

Reducing Systemic Biases Associated with Disciplinary and Achievement Disparities

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Nature of the Problem

The Prevalence of Systemic Racial Biases: Implications for Teachers

Using implicit attitude measures of racial stereotypes, a series of six studies conducted over six years at Stanford and other universities indicate that the ape-Black association is unconsciously present even among bright White, Black, Asian, and Latino college students who have minimum conscious knowledge of the historical ape-Black association (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). On this measure of implicit attitudes using samples of White, Asian, Latino, Hispanic, Asian American, African American, and mixed-race Americans, it would appear that even our intellectually gifted have not out-lived or outwitted our 400 plus years of racial oppression in America or similarly groundless confabulations on Black life dating back to at least the 15th Century. Not surprisingly, there is evidence from neuroimaging studies that members of highly stigmatized groups may be so dehumanized that they are not even encoded in the brain as social beings (Harris & Fiske, 2006). Indeed, based on millions of participants who have taken the racial implicit attitudes test through online centers located at Harvard, Washington, other universities, and from their own homes, *nearly 80 percent of White and almost 50 percent of Black adults identify with pro-White and anti-Black attitudes* (Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010; Banaji & Greenwald, 2013)—even among those who self-identified themselves as political activists or bias free. These proportions are not far removed from pro-White and anti-Black attitudes reported in doll studies of Black and White children during the late '30s in America (Beale-Spencer, 2010, 1939) and in more recent studies in South Africa (Shutts, Kinzler, *et al*, 2011).

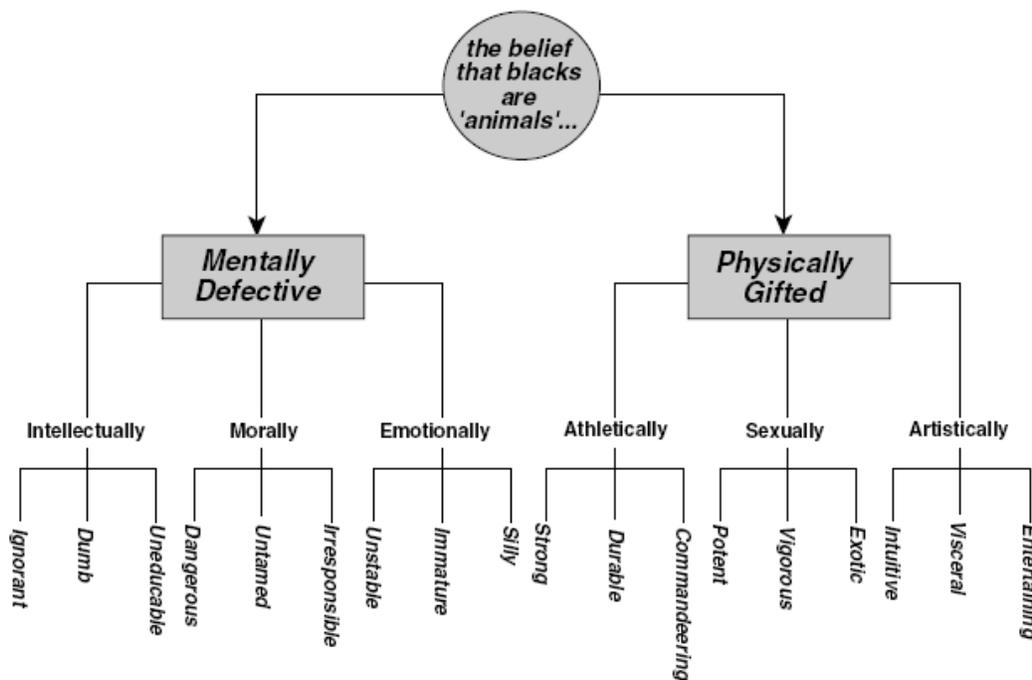
Extrapolations, based on population statistics reported in our 2018 Census, suggest that nearly 7 of 10 persons Black *and* White encountered on the street, in the halls of congress, in our academic academies, or even among friends as well as enemies believe consciously or unselfconsciously that Blacks are mentally defective and physically gifted. Together we are heirs *and* progenitors of Post Traumatic Cultural Disorder (PTCD) which may be explained in part by Cudd's (2006) argument that the oppressed, without benefit of culturally grounded anchorage, may be persuaded to participate in their own oppression (Taylor, Doswell, Tull, *et al.*, under editorial review).

