

Chapter 3

INCLUDING THE EXCLUDED: CONCEPTS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF THE US ACADEMY

*James L. Sherley, M.D., Ph.D.**

The Adult Stem Cell Technology Center, Boston, MA, US

ABSTRACT

The author delivered this lecture at the Second Annual Retreat of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine Minority Faculty, on March 26, 2007. Hopkins cardiac surgeon Dr. Levi Watkins, Jr. invited him to present the retreat's keynote address as a 1988 graduate of the School of Medicine. Dr. Watkins recruited Dr. Sherley to Hopkins along with other black students in 1980.

On the occasion of the lecture, Dr. Sherley had recently ended a 12-day hunger strike undertaken to protest his claim that racial discrimination was a key factor in the decision to deny him tenure promotion at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. When giving the lecture, he believed that MIT was fulfilling its part of an agreement to undertake a review of his complaint with an external arbiter.

However, later in April, MIT Provost Rafael Reif notified Dr. Sherley that MIT would not meet its agreement. Dr. Sherley was summarily evicted from MIT on June 30, 2007. The lecture is presented in its original form to convey to colleges and universities of higher learning, not only its ideas on principles for improving fair inclusion in the US academy, but also to convey those principles in the context in which they were drafted and shared.

Keywords: Exclusion, inclusion, discrimination, racism, integration, tenure, diversity, respectful familiarity

* Corresponding author: James L. Sherley, M.D., Ph.D.: The Adult Stem Cell Technology Center, P.O. Box 301179, Boston, MA 02130. E-mail: jlsherley@gmail.com.

INTRODUCTION

“First and foremost, I want to thank Dr. Levi Watkins for his invitation to return to Hopkins to speak with you on this occasion; on a topic that defines my career as a scientist, that in many ways defines my life, and that recently perhaps even defines me. That topic is ending the systematic exclusion of African Americans, in particular, but, as well, members of other racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities, from fair, full participation in all facets of American society and life. The facet of American society and life that is my focus tonight, that has relevancy to all of us assembled here, is the US academy, institutions of higher learning and professional development, like The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

So, the title for my presentation tonight is:

‘Including the Excluded: Concepts for Successful Integration of the US Academy’

I also want to thank the other organizers of this retreat and *you*, its participants who are members of the Hopkins academy, for this opportunity to exchange ideas on an issue that is still one of the most difficult and trying moral challenges for Americans, acknowledging and ending racism. Tonight I will speak the name of the id in our society, racism, instead of the name of its alter ego ‘diversity.’ ‘Diversity’ is a nice, currently politically correct word that has come to be pervasive in discussions of unfair discrimination. I plan on uttering it as seldom as possible tonight. The use of this word has promoted confusion and obfuscation on the essential issue of racism and other forms of unfair exclusion. Redressing and ending racism is a moral imperative. This is an issue of fairness and justice, liberty and equality, freedom. Any other characterization serves only to impede action to identify racism and other causes of unfair exclusion, to redress them, and to end them.

There are many other examples of language in the discussion of racial discrimination that have been introduced and adopted, but which serve only to prevent clarity of ideas and intent. Here are some of my favorite pet peeves:

Tolerance – African Americans and members of other minority groups do not want to be just *tolerated*. They want full inclusion without recriminations. The use of the tolerance language is symptomatic of the persistent resistance to genuine inclusion.

Affirmative Action – This is an essential legislative action for the advancement of inclusion. However, it is unclear what it affirms. The language of this legislation to ‘compensate for past discrimination’ was perhaps politically expedient and necessary for a limited victory; but it fails to recognize that unfair discrimination is not a thing of the past, but it is alive and well now. I would have preferred ‘preventative action.’

Playing the race card – How wonderful. If you are the target of racist actions, seeking redress is deemed invalid. This language says that making the charge of racism is inherently illegitimate; and intimates that charges of racism are simple-minded schemes to obtain inclusion that is not justified for any other reasons. Now, just think about it for a moment: It is quite illogical to think that a system that is based on unfair exclusion would show any acceptance of the validity of charges of unfair exclusion. And accordingly, if you talk to employment law attorneys or anyone involved in such adjudications for that matter, you will learn that charges of racism or unfair discrimination are among the most difficult cases to bring to trial and to prosecute in this country, whether we are talking about the courts system or internal institutional grievance proceedings. That has certainly been my experience at MIT.

