CAN EDUCATION UNDERMINE REPRESENTATION?[1]

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In the United States, more women and people of color hold positions of power. The Supreme Court, Ivy League Universities, prestigious publications such as the New York Times, and even the Presidency are more diverse than they were 30 or even 10 years ago. Many will commend this trend because a greater diversity in those elite institutions leads to a greater representation of the interests, opinions, and viewpoints of groups or communities that have been historically marginalized. In fact, the importance of diversifying representation among the elites is one argument that is often invoked in favor of Affirmative Action. Those who hold positions of power in politics, healthcare, education, the media and so on have influence over policies and laws that affect us all. If we are to have better representation of the interests of those who have been historically marginalized in influencing those decisions, educational institutions that are a path into those positions should admit students from a diversity of backgrounds, in particular, from marginalized communities.

This democratic justification for affirmative action depends on three crucial ideas. The first is that elites should be more representative of the viewpoints of different sectors of society, in particular, historically oppressed communities. The second is that educational institutions can function as a pathway for members of oppressed communities to join that elite. The third is that members of oppressed communities who join the elite through this educational path will increase the representation of their communities' viewpoints. Underlying this argument is the assumption that the educational process will not significantly undermine the capacity of members of

oppressed communities to serve this representative function. In fact, one might even think that education can only enhance the capacities of such members to be representatives. This is the assumption I reconsider in this paper.

The central question is this: how does education for upward mobility affect the representative capacities of members of marginalized and oppressed groups? I will argue that though education in the selective colleges and universities that are a path to the elite enhances the skills and knowledge of members of oppressed groups in important ways, it can also have a negative effect on their capacity to be representatives of the communities from which they hail. By relying on social science evidence concerning the cultural mismatch between students from low-income minority communities and the culture at selective colleges and universities, I argue that access to and success in those educational institutions puts pressure on members of oppressed groups to conform to the dominant culture in those institutions and, thus, become less representative of their communities in crucial respects.

If my argument is right, it should lead us to reconsider the representative role that members of oppressed groups are thought to play among the elite. Simply admitting students with the hope that they will give voice to the concerns of the communities from which they hail is insufficient to foster more diverse representation. The solution to this problem requires broad and systemic change in institutions outside of the university—residential segregation, educational segregation in elementary and secondary school, to name a few. But, even against a background of non-ideal conditions, there are some steps universities can take to minimize the effect of cultural mismatch on the educational experiences of students from oppressed communities and to encourage research that brings the voices from those communities directly into public discourse.

Suspicion of the educated is a deep current in popular conservative thought in the United States.[2] There is a kernel of truth in this sentiment that my paper will aim to articulate, but before I do let me clarify two important ways in which my position is different from the kind of anti-intellectualism that some might mistake me for advancing. My argument does not seek to wholly undermine Affirmative Action. Educated people from marginalized communities are still better representatives of those communities than those who have never been part of such a community. What my argument does is highlight the limitations of this approach. My argument also does not lead to the conclusion that representatives of oppressed groups should be less educated. There are many good reasons for representatives to have deep specialized knowledge of their field. The benefits outweigh the costs. But, again, this does not mean that education that aims to increase the representation of oppressed communities among the elite isn't severely limited in the extent to which it genuinely diversifies the viewpoints represented in public discourse.

The problem, as I will argue, is that under conditions of severe injustice in which members of economically and racially privileged groups segregate into and dominate elite educational institutions, gaining deep specialized knowledge is not easily separable from the pressure to become culturally assimilated into the dominant class. Given the current *contingent* link between economic and racial privilege and access to selective educational institutions, the path to positions of power through education becomes a double-edged sword for members of oppressed communities. Bear in mind that if this argument is right, under more just social and economic conditions, educational institutions would not undermine representation in this way.

In Section I, I review the argument that supports using education as a vehicle to increase the representation of the viewpoints of oppressed communities among the elite. In Section II, I

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[2] For the classic analysis of this see Hofstadter (1963).

summarize the social science findings in favor of the cultural mismatch hypothesis. In Section III, I put the claims of the previous sections together to argue that elite education can make members of oppressed communities less representative in crucial respects. In Section IV, I consider a more promising notion of representation, but conclude that it doesn't ultimately fully address the concerns raised in the previous section. In section V, I suggest some alternative ways elite educational institutions can foster better representation. In Section VI, I consider objections. And in the final section, I reflect on the ways in which this problem is a result of non-ideal conditions that we should aim to change.

I.   Descriptive Representation and Education

Descriptive representatives are those who in virtue of sharing some relevant features with members of a group are able to represent some of the group's interests, concerns, or viewpoints. For example, a Black electoral representative in virtue of her race might share some experiences with other members of the Black community—racism, police violence, and so on—in such a way that she is better able to represent some of those interests than a representative who is not Black. Skeptics of descriptive representation argue that: (i) there is no principled way of drawing the relevant groups, (ii) there is no good reason to think that an individual in virtue of sharing certain qualities with members of a group is better able to represent their interests, and (iii) the groups that are generally invoked in this context—women, Blacks, Latinos, and so on—are generally too diverse to genuinely share a set of interests. In response, political philosophers and theorists have argued that: (i) we can specify groups in virtue of shared obstacles to accessing certain forms of power,[3] (ii) though being a member of a group is not sufficient to be a good representative of a

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[3] Phillips (1995).

group it does increase the likelihood that one will be better be able to represent those interest,[4] and (iii) we can acknowledge and affirm the heterogeneity of groups while representing some set of shared concerns.[5] For the purposes of this paper, I will accept that there is a legitimate argument that can be made in favor of descriptive representation.

