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Arlo Kempf
arlo.kempf@toronto.ca

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If We Are Going to Talk About Implicit Race Bias, We Need to Talk About Structural Racism

Moving Beyond Ubiquity and Inevitability
in Teaching and Learning About Race

Arlo Kempf

Abstract

This article argues for a critical intervention in the popular discourse surrounding the analysis of implicit race bias as an anti-racism strategy. Also called unconscious race bias, implicit race bias provides a corporate-friendly lens for understanding the functions and operations of racism at the individual level. Based primarily in social psychology, the study of implicit race bias relies on the assumption that our unconscious negative and positive associations with people of different races are formed through various processes of socialization and can correspond with and impact our conscious race-based interactions. Recognizing the danger of popular understandings of race which neither consider nor account for race beyond the level of the individual, this article calls for the use of critical race theory (CRT) and critical pedagogy as tools to disrupt, interrogate, and deepen implicit race bias approaches. By bringing attention to questions of race power and inequity at the institutional, structural, and systemic levels as a precursor for taking up race at the individual level, I offer that CRT and critical pedagogy are indeed necessary for those looking to critically engage teaching and learning con-

Arlo Kempf is Assistant Professor and Director of the Master of Teaching Program in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Email address: arlo.kempf@toronto.ca

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cerning implicit race bias. The article concludes by describing a recent study with Canadian teachers which attempts to bring critical perspectives and practices into dialogue with implicit race bias.

Introduction

Implicit race bias (IRB) has become a popular cultural topic in mainstream media, a popular area of research and debate in social psychology, and the common foundation for diversity training in countless corporate contexts. Based primarily in social psychology, the study of implicit race bias relies on the assumption that our unconscious negative and positive associations regarding people of different races are formed through various processes of socialization, and can correspond with and impact conscious race-based interactions. At present, implicit race bias interventions are frequently misused as one-off panaceas, and the implications of implicit race bias are frequently misunderstood. This article argues for a critical intervention in the application of IRB as an anti-racism strategy, to identify a useful role for IRB approaches for anti-racist work which aims to address racism at the systemic, structural, institutional, and individual levels.

Implicit race bias research suggests that all people have implicit race biases and that these biases are in part linked to neurology. The danger here lies in a resulting passivity of ubiquity (e.g. *everyone is racist so it's not that big of a deal*) and a resulting passivity of inevitability (*racism is—at least in part—how we are wired, so there is no way to stop it*). Such misunderstandings can make it difficult to understand our personal responsibility for racism and inequitable race power, as well as the ways in which racism at the individual level is representative of larger institutional and systemic operations. These misunderstandings may also mask, mute, or deny the impact and experience of racism on Indigenous folks and people of colour. This in part, may explain why IRB provides a corporate-friendly lens for understanding the functions and operations of racism.

Recognizing the danger of popular understandings of race which neither consider nor account for race beyond the level of the individual, this article calls for the use of critical race theory (CRT) and critical pedagogy as tools to disrupt, interrogate, and deepen implicit race bias work. By bringing attention to questions of race power and inequity at the structural, institutional, and systemic levels as a precursor for taking up race at the individual level, I offer that CRT and critical pedagogy are indeed necessary for those looking to critically engage teaching and learning about implicit race bias.

This article begins by offering an introduction to implicit race bias, including a brief discussion of how IRB has been taken up in popular media and in the corporate sector. Noting the call for greater attention to IRB in K-12 schooling and university contexts, this paper then offers a brief overview of the academic conversation and scholarship on IRB and education, drawing primarily on work from social and educational psychology in the United States and Canada. Guided

by critical race theory and critical pedagogy scholarship, the paper then offers a theoretical interrogation of the limitations of mainstream IRB approaches and offers a way forward for using critical engagements with IRB, informed by CRT and critical pedagogy principles. Finally, I describe some very preliminary emerging findings from a recent study with Toronto high school teachers which endeavours to engage the critical work called for in the previous sections. A short conclusion follows.

