“Moving Toward A Transformative Dialogue on Race: Understanding the Importance of Structural Racialization”

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Overview

- What is the landscape of opportunity?
  - Challenges
  - Opportunities
- What is structural racialization?
  - Understanding opportunity through an SR lens
- Systems thinking
We all live in opportunity structures.

The opportunities available to all people are not the same.

Opportunity is racialized.
The highly uneven Geography of Opportunity...

...Some people ride the “Up” escalator to reach opportunity

...Others have to run up the “Down” escalator to get there
Opportunity is global

- Our world today is more complex and interconnected. Future changes will not be only driven by local/national issues, but influenced by systemic global trends and challenges
  - Examples
    - Globalization
    - Global warming
    - The credit and foreclosure crisis
    - Growing diversity and widening inequality

- We must adjust our lens of analysis to reflect these changing conditions
  - Moving towards a systems approach of problem solving and identifying solutions
Opportunity is mediated

- For much of human history, we interacted exclusively on a face-to-face basis within small communities
  - How we understand discrimination,
  - prejudice, and identity

- Now, many of our relationships are mediated
  - Technology
  - Distance
  - Institutions
    - People in foreclosure cannot find a person to talk to

- And our opportunities are strengthened or truncated by these mediating factors
Opportunity is racialized

- Structural racialization: the joint operation of institutions produces racialized outcomes.
- Structures unevenly distribute benefits, burdens, and racialized meaning.
- In 1960, African-American families in poverty were 3.8 times more likely to be concentrated in high-poverty neighborhoods than poor whites.
- In 2000, they were 7.3 times more likely.
- This uneven distribution has negative consequences not just for those with the greatest need, but all of us.
Opportunity is spatialized

- Structural racialization involves a series of exclusions, often anchored in (and perpetuating) spatial segregation.

- Historically marginalized people of color and the very poor have been spatially isolated from economic, political, educational and technological power via reservations, Jim Crow, Appalachian mountains, ghettos, barrios, and the culture of incarceration.
Segregation, Inequity & Sprawl

- Sprawl pulls limited resources away from existing communities
- The “favored quarter” safeguards access to high quality opportunity structures

“Space is how race plays out in American society-and the key to solving inequities in housing, transportation, education, and health care...Sprawl is the new face of Jim Crow.”

- John Powell
Opportunity is complex and cumulative

- Rebecca Blank builds on Myrdal’s concept of “cumulative causation.”

- In the U.S., while whites are poor in greater numbers, people of color are more likely to be in prolonged poverty and to suffer the cumulative effects (poor health, lack of labor market experience, inadequate education)

- Single-issue policies do not adequately address the multiple oppressions of poverty
Opportunity Matters: Neighborhoods & Access to Opportunity

- High poverty areas with poor employment, underperforming schools, distressed housing and public health/safety risks depress life outcomes
  - A system of disadvantage
- People of color are far more likely to live in opportunity deprived neighborhoods and communities
Membership in a Legitimate Democratic State

- Membership is the most important good that we distribute to one another in human community (Michael Walzer)
  - Prior in importance even to freedom
  - Citizenship, a precondition to freedom
  - Membership, a precondition to citizenship

- Distribution of membership
- Cost to not belong
What does it cost to not belong?

The cost of membership in a democratic society

- Current estimate for family of four: $48,778*
  - Over three times as many families fall below family budget thresholds as fall below the official poverty line

How far do you fall (children in extreme poverty, skyrocketing bankruptcy rates, family homelessness)?

Do neighborhoods provide sustainable opportunity?

*James Lin and Jared Bernstein, What we need to get by. October 29, 2008 | EPI Briefing Paper #224
Opportunity pathways vary...

- How can we be sensitive to inter- and intra-group differences?

- How do the ladders or pathways of opportunities differ for different people?

- Every institution has built in assumptions, i.e. “stairways” are a pathway – but not for people in wheelchairs, baby strollers, etc.
People are “differentially situated”

- Example: controlling for risk factors, African Americans were 15-30% more likely than whites to get subprime loans for purchase and for refinance
  - Likely refinance targets: elderly, often widowed, African American women in urban areas

- For Latinos, similar numbers for purchase, not for refinance
  - Many Latino homebuyers were recent, first generation homebuyers who could not be automatically underwritten (multiple income earners, cash, local credit, etc.)

Sources: Graciela Aponte (National Council of LaRaza) and Debbie Bocian (Center for Responsible Lending) presentations at The Economic Policy Institute panel “Race, Ethnicity and the Subprime Mortgage Crisis” on June 12, 2008 in WDC; and “Baltimore Finds Subprime Crisis Snags Women” in The New York Times online, Jan. 15, 2008
Not only are people situated differently with regard to institutions, people are situated differently with regard to infrastructure. People are impacted by the relationships between institutions and systems... ...but people also impact these relationships and can change the structure of the system.
How race works today

- There are still practices, cultural norms and institutional arrangements that help create and maintain (disparate) racialized outcomes

Structural racialization addresses inter-institutional arrangements and interactions

- It refers to the ways in which the joint operation of institutions produce racialized outcomes
  - In this analysis, outcomes matter more than intent
The Importance of Institutional Arrangements

"Today, class, we'll learn about the bad ol' days...

...when we thought separate could be equal."
Structural Racialization

- Structural racialization refers to the ways in which the joint operation of institutions produce racialized outcomes.

- Structures matter and are not neutral. They unevenly distribute benefits, burdens, and racialized meaning.