In particular, I'm going to focus on the representation of low-income, often predominantly minority communities, in the United States.[6] I do so because this group is, arguably, one of the least-advantaged within this country and because my argument depends on empirical evidence concerning the impact of education on this particular kind of group.[7] Such communities fit many of the criteria for descriptive representation. Despite the diversity within these communities, many of its members will share experiences of poverty, failing schools, inadequate healthcare, violent policing, inadequate housing, and institutionalized racism. And these shared experiences give members of that group access to a shared set of concerns that need to be voiced in public discourse concerning poverty, education, healthcare, policing, and so forth. These communities face systematic and institutionalized barriers to political, economic, and social power—they are oppressed.

The literature on representation mostly has focused on the question of electoral representatives. Though that issue is an important one, in this paper I'm interested in the broader notion of representation. Journalists, managers, academics, consultants, researchers at think tanks, judges, doctors, and many other professionals have a strong influence on public discourse

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[4] Mansbridge (1999).

[5] Young (1990); Alcoff (1991); Young (1997).

[6] Even though the issues of race and class are separable, in point of fact, in the United States many low-income and working-class communities are also largely Black and Latino communities. However, much, though not all, of what I say can also be said about low-income rural White communities.

[7] The conclusions I reach could apply to many other groups here and elsewhere, but one has to look closely at the evidence in each case.

and the legislative process, yet they are not elected. Education is often the only avenue through which members of oppressed communities can enter these professions. Therefore, if we think that those positions of influence, which I call the elite, should include the perspectives of oppressed communities, then opening up access to elite institutions of higher education for members of those communities is one way of increasing their representation among the elite. Affirmative action is often justified on these political grounds, not merely on meritocratic or redistributive grounds.[8]

Elizabeth Anderson has advanced an influential version of such an argument. She argues that elites should be responsive to the interests of all sectors of society. This requires that they: (i) be knowledgeable of what those interests are, (ii) be motivated to serve and advocate on behalf of those interests, (iii) have the technical expertise to advance those interests, and (iv) have the ability to interact with people from different sectors of society.[9] Anderson argues that once we take this democratic requirement of responsiveness seriously, we must select membership into the elite from all sectors of society, including the least advantaged. The advantaged, Anderson claims, are not in a good position to serve this representative function because they tend to segregate themselves into neighborhoods and schools with others who are also advantaged. When elites are drawn primarily from the advantaged sectors of society, they will lack (i), (ii), and (iv) above. Even though some of these deficits could be improved through social science evidence of the interests of the least advantaged, Anderson argues that this might not be enough to adequately motivate the elites to serve those interests or to give them the epistemic access that those who have had first-person knowledge of being disadvantaged would have.[10] Therefore, it is

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[8] My argument does not weaken these other sources of justification for affirmative action.
[9] Anderson (2007).
[10] This argument intersects in important ways with work on epistemic injustice. See Fricker (2007).

better to make sure that the elites are themselves drawn from all sectors of society. She writes that: "While there is no guarantee that each elite drawn from the ranks of the disadvantaged will be motivated to help those of their group, the availability of the motivational path of personal identification in addition to charity makes this more likely."[11] It is important to note here that unlike elected representatives who choose to play this role and, arguably, incur an obligation in virtue of this, Anderson's argument relies on the claim that members of oppressed groups *are more likely* to represent those interests, not that they are obligated to do so. I return to this point in Section VI.

The argument thus far is this: Predominantly low-income minority communities are some of the least-advantaged groups in the United States. Their members share many experiences of oppression and they are underrepresented among those who hold power and influence in society. Education is often one of the few paths to such positions. When members of those marginalized communities enter university, they have first-person knowledge of the interests and concerns shared by many members of their communities and are more likely to be motivated to serve and advocate on behalf of those interests. At university, they develop the technical expertise to advance those interests and the ability to interact with members of other sectors of society that, given the reality of residential and educational segregation in the United States, they probably will not have encountered before they arrived to college. When those students enter the elite, they will satisfy Anderson's criteria and increase the likelihood that the voices of those communities will be represented in public discourse.

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[11] Anderson (2007: 611).

II.   Cultural Mismatch

Social scientists have recently shown a renewed, though cautious, interest in the ways in which culture plays a role in the entrenchment of disadvantage in oppressed communities. The caution stems from the ways in which cultural explanations of poverty have historically been misused and misrepresented in public discourse. Some have deployed them to depict poor Blacks and Latinos in ways that feed into problematic stereotypes of laziness and violence, while failing to acknowledge the diversity within those communities and the many values that are shared by the poor with those who are better off.[12] Others have taken cultural explanations to shift blame away from structural factors such as poverty, unequal educational resources, residential segregation, and institutionalized racism to the cultural 'deficiencies' of oppressed communities. But to accept that culture is one of the barriers in the path of upward mobility does not require us to deny that structural factors play a large and significant causal role, that there is cultural diversity within those communities, or that there is much that is shared across communities.

Many of these misconceptions stem from thinking of culture as a monolithic set of values that determine individual behavior.[13] Following sociologist Ann Swidler, we can instead think of culture as the different habits, repertoires, and styles that people use to interpret and frame their actions.[14] Culture provides us with shared frameworks through which we understand the world around us. Those frameworks might be shared with a variety of different groups depending on a myriad of factors such as class, ethnicity, geographic location, age, and so on. Furthermore, some of these frameworks might be inconsistent with each other, even within a community. And as

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[12] Much of this came in the wake of The Moynihan Report. For a recent reassessment of the report, see Geary (September 14, 2015).

