

IMPACT OF IMPLICIT BIAS AND SYSTEMIC RACISM ON CHILD WELFARE

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DOROTHY
ROBERTS
AUTHOR OF
TORN APART
2022

- In her book *Torn Apart* 2022 legal scholar and sociologist Dorothy Roberts exposes the foundational racism of the child welfare system.
- In her book *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*, 2001 she documented the racial realities of America's child welfare system.
- At that time Black children made up nearly half of the US foster care population, although they constituted less than one-fifth of the nation's children. That made them four times as likely to be in foster care as white children.

50% OF BLACK AND
NATIVE AMERICAN
CHILDREN
EXPERIENCED
CHILD PROTECTIVE
SERVICES IN
SACRAMENTO
*REPORTED IN
MOTHER JONES*

The results of a study reported in the American Journal of Public Health found that half of Black children, as well as half of Native American children, experienced a California Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation at some point during the first 18 years of their lives, compared to nearly a quarter of white children. One in eight Black children spent time in foster care—a rate three times as high as white children. The vast majority of cases are triggered by “neglect,” a catch-all category of offenses often caused by poverty or addiction.

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DISPARITIES IN
CONDITION
CAN ONLY BE
THE RESULT OF
SYSTEMIC
RACISM

- If we truly believe that all humans are equal, then disparity in condition can only be the result of systemic discrimination.

Dr. Ibram Kendi "How to be an Anti-Racist"

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WHAT IS SYSTEMIC RACISM?

Those patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within institutions in ways that intentionally or unintentionally, consistently penalize, and disadvantage individuals who are members of nonwhite racial/ethnic groups.

When there are persistent racial disparities in all public systems, then what we are describing is systemic racism.

Thus, systemic racism is the outcome of how policies are developed and enforced, laws are passed, how racial stereotypes are utilized and how disparities are created by every-day people.

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**EVEN BLACK
FAMILIES WHO
ARE "LOW
RISK" FOR
CHILD
WELFARE
INVOLVEMENT
FACE A
HIGHER RISK.**

Black children were more likely to be placed in foster care even when their parents were employed, drug free, and not receiving welfare; even when they came from small families and safe neighborhoods: and even when they had no disabilities or mental health problems.

• Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds* p. 52

SYSTEMIC RACISM
AND IMPLICIT BIAS IS
NOT RANDOM IT'S
SOCIALY
CONSTRUCTED.

THE GOAL OF THIS
PRESENTATION IS TO
DISCUSS HOW
INSTITUTIONAL AND
INDIVIDUAL
DECISION-MAKING
CONSTRUCT
DISPROPORTION-
ALITY IN CHILD
WELFARE.

Five factors that can produce disparities across all systems, making families of color more susceptible to poverty and child welfare involvement.

• Interactions of 5 factors preserve systemic racism:

- 1) Implicit bias
- 2) Stereotypes
- 3) Colorblindness
- 4) Microaggressions
- 5) Language

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IMPLICIT BIAS, ATTITUDES OR STEREOTYPES THAT ARE
OUTSIDE OUR AWARENESS AND AFFECT OUR
UNDERSTANDING, OUR INTERACTIONS, RESULTING IN
DISCRETIONARY DECISION-MAKING.

Unconscious bias, also known as *implicit bias*, refers to attitudes or stereotypes that are outside our awareness and affect our understanding, our interactions, resulting in discretionary decision-making.

Researchers have found that we all harbor unconscious associations—both positive and negative—about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, social class, and appearance.

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POVERTY MIMICS NEGLECT!

SOCIAL CLASS ADVANTAGES OR DISADVANTAGES

- Behavior that appears normal in affluent white families, e.g., smoking a joint, co-sleeping, kids in hot tubs, tree houses would look like neglect or abuse in black families.
- White professional class families are presumed to make decisions that are in the best interest of their children.
- Poor families are foreshadowed by stereotypes that reinforce beliefs, e.g.; "Black families have poor parenting skills".