Yet, ‘playing the race card’ is used liberally and often provided as a basis for maintaining exclusionary policies and practices. I prefer ‘sounding the racism alarm.’

So, tonight as we consider and discuss, and as we move forward in this retreat, let us pay attention to language. Sometimes we may have to take the time to elaborate, to work hard to express exactly what we feel and what we mean. The same can be said as a general principle of engaging in dialogue that has the stated purpose of increasing fair inclusion in the academy.

The concepts, ideas, and life stories that I share with you tonight, I do so in the spirit of restoring and redefining an ideology for change in the US academy. Change in the basic manner in which minority members of our free society are excluded from many of the desirable features of American life.

I wish to engage you in a process that aims to strip bare the discussion of racial discrimination and other forms of exclusion, to move you away from entrenched practices, customs, and ideas that are simply glossy veneers that hide underlying conceptual flaws that *have* served to prevent more rapid progress in full inclusion and that will *continue* to do so if they are not exposed, discredited by intellectual discourse, and deliberately discarded. As I stated earlier, in particular, I will focus on the academy, the opportunity for full participation in all aspects of the life and operation of institutions of higher learning and professional training: admission, matriculation, graduation, teaching, tenure, administration, ... institutions like this one, Hopkins, and like the one at which I am currently demanding fair inclusion, MIT.

The ideas and thoughts that I present tonight are directed to everyone here, and to those absent. So, whatever your position now or your disposition later, please, go out and engage the debate that must occur with others. The greatest challenge to gaining full inclusion by excluded minority groups is their small numbers in the academy. The mean joke of democracy is the tyranny of the majority.

Certainly, if members of minority groups do not work to secure their own inclusion, they will be excluded forever. However, their independent action is not sufficient. Either all minority populations must join together to insure each other’s inclusion; or a large number of the majority, *whites*, must work with members of minority groups to secure and insure inclusion for all, without unfair discrimination.

So, these words and ideas tonight are for you all, equally, with full inclusion. No matter what your personal description, no matter how you define your person and your ideology, this presentation is directed to you, because the most rapid acceleration to the end of racism and other forms of unfair discrimination is communal commitment and action that involves us all. But I hope I don’t need to tell you, that of course, this requirement is also the singular greatest barrier to ending racism in America. However, in the history of the world, greater evils have been breached. Witness the spread of Christianity; witness the end of apartheid in South Africa, witness the decline of colonialism in Africa; witness the fall of the Roman Empire. Racism in America can end... and it will.

My focus on exclusion from the US academy is the stark problem of racism enacted against African Americans in US universities, especially in terms of the tenure of African American faculty members. There are several reasons why this focus is appropriate for me, but also for any other speaker on this general topic. My own racial heritage and personal story is certainly a factor; but this focus is also imperative because of the blanketing history of enslavement of Black peoples in this country and the years of rank societal discrimination

against them. These attitudes are still reflected in the current status of African Americans in the US academy. Across the board, African Americans are the societal group that experiences the greatest disparity between their representation in the US population and their rate of inclusion in all aspects of academy life and function.

In particular, their representation among science and engineering faculty is essentially unchanged beyond the small increases in inclusion that occurred more than 30 years ago as a response to legislation that promoted greater inclusion.

There is no point in working on a problem, if you do not expect to solve it. There is no point, if you do not believe it can be solved. One of the things I have come to believe is that while many African Americans do not believe racism in America can ever end; many whites do believe it can end. They believe it can end, but they do not believe that it will end. This belief is manifested in persistent efforts to prevent it from ending by perpetuating unfair exclusionary attitudes, ideas, practices, and policies.

As a metaphysical construct, we can expect that anything with an identifiable beginning can be brought to an identifiable end. The process for ending it may require a lot of energy, but it can be done. Racism enacted against Black people in America certainly has an identifiable beginning with slavery, though racism per se has earlier origins in the Old World, when people from separate lands first encountered each other. Racism is a manifestation of attempts by moral humans to justify their domination of other humans who look different. Looking different is a crucial requirement for the most effective racism, because it minimizes confusion with members of one's own group.

