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Special Editor

Liviu Warter, Ph.D.

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism, Iasi, Romania

E-mail: liviu@warter.ro

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A TREATISE ON THE JACKASS IN ACADEME: HOW ARROGANCE AND SELF-CENTEREDNESS DESTROY THE CREDIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Hershey H. Friedman, Ph.D.

Professor of Business, Business Management Department, Koppelman School of Business,
Brooklyn College of the City University of New York

Email: x.friedman@att.net

Linda Weiser Friedman, PhD

Professor of Information Systems and Statistics, Baruch College Zicklin School of Business
and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Email: prof.friedman@gmail.com

Abstract

There have been complaints that higher education is drowning in bullshit. Much of this is due to the various a-holes one encounters in academe. No other word can adequately describe the extremely nasty, abrasive individuals one is likely to encounter in academe who consider themselves superior to others and feel that the rules of civility do not apply to them. These arrogant, self-important tormentors tend to emphasize other's shortcomings and faults. The venomous people described in this paper fall into many categories: the disciplinary elitist, the egotistical narcissist, the (so-called) expert, the academic workplace bully, academic indoctrinators, and the egocentric college leader. All of them can cause huge problems and create dysfunction in individual academic departments and the entire institution. They have damaged the reputation of higher education.

Keywords: higher education, indoctrination, disciplinary elitist, replication of research, administrative bloat, workplace bully.

Introduction

In 2018, Christian Smith, a professor at the University of Notre Dame, bitterly complained about all the bullshit (BS) in which higher education is drowning (Smith, 2018). Smith feels that many of the problems the United States is facing today are due to what is going on in higher education. Some of the BS Smith complains about include the following:

- BS is universities hijacked by the relentless pursuit of money and prestige, including chasing rankings that they know are deeply flawed, at the expense of genuine educational excellence...
- BS is the farce of what are actually "fragmentversities" claiming to be universities, of hyperspecialization and academic disciplines unable to talk with each other about obvious shared concerns.
- BS is the university's loss of capacity to grapple with life's Big Questions, because of our crisis of faith in truth, reality, reason, evidence, argument, civility, and our common humanity.
- BS is the grossly lopsided political ideology of the faculty of many disciplines, especially in the humanities and social sciences, creating a homogeneity of worldview to which those faculties are themselves

oblivious, despite claiming to champion difference, diversity, and tolerance

- BS is the only semi-intelligible outbursts of antagonism from enraged outsiders incited by academe's suppressions of open argument, which primarily work to validate and reinforce the self-assured superiority of the suppressors, and sometimes to silence other legitimate voices.

Smith (2018) concludes that many of the awful things that are occurring in the United States such as fake news, bigotry, intense polarization, corruption, legislative paralysis, and the growing rage of many Americans is not unexpected when higher education is not properly doing its job.

A 2018 Pew Research Center survey found that the majority of Americans believe that higher education is going in the wrong direction. The majority of both Democrats (56%) and Republicans (73%) agree that "Students are not getting the skills they need to succeed in the workplace" (Jaschik, 2018). The reputation of higher education has not been enhanced by the latest college scandal involving bribery to guarantee admission into the finest American colleges (Wong, 2019).

This paper will describe the kind of nasty people (the a-holes) that are responsible for many of the problems in academe. What is an asshole? Aaron James, a prominent moral philosopher, attempts to answer that question in his book. According to James (2012: pp.5-6), the following are that unsavory individual's characteristics: he "allows himself to enjoy special advantages and does so systematically; does this out of an entrenched sense of entitlement; and is immunized by his sense of entitlement against the complaints of other people." In a nutshell, an a-hole believes himself superior to others and therefore exempt from the rules. A-holes are nasty, supercilious, and abrasive individuals; many are workplace bullies. They tend to emphasize the shortcomings and faults of others, and have no problem interrupting conversations. They also habitually cut into lines, since they see themselves as superior to others. These jackasses tend to be men, but some women qualify.

Sutton (2007a:10) lists 12 common actions used by these jerks:

1. Personal insults
2. Invading one's 'personal territory'
3. Uninvited physical contact
4. Threats and intimidation, both verbal and nonverbal
5. "Sarcastic jokes" and "teasing" used as insult delivery systems
6. Withering e-mail flames
7. Status slaps intended to humiliate their victims
8. Public shaming or "status degradation" rituals
9. Rude interruptions
10. Two-faced attacks
11. Dirty looks
12. Treating people as if they are invisible

In an article that explains why he wrote his book, *The No Asshole Rule*, and used the somewhat obscene term "asshole" in the title, Sutton (2006) claims that no other term does justice to the kind of jackasses these people are. They can cause huge harm to organizations; firms should have a no a-hole rule when it comes to hiring. Moreover, people working for a-holes often also become jackasses and jerks; it is contagious. What kind of a-holes are prevalent in academe?

The Disciplinary Elitist

Some academics believe that only their discipline (or subdiscipline) has the answer to how the world works. *Déformation professionnelle* — the tendency to see things in a narrow

way, i.e., from the point of view of one's discipline or profession — is a cognitive bias that interferes with critical thinking (Friedman, 2017). Disciplinary elitism provides the a-hole with an excuse for disparaging the work of others. This sort of academic bigotry runs rampant through our myriad ivied and hallowed halls in direct opposition to the otherwise open-minded culture in which most forms of bigotry and intolerance are simply not – well – tolerated. What is possibly strangest about this *disciplinist* way of thinking is that the large majority of these academic disciplines did not even exist several hundred years ago, and some disciplines are less than a century old. A result of this academic elitism is the sort of lack of respect that often results in the supersized feuds we have come to expect in academe, such as finance vs. economics; sociology vs. economics; liberal arts vs. business; psychology vs. sociology; etc.

