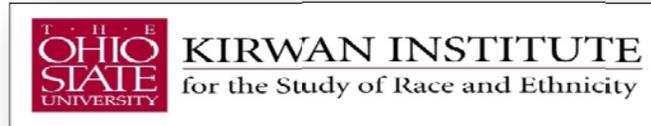**CONTEXTUALIZING THE KIRWAN INSTITUTE RESEARCH AGENDA**

<u>Research Domain: Race in the Mind</u>

Tom Rudd, Senior Researcher

March 2011

CONTEXTUALIZING THE KIRWAN INSTITUTE RESEARCH AGENDA
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<u>**Overview**</u>

At the Kirwan Institute, we understand that it is critical to have an analysis about race, ethnicity, and other forms of hierarchy. We also understand that this analysis is not a communications strategy or a framing strategy. It is not enough to say that we must talk about race. That is only the first step. We must also learn through research how to talk about race in a transformative way so that race is no longer seen as a necessary divide, but something that can help define and release our collective creative capacity. For example, we have discovered that just talking about disparities based on race and ethnicity may have a negative impact on efforts to generate support for race conscious programs. We must also understand how race operates in our minds, both explicitly (in our conscious mind) and implicitly (in our unconscious mind).

Research suggests that even when we are not talking about race, we are thinking about it. This notion is easy to understand when we consider how visible race has been in the social, economic, and political history of the United States. Race has been—and continues to be—a strong force in determining how opportunity is distributed in our society. Also, race influences many of the important decisions we make in our personal, professional, and social lives: where we live, who our friends are, which political candidates we vote for, and which social programs we support. For most Americans, all of these issues include some consideration of race.

Research also suggests that most of us are guided by a set of very subtle "symbolic attitudes" that develop from our earliest experiences—attitudes like racial prejudice or liberal/conservative political ideology. These attitudes, often invisible to us, are so powerful that they can control our position on critical issues involving race—issues like affordable housing, affirmative action, school integration, and even the size and role of government.

Our research also shows how racialized meaning has been used to harm all people and distort our democratic ideals and our economic vitality. Racialized barriers to opportunity retard the life chances of Whites as well as Blacks, although not in equal measure. We are aware that racial justice is in everyone's interest and is consistent with strong democratic ideals.

Shifting the way we think about, talk about, and act on race can have a significant positive impact on efforts to promote social justice in critical areas including criminal justice, law enforcement, education, health care, housing and employment. To facilitate this shift at the Kirwan Institute, we have initiated an innovative

research and scholarship focus that we call a "transformative agenda around race." This research domain includes two central foci: "Talking About Race" and "Race in the Mind."

Race in the Mind

In this relatively new research domain, we are examining the processes by which attitudes and ideas about race impact and mediate the relationship between race and opportunity and how these effects can be mitigated. We approach this body of work with the understanding that racialized barriers around opportunity—the dramatically unequal distribution of benefits and burdens in our society— are fueled and perpetuated principally by a concept that we call "structural racialization." In this context, structural racialization is defined broadly as the complex process by which policies, institutions, organizations, people, history, cultural messages, and systems interact to create and perpetuate racial inequality. Because of our successful work in this research area, we understand that racialized barriers to opportunity in the U.S are multiple, interactive, reinforcing and cumulative over time. For example, a structural racialization analysis reveals the multiple conditions that negatively impact student performance in racially segregated metropolitan schools, and also illuminates the reinforcing relationships between student success, neighborhood conditions, affordable housing, access to mental and physical health resources, and other "opportunity structures."