[13] For a critique of the monolithic understanding of culture prevalent in political discussions of multiculturalism, see Phillips (2006).

[14] Swidler (1986).

individuals we can accept or reject different aspects of the different frameworks available to us, even as they help us understand our social world. For example, a young Latina who is growing up in New York will share some cultural frameworks with other Latinos growing up in America, some with other young women, and some with other New Yorkers. She probably will share many of those frameworks with other young Latinos growing up in her neighborhood in New York, that is, with those in her community.

The cultural mismatch hypothesis is the claim that in the United States there is a difference between the culture prevalent in middle-class, largely white, institutions such as selective universities, corporations, and middle-class workplaces and the culture prevalent in working-class or low-income communities. To reiterate, this is not to say that there is one monolithic culture in either the middle-class or working-class, or that there is no cultural variation within each of these communities, or that any one individual subscribes to all elements of the culture in which he or she grew up. But, if the evidence is right, it does mean that there are differences in culture that can pose barriers to entry into the institutions in which opportunities to move into the elite are found.

Children born into low-income, often minority, communities are more likely to lack the 'cultural capital' of the middle-class.[15] These differences could concern styles of interaction, for example, when and how to make eye contact, styles of dress, ways of speaking, and so on.[16] But some of these differences might go deeper and concern how we interact with authority figures such as teachers or doctors, how reliant we are on extended family, or how competitive we are.

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[15] The idea of cultural capital can be traced back to Bourdieu (1986) However, Bourdieu's discussion focuses on cultural knowledge (e.g. Opera, French Wine) that better explain the cultural barriers in the French context than the American. However, the germ of the idea of cultural capital has been reconceived by social scientists to suit the American context see Lareau and Weininger (2003).

[16] Programs that focus on preparing inner-city youth for the workplace often focus on changing some of these superficial styles of interaction. See Patterson and Rivers (2015).

Finally, there might be genuine disagreements concerning the relative importance of family, individual achievement, and financial success.

Psychologist Nicole Stephens and her colleagues have conducted several studies that lend support to the cultural mismatch hypothesis.[17] They argue that first-generation college students often arrive on campus with an interdependent cultural model. According to this model, students understand the self in relationship to the needs and interests of their community. In contrast, they suggest, college students whose parents have gone to college and are middle or upper class have an independent cultural model in which the self is understood as independent of others and free to act on individual preferences and interests. Many selective colleges, they argue, are organized around the independent model and, consequently, can be difficult places for students who come with an interdependent cultural model to navigate. Though the difference between these two cultural models seems more complex than the distinction between independent and interdependent models (for example, it doesn't explain the high achievement of some Asian communities who are thought to come from an interdependent cultural background), the research does suggest that first-generation college students confront different cultural barriers than their more privileged peers.[18]

These cultural differences appear to be malleable and affected by schooling and peer interaction.[19] Sociologist Anthony Jack studies the difference in college adjustment between low-

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[17] Stephens, Fryberg et al. (2012).
[18] Also see Armstrong and Hamilton (2013).
[19] They also appear to be partially explained by the parenting styles to which children are exposed. The influential work of sociologist Annette Lareau on the parenting styles of working-class and middle-class families shows important differences in how working-class and middle-class children grow up. She argues that middle-class families spend a lot of resources cultivating their children's development by being involved in their schoolwork, signing them up for extracurricular activities that cultivate their individual talents, reading to their children, and reasoning with them. In contrast, working-class families focus on supporting their children's development by making sure they have their basic needs meet, but they are not as involved in structuring their children's time or cultivating their individual talents in the way that middle-class families do. Whereas middle-class children are being educated to interact with the world of middle-

income students who went to regular public school, the Doubly Disadvantaged, as opposed to low-income students who went to elite private schools through scholarships, the Privileged Poor.[20] His work offers a fascinating insight into the difference that one's social experience in high-school can make to one's college experience. The Privileged Poor, despite sharing similar socioeconomic backgrounds with the Doubly Disadvantaged, find college less alienating and are more at ease socially. This can be explained by the socialization that happens while at private school but also by that which happens outside of school. The Privileged Poor report spending most of their time socializing in the largely White, middle-class neighborhoods in which their private school friends live. One Privileged Poor student reported not even knowing who her neighbors are because she spends so much time with her private school friends.[21] Furthermore, these two different groups of students have different levels of facility in interacting with authorities such as professors and administrators. The Privileged Poor find it easier to develop relationships with professors and report more positive interactions with administrators and faculty than the Doubly Disadvantaged.[22]

If the evidence presented so far is right, cultural mismatch is one barrier that students from disadvantaged communities face in entering and succeeding in educational institutions from which the elite are often drawn. The evidence also suggests that as students make their way through the sorts of educational institutions that feed into elite positions in society, they begin to understand, internalize, and become adept at negotiating the cultural norms that dominate

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class institutions, in particular, authority figures, working-class children are developing socially alongside other working-class children in a less structured environment. Economic factors play a role in this process. Working-class families often do not have the time or resources to invest in the cultivation of their children. Furthermore, because working-class families tend to live in neighborhoods with other working-class or low-income families, their children are much less likely to interact with middle-class children. See Lareau (2003).

