

# BLACK HISTORY NEWSLETTER

## HOW IS INTERNALISATION LINKED TO STEREOTYPES AND RACISM?

- Internalisation is the unconscious process of accepting a set of attitudes, values and characteristics of other individuals or groups, so that they become part of one's character.
- The University of Western Australia defines internalised racism as "self hatred or disapproval of one's own racial group for the lack of white characteristics".
- In a society where racial discrimination is visible in the workplace, sports and institutions, it can be challenging for some in the black community to avoid internalising these racist messages and stereotypes.
- Ideas such as the "bad is black" effect, or the stereotype that black women are 'hostile', or the belief that all black men are absent fathers and perpetrators of drug crime can damage the perception black people have of themselves.
- This has created a domino effect and many people, especially young children, have internalised these ideas.
- Researchers, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, investigated the significance of this.

## WHAT WAS THE CLARK DOLL EXPERIMENT?

- Conducted by Dr Kenneth Clark and his wife Mamie Clark, the couple looked at stereotypes and aimed to investigate children's self-perception in relation to their race.
- In the study, black children ranging from ages 6 to 9 were shown two dolls - one white and the other black.
- They were asked the following questions in this order:
  1. Show me the doll that you like best or that you would like to play with.
  2. Show me the doll that is the 'nice' doll.
  3. Show me the doll that looks 'bad'.
  4. Give me the doll that looks like a white child.
  5. Give me the doll that looks like a coloured child.
  6. Give me the doll that looks like a Negro child.
  7. Give me the doll that looks like you.

- The researchers discovered that black children often favoured and chose to play with the white dolls in comparison to the black ones.
- Furthermore, when asked to draw and colour in a human figure with the colour of their own skin, the children frequently chose a lighter shade than their actual skin tone.
- In fact, the children also associated the colour 'white' with positive attributes such as good and pretty, whereas 'black' was attributed to being bad and ugly.
- When asked the last question, 44% of the black children said that the white doll looked like them.
- However, some children became visibly distraught at having to identify with the doll that they had rejected and some even stormed out of the room.
- Unsurprisingly, the black children who attended segregated schools had an even higher instance of labelling the black doll as bad and preferring the white doll to play with.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Democratic Republic of Congo is widely considered the richest country in the world regarding natural resources with an abundance of gold, tantalum, tungsten and tin. These minerals are used in electronic devices such as mobile phones and laptops, however it continues to have an extremely poor population due to the exploitation of these resources.

## WHAT DID THE FINDINGS OF THE CLARK DOLL EXPERIMENT SHOW?

- Dr. Clark and his wife concluded that "prejudice, discrimination, and segregation" created a sense of inferiority among black children and damaged their self esteem.
- They also deduced that the children had internalised racism.
- This had stemmed from discrimination they had faced in the past and being stigmatised in society.
- It helped support the argument that school segregation was distorting the minds of young black children and this caused many black children to hate themselves.

## WHAT IMPACT DID THE CLARK DOLL EXPERIMENT HAVE?

- This piece of research became a tool used to help end school segregation across America in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954.
- Kenneth Clarke told judges in the Supreme Court that the preference black children demonstrated for white dolls represented deep psychological damage that was reinforced by segregation.
- In theory, the *Brown* ruling overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine and ended 'de jure' segregation - by law. But in reality, 'de facto' segregation - in practice - still exists to this day.

## HOW IS THE CLARK DOLL EXPERIMENT RELEVANT TODAY?

- The results of this pioneering experiment resonate with many people in the black community.
- Society and the media regularly reinforce racial stereotypes, which can knock down the self esteem and confidence black people should hold for themselves.
- Often, young children imitate and learn behaviour they are exposed to, which establishes racial biases in the unconscious mind.
- This experiment supports the view that nobody is born racist, so any form of racism is taught or learned from external sources such as having bigoted parents.

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pedroj15@broughtonhall.com