Implicit Race Bias

Over the past decade, implicit race bias has become a corporate diversity darling. Most famously, Starbucks[®] Corporation closed 10,000+ U.S. and Canadian café locations for a half-day in 2018, to provide mandatory anti-bias training to 200,000+ employees. The training came as a response to the unlawful arrest of two African-Americans at a Philadelphia Starbucks[®] (Abrams, 2018). Online trainings like these have not been shown to work (see Chang et. al., 2019). Although the coffee company's use of IRB was the most widely reported, the content mirrored that of many other versions of similar corporate training; differing primarily in scale rather than theoretical approach in terms of a corporate diversity strategy. From Microsoft, to Google to Papa John's to Buffalo Wings to countless other corporations and businesses (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020), bias training is a popular mechanism for companies to appear to be doing something about racism in their organizations. Although largely understudied (with Chang et. al., 2019 offering an important exception) the work has been both lauded and criticized. Despite myriad opinions, very little popular coverage has addressed what IRB is or how it works.

Implicit (or unconscious) bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (Kirwan Institute, 2015), and it emerges from a combination of the way our brains seem to work, and the way we are socialized—some approximation of a synergy of nature and nurture. On the nature side of this, animals are often hardwired to make positive and negative associations, and this is a highly functional tendency for survival; be it ducklings imprinting on and following the first moving objects they see after hatching, or human babies having positive associations with the first faces they encounter. Further, humans rely upon categories and schema (forms of thought or behavior that consolidate and shape categories of information and the associations among them) to make sense of the vast quantities of data that we process as part of everyday life. This relational short hand saves time, allowing us to more quickly understand and interact with the world around us.

On the nurture side, unconscious associations are cultivated over the course of our lives, through encounters with direct and indirect messages (Kirwan Institute, 2015). We are socialized by and in peer groups, teachers, curriculum, family, traditional media, social media, religion, spirituality, etc. Additionally, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, language, immigration status, neurotypicality, ability, and other factors inform and are informed by how we walk through the world,

how we experience advantage and disadvantage, how we connect and disconnect with others, etc. Based on these identity factors, we experience and enact things such as racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other oppressive attitudes and behaviors—this includes our biases around a host of phenomena, including race. Socialization impacts the nature of our unconscious associations and is informed by societal social relations. Implicit race bias both produces and is produced by dominant race patterns, ideas, and conversations: The imprint of a racist and homophobic society, for example, will be racist and homophobic implicit bias.

Bringing the nature and nurture pieces together in terms of implicit race bias, our associational shortcuts rely upon poison cues (racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.) to inform the categories and schema we use and create to navigate and make sense of our lives. Bias thusly maps onto—and can be a map of—societal phenomena, e.g., White supremacy, transphobia, settler colonialism, etc.

All of this stuff going on in our heads impacts how we (mis)understand the world and those in it during the course of our interactions with others. Alter et. al. (2016) describe what they call the “Bad is Black” effect which looks not only at the adjustment of skin tone in media portrayals of African Americans, but also at powerful patterns of a negative association with dark skin. Goff et. al. (2014), found African American boys under 11 years old are more likely than their White counterparts to have their age overestimated, to be perceived to be guilty of a crime, and to be victims of police violence when accused of being criminals. Wilson, Hugenberg, and Rule (2017) found that African American men were frequently misperceived as larger, more muscular, and taller than White men the same size; which correlated with misperceptions of threat and harm.

Implicit race bias is also consequential for how we live our lives in relation to others, as we know that IRB has an impact on our decision making in terms of how we deal with people of different races (Staats, 2014). Further, negative effects of bias are linked to social power and group status (i.e., consequences of bias affect different people differently, even though we all have biases) (Choudhury, 2015).

Studying Implicit Race Bias and Education

Across Canada, educational outcomes are frequently patterned along racial lines (in addition to income, gender, neurodiversity, ability, language, sexuality, and other considerations) and the relationship between race and educational advantage and disadvantage is well-established in relevant literature, particularly with regard to the Ontario context (see for example James, 2019, 2018, & 2012; Robson, 2018; Dei, 2017; Clandfield, et. al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; TDSB, 2013; St. Denis, 2011). More specifically, the phenomena surrounding teachers’ race-based expectations of students are well-documented in the U.S. and Canada (see Henry et. Al., 2017; Crosby & Monin, 2007; Dei, 2000; Dei et.

al., 1997; & Dee, 2005). Targeting implicit racial bias in education has become an explicit policy priority at the national (see CMEC, N.D. 2017), provincial (see Government of Ontario, 2017; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), and school board levels (see TDSB, 2017). Confirming what critical race scholarship has long suggested, the role of individual and organizational bias is now recognized in policy as central to equitable outcomes in schooling.

