Transforming Race Today: Structural Racialization, Systems Thinking, and Implicit Bias

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Today’s Conversation

- Talking about race
- The mind sciences
  - Framing
  - Implicit Bias
- Structural Racialization & Systems Thinking
  - How people are situated
  - Thinking in terms of relationships and processes
3 Interrelated Sites of Racial Justice

Explicit

Implicit

Structures & Policies
Talking About Race

To not talk about race is to talk about race.

Graphic from: Lester, Julius. *Let’s Talk About Race*
“Much of what we call race is nonphenotypical.
All of what we call race is nonbiological.
Race is a process.”

~john powell
Race in the Media

John Stossel on the Civil Rights Act

Video clip (start at 1:40)

Shirley Sherrod, USDA official falsely accused of racial discrimination

Video clip

Arizona’s SB 1070 immigration law & racial profiling fears

Video clip
Race Neutrality?

- The question is not if we should talk about race, but how we should talk about race.

- Race-neutral tactics may appear to have appeal, but in reality, we’re not seeking race-neutrality – we’re seeking racial fairness.

Is colorblindness an appropriate shift in how we perceive race?

No. Colorblindness will not end racism.
Why It Is Difficult to Talk About Race?

- U.S. history of violence, repression, and injustice toward people of color
- Feelings of resentment, guilt, and hostility
- Fear of stigmatizing groups and creating self-fulfilling prophecies
- Lack of information about consequences of racial inequality
- Failure to actively envision a “true Democracy”
- Fear of being labeled a racist
- Lack of practice!
- Implicit bias (unconscious)
Talking About Race - (Don’t)

Techniques to avoid:

- Present disparities only
- Frame action as robbing Peter to pay Paul
- Separate out people in need from “everybody else”
- Glide over real fears, shared suffering, or the fact that people are often internally divided
- Dismiss the importance of individual efforts
Talking About Race - (Do)

- Frame the discussion using the norms & values of the audience
  - Anchor to *their* narratives

- In the story you tell, make sure everyone can see themselves
  - “Us” -- not just “those people”

- Acknowledge that individualism is important – but that the healthiest individual is nurtured by a community invested in everyone’s success

- Emphasize shared, deep values
Underscore Deep Shared Values

- Unity
- Security
- Opportunity
- Community
- Mobility
- Redemption
- Fairness
- Liberty
Racial attitudes in the U.S. have improved significantly over time. We have moved from segregation into a period of racial egalitarianism. Interracial relationships are becoming more accepted. We elected a biracial President.

The United States continues to be strongly divided by race. Nationally, the black unemployment rate tends to be about twice as high as the white rate. A black male born in 2001 has a 32% chance of spending time in prison at some point in his life, a Hispanic male has a 17% chance, and a white male has a 6% chance.

Framing Matters

- Both these perspectives are true – how we frame issues of race matters.

- Consider the false dichotomies we often use when we think and talk about race. These binaries are actually frames.
  
  - Black / White
  
  - Post-racialism / Civil Rights
  
  - Race is *not* important / Race matters
Framing

How messages are framed affects how they are perceived.
Framing Conversations

- **Unity:** Focus on terms that bring people together rather than those that are divisive

  - “Us/them” mindset → a “we” perspective

  - “We, the people…” recognizes “All the people”

- **Linked fate:** The fates of all people are linked

  - We need to understand the effect that institutional arrangements have on all individuals.

Create Empathetic Space

• Build connections through personal narratives

“I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas… I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners - an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.”
Race in Action

Power

Implicit Bias / Mind Science

Structural Racialization
More than just asking people what they think, we need to understand the processes behind how they think.
Implicit Bias

- People are meaning-making machines.
  - Individual meaning
  - Collective meaning

- Only 2% of emotional cognition is available to us consciously

- Racial bias tends to reside in the unconscious network

We unconsciously think about race even when we do not explicitly discuss it.
Our Unconscious Networks

- What colors are the following lines of text?

1. Vqeb peow ytro
2. Cvur zxyq brrm
3. Vhrn wwte zytn
4. Xoc jbnì oew mne
5. Zre ytu vee mkp
Our Unconscious Networks

- What colors are the following lines of text?

1. **Sky**
2. **Grass**
3. **Dirt**
4. **Sunshine**
5. **Stop sign**
Our Unconscious Networks

- What colors are the following lines of text?

1. **Dirt**
2. **Sunshine**
3. **Sky**
4. **Grass**
5. **Stop sign**
Our Unconscious Networks

• What colors are the following lines of text?