- This uneven distribution has negative consequences not just for those with the greatest need, but all of us.
Why “structural racialization” as opposed to “structural racism?”

When you use the term “racism,” people are inclined to see a specific person—a racist. However, a racist is not necessary to produce structural outcomes. Instead, institutional interactions generate racialized outcomes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context: The Dominant Consensus on Race</th>
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<td>White privilege</td>
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<th>Current Manifestations: Social and Institutional Dynamics</th>
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<td>Processes that maintain racial hierarchies</td>
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<th>Outcomes: Racial Disparities</th>
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<td>Racial inequalities in current levels of well-being</td>
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| Ongoing Racial Inequalities |

Adapted from the Aspen Roundtable on Community Change. “Structural Racism and Community Building.” June 2004
The Arrangement of Structures

- How we arrange structures matters
  - The order of the structures
  - The timing of the interaction between them
  - The relationships that exist between them

- We must be aware of how structures are arranged in order to fully understand social phenomena
Racialized policies and structures:
- Promoted sprawl
- Concentrated subsidized housing
- Led to disparities between schools
  - Achievement gap
  - Discipline rates
  - Funding disparities
  - Economic segregation
  - Graduation rates
  - Racial segregation
Example: Structural Arrangements and Unemployment

- Jobs are distributed through structures
  - Most teachers are women
  - Most construction workers are men

- When unemployment rates change, we need to be conscious of how people are segregated into economic sectors

- There are racial and gendered outcomes to these structural arrangements
Connection Between Housing and Schools:
Housing Discrimination → Segregation → Dysfunctional Schools

Low Opportunity

High Opportunity
Where children live determine their access to schools....
jobs & role models...
playgrounds, parks, arts...
bookstores, libraries, and other amenities
Most people (including scholars and activists) think of problems from an individual perspective rather than a systems perspective.

This framing of the issues has the potential to limit our understanding of the nature and depth of a problem as well as a proper solution.

Systems theory is a transdisciplinary model that focuses on a web of relationships and processes and not on linear, singular causation or the intent of one or even a few individuals.
Systems Theory: Considering Consequences

- In a complex systems model, actions and inactions have multiple effects, and the delayed or distant consequences are often different from more proximate effects.

- From a systems perspective, causation is cumulative and mutual.
  - Outcomes are caused by the actions (and inactions) of many actors and institutions over time and across domains.
  - Outcomes are the result of causes that accumulate over time and across domains.
Consider the Broader Context

- We want to avoid negative feedback loops

- A structural analysis is deeply relational and time bound
  - Example: the subprime crisis. “People got bad loans.”
    - A surface view solution: “Stop giving people bad loans.”
    - Contextualized view (SR analysis) solution: Fix the dual credit market, stop spatial segregation/redlining, work toward stable home-equity building, etc.
The Newtonian Perspective:

A $\rightarrow$ B $\rightarrow$ C $\rightarrow$ D $\rightarrow$ E

Social phenomena may be understood by breaking down the sum of the constituent parts.

Systems Thinking:

Causation is reciprocal, mutual, and cumulative.
System Interactions

How do we move forward?

- Put your outcome first: what do you want to achieve?
- Work backwards from there ... how do you achieve it, for everyone?
- Understand our linked fates
- Talk about race – it is part of the American story
Understanding our linked fates

- Our fates are linked, yet have been socially constructed as disconnected through the categories of race, class, gender, nationality, region...

- Race is often envisioned as a system that separates groups from each other with durable boundaries around each group
  - This view supports the idea that disparities impacting one group have no impact on others

- In reality, these effects are far reaching and impact everyone – we share a linked fate
Rethinking Structural Arrangements

- Bringing people into structures that formerly excluded them may not be enough

- Message is: individual is not properly “negotiating” the ladder when the ladder is too narrow or long ... and we’re climbing alone
  - Insensitive, perhaps hostile structural arrangements

- We need to re-think structures themselves
Appendix
Three Interrelated Sites of Racial Justice

- Explicit
- Implicit
- Structures & Policies
Individual Racism, Implicit Bias

- Only **2%** of emotional cognition is **available to us consciously**
- Messages can be “framed” to speak to our **unconscious**
- **Racial bias** tends to reside in the unconscious network
Racial attitudes operate in our “unconscious” (also called “subconscious”) mind

Usually invisible to us but significantly influences our positions on critical issues

Negative unconscious attitudes about race are called “implicit bias” or “symbolic racism.”
Unconscious Networks
Unconscious Networks

What colors are the following lines of text?

1. Vqeb peow ytro
2. Cvur zxyq brrm
3. Vhrn wwte zytn
4. Xoc jbni oew mne
5. Zre ytu vee mkp
Unconscious Networks

- What colors are the following lines of text?

1. Red
2. Blue
3. Yellow
4. Green
5. Brown
Unconscious Networks

What colors are the following lines of text?

1. Sky
2. Grass
3. Dirt
4. Sunshine
5. Stop sign
Unconscious Networks

What colors are the following lines of text?

1. Dirt
2. Sunshine
3. Sky
4. Grass
5. Stop sign
Unconscious Networks

What colors are the following lines of text?

1. Green
2. Blue
3. Brown
4. Red
5. Yellow
Awareness Test

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrqrkihlw-s
How to Talk about Race

- Speak on structures and systems rather than explicit individual action/reaction
- Speak on the subconscious—the implicit bias that is stored within the mind
- Speak on relationships—build collaborations and engage in real discussion
Talk about race can reinforce our conscious beliefs or challenge our implicit biases.