

Antiracist Applied Behavioral Science: Using Our Tools to Confront Structural Racism

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Roadmap

- **A Quick Primer on Applied Behavioral Science**
- **An Opportunity for More Nuance**
- **Pursuing Antiracism in Applied Behavioral Science**
- **The Path Forward and a Call to Action**



Assumptions About Decision- Making

People are rational

Motivated by self-interest

Have unlimited time

Are unlimited by cognition

We understand their motivation

We understand their norms and social context



Fast and Slow Thinking

System 1



Fast



Unconscious



Automatic



Everyday
Decisions



Error prone

System 2



Slow



Conscious



Effortful




Complex
Decisions




Reliable





In a lake, there is a patch of lily pads. Every day, the patch doubles in size. If it takes 48 days for the patch to cover the entire lake, how long would it take for the patch to cover half of the lake?



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47 days!

Fast and Slow Thinking

System 1



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Decisions



Error prone

System 2



Slow



Conscious



Effortful



Complex
Decisions



Reliable



Realistic view of decision-making

- People make biased judgments informed by System 1 processing
- People have malleable preferences that can be changed by the real or imagined presence of other people
- People are influenced by social context and environment



Realistic view of decision-making

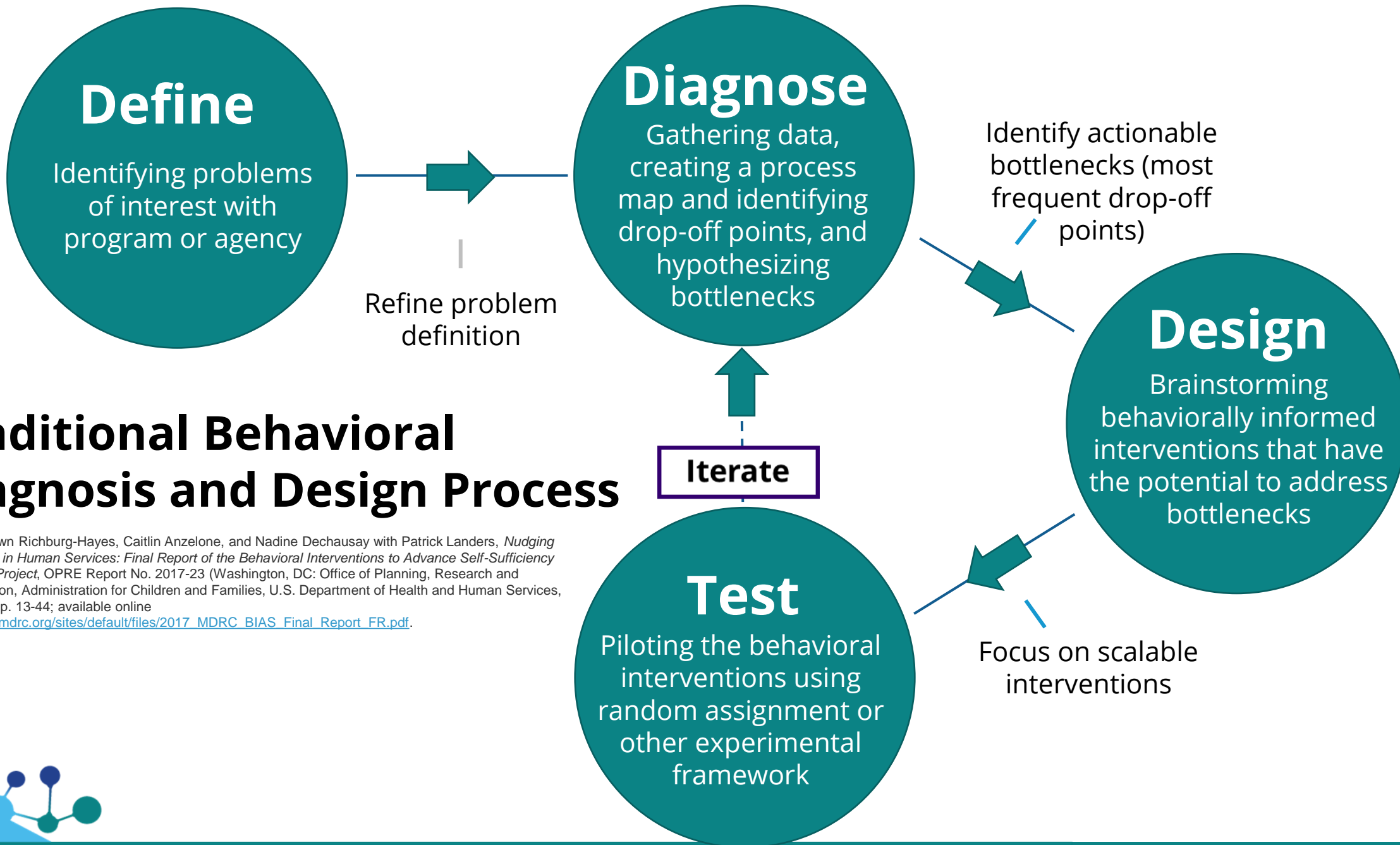
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Why does this matter?