Harvard University's Implicit Association Test is among the major instruments used in the study of implicit racial bias, with over 12 million participants since 1998. This electronic measure has inspired numerous other instruments and tests, using the same principle of timed tests of participants' reactions when prompted to associate negative and positive images with particular races. These are particularly numerous in projects aimed at law enforcement (see for example, Correll et. al., in press; Correll et. al., 2017; Correll et. al., 2011; Correll et. al., 2007; Correll et. al., 2002). Little research on implicit racial bias has been conducted in Canada, with the vast majority emerging from the U.S. Very little U.S. work has focused specifically on education.

Researchers have employed physiological tools to measure implicit reactions to difference (including race) using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) (Phelps et. al., 2000). Others have tracked patterns of cardiovascular responses (Blascovich et. al., 2001); facial electromyography (EMG) (Vanman et. al., 2004); and cortisol responses (Page-Gould et. al., 2008). Using novel intermodal association tasks, developmental psychologists Xiao and colleagues (2017a & 2017b) have found implicit bias in infants as young as six months. These findings may help us understand tendencies and patterns among groups of people. This important work has mostly focused on better understanding, documenting, and identifying implicit racial bias. As Banaji and Greenwal (2013) suggest, the question mark in terms of next steps in implicit racial bias research is whether or not we can undo (or de-bias) as well as mitigate the impacts of bias in our decision-making, actions, and interactions.

Implicit biases are automatic and unintentional, and are therefore more likely to manifest in a hurried moment. Reflection and "thinking slow" by engaging in mindful, deliberate processing can prevent our implicit biases from kicking in and determining our behaviors (Kahneman, 2011). This has many implications for in-class interactions, assessment, discipline, etc. Pronin's (2007) work engaged the concept of objectivity, and concluded that presuming oneself to be objective tends to increase the role of implicit bias. Findings suggest teaching people about non-conscious thought processes may lead people to be skeptical of their own objectivity. By working with IRB, we may thus be able to better guard against biased discipline, interactions, evaluations, etc. in schooling contexts.

Several researchers have explored practices which increase motivation to be fair, including learning about implicit bias; leveraging existing equity leanings; and interrogating our personal stories, lenses, and narratives of self (see Kang et.

al., 2012; National Center for State Courts, 2012; & Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004). Additionally, Crosby et. al. (1986), studied the practice of counting: Unconsciously biased behavior is best identified by using data to determine if patterns of behavior are leading to racially disparate results. Their conclusions suggest that once one is aware that judgements or actions are having disparate outcomes, it is then possible to consider whether the outcomes are linked to bias. This may have implications for grading, calling on students, discipline, favour, etc.

In terms of de-biasing/eliminating bias, Dasgupta & Asgari, (2004) have investigated counter-stereotypic imaging, an approach involving imagining in detail, counter-stereotypic others. These can be abstract or real (e.g., a personal friend). The approach makes positive exemplars noticeable and available when challenging a stereotype's legitimacy. Other researchers have investigated individuation, an approach that relies on avoiding stereotypic extrapolations by obtaining specific data about group members. This is meant to help people to evaluate members of a specific group based on personal, rather than group-based, attributes (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990).

To date, the relevant research on both mitigating and eliminating implicit racial bias has not included the practices of teachers, and none of it has looked at Canadian education contexts, which have varied but specific demographics, histories, and organizational approaches. While this gap in the literature is significant, the paucity of study on teaching and education is perhaps less concerning than the lack of critical scholarship on IRB which attends to the production, reproduction, operation, and maintenance of racism at the institutional, structural, and systemic levels, as well as to concrete questions of social change and racial justice. As a precondition for the use of IRB analyses to address racism in education, a critical intervention is needed. Critical race theory and critical pedagogy offer two important apparatus for this work.