Jackasses might use disciplinary elitism to bash faculty from other disciplines and belittle the research done by scholars from other areas. The reality is that knowledge has become increasingly interdisciplinary and that disciplines are converging. Despite this, we see more and more examples of disciplinary elitism. Perkins (1991) feels that academic subjects are “artificial partitions with historic roots of limited contemporary significance.” Edwards (1999) asserts that “in so many cases, the most provocative and interesting work is done at the intersections where disciplines meet, or by collaborators blending several seemingly disparate disciplines to attack real problems afresh.” Klein (1996: 191) also observes that: “Almost all significant growth in research in recent decades ... has occurred at the ‘interdisciplinary borderlands’ between established fields.” It is unrealistic to believe that an educator from only a single discipline can provide the necessary knowledge to solve problems that will arise two decades, or even ten years later.

An academic bigot with no respect for other academic disciplines is an a-hole. It is not healthy for the university, and it is certainly not healthy for students. Disciplinists who want their departments to be “pure” and exclude those with expertise in other disciplines may actually harm the quality of the research done by their own departments. Disciplinists also hurt research by discouraging collaboration among scholars in different areas. Each discipline uses its own models and jargon to ensure that they have complete control over information. It is probably true that a society that only encourages “education for economic growth” and has no respect for the liberal arts may end up hurting itself in the long run. The same can be said for an educational system that only cares about the liberal arts and sneers at what its proponents refer to as “vocational.”

Disciplinists who feel that only technical or professional skills are important undermine education as much as the liberal arts elitists who have no respect for the professions. Scholars researching the discipline of business are among the first to admit that business programs that are too narrow “do not give the students the depth they need to be morally engaged citizens and intellectually agile workers” (Glenn, 2010). William Sullivan, a senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, declared: “While business programs should embrace the liberal arts, it is equally true that liberal arts programs have things to learn from business and other pre-professional fields.” (Glenn, 2010)

No single discipline has a monopoly on understanding how the world works. Friedman, Friedman and Pollack (2008) underscore that all disciplinary models have something to contribute, and no one model is the perfect representation of reality. It is becoming increasingly clear that knowledge crosses disciplines; great strides in research can only be made when individuals from several fields collaborate. The greatest accomplishments of humankind have been the results of individuals from many disciplines working together. Space travel, for example, would not be possible without the achievements of researchers in areas of physics, engineering, chemistry, computer science, materials science, operations research, and management. Ideally, colleges and universities should be the type of

organizations where knowledge is shared. This cannot happen if disciplinary elitists have no respect for other disciplines.

The Egotistical Narcissist

The other kind of jerk who causes immense harm to an academic department and institution is the egotistical narcissist. Lynch (2017) underscores the point that the “defining trait of the age seems to be arrogance...the arrogance of thinking that you know it all and that you don’t need to improve because you are just so great already.” These jackasses are convinced that only their research is valuable and everyone else is not a true scholar. They tend to be extremely arrogant and are quick to attack the research of others. Sometimes, these a-holes have actually published a few papers in “A” journals but often with co-authors. They are so arrogant that they will bash scholars who write books or get large grants. They only value the kind of research that they do. Only journals that accept their papers are stellar in their minds; others are inferior. Academe is filled with narcissistic a-holes who brag about their research in top journals even years after they have stopped writing articles. They also exaggerate the level of their contribution. One jackass told faculty members that he spent 60 to 80 hours a week on his research. The same jerk published papers with several co-authors, but asked faculty members to publish solo papers.

What is often true of these jackasses is that they tend to be quite shallow. The ability to publish a few papers in “A” journals does not make one a great scholar. Indeed, the best way to become a scholar who publishes in “A” journals is to focus on one small area of research and publish exclusively in that area. This may lead to publications in these journals but ensures that one will be an extremely narrow thinker. True scholars listen to what others have to say and try to learn from everyone.

Moreover, many scholars make a huge impact through books, not journal articles. In the field of management, authors such as Stephen R. Covey are known for important books they have authored (e.g., *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* sold more than 25 million copies), not journal articles. An examination of the Thinkers50 list since 2001 clearly shows that the greatest management ideas did not all originate from journal articles (<http://thinkers50.com/t50-ranking/2015-2/>). Some of the great thinkers who made it to the Top 50 list include Daniel Pink, Sheryl Sandberg, Tom Peters, Jack Welch, Bill Gates, Thomas Friedman, Steve Jobs, Malcolm Gladwell, Jeff Bezos, Richard Branson, Andy Grove and many others who wrote books or had real-world experience as a CEO. Great ideas can come from anywhere and are not limited to academic journals.

One jerk who never published a book was attacking a faculty member who had published five books but had written no major journal articles. As noted, a-holes are into status slaps and status degradation. It does not matter how a colleague contributes to research, since the goal is to humiliate and not to encourage. The question whether it is better to publish a book or write a scholarly paper is meaningless. Scholarly contributions may take many forms (grants are another way to make a contribution, as are creating popular websites that benefit others).

Green (2016) examined Google Scholar in order to determine which publications were the most cited. The most cited book was *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas Kuhn with 81,311 citations. Only three business books made it into the Top 25, Michael Porter’s *Competitive Strategy*, Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline*, and Geert Hofstede’s *Culture’s Consequences*. The two most-cited journal articles are: “The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations” by Baron and Kenny (58,442 citations) and Jensen and Meckling’s “Theory of the Firm” (56,683) (Green, 2016). Undoubtedly, important contributions to the literature can be made with books or journals. In actuality, the

information in books or journals may get many citations but contain untrue or misleading information.

