

Research Evidence about Diversity Training & “Anti-Racism” Education and the Harm it Does

A brief review of the scholarly literature by David Millard Haskell, PhD

Summary

Currently in public schools across the province of Ontario, students are receiving diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) instruction under the broader title of “Anti-racism” education. Typically, within “Anti-racism” education, students are taught about White Privilege and Implicit Bias/Unconscious Bias.

As a brief review of some of the major research shows, DEI instruction generally, and “anti-racism” education in particular, has been proven **not to** increase harmony and decrease racism. When it does have an effect, the effect is toward greater division and bigotry. Modules in White Privilege have been shown to have significant negative effects; claims related to the existence of Implicit Bias have been shown to lack scientific evidence.

General Findings DEI Instruction

A 2021 study was published in the [Annual Review of Psychology](#). The lead author was Elizabeth Paluck from Princeton University. Paluck and her colleagues didn’t do a single study, they did a meta-analysis of over 400 hundred existing studies.

Their goal was to see if mandatory instruction in diversity, equity and inclusion works to decrease prejudice and increase harmony.

After analyzing the outcomes of the over 400 research papers, Paluck and her team concluded that despite the bold claims made by people developing and facilitating this kind of instruction, the average impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion training is zero. That is, it elicits no lasting change.

(See: [Prejudice Reduction: Progress and Challenges](#), Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Roni Porat, Chelsey S. Clark, Donald P. Green, Annual Review of Psychology 2021 72:1, 533-560.)

Specific Findings DEI Does Harm

In 2018, Harvard sociologist Frank Dobbin reviewed the extant research on DEI instruction with a special emphasis on the harms it does. He relayed his findings in the academic journal [Anthropology Now](#) in an article titled: “Why Doesn’t Diversity Training Work?”

Summarizing the conclusions of the pertinent studies from the 1990s to today, Dobbin states: “Field and laboratory studies find that asking people to suppress stereotypes tends to reinforce them — making them more cognitively accessible to people.” In short, such training **activates bigotry**.

(See: Dobbin, Frank, and Alexandra Kalev. 2018. “Why Diversity Training Doesn’t Work: The Challenge for Industry and Academia”. Anthropology Now 10 (2):48-55.)

Related to specifics, one of the research papers cited by Dobbin said of diversity training’s activation of bigotry that: “The results provide strong support for the existence of this effect... stereotype suppressors [those taught to suppress their bias] responded more pejoratively to a stereotyped target on a range of dependent measures.”

(See: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67 (1994); [Out of mind but back in sight: Stereotypes on the rebound. \(apa.org\)](#))

Specific Findings that Instruction in “White Privilege” Does Harm

1) In 2019 a study was published in the [Journal of Experimental Psychology: General](#) . Dr. Erin Cooley of Colgate University in the US was the lead researcher.

The aim of the study was to measure the affect that lessons on white privilege would have on attitudes of students.

The study found that teaching lessons on white privilege **did not** make students more sympathetic to people of colour. In fact, **it did nothing positive**. But it did increase hostility toward poor whites.

The researchers concluded, quote: “learning about White privilege reduces sympathy, increases blame, and decreases external attributions for White people struggling with poverty.”

(See: Cooley, E., Brown-Iannuzzi, J. L., Lei, R. F., & Cipolli, W. III. (2019). Complex intersections of race and class: Among social liberals, learning about White privilege reduces sympathy, increases blame, and decreases external attributions for White people struggling with poverty. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 148(12), 2218–2228.)

2) In May 2022 a study was published in the journal [PLoS One](#). The lead researcher was Christopher Quarles from the University of Michigan.

The research involved an experiment to see how introducing the concept of white privilege would affect online discussions on issues related to racial equity.

The researchers found that introducing the concept of white privilege **shuts down** open discussion and **lowers support** for racial harmony. They concluded, quote:

“mention of white privilege seems to create... discussions that are less constructive, more polarized, and **less supportive** of racially progressive policies.”

