Introduction

COLLEGES ARE RADICALLY different places than they were just a few decades ago. With growing enrollments of students of color and women, the typical college student is no longer a White male aged eighteen to twenty-two. Universities have also changed how they serve diverse student bodies. At many campuses, chief diversity officers, ethnic studies programs, and multicultural student services offices collaborate to offer students opportunities to learn about issues related to race, class, sexual orientation, religion, and other identities.

For all the strides universities have made in diversifying, a common lament is that they have actually achieved very little. Comments such as "Students just stick to themselves," "People stay in their comfort zones," and, famously, "Why do all the Black kids sit together in the cafeteria?" characterize public perceptions that colleges and universities are starkly and pervasively divided by race. The term *self-segregation* has come to simplistically describe the notion that students of color (a broad term referring to African American, Latinx, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American and other Indigenous populations) are insular, retreating to their own racial/ethnic groups instead of mixing with the rest of campus. In a *Georgetown Voice* article entitled "Diversity Beyond the Statistics: Self-Segregation Among Student Groups," a student bemoaned that "the popularity of student cultural associations and the establishment of cultural housing has been counterproductive to the values Georgetown

wants to instill through diversity. While I respect and admire the work of these clubs, often the diversity they advance also fosters an environment in which each ethnic group remains with its own."[1]

This writer's thoughts reflect a broader conversation in the public discourse around the question, *Is diversity counterproductive?* It's a legitimate question. After all, what's the point of bringing different types of students to campus if they're just going to stick with themselves?

While on the subject, Is affirmative action still needed? With the Supreme Court ruling in *Fisher II v. Texas*, race-conscious admissions is (likely) here to stay, yet the public remains confused about what affirmative action really is and how it affects students. Many people think that it only helps rich minorities (like say, President Obama's daughter Malia), leaving poorer minorities in the dust. There are thousands of strong students from low-income backgrounds who are disadvantaged in the admissions process, so wouldn't it be better to base any preferences in the admissions system on class instead of race? And what about Asian Americans? Do they really need a SAT score that is 140 points higher than White students or 200 points higher than Black students to get into a top college? It all seems pervasively unfair.

All these questions can make the public wonder if diversity hurts more than it helps, precisely at a time when our country is grappling with serious concerns about our ability to support a diverse democracy. As someone who studies higher education, I hear questions like that all the time. What concerns me, however, is my sense that they are based more on opinion, projections, and anecdotes than on facts and data.

In *Race on Campus: Debunking Myths with Data* I have two big goals. First, I want to challenge pervasive myths on how race works in higher education, both in admissions and campus life, by drawing on the latest empirical research. I draw on statistical analyses that colleagues and I have conducted of large-scale, national, longitudinal datasets—thousands of students attending hundreds of colleges—where we control for key background and experiential characteristics, allowing us to get closer to

understanding what factors are potentially influencing an outcome. In other examples I draw on research studies conducted by peers in the field. In all cases, the studies I cite have gone through the rigorous evaluation of publication in peer-reviewed journals, many of which are the top in their respective fields.

I will walk readers through key enduring myths surrounding race, higher education, and the college admissions process. Besides challenging allegations of rampant self-segregation, these myths include the following notions: class-based affirmative action is the true answer to inequality; Asian Americans are harmed by affirmative action; the SAT is a reliable way to measure excellence; and students of color are "mismatched" when they attend selective institutions. With all these perceptions, we need to draw on research and evidence to inform public opinion and policy.

In combining research on admissions with studies on the racial dynamics of campus life, I hope to highlight how the two are really inseparable. Sure, we may talk about them independently in policy discussions, but the issues that affect who comes to campus, and under what conditions, are closely linked to the types of experiences students have once they are enrolled. Simply put, the inequality that stratifies students' pathways to college does not end once classes start. Additionally, some of the stereotypes that fester in discussions about who is qualified to attend what types of institutions carry over to the campus environment, affecting the ways that classmates, faculty, administration, and staff view and treat students of color (we'll see this most glaringly in the debate on mismatch).

As a teaser, I will tell you that the research shows us that far from being insular, students of color are constantly interacting across race in the collegiate setting. Part of this dynamic is that they have little choice at institutions where they are a numerical minority: they constantly interact across race in classrooms, residence halls, intramural sports, and the like. Not only that, they have high levels of close interracial friendship—notably higher than the rate for White students.[2] Counterintuitively, participation in ethnic student organizations, the very clubs that seem like

havens for self-segregation, is actually linked with *higher* rates of interacting across race during college.[3] "Recharging" with same-race peers gives students of color the energy they need to mix with the broader campus. Indeed, the data reveal that students' experiences are much more multifaceted than the hour or two they might spend hanging out in the cafeteria with same-race peers. And there's good reason why this recharging time is critically important to their very survival on racially mixed or predominantly White campuses.