1. Green
2. Blue
3. Brown
4. Red
5. Yellow
Our Unconscious Networks

- What colors are the following lines of text?

1. Red
2. Blue
3. Yellow
4. Green
5. Brown
Implicit Bias – Unconscious Modeling
“People in industrialized societies often think line A is shorter than line B, but that illusion is weaker or absent in some small-scale societies, whose members perceive the lines as equally long.”

The Spinning Girl Illusion

Are you right-brained or left-brained?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkjVqhEcHiY&feature=related

OR

Implicit Association Tests

Racialized outcomes do not require racist actors.
Implicit Bias Against Nonwhites is Pervasive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups Compared</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
<th>Implicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks/Whites</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians/Whites</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages represent the percent biased in favor of group.

The Shooter Video Game
Where is this family sitting?
Where is this family sitting?

When scientists showed a similar sketch to people from East Africa - a culture containing few angular visual cues - the family is seen sitting under a tree. The woman is balancing an item on her head.

Westerners are accustomed to the corners and box-like shapes of architecture. They are more likely to place the family indoors and to interpret the rectangle above the woman's head as a window through which shrubbery can be seen.
Awareness Test

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrqrkihlw-s
Neurological Origins of Prejudice?

- Limbic system – categorizes what we perceive
  - The limbic system is a very old part of the brain; it can be found in animals.
- One part of the limbic system, the amygdala, is responsible for strong emotional responses (i.e., fight or flight)
Is the Amygdala Responsible for Prejudice?

- The amygdala perceives “potential threat and is involved in the biased or prejudiced response in the context of social evaluation, reacting as if one is prepared for fear in particular, or hostility against what it perceives to be out-groups.” (p. 57)

- We are hard-wired to categorize in-group vs. out-group, not to be prejudiced.
Reacting Before You Even Realize It

- Neural pathways connect the amygdala/limbic system to the prefrontal cortex, which is where rational thought occurs.

- Amygdala is fast; the logical action of the prefrontal cortex is slower.

- “Thus by the time we are consciously aware of the person, and our stereotypes and beliefs about the person surface in our conscious mind, our emotional reaction has already occurred.” (p. 83)
Social Categories and Meanings

- Race is a social reality.

- While we are hardwired to categorize in-group vs. out-group, we are “softwired” for the content of those categories.

- Softwiring is social.

- Racial categories and meaning can be constantly reconfigured.
Social Cognition: Warmth & Competence

Where do you think your group ranks?

- Pitied Out-group
- Esteemed In-group
- Despised Out-group
- Envied Out-group

Social Cognition: Warmth & Competence

Low Warmth

Pity:
- women, elderly, disabled

Low Competence

Despised:
- African Americans, Undocumented immigrants

Esteemed In-group:
- Your own group, who you identify with

Envied Out-group:
- Competent, but don’t really like them: Asians

Our brains are prewired to overcome prejudice.

- We need to view members of a stereotyped outgroup as fellow human beings.
  - “What kind of vegetables does that homeless person like?”
  - Once we see those individuals as people, the amygdala is not activated; prejudice is eliminated.
  - “So, using our capacity for reason, logic, and critical analysis to combat our false beliefs, distorted views, and prejudices can result in messages being sent out from the prefrontal cortex that travel along neural pathways to the amygdala, inhibiting its activation.” (p.81-82)

Acknowledging Our Biases

- Suppressing or denying prejudiced thoughts can actually increase prejudice rather than eradicate it.

- “Research has confirmed that instead of repressing one’s prejudices, if one openly acknowledges one’s biases, and directly challenges or refutes them, one can overcome them.” (p. 70)
How to Debias – Consider the Opposite

- Repeatedly exposing people to admired African Americans can help counteract pro-white / anti-black IAT results...
How to Debias – Negative Examples

- BUT, a more productive strategy is to show both admired African Americans and infamous whites.

Persistent Prejudices

- Unconscious biases are reflected in institutional arrangements.

- Prejudice leads to outcomes, and the outcomes reinforce the stereotypes / prejudice.

  - Ex: Females aren’t good at math.
    
    Many females don’t take math classes.
Priming & Stereotype Threat

- Our environment affects our unconscious networks

- Priming activates mental associations
  - Telling someone a scary story activates a frame of fear

- Claude Steele’s “stereotype threat”:
  - For example, tell students about to take a test that Asian students tend to do better than whites, and the whites will perform significantly worse than if they had not been primed to think of themselves as less capable than Asians.