The Structure of Racial Biases: Implications for Students

1. Figure 1 provides a graphical summary of the deep structure of racist stereotypes that have been internalized by Blacks—presented here because of the increasing percentage of Black students across the Pittsburgh School District in general and the majority enrollment of Black students in predominately Black neighborhoods.

Figure 1: Deep Structure of Racist Stereotypes

Taylor & Kouyaté (2003)



On this Black inner-city sample of adult males and females, Figure 1 fleshes out four levels of racial stereotypes: Blacks are animals (Level I) which may ‘explain’ why Blacks are mentally defective and physically gifted (Level II). They are mentally defective intellectually, morally, and emotionally and physically gifted athletically, sexually, and in every field of entertainment (Level III). Further attributes of Level III descriptors are broken down further (Level IV). In our full model, we permitted mentally defective and physically gifted factors to covary and a second we specified that these factors were independent. Comparatively, the full model specification (factor interdependence) was statistically superior to the second model (factor independence). This finding suggested to us that both factors were being organized by a higher factor which we labeled ‘Blacks are animals.’ In this and related studies of internalized racism which also included Black college students (Taylor, Brown, and Denton, 1996), we have found even on a measure of explicit stereotypes that between 34 percent of Black college students and nearly 50 percent of Blacks in the general population continue to endorse these racial stereotypes about Blacks.

Racial Biases Trigger Nine Types of Racial Discrimination: Implications for Teachers

Video of Nine Type of racial discriminations (Click on green script to enable video presentation)