The evidence that most whites believe that racism can end is the widespread active resistance to change that increases the inclusion of minorities. In a social structure in which many actively work to exclude minorities, passivity by an even larger fraction of the majority can provide a huge synergy for exclusion. In a system of this type, inclusion policies must be active to work at all. They must be an active process, requiring thinking, planning, execution, and vigilance. When inclusion policies are passive, they fail.

This aspect of inclusion policies is well illustrated by the inclusion of women on the faculty at MIT and other universities around the country. After the civil rights legislation was enacted in response to the marches, protests, and boycotts of the 1960's to increase participation of African Americans in US jobs, schools, and universities, the enrollment of women in US undergraduate and graduate programs skyrocketed with the fuel of so-called affirmative action programs. This rise in participation was soon matched by a rise in women faculty members in science and engineering during the late 1970's.

However, during the 1980's and 1990's at MIT, the number of women faculty reached a plateau that was unchanged for more than a decade until new attention was brought to the problem of their inclusion on the faculty as a result of the highly lauded Report on Women Faculty at MIT, whose publication energized increases in women faculty members around the country. Women faculty members at MIT now recognize and work to insure active vigilance not only of their gains, but also of their continued progress towards faculty representation at population parity.

Now, a curious feature of the remarkable success experienced by women faculty at MIT is that it occurred without significant increases in the inclusion of African American faculty, men or women. How can this be? MIT is not unique in this regard. And although I don't have exact numbers for Hopkins, I am fairly certain that a similar phenomenon occurred here on a similar time scale.

Answering this question is the beginning of considering new concepts for the successful integration of the US Academy. It is the beginning of fairly including the excluded.

Before examining this crucial question further, I want to tell you about my parallel perspective of this phenomenon. From 1976 to 1980, I was an undergraduate biology major at Harvard in Cambridge Massachusetts. I didn't have a single African American professor, instructor, or teaching assistant in a lecture during my entire time there, though my freshman house proctor was an African American law student. There was only one African American professor in the Biology department at Harvard at that time; and though my course interests did not take me into any of his classes, I enjoyed every opportunity available to join in forums in which he spoke. I have a bouquet of roses in my office at MIT now that were sent to me by this professor in support of my recent hunger strike to protest racial discrimination in MIT's treatment and tenure process for minority faculty.

In 1976, I was part of the demographic wave of African American students who entered US colleges and universities in increased numbers due to the impetus provided by civil rights legislation. That is I was an "affirmative action baby." It was a remarkable time. Although we faced many examples of racism and exclusion at Harvard, there were advances in inclusion, headway was being made; and we planned to go out and change the known world in America.

And we did, in many respects, but not to the extent that we planned and expected. Partial inclusion can initially appear to be full inclusion; and one of the tragic fallacies of thought regarding affirmative action was and continues to be the belief, by many of the excluded, that it was the beginning of progressive change, change intended to bring an end to unfair exclusion; when in fact it was and continues to be only a short-term response to a transient period of intense political, social, and economic pressure for fair inclusion.

In 1998, when I returned to Cambridge, Massachusetts, 22 years later as an assistant professor, there were no tenured African American professors in biology at MIT and still only one at Harvard. Now in my 9th year at MIT, this situation has not changed. I turn now to an analysis of its cause, an analysis that I hope will reveal and suggest to you how to develop more effective strategies for increasing inclusion of the excluded at Hopkins.

There is an idea in the air of American life that many forms of discrimination are on the way out. That racism has already gone from America. Clearly it isn't. We in this room recognize the fallacy of this statement. Why else do we still need a minority faculty retreat? Even my 12-year-old daughter has experienced this phenomenon. When she attended a predominantly white private elementary school, she remarked that the white kids in her class thought racism was something in the past that no longer existed, while she realized that it was still present today.

The difficulty with advancing freedom and opportunity in America is that all advances occur due to activism. They are not given; they are wrest from those who would continue to hold them exclusively and unfairly.

