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Friendship and Bias: Ethical and Epistemic Considerations

Sheila Lintott

Introduction

Egalitarians find the seemingly stubborn persistence of social inequality deeply troubling and somewhat puzzling.[1] In "Split-Level Equality," Laurence Thomas observes, "the continual existence of social inequality is something of a mystery because just about everyone says that she or he believes in equality" (Thomas 1999, 189). Thomas argues these seemingly mysterious inequalities will continue to plague us if we neglect the role personal relationships play in maintaining them. He further maintains that "ethnic privileging" is generally accepted within personal relationships, for example, friendship and marriage, and this shows we are "not as committed to . . . public equality as we profess to be" (Thomas 1999, 201). Instead, Thomas thinks we function on split levels: insisting social identity factors such as race and ethnicity be ignored in public contexts, while allowing, even expecting, such factors to justify discrimination in personal relationships. To wit, as Thomas points out, there is broad agreement that race should not factor in hiring decisions, yet there is little concern with how heavily it factors in marrying and socializing, even at the explicit insistence of some families. Thomas focuses on romantic relationships; here I focus on friendship.

His analysis supports feminist critiques of the distinction between public and private realms; the personal is, after all, still political. As Carol Hanisch wrote decades ago, "one of the first things we discover . . . is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution" (Hanisch 1970, 76). This remains true today. Interaction between the personal and the political make any clear distinction between them a fantasy. The so-called public, professional realm influences, even structures the so-called private, personal realm and, most relevant here, personal relationships have measurable public effects. So, the line between these two realms is far from clear. Whom one marries or with whom one socializes helps determine whom one benefits and supports privately *and* publicly.

Thomas is undoubtedly correct that reducing bias in the personal sphere is crucial to increasing equality in general, yet his analysis of our "split-level" behavior offers only partial explanation. I agree with him that this reality is evidence that we are not as committed to egalitarianism as we claim to be; however, I also see this behavior as evidence of more insidious biasing forces. Yes, surely some people are not as committed to egalitarian ends as they profess to

be. However, many are, despite the fact that they indeed favor others like them in personal relationships. It is this tension that I grapple with here and I focus on how it is manifest in friendship.[2]

Friendship's Value

At the outset, I should confront the common assumption that friendship is or should be purely of intrinsic value. Such an understanding of friendship is overly simplistic. With Aristotle, we might recognize that there are different kinds of friendship, those based on utility, pleasure, and virtue, but only one of them, the virtue-based one, is perfect or true. In the perfect friendship, friends love one another for their own sake and not for the sake of some utility or pleasure to be gained from them: "Those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves, but in virtue of some good which they get from each other. So too with those who love for the sake of pleasure" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156a10). This, however, does not mean that friendship is not also valued for its utility or pleasure. Aristotle notes this as well: A friend "must also be not merely good absolutely but good for you, if the friend is to be a friend to you. For a man is good absolutely by being good, but a friend by being good for another" (Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1238a4). Of course, Aristotle is not claiming that true friendship is merely instrumentally valuable for the pleasure or goods it affords, which is clear given his distinction among three types of friendships. And neither am I. Friendship is, however, useful to us in a myriad of ways including providing pleasure, self-knowledge, grounds for cultivation of virtue, intense feelings, and breadth of experience. My aim here is to disclose and examine the non-intrinsic values of friendship, not to deny its intrinsic ones.

Implicit Bias and Friendship

Are you biased toward your friends? Of course you are, and, in many contexts, you ought to be. The very nature of friendship demands it. Friends give friends more of their time, energy, resources, love, and, indeed, more of their very selves than nonfriends. If this were not the case, friendship would not mean what it does today, and it would probably would not mean much at all. The value of friendship is tied up with bias and the ways biases enter friendships are worth examining for they can, unbeknownst to us, contribute to inegalitarianism. I focus here on the biasing factors that help determine with whom we become friends. Such biasing factors include implicit bias, in-group preference, and stereotype threat.

Roughly speaking, an implicit bias is an automatic tendency to think, feel, or act in biased ways regarding people based on their apparent social identities in line with widely held stereotypes; these biases are not easily available to introspection and often are not in sync with a person's espoused beliefs, feelings, and attitudes (Greenwald and Krieger 2006). So, although I do not believe

men are inherently better at math than women or that women are naturally better with children than men, I nonetheless am more likely to implicitly associate men with the occupation of engineering and women with that of elementary school teacher (White and White 2006). Implicit biases are not just unfortunate mental associations that persist like embarrassing blemishes one might hide; implicit biases affect behavior and judgment. For example, studies of implicit biases in hiring have shown that men are judged more competent than women and whites than blacks as is evidenced by the well-known and frequently replicated résumé study. When given two identical résumés with only the names changed (in some studies to reflect different genders, in others, races), white males are consistently ranked higher than their female or black counterparts (Steinpreis, Anders, and Ritzke 1999; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004).