Alright, challenging myths with data—got it. The second goal of *Race on Campus* is to unpack the origins of race-related myths in higher education and critique the persistent spread of misinformation. I address the misconceptions and stereotypes behind these myths (e.g., why people get fixated on the example of Malia Obama as a supposed affirmative action beneficiary) by introducing critical research on cognitive biases. An example of this is what pioneering psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman dub the "availability heuristic."[4] Cognitively processing life takes a lot of effort; the brain has to rely on mental shortcuts to process information. In particular, brains rely on information that is easiest or simplest to recall. Sometimes it's the information most recently heard ("I just read in the news that . . . ") or something that resonates with personal experience. Other times it's something that we keep hearing about over and over again. On top of that, it is harder for brains to summon instantly all the possible exceptions—the "but what about" thought. It is much easier to rely on default ways of understanding than it is to entertain a more nuanced understanding of a problem. To be sure, life's challenges and stresses demand that we function on autopilot for many mundane tasks or jobs, and the availability heuristic refers to our tendency to summon examples that we can readily remember and easily recall. While this strategy is certainly helpful for managing day-to-day life, sometimes it can lead us to turn to anecdotes or compelling examples instead of combing through the data and looking for disconfirming evidence.

You may be familiar with Tversky and Kahneman from Kahneman's masterful synthesis of their research, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (it's a really thick book with a pencil on the cover).[5] In it he explains two systems of thought. System 1 is quick and intuitive, relying on mental shortcuts to help the brain come to quick conclusions. Gut feelings? They come from System 1. In contrast, System 2 is slower, more rational and deliberative. Thinking it through, looking at the data, being aware of your own preconceptions and challenging them—that's System 2. Reading through *Thinking Fast and Slow*—or any book highlighting the extent to which we rely on System 1, sometimes to our own detriment (the title of Dan Ariely's *Predictably Irrational* sums up our capacity for judgment)—is illuminating. Most of us see ourselves as logical folks, but the same intuition that makes it possible to navigate modern life means that our brains are susceptible to assumptions and judgments that don't capture the full extent of what's going on. We need both systems to live life, but we also need to keep ourselves in check, knowing very well that some of the smartest folks in the room, like Kahneman and friends, are the first to acknowledge that we're deeply limited creatures.

The tendency to rely on mental shortcuts in processing information (System 1) is doing the public a deep disservice when we assess the state of race relations on college campuses. It's too easy for people to feel confident in their understandings of what is happening on college campuses today, especially for people who attended college at some point. Assessments of campus life get repeated and repeated again, cementing themselves as facts in the public consciousness, per the availability heuristic and other cognitive biases. While personal experience and observation are important, the public needs to look beyond "a single story" to understand the bigger picture that data show.[6]

By helping readers understand why certain race-related myths are so pervasive, *Race on Campus* will help readers examine their assumptions and gain a more informed perspective on diversity in higher education.

Colleges and universities have made tremendous strides in diversifying and supporting diverse student bodies, but we owe it to the next generation of students to use research and data to guide policies and programs, not hunches and assumptions.

AN OVERVIEW

Who should read this book? Everyone! If you're a graduate student, academic, policy maker, educator, everyday citizen—come on in. One of my key goals is to highlight empirical studies on race in a way that is more accessible than the original peer-reviewed journal articles, which are primarily read by academics. Don't get me wrong, academic journals are riveting reading, but it can be tedious to comb through study after study, so I've done that work for you. I've also done my best to write this book in a conversational tone to make it accessible to a wide range of readers. So if you like this book, don't hesitate to pick up more copies for Mother's Day, Teacher Appreciation Week, Boxing Day—you get the picture. I owe tribute to books that have done a great job of bringing social science research to a broader audience, from the original *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* to *Freakonomics*.

Here's an overview of what *Race on Campus: Debunking Myths with Data* addresses.

Chapter 1:

Black Students and the Cafeteria—What's the Big Fuss?

Who's eating where in the cafeteria, and why do we care so much? This chapter talks about the campus cafeteria as a (mistaken) symbol of all that's wrong with race on college campuses and debunks the myth that students of color pervasively self-segregate during their college years. In fact, numerous studies show that students of color interact more across race and have more close interracial friendships than White students do. I also draw on research to show how organizations that seem like they

cultivate self-segregation and deter racial diversity, such as ethnic stu-
dent organizations, actually foster diverse interactions and significant
engagement for students. I use the concept of the availability heuristic to
help readers understand why students of color *seem* to be self-segregating
when, in reality, their experiences are more diverse and multifaceted.

Chapter 2:
Who's Really Self-Segregating? Sororities, Fraternities, and Religious Groups

On the flip side, organizations like fraternities and sororities are linked to
limited engagement with diversity for White students, and affluent White
students tend to have friendship groups that are the most homogeneous. I
discuss why this is so and why it's easy for us to overlook this, as compared
to the critical attention (and blame) focused on students of color. I also
look at religious student organizations, another community that is largely
divided by race, and explain why this dynamic is less problematic than
Greek life on many campuses.

Chapter 3:
Is Class-Based Affirmative Action the Answer?

