs. The testers were articulate, clean-cut, college-educated young men between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-six, similar in height, physical attractiveness, verbal skill, and interactional style and demeanor. The Latinx testers were US citizens of Puerto Rican descent and spoke without a Spanish accent. The testers were trained to present themselves in similar ways to potential employers as high school graduates with steady work experience in entry-level jobs. They applied for jobs in restaurants and retail sales, as warehouse workers, couriers, telemarketers, stockers, movers, customer service representatives, and other similar jobs available to someone with a high school degree and little previous experience. In applications to 171 employers, the White testers received a positive response (interview or job offer) 31 percent of the time, the Latinx testers received a positive response 25.2 percent of the time, and the Black testers, 15.2 percent of the time. Stated differently, the Black applicant had to search twice as long as the equally qualified White applicant before receiving a callback or a job offer.²²

In another version of the same experiment, the White testers presented themselves as ex-felons (having served eighteen months for possessing cocaine with intent to sell) and were teamed up with Latinx and Black applicants with no criminal records. Whites with criminal records still had more callbacks or job offers (17.2 percent) than did Latinx testers (15.4 percent) and Black testers (13 percent) with no criminal

records. Though the discriminatory outcomes were clear, “few interactions between our testers and employers revealed signs of racial animus or hostility toward minority applicants.”²³ In the absence of prejudiced remarks, would rejected Black applicants even be aware that discrimination was operating without being able to compare their results to those of their White and Latinx teammates? Maybe not. But as these studies demonstrate, getting to the point of an interview is a higher hurdle for Black applicants than White ones, and in the case of the last study, a higher hurdle than for Latinx applicants as well.

Goal-oriented affirmative action can help address this problem. At each step of the process, the question is asked: is our pool of qualified candidates diverse, and if not, have we cast our net wide enough? In this approach, more of those résumés of Black candidates would likely have been at least considered for the next step in the evaluation process. In a goal-oriented process, once the qualified pool of applicants has been identified, those in the pool who move the organization closer to its diversity hiring goals are likely to be favored. This doesn’t mean that underrepresented candidates would always be the ones selected (the consistently lower rates of White unemployment let us know that White people are still being hired), but some of the time candidates of color would prevail. The White candidates who are not selected are likely to feel disappointed and might even believe that they were better candidates than the ones selected, but such perceptions are by definition subjective.

I am reminded of a dialogue I had with one of my White female students about affirmative action. In an essay on the topic she wrote, “I am in favor of affirmative action except when it comes to my jobs.” I wrote in response, “Which jobs have your name on them?” Of course she wanted to get the jobs she applied for and did not want to lose out to anyone, especially on the basis of race, a factor over which she had no control. Yet she seemed to assume that because she wanted them, they belonged to her. She assumed that she would, of course, be qualified for the job and would therefore be entitled to it. What was she assuming about the candidates of color? She did not seem to take into account the possibility that one of them might be as qualified, or more qualified,

than she was. The idea that she as a White woman might herself be the beneficiary of affirmative action was apparently not part of her thinking.

We have all heard someone tell a story about a friend or relative who lost a coveted job opportunity because a “less-qualified” person took that spot, almost always reported to be a person of color, usually Black, not a White woman. I always wonder how the speaker knows so much about the selected candidate’s résumé or what happened in the final interview. Can we really say with confidence any particular hiring decision was not the best choice for the organization and its goals?

Despite the attempts to ensure a fair process, without the clarity of a clear set of institutional diversity goals to guide their decision-making, too often well-intentioned search committees find the “best” person is yet another member of the dominant group. What goes wrong? Some answers may be found in the research of social psychologists.