Primming

- Experiment with 7th graders; ~50% white & 50% Black
  - Given a list of values
    - Experimental group: Choose the values that are most important to you and write why they are important
    - Control group: Choose the values that are the least important to you and explain why
  - End of semester – While Black students still did not do as well as whites, the Black students in the experimental group showed a 40% reduction in the racial achievement gap.

- Experiment was repeated with a group of college students and yielded a 50% reduction in the racial achievement gap.

How to Change Our Implicit Biases

• Be aware of implicit bias in your life. We are constantly being primed.

• Debia by presenting positive alternatives.

• Consider your conscious messaging & language.
  • Affirmative action support varies based on whether it’s presented as “assistance” or “preference.”

• Engage in proactive affirmative efforts – not only on the cultural level but also the structural level.
How we arrange structures matters
  The order of the structures
  The timing of the interaction between them
  The relationships that exist between them
Structural Racialization

- How race works today: There are still practices, cultural norms and institutional arrangements that help create & maintain (disparate) racialized outcomes.

- Structural racialization addresses inter-institutional arrangements and interactions.
  - It refers to the ways in which the joint operation of institutions produce racialized outcomes.
    - In this analysis, outcomes matter more than intent.
Why “structural racialization” as opposed to “structural racism?”

- When you use the term “racism,” people are inclined to see a specific person — a racist.
- By using the term “racialization,” a racist is not necessary to produce structural outcomes. Instead, institutional interactions generate racialized outcomes.
Structural Racialization Produces Racialized Outcomes

Context: The Dominant Consensus on Race
- National values
- Contemporary culture

Current Manifestations: Social and Institutional Dynamics
- Processes that maintain racial hierarchies
- Racialized public policies and institutional practices

Outcomes: Racial Disparities
- Racial inequalities in current levels of well-being
- Capacity for individual and community improvement is undermined

Ongoing Racial Inequalities

Adapted from the Aspen Roundtable on Community Change. “Structural Racism and Community Building.” June 2004
Structural Racialization Analysis Applied

Exclusionary Zoning

A Housing Market that Does Not Serve the Population

Subsidized Housing Policies

Racial Steering and Discrimination

Discriminatory and Unfair Lending

Housing Challenges
Example: A bird in a cage

Examining one wire cannot explain why a bird cannot fly.

But multiple wires, arranged in specific ways, reinforce each other and trap the bird.
Different communities are situated differently with respect to institutions.

**Example: Universal Healthcare**

- **Community A** has no insurance and no hospitals in the area.
- **Community B** has no insurance, but there's a hospital down the street.
- **Community C** has access to both insurance and a hospital.
Problem: 3 people are out to sea and a big storm is coming.

Goal: To reach the people within 6 hours.

Assumption: If we can reach them within 6 hours, we will save them all.
Situatedness (example)

- But the 3 are not all in the stormy water in the same way…

- Which person would be most likely to survive the 6 hours it would take to reach them??

- If water is a “structure,” (housing, education, etc.) some groups are able to navigate the structure more successfully than other groups.
Structures and policies are not neutral. They unevenly distribute benefits and burdens.

Institutions can operate jointly to produce racialized outcomes.

Source: Barbara Reskin. http://faculty.uwashington.edu/reskin/
The “Good Life” in Minnesota

- An August 13, 1973 *Time* magazine article portrayed Minnesota as having a largely white, solidly middle class, highly-educated population and one of the nation’s brain centers.

- But, not everyone has had access to the “good life.”
People Are Situated Differently

- Example: Controlling for risk factors, African Americans were 15-30% more likely than whites to get subprime loans for purchase and for refinance
  - Likely refinance targets: elderly, often widowed, African American women in urban areas

- For Latinos, similar numbers for purchase, not for refinance
  - Many Latino homebuyers were recent, first generation homebuyers who could not be automatically underwritten (multiple income earners, cash, local credit, etc.)