Critical Race Theory and Implicit Race Bias

Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework used extensively to understand race formation and race relations. CRT arose as an application and extension of the critical legal studies (CLS) movement in the U.S., in the late 1970s, offering a framework for understanding and analyzing institutional, systemic, and individual racial privilege and punishment with a focus on the sources of racial oppression (see Bell, 1992, Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, and others). As a critical and generative institutional site of racial production and reproduction, education is a significant area of focus for CRT. The seminal scholarship of Lynn and Parker (2006), Dixson and Rousseau (2005), Ladson-Billings (1998), Tate (1997), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), and others has exposed, troubled, and resisted the role of schooling in the preservation and maintenance of racism and other systems of oppression.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2018) contends the origins of CRT can be found in

the early 20th-century writing of W. E. B. Du Bois, and thereafter in that of Garvey, the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence. Following Ladson-Billings' argument, CRT has a very long history of recognizing the conjunction of power relations and race as a social construction with tangible individual, institutional, and systemic repercussions. Among the key claims of CRT scholars is that although race has no biological significance, it has profound material implications for our lived reality, organized as advantages and disadvantages. Critical race theory rejects colorblind understandings of race relations at the individual, institutional, structural, and systemic levels. Scholars, including Bonilla-Silva (2003), Urrieta (2006), and others highlight how racism is nurtured when the circumstances for its indiscernibility are maintained.

Among the chief discursive trappings employed to rationalize the denial of racism and assert the irrelevance of race, is the popular assignment of race to the past. Post-racialism is an increasingly popular conception. Bell (1990) argued that the relevance of race and the existence of racism persist and are persistently denied—a critique that remains at the heart of CRT. Among the crucial contributions of CRT to the field of education is thus the insistence that race be seen and accounted for in the first instances of institutional life. It is worth considering who benefits from a post-racial discourse, as well as who is made safe and who is threatened. As Leonardo (2009) argues, safe space in race dialogue too often provides safety only for dominant racial bodies while preserving the discursive violence of mainstream race dialogue experienced by many people of color. Indeed, the post-race approach fits this description powerfully, as some people may be more post-racial than others; just as some race biases are more impactful than others.

Against this backdrop, we can problematize popular IRB approaches which, ironically, can triage the injured White racist with the reassurance that race bias is not only normal but also innately (and biologically) human. Further, those 'trained' in one-off sessions may walk away secure that their own racism is indeed part of something far larger, in which they play no agentive role and for which they bear no responsibility. This approach ignores the fact that not all race bias is created equal in terms of lived consequences: i.e. the systemic, structural, institutional, and individual privileging of White folks and the punishment of everyone else at in Euro-North American contexts. Starbucks[®] and other companies admitting to creating and operating racist spaces are asking their employees to change, one by one, rather than enacting systemic or structural change in their organizations. To be clear, the Starbucks[®] training is primarily an issue not for the content of the training itself, but rather for the lack of broader perspective, deeper and sustained engagement, and follow-up. As a counter to this one-off, head in the sand approach, learning about one's own race bias (however inevitable and widespread) should serve as an entry point for understanding the ways in which the structural and institutional operations of race and racism have imprinted upon and within us, as well as the ways our biases feed cycles of race formation and racial injustice.

The unfulfilled promise of IRB discourses is that de-biasing and/or becoming free of racism (and our responsibility for racism) is possible without deep work, without deep criticality and discomfort. Indeed, the most dangerous implied assumption resulting from IRB approaches is that we need only tweak or slightly correct an otherwise well-functioning social apparatus, with the rule of logic sure to straighten things out, if not sooner then for sure later. This seductive fiction has a long history in popular race discourse. In sketching the development of critical legal theory (CLT), which served as midwife to critical race theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017), argues:

[I]n the early 1980s... [c]ivil rights lawyers and liberal allies... shared a baseline confidence that once the irrational distortions of bias were removed, the underlying legal and socioeconomic order would revert to a neutral, benign state of impersonally apportioned justice [which] premised racial liberation on the enlightened terms of rationality. Accordingly, racial power was seen as “discrimination,” a deviation from reason that was remediable through the operation of legal principles.