- We can better understand people's decision-making by understanding what motivates them
- We can map the errors and design policies that account for these errors
- Enables more effective policy, meet people where they are

Traditional Behavioral Diagnosis and Design Process



¹Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Caitlin Anzelone, and Nadine Dechausay with Patrick Landers, *Nudging Change in Human Services: Final Report of the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project*, OPRE Report No. 2017-23 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017), pp. 13-44; available online at www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/2017_MDRC_BIAS_Final_Report_FR.pdf.



The power and promise of applied behavioral insights

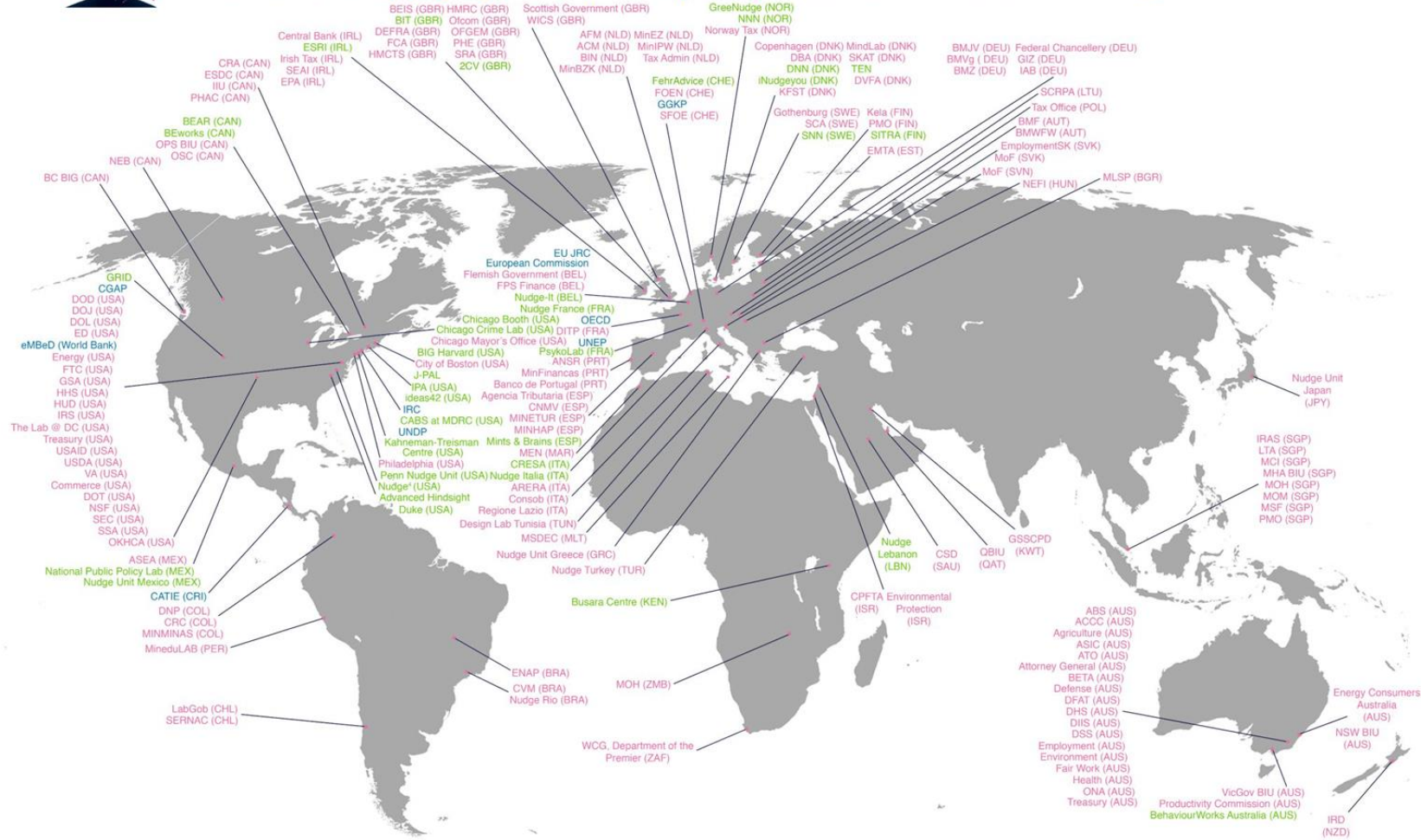
- Retirement savings, Pension Protection Act (Madrian & Shea, 2001; Beshears et al., 2010)
- Defaults as a tool for public policy (Johnson & Goldstein, 2003; Thaler & Sunstein, 2003)
- Behavioral science insights for public policy (Angawi & Hasanain, 2018; Richburg-Hayes et al., 2017; Benartzi et al., 2017; Congdon & Shankar, 2015)





