Epistemic Exclusion: A Theory for Understanding Racism in Faculty Research Evaluations

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Despite institutional efforts, growth in the number of faculty of color has largely plateaued, limiting research innovation and other benefits of diversity. In this article, we seek to understand structural barriers to faculty equity by (a) detailing a theory of epistemic exclusion within academia and (b) applying the theory of epistemic exclusion to the specific context of faculty departmental reviews of scholarly research (e.g., annual review, promotion and tenure review). Epistemic exclusion is a form of scholarly devaluation that is rooted in disciplinary biases about the qualities of rigorous research and identity-based biases about the competence of marginalized group members. These biases work in tandem to systemically and disproportionately exclude marginalized scholars (e.g., people of color, women) from the academy. In the context of faculty departmental reviews, epistemic exclusion can happen in formal systems of evaluation through criteria, metric, and application exclusion. It can also occur informally during interpersonal interactions and communications through legitimacy, contribution, and comprehension exclusion. In this article, we detail each of these types of exclusion, how they may interact with each other, and their consequences. We assert that epistemic exclusion threatens the diversification of academia and offer suggestions for equitable evaluation practices and reducing epistemic exclusion within higher education broadly.

Public Significance Statement
Epistemic exclusion in academia is a type of scholarly devaluation rooted in disciplinary biases about rigorous scholarship and identity-based biases about marginalized group members. This structural bias has a disproportionately negative impact on marginalized scholars and occurs in the evaluation of faculty research through formal and informal processes.

Keywords: epistemic exclusion, faculty diversity, higher education, research evaluation, bias

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Traditionally, institutions of higher learning were exclusionary spaces, predominantly serving affluent White men (Thelin, 2011). Over time, the values of higher education have shifted to be accountable to the needs of a broader and more diverse public. Consistent with these changes, contemporary expectations are that institutions of higher education serve vital functions for the public, such as fostering an educated populace with the critical thinking skills to be engaged members of society and creating a more equitable society by supporting research that addresses social problems and seeks solutions that improve the human condition (McArthur, 2011; McMahon, 2021). Faculty diversity is crucial to meeting these goals, as it promotes research innovation, creative problem solving, and the academic success of an increasingly diverse student body (Goulden et al., 2011; Hofstra et al., 2020; Stout et al., 2018). Despite these benefits, the innovative research that faculty from marginalized groups[1] contribute to the institution is less likely to be rewarded in academia. For instance, Hofstra et al. (2020) found that relative to majority students, dissertations authored by minority (e.g., underrepresented) students often make more innovative contributions to the literature, but these students' contributions are discounted within academic settings (e.g., novel contributions are taken up less often by others; these authors are less likely to be selected for faculty research positions). To reap the full benefit of inclusion for marginalized faculty, it is essential that institutions of higher

education adapt to embrace these faculty and their work rather than expecting scholars to assimilate to scholarly norms that routinely and historically generate exclusions.

For these reasons, universities have been working toward increasing faculty diversity, often through interventions designed to recruit more faculty from marginalized racial groups. Despite these efforts, growth in the number of faculty from these groups (e.g., Black, Latinx, and Native American faculty) has plateaued (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, 2021—e.g., 23% of all faculty were faculty of color in 2016 and only 26% in 2020), with only modest improvements in faculty representation, particularly among higher ranks (e.g., relatively lower numbers of full professors of color [21%] compared to White professors [79%][2]; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). To understand this lack of progress, many scholars have pointed to racism within higher education that leads scholars of color to experience many forms of mistreatment including tokenism, incivility, microaggressions, and other forms of bias and discrimination (e.g., Niemann, 2011; Turner et al., 2008). However, we argue that efforts to recruit and retain faculty from marginalized groups may additionally be undermined by systemic practices that continue to exclude their scholarship in ways that impede their success in the academy.

To understand exclusion via systemic practices, it is important to understand structural factors—policies, practices, and norms—that may create barriers to equity. A key structural practice relates to evaluation processes, which include, but are not limited to, hiring, promotion, publishing, and awarding of honors and grants. In this article, we examine *epistemic exclusion* in the evaluation of scholarly work, specifically within two contexts: formal faculty departmental reviews (e.g., annual review) and informal, interpersonal interactions involving department colleagues. Although some exclusion based on epistemic concerns may be justified, we focus on epistemic exclusion that is unwarranted, meaning that the devaluation is often contrary to the quality of the work and how the work is perceived in the discipline outside of the scholar's department. Furthermore, we define this type of

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[1] We use the terms "marginalized scholars," "marginalized faculty," and "faculty from marginalized groups" to refer to faculty who self-identify as being a member of any marginalized social identity group (e.g., Black person, woman, sexual minority).

[2] As a comparison, the 2022 U.S. Census Bureau (2022) population estimates indicate that 58.9% of individuals are "White alone, not Hispanic or Latino."

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scholarly devaluation as rooted in the disciplinary biases of a field about the qualities of rigorous and valuable research (e.g., quantitative vs. qualitative, theoretical vs. applied) and identity-based biases (e.g., stereotypes) about the competence and legitimacy of marginalized group members (Settles et al., 2020, 2021). These two biases may work together to systemically and disproportionately exclude marginalized scholars from the academy. And, although epistemic exclusion is a manifestation of racism within academia, epistemic exclusion is distinct in that it assails both the faculty's scholarship and marginalized identities they may hold, including those beyond race (e.g., being a woman or sexual minority). We suggest that the limited impact of faculty diversification efforts may be partially due to epistemic exclusion in the systems of evaluation operating at multiple career stages—from limited hiring of early career marginalized scholars to a revolving door of faculty from marginalized groups who are not retained and/or promoted. Accordingly, we focus on epistemic exclusion in an effort to address the structural systems that create a disconnect between the stated goals and values of universities and the evaluation of scholarly work conducted by faculty hired to advance those goals and values.