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IMPLICIT BIAS

IT'S HOW THE BRAIN IS WIRED!



- "If scientists could scan our brains when we see spiders or snakes, they would see that the area of our brains that focuses on fear, threat, anxiety and distrust is triggered or, as neuroscientists say, "activates." Studies have shown that the same area of the brain activates more when white people see pictures of African American faces than when they see pictures of Caucasian ones."

• *(An Overview of Implicit Bias by the Equal Justice Society)*

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HAVING A
POSITIVE
ATTITUDE
TOWARDS A
GROUP DOES
NOT MEAN
WE DON'T
HAVE IMPLICIT
BIAS.

- People may overlook their implicit biases because they don't have any ill-will towards the group. Having a positive attitude about a group, such as Latinx, and enjoying their culture does not immunize us from negative stereotypes.
- For instance, one might have a positive overall attitude toward Blacks and still associate them with dangerousness; or Latinos and still assume that they are undocumented. (Implicit Bias in the Courtroom)

CHILD WELFARE

A CHILD WELFARE DIRECTOR STATED:

Black and White children are equally likely to have substantiated allegations; recurrence of maltreatment.

Black children are 25% more likely to enter foster care and 50% more likely to re-enter foster care than White children.

When asked-how do you explain that disparity; the response was "we need to do more research."

STEREOTYPES MEDIA

WE CREATED THE
CONCEPT OF "RACE"
BY USING UBIQUITOUS
RACIAL NARRATIVES
AND
MISREPRESENTATIONS
TO EXPLAIN, JUSTIFY
RATIONALIZE AND
PREDICT NEGATIVE
OUTCOMES

- 2020 Kansas City Star Apology "*Sins of commission and omission*"
- *It disenfranchised, ignored and scorned generations of Black people in KC. It reinforced Jim Crow laws and redlining and robbed an entire community of opportunity, dignity justice and recognition.*
- "*Negroes in brutal crime*"
- "*Negroes held in killing*"
- "*Dangerous negroes*"

STEREOTYPES
ARE POWERFUL
INFORMATION
SYSTEMS.
STEREOTYPES
ARE UBIQUITOUS!
STEREOTYPES
SHAPE AND
INFORM
PERCEPTIONS OF
WHO IS GOOD,
OR BAD!

WE ALL KNOW
THIS...

- Stereotypes that link Black people to criminal activity make it easier for anyone to surveil and suspect them of breaking the rules. They experience heightened scrutiny for "living while Black" from random people who make 911 calls reporting them for the most mundane things e.g., children selling water in a park, barbequing in the park, trying to cash their check, raking leaves in their front yards, birdwatching in Central Park, falling asleep while studying in a common area at a prestigious university, or hanging out at Starbucks.
- In 2019 Grand Rapids MI made racially biased 911 calls a crime.

STIGMA: CRACK BABIES, CRACKHEADS, CRACK MOTHERS



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STEREOTYPES AND THE ALL- AMERICAN GIRL-MISSING WHITE WOMAN SYNDROME

All American girl- Missing White Woman Syndrome; Gaby Petito Case vs. Murdered and Missing Black and Indigenous women

- According to a newsroom director, viewers and readers relate to young white girls and women as "universal beings" in need of protection. "The audience is more able to think, 'That could be my daughter, my sister, my neighbor.' There's a built-in emotional attachment."
- "If there's a missing white woman, we are going to cover that, everyday." Gwen Ifill 2004

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"BLINK" BY MALCOM GLADWELL

You don't choose to make positive associations with the "dominant group", says Mahzarin Banaji, (Harvard IAT).

"All around you this group is paired with good things. You open the newspaper and you turn on the television and you can escape it."

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"YOU COULD ABORT EVERY BLACK BABY IN THIS COUNTRY, AND YOUR CRIME RATE WOULD GO DOWN."

*WILLIAM BENNETT - SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
FOR PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN 2005*

This quote demonstrates the inextricable association of black people and criminality-even unborn babies!