Furthermore, they stated that the concept of white privilege made **previously supportive** whites less engaged in the conversation and it “led to less constructive responses from whites and non-whites.”

(See: Quarles CL, Bozarth L (2022) How the term “white privilege” affects participation, polarization, and content in online communication. *PLoS ONE* 17(5): e0267048.)

The Lack of Proof for Claims of Implicit Bias/Unconscious Bias

The concept of unconscious bias or implicit bias promotes the understanding that even if you don’t say racist things, commit racist acts, or consciously think racist thoughts, you are still likely a racist “unconsciously.”

The justification of the concept—the “proof” that implicit bias exists—rests on experiments done using a research tool called an implicit assessment test (IAT). These IATs involve reading words and looking at pictures to gauge one’s unconscious biases.

Based on the results of thousands of IATs, some researchers have claimed whites harbour bias against non-whites. In short, they say whites are “implicitly biased” against non-whites.

This concept is promoted in schools across Ontario during diversity instruction (often outside consultants will come to speak on this issue).

This concept convinces white children that they harbor implicit dislike for their visible minority/sexual minority classmates. After they are made to feel guilty for thoughts, words or behaviour they have never expressed, the

suggestion is made that to fight back against and atone for their “unconscious bias” they must step back from opportunities and not voice opinions (often referred to as “checking their privilege”) to allow marginalized people more opportunity.

As the evidence below shows, the theory and claims of unconscious bias/implicit bias are **not supported by empirical evidence**.

1) A 2019 study titled “Meta-Analysis of Procedures to Change Implicit Measures” published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* reviewed the findings of 426 studies that used some variation of the Implicit Association Test (IAT). The IAT is the tool used to “prove” that implicit bias exists.

The researchers discovered two things: One is that the correlation between implicit bias and discriminatory behavior is almost non-existent. Also, they conclude that there is very little evidence that changes in implicit bias have anything to do with changes in a person’s behavior.

The researchers note that proponents of implicit bias testing have argued that “changing automatic processes should lead to a change in behaviors in these conditions,” after reviewing over 400 experiments on implicit bias the “findings stand in stark contrast to these predictions.”

See full article here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308926636_A_Meta-Analysis_of_Procedures_to_Change_Implicit_Measures

2) In 2013 a similar study, another meta-analysis of studies measuring the efficacy of the Implicit Assessment Test was published in the *Journal of personality and social psychology*. This study had the explicit aim of determining if IAT could predict ethnic and racial discrimination (as proponents say it can).

The authors found that IAT does not, in anyway, measure racist feelings; it does not provide any accurate measures, quote: “IATs were poor predictors of every criterion category other than brain activity, and the IATs performed no better than simple explicit measures.”

See full article here: [Predicting ethnic and racial discrimination: A meta-analysis of IAT criterion studies — NYU Scholars](#)

3) A recent study that brutally debunks the validity of implicit bias is the 2021 paper by Ulrich Schimmack titled “Invalid Claims About the Validity of Implicit Association Tests by Prisoners of the Implicit Social-Cognition Paradigm” published in the journal *Perspective in Psychological Science*.

He concludes: “IAT proponents consistently ignore or misrepresent facts that challenge the validity of IATs as measures of individual differences in implicit cognitions... In conclusion, IATs are widely used **without psychometric evidence of construct or predictive validity**.”

See full paper here: [Invalid Claims About the Validity of Implicit Association Tests by Prisoners of the Implicit Social-Cognition Paradigm - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

A trove of scholarly work, published in top psychology journals shows that the IAT (the test used to justify the theory) falls far short of the quality-control standards normally expected of psychological instruments. (see a scholar to U of Toronto berate the concept here: [A common test to evaluate people's implicit bias has been 'oversold,' U of T researcher says \(utoronto.ca\)](#))

The IAT is shown to be an unreliable measure that correlates far too weakly with any real-world outcomes to be used to predict individuals’ behavior — even the test’s creators have now admitted as such (see them admit it here: [The False ‘Science’ of Implicit Bias - WSJ.](#))

What is at the Heart of “Anti-Racism” Education?