One of the biggest questions in higher education asks, Is class-based affir-
mative action the answer to our problems? Some have argued for class-
based affirmative action over race-conscious admissions (the current
system at most selective institutions), portraying it as an either-or, mutu-
ally exclusive decision between considering class (and class alone) versus
considering race in combination with numerous factors, including class.[7]
I show that institutions need a variety of methods to attract diverse stu-
dent bodies, including approaches that are both race and class conscious,
and also demonstrate the need for institutions to have the *option* to con-
sider race, even in the twenty-first century. I highlight the limitations of
anchoring (a type of cognitive fallacy) to challenge the myth that affir-
mative action is benefiting the "rich Black student" (e.g., Malia Obama)

instead of a broader range of students who need an admissions system that considers race.

Chapter 4:
Why Affirmative Action Is Good for Asian Americans

In 2014 the anti–affirmative action movement filed a lawsuit against Harvard University, presenting a group of Asian American students with stellar test scores, outstanding grades, and strong extracurricular activities as the plaintiffs. I debunk the myth that Asian Americans are systematically discriminated against in selective college admissions and show how they benefit from the racially diverse student bodies that affirmative action can produce. I address how Thomas Espenshade and Alexandria Walton Radford's research on test scores linked with the probability of admission has been misunderstood and misrepresented and, thus, has contributed to the exploitation of the Asian American community by the anti–affirmative action movement.

Chapter 5:
Why the SAT and SAT Prep Fall Short

Despite the slight uptick in schools deciding to go SAT-optional, the SAT remains a dominant and hegemonic force in college admissions. The equity of the SAT is threatened by the pervasive inequality that permeates K–12 education, and students have deeply divergent opportunities to master the test. Many critics have focused on the disparities in access to test preparation services. Test prep agencies such as Kaplan and the Princeton Review—which charge hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars—boast that they increase students' scores by hundreds of points. I present research that should further raise eyebrows about the equity of the SAT. Not only do inequities exist in access to test prep services, but, counterintuitively, research suggests that overall gains associated with test prep are minimal and that not all students gain equally from test prep, even when they get the opportunity to take it. Troublingly, these inequities are linked to race.[8]

Overall, the differential benefits students experience from test prep adds to the evidence on how the SAT falls short as an "objective" and "reliable" measure.

Chapter 6:

The Problem of the "Problem of Mismatch"

Before his passing, Justice Antonin Scalia famously remarked about the possibility that African American students can excel at "a less-advanced school, a slower-track school where they do well." The so-called theory of mismatch—the idea that Black, Latinx, and Native American students are out of their league attending highly selective institutions and would do better at "slower-track" institutions—has been hotly debated in the media, as well as in pop social science books such as *David and Goliath*, by Malcolm Gladwell, and *Mismatch*, by Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor.[9] While Scalia's comments reflect gross stereotypes, Sander and Taylor claim to draw on empirical analysis to suggest that attending the most selective schools works against the interests of students of color.[10] Are they right? I engage with Sander and Taylor's work and detail the extensive body of research that refutes mismatch. Troublingly, the discourse on mismatch ignores the assets and savvy that students of color use to succeed in selective institutions of higher education. I also question why mismatch is rarely raised as a concern for the scores of White and Asian American college students who struggle in higher education.

HOW THEN SHOULD WE THINK? A CONCLUSION

In the concluding discussion I provide recommendations for how we can think better about race in higher education, given the pervasiveness of cognitive fallacies. With greater media attention allocated toward boosting socioeconomic diversity on college campuses, it is tempting to assume that universities have achieved their goals when it comes to racial diversity. However, the work of diversity—racial and otherwise—is far from

done. I explain how the trend toward prioritizing inclusion is important but falls short without continued attention to diversity and equity and how any emphasis on diversity needs to take place within a broader commitment to addressing inequality and racism, both past and present. Rather than thinking of diversity as a place or status that we can reach and then be done, I explain how the work of diversity and antiracism is never finished and how recognizing the lack of an endpoint can help us engage with the issues more honestly, authentically, and effectively.

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Diversity. It's something people increasingly recognize that we need, but we seem to be at odds over how to foster and support. It's one of our country's greatest strengths, but it's also a source of divisiveness and confusion. I grew up beating a drum for racial diversity and equity early. Growing up Korean American in a predominantly White suburb in Ohio always made me wonder, "Is there something more?" As a campus activist in Nashville during my college days, I got involved in efforts to recruit more students of color to our predominantly White campus. Eventually I realized I could study these things for a living, which led me to my career as an academic.

Part of my interest in writing this book is to share some of my own journey of realizing that I, an academic "diversity expert," have at times missed key pieces of data or jumped to conclusions on issues only to have my preconceptions overturned. Like everyone else on the planet, my System 1 is quite strong, and, really, I'm quite fond of it. At the same time, I know that my worldview and perspective are limited—I am an "n of 1"—and I've been proven wrong many times. However, there's something strangely satisfying about challenging your assumptions—if you're brave enough to try it and are willing to be surprised. I hope you'll join me for the ride.