Social psychology on the science of implicit biases illustrates the errors in widely held beliefs that human behavior is generally conscious, intentional, and controlled. Psychologist Anthony G. Greenwald and legal scholar Linda Hamilton Krieger discuss how "theories of implicit bias contrast with the 'naïve' psychological conception of social behavior, which views human actors as being guided solely by their explicit beliefs and their conscious intentions to act" (Greenwald and Krieger 2006, 946). Contrary to this naïve view, the science of implicit bias shows, through numerous studies that have been reproduced and refined over decades of research, "that actors do not always have conscious, intentional control over the processes of social perception, impression formation, and judgments that motivate their actions" (Greenwald and Krieger 2006, 946). Experiments designed to study implicit biases aim to detect implicit memories, implicit attitudes, implicit associations, implicit stereotypes, and implicit self-evaluations. These studies indicate that most people have implicit biases against traditionally disadvantaged groups.

Although most attention has been paid to the workings of negative implicit biases, implicit biases are valence versatile: the associations *can be* positive or negative. The psychological process goes something like this: an individual is perceived as having a particular social identity and the perceiver unconsciously associates that social identity with some stereotype(s) (e.g., women are emotional, men are rational, Asians are good at math, Jews are stingy). The perceiver thereby associates the individual with the stereotype, which in turn affects her attitudes and behavior toward and interactions with the individual *even in cases where the person firmly believes the stereotype is false and damaging*.

Homophily and In-Group Preference and Friendship

Related to implicit bias is the phenomenon of homophily or in-group preference. Homophily, literally "love of the same," is the name social scientists give to the familiar phenomenon of "like attracts like" or "birds of a feather flock together." Thus, homophily is the tendency people have to interact with others they perceive to be similar to them. In-group preference is a closely related

phenomenon and is the tendency to favor or be positively disposed toward those perceived to be in one's group (Brown 1986). As individuals, people seem strongly positively disposed toward and tend to primarily interact with others who are also members of their group, whatever group might be most salient, for example, racial or gender identity (see Currarini and Mengel 2012). Homophily and in-group preference have been established by nearly a century's worth of social science research, not to mention plentiful everyday observations (Schofield and Sagar 1977; Patchen 1982; Marsden and Campbell 1984; Schrum, Cheek, and Hunter 1988; Moody 2001; Quillian and Campbell 2003; Marsden, Marmaros, and Sacerdote 2006; Mayer and Puller 2008). These tendencies help explain the self-organization and self-segregation of people according to various aspects of social identity across a broad array of social settings, for example, social gatherings, corporate workplaces, playgrounds, and universities (Mackinnon, Jordan, and Wilson 2011; Rivera 2012).

Homophily and in-group preference are best thought of as formal implicit biases that are multiply realizable and contextually variable, shifting with the shifting salience of different aspects of social identity. The way they manifest depends on variables in different settings. But the basic idea is that if I see another as a member of "my group," whatever group that might be, I am likely to be positively biased toward and attracted to that person. Positive emotions are more strongly felt and commitment and loyalty are more active for "in-group" people. As a corollary, I am more or less indifferent to and sometimes negatively disposed toward those I perceive as not members of my group, as, in other words, members of an "out-group." Studies provide ample evidence of homophily and in-group preference in various contexts, from voluntary associations like friendship (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987), to workplaces (Ibarra 1992), organizational teams (Ruef, Aldrich, and Carter 2003), and educational settings (Schrum et al. 1988; Joyner and Kao 2000). Studies also suggest that these preferences react to shifting salience; for example, one study shows that when individuals are randomly assigned to groups dubbed only by t-shirt color, they show a strong preference for others wearing the same t-shirt color (Dunham, Scott Baron, and Carey 2011). Moreover, this is the case even when the participants are never explicitly informed of the grouping, but are merely given t-shirts to wear.

Discerning whether the preference to socialize with others like us is the root cause of or is caused by homophily and in-group preference is difficult—it is a chicken and egg situation—and the most likely story is one of a causal loop with such preferences reinforcing implicit biases and vice versa. Implicit biases are linked to homophily and in-group preference in at least three ways. First, implicit biases help explain the homogeneity often found in friendships. We are, it seems, implicitly biased toward others we perceive to be like us. Second, the homogeneity of friendship groups is amplified because friends of friends often befriend one another. If my friend and I are very similar in social identity, then likely so are our friends. Third, it is reasonable to think that homogeneity in social groups further entrenches implicit biases. If we are only with others who are like us,

members of our in-group, we grow more comfortable with them and less comfortable with those in the out-group. As a result, we find increased fear and dislike of "others," clear and obvious factors that threaten egalitarian ends. Moreover, the discomfort can create another obstacle to egalitarianism, stereotype threat.

Stereotype Threat and Friendship

"Stereotype threat" is a term coined by Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson in 1995 to describe a sort of "self-evaluation" that puts one at "risk of confirming . . . a negative stereotype about one's group" (Steele and Aronson 1995, 797). In short, when people are aware their performance may confirm a negative stereotype, they tend to underperform or avoid situations that trigger the stereotype threat. For example, in their original research, Steele and Aronson learned that if African Americans are told a test is designed to measure intellectual ability, they score lower than if they are told it is designed to measure problem solving under lab conditions. One theory explains that this underperformance happens because stereotype threat increases cognitive load. According to this line of thinking, if some aspect of my identity is salient for me, I may be preoccupied—whether I am aware of it or not—with thoughts of the stereotypes associated with that identity. This increased cognitive load distracts from other mental endeavors and utilizes mental resources that could have been employed for the task at hand. Moreover, wanting badly to make a good impression intensifies the negative effects, as is confirmed by research showing the more invested a person is in doing well, the more vulnerable they are to being negatively affected by stereotype threat (Aronson et al. 1999).