While Jensen and Meckling (1976) have published one of the most-cited business articles ever; this does not mean that their article is of value. They have drawn criticism for their claim that the “maximizing shareholder value” should be the objective of the firm, an opinion based on the mistaken view that “shareholders owned corporations and were corporation’s residual claimants” (Stout, 2013). After the Great Recession of 2008, it is clear how much harm was done by the foolish idea that the job of the CEO was to primarily maximize shareholder value and that CEOs should be rated on the basis of a single objective. Not only did this not strengthen companies, this misguided philosophy hurt many firms (Stout, 2016; Stout, 2013; Clarke & Friedman, 2016). Stout (2016) refers to maximizing shareholder value “myth” as the “dumbest business idea ever.” She explains how it can cause serious problems for a firm in the long run.

The answer may lie in recognizing that shareholder value-increasing strategies that are profitable for one shareholder in one period of time can be bad news for shareholders collectively over a longer period of time. The dynamic is much the same as that presented by fishing with dynamite. In the short term, the fisherman who switches from using baited lines to using dynamite sees an increase in the size of his catch. But when many fishermen in the village begin using dynamite, after an initial increase, the collective catch may diminish steadily. Shareholders may experience the same regrettable result when they push managers to “maximize shareholder value” (Stout, 2016).

Stout (2013, 2016) also posits that there are many kinds of shareholders, not all of whom have the same values, goals, and interests. Some might want to hold the stock for the long term until they retire; others may be speculators interested in selling quickly. Some shareholders may not be concerned about social responsibility and would not be concerned if their company bent the rules to increase profits; others may be very socially responsible and want the firm to improve society.

The idea of rating faculty on the basis of a single objective, whether “A” journals, books, grants, or innovative websites, is as ridiculous as rating CEOs on the sole criterion of maximizing shareholder value. A multi-objective approach must be taken. Of course, the academic jackass will choose the approach that can best be used to belittle the accomplishments of others.

Some a-holes are part of a group of individuals who join forces to reference each other’s work. This is a dishonest way to game the citation system and make journal articles appear more important than they really are (Oransky & Marcus, 2017).

For authors, the payoff is clear: The more citations your articles generate, the more influential they appear. And journals have similar incentives: Encourage authors to cite papers that appear in your pages and you’ve created the illusion that your journal is highly influential. Indeed, the controversial Impact Factor ranks scientific periodicals on how frequently their articles earn citations (Oransky & Marcus, 2017).

Even worse than this, is when faculty collude and make a reciprocal arrangement in which each adds the other as a third or fourth author to an article in order to increase the number of publications for each of the authors.

The value of journal articles took a big hit after a hoax was perpetrated on several identity-oriented journals. Apparently, three authors were able to submit 20 papers in less than one year to several journals. Seven of the papers were accepted and four were published. These papers, written in two weeks, were pejoratively referred to as part of “grievance studies” (Schuessler, 2018). One paper had the title of “Human reactions to rape culture and

queer performativity at urban dog parks in Portland, Oregon.” This paper was published (and retracted after the hoax was revealed) in *Gender, Place & Culture*. Steven Pinker, a renowned Harvard psychologist, tweeted: “Is there any idea so outlandish that it won’t be published in a Critical/PoMo/Identity/‘Theory’ journal?” (Eggington, 2018). Eggington (2018) claims that the hoax demonstrates “how the drive to hyper-specialization that has become the rule in universities undermines the work the humanities should be doing for the healthy functioning of a pluralistic society.” The authors themselves asserted that “scholarship based less upon finding truth and more upon attending to social grievances has become firmly established, if not fully dominant, within these fields” (Schuessler, 2018). This was not the first time a journal was tricked into publishing nonsense. In the late 1990s, physicist Alan Sokal, perpetrated a hoax by publishing a meaningless paper filled with fashionable jargon in the prestigious academic journal, *Social Text* (Mounk, 2018).

The Center for Open Science (COS), co-founded by University of Virginia psychologist Brian Nosek, has been attempting to determine the reliability of published research. If research cannot produce the same results on a second try, it is of little value. One study found that only 39% of psychology papers could pass the replication test (Bohannon, 2015). A more recent study, that increased the power of the original studies by using five times as many subjects, found that, 62% of social science studies can be replicated (Servick, 2018). The inability to replicate research studies is a serious problem in all of science, including medicine. According to Tractenberg, chair of the Committee on Professional Ethics of the American Statistical Association:

A survey of more than 1,500 investigators, published in a 2016 issue of *Nature*, showed that more than 70 percent of researchers have tried and failed to reproduce other scientists' experiments, and more than half have failed to reproduce their own experiments (Tractenberg, 2017).

One problem may relate to statistical significance. The cutoff for significance is .05 and that may be too generous and lead to many false positives. One researcher has suggested using a significance level of .005 as a way to improve the quality of research (Brookshire, 2019).

Many of the jackasses who enjoy belittling the research skills of others are mediocre teachers. Cederström and Marinetto (2016) posit that “being a disengaged teacher is nothing to be ashamed of at a research university.” They claim that teaching material that engages students or writing articles that are actually read are not rewarded. Moreover, “bad prose is not necessarily a disadvantage when making an academic career” (Cederström & Marinetto, 2016). They also assert that much academic writing is something of little interest to most people. This may be why very few people read journal articles. The average journal article is read in full by seven to ten people (Pooley, 2018; Lambert, 2007).