Aversive Racism, Uncomfortable Egalitarians, and Color-Blindness

Psychologists Samuel Gaertner and John Dovidio, along with numerous colleagues, have been studying race relations, and its relevance to our question, for more than forty years. They argue that White opposition to affirmative action programs is largely rooted in a subtle but pervasive form of racism they call “aversive racism.” Aversive racism is defined as “an attitudinal adaptation resulting from an assimilation of an egalitarian value system with prejudice and with racist beliefs.” In other words, most Americans have internalized the espoused cultural values of fairness and justice for all *at the same time* that they have been breathing the smog of racial biases and stereotypes pervading popular culture. “The existence, both of almost unavoidable racial biases and of the desire to be egalitarian and racially tolerant, forms the basis of the ambivalence that aversive racists experience.”²⁴ The key to understanding this framework is to recognize that the internalization of the biases and stereotypes of popular culture and continued segregation from (and therefore lack of familiarity with) Blacks leave many Whites feeling uneasy, uncomfortable, even perhaps fearful in the presence of

Black people, often without their conscious awareness of these feelings. Consequently, interracial interactions may generate discomfort and lead White people to avoid or withdraw from such situations, finding them “aversive.” The idea that they might be considered prejudiced by anyone (including themselves) is also an “aversive” idea, hence the name “aversive racism.”²⁵

Pointing to the findings of several impressive research studies, Dovidio and Gaertner argue that because so-called aversive racists see themselves as nonprejudiced and racially tolerant, they generally do not behave in overtly racist ways. When the norms for appropriate, non-discriminatory behavior are clear and unambiguous, they “do the right thing,” because to behave otherwise would threaten the nonprejudiced self-image they hold. However, in situations when it is not clear what the “right thing” is, or if an action can be justified on the basis of some factor other than race, racial bias will reveal itself. In these ambiguous situations, an aversive racist can discriminate against Blacks and still preserve the racially tolerant self-image.

For example, in a 1989 study of hiring decisions, Dovidio and Gaertner asked White college students to review application materials and evaluate candidates for a peer-counseling position on campus. The application materials were arranged in three categories—those of a highly qualified candidate, those of a moderately qualified candidate, and those of a weakly qualified candidate—with half of the materials in each category identified as those of a White applicant and half identified as those of a Black candidate. When the decision was unambiguous (as in “hire the strong candidate”), there was no selection bias. Both White and Black “strongly qualified” candidates received positive recommendations from the students. Similarly, when the candidates were “weakly qualified,” there was no discrimination. The choice was unambiguous—“reject weakly qualified” applicants. However, when the candidates were “moderately qualified,” the decision to recommend or reject was less clear. In that instance, “moderately qualified” White candidates were recommended significantly more often than the “moderately qualified” Black candidates, even though the credentials were the same. Seventy-five percent of the moderately qualified Whites were

recommended, compared to only 50 percent of the moderately qualified Black candidates. In 1999, ten years later, Dovidio and Gaertner repeated the same experiment with a new group of White undergraduate students and found almost identical results. Seventy-seven percent of the moderately qualified Whites were recommended compared to 40 percent of the Black candidates in that same category. As part of these studies, they also measured the students' overt expressions of prejudice using a self-reported prejudice scale. The students in 1999 expressed less prejudice on the survey than the students from 1989, but the pro-White bias in their decision-making was virtually the same.²⁶

In a subsequent study, participants were asked to help make admissions decisions for the university. Again, Black and White applicants were matched and described as either uniformly strong (high SAT scores and high grades), uniformly weak (low SAT scores and low grades), or unevenly strong (either grades were high or SAT scores were high, but not both). When applicants were clearly strong or clearly weak, there was no anti-Black bias. The right decision—to admit or reject—was unambiguous. However, when applicants were strong in one area but not both, differential treatment emerged. Black candidates were more likely to be rejected based on the weak area (either weak grades or weak SATs), minimizing the strength in the other area, but White candidates were more likely to be accepted based on the area of strength, minimizing the weakness in the other area. In other words, the participants systematically changed how they weighed the criteria to justify their decisions on the basis of race. Unevenly qualified White candidates were given the benefit of the doubt in a way that Black candidates were not. Summarizing the variety of studies they conducted, Dovidio and Gaertner concluded, "Aversive racism—racism among people who are good and well-intentioned—can produce disparate outcomes. . . . Although the bias of aversive racists may be subtle and unintentional, its consequences may ultimately be as severe as old-fashioned racism—threats to the well-being of blacks and the restriction of opportunities."²⁷