Underperformance is but one of the ways stereotype threat negatively impacts behavior. Another is *situational avoidance* as coined by Rachel McKinnon. McKinnon discusses the risk of hostility, harassment, and violence a transgendered person faces when using a public restroom which "leads to anxiety and stress, and in some cases, situational avoidance: some (perhaps many) trans persons intentionally avoid public bathrooms merely because of the stress and the *threat* of being perceived in light of (negative) stereotypes, however unlikely it may be in their particular case" (italics in original, McKinnon 2014, 10). Likewise, when at a philosophy conference I might confine my socializing to a group of women philosophers or avoid socializing completely to avoid being perceived as an incompetent philosopher. It is unsurprising then if most of the philosophers I befriend are women. So, although most of the research on stereotype threat has focused on academic or athletic performance in somewhat formal settings, it is easy to see how the same forces are at play in informal social settings.

How Biases Ground Friendship

Finding evidence of in-group preference in friendship can be tricky. Ask anyone how diverse her friend set is and she will likely come up with an impressively

diverse list of friends. It is more telling if, rather than asking about how diverse their friend set is, one first asks for a list of friends and then inquires into the social identities of the friends on the list. As you might expect, this approach yields very different results. Steele describes a student-led experiment with this approach:

> They stopped a number of black and white students as they crossed campus and asked them to complete a four- or five-page questionnaire. They wanted to find out how many close friends of a different race students had. The first page of the questionnaire asked them to list their six best friends, and the last page asked them to record their race. (This was so that a possible friend's race couldn't influence whether or not he or she was included on the list of close friends.) The survey revealed that among their six closest friends, neither white nor black students averaged even one friend from the other racial group. Blacks, for example, averaged only two-thirds of a white friend among their top six friends. As the students had been telling me, their social networks were organized by race. (Steele 2010, 21–2)

Think of your closest friends, those you most enjoy being with, those you love and trust, and those who know you as well as (or better than) you know yourself. Think of your friends from college. Think of your Facebook Friends—all 200+ of them—or your high school friends. How diverse are these groups? A great body of evidence predicts that many of your friends are probably very much like you in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic class, gender, and sexual orientation (see Kandel 1978; Marsden 1987, 1988; Kalmijn 1998; Mark 1998; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; Kao and Joyner 2004; Berry 2006; Ennett and Bauman 2008; Wimmer and Lewis 2010; Currarini and Vega-Redondo 2013). Indeed, people, perhaps unwittingly and probably in part due to situational avoidance prompted by stereotype threat, rarely interact in meaningful ways with people significantly different from them. More importantly, when they do, they are still unlikely to befriend them, as is shown by research that distinguishes between in-group preference that exceeds what is expected relative to demographics (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001).

Homophily, in-group preference, implicit bias, and stereotype threat are all at work in the formation of friendships. Whom we befriend is the result of, among many other things, a combination of these forces. These tendencies are rarely seriously questioned. As Thomas explains, "whereas preferences for ethnicity that are expressed in the public sphere are subject to considerable moral condemnation, such preferences in the private sphere are generally regarded as beyond substantial moral criticism" (Thomas 1999, 192).

So, *is* similarity a necessary feature of friendship? Plato and Aristotle thought so, but only to an extent. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato admits, "similarity of age tends to similarity of pleasures and consequently makes a couple good friends" (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 240b). Yet, in the *Lysis*, while Plato notes that it appears as though "like men are friendly with like men, in so far as they are like," he continues to critically evaluate the value of similarity in friendship deciding that "the like man is not a friend to the like man, but the good will be a friend to the good, in so far

as he is good, not in so far as he is like" (Plato, *Lysis*, 214e–215a). Likewise, Aristotle insists that true friends must be "alike in excellence," but this is quite unlike similarity of social identity (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b7). For Plato and Aristotle, then, similarity of virtue is needed for friendship, but this is not the same as demanding similarity of identity.[3]

Obviously, friends are going to be somewhat like-minded, both as grounds of attraction and as a product of the relationship, yet they need not be similar in identity. As C. S. Lewis tells us, "friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste" (Lewis 1993, 41). It is true that shared past experiences and interests definitely bond us: they can be shortcuts to friendship. But there is a downside to relying too heavily on innocent and obvious seeming connections, for they can be barely veiled shorthand for racial, ethnic, class, gender, or other similarities that may trigger various biases and prejudices.

