



Contemporary Structural Racism

Description:

- *What is structural racism?*
- *How does structural racism impact access to opportunity?*

First, I introduce the concept of structural racism using several metaphors, demonstrate how it is rooted in the persistent legacies of historical discrimination, and explain how it differs from individual bias. Then, I illustrate how contemporary structural results in racial disparities in access to opportunity: a. access to quality education, b. opportunity to earn employment income, and c. opportunity to build home equity. If enough time is allotted, I will also identify the role of individual "opportunity hoarding" in reproducing and exacerbating structural racism.

A. Five qualifiers:

1. I distinguish between *empirical* vs. *policy* questions about race.
 - **Empirical issues** (e.g. "*Does systemic racism exist?*") have a right-or-wrong answer that can be discovered through scientific study (data/evidence), and thus are not subject to debate.
 - **Policy issues** (e.g. "*What should the government do about racism?*") are debatable questions without a right-or-wrong answer, and thus *should* be debated.
2. **Structural inequities are influential, but not determinat**. Privilege does not solely determine outcome; rather, it amplifies the impact of individual merit on outcomes (while the presence of privilege mutes it).
3. Structural racism is only one of several intersecting inequities
4. Structural racism harms us all
5. None of us is to blame for the past, but we are collectively responsible for the future

B. What is structural racism?

1. Structural racism refers to policies and practices that are rooted in the persistent legacies of historical discrimination, that limit access to opportunity for (low-income) African Americans and shape and constrain their individual choices and behavior, and result in systemic disparities in outcomes, whether intentional or not.
 - The historical racial wealth gap continues to impact racial disparities today because generational wealth provides access to opportunities and a financial "head start" on life. Historical residential segregation continues to impact racial disparities today because it concentrates poverty and limits access to opportunity (and thus also upward mobility).
 - Historical discrimination and segregation are perpetuated in facially "race-neutral" ("colorblind") forms, with *wealth* and *geography* acting as proxies for race.
 - Even if all interpersonal racial bias ended, structural racism would continue almost unabated, and racial economic disparities would continue to grow.

- Since historical discrimination was usually place-based, so too is contemporary structural racism.
 - Individuals with privilege (of all races) reinforce structural racism to maximize self-interests within the constraints of institutions, rather than because we are “bad” or “racist.”
2. Difference between *structural* racism and *interpersonal* racism:
 - Interpersonal racism (“people”): bias, prejudice, stereotypes, and *racial status beliefs* about a group’s competence and hierarchical status
 - Structural racism (“place”): place-based inequalities in access to institutions and opportunities that are rooted in historical racial discrimination against a racial group (“people”) in a vicious cycle.
 3. Difference between structural *racism* and structural *poverty*:
 - Structural poverty (“place”): place-based inequalities in access to institutions and opportunities.
 - Structural racism (“place”): place-based inequalities in access to institutions and opportunities that are rooted in historical racial discrimination against a racial group (“people”) in a vicious cycle.

C. How does structural racism impact access to quality education?

1. **Racial bias** impacts racial bias in grading, discipline, and selection for gifted programs. White families avoid schools with a significant share of Black students.
2. **Generational wealth disparities** impact access to tutoring, intervention for learning disabilities, enrichment activities, SAT prep, and SAT scores.
3. **Racial segregation** impacts K-12 school funding, and thus school quality and access to 8th grade Algebra and AP/IB classes.

D. How does structural racism impact opportunity to earn employment income?

1. **Racial bias** impacts employment hiring, evaluations, and promotions.
2. **Generational wealth disparities** impact the ability to cushion financial shocks, afford internships, get job/internship contacts, and finance new businesses and career changes.
3. **Racial segregation** impacts K-12 education quality and proximity to employment (spatial mismatch)

E. How does structural racism impact opportunity to build home equity?

1. **Racial bias** impacts mortgage discrimination, higher mortgage interest, ‘racial steering’, disparate treatment (more stringent financial qualifications required), whites avoiding integrated neighborhoods, lower home appreciation.
2. **Generational wealth disparities** impact the availability of financial assistance and inheritance from family, and exposure to financial literacy.
3. **Racial segregation** impacts access to conventional (vs. predatory/subprime) mortgages, housing appreciation, and property taxes.