"If it were your sole purpose to reduce crime, Bennett said, "You could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down."

"That would be an impossible, ridiculous and morally reprehensible thing to do, but your crime rate would go down," he added.

COLORBLINDNESS

- *"You shouldn't talk about race or think about race because race doesn't matter."*
- *"Whoever mentions race first is the racist in the room."*

Lani Guinier

- *Colorblindness is a strategy to discourage people from thinking and talking about disparities in employment, housing, education, criminal justice, environment, voting rights, and plain old everyday racism in daily social interactions that remain ubiquitous features of U.S. society.*

Off White, Robert Carter

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STEREOTYPES CAUSE US TO ASSOCIATE GREATER RISK WITH BLACK PEOPLE; WE ARE MORE LIKELY TO MAKE MISTAKES WHEN WE USE STEREOTYPES TO FILL IN THE BLANKS.

WHITE PEOPLE AS A GROUP ARE NOT STIGMATIZED BY NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES THEREFORE, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE "BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT" DECISION-MAKING."

- *"We found that we were serving a disproportionately low number of African American women relative to the population. When we relaxed the screening criteria we found an increase in the number of African American women coming into the program.*
- *Specifically, we eliminated the exclusionary criteria of prior domestic violence and mental health diagnosis. We found that Caucasian women were coming into the program with the same problems, but these problems were discovered after the screening and the women were allowed to proceed with acceptable outcomes.*
- *African American clients increased and our outcomes improved as well."*

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PERSONAL
EMAIL FROM A
JUDGE IN
MICHIGAN

".....every time I visit a prison or a juvenile detention facility I am struck by the numbers, the obscenely disproportionate number of black inmates that we have here in Michigan."

One school administrator: *"They come as students and leave as felons"!*

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TWEET BY:
CHRISTOPHER RUFO
WHO INVENTED THE STRATEGY TO END
DISCUSSIONS ON SYSTEMIC RACISM

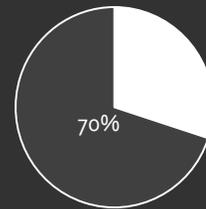
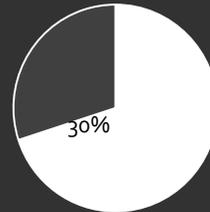
"We have successfully frozen their brand—"critical race theory"—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions.

We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category."

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STEREOTYPES AND IMPLICIT BIAS CAN AFFECT OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC SYSTEMS

- One study found that prosecutors dismissed only 30 percent of cases against African American girls, while dismissing 70 percent against white girls. Equal Justice Initiative 2017



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STEREOTYPES AND IMPLICIT BIAS CAN AFFECT OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC SYSTEMS

- Black girls are:
 - Five times more likely to be suspended than white girls
 - Twice as likely to be suspended than white boys
 - Nearly three times as likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system
 - 20 percent more likely to be charged with a crime than white girls



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LANGUAGE LIKE TOXINS IS DEADLY IN SMALL DOSES

SUPREME COURT JUSTICE ROBERTS

"TANTRUM" OR "OUTBURST OF VIOLENCE."
THE DECISION TO CALL THE POLICE, PUSHES THIS KINDERGARTNER INTO THE
SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE.



SYSTEMS INTERSECT IN
WAYS THAT PUNISH
BLACK WOMEN
DISPARITIES IN PUBLIC
SYSTEMS, E.G.,
TRANSPORTATION,
CRIMINAL JUSTICE, CHILD
WELFARE

FOR EXAMPLE:
UNMARKED
CROSSWALKS, POORLY
PLANNED BUS STOPS,
DRIVER FAILURE TO
YIELD; PEDESTRIANS ARE
ALMOST ALWAYS TACITLY
BLAMED FOR
JAYWALKING AS THE
CAUSE OF THEIR OWN
DEATHS.