As it is currently applied in educational settings, the term “anti-racism” is misleading.

In this pedagogical movement, discrimination based on skin colour is actually encouraged.

The top-selling instruction manual on the topic, *How to Be An Antiracist* (2019) by American academic Ibram X. Kendi, categorically rejects the idea of treating all people equally.

Instead, Kendi insists that to make society “equitable” those who are white must be denied equal treatment and be made to pay for historical misdeeds. He claims, **“The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination.”**

The second most popular instruction manual in this area is Robin DiAngelo’s 2018 book *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*.

In it readers are told that only whites exercise power and thus only whites can be racist. DiAngelo demonizes whites saying they are inherently racist and prone to oppressing others: **“a positive white identity is an impossible goal. White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy.”**

Does research support the notion that Race/Racism is a factor in educational or career failure? NO.

Most recently, in March of 2021, the [UK Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities](#) studied data from across Britain to determine how race affects education and income; they concluded: “[t]he evidence shows that geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture and religion have more significant impact on life chances than the existence of racism.”

Previous work by many others including Black scholars [Roland Fryer](#) and [Thomas Sowell](#) have come to the same conclusion: habits and homelife matter most.

In Canada, data from Statistics Canada shows that Canadians of East-Asian and several other non-white ethnic groups have for many years achieved higher average income and educational attainment than Caucasians. The same is true in the US.

“The results of [the study by Statcan researchers Theresa Qiu and Grant Schellenberg](#) will come as a shock to anyone expecting to find whites sitting atop the labour market. Rather, the best earners are Canadian-born Japanese males, who earn an average \$1,750 per week. This compares to \$1,530 earned by white men. Chinese, Korean and South Asian (from India, Pakistan etc.) males also take home more than whites. Among women, whites are out-earned by a majority of groups within the visible minority category, including Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, South Asian and Southeast Asian (from Vietnam, Thailand etc.). At \$1,450 per week, the average Canadian-born Korean woman earns \$330 more per week than the average white woman.”

See: Peter Shawn Taylor, “It’s Time to Abolish the Absurd (and Slightly Racist) Concept of ‘Visible Minorities,’” *C2C Journal*, February 19, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3WSkr3o>.

Work of Princeton Researcher Russell Nieli—The Negative Impact of Affirmative Action

Russell Nieli, a Political Science Professor at Princeton University, is a leading expert on the effects of affirmative action programs (usually called equity programs here in Canada).

These policies go by different names: Affirmative action, equity initiatives, racial and gender preferences, minority quotas

But whatever the name the policies insist that someone's status as a minority should allow them to experience preferential treatment, usually in terms of hiring or education but sometimes even before the courts.

Some people call it positive discrimination. And there's no doubt it's discrimination for those who don't possess the correct external characteristics... but it's certainly not positive.

Nieli shows that affirmative action actually destroys social cohesion and increases racial and gender divisions in society. His most up to date research is featured in his 2012 book Wounds That Will Not Heal: Affirmative Action and Our Continuing Racial Divide

He brings together evidence from historical research, sociological research, psychological research and even data from evolutionary biology. And all the evidence shows that affirmative action—or equity policies—lead to breakdown in social cohesion and increases racial and gender divisions.

If I had to summarize Nieli's work, he says it all comes down to a "reciprocity norm."

Reciprocity Norm: from an evolutionary perspective, people are naturally tribal so we seek to advance our own tribe—people who are like us. The trouble with that is it leads to a lot of war and death. So, at one point along the evolutionary route, humans in certain parts of the world gravitated to the idea of the reciprocity norm. The gist of it was this: I promise not to favour my tribe members if you promise not to favour your tribe members. Instead, of skin colour or ethnicity or gender determining who will move ahead, let's use merit and competency as the measure for social and economic advancement. It's not going to be perfect, but it's something that individuals are more able to control than external factors like race or gender.