Behavioural Insights and Public Policy

Institutions applying BI to public policy around the world



Institutions inside government

Institutions outside government

Multi-national organisations

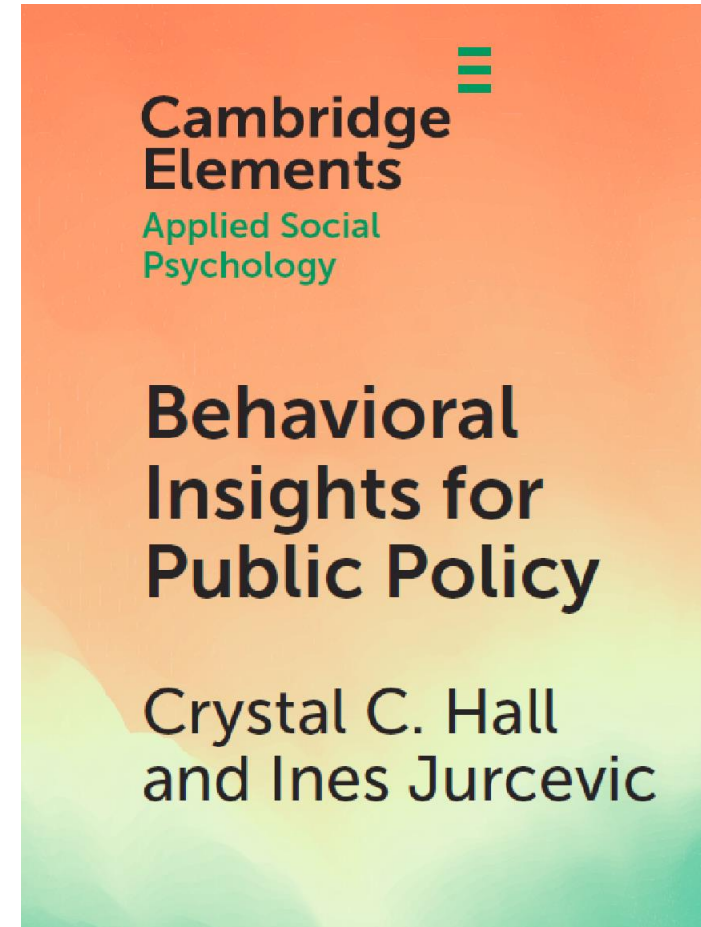
Source: OECD Research (2018)



So, what's the problem?



Ines Jurcevic
Assistant Professor
UW Evans School



“...To more fully realize the benefits of behavioral insights and deliver better results at a lower cost for the American people, the Federal Government should design its policies and programs to reflect our best understanding of how people engage with, participate in, use, and respond to those policies and programs. By improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Government, behavioral science insights can support a range of national priorities, including helping workers to find better jobs; enabling Americans to lead longer, healthier lives; improving access to educational opportunities and support for success in school; and accelerating the transition to a low-carbon economy.”

-Executive Order 13707: Using Behavioral Science Insights to Better Serve the American People. Signed by President Barack H. Obama on September 15, 2015



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The challenge

- Defining “success” and “failure”
- **One size does not necessarily fit all** (Marchiori et al., 2017; Mols et al., 2015; Chater & Loewenstein, 2017)
- **The implications:**
 - Psycho-emotional “taxes”
 - Better understanding of the impact of interventions
 - Reinforces a need for better data
- **All in the service of equity and the public good!**



A constrained context

- **WEIRD participants and researchers** (Ceci et al., 2010; Henrich et al., 2010; Arnett, 2008; Roberts et al., 2020; Dupree & Kraus, 2021; Nzinga et al., 2018)
- **WEIRD research practices** (Dupree & Kraus, 2021; Nzinga et al., 2018; Rad et al., 2018)
- **Underexamined psychological taxes** (Glaeser, 2005; Loewenstein & O'Donoghue, 2006; Eyal, 2014; Tieffenbach, 2014)
- **Who is (or isn't) nudged – the need for intersectionality** ((Shih & Sanchez, 2009; Syed et al., 2018; Brady et al., 2018)



SOCIETY

Breaking the Silence: Can Behavioral Science Confront Structural Racism?