The Expert

Academe is filled with so-called experts who are often cited by the media, used to make predictions. Of course, these predictions are usually wrong. Kahneman (2011: 261-265) believes that one must be very careful when dealing with people who are overconfident and assertive. They certainly believe that they have the expertise, but they may not perform better than chance. He concludes that “an unbiased appreciation of uncertainty is the cornerstone of rationality — but it is not what people and organizations want...Acting on pretended knowledge is often the preferred solution” (Kahneman, 2011: 263).

Several books have been written about expert predictions that turn out to be wrong. According to Dobelli (2013):

Experts suffer even more from the overconfidence effect than laypeople do. If asked to forecast oil prices in five years' time, an economics professor will be

as wide of the mark as a zookeeper will. However, the professor will offer his forecast with certitude (Dobelli, 2013).

Kahneman (2011: 218-219) cites research conducted by Tetlock (2005) that demonstrates how poorly experts who make a living “commenting or offering advice on political and economic trends” actually perform. They do not do better than monkeys throwing darts on a board when displaying the various possible outcomes (Kahneman 2011: 219). Virtually all economic models failed to predict the Great Recession of 2008 (Krugman, 2012; Smith 2015). The best economic models are not judged on predicting something new but on “how well the model fits the data on the phenomenon the model was created to describe.” This, of course, is almost worthless, since you might end up with hundreds of contradictory models to describe hundreds of different phenomena (Smith, 2015).

Smith (2015) further states:

Economists didn't just fail to see that monster recession; they routinely fail to see economic events coming. The best models we have -- the ones central banks use, which take graduate-level training in order to handle -- have about as much forecasting power as simple, naïve mathematical techniques that any undergraduate statistics major could whip up in a few minutes (Smith, 2015).

Kahneman (2011: p. 241) has this to say about expert intuition: “Claims for correct intuitions in an unpredictable situation are self-delusional at best, sometimes worse ... intuition cannot be trusted in the absence of stable regularities in the environment.”

If an environment is very stable and regular, an expert does have the ability to understand the regularities by observing the right cues. In areas where there are no regularities and consistencies (e.g., the stock market or political environment), people will not be able to develop any real expertise.

Predictions made by academics are especially suspect. Kahneman (2011: p. 219), citing Tetlock (2005), has the following to say about these kinds of predictions:

In the age of academic hypersegmentation, there is no reason for supposing that contributors to top journals — distinguished political scientists, area study specialists, economists, and so on — are any better than journalists or attentive readers of *The New York Times* in ‘reading’ emergency situations (Kahneman 2011: p. 219).

Needless to say, experts have “a large collection of excuses” to explain why their predictions were incorrect. They often attributed an erroneous prediction to “an unforeseeable event” that had occurred. Of course, the experts who are most in demand are those that suffer from extreme overconfidence (Kahneman, 2011: p. 219).

Kahneman (2011: pp. 222-233) maintains that algorithms often do a better job at predictions than experts. He describes several situations in which one should rely on a simple checklist consisting of, say, six relevant characteristics rather than relying on an expert. He discusses a simple algorithm developed by Dr. Virginia Apgar in 1953 to determine whether a newborn infant was in distress. Her method is superior to the expert judgment of obstetricians since it focuses on several cues. Kahneman does point out the hostility towards using algorithms. Incidentally, Apgar's algorithm, still in use, has saved thousands of lives.

Kahneman (2011: p. 226) cites the work of Dawes (1979) and claims that a simple formula that uses predictors (i.e., independent variables) with equal weights are often superior to multiple regression models that use complex statistics to assign different weights to each of the predictor variables. That is because multiple regression models are often affected by “accidents of sampling.” Of course, some common sense is needed to select the independent variables most likely to predict the dependent variable accurately. Dawes (1979) contends that the simple metric of “frequency of lovemaking minus frequency of quarrels”

does an excellent job of predicting marital stability (Kahneman, 2011: p. 226). The bottom line is that we should not be overly impressed with the judgment of experts.

This is what can be said about expert predictions:

When they're wrong, they're rarely held accountable, and they rarely admit it, either. They insist that they were just off on timing, or blindsided by an improbable event, or almost right, or wrong for the right reasons. They have the same repertoire of self-justifications that everyone has, and are no more inclined than anyone else to revise their beliefs about the way the world works, or ought to work, just because they made a mistake.

Extensive research in a wide range of fields shows that many people not only fail to become outstandingly good at what they do, no matter how many years they spend doing it, they frequently don't even get any better than they were when they started. In field after field, when it came to centrally important skills—stockbrokers recommending stocks, parole officers predicting recidivism, college admissions officials judging applicants—people with lots of experience were no better at their jobs than those with very little experience (Eveleth, 2012).

Kahneman (2011: 205) states that the correlation between the quality of the CEO and the success of his or her firm is probably about .30. Several studies demonstrate that chance plays a much more important role in the performance of companies than CEOs (Fitza, 2013). Kahneman (2011: 206-208) asserts that the halo effect together with outcome bias helps explain the popularity of various books dealing with leadership. These books focus on successful firms and then attribute it to leadership style; in most cases it is simply luck. Chance quite often explains the success of certain firms and the failures of others, not the competence of leadership. Indeed, with the passage of time, the situation often reverses itself and the successful firms become unsuccessful and vice versa.