[20] Jack (2014). Also see Khan (2011) for an analysis of the socializing that takes place at elite private schools.

[21] Jack (2015: 89).

[22] Jack (Forthcoming).

middle-class institutions.[23] Many of them become increasingly geographically and socially isolated from the communities in which they grew up. The question I now turn to consider is whether gaining these cultural competencies changes the features that make these upwardly mobile students potentially good representatives.

III.   Can Education Undermine Representation?

In order to make the argument that education can undermine important features that make the upwardly mobile representative, we must proceed carefully. First, my argument rests on empirical evidence which is subject to disconfirmation.[24] Second, we shouldn't take the evidence to show that the upwardly mobile fully 'assimilate' into a monolithic American middle-class culture while losing a monolithic working-class minority culture.[25] Third, we shouldn't assume that this theoretical framework can explain any one individual's cultural experiences or life trajectory—the ethnographic evidence suggests commonalities and variation in the experiences of upwardly mobile students. (I come back to this in the following section.) Finally, we should not diminish the role that socioeconomic status continues to play in hindering the paths of the upwardly mobile.[26] Culture interacts in complicated ways with the background structure of income inequality, residential segregation, and educational access. This is a paper in non-ideal theory—it takes some factors for granted that are contingent and unjust.

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[23] There are limits to this process, in particular when it comes to career choice, see Beasley (2012).

[24] One might argue that structural barriers are built into the very notion of a representative elite and so not subject to disconfirmation. What is subject to disconfirmation is whether the cultural barriers at stake here are ones that replicate class, racial, and ethnic hierarchies. It is these barriers that are the focus of my discussion not the ones that are built into the very notion of an elite. Thanks to Emilee Chapman for urging me to clarify this point.

[25] This is especially true when the subjects in question are children whose identities are being shaped through their educational experiences.

[26] Bowles, Gintis et al. (2005).

What the evidence does appear to show is that in order for students to more easily access the educational and employment opportunities available to those better off, there is significant pressure on them to adapt to the cultural expectations of elite institutions.[27] Furthermore, given the reality of socioeconomic and racial segregation in housing and schools, this often requires that the upwardly mobile spend significant amount of time away from the communities from which they hail.[28] And, when they have families of their own, it is very likely that they will move to neighborhoods that reflect their new social class.[29] But does this pressure change them in ways that matter to their capacity to represent their communities in public discourse?

The cognitive, social, and cultural skills gained by members of oppressed communities as they are educated for elite positions makes them better representatives in some crucial respects. Students gain the technical expertise required to pursue careers in politics, academia, medicine, or journalism. This knowledge is necessary for them to be able to advance their own individual interests and goals, but it is also makes them better at representing and advocating for their communities' interests should they chose to do so. Furthermore, as Jane Mansbridge argues, the interests of a community in matters of policy are often uncrystalized. Most of us do not know enough about Carbon Taxes or the FDA approval process to have well-formed interests about those policies. In such cases, "the best way to have one's most important substantive interests represented is often to choose a representative whose descriptive characteristics match one's own on the issues one expects to emerge."[30] Education gives upwardly mobile members of oppressed

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[27] Neckerman, Carter et al. (1999).
[28] See Orfield, Bachmeier et al. (1997); Fry and Taylor (2012); Orfield, Kucsera et al. (2012).
[29] See Neckerman, Carter et al. (1999); Wilson (2012). Although it should be noted that racial segregation continues to be an important factor, for a review of the literature see Charles (2003).
[30] Mansbridge (1999: 644).

communities the knowledge and skills they need to be experts when advocating for the interests of their communities.

However, education into the elite also raises three sources of concern for the representative function of upwardly mobile members of oppressed communities. The first is that the existing demographics in those institutions can lead racial minorities to feel pressure to silence some of their interests for the sake of 'fitting in' into an educational institution or workplace. The second is that education in those institutions can lead to a genuine change in interests and, crucially, perspective. The third, and related point, is that education for upward mobility often requires that students literally distance themselves from their communities in ways that changes their position with respect to structures of oppression.

a.   Silencing Perspectives

Stereotype threat is the anxiety that comes from fear of confirming a stereotype. Claude Steele and his collaborators have shown that this anxiety leads women to underperform in situations in which they are stereotyped as not as capable—math and science—and Blacks to underperform in situations in which they are stereotyped as not as capable—academics.[31] Steele writes that "even when black, Latino, and Native American students overcome other disadvantages in trying to gain parity with white and Asian classmates, they face the further pressure of stereotype and identity threats."[32] There are many consequences of stereotype threat for the academic performance of students of color and women. But one important consequence for the purposes of this paper is that students are under pressure not to call attention to their racial background and this, in turn, can lead them to fail to speak up for the interests of the

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[31] Steele (2011).
[32] Steele (2011: 158-159).

communities from which they hail, even when those viewpoints are not adequately represented in the classroom or, eventual, workplace. For example, Kathryn Neckerman and her collaborators suggest that "middle-class blacks may use conversational ploys, assume interests or demeanor to put white acquaintances or co-workers at ease."[33] Educational institutions and workplaces in which minorities are afraid of confirming stereotypes can lead those minorities to silence or edit themselves in ways that are detrimental to their representative function.

b.   Changing Interests and Perspectives

One's position in society is partially shaped by one's skills, how those skills are valued in the labor market, and one's economic resources. Education alters this (and much more, one hopes) by bestowing knowledge and skills on students that make them more valuable in the labor market. Therefore, at an obvious level, upward mobility through education changes students' positions by changing their economic class. This can have a very direct effect on their interests and motivation in a way that potentially undermines their capacity to fulfill the criteria suggested by Anderson for representative elites, but might be an unavoidable consequence of gaining an education. What we need is to disentangle those changes that stem directly from developing the skills and knowledge that are central to education, from those that are the result of the phenomenon described in the previous section.