By **Crystal C. Hall** and **Mindy Hernandez**

June 21, 2021



Image: [nappy/Pexels](#)

A few months after George Floyd's murder catalyzed a national reckoning, in the middle of a pandemic disproportionately devastating Black and brown



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...we have failed to account for structural racism in our designs and interventions because the challenge feels too big for our tools and methods.



"A racist is someone who is supporting a racist policy by their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea.

An antiracist is someone who is supporting an antiracist policy by their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.

"Racist" and "antiracist" are like peelable name tags that are placed and replaced based on what someone is doing or not doing, supporting or expressing in each moment. These are not permanent tattoos. No one becomes a racist or antiracist. We can only strive to be one or the other."

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Defining and Applying Antiracist Behavioral Science

- Applied behavioral science widely celebrated!
- A major failure: naming and challenging the systems and structures that perpetuate inequality (see also Chater & Loewenstein, 2022 – *i* frame vs. *s* frame)
- The challenge: Achieving antiracism through race-conscious implementation of applied behavioral science



Traditional Behavioral Diagnosis and Design Process

Define

Identifying problems of interest with program or agency

Diagnose

Gathering data, creating a process map and identifying drop-off points, and hypothesizing bottlenecks

Design

Brainstorming behaviorally informed interventions that have the potential to address bottlenecks

Test

Piloting the behavioral interventions using random assignment or other experimental framework



A Revised Behavioral Practice

Prepare!

Define

Co(Define)

Diagnose

Co(Discover)

Design

Co(Design)

Test

**Share
and
Scale!**

What are the barriers?

- The problem feels too big
- Our research practices center whiteness
- Our teams aren't adequately diverse with respect to race and ethnicity
- We “design around” underlying issues of structural racism











What can we do?

- Demand better data
- Leverage a broader set of social science insights
- Diversify the field
- Embrace many ways of knowing



Strategy	Type of Research	Example Concepts
Leveraging Individual Differences	Personality Psychology	Locus of Control, Self-Efficacy
Understanding Culture and Context	Social Psychology (Self and Identity, Emotion, Culture)	Social Identity, Social Norms
Acknowledging Power and Privilege	Social Psychology (Intergroup Relations)	Stigma and Discrimination

Individual Level
↓
Group/Societal Level

Fig. 1. Summary of potential strategies for improving savings interventions, the types of psychological research that explore these strategies, and concepts related to each strategy that exemplify how the strategy can promote or prevent savings behavior when applied.

THE **PhD** PROJECTSM



About The PhD Project

Founded in 1994, we became a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2005 with tremendous support from corporations, foundations, organizations, participating universities, supply alliance members and individuals.

Dedicated to increasing minority representation in the business world by supporting African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and Native Americans in becoming business professors who will mentor and motivate tomorrow's business leaders.