Among the fundamental assertions of CLT, Crenshaw adds, is that, “no neutral process of principled legal reasoning could justify the racialized distribution of power, prestige, and wealth in America” (ibid). Guided by Crenshaw’s conceptual framing, we can see implicit race bias as a rational, logical, and inevitable consequence of racial systems, structures, and institutions rather than an irrational anomaly that needs correcting at the individual level. Indeed, this pushes us past the urge to merely right the path of the vessel that is implicit race bias, to note that what we are facing here includes the tides, winds, and flow in and through which this vessel is travelling. Noting that racial prejudice and discrimination are products of racist systems, institutions, and structures, there is no final fix that can be applied to race bias absent a breach and dismantling of the operations of race and power at these higher levels. Just as there is no actual historical moment to which chants of *Make America Great Again* harken, there is no return to logic/neutral, rationalism awaiting those of us keen to address our race biases.

As hooks (1984) reminds us, “the classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility,” in which we “have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress” (p. 207). It is these practices of freedom: of imagining, of understanding together, of grappling to be in and of the world, of transgression for social justice, that occupy some of the core offerings of critical pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy and Implicit Race Bias: Toward Liberatory Pedagogies

Critical pedagogy is a beautiful and messy tangle of philosophy, method, practice, and activism which argues for education as a place for radical love and engagement by and for students and teachers (understood broadly). Geared toward

critical reading, reflection, and transformation of the world through engagement with the word, and vice versa, critical pedagogy seeks to develop the agency of all in the learning relationship, in critical collaboration toward the operationalization of a just world. The seminal works of Darder (1991), Freire (2000), Giroux (1991), hooks (1994), Kincheloe (2004), McLaren (1994), Steinberg & Kincheloe (2010), and others make up an (anti-)canon of sorts; while scholars such as Fanon (1967), Lorde (1984), Tijerina & Guitérrez (2000), Anzaldúa (1987), and others offer foundational and intellectually complementary insights on race, land, and identity—absent in much of the work mentioned above. Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008); Grande (2004); Lynn (1999); and others offer significant and instructive critiques and criticism of early critical pedagogy approaches while building on these works, with a focus on race-centric and Indigenous approaches to critical teaching and learning. The tangle of critical pedagogy (for it cannot really be called a braid) includes these controversies, inadequacies, and evolutions. This messy theoretical and practical contribution has a great deal to offer classrooms in general and may be essential for taking up questions of IRB in particular.

Implicit race bias approaches possess tremendous value as an invitational entry point—particularly for White middle-class teachers and students—for beginning to understand racism in everyday life. White supremacy allows for too few entry points for White folks to engage questions of race and racism without shifting the burden of that work to Indigenous people and people of colour. Implicit race bias offers a small window through which to crawl into a critical conversation. If IRB approaches lend themselves too easily to analyses which go no further than the level of the individual, we can call on pedagogy to make the link from the daily individual, to the broader contemporary and historical machinations of race and racism at the structural, institutional, and systemic levels—including understandings of settler colonialism, coloniality, and White supremacy.

As mentioned above, the work to mitigate and eliminate the effects of implicit race bias includes sustained reflection and slow thinking for engaging in mindful and deliberate processing. The work calls on teachers to debunk false notions of objectivity in all aspects of the teaching and learning relationship; interrogating their own identities, narratives, and notions of self and thinking deeply about individuality, presumptions, and interactivity. Such reflexivity is indeed at the core critical pedagogy in practice. Such thoughtful pedagogics opens up space for deeper thinking—the very space needed to critically interrogate the relationships between the micro and the macro, the implicit and the explicit life of race. At the core of our thinking in critical pedagogy is the connection between and potential simultaneity of, theory to practice. Called critical praxis, this process is described by Freire as, “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (2000, p. 126). Critical pedagogy theorist Henry Giroux (1991) takes this a little further, calling for a border pedagogy that opposes “representational practices that make a claim to objectivity, universality, and consensus” in which “cultural

workers can develop pedagogical conditions in which students can read and write within and against existing cultural codes...” (p. 54). Writing three years later on critical pedagogy in the classroom, bell hooks (1994) argues that “to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars ... to cross boundaries’ and ‘disrupt the seemingly fixed (yet often unstated) assumptions” (p. 130). Freire, Giroux, and hooks thus suggest a necessary trespassing by teachers and students into more a holistic approach to understanding race and society.