Therefore, gains require vigilant stewardship; and continued advances require continued activism. Like much of the rest of American society, US universities have become complacent on the issue of insuring fair inclusion.

What has changed in the past 40 years since the civil rights struggles of the late 60's? Anti-discrimination laws enacted at that time provided legal protection and recourse against blatant, easily defined acts of discrimination. However, it is important to recognize that most of these new policies only limited discrimination by institutions that received federal funds.

Look at this duplicity and ponder what it means about the life of racism in America.

Many civil rights regulations do not apply to private institutions funded without federal dollars, like my kids' private school. Where there has been change in the inclusion practices of private institutions, it has been driven by the moral, economic, and political forces that federal policies engendered. Few are engaging in fostering inclusion without some form of active pressure. Those who wish to turn past advancements into drivers of continued advance without maintaining the pressure for fairness are kidding themselves. We must all recognize them for what they are, the hard won gains of activism.

Like any other complex problem, the solution to ending exclusion from the academy based on racism and other forms of unfair discrimination is necessarily complex and multivariate. However, that is not the same thing as saying it is too hard to accomplish. Let me emphasize at the outset, that the only thing hard about this problem is engendering the will and commitment to do the work required to solve it. Thereafter, it is as simple as ins and outs, for the clinicians; and steady state kinetics, for the scientists and the clinicians. Of course, there are important human factors to consider as well.

In the abstract, increasing the representation of African Americans on US faculties requires simply a commitment to their recruitment, hire, fair treatment, and retention. However, in order to accomplish each of these, there must be institutional policies and procedures in place to insure them. It is here that administrative leadership and will is often lacking; and its intent is contrary to what is pronounced. Now, let us look at each abstract feature in real terms, in more depth.

One of the earliest and most formidable barriers to inclusion of African Americans was the persistent myth that they lacked sufficient intellectual capacity to succeed in the academy. This thinking is pervasive, because throughout the years the level of African American's academic preparation has commonly been erroneously equated to being a measure of their intellectual ability. When some African Americans gained the means to secure a better education, the disparity between their academic preparation and entrance exam performance and those of whites shrank dramatically.

The racist assertion that inclusion required by affirmative action programs is synonymous with intellectual inferiority is still a significant problem in the academy. Just last week, minority students brought to the attention of the MIT administration and faculty that a climate exists on our campus that encourages white MIT students to write editorials in the MIT student newspaper, *The Tech*, endorsing this destructive viewpoint. It is not surprising that such damaging attitudes continue to exist and flourish, given the administration's current response, which has been to do absolutely nothing. Student groups on campus who are prone to such behavior interpret a lack of response from the administration and faculty as an affirmation of their racist beliefs and acts. By not acting to promote inclusion in such situations, the faculty, *de facto*, promote exclusion. Every act of racism in the academy must be identified, defined, and redressed, if we will continue to make progress in establishing a fair and inclusive institution. It is in this regard that many of us fall short of the mark of meeting our moral responsibility to respect and defend freedom for all.

Despite data and history to the contrary, the idea that African Americans and members of other minority groups cannot perform and achieve at the same level as whites is paradoxically still pervasive. Although African Americans may be better prepared for positions in the academy, they still encounter unsubstantiated attitudes that they cannot make outstanding contributions. To maintain this myth, when minority individuals achieve significant accomplishments, one of two attitudes is expressed.

They are either accorded special magical powers that are deemed not shared by other members of their group, or their accomplishments are devalued.

The solution to dispelling this myth is quite straightforward. Only ignorance can sustain such beliefs and attitudes. Developing mutually respectful familiarity ends misinformed prejudice. This aspect of increasing inclusion is evident in the initial rapid progress made by women in gaining inclusion in university faculties. One of the factors playing a role is that white men who previously held essentially all faculty positions had some degree of respectful familiarity with white women in the form of their mothers, wives, sisters, aunts, and friends. Many of them had encountered women of similar intellect and academic ability, whether they were willing to acknowledge this or not. But what about Black people?

Many current white faculty members in the academy have had no or very limited personal interactions with African Americans in any capacity, let alone as intellectual equals. This lack of knowledge from personal experience in meaningful interactions is a major cause of the persistent myth of Black inferiority.