The foundational work that Dovidio and Gaertner did in the twentieth century has been expanded upon by Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald using twenty-first-century technology. With advances in

our understanding of human cognition, psychologists now agree that much of human judgment and behavior is produced with little conscious thought. Our internalized stereotypes and biases are not always consciously known to us, but they can still influence our behavior. The implicit-association test (IAT) developed by Banaji and Greenwald was designed to measure the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy) by tapping into thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control.²⁸

As the researchers describe on the Project Implicit website, "The main idea is that making a response is easier when closely related items share the same response key. When doing an IAT you are asked to quickly sort words into categories" using computer keys. Since reaction times are recorded in milliseconds, responses are not subject to the kind of conscious control one might use when responding to a survey question. By timing their reactions, the researchers can see the pattern of associations that participants are making. (If you want to try out the Race IAT, you can do so by going to the website. It takes about ten minutes.) Most who take the Race IAT are faster at linking racial White images to pleasant words than at linking racial Black images to pleasant words. This pattern is described as showing "automatic preference for White relative to Black."²⁹ Does an "automatic White preference" on the Race IAT mean a person harbors deep-seated prejudices? Not necessarily. Banaji and Greenwald write that nothing about the IAT suggests that it taps into the kind of dislike, disrespect, or even hatred that we associate with strongly held prejudices. But now that millions of people have taken the test and many research studies have been done using the methodology, they have reached two important conclusions.

First, we now know that automatic White preference is pervasive in American society—almost 75 percent of those who take the Race IAT on the Internet or in laboratory studies reveal automatic White preference. This is a surprisingly high figure. . . .

Second, the automatic White preference expressed on the Race IAT is now established as signaling discriminatory behavior. It

predicts discriminatory behavior even among research participants who earnestly (and, we believe, honestly) espouse egalitarian beliefs. That last statement may sound like a self-contradiction, but it's an empirical truth. Among research participants who describe themselves as racially egalitarian, the Race IAT has been shown, reliably and repeatedly, to predict discriminatory behavior that was observed in the research.³⁰

For example, it predicts results like the ones Dovidio and Gaertner found—in a simulated hiring situation, White applicants were judged more favorably than equally qualified Black applicants. It also predicts doctors' differential treatment of Black and White patients—emergency room and resident physicians recommend the optimal treatment, thrombolytic (blood-clot-dissolving) therapy, less often for a Black patient than for a White one with the same acute cardiac symptoms.³¹ (The Institute of Medicine has concluded that racial and ethnic minorities receive less-effective care even when income levels and insurance benefits are the same, pointing to implicit bias as the cause.)³²

Of the more than 1.5 million White Americans who have taken the Race IAT on the internet, approximately 40 percent regard themselves as egalitarian and still show the automatic White preference in their response times. This combination of egalitarian attitudes and unconscious bias is similar to what Dovidio and Gaertner described in their definition of aversive racism. Banaji and Greenwald agree with their theoretical understanding of the issue but suggest what might be described as a “kinder, gentler” label—“uncomfortable egalitarians.” They write,

We have some observations about these uncomfortable egalitarians. First, there are a lot of them. . . . Second, their differential behavior toward White and Black Americans can well be responsible for a substantial portion of the disadvantage experienced by Black Americans. . . . Third, and perhaps most needing explanation—is that uncomfortable egalitarians are extremely unlikely to notice that their differential behavior toward Whites and Blacks contributes in

any way to the disadvantages experienced by Black Americans. . . . Uncomfortable egalitarians may be the prototypical “good people” who have hidden biases. They see themselves as helpful, but it turns out that their helpfulness is selective, caused in part by their discomfort in interracial interactions. Their discriminatory behavior consists of being selectively ready or able to help only or mostly those who are like them—in other words, those in the groups for which they have automatic preferences . . . unaware that their comfort and helpfulness in interactions with in-group members is not matched by similar levels of comfort and helpfulness toward out-group members.³³