For example, a student who studies to become a doctor does, in virtue of this, change her economic position and, thereby, some of her interests and projects, but she also gains medical skills and knowledge that make her a better representative for her community. She can now advocate for healthcare access and prevention, for example, on the basis of her authority as a medical expert. Of course, there is the potential that even if our imagined student cared about

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[33] Neckerman, Carter et al. (1999: 953).

gaining a medical education in order to advocate for her community initially, she might start to care more about her own individual career advancement as she makes it through medical school. It is unavoidable that education might have this effect merely by increasing her knowledge of what life paths, projects, and goals she can pursue. But many of these potential changes in her interests and goals stem directly from the education required to gain the expertise that is essential to her education.[34]

It has been pointed out in the literature on representation that there is, in principle, no reason why the interests of historically marginalized groups cannot be represented by others—what matters is that there is someone who does advocate for those interests.[35] One way of pushing against this charge, following Anderson, is to suggest that members of oppressed groups, even those whose personal interests have changed through education, are more likely to be motivated to advocate for the interests of the community into which they were born. Evidence lends support to this claim.[36] So, even though some students from oppressed communities might care less about advocating for their community, admitting those students still increases the likelihood that some of them will retain the motivation to work on behalf of those interests.

Another way of pushing back against the representation skeptic, following Iris Marion Young, is to suggest that members of oppressed groups are more likely to have epistemic access to the perspective of that community.[37] Social perspectives are defined as "the way people interpret issues and events because of their structural social locations. Structural social locations arise from

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[34] Note, however, that it is not necessarily linked since in a country with different economic policies, for example, one in which the remuneration of doctors wasn't subject to a free market, these skills might not differentiate her economic position from others in her community to a very large extent.

[35] Pitkin (1967).

[36] Beasley (2012).

[37] It should be noted that Young argues forcefully that representation is inherently limited. I see my argument as sympathetic with hers.

group differentiations that exist in a society, collective attributions that have a cultural and practical meaning for the way people interact or the status that they have."[38] But though this aspect of representation is crucial, it is also potentially the most liable to be undermined by the contingent forces that result from cultural mismatch.

When one is a member of an oppressed community, one shares a social location with others of that community in so far as one is similarly positioned with respect to economic, political, and social structures. It is in virtue of sharing this position that one can be taken to share some elements of the community's perspectives and, thus, do a better job of representing that community than someone who is not similarly positioned with respect to those structures. Someone from an oppressed community who sees her interests changing through education might still be able to advocate for the interests of her community even if those interests are no longer her own. However, sharing a perspective requires that one be similarly positioned with respect to the structures of oppression and understand the world sufficiently similarly, for example, by sharing cultural framework. If, as I have suggested, education for upward mobility changes a student's cultural framework, as she develops the ability to understand, navigate, and adapt to the cultural expectations of middle-class institutions, then it is changing her position with respect to the structures of oppression in important ways than go beyond a change in interests.[39] The effect of this is subtle and, crucially, only contingently tied to gaining deep specialized knowledge of her field.

For example, our medical student might think that certain resources are available to members of her community without noticing the ways in which those resources are only available if one can navigate the bureaucratic institutions that control access to those resources. Since she

[38] Young (1997: 365).
[39] For the distinction between interests and expertise see Young (1990)

has learned how to talk to those in authority in such institutions, she doesn't see them as inaccessible in the way that members of the community from where she comes from might. Or she might come to see the availability of certain courses of action using an independent cultural frame—whether she could apply to that college or fellowship—and not using an interdependent cultural frame—whether her family can afford to have her go to college.

It should be note that sometimes this cultural change might be for the better. We should not shy away from saying that as liberals we can criticize some aspects of the culture of the oppressed or the non-oppressed.[40] To paraphrase Stephen Macedo, we need not endorse a liberalism without spine to see the problem I have raised here. If the behavior, values, or cultural frames at stake are contrary to central liberal values or to developing the dispositions needed to maintain a civic society—for example, violence, degradation of others on the basis of gender or race, or intolerant religious fundamentalism—then the transformative power of education is for the better. If it minimizes the representative capacities of those individuals, so much the worse for representation. We don't need to have the views of the intolerant, violent, or racist represented in public discourse. Sometimes education changes students because they come to genuinely see the value of tolerance, equality, or liberty.