Stereotype threat may be at work here. If I meet a person who seems to differ from me in ways I judge significant, I may worry about what to say to her and whether I will offend her. As a highly educated white woman, I may be concerned that I will come across as racist or classist. As a result, I may be guarded and self-conscious, leading me either to underperform or to avoid the situation entirely—and neither is the best phenomenological entrée to friendship. People are often apprehensive in social settings, especially those involving relative strangers, leading individuals with perceived shared social identity to congregate together. When friend sets are very homogeneous, the interactions among the friends can help mask the implicit biases at issue and might further contribute to ignorance or engender explicit biases. Maria Lugones tells of this feeling of discomfort in a social setting when a reference is made that she does not know:

> One may be at ease because one has a history with others that is shared, especially daily history, the kind of shared history one sees exemplified by the response to the 'Do you remember poodle skirts?' question. There you are with people you don't know at all. The question is posed and then they all begin talking about their poodle skirt stories. I have been in such situations without knowing what poodle skirts, for example, were and I felt so ill at ease because it was not *my* history. (Lugones 1987, 12)

Allusions to poodle skirts may seem rather trivial and socially and politically inert, but the comfort of shared allusions can prime people for friendship. Shared allusions often depend on shared history relative to factors such as race and class, which means they can trigger stereotype threat for others and further entrench homogeneity in friendship groups.

Ethical Implications of Bias in Friendship

Many of the implications of the biasing forces discussed here are fairly obvious. In sum, they lead to homogeneity in friendship, homogeneity that limits social mobility by keeping goods such as emotional support, professional networking, and

social opportunities within certain groups (see Granovetter 1973 on social networks and job recruitment and Ruef, Aldrich, and Carter 2003 on homophily among entrepreneurs). Not everyone is in equal possession and control of shareable goods and transferable privilege; the distribution of these goods largely correlates with social identity and so does the distribution of friendship.

Problematic Partiality

Some philosophers find friendship troubling because it is difficult to square with traditional insistence on impartiality as a criterion of morality. Friends treat friends better than nonfriends as a matter of course, just because they are friends, which some do not find *prima facie* morally relevant. We sometimes even privilege our friend's interests when doing so entails failing to meet some nonfriend's equal or even more basic interest, for example, if I barely acknowledge a homeless person on the street when rushing to meet a friend for coffee. This is why Elizabeth Telfer admits that "… friendship seems *prima facie* to involve a kind of injustice, in that it means giving preferential treatment to those who differ neither in need or desert—in other words … far from being duties, our services to friends might be construed as positively immoral" (Telfer 1970–1971, 235).

However, as Lawrence Blum argues, friendship legitimately grounds special duties (Blum 1982). According to Blum, impartiality is inapplicable in friendship and as an ideal impartiality rarely comes into conflict with the partiality of friendship. Telfer agrees, because, even in cases of conflict, "… there is nothing self-contradictory in the idea of duties towards those for whom we already feel a special concern, and … the existence of this concern is part of the justification for the claim that we have special duties to friends" (Telfer 1970–1971, 236).

Maybe so, but we need to pause to ask what determines to whom we "already feel a special concern." "Because he is my friend" may provide some moral justification for differential treatment while attempts to justify differential treatment "because he's white," "because she's Catholic," or "because he's heterosexual," patently fail. However, if a major reason a friendship has formed concerns social identity, then justifying partiality "because he is my friend" is not entirely distinct from justifying partiality "because he's white."

Reproduction of Inequality

Friendship is a scarce resource because the time and energy needed to cultivate it are scarce. As Aristotle says, "those who have many friends and mix intimately with them all are thought to be no one's friend" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1171a16). However, scarcity does not justify the social segregation evidenced in friendship, nor the inequalities that result from it. Because wealth and power are not equally distributed across various social identities, biases that ground friendship help maintain the status quo by containing the sharing of goods among homogeneous groups, thus helping to reproduce the current distribution of

wealth and power. This underscores C. S. Lewis's observation that "some forms of democratic sentiment are naturally hostile to [friendship] because it is selective and an affair of the few. To say 'These are my friends' implies 'Those are not'" (Lewis 1993, 40–41). Committed egalitarians should be very worried about the contribution current patterns of friendship make toward maintaining inequality.

Limitations on Moral Development

Our friends help us become who we are and, hopefully, to become who we want to be. Cocking and Kennett's insightful "drawing view" of friendship is particularly informative here:

> On a drawing account the self is conceived as a relational thing that is, in part, developed or molded through the friendship, and this process of mutual drawing seems to us central to the establishment and maintenance of the intimacy of companion friendship. Indeed, we will claim that companion friendships cannot get off the ground, let alone flourish, for people who significantly lack the capacity to be responsive to direction and interpretation by another. As such, the process of mutual drawing is partly constitutive of such friendships. (Cocking and Kennett 1998, 505–06)

They conclude that understanding friendship in this way can "shed some light on the way in which friendship contributes to one's identity. ... I am (partly) determined by the friend's interpretation of me and I have reasons to act that are directed by her interest" (Cocking and Kennett 1998, 527).

