Race, Structures and the Self

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INTRODUCTION

Overview and Welcome

Implicit Bias and Race

Towards a structural understanding of race and racial disparities

Towards a larger understanding of the “self” and the “racial self”

Questions, comments, discussion
The well-informed bodhisattva...strives to respond to the three great moral imperatives of our time - to heal the violated planet, and to enable both the underclass at home...and the wretched of the earth to win dignity and freedom. To the traditional Buddhist task of calming the mind is added that of employing it to transform and dismantle social systems and processes which supercharge the suffering of humanity as well as encompassing the ruin of the planet and its creatures...As Mahatma Gandhi observed, the belief (whether of Lenin or Adam Smith) that we can devise a social system so perfect that no one will need to be good, is one of the great delusions of our time. But without the outer work the inner work cannot be socially manifested on the scale that is now required.

KEN JONES - THE ZEN OF SOCIAL ACTION -
http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/zen-social-action.html
“We are all caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever effects one directly effects all indirectly.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Our fates are linked, yet our fates have been socially constructed as disconnected, especially through the categories of class, race, gender, nationality, religion...
Race, Buddhism and the Self

- Individuals as autonomous-independent *selves*
  - Egoistic, possessive, separate, isolated, rational
  - Role of state: protect individualism and private property
- This is reflected in beliefs about Judeo-Christian God
  - Protects against evil, punishes wrongdoers, promotes individual-success through own will
  - Within this view, government social programs seen as counter-productive and reinforcing negative behaviors
Race, Buddhism and the Self

- Where is “self” in Buddhist practice?
  - Who are you practicing for?
- Where is “love” and “religion” in our politics?
  - Does a separation between church and state really mean a separation between political sphere and spiritual sphere
- Is LIBERATION a spiritual or political concern?
Race, Buddhism and the Self

Identities can be multiple and conflicted
- The British did not become “white” until Africans became “black”

Both internal and external pluralism is supported by a healthy society

We may experience an uncomfortable awareness of our own multiplicity
- W.E.B. DuBois’ double consciousness
- Experiences in meditation of fluidness of self – can sometimes be freeing, can sometimes be scary/unpleasant
Race, Buddhism and the Self

WHERE IS RACE?

RACE IS THE EMERGENT PROPERTY OF ALL THESE INTERACTIONS

RACIAL MEANING

RACIAL DISPARITIES

RACIAL ATTITUDES
Multiple sites for Racial Justice

Structures & Policies

Implicit

Explicit
Implicit Bias

- Consciousness is not consistent or unified internally, only externally
- Many stories about race percolating below surface
  - Ones that rise to the top depend on which schemas get activated – schemas not only activated through words, priming, but also context
  - How you feel about me standing in front of room, maybe very different if we were alone on street at night
“Day 44: still stranded, with nothing but flat empty water as far as the eye can see”
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 jbni 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?
PRIMING

What frameworks are being called to conscious thought?
Implicit Association

- How we behave often hinges on factors of which we are unaware

- People’s minds operate through schemas
  - “Schemas are simply templates of knowledge that help us organize specific examples into broad categories.”

- The schemas we use to categorize people are called stereotypes [not nec. prejudice]

Source: http://americansforamericanvalues.org/unconsciousbias/
Implicit Association and Bias

“Both history and societal factors play a crucial role in providing the content of schemas, which are programmed through culture, media, and the material context.”

Implicit bias lives within our schemas

Bias doesn’t make you prejudiced; it makes you a person

Source: http://americansforamericanvalues.org/unconsciousbias/
What is above the woman’s head on the left?
When scientists showed a similar sketch to people from East Africa, on her head. In a culture containing few angular visual cues, the family is seen sitting under a tree. Westerners, on the other hand, are accustomed to the corners and boxlike 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.
 Implicit Bias/Neuroscience

- Brain is far more malleable than previously thought [plasticity]

- Regular meditation practice can “rewire brain” – specifically quiet down amygdala and move activity to prefrontal cortex and also increase activity in the insula – associated with empathy/compassion.

- Also reduction of activity of parietal lobe which helps orient self-as-separate during meditation – looser identification with isolated individual self
Implicit Bias/Neuroscience
Implicit Bias/Neuroscience

“A person who meditates consequently perceives objects more as directly experienced stimuli and less as concepts... With the removal or minimization of cognitive stimuli and generally increasing awareness, meditation can therefore influence both the quality (accuracy) and quantity (detection) of perception.”