Through our work on structural racialization, we have learned that the subtle forces and relationships that create and perpetuate racial inequality are often not visibly fueled by racist intent. Racialized outcomes do not require racist actors. However, we also know that the ways in which individuals think about race—how race resonates, explicitly and implicitly, in our minds—have significant implications for social justice and access to opportunity. For example:

- An investigation of bail-setting in Connecticut found that judges set bail in amounts that were twenty-five percent higher for black defendants than for similarly situated white defendants. [1]

- A study of judicial decision making under the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 found that federal judges imposed sentences on African Americans that were twelve percent longer than those imposed on comparable White defendants. [2]

- Research on capital punishment shows that killers of White victims are more likely to be sentenced to death than are killers of Black victims and that Black defendants are more likely than White defendants to receive the death penalty. [3]

If judges are influenced by unconscious racial bias at any level, might this also be true of elementary school teachers, police officers, doctors, bank loan officers, tenure review committees, corporate personnel administrators…? In a 2007 study, researchers Clark McKown and Rhona Weinstein found that "in ethnically diverse classrooms where students reported high levels of differential teacher treatment toward high and low achieving students, teacher expectations of European American students were between .75 and 1.00 standard deviations higher than teacher expectations for African American and Latino students with similar records of achievement. [4]

Within this broad research domain—Race in the Mind—we have articulated four overarching goals that will inform our research agenda moving forward. These are:

- Calling out and pushing back against implicit racial bias
- Understanding and pushing back against colorblind racism
- Understanding and eliminating stereotype threat
- Understanding and ameliorating the physical and psychological consequences of overt and implicit racial bias on African Americans and other populations of color

1) RACE IN THE MIND: Calling Out and Pushing Back Against Implicit Racial Bias

In his book, The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation, Professor Drew Westen tells us that "Irrespective of what we may feel and believe consciously, most White Americans—including many who hold consciously progressive values and attitudes—harbor negative associations toward people of color." Research also suggests that most of us are guided by a set of very subtle "symbolic attitudes" that develop from our earliest experiences—attitudes like racial prejudice or liberal/conservative political ideology. [5] While these attitudes are often invisible to us, they can influence the way that we think about race and our position on critical issues involving race—issues like affordable housing, affirmative action, school integration, and even the size and role of government. Research also shows that these attitudes have enough power to trump our own self-interest.

Symbolic attitudes operate in what researchers call our "implicit mind," the part of the brain that we commonly call the "subconscious" or the "unconscious." Often, these implicit attitudes are in conflict with attitudes located in our conscious mind, or what we explicitly think about race. So for example, an elementary school teacher may say—and explicitly believe—that she has equal expectations for all of her students, while in fact, implicit racial bias lowers her expectations for student of color and stimulates subtle differences in the way she behaves toward these students. What scholars and social scientist call "white privilege" is a form of this implicit racial bias. It is the collective unconscious belief that White people are entitled to a position at the top of an imagined social/political/economic hierarchy.

Westen suggests that, typically, our subconscious attitudes are less egalitarian than our conscious attitudes. When we talk about race, we have the opportunity to examine and challenge these attitudes and to reinforce our conscious beliefs. If we do not talk about race, our more negative implicit attitudes about race are left unchallenged.

Implicit Racial Bias: Implications for Criminal Justice and Education
By using a structural racialization analysis at the Kirwan Institute, we have developed a good understanding of the conditions and relationships that create and perpetuate dramatically high incarceration rates among African American men and seriously low-performing schools in racially segregated low-opportunity communities of color. With this understanding, we have proposed and worked with metropolitan communities to implement a range of place-based interventions designed to eliminate racialized structural barriers to success and move African Americans and other marginalized populations closer to areas of high opportunity. What we are only beginning to investigate is the influence of subtle implicit racial bias on tangible outcomes in the criminal justice and education domains, not only how implicit bias affects outcomes for people of color, but also how these populations internalize and respond to implicit racial bias.

As noted above, research suggests that the ways in which judges and teachers "process" race in their implicit minds can negatively influence their judgments and behavior toward people of color. In the judicial arena, implicit racial bias can influence decisions made not only about individuals but about policy as well. For example, the dramatically unbalanced penalties for the possession/sale of powder cocaine and crack cocaine—two forms of the same drug—cannot be examined without attention to race. In its 1977 report, The U.S. Sentencing Commission found that "nearly 90 percent of the offenders convicted in federal court for crack cocaine distribution is African-American while the majority of crack cocaine users [are] white." Crack cocaine is the only drug for which the first offense of simple possession can trigger a federal mandatory minimum sentence. Before 2010, possession of 5 grams of crack cocaine could trigger a 5 year mandatory minimum sentence. Possession of any quantity of any other substance by a first-time offender—including powder cocaine—is a misdemeanor offense punishable by a maximum of one year in prison." (21 U.S.C. 844).[6] Since 1986, defendants caught with 500 grams of powder cocaine received the same punishment, five years in prison, as defendants convicted of possessing only five grams of crack cocaine, a sentencing ratio of 100-1. In August of 2010, President Obama signed a new law that will close, but not eliminate, the long-disputed gap in federal sentencing for the sale and use of crack vs. powder cocaine. The new law reduces the disparity, cutting the ratio to about 18-1. [7]