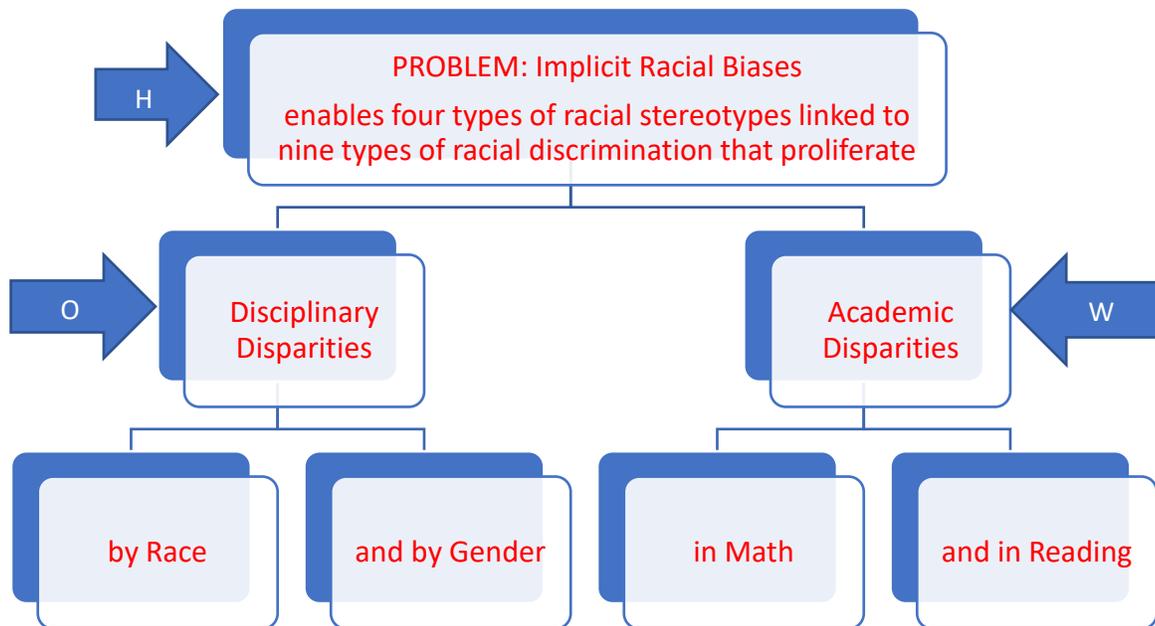
Page | 2

- 1.1. **Undermining.** The granting and removal of privileges; lifting and crushing hope.
[1 Undermining Narrative](#)
- 1.2. **Constricting.** The relative permanence of placement of Black students in special education classes; the rarity of placement of Black students in advanced courses; failure to identify and sustain practices that accelerate the achievement of Black students.
[2. Constricting](#)
- 1.3. **Dissimulating.** Noticing information consistent with racist stereotypes and neglecting information inconsistent with racist stereotypes. Featuring headlines *with* pictures of Black victims and alleged perpetrators more often than pictures of White victims *with* alleged perpetrators (stereotype consistent) or failing to celebrate the achievement of predominately Black schools that are accelerating or reversing racial achievement gaps
[3. Dissimulating video](#)
- 1.4. **Dodging.** Evading, shunning, moving away from, averting one's eyes, 'negative hallucinating' (not 'seeing' who obviously is in plain view) are examples of nonverbal dodging typically issuing from fear or anxiety triggered by the presence of socially, economically, or culturally marginalized persons. Passing over the raised hand of a Black student.
[4. Dodging](#)
- 1.5. **Detaching.** Refusing to accept even nominal responsibility for the condition of persons who are socially, economically, or culturally marginalized. Student failure is the student's fault—the student's genes, family, or community, and likewise for employers or supervisors; substituting the idiosyncratic principle 'Every tub must rest on its own bottom' for the allocentric principle 'I am my brother's keeper'.
[5. Detaching](#)
- 1.6. **Deceiving.** Lying, duplicity, and dishonesty are the big three here—interest expressed without commitment to action, promises made but not kept, resources expected but redirected, urges saintly patience without compelling results: *Haven't you noticed the racial achievement gaps are narrowing?*
[6. Deceiving](#)
- 1.7. **Denigrating.** Besmirching the *personhood* of those socially, economically, or culturally marginalized. Talking down to 'them' and talking badly about their character, personality, or presentation, their presumed laziness, incompetence, unattractiveness, or immorality are examples.
[7. Denigrating](#)
- 1.8. **Demonizing.** Besmirching the *humanity* of those socially, economically, or culturally marginalized. They are 'animals' 'beastly', or 'evil' by nature and in intent. Use of racial epithets such as the 'N' word or gender epithets such as the 'B' word often accompanies highly confabulated descriptions of Blacks and women. Because of their presumptive primitive or evil nature, they must be controlled, corralled, or segregated to ensure the peace and safety of 'real' humanity—the decent and civilized ones like 'us'.
[8. Video Unavailable but see page 6 for graphic example.](#)
- 1.9. **Destroying.** Using physical or symbolic dehumanizing methods to inflict mental suffering or physical injury to persons who are socially, economically, or culturally marginalized. At the extreme are bombings, lynchings, and intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic assaults or homicides which ferment a culture of fear and 'legitimate' the use of violence.
[9. Destroying](#)

Approach to Solutions: This is HOW We Do it!

Figure 2 provides our framework for designing interventions that accelerate reductions in *disciplinary disparities* and *academic disparities* that flow from implicit racial biases. [This is HOW we do it¹](#).

Page | 3 Figure 2 [Dimensions of Racial Stereotypes Video](#):



Altogether, our interventions: [Cultural literacy Video](#)

H (Reduce implicit racial biases—Racial Stereotypes and Racial Discrimination, P2),

O (Reduce Disciplinary Disparities by Race and Gender, P9), and

W (Reduce Academic Disparities in Math and Reading, P10)

are designed to produce *well-behaved **and** well-educated students who are college bound or career ready, socially competent, and culturally equipped to advance quality of life in neighborhoods and communities they call home*. Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry

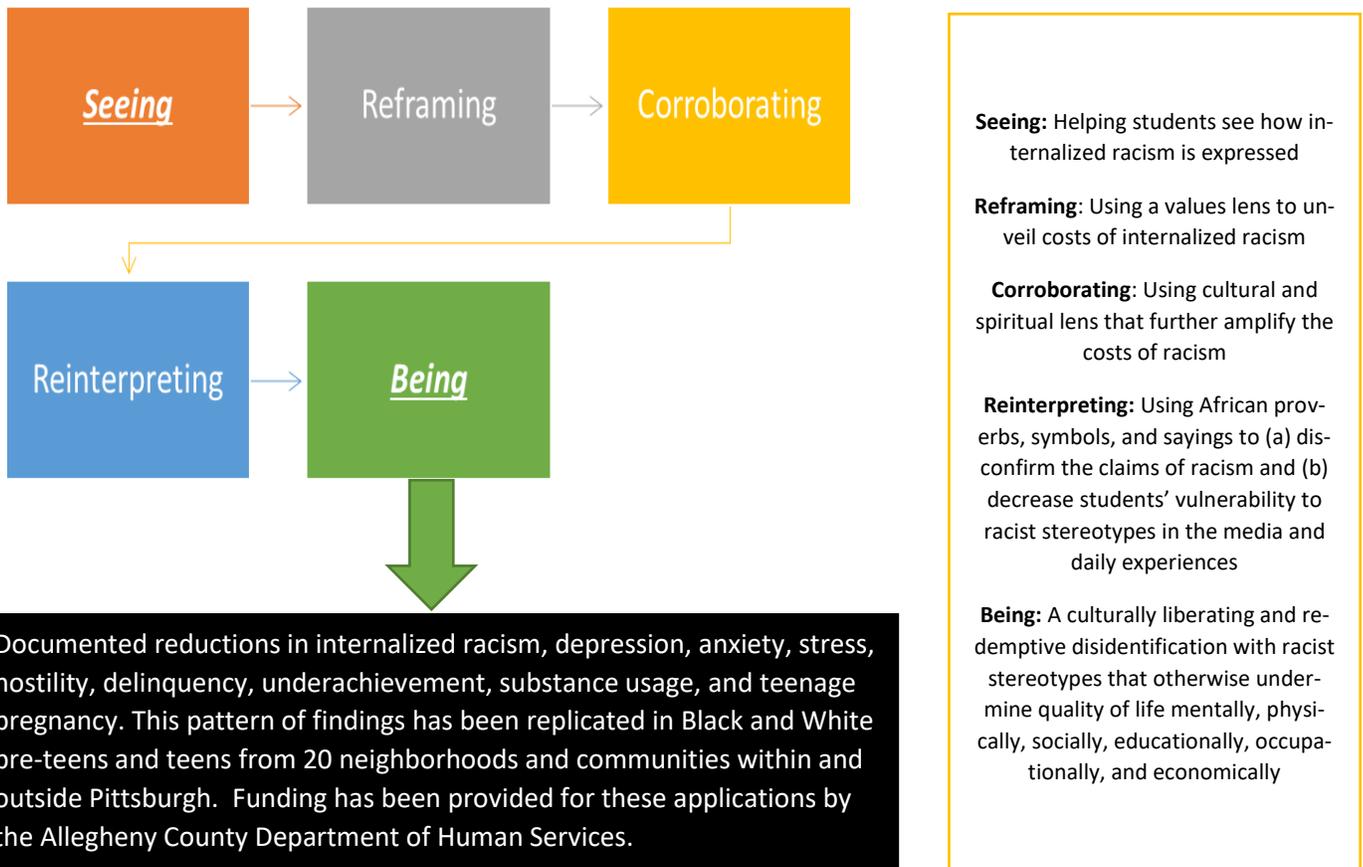
H Reduce Implicit Biases: [Video for cost of racial stereotyping](#)

1. *Racial Stereotypes*. For more than 17 years, we have worked with Black and White male and female pre-teens, teens, and adults from 20 neighborhoods and communities within and outside Pittsburgh to mitigate internalized racist stereotypes they shared in common: Blacks are ‘animals’ who are ‘mentally defective’ and ‘physically gifted’ (see Figure 1). Toward this end, we have utilized a wide-range of visual and auditory samples drawn from historical or current media that offered rich opportunities to guide participants’ attention to and appreciation of the mentally and socially destructive implications of racist ideology and behaviors reflected in these sampled products. Also,

¹ *This is HOW we do it* contrasts sharply with Montell Jordan’s hip-hop hit *This is how we do it* (2009) which is narratively and graphically saturated with racist stereotypes.

enrollees are helped to see how these sampled products were violative of cultural values (e.g., Love and Respect, Learning Orientation, Interpersonal Skills,...,Self-Esteem) and spiritual values (e.g., hope over despair, capitulation over independence).

Figure 2 Enabling Transformational Shifts from **Seeing** to **Being**



We will make developmental adjustments in this model of intervention for use with teaching staff, our expectation being that they, too, will report salutary reductions in internalized racism following training and certification.

We next evaluate our approach for introducing and consolidating teachers' skills in recognizing, understanding, and overcoming nine types of Racial Discrimination identified on page 4.

2. *Racial Discrimination.* We examine our approach to 4 of the 9 types to illustrate our approach to all. Each of these types, identified on page 3, is introduced in profile and then followed by detailed procedures utilized in processing each with assigned teachers who will be trained and certified in this method.

2. Constricting

Minimizing equitable access to opportunity structures offered by the larger society—education, occupation, and income

Icon: Cage

Narrative: If you put a buzzard in a pen six or eight feet square and entirely open at the top, the bird, in spite of his ability to fly, will be an absolute prisoner. The reason is that a buzzard always begins a flight from the ground with a run of ten or twelve feet. Without space to run, as is his habit, he will not even attempt to fly, but will remain a prisoner for life in a small jail with no top.

