

# Issue of teacher implicit biases



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This paper will delve into teachers' implicit or unconscious biases. The *Brown v. Board of Education*, known for ending the "separate but equal" which was decided in *Plessy v. Ferguson* case obviously ended a lot of the overt racism and discrimination in our country, but there is still implicit and institutional racism seen within schools. Teachers in education make countless decisions that affect a student on a daily basis such as who gets called on in class, what kind of feedback students receive on their work, who gets praise, who gets redirection or punishment and many other aspects. The unconscious perceptions, views, and attitudes towards different races affect the way in which these decisions are made or the ways in which situations are responded to. Countless studies have shown that students in minority races, especially African American's are likely to be treated relatively poorly compared their white classmates by their teachers. These implicit biases teachers have, connect back to colorblind racism as well as common stock stories heard about African American children and African American family structure, as well as minority groups in general. Further I will argue in this paper that, these implicit biases effect is the phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline, in which a huge number of students are being pushed out of school and into the criminal justice system, it's a racial justice crisis because the students pushed out are disproportionately students

An implicit bias is influenced by attitudes and stereotypes that we all hold based on our experiences. Implicit bias influences how we act in a subconscious way, even if we renounce prejudices or stereotypes in our daily lives (Scialabba 2017). These implicit biases reveal unfavorable assessments that lie deep in our subconscious in which we tend to favor our own group to

which we psychologically identify with (Scialabba 2017). “ A growing body of research shows that we all harbor unconscious biases, Beverly Daniel Tatum has explained we absorb bias in the same way we breath in smog- involuntarily and usually without any awareness of it” (Fiarman, 2016, 10). In today’s society there is multimedia news coverage of these biases police officers hold and their effects on marginalized groups of the community particularly African Americans. Similar to biases police officers hold, there is studies and statistics that prove others in our community have these same forms of biases that are also hurting marginalized groups in our community. My focus will be on, teachers implicit biases and how these biases are connected with colorblind racism and ultimately stem from stock stories commonly heard about minorities from society which then lead to the school-to-prison-pipeline phenomenon. To begin with a little bit of history on segregation in history, it is important to understand that Plessy v. Ferguson doctrine “ separate but equal” doctrine declared in 1896 claimed the segregation was not discrimination. So, it was at this time that schools were segregated, but in 1954 a supreme court case ruling known as Brown V. The Board of Education ruled the “ separate but equal” doctrine unacceptable. This case began the long process of desegregation within our nation’s public schools. This was a pivotal step in our history that has undoubtedly helped to eliminate overt racial discrimination within our country. However just because this ruling has helped lessen overt racial discrimination within our country, there is still institutionalized racism within our education system in which includes our educators’ implicit biases. There have been several studies done on teachers to show the ways these implicit biases work and in what scenarios they surface which I will go in depth later on. Just like many

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other sociological factors in our society that effect the education system and further marginalize minorities, these biases held by teachers are functioning to do the same.

As I mentioned before there are many studies out there that prove and support the idea that teachers have implicit biases. When teachers expected bad behavior who did they watch? A study done at Yale University, reveals that the teachers participating in the study had their eyes mainly on the black students in the group, even more so on the black male. The most eye-opening revelation to this study done was the fact that the teachers were told to watch for challenging behavior that may be happening, when in fact there was no challenging behavior that was going to occur. This study was done on approximately 135 pre-school teachers, because of this we can conclude that these biases teachers hold against minority students begin at the youngest ages in education. (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, Shic 2016). Further diving into research that supports the idea that teachers possess these implicit biases there was another study, that drew upon identifying them that builds off this previous study. Since the previous study has revealed teachers often watch African American students for challenging behavior, what do these punishments towards these students look like? Teachers when shown child discipline reports with names suggesting the child was African American such as Deshawn or Latoya compared to names suggesting Caucasian background like Greg and Mary, teachers were dealing out harsher punishments to the children's names that suggested African American background. There was lesser punishment in terms of length and harshness for the children whose names suggested Caucasian background.

Here, we see that teachers use their perceptions of students and their race to respond to student behavior (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). These ideas put forward by these studies back up and explain the data that was released by the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) for the 2013-2014 school year. Only 15% of the public-school population is made up of African Americans, but they nearly make up 39% of all suspensions given out (Anon 2018). To build off the idea that teachers look and watch more closely at African-American males, they alone make up 25% of school suspensions given out yet only make up 8% of the public-school population (Anon 2018). Since we see that in fact teachers do have implicit racial biases, they further carry out an effect on these minority students. We know teachers hold an impact in students and children's lives, we've all heard a valedictorian speech in which that individual thanks many people for getting them where they are today, amongst those people they are giving thanks to is teachers. Existing research has shown that, teachers' expectations for graduation differ across races. When reviewing students, white teachers that taught both African American and white students the same subject, gave lower expectations of the African American student compared to the white student; who got a higher rate of expectation to graduate. Overall, white teachers had lower perceptions of African American students compared to their white students (Rosen 2016). Later we will discuss what these expectations do to the student throughout their education process. Finally, since it was mentioned that the effect of these racial biases these teachers have can lead or contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. There has been a shift in the way students are being disciplined in schools. This shift is switching from issues amongst student conflict being handled internally, to <https://assignbuster.com/issue-of-teacher-implicit-biases/>

these conflicts being handled externally, meaning bringing in law enforcement (Nance 2016). So, pulling the pieces together, if teachers racial biases are giving harsher and more frequent punishments to students of color, and these punishments are shifting from being handled by the school to being handled by law enforcement these biases are therefore contributing to this phenomenon of school-to-prison pipeline.