The epistemic level of the individual, understood more deeply using IRB, can here be linked, through critical reflexivity to processes of race power writ large. Quoting Fanon, Sara Ahmed (2007), reminds us to think of the “‘historic-racial’ schema” which lie below our daily experiences, relationships, and interactions; suggesting, “the racial and historical dimensions are beneath the surface of the body described by phenomenology, which becomes, by virtue of its own orientation, a way of thinking the body that has surface appeal” (p. 153). Shor and Freire (1987), in a provocative discussion on dialogical liberatory education, argue dialogue is not “a mere technique, which we can use to help us get some results” (p. 13) but is instead “a means to transform social relations in the classroom” (p. 11) as well as “a way to recreate knowledge as well as the way we learn” (p. 11). Offering a concise bridge between the individual and the structural in the classroom, Lynn (1999) argues that critical race pedagogy must centre “the endemic nature of racism in the United States; the importance of cultural identity; the necessary interaction of race, class, and gender; and the practice of a liberatory pedagogy” (p. 615).

For the pedagogue—or teacher, or cultural worker—the challenge of this work exists both internally, and simultaneously in dialogue and relation (with others, with history, and with biology). Further, the relationship between the world of the psyche and that of larger structures of privilege and punishment is well-established (see Fanon, 1967; Oliver, 2004; & Gringe 2014). We can return here to the notion of imprinting, and the ways in which our individual race biases (conscious and unconscious) are produced by and are producers of racism at the structural, systemic, and institutional levels. Indeed, the very idea of *individual* implicit bias is problematic in so far as it suggests an isolated and discrete island of negative and positive associations, impossibly removed from biology, interaction, socialization, and countless other factors that are inherently interactive. For the White classroom teacher in a Euro-North American context, race bias is indelibly social and relational. Teaching for racial justice then requires an engagement of the social, political, historical, epistemological, etc as they are brought to bear on the individual. Working toward and through difficult pedagogical connection and reflection at the professional and personal levels is thus key for engaging questions of IRB. The final section of this article describes a recent small-scale qualitative research project with Toronto secondary teachers who spent a school year analyzing and working through questions of implicit race bias and pedagogy; and presents some reflections emerging from early data analysis work.

The Implicit Bias and Teacher Practice Study

Unfortunately, implicit race bias work is often undertaken as a brief and stand-alone professional diversity training activity. As described above, such approaches may focus exclusively on the individual and may conflate the ubiquity of implicit race bias with the notion that racism is inevitable, universal, and beyond the responsibility of any group or individual. Recognizing this significant limitation, the Implicit Bias and Teacher Practice Study aimed to introduce two unique elements to implicit race bias mitigation work.

First, following the call outlined above, the study brings together anti-racist approaches informed by critical race theory, anti-colonial theory, and other critical approaches, which consider the historical, colonial, institutional, and systemic elements of race and racism; thus bringing a critical approach to an often narrow corporate vision of diversity work. Second, this work differs from conventional anti-bias work by lengthening and deepening the typically limited scope and sequence of the activities, learnings, and practices. The study was conducted over a full school year—a ten-month engagement period by teachers—using a variety of methods including journaling, dialogue, and interviews.

Braiding critical and social psychology literature, this multimodal approach aims to create space for a deeper dive into critical antiracist work to mitigate the impacts of conscious and unconscious race bias on teacher practice. The study draws broadly from critical race theory (CRT) and implicit race bias literature in social psychology (both approaches are described above) as well as second-wave White teacher identity studies and anti-colonial theory. Second-wave White teacher identity studies builds on CRT, as well as critical whiteness studies, to offer a complicated and critical study of “the cultural production of race, whiteness, and White teacher identities that articulates complex historical and social forces along with related understandings of teaching and learning in context” (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 1163).