In the education arena, research on the effects of implicit racial bias by elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators on student performance is relatively new and, as yet, somewhat unsubstantial. However, race-based disparities in school discipline are well documented. Researchers Anne Gregory, Russell J. Skiba and Pedro A. Noguera suggest that:

> *Although our national discourse on racial disparity tends to focus on academic outcomes—the so-called achievement gap—in school districts throughout the United States, Black, Latino, and American Indian students are also subject to a differential and disproportionate rate of school disciplinary sanctions, ranging from office disciplinary referrals to corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Ostensibly, the intent of school disciplinary interventions is to preserve order and safety by removing students who break school rules and disrupt the school learning environment and, by setting an example of those punished students, to deter other students from committing future rule infractions. However, schools tend to rely heavily on exclusion from the classroom as the primary discipline strategy (Arcia, 2006), and this practice often has a disproportionate impact on Black, Latino, and American Indian students. The use of school exclusion as a discipline practice may contribute to the well-documented racial gaps in academic achievement. [8]*

In the investigation of implicit racial bias in our schools, the larger question continues to be if primary and secondary school teachers harbor implicit racial bias, how prevalent it is and how and to what degree this bias influences student performance and achievement in the classroom. However, we must also ask if the differential and disproportionate rate of disciplinary action against African American students is explained, to any degree, by implicit feelings of racial hostility and resentment toward students of color by teacher and school administrators.

While a large-scale definitive investigation of the impacts of implicit racial bias in the criminal justice and education arenas is relatively new, an investigation of the psychological and physical effects of implicit bias on individual people of color is even less substantial, (with the exception of research on stereotype threat). However, several hypotheses are emerging. For example, some researchers

suggest that the significant disproportionately high incidence of pre-term births among African American woman is linked to the stress produced by racism and especially by implicit racial bias. [9] Other researchers suggest that the stress caused by subtle racism worsens many of the health problems experienced by African Americans and other people of color. Other researchers suggest that the cognitive and psychological costs associated with coping with and managing implicit racial bias ("subtle discrimination") actually place some African Americans and other people of color at a cognitive disadvantage; in other words, when mental resources are being used to cope with racism, they may not be readily available for other cognitive tasks. [10]

Implicit Racial Bias: Principal Research Questions

We have identified the following research questions to guide the implicit racial bias work at the Kirwan Institute:

1) What is the social/psychological basis of implicit racial bias?
2) Can individual implicit racial bias be prevented/controlled/eliminated?
3) How pervasive is implicit racial bias in the U.S. population?
4) How does implicit racial bias influence public policy?
5) What are the psychological and physical effects—including stereotype threat—that implicit racial bias has on populations of color in the U.S.?
6) In what ways and by what mechanisms does implicit racial bias distort perceptions of social equality and influence the behavior of Whites?
7) At what level (frequency, intensity) does implicit racial bias influence decisions made by individuals in positions of power and influence?
8) How can we mitigate the consequences of implicit racial bias in the criminal justice and education domains?
9) Do implicit association tests accurately measure implicit racial bias?

Implicit Racial Bias: Suggested Readings

Please see Appendix.