However, the communities I am concerned with here are not ones that have cultures that are generally at odds with liberal values. In this case, the mismatch has to do with how to interact with authority figures, to navigate institutions, to assert oneself and have one's needs acknowledge, and, perhaps, the relative value one places on community as opposed to individual advancement.[41] The cultural mismatch is not like that of the intolerant religious fundamentalist and the liberal; it is not a product of a substantial clash over fundamental political values or the

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[40] Macedo (2000); Callan (2004).
[41] I have addressed this set of issues in Morton (2011, 2014).

place of religion in the public sphere. Rather the mismatch is the product of unjust racial and economic segregation. The pressure to adopt the culture in those cases is not generally due to its being better on substantial normative grounds, but to its being instrumentally beneficial in accessing educational opportunities and economic advancement.[42]

It's difficult to separate the changes in interests and perspective that are due to those aspects that are intrinsic to education—the knowledge, skills, and, potentially, values that are gained, those that are tied to the labor market value of one's education—the disparities in income between the elite college educated and those who live in low-income communities, from those that are the result of the cultural forces discussed in the previous section. The recent social science research gives us a way of honing in on this third aspect. And this third aspect matters a great deal (though not exclusively) to whether elite educational institutions can live up to the democratic goals many of them have set-up for themselves by embracing diversity in admissions.

c.   Distancing

Gaining access to the opportunities available to the middle-class often requires that a student start spending time where those who are middle-class live, study, and work. Given the reality of economic and racial segregation in the United States, this can involve a literal distancing from one's community, family, and friends.[43] Take, for example, the enthusiasm over "No Excuses" charter schools such as the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) and the Uncommon Schools Network. These programs focus on high achievement and strict discipline. Some of them have had remarkable success in increasing the achievement of low-income minority students in

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[42] I discuss why grit and perseverance are not subject to this critique in Morton (2014).
[43] See footnote 27.

standardized tests and college admission.[44] Though there is much to be said for the pedagogical

achievements of such programs, part of the mechanism through which they achieve those goals is

by, in effect, isolating students from their communities through a longer school year, longer

school days, and Saturday classes.[45] In fact, young people growing up in poor neighborhoods who

strive to be upwardly mobile will often withdraw from their neighborhood, in many cases,

encouraged by their parents.[46]

Evidence suggests that literally moving oneself away from poverty and closer to where

better opportunities reside can be an effective strategy. Studies of voucher programs that enable

poor black families to move to an integrated suburban neighborhood find that doing so

significantly improves their lives in a variety of domains including employment and education.[47]

There is substantial pressure on students to leave their communities and head towards where

opportunities for advancement reside such as elite educational institutions. However, in doing so,

students change their position with respect to oppressive structures. This makes them dissimilar

from others in their community in ways connected to the change of perspective described in the

previous section.

I have argued that there are several forces at play in elite educational institutions in the

United States. The first makes students who have gone through the educational process better

representatives. Students learn the necessary skills and knowledge to become experts at their

professional domains. This expertise can allow them to better pursue and advocate for the

interests of their community. The second makes students who have gone through the educational

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[44] See Cremata, Davis et al. (2013). Although some argued that they do not do as good of a job of educating students into the cultural expectations of the dominant class, for a critique see Golann (2015).
[45] Mathews (2009)
[46] Edin, Rosenblatt et al. (2015).
[47] Rosenbaum (1991). It should be noted that this program was a challenge for some families because they still felt tied to their communities back home. See de Souza Briggs, Popkin et al. (2010).

process potentially worse representatives. Students are in social contexts in which success often requires them to silence their group-based interests, to change their perspectives with respect to oppressive structures, and to literally distance themselves from their community. This confluence of factors is contingent on the way in which access to educational resources interacts with race and socioeconomic class. I return to this point in the final section.

IV.   Rethinking Representation

I have made the case that there is pressure on students from oppressed communities to adapt culturally to succeed in elite educational institutions and gain employment opportunities. This process can negatively impact their capacity as representatives by putting pressure on them to silence their interests, genuinely changing their perspectives, or through distancing. Of course, students react to these pressures in different ways. This kind of cultural process is not deterministic. Some decide to make a concerted effort to maintain a sense of ethnic, racial, or cultural identity,[48] while some mournfully lose their attachments to their family and home community.[49] But evidence suggests that what many students who are successful in their path towards upward mobility do is adopt a form of 'cultural code-switching,' that is, they adapt to the cultural norms and expectations of the context they are in.[50] In their home communities, they switch how they talk, what they say, and how they interact with others, while at school or work they adapt to the ways of talking and interacting of the White middle-class.[51] These 'Cultural

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[48] This is the approach advocated by Carter (1993). But his focus there is on maintaining a sense of racial identity. Whether the approach he advocates is really available in the case we are concerned with here, where class and race interact in powerful ways, is a matter of some debate.
[49] This is the controversial argument made in Rodriguez (1983).
[50] See Carter (2005).
[51] Prudence Carter, in her ethnographic research of urban Black youth, observes that: "Inside the school or the office, [Cultural Straddlers] read the different cultural codes and exchange their own 'black' capital for dominant forms to signal 'intelligence' and similarity to the people in charge who might have devalued their black cultural capital. Once they return home, however, many exchanged their dominant cultural

Straddlers', as sociologist Prudence Carter calls them, suggest a possible model through which to address the problems raised in the previous section. [52] If they can maintain relationships with members from oppressed communities while participating in the elite, they might do a better job of representing those interests and viewpoints.

Suzanne Dovi persuasively argues that we need further criteria to assess descriptive representatives than simply whether they share some features (e.g. class, race, geographic origin, etc.) with members of oppressed communities. Descriptive representatives are preferable when they have a 'mutual relationship' with disposed groups.[53] She suggests that our assessments of descriptive representatives should consider whether they "reach out to (or distance themselves from) historically disadvantaged groups."[54] Cultural Straddlers would seem to fit the bill.

There are two central problems with this potentially tidy solution. The first is that it fails to acknowledge the ways in which educational institutions make it difficult for Cultural Straddlers to maintain relationships with their communities. The second is that it doesn't adequately account for the ways in which Cultural Straddlers are still limited in how representative they can be of the communities in which they grew up.