The ordinary bat that flies around at night, a remarkable nimble creature in the air, cannot take off from a level place. If it is placed on the floor or flat ground, all it can do is shuffle about helplessly and, no doubt, painfully, until it reaches some slight elevation from which it can throw itself into the air. Then, at once, it takes off like a flash.

A Bumblebee if dropped into an open tumbler will be there until it dies, unless it is taken out. It never sees the means of escape at the top, but persists in trying to find some way out through the sides near the bottom. It will seek a way where none exists, until it completely destroys itself.

In many ways, there are lots of people like the buzzard, the bat and the bee. They are struggling about with all their problems and frustrations, not realizing that the answer is right there above them. We are obligated to help them find their way out—whatever the nature of their barriers that constrict their becoming what they were intended to be.



Unknown Author

4. Dodging

Evading, shunning, moving away from, averting one's eyes, 'negative hallucinating' (not 'seeing' who obviously is in plain view)

Icon: Whelp

Narrative: A BLIND MAN was accustomed to distinguishing different animals by touching them with his hands. The whelp of a Wolf [young wolf] was brought him, with a request that he would feel it, and say what it was. He felt it, and being in doubt, said: "I do not quite know whether it is the cub of a Fox, or the whelp of a Wolf, but this I know full well. It would not be safe to admit him to the sheepfold."

Deep whelming fear, anxiety, and threat are triggered by this young wolf which motivates estrangement and exclusion from the 'fold'—those like us. Moreover, this fear is so primitive that full sight is not required to activate it—even the blind can 'see'!

Aesop Fable



6. Deceiving

Lying, duplicity, and dishonesty are the big three here—promises made but not kept

Icon: Wolf

Narrative: "WHY SHOULD there always be this fear and slaughter between us?" said the Wolves to the Sheep. "Those evil-disposed Dogs have much to answer for. They always bark whenever we approach you and attack us before we have done any harm. If you would only dismiss them from your heels, there might soon be treaties of peace and reconciliation between us." The Sheep, poor silly creatures, were easily beguiled and dismissed the Dogs, whereupon the Wolves destroyed the unguarded flock at their own pleasure.

Here, the wolf feigns friendship, even agreeing to protect and promote the wellbeing of the sheep who accept this false promise to their demise. This accords with 'treaties' or agreements made by the privileged and accepted by victims to the detriment of the latter—the socially and culturally marginalized in our society.



Aesop Fable

8. Demonizing

Besmirching the *humanity* of those socially, economically, or culturally marginalized.

Icon: Wounds

Narrative: There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence.

The first day, the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one.

You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry the wound is still there. A verbal wound is as bad as a physical one." The wound here has created an abscess which is capable of infecting the whole body much like demonizing assaults on the cultural and spiritual being of victims marginalized by our society.



Author Unknown

We will use this last discrimination type—*Demonizing*—to illustrate our processing approach to each of our nine types of racial discrimination.

Notice first that each type of racial discrimination entails processing along multi-cognitive modalities—visual, auditory, and sensory—to facilitate depth of understanding and application. We recognize some learners may either prefer or profit more from visual, auditory, or sensory modalities, but we use them all to enhance depth of understanding and quality of application. Each racial discrimination type is processed in the following manner:

1. *Make it Personal:* If something like this happened to you:

a. How would it make you feel deep inside?

b. What would it make you think about yourself?

c. What would you tell others about what happened to you?

d. What would you say to the person responsible for saying this to you?

2. *Quantify the Encounter:* Use the following table to check off how this incident would make **you** feel:

#	Item	Not at All	A Little	Moderately	Frequently	Undoubtedly
1	Disregarded					
2	Repudiated					
3	Spurned					
4	Harmed					
5	Damaged					
6	Dehumanized					

3. *Name the Discrimination Type:* We call this form of discrimination **Demonizing**.

In a lab experiment conducted by graduate student Jo-Ellen Rudolph and her undergraduate research team (2018), they found that the experimental group receiving treatments identical to those described above were more likely to express proactive, adaptive, and sustained resistance to racial discrimination than control group subjects. Moreover, this documented advantage of experimental over control group participants remained after statistically controlling for differences in race, gender, class status, and socioeconomic background.