TLOCKZYNSKI -"Perception of Visual Illusions by Novice and Longer-Term Meditators”

Many areas affected by meditation also places where “judgement” occurs – precisely the places that different racial schemas can activate

Meditation as way to become aware of schemas getting called into being
Implicit Bias and Meditation

- Meditation may EXPAND awareness of multiple awarenesses of race happening in any situation.
- Some studies have shown reduction in implicit bias scores among meditators, and some show no changes.
  - Possible that experienced meditators are more able to change implicit bias test scores than non-meditators (more flexible).
  - Possible that experienced meditators have less of a link between implicit bias and external prejudice/actions (more able to not be in a reactive mode).
  - Possible that relaxation response increases ability to empathize and not be processing information in “fear mode”.

All currently suggested hypotheses but clear that meditation on its own isn’t very good for reducing implicit bias.
Some optical illusions are independent of awareness, however some can be altered. Below is an optical illusion that some experienced meditators see differently than non-experienced meditators.

Difference is in millimeters, so no bragging.
Other ways to counter implicit bias

- Conscious messaging/conscious language
  - Differences in affirmative action support—“assistance” vs “preference”

- Talking about race/instead of not talking

- Purposeful empathizing
  - Some experiments even as little as having to imagine what someone’s favorite food or favorite color was

- De-biasing – presenter counter-images

- Work to disrupt categories – racial disparities not separate from racial meaning
Multiple sites for Racial Justice

Structures & Policies

Implicit

Explicit
TOWARDS A STRUCTURAL VIEW OF RACE / RACIAL DISPARITIES

• racial attitudes getting better, but disparities continue to persist - how do we explain the persistence of disparities in a post-Civil Rights U.S.?

• move from *de jure* segregation to *de facto* segregation

• move from explicit racist laws/attitudes to seemingly neutral structures that reproduce disparities

• shifting the focus from attitudes to manifestation - stop focusing on racial intent as determining factor in talking about existence of “racism”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Understanding {}</th>
<th>Structural Understanding {}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An independent-isolated-individual psychological issue</td>
<td>An outcome that results from interactivity of institutions &amp; actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De jure</td>
<td>De facto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past, if present an anomaly</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overt</td>
<td>Overt and covert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrational</td>
<td>Rational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tautological</td>
<td>Non-tautological (multidimensional)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva  
*Racism Without Racists* (1997)
African-American men were 1.8x more likely than white men to be unemployed in 1980, by 2000 that had risen to 2.4x more likely – 2007 estimates indicate this has increased even further. If incarcerated populations are included in the jobless count, African-American men are now over 3x more likely than white men to be unemployed, a larger disparity than even the 1950s.

The Black-White disparity in incarceration was close to 3-1 in 1930. Today it is higher than 8-1, and still increasing exponentially. Incarceration for drug-related offenses peaked at a 20-1 disparity in the mid 90s and is currently holding steady at 15-1.

(In 2007, nearly 7% of African-American children had one or both parents currently in prison, a higher percentage than ever before in history)

The likelihood of a poor African-American child living in concentrated poverty compared to her white counterpart was about 3x in the 1960s, it is now 7.2
DISPARITIES: SNAPSHOTS

The typical Black family had 60% as much income as a white family in 1968, but only 58% as much in 2002.

Black infants are almost two-and-a-half-times as likely as white infants to die before age one – a greater gap than in 1970.

At the slow rate that the Black-white under poverty gap has been narrowing since 1968, it would take until 2152, to close.

For every white dollar earned, African Americans earned 55 cents in 1968 – and only 57 cents in 2001. At this pace, it would take Blacks 581 years to get the remaining 43 cents.

While white homeownership has jumped from 65% to 75% since 1970, Black homeownership has only risen from 42% to 48%. At this rate, it would take 1,664 years to close the homeownership gap – about 55 generations.
THE RACIAL LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED DRastically FROM 1947-2006, YET INCOME DISPARITIES ARE ESSENTIALLY UNCHANGED
How do we explain disparities?

Minimize the existence of disparities

“Things may not be entirely equal, but it’s not nearly as bad as it used to be.”

“The racial ‘playing field’ is level.”
How do we explain disparities?

Blame culture for racial inequality rather than societal structures or white privilege (attribution bias)

“Blacks are lazy and lack motivation.”

“We get what we deserve in life. If some racial groups aren’t doing as well as others, people just need to work harder.”
How do we explain disparities?

Racial phenomena are “natural”

“Racial segregation in housing is natural. After all, they prefer to live by themselves instead of interacting with us.”

“They’d rather be with their ‘own kind’ anyway.”

“People have classified others into groups since the beginning of time, we all stereotype”
How do we explain disparities?

Focusing on individuals and their traits, assuming that we all start from the same “position” in society

“We should all be judged as individuals based on our personal merits. No one should receive special privileges. It’s not fair.”

“People like Tiger Woods, George Lopez, and Oprah Winfrey are proof that anyone can be successful in America.”