2) RACE IN THE MIND: Understanding and Pushing Back Against Colorblind Racism

Many Americans believe that every citizen has an equal opportunity to benefit from the best that America has to offer, to fully develop the potential that resides in each of us from birth, and that race has no impact on this opportunity. This notion—and the attitudes, behaviors, and policies that stem from it—is called "colorblindness." Individuals who embrace a colorblind frame often search for information to support it. So, for example, successful people of color like Oprah Winfrey, Tiger Woods, and Barack Obama are offered as proof that anyone can achieve success in America regardless of race. A colorblind interpretation of racial hyper-segregation in our cities similarly focuses on individual autonomy, holding that people of color freely choose to live with each other. However, a large body of research indicates that many African Americans and Latinos live in low opportunity, segregated communities not because of preference, but because they face a range of structural obstacles to housing in stronger, more diverse neighborhoods.

Colorblind attitudes, behaviors, and policies often have disparate racial effects, and therefore function as forms of racism. Misperceptions about, or denial of structural barriers to racial equality in the United States can lead to opposition to policies and programs designed to eliminate barriers to opportunity in housing, education, health care, and other critical life domains. If we fashion our programs and policies as if race and ethnicity no longer matter in the distribution of social and economic benefits and burdens, these programs and policies are likely to deepen racial inequality, regardless of their intent.
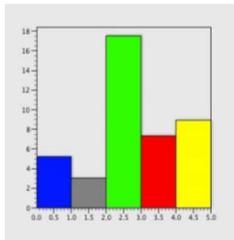
Colorblind racism is a very nuanced psychological phenomenon:
- Some people experience a condition that social scientists call "strategic colorblindness," the belief that talking about race is itself a racist act because it requires an overt recognition of racial differences.
- Some people are colorblind because they embrace the proposition that race has no biological foundation and is, therefore, an arbitrary social construction without substance.
- Others believe that civil rights laws have done their job and that marginalized populations of color no longer need legal protection from discrimination.
- Many individuals and groups experience colorblindness because they are unaware of significant structural disparities between Whites and populations of color in critical opportunity domains including education, employment, housing, health and health care.
- Others are aware of racialized disparities in the distribution of benefits and burdens in our society but they believe that these differences are a matter of individual volition and responsibility, that everyone has an equal opportunity to benefit from the best that America has to offer—through hard work and perseverance—regardless of the person's race.
- Others are aware of and supportive of racialized barriers to opportunity and use colorblind racism to mask their own racial bias and resentment.

- Still others experience a form of individualized colorblind exceptionalism, insisting that some of their Black and Brown friends and acquaintances and some celebrities of color have transcended race.

Most of these people want to relegate race and racial inequality to a place of invisibility and silence. The central problem with this ideology is that, as Tim Wise has said, if "we don't call [racism] out and name it, division and inequity become normalized."[11]

Typically, colorblind racists oppose programs designed to ameliorate the consequences of past racial inequality—programs like equal opportunity employment and school integration—but they insist that this opposition has nothing to do with race. Instead they complain about "reverse discrimination" and burdensome federal spending and call for a return to neighborhood control of schools. While color-blind racists readily acknowledge past racial injustice, they insist that current civil rights laws prohibit racial discrimination and, besides, they had nothing to do with those injustices. Colorblind opponents of President Obama insist that their opposition has nothing to do with his race. Among those who refute this position is former President Jimmy Carter.

"I think an overwhelming portion of the intensely demonstrated animosity toward President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man, that he's African American. I live in the south, and I've seen the south come a long way, and I've seen the rest of the country that shared the south's attitude toward minority groups at that time, particularly African Americans. And that racism inclination still exists. And I think it's bubbled up to the surface because of the belief among many white people, not just in the south but around the country, that African Americans are not qualified to lead this great country. It's an abominable circumstance, and it grieves me and concerns me very deeply." [12]

Designing and implementing strategies to overcome colorblind racism is a very nuanced process. For example, research suggests that exposing uninformed individuals to information about race-based disparities may be effective in combating colorblind racism but only if these people have individual and collective respect, empathy and compassion for the disenfranchised group(s). Otherwise, information about racial disparities may serve only to reinforce negative racial stereotypes. Illuminating a structural racialization analysis can be an effective tool for mitigating colorblind racism. This dialogue shifts the focus away from individual attitudes and behaviors and emphasizes institutional arrangement, public policies, and other structural factors as the principal facilitators of race-based disparities in critical opportunity domains. Because one of the central tenants of a structural racialization analysis is the proposition that racialized outcomes do not require racist intent, individuals can participate in this dialogue without overt feelings of guilt.