To better understand some of the systemic barriers to faculty diversification within higher education, the current article has two primary aims. First, we detail our theory of epistemic exclusion in academia and how it affects evaluation processes in academic systems generally. Our past research indicates that the theory applies across disciplines (Settles et al., 2019, 2020, 2021); as such, in this article, we talk about epistemic exclusion across academic fields while offering several examples from the field of psychology. Second, we apply the theory of epistemic exclusion to the specific context of faculty departmental reviews (e.g., annual review, promotion and tenure review) because these evaluations, which transcend formal and informal

contexts, are high-stakes settings that determine whether individuals retain their access to the academy. Moreover, our starting point is faculty research, which is critical to faculty careers across many institution types and disciplines and especially relevant in the careers of tenure-track faculty. We conclude with practical suggestions for how faculty, institutions, and higher education more broadly may begin to remedy epistemic exclusion in faculty evaluations. It is important to note that the theory of epistemic exclusion and its application to faculty departmental reviews has been an iterative process of theory development that has alternated between inductive and deductive approaches. As we have tested aspects of our theory, it has evolved into what we share here.

The theory of epistemic exclusion has transformative potential in four primary ways. First, the theory speaks to how biases are not only held by individuals but also rooted in systems, such as evaluation processes, that dually contribute to inequities in the evaluation of faculty and their scholarship. Second, the theory proposes systemic causes of unfair evaluation processes and, in doing so, provides insight into why institutional attempts to create inclusive and diverse environments that are not systems-based have been ineffective. Third, as a critical theory, epistemic exclusion theory argues that biased evaluation processes that seem "normal and natural" must be remedied through a significant reenvisioning of these processes. Last, although the current article centers on the epistemic exclusion of faculty in higher education, the theory applies to other contexts with evaluation processes that are undergirded by epistemic processes (e.g., hiring and promotion in industry). The theoretical advancements articulated in this article can have a direct impact within psychology and beyond, thereby promoting a paradigm shift in terms of how scholars engage in antiracist and equitable evaluation processes.

The Theory of Epistemic Exclusion in Academic Contexts

Our theory of epistemic exclusion is significantly informed by Black feminist epistemology (e.g., Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), which asserts that the knowledge of Black women has been suppressed, subordinated, and depoliticized within institutions, meaning that it has been detached from its intended political and social influence on institutions; this "has led to the elevation of elite White male ideas and interests and the corresponding suppression of Black women's ideas and interests in traditional scholarship" (Collins, 2000, p. 5). Furthermore, Collins identifies a tension in which for Black women to achieve academic prestige, they must adopt mainstream academic norms representing White male interests and ideas. Thus, Black feminist thought articulates the oppressive processes by which some groups are delegitimized as knowledge producers, including a devaluation of knowledge grounded in and acquired from lived experiences (Collins, 1986; Gonzales, 2018). Much of
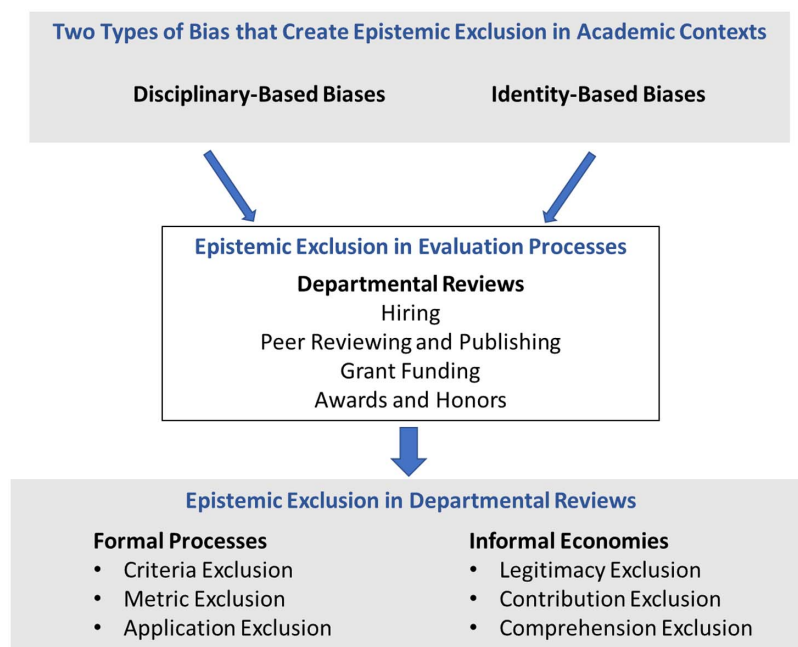
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the foundational work on epistemic exclusion and injustice is based on Black feminist epistemology, and specifically the work of philosopher, Kristie Dotson (2012, 2014), who offers a generative articulation of epistemic exclusion theory. Our theory is deeply informed by and builds on the work of Dotson, extending the application of her theory to the domain of higher education and faculty evaluations. In drawing on

Black feminist epistemology (e.g., Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), and specifically the original writings of Dotson (2012, 2014), our theory of epistemic exclusion within academia (a) centers devalued knowledge and the experiences of devalued knowers and (b) challenges established and historical disciplinary norms that create a hierarchy of scholarly work that limits the inclusion of other types of scholarship (e.g., quantitative vs. qualitative). In this way, our theory highlights how the scholarly evaluation processes undergirding academic systems of merit may be inequitable and disproportionately impact marginalized scholars.