O Reduce Disciplinary Disparities by Race and Gender

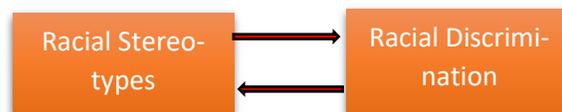
Based on recent reviews of the literature, we are clear-minded that reducing implicit bias is a promising strategy for reducing disciplinary disparities by race and gender. For example, Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, and Smolkowski (2017) examined school office discipline referrals for 1,154,686 students enrolled in 1,824 U.S. schools. Controlling for relevant school factors, they found evidence of racial disproportionality: Black students received far more office discipline referrals than White students. Their findings accord not only with racial disproportionality documented in Pittsburgh but also co-validated nationally by the Kirwan Institute which specializes in reducing racial disproportionality [Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline: Implicit Bias is Heavily Implicated | Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity \(osu.edu\)](https://www.kirwaninstitute.org/2017/05/16/racial-disproportionality-in-school-discipline-implicit-bias-is-heavily-implicated/).

Our approach to racial disproportionality in disciplinary referrals is distinctive in four ways:

1. We fully accommodate the complex structure of racist stereotypes as others have not (see Figure 1);
2. We fully accommodate the complex structure of racial discrimination as other have not (see page 3 which identified 9 types of racial discrimination).
3. We fully accommodate the necessity of interventions that diminish racist stereotypes *and* racial discrimination as others have not.
4. We are among the minority of organizations that believe taking on both priorities—diminishing racist stereotypes *and* racial discrimination—is necessary because these processes are causally interrelated; that is, if you do the one without the other, salutary effects of the one will soon be undermined by negative effects generated by the neglected other (see Figure 2):

Figure 2

Relationship between Racial Stereotypes and Racial Discrimination



We therefore believe that our interventions offer comparative advantages that will net more accelerated reductions in racial disciplinary referrals within and outside school systems—this expectation applying to Black female as well as male students.

W Promote Student Well-being by Accelerated Closures of Racial Achievement Gaps

H (diminish four levels of implicit and explicit racist stereotypes) and **O** (diminish nine types of racial discrimination) will establish a systemic climate which welcomes **W** (accelerating the closure of racial achievement gaps in reading and math). Without **H** and **W**, sustainable drives toward Justice (Outcome Equity) and Freedom (Fair Access to the nation’s fountains of opportunity) are improbable if not impossible. This is not speculation. We have electronic files of nearly 200 schools across the nation that had launched strong successful drives toward Justice and Freedom only to see them unsettled and reversed by surging re-emergence of implicit bias and racial discrimination. We have documented this travesty of Justice and Freedom in public school districts large and small located in locations North and South and East and West. We also have documented multiple examples of this process even in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—one of America’s most livable cities.

So, then, we are vigorous supporters of policies and practices that diminish implicit bias and racial discrimination as together they enable deployment of policies and practices that ongoingly normalize the achievement of Justice and Freedom. *There is a glitch, however: Evidence is strong that diminishing implicit racial stereotypes does not in itself accelerate the closure of racial disparities in reading and math, i.e., reducing implicit racism does not reliably accelerate closures of racial achievement gaps* [Educator bias is associated with racial disparities in student achievement and discipline \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/research/educator-bias-is-associated-with-racial-disparities-in-student-achievement-and-discipline/)

We therefore support implicit bias training for reasons identified but we support an additional model that provides evidence of accelerated gap closures in foundational disciplines of reading and math. We

refer to these policies and practices as Values for Life which we now describe in terms of historic origins and subsequent findings.

Page | 9 Twenty years ago, we asked caregivers of children under age five to sit back and relax and try to imagine their children's lives 10 to 15 years from now. We then presented four systemically structured questions: At that time, how would you like your child to feel deep inside about himself (herself)? About you? About school? About his (her) friends? Typically these questions, administered over the years to large numbers of Black and White biological and surrogate male and female parents of low and middle income, evoked emotionally-tinged narratives that could be allocated about 75 percent of the time to one or more of seven categories: *I want my child to be high in love and respect, interpersonal skills, learning orientation, self-confidence, self-persistence, self-esteem, and self-reliance*. Taken together, these seven categories we now refer to as Values for Life.²

Having found that Values for Life were affirmed across racial, socioeconomic, gender, and intergenerational lines, we wondered whether these family values were shared with schools and churches—complementary socializing systems. We adjusted our interview format for elementary school teachers (imagine children in your class 10-15 years from now) and pastors-in-training (imagine children in your fellowship 10-15 years from now). We found that the seven values identified by families with children under five were affirmed by teachers and seminarians. We reasoned that values shared among these major socializing systems might carry future implications for community building—and it has.