There is an analysis that I have been conducting on my own, since I made an observation about 6 years ago regarding whites whom I have gotten to know very well. There are several white individuals with whom I felt an immediate sense of natural, usual, engagement, without any degree of reserve or awkwardness on their part, and without me feeling a need to be guarded in my interaction with them. I have become good friends with each of them; and after getting to know them better, I have learned that for each of them, at some time before they reached adulthood, they had one or more lasting interactions with individuals who were African American. So far, I can identify no exceptions in my own experience to this informative relationship. For me it is a personal affirmation for an effect that is quite the expected in human relationships. Meaningful, positive, personal interaction among members of different societal groups reduces prejudice and dispels cultural myths.

Recognizing such social barriers and developing strategies to reduce them is an important component for a successful effort to increase fair inclusion. Attention must be given to them at every step, from recruitment efforts to retention commitments.

In particular, acknowledging and reducing such biases in all decision-making steps is a crucial need. The inferiority myth wreaks havoc on minority faculty appointments and promotions. Institutions committed to increasing the inclusion of members of traditionally excluded populations must develop procedures for detecting such invalid unfair biases, challenging them, and eliminating them.

The same inferiority myth plagues minority faculty members during their appointment in the academy in many respects. With recognition of this myth as a shadow-casting background factor, I want to spend just a few minutes talking about some common problems in the experience of minorities in the academy, before coming to my main concept for successful integration of the US academy. I don't need to say much about the need for fair and equal treatment, because its crucial nature for a successful academic career is self-evident.

One of the hardest battles to fight is one in which your opponent never planned to do battle with you. All too often, minority faculty members are hired without any real commitment to give them the full support they need for a productive, successful career.

Although many succeed despite these exclusionary practices, many do not; and even those who persevere do so with significant injury to their psyches, self-esteem, and optimism for life and work. What minority faculty members require is the same as all other faculty members, an institutional and collegial commitment to providing the regard, the respect, the

information, the resources, and the collegial support needed to succeed. They require honesty and integrity from those who are responsible for the stewardship of their mentoring and nurturing.

Minority faculty members cannot insure full inclusion and fair treatment themselves. Through codified process, the institution must insure that such a crucial expectation is being met. Too many institutions leave the well-being of their minority faculty to the willy-nilly whims of department heads for which nothing is known of their true attitudes towards issues of social fairness.

But listen to me when I say, ‘To address this concern we don’t need to know their minds.’ Their actions are the only metric required. I dare say there is not a single institution of higher learning in the US that monitors and records the actual resource allocations, information, and general support of its minority faculty to be sure that it is on par with other faculty members. The main conclusion of the women’s report from MIT was that the experiences, resource allocation, and salaries for women faculty were vastly less than that of their male colleagues. The lesson here is, ‘Do the numbers, find the problems.’

Another significant problem faced by minority faculty members in the academy are the presumptions and assumptions made about our views on a variety of issues. Very few people are willing to just ask us what we think; and often there is no interest in what we think, just interest in presuming what we are willing to agree to do. The common example is the presumption that we will agree to assist with any ‘diversity’ initiative without any input into its development or form; or that we should agree to work on such initiatives in any form. (Okay, I had to say [diversity] one more time in this specific context).

I personally wish that all minority faculty members were inclined to work on such initiatives when the goals are genuine. However, it is an act of racism to call on minority faculty members for this purpose just because of their race. Mind you, it is also an act of racism to exclude them solely because of their race. They and all other members of the faculty should be given the invitation or charge to undertake in these efforts, without the motivation being their race. Can we work on this? Can we, please?

Often, in discussions on how to increase the inclusion of excluded groups in the academy, the pipeline issue is raised proudly as the solution. I don’t wish to minimize it. The flow in the pipeline of well-prepared able minority students is an essential, rate-determining factor; and it must continue to increase if the inclusion of African Americans and other minorities in the academy is ever to achieve or possibly surpass population parity. The problem with supply-side pipeline efforts is that they alone are not sufficient. I submit to you that the single most significant barrier to increasing the inclusion of African Americans in the academy is racism, that exists not only in the greater US society, but also more importantly in the academy itself.

