Chapter 2

Understanding the Relationship Between White Teacher Implicit Bias and Black Student Academic Disparities and High Discipline Rates

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the concept of implicit racial bias as a significant factor contributing to the disparities between the discipline rates of White and Black students. While overt acts of racism are not as common as they were during other times in United States' history, implicit or unintentional racial bias still leads to differences in educational opportunities for the nation's students. The chapter begins with an examination of the concept of implicit bias broadly before turning toward implicit racial bias specifically. The chapter continues with a historical overview of the ways in which schooling for Black students has always been controlled by a dominant White society. Next, the researcher presents current data about the inequities in exclusionary discipline practices. The chapter concludes with recommendations for recognizing and addressing implicit bias and the problems it creates.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States of America, families often link the attainment of a quality education

with the American dream (Noguera, 2003). Parents hope that their children gain equitable access to learning opportunities so that they might succeed academically and socially. Unfortunately, equitable opportunities are not always available; differences in educational experiences exist. Over the course of the last few decades legislators have mandated countless policies to hold schools accountable for the success of their students, but even when schools have ample funding, rigorous curricula, and quality facilities, inequities still appear (Losen, 2014a). These inequities are often visible when comparing outcomes across multiple schools or districts, but they also occur internally within individual schools. For example, two children attending the same school can have vastly different educational experiences, though on paper it would seem all things were equal. While these differences may be traced to a range of causes and effects, of particular concern is the link between implicit racial bias and the disproportionality of school disciplinary practices between White students and their Black peers.

Existing research demonstrates that implicit bias is endemic in society, and the nation's K–12 educational settings are not immune to this problem (Cameron et al., 2010; Chin et al., 2020; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Teachers' implicit racial biases negatively affect all students' educational outcomes (Chin et al., 2020; Quinn, 2017; Warikoo et al., 2020) and severely impact Black students in particular. Because of implicit bias, White teachers can see Black students as disobedient, disruptive, or defiant and consequently Black students are more likely to be suspended than their White peers (Anyon et al., 2014; Losen, 2014). Even for minor misbehaviors, Black students often receive harsher punishments. When White teachers discipline Black students, the outcome of those students' experience is often significantly different than those of their White counterparts (Chin et al., 2020; Fay, 2018).

The disciplinary disparity can be detrimental to Black students' psyches and negatively impact their futures. The effects of these disciplinary practices exacerbate the academic demise of Black students but also extends beyond the academic setting (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). These disciplinary actions put Black students at a higher risk for negative consequences within the school system such as in-school and out-of-school suspension, but furthermore, offenses at school are often linked with the criminal justice system leading Black students to have earlier contact with that system (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Vavrus, 2008).

While the problem of implicit bias in K–12 schools is current, it is rooted in the systemic racism that was present at the dawn of this country and ever-present in the history of the country's educational establishments. The story of education in the United States is inextricably linked with the practice of a dominant White society disciplining Black bodies. These practices and their effects were easier to see in the days of slavery and Jim Crow, and although they are less visible when carried out through implicit bias, their impact is still damaging. Though legally, Black students

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