There is no malice in helping people like yourself—what Banaji and Greenwald call “in-group favoritism”—but as we saw in the Dovidio and Gaertner hiring simulations, it does mean that a lot more White people will get jobs ahead of equally qualified Blacks. At the conclusion of their book, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, Banaji and Greenwald review decades of social science research and come to this conclusion: “Black disadvantage exists. . . . The further conclusion—one demanded by the great weight of evidence—is indisputable. Some portion of Black disadvantage is attributable to the way people respond to Blacks just because they are Black.”³⁴ Social science research is also conclusive that, while explicit bias is infrequent, implicit bias (automatic race preference) is pervasive and contributes to the racial discrimination against Black Americans.³⁵

The next question many people ask is, “What can I do about an implicit preference that I don't want?” Banaji, Greenwald, and their colleagues offer this advice on their Project Implicit website:

It is well-established that implicit preferences can predict behavior. But, there is not yet enough research to say for sure that implicit biases can be reduced, let alone eliminated. . . . Therefore, we encourage people not to focus on strategies for reducing bias, but to focus instead on strategies that deny implicit biases the chance to operate. One such strategy is ensuring that implicit biases don't leak out in the first place. To do that, you can “blind” yourself from learning a

person's gender, race, etc. when you're making a decision about them (e.g., having their name removed from the top of a resume). If you only evaluate a person on the things that matter for a decision, then you can't be swayed by demographic factors. Another strategy is to try to compensate for your implicit preferences. For example, if you have an implicit preference for young people you can try to be friendlier toward elderly people. Although it has not been well-studied, based on what we know about how biases form we also recommend that people consider what gets into their minds in the first place. This might mean, for example, going out of our way to watch television programs and movies that portray women and minority group members in positive or counter-stereotypical ways.³⁶

There is some evidence that repeated exposure to positive counter-stereotypic images can be useful, but it is truly difficult to disrupt the stereotypes we learn early and often in our lives.

Color-Blind Racial Ideology

Despite so much evidence that people are not color-blind even when they want to be, color-blind racial ideology has become commonplace among Whites in the United States, particularly in the twenty-first century. In fact, what psychologists Dovidio and Gaertner called "aversive racism," Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, looking through a sociologist's structural lens, has called "color-blind racism." He describes color-blind racism as the dominant racial ideology of contemporary America, in which White people deny or minimize the degree of racial inequality or explain contemporary racial inequality as the result of factors unrelated to racial dynamics (such as Black cultural values or economic forces unrelated to race.)³⁷

Color-blind racial ideology can be expressed in multiple ways. One is what Ruth Frankenberg calls "color evasion"—as when someone says, "I don't see color; we are all the same," for example. This emphasis on sameness is a way of denying or rejecting the idea of White racial superiority. In theory, this sounds good, but it overlooks the fact that people

of color are not having the same experiences as White people. As the research discussed earlier demonstrates, their racial group membership is impacting their daily lives. Another expression of color blindness is what Frankenberg calls "power evasion," as when someone minimizes the impact of racism, claiming that everyone has the same opportunity to succeed and those who don't have only themselves to blame.³⁸ In *The Myth of Racial Color Blindness*, the editors, Helen Neville, Miguel Gallardo, and Derald Wing Sue, explain, "To deny race and ignore the existence of racism actually causes harm to people of color because it a) falsely perpetuates the myth of equal access and opportunity, b) blames people of color for their lot in life, and c) allows Whites to live their lives in ignorance, naiveté, and innocence."³⁹

Another feature of color-blind racial ideology is the belief that talking about race makes things worse—that it promotes racism and/or is racist in and of itself.⁴⁰ Those who bring up race are "playing the race card" and creating problems where otherwise there would be none, or so the logic goes. This last feature of color-blind racial ideology serves to silence those who seek to challenge institutional racism within organizations and the larger society and is another way that color blindness perpetuates the status quo. When someone raises questions about racial practices or policies in an environment where White color blindness is the norm, the response is often one of hurt and defensiveness, as in "Are you calling me a racist?!" Remember Dovidio and Gaertner's description of aversive racism—called "aversive" because the person is *averse* to acknowledging any link to prejudice or racism. The conversation then often becomes about hurt feelings rather than the systemic issues that need addressing.