This statement should surprise no one. Although our institutions of higher learning reside under the pinnacles of social, political, and scientific enlightenment, they are not fully inoculated against the scourge of racism and other forms of unfair discrimination. Although there is certainly a reduced scale of racism compared to the extramural American scene, it is still a significant force in academy life. So, the questions for us are, ‘Will we take up the mantle of morality to end racism in the academy; and if so, how will we accomplish this difficult undertaking?’ I have a recommendation in this regard, but first I want to share one more personal story to emphasize again a crucial concept.

In 2001 I was inducted into the first class of the Pew Charitable Trusts' newly established Science and Society Institute. The mission of the new Institute was to provide interested past Pew Scholars in Biomedical Research training for addressing or advancing scientific ideas and issues in the public sphere. Most of my colleagues were developing messages to advance issues like science education, medical education, and public relations.

I chose as my issue for bringing to public notice the abysmal rates of tenure for African American faculty in the biological sciences. One of the other participants, in a role-play session, asked me to address the following question:

He asked, 'James, why do we need black scientists, too? We have plenty of white ones.'

You know, neither that question, nor an answer for it, had ever occurred to me! I didn't have an answer for it then. However, I rejected the answer given by other members of the group. They put forth the argument that I should be allowed to be a scientist because of the diversity justification (there's that word again.) You know, the argument that diversity justifies itself. I maintained that diversity did not need to be justified, and it certainly was not the justification for permitting black scientists like me.

Before I got home from that meeting, the answers were clear to me. First, it is simply a matter of fairness. I have a right to be scientist. Inclusion is a moral issue. Having white scientists, but not black ones because of unfair discrimination against African Americans is a morally unacceptable proposition.

The second answer has broader impact on our society. When we deny talented members of our society from fulfilling their potential, we all lose. Unfair exclusion is a vast waste of our most valuable resource, human ingenuity. Racism in this country continues to extract huge costs in unnecessarily derailed potential and tragic human lives.

This re-emphasis on the recognition that ending racism is a moral issue brings me to my final concept for the successful integration of the US academy. Redress and sanctions. In my own struggles at MIT, I have learned that, in general, colleges and universities have no procedures, or woefully inadequate procedures, for monitoring and investigating charges of racism in faculty appointments and promotions. This is not restricted to faculty affairs either. In large part, the same can be said for student affairs as well. Let me ask you these questions: 'At Hopkins, if a faculty member or student is injured by an act of unfair discrimination, to whom do they turn? Who is responsible for investigating their charges? What is the process by which their complaints are adjudicated? What kinds of sanctions can be brought to bear on the responsible individuals or parties?'

How can we expect to make progress towards the goal of full inclusion, when lambs are thrown in with wolves without any shepherds to be found? How can we make progress when all paths for redressing racism lead to dead ends with individuals who either have no authority or who provide no moral leadership against acts of discrimination? I am pushing for some great university to take up the standard for all of the US academy, to establish effective policies and procedures for monitoring the treatment of minority faculty, addressing charges of unfair discrimination, and effectively sanctioning the responsible individuals.

This single step of full commitment would improve the environment of the academy rapidly and profoundly.

To be sure, the naysayers will raise the objection of their fears of minorities ‘playing the race card.’ I have already dispatched this illogical thinking earlier. Others will raise fears of disruptions of university governance due to imagined floods of charges, many trivial or frivolous. I am willing to predict otherwise. Indeed, if the actual false claim rate were even half of the charges brought, the academy and America would still reap a huge reward in all of the benefits that flow from a fair and just society.

I have one final thought to share before closing. I speak to all of you with equal gravity. Whatever your place in the Hopkins academy, the need for your active attention and engagement is great. However, each of you should also know that a single spark can start a fire that burns for eternity, if others will just tend to that fire and feed its flames with similar acts of goodness. The actions of a single person can bring change. However, that change happens faster when the numbers are greater. I hope that you can join me in the knowledge that racism and the unfair exclusion it causes will end in the US Academy and in America. I don’t see MIT leading the campaign to accelerate the arrival of this future any time soon. But, perhaps, *you* at Hopkins will.”