Recognizing the strong and unique influence friends have on one another is important for comprehending the value and meaning of friendship, as well the ethical implications of homogenous friendship. Friends teach one another a great deal and can do so in a very effective manner, through suggestions, modeling, or other subtle influences and without condescension or lectures. Or, a friend's influence might be more explicit, for example, if I bring an ethical dilemma to a friend, she may help me see issues and options that were not visible to me alone by showing me a new perspective or calling my attention to relevant considerations I missed. The extent to which a friend can assist me in this manner depends in part on how much we differ, which is part of Plato's rationale for dismissing similarity as a precondition of friendship, for there is not "any good or harm that a like thing can do to a like thing" and no good can "be done to it, which cannot also be done to it by itself" (Plato, *Lysis*, 215a). Marilyn Friedman also speaks of this issue:

> In case friends are extremely similar ... the moral growth that occurs through vicarious participation in the friend's perspective is less likely to amount to radical transformation of a deep-level, abstract moral commitments and more likely to amount to a fuller articulation of the moral values both friends already have in common. (Friedman 1993, 202–03)

Given my egalitarian commitments, I would be more the person I wish to be if I had more friends who could challenge my beliefs, broaden my perspective,

push me out of my comfort zone, and serve as intimate counterexamples to familiar stereotypes. In this sense, homogeneity in friendship undermines me and curtails my moral growth. This is particularly disturbing because of friendship's unique potential to foster moral growth.

Disrespect

Although more difficult to parse, not being considered a candidate for friendship and therefore not being befriended can be a matter of disrespect. The failure to befriend can be a failure in what Stephen Darwall terms "appraisal respect" which is basically a positive attitude towards another because of their character traits (Darwall 1977, 44). As Darwall explains, "appraisal respect is an attitude of positive appraisal for a person either judged as a person or as engaged in some more specific pursuit" (Darwall 1977, 44). The sort of respect at issue here is not the more general and familiar sort of respect due to persons as such. It is more individualized and is sometimes due to others in addition to basic moral respect. A kind person, for example, deserves our respect in this sense in addition to deserving respect in the more general sense.

Consider the attitude expressed in the beginnings of a friendship. The judgment that another person is a potential friend entails recognizing her as a worthwhile person: worth knowing, worth time, and worth respect. As Emerson tells us, "In the last analysis, love is only the reflection of a man's own worthiness from other men" (1991, 230). Nehamas cashes this out in terms of optimistic affection and trust: "I . . . act on a sense—vague but intense—that there is more to you than I can now see and that it would be better for me to learn what I suspect you can offer" (Nehamas 2007, 57).

In some cases one might actively and consciously judge another as inappropriate as a potential friend. Why? Perhaps because the person's character traits, interests, or habits are judged to be undesirable or at least not worth the time and effort befriending them would require. However, the person may indeed be worth the time in some or all of these respects but we fail to notice this due to their differences from us or related biases.

Cases like this are variations on the theme of social invisibility, as, for instance, when middle-aged women report (with mixed feelings) their invisibility as sexual beings[4] or when black men report feeling invisible when it comes to promotions as work. In many cases, the person harmed may be unaware of the slight, but this does not ameliorate the harm. A woman in her 50s who is repeatedly overlooked on an online dating site is being deprived of social and romantic opportunities and may suffer a reduction in self-esteem. A black man who is repeatedly overlooked at work is deprived of professional and economic goods and may suffer a reduction in self-confidence. Sometimes failing to recognize another as a potential friend, even when the failure is not noticed, is a failure to recognize the particular worth of that person *as a friend*, as a worthwhile person, as one's equal, or for their potential to enhance our life. This does not

mean that we have a duty to befriend anyone in particular or everyone in general. It does however mean that not befriending someone can be due to unwarranted implicit or explicit negative attitudes toward them that can lead to a failure to afford them the respect they are due.[5]

Epistemic Implications of Bias in Friendship

Socially and ethically, it is obvious that homogeneous friendships work against the cultivation of a just society because friendships ensure that power, privilege, and wealth continue to remain in the hands of persons of similar social identities. In addition, these friendships also have negative epistemic effects, most of which are not entirely independent of the ethical implications just discussed.

Reduced Epistemic Value

We learn much from and with our friends; friendship broadens our perspectives and increases our range of experiences. As Partha Dasgupta explains, "Society is not composed of culturally alienated beings. In dealing with someone you learn something not only about him, but also about others in his society" (Dasgupta 1988, 64–65). Friendship's epistemic value includes its promise to enable moral development, which it is less able to do the less diverse our friend set is (see, e.g., Hallinan and Smith 1985; Hallinan and Williams 1989). Friedman again:

> Because we might comprehend our own personal experiences in limited terms, or because the range of our experiences might be narrow in virtue of the restricted opportunities of our own lives, we do not always have the experiential or conceptual resources on our own to gain new moral insights or to surpass our own moral outlook. . . . Friendship offers one potential pathway toward such [deep] transformations, and even though it is not the only such route, it is one that is widely available and accessible. (Friedman 1993, 197)

Furthermore, the knowledge gained through friendship is often self-knowledge. Flocking together in homogenous groups results in provincial perspectives that can obscure our biases and preclude the development of knowledge and virtues that can only be acquired through close interactions and collaboration with others who are different from us. As Miller McPherson and his colleagues explain, "homophily limits people's social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001, 415).