In the context of academia, our theory of epistemic exclusion asserts that two types of bias—disciplinary and identity-based—shape who is perceived as a legitimate knower and that these biases are deeply embedded in seemingly objective and neutral performance standards (see Figure 1). Performance standards—explicit or implicit criteria that establish what is required for positive evaluations—often reflect disciplinary norms and values about the qualities of "good" scholarship that in turn define certain research as "rigorous" and "mainstream" (Gonzales, 2018). For instance, in disciplines that emphasize both positivist and postpositivist epistemologies, like psychology (Eagly & Riger, 2014), rigorous research is often characterized as objective, generalizable, and value-free (Kuhn, 1962; Popper, 1959; Titchener, 1916); this tends to devalue researchers operating

Figure 1

Epistemic Exclusion in Faculty Research Evaluation Processes

Note. Conceptual figure illustrating how within academia, disciplinary-based and identity-based biases lead to epistemic exclusion in multiple types of evaluation processes (e.g., hiring). The bottom portion depicts the theorized ways that epistemic exclusion occurs in departmental reviews through both formal processes and informal economies. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

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from epistemological stances informed by social context (e.g., social constructivism) or using critical approaches (e.g., intersectionality).

We note that the specific scholarly qualities that are incentivized and rewarded vary across disciplines, which are distinguished from each other by their boundaries. Gieryn (1983) articulated the concept of "boundary work" by which disciplines define their knowledge domains, methodologies, and scholarly norms. That is, boundary work involves "the codification of ideological commitments and best practices that mark the limits of what counts as inside the discipline, and what is relegated outside of it" (Grzanka & Cole, 2021, p. 1336). Boundary work is a critical part of maintaining the identity and autonomy of a discipline, in which gatekeepers may seek to bar entry to those who lack the necessary capabilities, determine what knowledge has legitimacy within the discipline, or exclude scholarship that does not meet assessments of quality (Elpers & FitzGerald, 2013). It is important to keep in mind, though, that disciplines are social constructions, and the boundary work required to maintain them is contingent and varies as the disciplinary contexts, topics, methods, and members change. For example, scholars (e.g., Eagly & Riger, 2014; Kuhn, 1962) have noted the ways in which definitions of rigorous scholarly work become "invisible and taken-for-granted" over time despite reflecting "historical and sociocultural decisions" (Settles et al., 2020, p. 806). Psychology offers an illustration of this, with researchers beginning to favor quantitative methods over qualitative ones in the mid-1900s due to the prominence of behaviorism (Wertz, 2014).

One challenge of boundary work that contributes to the variability in valued scholarly qualities is the need to negotiate pressures to expand versus reinforce disciplinary boundaries (Fini et al., 2023). Disciplines "are in a constant state of struggle between established and emerging actors who compete for

symbolic distinction based on subjective rules of merit, and the vested interests and social objectives these rules embody" (Cattani et al., 2014, p. 258). Cattani et al. (2014) further noted that individuals at the core of a discipline, in particular established individuals who have acquired power and privilege, tend to reinforce existing boundaries (e.g., by recognizing work within the boundaries with awards). In contrast, individuals at the periphery of a discipline, emerging scholars who seek to innovate or challenge the status quo, tend to expand the disciplinary boundaries. When those who seek to expand the boundaries of a discipline are members of marginalized groups, the reinforcement of norms by those at the disciplinary center may reflect racism and other forms of oppression, like sexism.

Our theory of epistemic exclusion conceptualizes unwarranted disciplinary bias as occurring when those seeking to expand or shift the boundaries of a discipline and/or those working outside the status quo are devalued, despite contributing meaningfully to the field. An example would be if a faculty member in psychology was hired for their innovative scholarly work on racially minoritized populations, but then that scholarship was devalued in evaluations because it is published in "lower impact" race-focused psychology journals or uses novel methods (e.g., community-based participatory action research). We are not suggesting that every scholarly norm produces epistemic exclusion, but rather some norms reflect disciplinary biases that do not represent quality and may lead to unwarranted exclusions. Disciplinary bias would not be in play if the exclusion is warranted, that is, the scholarly work is evaluated as poor quality or squarely outside the discipline by those who are well placed to make that determination (e.g., scholars in the same subfield).

There is a growing body of evidence regarding disciplinary biases within psychology. For example, Eagly and Riger (2014) found that from 2004 to 2012, only 8.7% of journal articles used qualitative methods, and Roberts et al. (2020) found that between 1974 and 2018, only 5% of journal articles published in prestigious journals within cognitive, developmental, and social psychology highlighted race. Settles et al. (2020) found that from 2004 to 2019, only 2.9% of articles using the critical theory of intersectionality were published in the 30 psychology journals with the highest impact factors. Moreover, E. B. King et al. (2018) found that diversity-focused articles compared to non-diversity-focused articles submitted to the *Journal of Management* over a 7 year period were "12 times more likely to be rejected than accepted and 15 times more likely to be offered a revision than accepted" in earlier rounds of review (p. 848). The authors note that based on this archival data and additional experimental data, diversity-focused research in industrial–organizational psychology is held to stricter standards in the journal review process (E. B. King et al., 2018). Thus, data indicate that certain types of scholarship are excluded from the field's publications, not because of their poor quality or incongruency with the discipline but due to their method, topic, theoretical lens, or population.