Kahneman claims that the message of *Built to Last*, a leadership book by Collins and Porras (1994), is that “good managerial practices can be identified and that good practices will be rewarded by good results.” Kahneman (2011: p. 207) disagrees, stating: “In the presence of randomness, regular patterns can only be mirages.” It is interesting to note that about 8 of the 18 companies extolled in *Built to Last* have stumbled (Reingold & Underwood, 2004).

Peters and Waterman (1982), authors of *In Search of Excellence*, studied 43 of America's best-run companies to determine what factors contributed to their success; they came up with eight basic principles of management. How did these firms end up doing in the longer term? Eckel (2013) says that “two-thirds of them underperformed the S&P 500 over a decade. Some faltered badly, and some even went out of business.” The stock performance of these companies did not stand the test of time (Baum & Smith, 2015). So much for predictions of experts.

The Academic Workplace Bully

Workplace bullying is a serious problem everywhere; bullies create a toxic workplace. According to Landau (2016), bullying may take the following forms:

- Overbearing supervision.
- Constant criticism.
- Blocking promotion.
- Exclusion, for example from lunches and drinks, relevant meetings, and important emails.
- Being overworked and expecting unreasonable response times.
- Making threats or comments about job security without foundation.

In the United States, according to a 2017 study, some 30 million workers have experienced bullying (29.6%) within the past year. More than 30 million workers have witnessed others being bullied (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2017). Bullying in academe is also a serious problem. According to Hollis (2012: p. 36): “close to 62% of respondents . . . confirmed that they had been bullied or witnessed bullying in their higher education positions in the last 18 months.” She also found that 16% of respondents changed jobs because of academic bullying (Hollis, 2012: p. 113).

Workplace bullying in academe can take many forms. One way is sub-disciplinary elitism; battles among subdisciplines are quite prevalent in academe: behavioral economics vs. classical economics; applied mathematicians vs. theoretical mathematicians; applied philosophers vs. theoretical philosophers; computer scientists vs. MIS faculty; econometricians vs. experimental economists; Austrian economics vs. Keynesian economics; Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) vs. Keynesian Theory, etc. Faculty members from one sub-discipline will often bash members of another sub-discipline, preferring to hire faculty members who share their beliefs, and attacking the research of those from other sub-disciplines.

In June 2000, the Post-Autistic Economics Movement began in France. Students felt that the discipline of economics relied too much on abstract mathematical models that were totally unrelated to reality. The harsh term “autistic science” was used to describe a discipline the students called close-minded and insistent on conducting research in “imaginary worlds” (Fullbrook, 2002).

Finding impartial external reviewers to evaluate the quality of the research of a candidate for tenure or promotion is one of the most taxing parts of the tenure process. These external reviewers are often selected by the chair of the department or the dean. Unfortunately, a hostile chair could easily select faculty members from a different sub-discipline, say, scholars that refer to the tenure candidates research as autistic, to serve as external reviewers of the tenure candidate. One doubts that a free-market economist up for tenure would fare well with an external evaluator who is a Marxist. It would not be difficult to find pro-BDS political scientists to tear apart the research of a pro-Israel political scientist up for tenure or promotion.

Academic bullies are also known for taking advantage of junior faculty. It is not uncommon for a senior faculty member to bully a junior faculty member who has done most of the work on a paper, and insist on being credited as a first author. Doctoral students or graduate teaching fellows working for an advisor who is an a-hole may find their research hijacked, not even being offered a co-authorship on a paper for which they did most of the work.

Hollis (2012: p. 113) states that bosses are bullies 72% of the time. Some department chairs, who enjoy being bullies, will devise the strangest rules in the name of improving quality. At one college, a department chair does not allow his faculty to teach partially online, hybrid, or fully online courses. He also does not allow faculty to teach jumbo classes (in many colleges jumbo classes count for six credits toward the workload rather than three credits). He also insists on examining every exam to make sure that faculty give exams that he considers appropriate, and also insists that course syllabi be 15 pages. All this supposedly done for the sake of quality. However, the chair is among the worst teachers in his own department. The untenured faculty are terrified of him.

Sexual abuse, an extreme form of bullying, is not uncommon in academe. A study conducted by the American Economic Association found that 85 female economists (sample size was about 9,000) claimed they had been sexually assaulted by a colleague or peer, and more than 20% were victims of an “unwanted sexual advance” (Casselmann and Tankersley, 2019). Forty-eight percent of female economists indicated that they “experienced

discrimination based on sex” vs. 3% for men; and 69% of female economists felt that their “work was not taken as seriously as their colleagues” vs. 43% for men. Only 14% of black economists agreed that “people of my race/ethnicity are respected within the field” (Casselmann and Tankersley, 2019).

The Academic Indoctrinator

There are all kinds of indoctrinators in academe. They tend to be ideologues who are dogmatic, unwilling to have honest discussions, and suffer from moral certainty. Kahneman talks about “willful ignorance,” which is a problem that results “when we know that there are other ideas out there, but we refuse to consider them.” Willful ignorance produces individuals who become so hardened in their positions that they even demonize people with differing opinions -- no amount of evidence will convince people suffering from “willful ignorance” to change their mind. Eventually, this refusal to listen to other points of view becomes denialism (McIntyre, 2016). For example, this seems to have happened to a large number of intelligent people who maintain that the MMR vaccine causes autism. This is why critical thinking is a vital skill (McIntyre, 2016). The hope is that individuals with critical thinking abilities will not fall into the trap of willful ignorance and will possess the capability of listening to other points of view.