There are at least two potential "downsides" to a structural racialization analysis: first, this analysis requires an acknowledgement of the reality that some of the most quintessentially American institutions and policies—the federal highway system and the GI Bill, for example—have energized racialized outcomes, something that many Americans are not willing to do. Secondly, to be most effective, a structural racialization analysis requires the ability to see and to understand the dynamic connections and causal relationships between institutions, policies, social norms and political/social/economic conditions that are often presumed to be independent. Accordingly, any effort to illuminate a structural racialization framework must be accompanied by information about systems thinking and systems science.

Colorblind Racism: Principal research questions

1) What are the cognitive, social and ideological foundations of colorblind racism?

2) What are the cognitive, social and ideological consequences of colorblind racism?

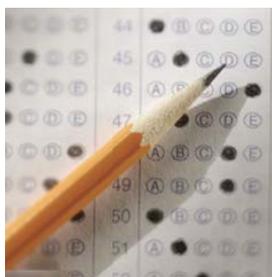3) At what level and in what ways does colorblind racism influence public policy?

Colorblind Racism: Suggested Readings

See Appendix.

3) RACE IN THE MIND: Understanding and eliminating stereotype threat

"Stereotype threat" is a very complex and nuanced concept. In simple terms, it is an unconscious response to a prevailing negative stereotype about an identifiable group by a member of that group. For example: the statistical fact that African American students generally score lower than White students on standardized college entrance examinations like the SAT, ACT and LSAT gives rise to overly-generalized negative stereotypes about the collective cognitive ability of all African Americans when compared to all Whites. An African American student who is aware of this stereotype understands—consciously or unconsciously—that it can have negative consequences on judgments made not only about the student but on judgments made about all African Americans and that these judgments can limit opportunity. So, when confronted with a standardized college entrance examination (typically and incorrectly perceived as a test of cognitive ability), the student believes that poor performance on the exam will reinforce the negative stereotype and create negative consequences for all African Americans. In a classic stereotype threat scenario, this fear creates such a high level of stress and anxiety that students' cognitive function is impaired while taking the test and the student performs below his or her actual ability. Stereotype threat should not be confused with non-racialized "test anxiety" experienced by many test takers.

As a side note, the SAT, ACT and similar examinations do <u>not</u> measure intelligence. Most of us know someone who we consider to be highly intelligent who does not perform well on these kinds of standardized tests. When the SAT was developed around 1926, it was called the Scholastic Aptitude Test. At that time, "aptitude" was a code word for intelligence. "When these tests were originally developed, people really believed that if they did the job right they would be able to measure this sort of underlying, 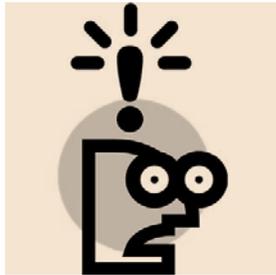biological potential. Often it was called aptitude, sometimes they called it genes, sometimes intelligence."[13] Today, the College Board insists that the SAT does not measure innate ability. What it does measure, they say, is "developed reasoning," described as the skills that students develop not only in school but also outside of school.[14] The College Board says that the SAT measures literacy and writing skills that are needed for academic success in college. They state that the SAT assesses how well the test takers analyze and solve problems—skills they learned in school that they will need in college.[15] Researchers Nathan R. Kuncel and Sarah A. Hezlett suggest that "…test scores reflect developed abilities and are a function of innate talent, learned knowledge and skills, and environmental factors that influence knowledge and skill acquisition, such as prior educational opportunities." [16]

A close look at the distribution of average SAT scores by race and family income suggests that what the SAT does a very good job of measuring is "access to opportunity." The correlation between SAT scores and reported family income is very high. In 2009, the highest average score on the SAT was posted by students who reported their family income as greater than $200,000 annually.[17] For these students, high access to opportunity, generally evidenced by high SAT scores, is cumulative. Access to high performing primary and secondary schools leads to high SAT scores that lead to heightened opportunity to attend selective colleges

and universities which leads to greater opportunity to choose a life that "one has reason to value."[18] Despite historic and impassioned prognostications about the public mission of the academy to energize fundamental democratic values including racial and ethnic diversity, it appears that most highly selective colleges and universities use the SAT (or the ACT) as a key component of their admissions strategy.