Epistemic Vices

Virtue epistemology resurrects Aristotelian insights about the normativity of knowing and highlights the virtues we should acquire if we wish to be our best epistemic selves. Epistemic virtues include being willing and able to be

swayed by evidence, careful in consideration and examination, and open to the truth even when it is unpleasant. Personal affections can cultivate epistemic vices by leading us to engage in what Sandra Murray calls "positive illusions" about our friends and lovers (Murray and Holmes 1993, 1997; Murray, Holmes, and Griffin 1996). There is a tendency to overrate our friends and to readily explain away their apparent faults. Moreover, as Sarah Stroud points out, positive illusions about one's friends are expected, demanded even, given the nature of friendship. Friends also tend to make sense of one another's faults, placing them in a context that makes them understandable and sometimes even part of their charm. Stroud writes:

> For the good friend's epistemic stance seems to involve a relative (although not . . . absolute) imperviousness to new evidence, a slowness to update her beliefs in the light of new data, which goes beyond the generic conservatism of belief. It is almost as if the good friend decided once and for all some time ago that her friend was a good person and then absolutely refused to pay heed to a possibly mounting pile of evidence to the contrary. That hardly constitutes epistemic virtue. (Stroud 2006, 514)

Friendship in general runs the risk of inculcating epistemic vices and the situation is further complicated by the roles biases play in friendship. This is because having a homogeneous set of friends does not afford the same opportunities to develop epistemic virtues, for example through exposure to different experiences, perspectives, values, and ideas, as having a diverse set of friends will allow. Moreover, having a homogenous set of friends can help obscure our own epistemic vices by creating an atmosphere in which it seems there is freedom to disagree and debate, but the level of the debate is hindered by the similarities of experiences, perspective, values, and ideas within the group. These negative epistemic implications are serious for individuals and even more so for society.

Discriminatory Epistemic Vices

Taken on a case-by-case basis, we can see that homogeneous friendship might thwart one's progress as a knower and cultivate epistemic vices. We would be better knowers if we were able to adapt to evidence without bias. But we are not. We are enmeshed in multitudes of personal relationships that color our vision. The matter is even more troublesome when we recognize the influence biases have on whom we befriend, for then we see these negative consequences are far from idiosyncratic to particular friendships. This should heighten concern about the epistemic vices of friendship. Epistemic biases in friendship mimic known patterns of systemic oppression and disenfranchisement because we live in complex societies that reinforce specific and widely shared biased beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. So, friendship is not epistemologically problematic in merely idiosyncratic ways. Friendship is formed in bias, produces biased behavior, and perpetuates bias.

Testimonial Injustice

In *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Miranda Fricker introduces us to various forms of epistemic injustice. Here is Fricker speaking of the injustice that occurs when a person fails to take another seriously as a reliable source:

> Knowledge that would be passed on to a hearer is not received. This is an epistemic disadvantage to the individual hearer, and a moment of dysfunction in the overall epistemic practice or system. . . . Further, the fact that prejudice can prevent speakers from successfully putting knowledge into the public domain reveals testimonial injustice as a serious form of unfreedom in our collective speech situation. (Fricker 2007, 43).

Friends trust one another and respect one another's opinions and ideas (Winter and Kataria 2013). Ideally, within friendship testimonial injustice should be relatively rare. However, the overall phenomenon of testimonial injustice goes unchallenged when friendships fail to obtain between diverse people, and therefore excellent opportunities to increase cultural literacy are missed.

Miscommunication and the Unfair Distribution of Its Costs

Homogeneity in friendships fails to counter and may even increase the likelihood of misunderstandings and miscommunication across groups. Innocent gestures, bodily stances, and expressions in one group might be interpreted in different ways in another group. For example, eye contact might be interpreted as a sign of attention and respect in one group and as a sign of aggression and dominance in another. Elizabeth Anderson explains the inequalities that result from cultural misinterpretation:

> When different people belong to distinct social networks, their norms of communication and interaction will diverge in ways that will not be immediately understood by either side. When the segregated groups stand in unequal social relations, the disadvantaged group will tend to bear the costs of misunderstandings arising from interactions. (Anderson 2010, 37)

So, the general flow of communication is blocked as a result of homogenous friendships, and the burden of miscommunication intensifies present inequality by further taxing and disempowering the disadvantaged.

Hermeneutical Injustice

Finally, closely related to the problem of *miscommunication and the unfair distribution of its costs* is another of the epistemic injustices Fricker identifies, hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when "the powerful

have an unfair advantage in structuring collective social understandings" (Fricker 2007, 147). Recall our earlier discussion of the *reproduction of inequality* that friendship helps sustain. Friendship protects given distributions of wealth and power and that distribution is not presently an egalitarian one. Given that friendship tends toward homogeneity, it maintains the status quo and keeps the power to structure collective social understandings in the hands of the same individuals and others like them. For example, before women were given real voice or were in positions of power, rape was defined in such a way that made marital rape inconceivable, although studies show that even before marital rape was legally considered rape, women who were the victims of such assaults did consider it rape. It was not until that message was heard by the powerful that social and legal definitions of rape began to change in a way that accommodates women's experiences with marital rape. If friendship protects current arrangements of social, political, and economic capital, it also protects current arrangements of epistemic capital.