Ian Haney López, author of *Dog Whistle Politics*, succinctly describes this pattern:

Claims to have been personally attacked take productive conversations about current racial patterns and collapse them into a stultifying ventilation of wounded feelings. It shifts attention from racial dynamics that hurt everyone, and focuses our eyes instead on the bruised egos of those whites who feel themselves personally targeted

whenever the conversation turns to race. The imagined charge is of small-minded bigotry. The actual charge, written across society . . . is that race in various forms continues to harm us all. Histrionic distress about supposedly having been called a racist impedes recognizing the truth about race's continued harmful power.⁴¹

Learning how to have these conversations is a necessary part of moving forward as a healthy society. You can't fix what you can't talk about. "Refusing to talk about powerful social realities does not make them go away but rather allows racial illiteracy, confusion, and misinformation to persist unchallenged."⁴² Learning to have the conversation is of particular importance for White people who want to see social change.

Because one of the characteristics that White aversive racists or uncomfortable egalitarians exhibit is the tendency to avoid or withdraw from interracial interactions due to the unease they often feel in those situations, it may be more effective for a White peer to take the initiative in naming and addressing racial bias in organizational or group settings.⁴³ The White person who has engaged in the kind of exploration of racial identity and reeducation described in the previous chapter (Chapter 6) is often willing to demonstrate that kind of courage. It is not easy, but that is the way effective ally work gets done. Keep in mind that when the environmental cues are *clear* about what the right thing to do is, the aversive racist or uncomfortable egalitarian will do the right thing. The voices of white allies in the room can help to make the right thing clear.

Affirmative Action Revisited

It is clear from the research evidence that interventions like affirmative action programs are still needed. It is not clear from the survey data discussed earlier that public support for these programs will be maintained. Eight states have already passed legislation eliminating any such programs in state educational or employment settings.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, it is important to note the benefits of affirmative action programs in the workplace. To the extent that employee diversity

is enhanced throughout an organization, employers find that they are better able to serve the needs of a diverse customer base. Diverse work teams lead to more effective problem-solving.⁴⁵ Removing artificial barriers to advancement broadens the talent pool. Affirmative action programs have also been shown to strengthen the bottom line. Companies that have increased their representation of women of all backgrounds and men of color have outperformed less-diverse companies in stock performance and reputational standing.⁴⁶

Much of the research that has been discussed in this chapter has been framed in terms of Black-White relationships, a reflection of the way most of the studies were conducted. Of course, affirmative action programs may also involve other people of color as well as White women.⁴⁷ Yet the Black-White emphasis in the aversive racism framework seems well placed when we consider that researchers have found that negative attitudes toward affirmative action are expressed most strongly when Blacks are identified as the target beneficiaries. When asked in research studies to respond to affirmative action programs benefitting people with disabilities, Native Americans, or Blacks, the most negative responses were directed to policies benefitting Blacks. As Audrey Murrell and her colleagues discovered, "Whereas giving preference based on nonmerit factors is perceived as unfair, giving such preference to Blacks is perceived as more unfair."⁴⁸

Keeping Our Eyes on the Prize: Goal-Oriented Affirmative Action

Though the research on evaluator bias is dismaying, it also points us in the direction of an effective response. Again, recall that when expectations for appropriate behavior are clearly defined and a biased response can be recognized, most egalitarian Whites are consistently as positive in their behavior toward Blacks as toward other Whites. If administrators clearly articulate the organization's diversity goals and the reasons that such goals are in the organization's best interests, the appropriate behavior in the search process should be clear. If we keep our eyes on the prize, we can get past the bias.