Sources: Graciela Aponte (National Council of La Raza) and Debbie Bocian (Center for Responsible Lending) presentations at The Economic Policy Institute panel “Race, Ethnicity and the Subprime Mortgage Crisis” on June 12, 2008 in WDC; and “Baltimore Finds Subprime Crisis Snags Women” in The New York Times online, Jan. 15, 2008
Situated Differently – Infant Mortality

Infant Mortality by Race/Ethnicity
Minnesota (Selected Years)

 deaths per 1,000 live births

- Asian: 7.3 (2002-2006)

Note: Infant mortality rate is the number of infant deaths per 1,000 births.
Source: Minnesota Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics

Situated Differently - Uninsured

Percent of Uninsured by Race (All Ages)  
Minnesota Selected Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>^</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>^</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>^</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MDH Health Economics Program and University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Minnesota Health Access Surveys

*Indicates statistically significant difference from previous year at the 95% level.
^ Indicates statistically significant difference from White within year at the 95% level.
# Indicates statistically significant difference between 2001 and 2007 at the 95% level.

Differently Situated → Widening Gaps

- In Minneapolis / Twin Cities: 66% of white students were ready for college while 10% of Black students were prepared. (2008)

- Result: widening income gap
  - Whites had a median household income of $56,642
  - Blacks had a median household income of $29,404

A More Complex Understanding

One Dimensional:
One variable explains differential outcomes

Multidimensional:
The individual bars working together to cage the bird

... to an understanding of processes and relationships
Introducing Systems Thinking

Relationships are neither static nor discrete.

The Newtonian Perspective:

Social phenomena may be understood by breaking down the sum of the constituent parts.

Systems Thinking:

Causation is reciprocal, mutual, and cumulative.
Systems Thinking

Think in **loops**, not just cause & effect

Disparities may be reinforcing

Gains in one area are often undone over time because of structures – not intent

- School Segregation & Concentrated Poverty
- Racial & Economic Neighborhood Segregation
- Increased Flight of Affluent Families
- Lower Educational Outcomes
Implementing Systems Thinking

- Our relationship to these systems and the responsiveness of systems is both **uneven and racialized**.

- While understanding the relationships that exist within a system is important, we need to look for **nodes of influence and power**.

- Where are the **levers** that can enact change?
Questions to Consider…

… when designing **new policies**:
- What outcomes do we want?
- Who should be targeted to benefit?

… when developing **new processes**:
- How should the decision-making table be set, and who should set it?
- Who should hold decision-makers accountable, and where should this accountability take place?

… when defining **new assumptions**:
- What are our values?
- What would it look like if equity was the starting point for decision-making?
Concluding Thoughts
Eliminating Structural Racialization

- A top-down approach to eliminating structural racialization will not work… but neither will a bottom-up.

- Community members must be involved and given a voice to help shape a new paradigm.

- Hence, coalition and community building are key elements in any strategy for challenging structural racialization.

Portland is a great example of this work being done successfully.
A Transformative Agenda

Transformative change in the racial paradigm in the U.S. requires substantive efforts in three areas:

- **Talking about race**: Understanding how language and messages shape reality and the perception of reality

- **Thinking about race**: Understanding how framing and priming impact information processing in both the explicit and the implicit mind

- Linking these understandings to the way that we act on race and how we arrange our institutions and policies
Our fates are linked, yet our fates have been socially constructed as disconnected, especially through the categories of race, class, gender, nationality, religion…

We need to consider ourselves connected to - instead of isolated from - “thy neighbor”
“We need to look at the individual in terms of many different relationships to him/herself, many things in relationship to his/her community and to the larger community, not just in isolation. If we take this approach seriously, it affects how we see the world, how we experience ourselves, how we do our work, and helps move us to a truly inclusive paradigm.”

~john a. powell
www.KirwanInstitute.org

KirwanInstitute

on:

www.race-talk.org

race-talk
Appendix

1 - More on Rochester, MN

2 – Inclusive vs. exclusive speech
Rochester, MN Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race / Ethnicity</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White alone</td>
<td>84,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian alone</td>
<td>6,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American alone</td>
<td>4,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>1,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other race alone</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaskan Native alone</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>4,115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rochester is one of the nation’s fastest growing MSAs.

Rochester Public School District Data

65 languages spoken in the district

66 countries of origin

13% ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages)

### Share of Adults Age 25+ with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher in the Rochester, MN metro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/ Pacific Islander</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Let me say that again – this is a national disgrace. Anyone who think this is a local or regional crisis – anyone who thinks this is about ‘them,’ and not ‘us’ – is sorely mistaken. How all of us benefit from the oil and gas produced off your shores. All of us have been enriched by the culture and legacy of this city. And when our fellow citizens hurt – all of us hurt. Whether in Oklahoma City or New York City or New Orleans – when Americans, our fellow citizens, suffer – all of us suffer.”
Divisive Language


"We need to rise up and we need to fight back. I hope you will do all you can to take back our country."