Prominent researchers in the stereotype threat arena include Professor Claude Steele at Columbia University , Professor Joshua Aronson at New York University, Professor Jeff Stone at the University of Arizona and Professor Christian Lynch at Princeton University. Steele and Aronson conducted ground-breaking research to determine if stereotype threat experienced by African American students could actually depress their performance on difficult standardized tests to a statistically reliable degree. Findings from one experiment show that when a difficult verbal test was presented as a test of ability, black students performed at a significantly lower level than white students, even though the two groups had been statistically matched on ability level.[19] In another experiment, white male students were told—before taking a difficult math test—that Asian students generally did better on the test than white students. While white male students do not typically have a sense of group inferiority about math ability, researchers suspected that this "prime" would trigger a form of stereotype threat: "any faltering on the test could cause them to be seen negatively from the standpoint of positive stereotypes about Asians and math ability."[20] Researchers hypothesized that if stereotype threat alone—in the absence of any internalized self-doubt—was capable of disrupting test performance, then white males taking the test after this comment would perform less well than white males taking the test without hearing the comment. [21] Findings indicate that this is indeed what happened.

Ironically, many researchers, academics, policy makers and educational practitioners believe that heavy reliance on standardized tests in the college admissions process—tests that trigger stereotype threat—is misplaced. For example, in reviewing a comprehensive study of 1970-96 Michigan Law School alumni by Lempert, Chambers, and Adams, Harvard University Professor Lani Guinier concludes that:

> "The study confirms the benefits of affirmative action to all Michigan graduates. It tells us that affirmative action critics' much-touted reliance on objective measures of merit have little to recommend them over the life span of a lawyer. After all, it is the life's work of the graduates that is the big test. Thus, rather than ban affirmative action, the law school might do well to expand its practice and to revamp the admissions criteria for all incoming law students. The Michigan study, to the degree that it can be generalized to other peer institutions, supports the position that law school admission criteria should be revamped. The authors found no relationship between LSAT/UGPA index scores and subsequent success in the legal profession, as measured by income or career satisfaction. Moreover, the minority graduates of Michigan, who had appreciably lower average LSAT scores, nonetheless went on to serve as leaders in public service at higher rates than their White classmates. The hidden societal costs of selection criteria heavily dependent on the LSAT extend beyond the Michigan study. Research shows a negative correlation between social activism and performance on the LSAT for the national pool of test takers." [22]

These assessments notwithstanding, the tremendous emphasis placed (or misplaced) on standardized test performance in the college admissions process today—especially at highly selective colleges and universities— warrants a vigorous continuing investigation of stereotype threat so that we can mitigate its consequences. If

we accept the proposition, as research suggests we must, that stereotype threat is a real phenomenon that can substantially depress the test performance of African American students and other students of color, then we must also recognize the probability that this phenomenon is at least partially responsible for our inability to achieve a desirable level of racial diversity in the nation's best law schools. All American Bar Association (ABA)-approved law schools require applicants to take the LSAT as part of the admission process.[23] In light of recent legal mandates to dismantle affirmative action programs, it is likely that we will see a renewed emphasis on the use of standardized test scores as indicators of future success in the college admissions process.

Stereotype Threat: Principal research questions

1) Is stereotype generally recognized as a real phenomenon in scientific and education communities?
2) Does a heightened awareness of stereotype threat (as a psychological phenomenon) among
     College students diminish its impact?
3) How significant is the impact of stereotype threat on the test performance of African American
     and other students of color.
4) Can the effects of stereotype threat be nullified or significantly reduced when African American
     and other students of color take high stakes standardized tests for college admissions.

Stereotype Threat: Suggested Readings
See Appendix.

Appendix
Contextualizing the Kirwan Institute Research Agenda
Race In The Mind
<u>Suggested Reading</u>

Implicit Racial Bias

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Stereotype Threat

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Colorblind Racism

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