Some might say, "Doesn't such an outcome-based focus lead to instances of 'reverse discrimination,' when well-qualified majority-group candidates are rejected in favor of a less-qualified candidate from an underrepresented group simply because that candidate meets the diversity goal?" Certainly that could happen, but only in a poorly administered program. When affirmative action programs are functioning appropriately, no one is ever hired who is not qualified for the job. Such an occurrence would undermine the program and would be patently unfair to the newly hired person, who has in effect been set up to fail.

In a well-conceived and well-implemented affirmative action program, the first thing that should be done is to establish clear and meaningful selection criteria. What skills does the person need to function effectively in this environment? How will we assess whether the candidates have these required skills? Will it be on the basis of demonstrated past performance, scores on an appropriate test, or the completion of certain educational requirements?⁴⁹ Once the criteria have been established, anyone who meets the criteria is considered qualified.

Now we can consider who among these qualified candidates will best help us achieve our organizational goals for diversifying our institution. If one candidate meets the criteria but also has some additional education or experience, it may be tempting to say this candidate is the "best," but this one may not be the one who moves us toward our diversity goal. Because of the systematic advantages that members of the dominant group receive, it is often the case that the person with the extra experience or educational attainment is a person from the majority group. If our eyes are on our organizational goal, we are not distracted by these unasked-for extras. If we need someone who has toured Europe or had a special internship, it should already be part of our criteria. If it is not part of the criteria, it shouldn't be considered.

And if making our organization a more-inclusive environment is a goal, then perhaps that goal should be reflected in our criteria so that whoever is selected can support the organization's goals. Fletcher Blanchard, author of "Effective Affirmative Action Programs," suggests what some of these new criteria might be: the extent and favorability of one's experience working in multicultural settings, the experience

of being supervised by managers of color, experience of collaborating in multicultural workgroups or living in racially mixed communities, fluency in a second language, or substantial college coursework in the study of multicultural perspectives.⁵⁰

In my own consultation with school systems interested in increasing their faculty of color, we have discussed the need for such new criteria. The number of young people of color entering the teaching profession is still too small to meet the demand. While effective recruiting strategies can increase a school system's likelihood of being able to attract new teachers of color, many White teachers will still be needed to replace retiring teachers in the coming years. Schools concerned about meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population should be looking specifically for teachers of all backgrounds with demonstrated experience in working with multiracial populations, with courses on their transcripts like *Psychology of Racism; Race, Class, Culture, and Gender in the Classroom; and Foundations of Multicultural Education*, to name a few.

Criteria like these are important for all candidates, but they are also criteria that are more likely to be met by candidates of color, because people of color often have more life experience in multiracial settings than many White people do. However, because such criteria are not explicitly race-based, they also should withstand the legal assaults that some affirmative action programs have experienced.⁵¹ Should these legal challenges move us into a post-affirmative action age, such criteria will be increasingly important in the search and selection process. Under any circumstance, clarity about organizational goals and qualification criteria will lead to better and more equitable selection decisions.

Faye Crosby, a White female psychologist who has studied affirmative action for many years, explains why it is so important to her: "[M]y fervent support of affirmative action comes ultimately from being the mother of White boy-men. It is because I want a better world for my children that I bother to fight for affirmative action."⁵² All of us want a better, more peaceful world for our children. If we want peace, we must work for justice. How do we achieve a more just society in the present context of institutional and cultural racism? Goal-oriented

affirmative action is but one potentially effective strategy. Serious dialogue about other strategies is needed, and that dialogue needs to be expanded beyond the Black-White paradigm that has shaped discussions of affirmative action. The voices of other disenfranchised groups need to be acknowledged in the process, because, as my students taught me long ago, “racism is not just a Black-White thing.”