Possible Strategies

So far, I have argued that diverse friendships are beneficial to individuals and to society and that homogeneous sets of friends are detrimental. Friendship facilitates trust, which can break down personal and professional barriers between people.[6] My argument implies heterogeneous friendship can help reverse and curtail the spread of biases, and this is supported by research that illustrates how intergroup friendships influence relevant social biases (Dasgupta and Greenwald 2001; Eller and Abrams 2003; Wagner et al. 2003). So far so good, but vexing questions remain. What can be done about current patterns of friendship? The burden does not fall primarily on individuals: if the state is committed to egalitarian ends, and insofar as the state benefits from the existence of friendships, it has a responsibility to encourage relationships that will further egalitarian ends and remediate institutions that thwart them. Therefore, public policies encouraging friendships that disrupt our tendency to group in homogeneous clusters should be implemented.

Individual Effort

To *some* extent individuals can and I believe should counter their own tendency toward homophily by being aware of and resisting it.[7,8] However, befriending someone because of their race, say to diversify your friend set, is at odds with the nature of friendship and probably racist in itself (it is definitely a bit creepy). However, being aware of and slowing down in acting on the tendency to migrate toward others like us violates no such norms, nor does taking one's time in making friends by looking for grounds of friendship that are deeper than perceived social identity factors such as race, class, and gender. We also might be on the lookout for such commonalities among our friends, explicitly pointing

to those that can serve as a basis for friendship (e.g., shared aesthetic tastes, history, or geographic familiarity), thereby assisting them in befriending one another when social identity might have functioned as an unnoticed obstruction. This could help reduce the spread of homogeneity in friendships, given that, as Wimmer and Lewis report, "recent empirical research suggests that the effects of racial homophily are also amplified by balancing mechanisms, that is, by the fact that friendships are usually reciprocated and friends of friends are likely to befriend each other, independent of the racial background of the individuals involved" (Wimmer and Lewis 2010, 585).[9]

Structural Support

However, individual efforts can only go so far. Social support to encourage the natural creation of more diverse friendships and the increased fluidity of social mobility is necessary.[10] In the United States, friendship is considered purely personal and it is difficult to imagine what sorts of social efforts might help remediate it. But there is no principled reason to exclude friendship from the realm of goods worth protecting, rewarding, and improving via state-sponsored means. After all, marriage is incentivized and privileged in our society allegedly because we believe marriage is good for society.[11] So too is friendship, arguably more so than marriage. Consider some of Ethan Leib's suggestions on how society might better support friendships: "It is . . . interesting to consider how we could design our cities and towns with friendship in mind. We might use well-placed public spaces to encourage people to gather and converse, and we might incentivize foot traffic. . . . Suburban sprawl might also be targeted for reform to help promote friendship" (Leib 2011, 81). Leib continues, "when we think about integrating schools and communities to include more racial or class diversity, we should do so with sensitivity to enabling friends to remain together (if they choose) rather than enforcing their 'desegregation' thoughtlessly" (Leib 2011, 81). I agree that existing friendships should be respected, but also want to insist that we can do more to encourage the initial formation of interracial and interclass friendships. Doing so is possible without violating personal freedom or our other liberal commitments.

Shifting Salience

It was once thought that bias wholly resulted from social learning—hate, we were told, is learned. However, recent research complicates this picture. Yarrow Dunham and colleagues show that preferences for members of one's perceived in-group emerge early and quickly, simultaneously, in fact, with the acquisition of the relevant category: "the emergence of implicit attitudes in children over the course of a 15-min study speaks against slow-learning models of implicit attitudes . . . and favors . . . proposals suggesting rapid emergence of implicit evaluations" (Dunham, Scott Baron, and Carey 2011, 8; see also Dunham, Scott

Baron, and Banaji 2008). Moreover, the distinctions drawn between groups can be trivial and completely without significance; for example, "random assignment to color group had a strong effect on implicit preference for the groups" (Dunham, Scott Baron, and Carey 2011, 7).

This suggests that one way to frame friendship remediation is to make more salient some less commonly divisive features. In social settings, we might structure people into heterogeneous groups—for example, children in school, based on some shared feature that is independent of social identity, such as interest in certain books or subjects. Efforts such as this could be complemented and reinforced by other groupings, for example, based on extracurricular interests, arts, and athletics.

On the one hand, empirical evidence suggests people's allegiances can be affected by subtle inclusion or exclusion into in-groups, which is good news. So, a concerted effort to rearrange segregated groups into various in-groups is somewhat promising. On the other hand, this same good news is bad news because other markers of identity still have greater influence. For example, "minimal in-groups are weaker organizers of evaluations than is gender" (Dunham, Scott Baron, and Carey 2011, 8). Outside the lab, when out and about in our communities, what is salient is determined by widely shared stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. In the context of a society in which race and gender remain major categories of identity and in which race and gender are associated with various, widely shared stereotypes and stigmatizations, the creation of minimal in-groups can only get us so far. The upshot: a more direct approach is needed, but one that does not violate the principles of our liberal democracy.