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These disciplinary biases about the boundaries of "good" scholarship are coupled with identity-based biases that challenge the credibility of scholars from marginalized groups. For example, research in the United States has documented the presence of negative stereotypes of Asian people as perpetual foreigners and lacking warmth (Fiske et al., 1999; Sue, 2010). Negative stereotypes of Black, Latinx, and Native American people portray them as lazy, lacking intelligence, and beneficiaries of unearned advantages (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013); women are also stereotyped as lacking intelligence and competence (Heilman, 2001). Echoing the tenets of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000), the intersection of negative stereotypes about women of color's race and gender (Cole, 2009; D. K. King, 1988; Settles & Buchanan, 2014) may make them especially vulnerable to negative stereotyping.

We posit that stereotypes and identity-based biases are typically not made explicit, but rather these biases are camouflaged by negative evaluations of the scholar's work. That is, individuals doing the excluding do not need to attribute their scholarly devaluation to the identity of the targeted scholar (e.g., a person of color), but instead can express disciplinary biases against the types of scholarship those individuals are more likely to engage in, such as scholarship centered on marginalized groups (e.g., Gonzales, 2018). This process allows epistemic exclusion to disproportionately target scholars from marginalized groups while being attributed to disciplinary norms about what defines high-quality and impactful scholarship.

We theorize that these two forms of bias, disciplinary and identity-based, combine to increase the likelihood that scholars of color and those from other marginalized groups will experience epistemic exclusion. Research has found that scholars of color (and women) more often engage in research outside the disciplinary mainstream due to the topic (e.g., race, diversity), method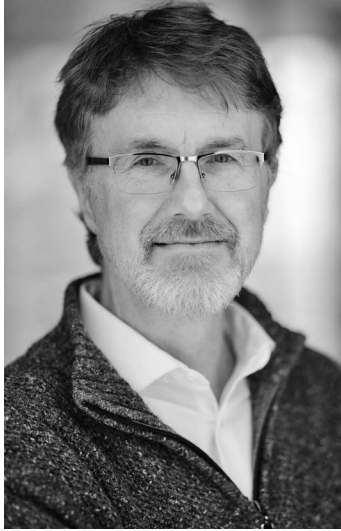 (e.g., qualitative, community-based participatory research), theoretical approach (e.g., intersectionality, critical race theory), or population of interest (e.g., marginalized groups; Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales, 2018). For example, research by Kozlowski et al. (2022) found that scholars of color and women were more likely to publish on certain topics, such as those related to inequality based on race, gender, class, or sexual orientation, which tended to be cited less than mainstream areas. The lower citations of this work, conducted by scholars of color and women, clearly illustrate how scholar identity and scholarly area can intersect such that scholars from marginalized groups are more likely to experience epistemic exclusion.

Empirical Work on Faculty Epistemic Exclusion

Our prior work provides evidence that scholars from marginalized groups are likely to experience epistemic exclusion. In interviews with 118 faculty of color at a research-intensive university, 43% of faculty of color described experiences of epistemic exclusion, despite not being asked about it specifically (Settles et al., 2019). Furthermore, underrepresented racially minoritized (URM) faculty in this study—namely African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American faculty—reported more epistemic exclusion than Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander faculty (AAAPI; Settles et al., 2021), with URM women more commonly reporting that their accomplishments were overlooked, credentials were questioned, and scholarship was misunderstood. Furthermore, participants experiencing epistemic exclusion often attributed the scholarly devaluation to their identities (e.g., race, gender; Settles et al., 2021).

We also observed race–gender differences in our quantitative investigation of epistemic exclusion. In a sample of 1,341 faculty recruited from a different research-intensive university, we found that women and URM faculty reported more epistemic exclusion than men and White faculty, respectively, with AAAPI faculty falling in-between (Settles et al., 2022). As it relates to the intersection of race and gender, study results showed that AAAPI women and White women reported more epistemic exclusion than AAAPI men and White men, respectively, whereas URM men and women reported similarly high levels of epistemic exclusion. Thus, epistemic exclusion is more often experienced by faculty of color (especially URM faculty) and women.

Epistemic exclusion further explains race–gender disparities in faculty retention and promotion through its impact on faculty well-being and their perceptions of the work environment. In our qualitative work, faculty of color expressed frustration, isolation, and uncertainty about their academic future, which, at times, led them to consider changing institutions or careers (Settles et al., 2021). In a subsequent quantitative study, we found that across race and gender groups, those who experienced more epistemic exclusion had more frequent thoughts of leaving the institution, which was explained by their lower job satisfaction and more negative perceptions of workplace climate (Settles et al., 2022). Therefore, our findings

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provide evidence of the negative effects of epistemic exclusion on marginalized faculty well-being and careers, especially as it relates to turnover and retention.

Experiences of Epistemic Exclusion in Faculty Departmental Reviews

Our prior research provides evidence that epistemic exclusion is relevant to marginalized faculty experiences of bias in evaluation processes and, with research from other scholars, supports epistemic exclusion as a type of devaluation that is based on both scholarly topic and scholar identity. This empirical support motivated us to deepen our understanding of epistemic exclusion by applying it to tenure-track faculty reviews (e.g., annual review, tenure and promotion review). Applying epistemic exclusion to faculty review processes, we theorized that this unwarranted form of scholarly devaluation can happen formally, through systems of evaluation, and informally, through interpersonal interactions and communications. This framework extends our prior empirical work and builds on a growing body of research in this area.

Formal Processes of Epistemic Exclusion in Faculty Departmental Reviews

Formal epistemic exclusion refers to a bias in the evaluation of scholarly work during formal evaluation processes (e.g., annual review, promotion and tenure). In our theory, we highlight three types of formal epistemic exclusion in faculty reviews: *criteria exclusion*, *metric exclusion*, and *application exclusion* (see Table 1). Each type of exclusion highlights ways in which standards may be unfairly used in formal evaluations.