Next, we generated positive and negative items for each value. For self-persistence, *e.g., maintains focus in face of distractions or seeks out challenging or difficult tasks* were identified for the positive polarity and *fails to complete projects started or short attention span* for the negative polarity. Item sets have been repeatedly revised over the years and subjected to rigorous psychometric evaluation. The result: We now have trial sets of items for each value across the developmental spectrum Pre-K to 12, some of these scales being observer- or self-ratings or both.

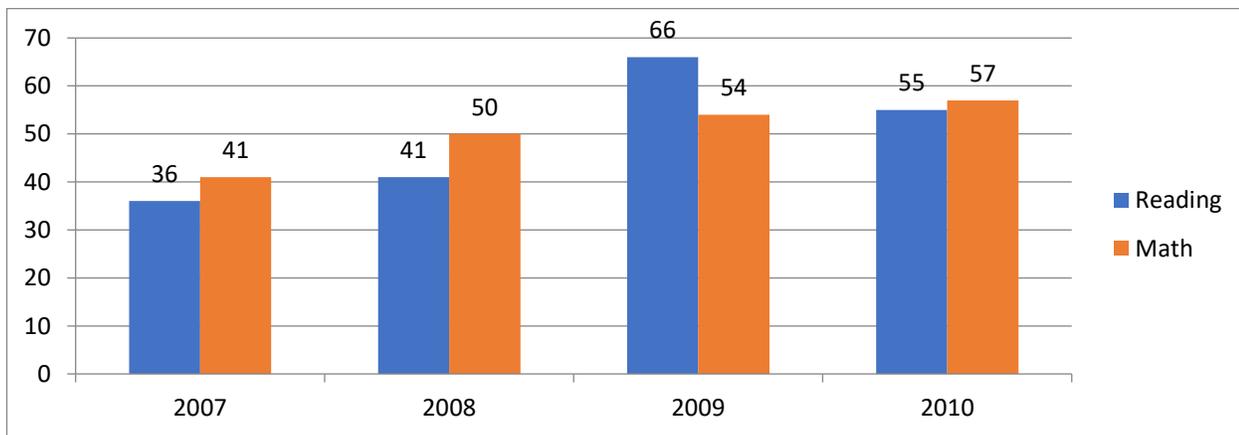
From the literature, we identified potential antecedents to each identified value. The short of a long story is that we found that 11 antecedent categories patterned in common and distinctive ways with each of our seven values. For self-persistence, *e.g.,* we found in field and lab studies that parents or parent surrogates who were skillful in managing five antecedent behavioral categories—Provides Learning Opportunities, Stimulates Language, Stimulates Inquisitiveness, Stimulates On-Task Behaviors, and Reverses Off-Task Behaviors—tended to have children who tested high in self-persistence. From these studies we identified antecedent behaviors for each of the remaining six values.

Clarifying linkages between antecedent behaviors and valued outcomes was one challenge, and identifying ways and means of helping families, schools, peers, churches, and neighborhoods become accomplished supporters and implementers of identified antecedents was the companion challenge. For this purpose, all Values for Life Interventions are informed by Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, one of the most utilized and best validated theories for understanding and predicting an impressively wide range of individual, social, and systemic behaviors (currently more than 41,000 citations in the professional literature). Using this theory to guide Values for Life (VFL) interventions Pre-K to 12, here's a summary of what we've found (published studies supporting these summaries are listed under References).

² I am grateful to my former Administrative Assistant Rev. Gwendolyn Harris who first suggested the name *Values for Life*.