Kahneman puts forth “adversarial collaboration” as an effective way to avoid confirmation bias, which arises when a researcher consciously or unconsciously designs an experiment in such a way to provide support for a particular position (Matzke *et al.*, 2013). Bringing together two researchers who disagree and having them conduct an experiment jointly often results in better research (Matzke *et al.*, 2013). The goal of adversarial collaboration is to discover the truth, not to win arguments (Kahneman, 2012).

Faculty members who are indoctrinators will also probably suffer from disciplinary elitism. Many indoctrinators look at disciplines such as business as vocational and of no value. Indeed, a good number of them view college as more about indoctrinating students than teaching them useful workplace skills. At one college, several economists in a combined economics and business department got together and decided to hijack any academic lines going to business. One faculty member proudly declared that one semester he taught marketing as a Marketing course.

Lloyd (2017) posits that moral certainty is dangerous. He suggests that “History overflows with misery inflicted by well-intentioned people who were convinced that they had seen the only true moral values, and who sought to convert or destroy those who would not agree.” His examples include the Inquisition, which was based on the moral certainty of the Roman Church that was certain that only its interpretation of Christian scriptures was correct. Similarly, Stalin’s Russia, Mao’s China, and Hitler’s Germany were totalitarian societies built on the belief that they knew the truth and anyone who disagreed had to be exterminated.

Mao’s “Cultural Revolution” resulted in the death of millions – one estimate is 30 million -- and was really a Chinese holocaust (Lewis, 2014: xviii). Communism is one social experiment that has failed miserably. White (2012: 453-457) lists 17 countries that became Communist; the total number of people that died in these countries from “execution, labor camps, famine, ethnic cleansing, and desperate flight in leaky boats” is about 70 million. White (2012: 453) underscores the fact that “when death and destruction have followed every single Communist regime ever established, there would seem to be a flaw in the system.” It should be impossible for anyone to believe that this is an economic system that works. Yet, many academics will still teach Marxism as a successful economic system that results in wealth for all.

Faculty members on the right can also suffer from the need to indoctrinate. White (2012: 309-315) describes the effects of Adam Smith’s opinion that “Famine has never arisen

from any other cause but the violence of government attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconvenience of death.” This notion that governments should not interfere with famine, resulted in the deaths of 26.6 million people in British-ruled India. Amartya Sen challenged this view and noted that famines do not take place in democracies; the action of government can prevent deaths from famines in poor as well as rich countries (White, 2012: 309).

Diversity is another area where indoctrinators have distorted the truth. There is ample evidence that a company that wants to thrive in today’s multicultural, globally competitive environment must be serious about diversity and do everything possible to eliminate all kinds of discrimination, obvious and subtle (Friedman, Friedman & Leverton, 2016). True diversity focuses on allowing people with diverse opinions to debate in constructive manners. Friedman, Friedman and Leverton (2016) provide compelling evidence that an essential ingredient for augmenting creativity is diversity, i.e., people from various kinds of backgrounds with diverse opinions working together. A homogeneous group consisting only of, say, white males with similar backgrounds and experiences, will generally not be as innovative as a diverse group.

Duarte *et al.* (2015) maintain: “Psychologists have demonstrated the value of diversity – particularly diversity of viewpoints – for enhancing creativity, discovery, and problem solving.” Encouraging ethnic, gender and other kinds of diversity is a way to ensure a diversity of viewpoints. A board consisting of only white males will not have the different mindsets, approaches, and backgrounds to make good decisions. Zalis (2017) highlights:

According to McKinsey, companies ranking in the top quartile of executive-board diversity were 35% likelier to financially outperform the industry medians. Other research finds that inclusive teams make better business decisions 87% of the time (Zalis, 2017).

Unfortunately, courses in diversity offered by colleges may have a deleterious effect. Ethnic studies courses that are taught correctly provide the necessary skills that both individuals and leaders need to succeed in a pluralistic society (Brown, 2016).

Indoctrinators may not be suitable for teaching courses in ethnic studies. Taught the wrong way, these courses may encourage tribalism and hinder society (Eggington, 2018). Kaylan (2010) points out that teaching any group that its members are always infallible can have serious consequences. The opposite of critical thinking, it can produce angry people who can never fit into society or the workplace. Walking around with a chip on the shoulder is what the wrong kind of minority cheerleading course may produce. Kaylan (2010) makes the powerful observation that “Ethnic minorities resentful of America might be less inclined to act out if they had a clearer notion of how their own cultures had failed them in the first place.” Ethnic/minority courses can be valuable and teach many valuable skills, but not when the purpose is to create resentful, angry and bitter people.

Jonathan Haidt co-founded Heterodox Academy to push for “viewpoint diversity” on campus (Goldstein, 2017). Heterodox Academy released a Guide to Colleges that provides ratings to enable students to know which campuses have diversity of thought and free speech. Haidt has been criticized for his absolutist stance on free speech, which his critics feel “is at odds with the need for a diverse and inclusive university.” Haidt believes that the new moral culture prevalent on many college campuses “values victims, prioritizes emotional safety, silences dissent, and distorts scholarship. It is a culture that undermines the university’s traditional mission to pursue truth” (Goldstein, 2017). Haidt feels that colleges are responsible for exacerbating the culture of victimhood.

Haidt believes that the list of “Sacred Victims” continues to grow. It now includes Blacks, women, LGBT, Latinos, Native Americans, the disabled, and Muslims (Goldstein, 2017). He is predicting that the political dysfunction we see together with the use of social

media to portray the other side at its worst will ultimately lead to violence and hundreds will die (Goldstein, 2017). According to Haidt, about 70% to 75% of America is now in a protected group. It is difficult to be a candid, truthful social scientist when “you have to try to explain social problems without saying anything that casts any blame on any member of a protected group. None of these groups can have done anything that led to their victimization or marginalization” (Leo, 2016).