In evaluation processes, there are criteria or general rules underlying evaluation standards (e.g., scholars need to publish high-quality articles in peer-reviewed journals). We theorize that *criteria exclusion* occurs when the criteria used in formal evaluations do not capture key aspects of a scholar's work. For example, in a department with an expectation that scholars publish high-quality journal articles, criteria exclusion can

Table 1

Types of Epistemic Exclusion in Faculty Departmental Reviews

Exclusion type	Definition	Example
Formal epistemic exclusion	Bias in the evaluation of scholarly work during formal evaluation processes.	
Criteria exclusion	Criteria used in formal evaluations do not capture key aspects of a scholar's work.	A scholar's public scholarship (e.g., writing or speaking for the public) is not included within the criteria used in evaluations.
Metric exclusion	Specific metrics used to determine whether work meets criteria do not capture important aspects of a scholar's work.	Citation counts are drawn from databases that undercount some scholars' citations.
Application exclusion	Individual evaluators apply criteria and metrics in a biased manner.	A scholar's publication record is devalued because they publish in journals with a topical (e.g., gender, race) or interdisciplinary focus.
Informal epistemic exclusion	Bias related to scholarly work that occurs within informal economies, that is, interactions, communications, and perceptions related to scholarly devaluation, often in informal contexts (e.g., everyday interactions, committee meetings).	
Legitimacy exclusion	Colleagues deny or minimize an individual's scholarly competence, skill, expertise, knowledge, or credibility.	Colleagues require the scholar to repeatedly prove their competence and knowledge.
Contribution exclusion	Colleagues doubt or minimize the contribution, importance, significance, or impact of an individual's scholarly work.	Colleagues devalue the contribution of the scholar's work because it is qualitative.
Comprehension exclusion	Colleagues deny that an individual's scholarly work is understandable, interpretable, or legible within the discipline.	Colleagues express a lack of understanding and disinterest in learning about the scholar's work.

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occur for a scholar whose primary form of publishing is through books; in this instance, there is a clear discrepancy between the evaluation criterion (journal publications) and the scholar's product (books). Criteria exclusion may also occur if grant funding is a criterion for successful review, but the scholar does not need grant funding to support their work. In such cases, the type of work the scholar engages in is not accommodated by the criteria, and thus their work will not be regarded as high quality. In our prior work, faculty of color clearly tied the devaluation of their scholarly work to it being outside of the mainstream within their department; within their comments, faculty participants indicated that their work could not be appropriately judged and, as a result, it was assessed as lower in quality (Settles et al., 2021), which we connect to limitations of the existing evaluation criteria (e.g., a scholar conducts qualitative research in a quantitatively inclined department).

Metrics are the specific ways in which criteria can be measured; they provide evidence that the scholar has met the required criteria for a successful evaluation. For example, if publishing high-quality articles in peer-reviewed journals is the criterion, the metrics used to assess this may include h-indices, citation counts, or publication in a limited number of "top" journals. *Metric exclusion* occurs when the specific metrics used to determine whether work meets criteria are unable to capture important aspects of a scholar's work. Our qualitative work found that faculty of color perceived that their work was often devalued due to the metrics used, especially metrics around publishing in specific outlets and earning specific amounts of grant funding (Settles et al., 2021). Moreover, there is evidence of bias in commonly used metrics. For example, Kozlowski et al. (2022) found that women and scholars of color are cited less, even when they publish in the "mainstream" areas with the highest citation rates, and other scholars have found that men are more likely

to engage in self-citation, which increases their h-index and citation rates (Bertolero et al., 2020; Chakravartty et al., 2018; M. M. King et al., 2017). This issue is also reflected in lower grant funding rates; Chen et al. (2022) found that at the National Science Foundation from 1999 to 2019, "Asian, Black/AA [African American], and NH/PI [Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander] PIs [Principal Investigators] were consistently funded below the overall rate, with average relative funding rates of −21.2%, −8.1%, and −11.3%, respectively" (p. 2). Therefore, if this metric is sensitive to the amount of funding received, it would devalue the funding of scholars who work in subfields with less available funding (e.g., health disparities), who thus receive smaller grants than others in their general field (Dzirasa, 2020; Erosheva et al., 2020; Hoppe et al., 2019).

Finally, individual evaluators are often involved in applying criteria and metrics to a scholar's record of work. These individual evaluators might be the department chair, a committee of colleagues working in the scholar's department, all faculty members in the department, or some other configuration. We theorize that *application exclusion* occurs when criteria and metrics are applied to a scholar's work in a biased manner. Application exclusion, unlike criteria and metric exclusion, is not only about structural bias but also reflects individual biases of evaluators expressed in relation to the scholar's work. One example of application exclusion would be devaluing a scholar's funding because the program that awarded it is focused on marginalized communities. We theorize that application exclusion is especially likely when evaluation standards are not formalized in written policies or are ambiguous, standards shift frequently, or when the evaluator harbors negative attitudes about the scholar's competence due to the scholar's membership in a marginalized group (e.g., a person of color) or because of the scholar's subfield (e.g., marginalized populations). In our qualitative study, faculty of color cited shifting standards in formal evaluations as contributing to epistemic exclusion (Settles et al., 2021). Participants described that having standards that were "moving targets" (p. 499) was a way to bar them from successful reviews, despite high productivity. Application exclusion may reflect the interplay of disciplinary and identity-based biases, whereby disciplinary biases can be used to obfuscate the inappropriate application of criteria and metrics borne out of evaluators' identity-based biases, even when the scholar's work meets the stated criteria.