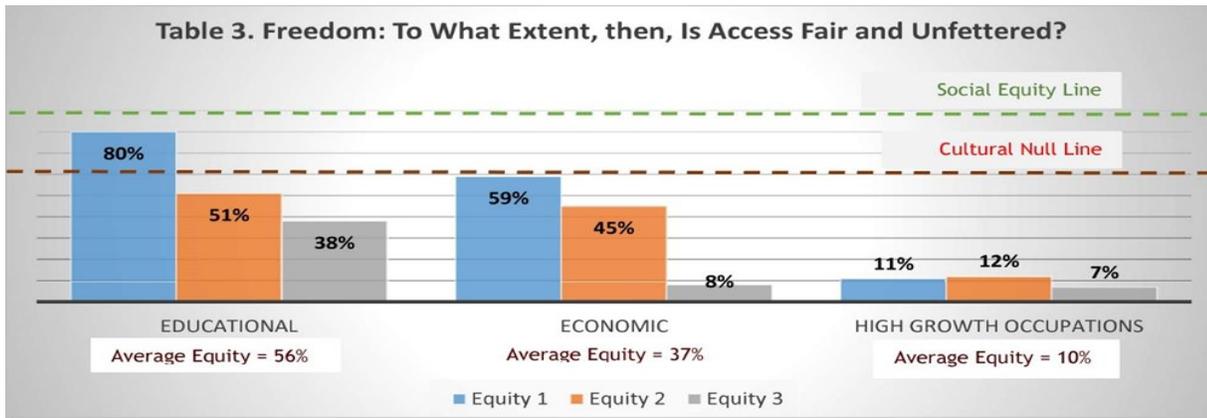
- Parents of Pre-K to 8 children have been trained successfully in two labs and multiple community settings to increase their children’s level of performance on each value;
- Achievement gaps on a nationally standardized test were practically eliminated within eight months of exposure to VFL interventions in a Pre-K urban school setting;
- At the end of the school year, six of seven VFL assessments were significantly higher for Head Start classrooms trained in VFL interventions relative to Head Start classrooms trained in the standard Head Start curriculum;
- On a third grade predominately Black low-income sample, there was a 14-point gain in math and 29-point gain in reading proficiencies at the end of the first year of VFL interventions. In a predominately Black high poverty secondary charter school, we found a 30.6 point gain in math and 13.5 gain in reading proficiencies following two years of VFL interventions.
- In samples of public elementary and high school students, *VFL interventions increased daily attendance and reduced tardiness; **reduced disciplinary referrals and suspensions**; decreased levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and hostility; and reduced proclivities toward juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancy.*

Figure 3. Values for Life and Accelerated Achievements in High School Reading and Math



Over a period of 4 years, we were invited to implement our Values for Life curriculum at a charter high school located in downtown Pittsburgh. We documented progressive gains in math and reading achievement proficiencies over the first three years in the predominately Black secondary school setting. In the fourth year when the CEO of the school was fired—its board composition and leadership changed hands and our contract was cancelled—achievement scores plummeted sharply without recovery even in the latest evaluations.

Finally, in Table 3 we examine implications of these findings for our construct of Freedom.



We utilized three nationally available indicators for each of three socioeconomic categories.

We evaluate access percentages to America's fountains of opportunity in Figure 4 against a cultural null of 60%, the valuation of each Black slave as stipulated for representation and taxation purposes in America's 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Although the valuation here was for political and economic purposes, we believe that this three-fifths or 60% proclamation may also approximate then and now in evaluating the nation's unselfconscious appraisal of Black relative to White life in America. Currently, only Access Indicator 1, high school graduation, exceeds this cultural null of 60 percent—the minimum cut point for assuring the nation we have pressed and shrugged our way beyond egregious and enduring political constructions of Black Other legislated nearly 334 years ago. Presently, however, our nation's attainment of fair and unfettered access is generally closer to the Cultural Null Line than it is to the Social Equity Line which denotes fulsome emancipation. *Implementation of recommended policies and practices will help lift this tragically familiar boot of oppression—400+ years and counting—off our children's necks. And this is HOW we do it!*

Strategies for Evaluation

Following our theory articulated in Figure 2 on page 4, implicit bias increases levels of (a) racial stereotyping and racial discrimination that in turn increases levels of (b) disciplinary disparities and (c) academic disparities. These expectations along with their corresponding remedies—**HOW**—provide our framework for evaluation:

1. For (a) we propose administering pre-to-post training assessments of:
 - 1.1. Implicit racist attitudes
 - 1.2. Explicit racist attitudes
 - 1.3. Knowledge of nine types of racial discrimination
2. For (b) we propose examining pre-to-post training assessments of:
 - 2.1. Number disciplinary referrals
 - 2.2. Type of disciplinary referrals
 - 2.3. Gender disparities in referrals
3. For (c) we propose examining ongoingly
 - 3.1. Shifts in reading grades over time disaggregated by race
 - 3.2. Shifts in math grades over time disaggregated by race
 - 3.3. Shifts in reading on standardized reading assessments disaggregated by race
 - 3.4. Shifts in math on standardized math assessments disaggregated by race

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Introducing our Team Members

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[Huberta Jackson Lowman, PhD](#)
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[Melvin Steele, PhD](#)
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For each identified team member

[Click link for background of each team member](#)