Color blind racism is rooted in these implicit racial biases that these teachers have. Color blind racism is when people embrace “ color blindness as nonracist, by ignoring the extent to which race still shapes people’s life chances and opportunities, this view actually reinforces and reproduces the subtle and institutional racial inequalities that shape our lives” (Coates Ferber Brunsma 2018). There are teachers who claim this exact idea, that is that they don’t “ see color” in the classroom. Their intentions behind saying this statement is trying to demonstrate that they teach all students equally no matter what race the student may be. However, this is just the opposite, by teachers saying they don’t “ see color” they are essentially ignoring all of the research I mentioned earlier. Not acknowledging race in the classroom, is contributing to these higher rates of suspension, and harsher punishments. When teachers don’t realize they have these unconscious racial biases, they might not even notice how they are surfacing and affecting their students. Teachers need to be aware of race and how racism is active in education by acknowledging the research behind this idea and noticing these biases in themselves. As well as color blind racism being connected with these implicit racial biases, stock stories also are causing some of the racial biases that teachers have. A stock story is “ tales told by the dominant group” (Coates

Ferber Brunσμα 2018). Stock stories are a source for whites and other races to begin to gain preconceived ideas of another race or culture. So, for example there is a common stock story heard and perceived by whites about a young African American male. The story we hear goes a little something like the black male is living with his single mother on limited financial resources, being socialized within a “ street culture” that has resulted in the internalization of a flawed code of behavior and morality (Anon 2017). To put this in context with my argument, since teachers are educating students but have this idea already in their head about young African American males, the teacher is making judgements based on stereotypical ideals spread by society about the African American race. The teacher is making these judgements of the student before even giving them a chance to see who they really are, it’s almost like an immediate response to seeing the color of their skin. We know that since the child is African American that the teacher will be watching them more for troubling behavior and giving the, harsher punishments as well. Another stock story that is told throughout society, is the fact that it is assumed someone with an accent doesn’t understand things to an extent as someone with no accent. There is this perception that having an accent, makes that person less capable and not as smart. So, a teacher having this bias is going to react to it by assuming that child with an accent needs “ easier material” in order to succeed, when in reality they might not. By giving the child this “ easier material” it is degrading their intelligence and then making them fall behind their peers who are the same age but learning more advance things that the child with the accent is supposed to be learning. So, what these expectations from the teacher do to the student is create almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy. The teacher

perceives the student to need easier material and the child begins to believe they aren't as smart as their peers and think less of themselves because of their teachers influence over them. Finally, to wrap up my argument, these biases are contributing to the school-to-prison-pipeline phenomenon. Being an African American child in school, you are being watched more closely and being called out for the slightest misbehavior and deemed more deviant than your white peers. Teachers will also may perceive you as a lower achiever compared to your peers and give you easier material causing, you to fall behind and you start to feel stigmatized in the classroom. If a child, which in this scenario is most likely a minority student, is feeling stigmatized in the classroom, they are more likely to act out and then we know receive harsher punishment. The punishment will come from law enforcement and take away from their learning time in the classroom causing them to fall even further behind than their teacher has already put them. When the student comes back into the classroom, they are judged by other students and looked at differently for getting in trouble. This is a cycle of events beginning from these racial biases within teachers which they gain through stock stories, which then are ignored through color blind racism and ultimately putting the minority student in a far worse situation than their peers.

In conclusion, teachers' racial biases need to be addressed and paid more attention to. These teachers need to steer away from the colorblind attitude in the classroom and rather recognize race and how it may affect the student based on the decision they may or may not make. Teachers, just like a lot of police officers are having to do, should have exclusive and in-depth training on how to recognize these biases and appropriately handle them in order to



better the future of students and their success in education. There should also be a more diverse population of teachers world-wide since a majority of them are white. However, realizing that this type of institutionalized racism is occurring in education it has occurred to me that having a more diverse population of teachers could be hard to accomplish. This would be difficult to accomplish if these minority students throughout their education aren't presented with the same opportunities and advantages the white students in education are given. The conclusions I was able to draw from my research was that, minorities particularly African Americans are treated poorly and unfairly by society, based off their race in which they have no control over. Students are suffering and not succeeding often times because of this flawed system they are put into in which enables these racial biases to be put in action. Since I have done a lot of my research on how education and race operate, I think it would be interesting to do similar research and look into how education and disability operate. I know that disabled students are also associated with negative biases, but I am curious to know the extent to which that issue lies just like I have discovered for different races of students.

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