One can find other kinds of indoctrinators/ideologues on a college campus. In economics departments, one finds indoctrinators who believe in one particular school of thought. One of the most vocal critics of the discipline of economics is Deirdre McCloskey.

The progress of economic science has been seriously damaged. You can't believe anything that comes out of it. Not a word. It is all nonsense, which future generations of economists are going to have to do all over again. Most of what appears in the best journals of economics is unscientific rubbish. I find this unspeakably sad. All my friends, my dear, dear friends in economics, have been wasting their time....They are vigorous, difficult, demanding activities, like hard chess problems. But they are worthless as science.

The physicist Richard Feynman called such activities Cargo Cult Science.... By “cargo cult” he meant that they looked like science, had all that hard math and statistics, plenty of long words; but actual science, actual inquiry into the world, was not going on. I am afraid that my science of economics has come to the same point (McCloskey, 2002: pp. 55-56).

There are indoctrinators in other disciplines as well. Ideologues in political science departments can also be close-minded about all kinds of subjects. There are political science departments all over the country where it would be virtually impossible for a faculty member with conservative views to get a job. The effect of all these indoctrination courses is that students graduate with an inability to be critical thinkers. The CLA+ exam (College Learning Assessment Plus) is a standardized exam that measures students' abilities in the following areas: critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving and writing. A *Wall Street Journal* review of the results from numerous CLA+ exams given at about 200 universities and colleges revealed that at more than 50% of institutions of higher education, at least a third of seniors “were unable to make a cohesive argument, assess the quality of evidence in a document or interpret data in a table” (Belkin, 2017).

Some academic experts, education researchers and employers say the Journal's findings are a sign of the failure of America's higher-education system to arm graduates with analytical reasoning and problem-solving skills needed to thrive in a fast-changing, increasingly global job market. In addition, rising tuition, student debt and loan defaults are putting colleges and universities under pressure to prove their value (Belkin, 2017).

Indoctrination is not learning; students have to be taught to think for themselves. Higher education may be partially responsible for the incredible hatred we are seeing among people who have different opinions. According to a recent paper, an amazing 42% of people in each political party see the opposition as being “downright evil.” Approximately 16% of Republicans and 20% of Democrats state that the world be a better place if large numbers of members belonging to the other party would be dead (Brooks, 2019). The antifa (short for anti-fascist) movement, with its willingness to use violence to oppose the alt-right, may be contributing to the inability of respectful debates between members of the right and left, even on college campuses. This is the philosophy of the antifa movement:

Antifa combines radical left-wing and anarchist politics, revulsion at racists, sexists, homophobes, anti-Semites, and Islamophobes, with the international

anti-fascist culture of taking the streets and physically confronting the brownshirts of white supremacy, whoever they may be (Lennard, 2017).

Richard Paul (1988) has the following to say about the danger of teaching morality and ethics that is not in conjunction with critical thinking: “How can we cultivate morality and character in our students without indoctrinating them, without systematically rewarding them merely because they express our moral beliefs and espouse our moral perspective?”

Without scrupulous care, we merely pass on to students our own moral blindness, moral distortions, and close-mindedness. Certainly many who trumpet most loudly for ethics and morality in the schools merely want students to adopt their ethical beliefs and their ethical perspectives, regardless of the fusion of insight and prejudice those beliefs and perspectives doubtless represent. They take themselves to have the Truth in their pockets. They take their perspective to be exemplary of all morality rightly conceived. On the other hand, what these same people fear most is someone else’s moral perspective taught as the truth: conservatives afraid of liberals being in charge, liberals of conservatives, theists of non-theists, non-theists of theists (Paul, 1988).

The Egocentric College Leader

Egocentric college leaders have no interest in transforming their schools into huge successes. What they care about is their own needs -- for money, power, and adulation. Their goal is to pad their CVs in order to look good when applying for the next job. Their goal is expansion, not maintenance; to them, faculty are tools to be used and manipulated; they see nothing wrong with lying. At one college, the administration insisted that all buildings were safe and free of asbestos and mold. A few years later, under a new administration, asbestos had to be removed from several buildings.

Covering up problems is what a-holes do well, since they receive no kudos for maintaining buildings and keeping restrooms functional and clean. They pretend that they are creating a good college by creating superfluous schools, departments, or centers; style, not substance, is what matters. It is often difficult to see how colleges waste money, but there is one simple test: Examine the number of academic departments and number of administrators.

Some administrators are obsessed with hiring other administrators, rather than faculty. One college that functioned well with one Associate Provost currently has three. Administrative bloat is a serious national problem, partially due to administrators who are extremely lazy, who would rather hire four administrators to do one job, than do a little extra work themselves. Some administrators, afraid of competent people, guarantee that only incompetent administrators are hired. Administrative bloat – the problem of too many administrators – has resulted in an inordinate amount of waste in higher education (Green, Kisida & Mills, 2010). According to Marcus (2014), the high cost of tuition is not due to the hiring of more educators but to administrative bloat. Ginsberg (2014) states:

Indeed, for every \$1 spent on instruction, \$1.82 was spent on noninstructional matters including ‘institutional support,’ i.e., the care and feeding of deanlets. If the ratio of deanlets to professors in 2010 had been the same as in 1976, there would now be nearly 400,000 fewer deanlets whose combined salaries account for one-fourth of all tuition dollars paid by students and their parents in 2010 (Ginsberg, 2014).