Education

There is a more direct approach that recommends itself, but it promises to take much longer to net results than the creation of minimal in-groups would seem to. We could increase knowledge about implicit bias, stereotype threat, and in-group preference and their personal and social implications. We cannot tolerate much state interference in our private lives and we cannot expect people to police themselves when they are unaware of their biases and even unaware of the existence of factors such as implicit bias, stereotype threat, and in-group preference. Perhaps, however, through public service campaigns, information about implicit bias, stereotype threat, and in-group preference and their negative effects could be spread. Individuals could be encouraged to learn about their own implicit biases, their risks of stereotype threat, and their tendency to flock towards others like them. Those of us who are committed to egalitarianism, which, as I have intimated throughout this essay, is allegedly most of us, should want to know our biases so that we can bring our lives more closely in line with our egalitarian ideals.

Public education can take place via more passive campaigns as well. We could include more representations of diverse friendships in advertisements, television shows, and films.[12] Mass media of all sorts is routinely criticized for lack of

diversity. More media that represents diverse friendships and realistically deals with the issues that arise in them, whether comically or dramatically, could help create an atmosphere more conducive to the real-life formation and sustainability of diverse friendships.

Conclusion

Our egalitarian goals commit us to working toward a diverse, fair, and equitable society, one intolerant of discrimination, whether blatant or covert, conscious or unconscious. As individuals, our egalitarian goals commit us to becoming the most fair and equitable people we can. Although philosophers have begun to consider the theoretical and practical implications of how biasing forces, for example, implicit biases and stereotype threat, influence us, we have yet to join social scientists in seriously and extensively considering the functioning of such forces in our everyday lives and relationships. Here, I have discussed how biasing forces are involved in friendship formation and the ethical and epistemic implications of these processes.

The psychological and philosophical literature on the workings of various biasing forces teaches us that, despite having made considerable advances in the reduction of blatant and conscious discrimination, much work remains if we wish to eradicate discrimination and achieve a truly egalitarian society (or at least get as close to it as possible). To do so, we will need to attend to the many counter-egalitarian biases that function covertly and sometimes unconsciously. With Thomas, I am concerned that people may be less committed to furthering egalitarian ideals than they openly declare. Here, I have provided analysis and argumentation that the work that needs to be done to further egalitarian ideals concerns not only explicit commitments and goals but also the many implicit factors that help structure our lives.

I have argued that, if left unexamined, friendship leads to unequal access to social goods based on social identity. This does not show that friendship is unethical, nor does it undermine the very real and very important value of friendship to individuals and society. It does, however, show that we need to be cognizant of the effects and influences biases have in and throughout our lives and relationships, including, indeed, *especially* those aspects of our lives whose value and justification seem unassailable. Presently, despite its tendency to involve and perpetuate social inequalities, friendship resides, as it were, under the egalitarian radar and provides a safe harbor for the perpetuation of biases and discrimination.

Notes

[1] My focus here is on the North American context.

[2] Nothing I say here is intended to suggest that the cultivation of heterogeneous friendships across society would be sufficient to end any and all forms of oppression. For a thorough critique of such Pollyanna hopes see Benjamin DeMott, *The Trouble with Friendship: Why Americans Can't Think Straight About Race* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995). However, it is also worth noting that evidence suggests that friendship does have the potential to reduce intergroup biases (see, e.g. Aberson, Shoemaker, and Tomolillo 2004).

[3] A number of philosophers question whether there is a necessary relationship between friendship and morality or virtue (see, e.g., Cocking and Kennett 2000; Jollimore 2001; Keller 2004; Nehamas 2010).

[4] This might be termed something like sexual ageism. For discussion of this and related issues see Sheila Lintott and Sherri Irvin (forthcoming) and Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman's work on sexual racism (2011, 2013, unpublished manuscripts a, b). On why Coleman modifies his name by striking through a portion of it, the portion given to him by those who sought to enslave his ancestors, see his statement at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/philosophy/people/nathaniel-adam-tobias-coleman-explanation>.

[5] The idea that failing to befriend can be a sign of disrespect coheres nicely with Josh Glasgow's thesis that racism is best understood as disrespect (Glasgow 2009).

[6] Homophily, trust, and friendship have been shown to interact in powerful ways; trust grounds friendship (Hatfield 1984); we trust and befriend others like us most readily, which determines to whom we are willing to become vulnerable and from whom we can learn (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; DiPrete et al. 2011).

[7] See Kelly, Faucher, and Machery (2010) for a discussion of "the self-regulation hypothesis."

[8] For insight into the natural of responsibility for implicit bias, see Jules Holroyd (2012), and on the topic of responsibility for attitudes more generally, see Angela Smith (2005).

[9] See also Mouw and Entwisle (2006); Goodreau, Kitts, and Morris (2009).

[10] See Kelly, Faucher, and Machery (2010) for a discussion of "the contact hypothesis."

[11] I am hesitant to endorse state involvement in any of our personal relationships as I agree with feminist criticisms of such practices; however, with some creativity, it may be possible to craft an alternative model for state sanctioning of personal relationships without such sanctioning being oppressive or unjust. For an overview of feminist critiques of marriage and a thoughtful argument for a new model of state sanctioning of various personal relationships, see Brake (2012) and Chambers (2013).

[12] The negative effects of stereotypes in advertising are well documented, and evidence also suggests that such media can be used to undermine stereotypes or introduce counter-stereotypical exemplars (see, e.g., Cohen-Eliya and Hammer 2004).

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