Informal Economies of Epistemic Exclusion in Faculty Departmental Reviews

Informal epistemic exclusion is bias related to scholarly work that occurs outside of formal evaluations and within informal economies. We speak of "informal economies" to highlight the broad, dynamic nature of informal exclusion that includes direct, overheard, or vicarious interactions,

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communications, and perceptions that reflect scholarly devaluation. Informal epistemic exclusion may be apparent in comments from colleagues directly made to the scholar or between colleagues about the scholar's work. Informal exclusion typically takes place at informal sites of contact, such as everyday interactions in the hallway or at the water cooler, in faculty or committee meetings, or during offsite faculty gatherings like a dinner party. However, informal types of epistemic exclusion may also take place at formal sites of contact, such as meetings in which a faculty member's work is evaluated, but there is no appeal to a specific, formalized evaluation criterion or metric, and such comments are not codified in the formal evaluation. In our theory, we highlight three primary types of informal epistemic exclusion: *legitimacy exclusion*, *contribution exclusion*, and *comprehension exclusion* (see Table 1).

In our theory, *legitimacy exclusion* occurs when others deny or minimize a scholar's competence, skill, expertise, knowledge, or credibility, and it presumes the evaluated individual is not a legitimate scholar because their expertise is lacking or insufficient. Legitimacy is critical social capital for academics; it is based on productivity, commitment, and merit and is determined from "cues, signals, and interactions from colleagues that [suggest] they [belong] in the department community" (O'Meara et al., 2018, p. 25). Examples of legitimacy exclusion include colleagues expressing doubt about whether a scholar can conduct high-quality work, attributing the scholar's work to collaborators or mentors, or feeling they did not need to seek input from the scholar on a matter about which the scholar had expertise. In our prior research, faculty of color described having their competence questioned repeatedly; as one participant shared, "You're ignorant until you prove yourself to be smart" (Settles et al., 2021, p. 499).

Within our theory, *contribution exclusion* occurs when others doubt or minimize the contribution, importance, significance, or impact of the scholar's work. With contribution exclusion, there can be a question of whether the scholarly work is needed or an assumption that it does not make a meaningful contribution to a field. Examples of contribution exclusion include a scholar having to defend their work more than others or if the work is criticized as lacking quality exclusively due to its topic area, methodology, or theoretical grounding. Similarly, colleagues' disinterest in offering a course related to the scholar's subfield communicates contribution exclusion. In our prior research (Settles et al., 2021), faculty of color described examples of contribution exclusion in which their scholarly work was not recognized in various types of reward systems (e.g., merit raises, verbal praise from colleagues).

We theorize that *comprehension exclusion* happens when others deny that one's scholarly work is understandable, interpretable, or legible within the discipline. Scholars in psychology may experience comprehension exclusion if colleagues question whether their scholarly work belongs within the field or is otherwise perceived as belonging to a different field, such as sociology, often because they seek to foreground structural factors in their work over individual ones (e.g., institutional vs. interpersonal racism). Other examples of comprehension exclusion include colleagues dismissing a scholar's work as being unfamiliar or a scholar having to change their work to be more easily understood by colleagues. Our research indicated that due to comprehension exclusion, faculty of color felt the need to adjust their research so that it better conformed to their disciplinary norms or spent a great deal of time and energy making their scholarship more legible to their colleagues (Settles et al., 2021). We expect that this type of exclusion is more commonly experienced by scholars whose work is, to some degree, outside of the field's norms even if it is typical within the scholar's subfield, such as qualitative scholars in psychology (Levitt et al., 2017, 2018).

We theorize that these informal types of exclusion suggest to the scholar that others do not view them as belonging to their discipline because they are perceived as lacking ability and competence (legitimacy exclusion), or their work is perceived as having limited value (contribution exclusion) or not fitting within the discipline (comprehension exclusion). Across these informal types of epistemic exclusion, the bias may reflect a specific aspect of the work, such as the methodology or topic, and it might also be reflected in the devaluation of the scholar's funding, honors, or awards.

Characteristics, Interactions, and Effects of Formal and Informal Epistemic Exclusion

There are several important characteristics of formal and informal epistemic exclusion in faculty departmental reviews.

First, these types of exclusion are unwarranted, yet it is a more likely outcome given the scholar's identity (e.g., marginalized race) and area of research (e.g., racism). Second, epistemically excluded individuals experience exclusion repeatedly. For example, a scholar may be told one year that they should write journal articles instead of books (criteria exclusion), be told the next year that their journal articles are not in sufficiently high-quality journals (metric exclusion), and be told the following year that despite publishing articles in sufficiently high-quality journals, the work was not highly evaluated because it is not perceived as being sufficiently rigorous (application exclusion). Concurrently, the scholar may experience interruptions or hostile questions about their work from other colleagues when presenting at departmental talks (legitimacy exclusion). Additionally, colleagues may disparage their work as unimportant to the discipline (contribution exclusion) or not a part of the discipline at all (comprehension exclusion) in discussions of student research, potential hires, or curriculum plans. Over time, the cumulative effects of epistemic exclusion exact a heavy toll on the scholar's well-being, sense of belonging, inclusion by colleagues, and desire to stay at their institution (Settles et al., 2020, 2022). However, the varied nature of the exclusion (e.g., its manifestation in different forms and contexts) makes it difficult to articulate to others as a pattern of bias.