“Affirmative Action actually hurts minorities because it keeps us thinking about race instead of just seeing humans”
COLORBLINDNESS VIDEO

CLICK ON PICTURE TO START MOVIE
MOoving Beyond Intent

• post-Katrina --> finding blame --> Does Bush care about black people? Is FEMA racist? Isn’t Mayor Nagin black?

• post-Obama --> Does election of black Pres mean racism is ending? Is this a post-racial world?

• Is the Tea Party about “race” or about “policy”?

• MOVING BEYOND DICHOTOMY
  • Race either “exists” or not
  • Is “important” or is not
  • Racism is “getting better” or “getting worse”
Systems Thinking

- Think of guitar feedback – a single note can be heard – can even be getting louder – long after the initial pluck has ended

- Because of STRUCTURES, racialized impacts can be occurring long after racist input has ended

- EXAMPLE: FHA LOANS, MORTGAGES, WEALTH BUILDING
FHA Loans – Racialized Input

- Post WWII FHA Loans - mostly available for whites only and new suburbs being built had racial covenants - (less than 1% of African-American Households able to receive mortgages from 1930-1960)

- By 1984, When GI Bill mortgages had mostly matured
  White net worth = $39,135
  AA net worth = $3,397

- By 2002
  Avg white wealth = $88,000 and
  Avg AA wealth = $8,000

WEALTH DISPARITIES GROW EXPONENTIALLY IN A CAPITALIST SOCIETY WITHOUT STRONG PROGRESSIVE TAXATION
Think in LOOPS not just CAUSE/EFFECT-disparities in one area cause disparities in multiple other areas which may reinforce the original disparity.
Systems Thinking

- Think of “web of causes” that all effect one another and themselves – individual intent a part of web, but is as much a result of policies with racialized outcomes as a cause of them
- Nothing simply “cause” or “effect”
- Structures produce outcomes, individuals inhabit those structures
Systems Thinking
IS THIS THE RESULT OF INDIVIDUAL EFFORT?

CEOs’ pay increases by 300 percent in 15 years.

Minimum wage drops by ten percent.

Are CEOs 300% more valuable?

In 2007 top 1% makes 70 times more than bottom fifth, compared to 22 times more in 1979.

Black ghettos have come to contain a disproportionate share of the nation's poor, creating an intensely disadvantaged environment that only blacks face. The key issue, in the end is not whether it is race or class that explains the plight of African-Americans in the late twentieth century but how race and class interact to produce barriers to black socioeconomic progress that are unique in their intensity, severity and durability.

Douglas Massey The Nation

Urban sprawl is the new face of Jim Crow

John Powell

Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
Who Lives in Concentrated Poverty Neighborhoods?

Over 3.1 million African Americans lived in concentrated poverty neighborhoods in 2000, Blacks and Latinos represent nearly 3 out of 4 residents in these neighborhoods.

Nearly 1 out of 10 Blacks lived in a concentrated poverty neighborhood in 1999, compared to 1 out of 100 Whites.
What’s happening now?

- Video of unemployment growth in the United States
What’s happening now?

- But unemployment is not equal.....
US has one of the highest percentages of childhood poverty, infant mortality, and incarceration in the world, despite its affluence as a country. It has lower life expectancies than most industrialized countries, and the least social mobility of any industrialized country.

The single largest predictor of wealth in the United States is the wealth of your parents.

The US is in the “top” countries for the average wealth of a national elected representative compared to the average wealth of its citizens.

The US has one of the highest rates of income inequality and wealth inequality (Gini Coefficient) in the industrialized world.
Wrapping it Up

- Racial categories and meaning are continuously re-created in multiple locations (individual, institutional, structural, interactional)
- Even “individual racism” is highly context-dependent – depends on priming/framing, context, awareness, etc
- Disparities are not dependent on “racism”
Wrapping it Up

- What about suffering?
  - Ontological suffering – The pain of “being embodied” – Dukkha - Noble truths
  - “Surplus suffering” – Ken Jones’ “supercharged suffering” – created by socioeconomic structures

- Suffering calls us to community – Suffering creates empathy

- DISSATISFACTION WITH ISOLATED SELF HAS THE POWER TO DRAW US MORE DEEPLY INTO RELATIONSHIP
Once a toddler can identify themselves, they know that if they're observing someone else, they also have a feeling. They know if they feel something, they are feeling it because someone else has it. They are two separate beings.

Selfhood goes together with empathic development, increasing selfhood and empathic development.
Wrapping it Up

- Political Structures are not subordinate to us as individuals – nor are our values in a vacuum.
- “Secular” and “Religious” are false distinctions.
Wrapping it Up

- So what does this mean for us? As activists? As meditators? As Buddhists? As atheists? As white people? As people of color?

- Not just “what does our spiritual practice” have to offer our activism, but what does our activism have to offer our spiritual practice