Many administrators are unaware that the latest buzzwords and theories in business do not include hierarchy and bureaucracy. However, lean management and learning organizations are hot issues, since these the two concepts work together to strengthen an organization. Friedman and Friedman (2016) describe the purpose of “lean thinking.” It is a holistic strategy, with the goal of making an organization run more efficiently by moving

away from a hierarchical organizational structure filled with bloat and unneeded layers of bureaucracy. Businesses today are trying to flatten their organizational structure. Modern corporations want fewer layers and want to create learning organizations where knowledge is shared.

Morgan (2015) has the following to say about the hierarchical organizational structure:

There are many challenges with this model but to name a few. Communication typically flows from the top to the bottom which means innovation stagnates, engagement suffers, and collaboration is virtually non-existent. This type of environment is riddled with bureaucracy and is extremely sluggish. This is why the hierarchy is perhaps the biggest vulnerability for any organization still employing it. It opens up the doors for competitors and new incumbents to quickly take over...those still stuck with the hierarchy are going to have one heck of a time trying to attract and retain top talent.

The hierarchy has permeated virtually every company around the world regardless of size, industry, or location. The greatest strength of the hierarchy used to be that it was so reliable at maintaining the status quo, which was exactly what companies wanted decades ago...The hierarchy is a very resilient management structure that has been so embedded in how we work that most organizations around the world are having a tedious time getting rid of it (Morgan, 2015).

It is obvious that college presidents who brag about creating more layers of bureaucracy and increase the number of administrators are following an obsolete form of organizational structure. Many of them believe that the creation of an increased administration within their institutions is a positive measure of their performance.

The number of college presidents removed from office has increased dramatically since 2007 (Schmidt, 2016); reasons include: “financial impropriety,” “widespread campus dissatisfaction,” “ineffective management,” and “questions of integrity” (Schmidt, 2016). Word is finally getting out about the incompetence and dishonesty of many college presidents, many of whom are being forced to retire. A former college president used \$36,000 of college funds for the payment of a part-time housekeeper, as well as another \$35,000 in college funds for her own retirement party. Foundation funds were used to add \$40,000 to the annual salary of the president of another college. The former president of City College, CUNY was forced to resign because of allegations of financial misconduct (Kanno-Youngs, 2016). Another college president, at SUNY Polytechnic Institute, resigned because of allegations that he was involved in a bribery scheme involving a huge project in Buffalo, NY (Diana, 2016).

Friedman and Kass (2016) discuss key metrics that can measure the true performance of college presidents. Unfortunately, some college administrators are better at spin than at building a successful organization. Hess (2013) studied effective CEOs and found that they tended to be servant leaders and cared about all stakeholders, not just shareholders; they were not self-centered a-holes.

These leaders were servants in the best sense of the word. They were people-centric, valued service to others and believed they had a duty of stewardship. Nearly all were humble and passionate operators who were deeply involved in the details of the business. Most had long tenures in their organizations. They had not forgotten what it was like to be a line employee. They believed that every employee should be treated with respect and have the opportunity to do meaningful work. They led by example, lived the “Golden Rule,” and understood that good intentions are not enough —

behaviors count. These leaders serve the organization and its multiple stakeholders. They are servant leaders (Hess, 2013).

Conclusion

Much has been written about anti-mentors. Damon (2004:149-150) interviewed many business leaders and found that the majority were influenced by anti-mentors; people that leaders did not want to emulate. Individuals learn more from negative examples, i.e., negative morality, than from instruction about the correct way to behave (Oser, 2006). Damon (2004: 150) states: "People can learn new values throughout their lives, gaining knowledge from observing the catastrophes that befall themselves and others."

This paper about the a-holes in academe was intended to give faculty a better understanding of how disciplinary elitists, egotistical, narcissistic, workplace bullies, and indoctrinators may cause immense harm to the reputation of an institution. Colleges are supposed to teach critical thinking, not willful ignorance. Employers also want to hire students who are critical thinkers (Belkin, 2017; Gerstein & Friedman, 2016; Selingo, 2012; Ungar, 2010).

In addition, the egocentric administrator is one whom should not be emulated by college officials. The best leaders understand that their goal has to be, by constantly improving, the creation of an outstanding institution. Such window dressing as adding departments, centers, and schools, and creating bloat does not result in anything positive. What all these different type of jackasses have in common is arrogance, self-centeredness and an unwillingness to listen to others. To them, humility is a trait that indicates weakness. This may why Dame & Gedmin (2013) claim that "the attribute of humility seems to be neglected in leadership development programs." We also need to see considerably more humility in higher education.

There is a persistent belief that great leaders are self-confident, authoritarian, and even somewhat arrogant. This may be why we see more a-holes in positions of leadership. Such autocratic CEOs are not effective leaders, a fact borne out by statistics. In the knowledge-intensive economy, "Farsighted, tolerant, humane and practical CEOs returned 758% over ten years, versus 128% for the S&P 500" (Tischler, 2007). One study found that "humble people tend to make the most effective leaders and are more likely to be high performers in both individual and team settings" (Orendorff, 2015).

Because a-holes tend to be self-absorbed and conceited, they are good at destroying quality departments, institutions and organizations. Argandoña (2015) emphasizes that "the humble leader is precisely the person who is best qualified to transform his firm into a profitable, successful, and respected organization." Bertrand Russell once said: "The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts" (Chastain, 2017).

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