In addition to these characteristics, formal and informal epistemic exclusion can interact with each other in important ways. For example, faculty learn the norms of their department (or discipline) by hearing colleagues assess others' scholarly contribution or fit in the field. These norms can become codified as the structures used in evaluations, or they can be misapplied by individual evaluators (e.g., department chair, faculty colleagues) to criticize work that would otherwise be favorably reviewed. Formal evaluation policies also shape and strengthen informal epistemic exclusion; by engaging in activities that are rewarded in their departmental evaluation standards, faculty are socialized to personally value these activities and may subsequently express exclusionary sentiments aligned with formal policies.

Discussion

We have provided a theoretical framework for understanding how seemingly neutral evaluation practices can perpetuate racism and other forms of oppression through epistemic exclusion and applied this theory to the specific context of faculty departmental reviews. We highlight evaluation processes because they are high-stakes contexts for faculty careers, determining who is allowed into academia and whether they will be retained and promoted. As such, the theory of epistemic exclusion seeks to make inequality in faculty evaluations visible and offers new points of intervention that can aid those seeking to increase faculty diversity and promote antiracist practices in higher education.

Although we have applied epistemic exclusion theory to faculty departmental reviews, we posit that it is likely to occur at other evaluation points that can facilitate or hinder faculty diversification, such as journal and award reviews, the selection of academic leaders (e.g., journal editors, department heads), and awarding of grant and fellowship funding. Notably, epistemic exclusion that occurs in these evaluative settings also creates barriers to faculty diversity by creating bias in productivity indicators that are used in hiring, annual review, and promotion and tenure. Because epistemic exclusion is embedded into academic systems with origins in inequality (Gonzales, 2018; Ray, 2019), it does not require individual ill intentions to persist. Therefore, remedying epistemic exclusion requires changes at the structural level through adjustments to policies, practices, and norms (Buchanan et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2020), which we detail in our suggestions that follow.

Limitations

The theory of epistemic exclusion has great potential to transform academia, and specifically challenge oppressive structures that contribute to the devaluation of marginalized scholars and their scholarship. At the same time, we acknowledge the limitations of how the theory to date has been explored and applied across contexts and groups. One limitation is our focus on the experiences of tenure-track faculty in research-intensive universities. In this context, exclusion related to research and scholarly work is likely to be especially relevant to faculty career trajectories. It may be that epistemic exclusion within teaching-focused institutions or for non-tenure-track instructional faculty (e.g., lecturers) will center around teaching, such that courses focused on certain topics (e.g., race and racism, social inequality) or using specific teaching approaches (e.g., antiracist pedagogy) are devalued. Furthermore, although we have focused on faculty epistemic exclusion, similar experiences may occur for graduate students whose research interests in marginalized populations or novel methodologies may be discouraged by faculty who do not share them. Areas for future research may include testing the theory of epistemic exclusion among different groups of scholars (e.g., lecturers, graduate students) and even considering how facets of exclusion interact to contribute to different consequences. For instance, although epistemic exclusion contributes to negative consequences generally (e.g., Settles et al., 2022), it may be the case that the consequences for graduate students, relative to faculty members, are more severe as students have yet to establish themselves in their field. Our theory of epistemic exclusion and our research to date offer potential avenues for future research, across minoritized and majoritized groups, that will further elucidate the nature of exclusion experienced among faculty and others in higher education.

In addition, the theory has initially focused on more visible marginalized identities, specifically race and gender. However, our prior research shows that epistemic exclusion is also related to rank and nationality (Settles et al., 2021, 2022). Therefore, epistemic exclusion based on scholarly topic and scholar identity may occur for many marginalized or low-status scholars. More research is needed to identify other meaningful aspects of identity, such as social class or sexual identity, that might increase the likelihood of epistemic exclusion experiences, as well as whether experiences of exclusion are compounded for scholars who hold multiple marginalized identities.

An additional limitation is that our theory has, to date, been focused on higher education, despite the likelihood that epistemic exclusion occurs in other sectors, such as evaluations in industry. When epistemic exclusion occurs in different contexts, we anticipate that there will be an interaction between evaluative norms and social biases, although the specific norms that are used to discount knowledge may differ. For example, although alternatives have been offered, we posit that efforts to eliminate Black history classes in high schools are based on evaluations that the topic is not legitimate or does not contribute to the high school curriculum and social biases regarding Black people in the United States. Similarly, medical doctors inadequately treating Black patients' pain may, at least in part, reflect beliefs that these patients are not credible evaluators of their pain and social biases about Black people's pain tolerance or likelihood of lying to acquire drugs (e.g., Staton et al., 2007).

Suggested Practices to Remedy Epistemic Exclusion

The theory of epistemic exclusion, through its grounding in critical frameworks like Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 1989, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Dotson, 2012, 2014), provides us with a lens to understand how biases rooted in systems of evaluation contribute to the perpetual exclusion of marginalized scholars and scholarship from the disciplinary mainstream. In the sections below, we draw from the theory of epistemic exclusion, as well as Sue et al.'s (2019) work on disarming microaggressions, to offer suggested practices for remedying epistemic exclusion that are systemically rooted and focused on equity in faculty reviews, specifically, as well as in higher education more broadly. Some of the suggestions put forth are more pragmatic, whereas others are more idealistic and intended to promote a reenvisioning of scholarly evaluation processes.