The anti-colonial work of Fanon (1965), Memmi (1965), and others offer a phenomenology of race, which is useful for understanding White teacher reflections on race and race bias mitigation. Drawing on this tradition, Sara Ahmed suggests, “whiteness is lived as a background to experience” and considers whiteness not “as an ontological given, but as that which has been received, or become given, over time... an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space” (2007, p. 150). Following the work of Tanner (2017), the study also engages the scholarship of Morrison (1992) and Thandeka (1999) who locate “race in the American imaginary by investigating how Whiteness is formed and shaped by a relationship with what both authors described as non-Whiteness” (Tanner, 2017, p. 174). Thus, I conceptualize the reflections and experiences of White teachers in the Canadian context, as sitting in relation to and in situation with the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) in Ontario educational contexts.

Among the crucial elements common to these critical approaches is the insistence that race is relevant and must be accounted for in the first instances of institutional life, as mentioned above. The braiding of these distinct but related theoretical domains allows for a deep and unconventional application of each; opening up space for a healthy complication of teacher reflections on race, practice, and pedagogy as well as of the theoretical approaches themselves.

In terms of methods, the project was a small multimodal qualitative study. Participants engaged in a series of activities. In the early fall, teachers completed a series of online modules offered by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, wrote short race biographies, and read a series of introductory articles on the theory and practice of implicit race bias and its mitigation. In late fall/early winter, each participant reviewed a series of 20 implicit race bias mitigation strategies with the research team, and co-designed a plan for the January-June term which included the implementation of 4-6 mitigation strategies. Strategies varied from technical activities such as anonymous marking, to more dialogical activities including structured dinners at which White teachers exchanged race biographies with Black and South Asian parents and students, to personal activities including perspective-taking exercises, and other activities. Additionally, each teacher read at least one full-length critical anti-racist and/or anticolonial book from the following list: *So You Want to Talk About Race*, by Ijeoma Oluo; *White Fragility*, by Robin DiAngelo; *Policing Black Lives*, by Robyn Maynard; *Everyday Anti-Racism*, edited by Mica Pollock; and/or *Unsettling the Settler Within*, by Paulette Regan. Over the course of the January-to-June term, teachers shared their ongoing reflections on these strategies and activities using online and handwritten journaling, through phone interviews, and through email exchanges. Each teacher then participated in a culminating interview.

We are currently in the early stages of data analysis and the research team has begun a thematic analysis of the data (see Ryan and Bernard 2003). We will craft responses by theme into individual vignettes, which we will likely cross analyze for comparison (Creswell 1998, and Merriam 1998). From these meta-themes, our case analysis will identify divergences and convergences within teacher responses. We will use a narrative approach to consolidate, explore and discuss teacher experiences and reflection (see Barone, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Jacobs, 2005; and Moen, 2006).

This study is based on the experiences and reflections of 12 (n=12) secondary high school teachers in a large urban school board in Southern Ontario, Canada. In terms of gender, three identified as men, two as non-binary, and eight as women. In terms of race, two identified as mixed race Asian and White, one identified as East Asian, and nine identified as White.

Some Very Cautious Themes Emerging from Early Data Analysis

In terms of results, initial data analysis suggests at least three emerging themes. First, teacher reflections and interviews suggest teacher perceptions of the efficacy of implicit race bias mitigation strategies may rely on the degree to which they notice conscious changes in their perceptions of and experiences with race, racism, and BIPOC students. In other words, teachers may not recognize and/or believe in the efficacy of strategies (despite empirical evidence of their ability to mitigate implicit race bias) if they do not notice any changes in their thoughts, feelings, and/or actions.

Second, teacher reflections and interviews highlight a powerful connection and synergy resulting from the concurrent use of critical anti-racist strategies (including critical race dialoguing and reading critical anti-racist texts) alongside implicit race bias mitigation strategies. Participants' deepest reflections on practice emerged from teachers working through critical texts, as well as interrogating their own implicit race biases. This hybrid approach allows for a consideration of the individual, institutional, systemic, and trans historical mechanics and productions of race and racism.