- April 10, 2010 a mother was crossing a busy street with her 4-year old son and his two siblings. The 4-yr-old was killed when he was struck by a hit-and-run driver. The driver had been drinking and using painkillers the night of accident. The driver who was also blind in one eye had already been convicted of two hit-and-runs. He was convicted, plead guilty and served 6 months of a 5-year sentence.
- The mother was convicted of three charges related to her son's death, reckless conduct, improperly crossing a roadway and second-degree homicide by a vehicle. Sentenced to six times as many months in jail as the hit-and-run driver. The mother's crime; jaywalking!

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Slights

Snubs

Insults

- Microaggressions are everyday verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs, insults which communicate hostile and derogatory messages which target persons according to the stereotypes. *D. Sue*



- Our biases can lead to microaggressions and how we act in the presence of people. Microaggressions can be communicated through language, tone of voice, interruptions, intimidating body posturing, commands vs. requests, or defensiveness.

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MICROAGGRESSIONS
CONVEY DISRESPECT
E.G., CURTNESS,
TONE OF VOICE,
DISMISSIVENESS,

- Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt's research cannot determine precisely if the differences in officer's language is attributable to bias but regardless of the cause, she states that the stakes are higher than just hurt feelings.
- **Research showed that when speaking to Black drivers, officers were rated as less respectful, less polite, less friendly, less formal and less impartial than when they spoke to white drivers.**
- According to Eberhardt, *an officer's language and the attitude it conveys could decrease a Black driver's inclination to cooperate. That increases the likelihood that the interaction might escalate and lead to an altercation and arrest, or worse-that could have been avoided.* (Biased pg. 106)

(Biased pgs. 105-106)

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RACIALLY CODED LANGUAGE

Colorblind Practices:

- I don't notice race, I treat everyone the same.
- I just follow the rules.
- Judges: I just read what's in the court reports

Racially coded language:

- Embedded in school records, child welfare case notes, medical records, arrest and court reports can promote bias at every subsequent decision point.



A young man walks through chest-deep flood waters after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday.

Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store in New Orleans, Louisiana.

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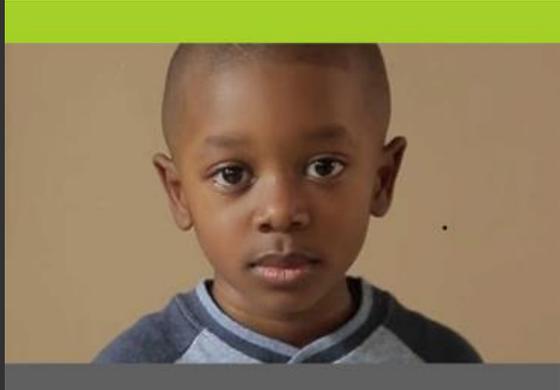
LANGUAGE IN
WRITTEN
DOCUMENTS
CAN REFLECT
BIAS AND
DISTORT
OUTCOMES AT
EACH
SUBSEQUENT
DECISION
POINT

- White mothers: "no drug involvement" vs. Black mothers: "mother alleges no drug involvement"
- Calling mothers "mother" instead of addressing them more formally.
 - *Combative*
 - *Aggressive*
 - *Hostile*
 - *Violent*
 - *Belligerent*
 - *Volatile*
 - *Resistant*
 - *Refused Service*

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VIDEO "OUR HIDDEN BIASES"

INDIVIDUAL BIASES AND SYSTEMIC RACISM WORK IN TANDEM TO MAINTAIN SYSTEMS OF INEQUALITY



• <https://youtu.be/ZWgVs4qj1ho>

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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO IMPACT SYSTEMIC RACISM

- Recognize your implicit biases and how they influence your decision making.
- Monitor everyday, and every decision to identify how systemic racism functions in society and how you might inadvertently contribute to it.
- Stay committed: It's not enough to acknowledge that you have biases!
- It's not enough to say, "I'm not racist"! We have to be vigilantly "anti-racist" to end systemic racism.

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THANK YOU

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