But the reciprocity norm only works in so far as the same rules apply to everyone. As soon as you explicitly introduce laws or policies that go against the reciprocity norm, the people on the losing end are more apt to revert back to tribal mentality that's inhospitable to those not like themselves.

Boomerang Effect: Those who benefit from the positive discrimination also suffer their own pathologies. In order to justify their preferential treatment, minorities who are enjoying the discrimination that works in their favour, have to repeatedly and dramatically claim that they remain oppressed. Even if the evidence suggests otherwise, perpetuating the notion that they have suffered and are suffering now, allows for them to rationalize any unfairness that's currently happening to others.

It's not just the stress of cognitive dissonance and deceiving yourself impacting the mental state of those who benefit from affirmative action or equity policies. There are other social pathologies that arise, too.

For example, equity policies can weaken the initiative and drive among group members because they know that sub-optimum performance can still move them forward.

Random Studies/Examples of Identity Politics Leading to Harm

Wendy William & Stephen Ceci, 2015.

A 2015 study by Cornell University researchers Wendy Williams and Stephen Ceci published by the National Academy of Sciences showed there is now a significant hiring bias against men applying for university jobs in sciences.

In experiments with professors from 371 colleges and universities across the U.S. they found [quote]: "science and engineering faculty preferred women 2-1 over identically qualified male candidates."

In a series of national hiring experiments found that there is a 2:1 faculty preference for hiring women in university STEM disciplines. The only additional qualification the women had was their gender. [identically qualified males with matching lifestyles]

A study published in 2016 in the journal Science found similar trends.

Citing overt “hiring bias,” French researchers determined [quote] “women applying for high-level teaching positions in male-dominated fields” are favoured over men applying for positions in those fields.

Harry Holzer, Journal of Labor Economic 1999

Are Affirmative Action Hires Less Qualified? Evidence from Employer-Employee Data on New Hires

Found evidence of lower educational qualifications among women and minorities hired under Affirmative Action.

2017 study conducted by the Behavioral Economics Team of the Australian government. Examining government agencies they wanted to measure who would get shortlisted and interviewed for senior executive positions. Among all groups, the least likely to get shortlisted were white men. This was unintended effect of the government’s own initiatives to reach out to women and minorities.

What is to be Done to Save our Educational System?

- 1) Ontario Bill 16 must be voted down immediately (the Ford Government must be held accountable for its inaction).
- 2) Moving forward, the provincial government must make it illegal for any teacher, school administrator, or any school board official to teach, disseminate materials that promote racial division.

Specifically, they must not promote the idea that an individual or group should be discriminated against because of their race. They must not promote that an individual or group, by virtue of their race is inherently privileged, racist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously. They must not promote that an individual or group by virtue of their race bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race.

- 3) Any instruction related to race that occurs in our public schools must explicitly reinforce and emphasize that the majority culture is an equally important part of Canada’s multicultural society.

Related to the research surrounding this last point, it has been shown that most current diversity training and “anti-racist” education specifically makes the majority population (i.e., whites) feel excluded and unwelcome.

Sociologists like Frank Dobbin at Harvard suggests that any such training “should emphasize multiculturalism but stress that the majority culture is an important part of that multiculturalism.”

This advice is reiterated in such studies as Victoria C. Plaut, Flannery G. Garnett, Laura E. Buffardi and Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks, “‘What About Me?’ Perceptions of Exclusion and Whites’ Reactions to Multiculturalism,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 2 (2011). [What about me JPSP.pdf \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

The researchers state: “We propose that the success of these [instructional] efforts also hinges on their reception by the dominant group. Owing to the prevalence of multicultural models of diversity in educational and workplace settings, we investigated the role of inclusion-related processes in shaping Whites’ responses to diversity. Our results suggest that whether the “What about me?” question surfaces for Whites in reaction to multiculturalism is consequential for diversity efforts.”