Suggestions for Equitable Faculty Evaluations

The theory of epistemic exclusion posits that exclusion results from biases rooted in systems of evaluation. Therefore, one way to promote epistemic inclusion is by updating current faculty evaluation processes so they are equitable and fair for all scholars. In this regard, we offer four strategies that might mitigate epistemic exclusion and foster inclusion. First, institutions and departments may consider revising their formal evaluation criteria and metrics to capture and value scholars working beyond the disciplinary mainstream. This may include valuing niche or topical journals as much as journals in the mainstream. It might also involve reducing the reliance on external metrics, like grants and journal impact factors, to inform whether scholarship makes a contribution, and increasing consideration of other forms of impact, like community or policy impact. Second, institutions can train the faculty involved in formal evaluations (e.g., department chairs and senior faculty members) about epistemic exclusion and the biases that may interfere with equitable evaluations. Because epistemic exclusion is rooted in identity-based *and* disciplinary bias, the training will need to focus not only on forms of identity-based bias (e.g., discrimination) but also on disciplinary values that may contribute to the exclusion of specific scholars and forms of scholarship. Third, we suggest that institutions and departments work to ensure that they have a diverse pool of faculty evaluators, particularly evaluators who have the scholarly expertise to appraise scholarship beyond the disciplinary mainstream. This may require institutions and departments to revise their policies to allow outside faculty members from the same discipline to serve on evaluation committees when departments lack the expertise needed to properly evaluate scholarship. Fourth, we encourage institutions and departments to change their reward structures to value marginalized scholars and diverse forms of scholarship (e.g., providing funding opportunities for research on diversity-related topics) because doing so signals that the institution truly values diversity and may likely lead to real change in faculty career outcomes. We note that scholars have already begun to advocate for implementing similar strategies to promote equitable evaluations (e.g., American Psychological Association, APA Task Force on Inequities in Academic Tenure and Promotion, 2023; Klein & Falk-Krzesinski, 2017); further still, some institutions may have already identified other promising practices that can be strong models for change.

Suggestions for Equity in Higher Education

Our suggestions for higher education are much broader and focus on actions disciplinary leaders can take to enhance the inclusion of marginalized scholars, which is directly aligned with the broader mission of higher education. First, we propose that disciplinary leaders (e.g., leaders in professional societies, journal editors) facilitate explicit discussions about the characteristics of good scholarship (Gonzales, 2018). Discussions of this type, which may emerge in professional societies (e.g., American Psychological Association), can bring awareness to disciplinary assumptions and norms that

undergird epistemic exclusion, as well as illuminate the biases inherent in seemingly neutral evaluation processes, like journal reviewing or even the selection of disciplinary leaders. Within these discussions, we encourage leaders to reflect on existing evaluation systems and *imagine* how they might become more equitable (e.g., "In what ways can we broaden our perceptions of 'good' scholarship?" "What norms do we want to establish in our field?"). We use the word "imagine" intentionally here to challenge individuals to think beyond the status quo and truly envision new ways of engaging evaluation processes. Second, with greater awareness, disciplinary leaders may revise their evaluation processes. For instance, editors may consider ways to remove bias from the journal review process, such as ensuring there is a diverse pool of journal reviewers who have expertise on more niche or emerging topics (Auelua-Toomey & Roberts, 2022; Buchanan et al., 2021). Last, because bias is deeply rooted within the policies and practices of higher education, it is critical that leaders within higher education continually monitor and assess for epistemic exclusion and hold perpetrators of exclusion accountable. At the same time, it is equally, if not more important to communicate the benefits of an inclusive academy and reward those who promote epistemic inclusion.

Suggestions for Faculty Experiencing or Observing Epistemic Exclusion

Our final set of suggestions targets faculty who have been affected by or are at risk for epistemic exclusion, and it is rooted both in past research on how faculty contend with epistemic exclusion (Settles et al., 2020) and existing frameworks outlining how individuals can respond to oppression (e.g., Sue et al., 2019). First, it is important to be able to label epistemic exclusion when it occurs. Because epistemic exclusion is rooted in seemingly neutral systems of evaluation, it can be hard to discern. Thus, part of intervening on epistemic exclusion is making this phenomenon visible; for faculty, this may mean highlighting areas where exclusion is likely to occur or even logging instances of exclusion as evidence to evaluators who may question its legitimacy. Second, scholars may consider broadening their support networks to include people who can corroborate their observations related to exclusion, as well as validate their experiences and value their work, such as departmental colleagues, peers in professional societies that value their scholarship, or even friends and family outside of academia. Third, scholars who successfully navigated evaluation processes in higher education (e.g., full professors or editors) may use their institutional power to not only shift evaluation processes to be more equitable (as mentioned above) but also mentor and support those with less institutional power in contending with experiences of exclusion.

The Role of Higher Education in Society

Inclusive institutions are better institutions in a variety of ways. Such environments improve student thinking skills, foster innovative research addressing important problems in society, and lead to solutions that not only improve conditions broadly but also have the potential for greater global impact (Goulden et al., 2011; Hofstra et al., 2020; Stout et al., 2018). For these many reasons, we must continue to call upon institutions of higher learning to be inclusive and embrace a diversity of research foci that address the needs of the heterogeneous populations they serve. Our current scholarly norms are legacies (typically) established by White men working in the center of their field at a time when the academy was not diverse and did not value diversity. If a discipline seeks to diversify, it must interrogate who determined those norms, when, and under what circumstances, and furthermore, consider who is granted the authority to determine the norms that shape the future of the field. This is especially urgent in our current times, where diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are facing unprecedented attacks (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2023). Such attacks seek to delegitimize scholars from marginalized groups as knowledge producers and remove their access to the academy. Universities can demonstrate institutional courage (Gómez et al., 2023) by taking affirmative steps to reduce epistemic exclusion; in so doing, they can assert their place as inclusive spaces that serve the public good and fight against efforts to revert higher education to spaces of exclusion.

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