Educational institutions often do not facilitate the relationships between the upwardly mobile and their home communities. There is substantial evidence that low-income minority students are much more likely to graduate if they attend an elite residential college.[55] The residential aspect is thought to play a role in their graduation rates, but also contributes to students' isolation from their communities. Furthermore, because educational and career

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capital for the black capital and their communities' acceptance of them as culturally competent and authentically black." (2005: 63).

[52] Morton (2013).

[53] Dovi (2002).

[54] Dovi (2002: 736).

[55] Bowen, Chingos et al. (2009).

opportunities are to be found in spaces dominated by the more advantaged, Cultural Straddlers have to spend more and more time in those spaces than in their own communities. This has an effect, as one of the Privileged Poor students Jack interviews explains: "You get in places and you start to feel privileged. Especially with me coming from boarding school. I've already been infected...You get spoiled. You don't even think about it. Sometimes I don't even think of myself as a low-income student."[56] If educational institutions are to play a role in increasing the representation of all sectors of society in the elite, they will have to think more carefully about how they can accommodate and facilitate relationships between students and their communities rather than perpetuate a model in which success comes at the expense of those relationships.

Second, this model doesn't address concerns about silencing. Cultural Straddlers navigate both cultures by adapting to the context. This is a successful strategy, in part, because Straddlers keep some of their preferences, ways of talking, and interests hidden when they are in educational institutions dominated by a different culture. As Charlotte, a middle-class black woman quoted by Karyn Lacy, articulates it: "We live in this world...you have two faces. So you know how to present yourself in the white world, and you present yourself in the black world as yourself."[57] Therefore, even if Cultural Straddlers maintain some of the interests and perspectives tied to their group membership, this will not help address the worries about representation if they are unable to voice them outside of their communities.

I have argued that students from oppressed communities feel pressure to assimilate into the cultural expectations of the middle-class in order to gain opportunities. Members from oppressed communities who respond to this pressure by code-switching resist some of these effects, but they do not resist them entirely. Education has transformed them in a variety of ways,

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[56] Quoted in Jack (2014: 466).
[57] Lacy (2007: 91).

many of them for the better, but the limitations that this transformation imposes on their role as representatives needs to be recognized by educational institutions. In particular, when those institutions point to diversity in admissions as a democratic imperative without adequately thinking of what happens inside the institution itself as being deleterious to representation.

V.   Fostering Representation

The ways in which elite educational institutions undermine the representative capacity of members of oppressed groups is not necessary. Residential segregation along class and race play a significant factor in deepening the cultural divide that emerges between the educated and those who remain in oppressed communities. There are limits to what educational institutions can do to remedy problems that lie outside of their walls, but there are steps they can take to diminish those effects. My argument has been based on empirical evidence concerning the role of cultural mismatch in higher education, but much more work needs to be done to discover how this effect can be mitigated. What I say here, therefore, is tentative.

What is clear is that education institutions need to think beyond admissions when thinking about how to foster representation among the elite. This would involve taking steps to minimize silencing, minimize the effect of cultural mismatch on students' academic success, and offering support to students who want to maintain relationships with their communities. For example, to what extent students feel silenced is partially a question of numbers. There is evidence that after a critical mass of one's group is reached stereotype threat is somewhat mitigated.[58] The pressure to edit or silence one's viewpoint is arguably less strong when this point has been reached. Therefore, elite educational institutions should aim to increase the

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[58] Steele (2011: 135)

representation of such groups among students, faculty, and administration in order to minimize the effect of stereotype threat.

But universities also need to think more carefully how the gap between students' communities and elite college campuses affects students' experiences. One controversial way of contending with this issue is to bring cultural difference to the fore. Nicole Stephens and her collaborators have devised a number of such interventions that appear promising.[59] But doing so can be a delicate and potentially divisive issue. Much more work needs to be done to find out what approach works best.[60] Students do not only arrive at college with potentially diverse perspectives, but with significant relationships to their communities. Therefore, we should also consider acknowledging and supporting these relationships rather than ignoring them.

Universities can also address the issue of representation by fostering research that brings the voices of members of marginalized communities into public discourse more directly. Sociologists such as Prudence Carter, Alice Goffman, and Anthony Jack bring the voices of members of low-income minority communities into academic discourse. They serve as intermediaries who don't attempt to supplant their own voices for those of members of those communities. Cultural Straddlers can play a crucial role here, if they so choose, as they are more likely to be in a better position to play this intermediary role. But members of university communities that do not come from oppressed communities can also play this intermediary role if they are in a position to do so.[61] Universities can do a lot more to encourage and support

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[59] See Stephens, Hamedani et al. (2014)

[60] For a fascinating study of the different ways in which elite universities deal with diversity, see Warikoo and Deckman (2014)

[61] It might be difficult for many of them to do this given cultural mismatch and the history of mistrust by members of oppressed communities of those in positions of power. Alice Goffman's work in Philadelphia provides an example of this kind of work and of the perils of doing so. See Goffman (2015)

research that facilities *direct* avenues of communication between the elite and oppressed communities.[62]

VI. Objections

Before I turn to concluding remarks, let us consider three objections to my argument.

a. Overvaluing Diversity

It might be suggested that in so far as education is pushing students towards a common culture, this is to be celebrated rather than lamented. Having a common culture serves an important role in fostering civic society.[63] The objector might suggest that underlying my argument is an appeal to a misleading liberal neutrality that essentializes the culture of groups and reinforces problematic divisions in society. Though I do believe that a commitment to liberalism should make us wary of blithely accepting appeals to the need for a homogenous culture, one need not accept this claim to see the force of my argument.