Finally, a consistent pattern emerged among participants, in which their views on race, racism, and their own racial identities (conceived of professionally and personally) appeared to change over time. Typically, participants' reflections evolved to include more complex understandings of race in education generally, as well as a greater sense of what needs to be done within their own classrooms in particular, to better support racial justice and equity. This suggests that the duration of the project, specifically, may have had an important impact on teachers' understandings of race and pedagogy.

Although the data analysis is incomplete, I can speculate that the study will be of scholarly significance in three broad areas. First, it is among the only studies on implicit race bias in the Canadian context and the first of which I am aware, to study implicit race bias mitigation practices in education in Canada. The findings may allow us to operationalize extant work on implicit race bias for concrete classroom application toward racial justice and equity work in teacher practice. Further, preliminary data analysis suggests the study may deepen and extend our existing understandings of the challenges and opportunities surrounding implicit race bias mitigation work by teachers in schools (including questions about perceived efficacy and teacher buy-in).

Second, this study brings social psychology into conversation with critical theoretical approaches including critical race theory, second-wave White teacher identity studies, and other approaches. This responds to the tension and division that characterize the chasm between these approaches, allowing for a healthy complication of the ways we understand race and racism and their impacts on teacher

practices. Uniquely, this allows us to consider emerging research on cognitive function at the individual level, while paying close attention to the institutional, systemic, and historical workings of race and racism. As noted in the emerging themes above, the project's dual theoretical approach may have played a positive role in terms of the ways teachers were impacted by the work.

Finally, this work responds to the call by second-wave White teacher identity studies scholars for a more critical and complex reading of whiteness in education, and to contemporary research with and on teachers. Specifically, these scholars suggest a need to centre White supremacy in place of White privilege, to look toward strategies for race consciousness-raising which are geared toward concrete social justice classroom practices, and which consider the notion of race beyond the domain of the individual (see Jupp et al., 2016, Lensmire et al., 2013, Tanner, 2017, and others). These mirror the practical and theoretical underpinnings of the project and may offer a productive braiding of social psychology approaches into this emerging scholarly area.

There is a lot missing here, to be sure (including a more robust development and presentation of findings). However, I hope this small study will offer an example of some of the critical engagement I have called for in this paper, bringing implicit race bias into engagement with critical theoretical and pedagogical approaches in both the consciousness and professional practices of participants.

Conclusion

Implicit race bias is a popular approach for understanding racism. It guides a great deal of corporate training, and it takes up a lot of space in the popular press. It offers a relatively simple explanation of a very complex thing. It does not call for decolonization, for justice, or for the end of white supremacy. It also points no fingers and lays no blame, while offering people the opportunity to see racism as biological, ubiquitous, and inevitable. As such, IRB approaches are likely to stick around for a while. Although its popularity may lie in these very limitations, IRB also appears to provide an important opportunity, if used critically, to provoke deeper thinking and understanding. Racism acts as a mechanism for naturalizing and justifying racial inequity. While race has no biological basis, it has tremendous social implications. Understanding more about the neurological and evolutionary reasons for the popularity of race as a tool—wielded socially to privilege and punish—can help us understand the world around us. While racism may seem ubiquitous, inevitable, and widespread, these qualities are a call to action rather than a placation. We can use IRB approaches to identify associations and related behaviours of which we are unaware and which are tied to larger social and historical phenomena; why, for example, a small physical gesture such as moving away from someone in an elevator may have a whole lot to do with colonialism and slavery; or why crossing the street to put distance between you

and another person, may be related to a lifetime of racist media exposure. In the classroom, engaging questions of implicit race bias may help teachers identify why and how they assess students differently by race (or call on, or punish, or have an affinity for, etc.). Importantly, implicit race bias can also serve as an analytical doorway through which to better understand the violence done to those we avoid in the world (in elevators, on the street, in the classroom etc.). In short summary, with the engagements argued for here, IRB may provide valuable pedagogical entry points for race learning and for critical practice, reflection, and reflexivity for enacting racial justice at the individual, institutional, structural, and systemic levels.

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