I have made the case, on the basis of social science evidence, that the cultural mismatch between oppressed communities and middle-class educational institutions and workplaces is a reality. I have not assumed that this division is good. My point simply has been that educational institutions in which individual members of oppressed communities are syphoned off into the elite perpetuate this division rather than undermine it. This, I have suggested, makes the elites problematically unrepresentative. Therefore, those who insist on the need for a common culture should focus on changing the sources of this cultural mismatch—residential segregation on the

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[62] Another model is provided by Community-based participatory research.
[63] See Macedo (2000: Chapter 1)

basis of class and race, unequal access to quality schooling, and the lack of truly common schools at the K-12 level—rather than on defending assimilation of the few into the culture of the elite.

b. No Obligation to Represent

I have been assuming throughout that those members from oppressed communities who enter into elite educational institutions are those who are best suited to play a representative role and, thereby, make public discourse and political decision more inclusive of the perspectives of oppressed communities. However, it might be argued that members of oppressed communities have no special obligation to act as representatives of those communities.[64] The democratic argument in favor of increasing access to elite positions for the oppressed relies on the thought that it is more *likely* that elites will be representative if they include members of oppressed communities. Without this premise, the whole idea of the democratic importance of education as a path to diversifying the perspectives in the elite is dead in the water.[65]

Nonetheless, we must bear in mind that in evaluating how representative a group is are we are making comparisons based on likely outcomes. Elites who are only drawn from the privilege sectors of society are the least likely to be representative of a diversity of perspectives; elites who include those drawn from oppressed sectors of society are more likely to be better on this score. My argument has been that educational institutions can also play a role in making members from oppressed groups less representative than they otherwise might be. We should recognize that increasing the diversity of the elites through educational institutions, which often replicate unjust power asymmetries, is a limited fix. In recognizing those limitations, we need to rethink the role

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[64] See Cudd (2006)

[65] Although I have given us reason to be cautious about how this mechanism works given the economic and social forces at play in educational institutions, I do not take myself to have made an argument that undermines the thought that some diversity is better than none. Furthermore, nothing I have said undermines other arguments to admit members of oppressed communities—on the basis of reparations for past wrongs or equal access to educational resources.

that we presume members of oppressed communities can play, but we should not reject the goal of having a more inclusive and representative elite. I have suggested various ways that educational institutions can encourage this goal by thinking more carefully about what happens within their walls after the work of admissions is done. It seems clear to me that the democratic (and other) benefits of educating some members of oppressed communities into positions of influence and power is outweighed by the concerns I have raised here as long as we recognize the limitations.

c.   Changing Background Injustice

Finally, one might reject this whole approach because one thinks we should instead focus on changing the economic and political structures that lead to inequality rather than looking to elite educational institutions to mitigate its effects. This point is particular apt given that it is non-elite educational institutions that are doing much of the work of educating members of oppressed communities.[66] However, given the current trends in hiring among the elite and the way that elite educational institutions feed into those jobs, there is still a question of how to diversify the perspectives represented among the elite.[67] There is much about the critique of the broader system to which I am sympathetic, but it's not clear to me how we get from here to there without having increased representation of the perspectives of the oppressed in public discourse.

VII.   Conclusion

Mansbridge suggests that descriptive representation, in political office, is particularly important when there is a history of dominance and subordination that breeds mistrust in members of some groups. In such cases, the descriptive representative who has shared "a set of

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[66] For a thoughtful counterpoint to the focus on elite universities, see Blum (Forthcoming)
[67] See Rivera (2015)

common experiences and the outward signs of having live through these experiences"[68] is better able to communicate and restore trust with members of those historically oppressed communities. However, when elite educational institutions function both as a path to opportunities and as a way to syphon off the most talented away from their communities, trust is imperiled. Consider the distrust voiced by a resident and coach at a Newark school who says: "Those private schools tell parents negative things about our district schools to lure your sons away. They want to take all the talented kids out. Stay home! Newark needs you!"[69] The distrust here is complex. It's not distrust of education itself, but rather of an educational system that syphons off the talented.

Educational institutions are complex human organizations. Ideally they function to develop deep knowledge and expertise. But they are also a reflection of the unjust power relationships that exist outside of their walls. This makes education a double-edged sword for members of oppressed communities. It is important to understand the role that structural factors play here. Residential segregation on the basis of class and race, lack of opportunities for middle-class jobs in low-income communities, underfunded and chronically failing school systems within those communities, and a fractured relationship with the police and other public authorities all play a role in exacerbating the gulf that students have to cross in order to access educational opportunities for advancement.[70] Furthermore, these factors also play a role in keeping the few who are upwardly mobile on the other side of that gulf once they have made it.

Ideally, educational institutions would be able to carry out the function of developing students' talents, knowledge, and expertise without replicating unjust power relationships. Under

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[68] Mansbridge (1999: 641)
[69] Quoted in Russakoff (2015: 169)
[70] Anderson (2010)

more just structural conditions, educational institutions could better play this function. Under the unjust conditions we are in, educational institutions play a much more ambivalent role in the upward trajectory of the few members of oppressed communities who can gain entrance into the elite. The tragic reality is that for many families in oppressed communities the highest aspiration they can have for a child is that she will distance herself, literally and metaphorically, from their community.

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