When we first started, there were just 294 minority business professors



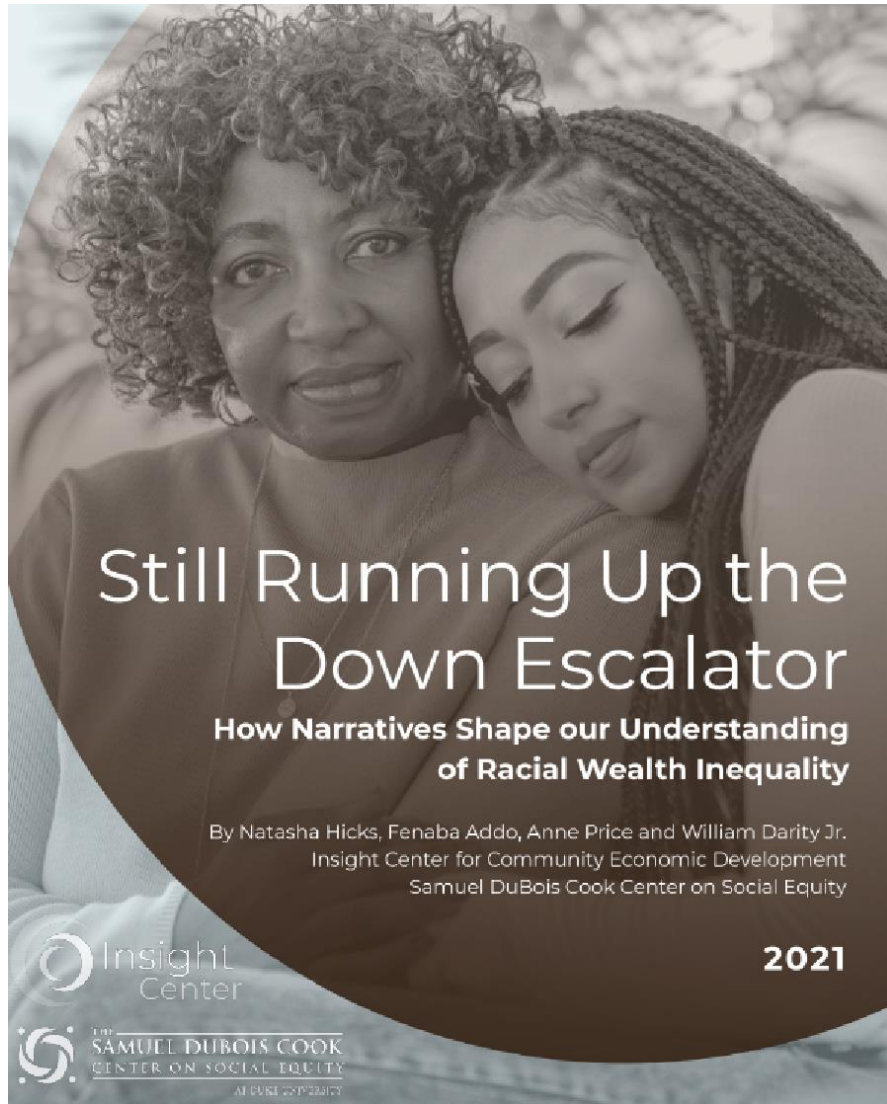
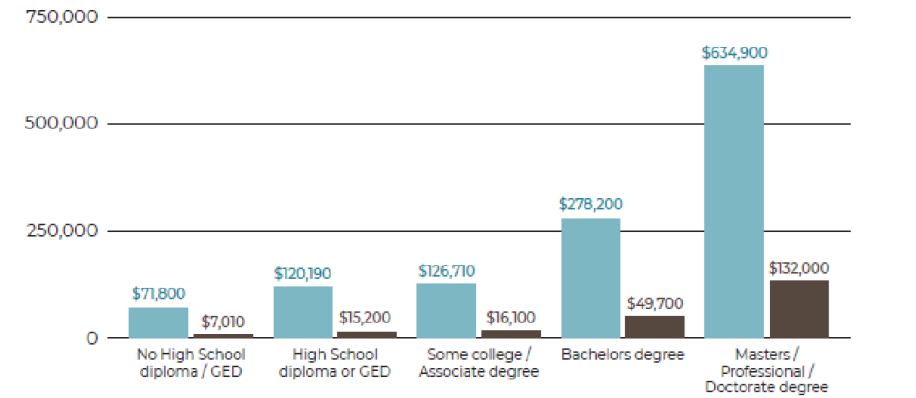
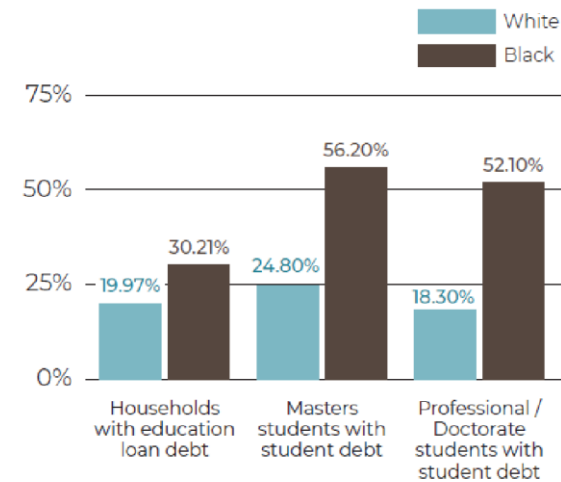


FIGURE 4: Median Wealth by Educational Attainment Level and Race



Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances

FIGURE 5: Percent of Households with Education Debt by Race



Source: Addo, Fenaba and Darity, William Jr. analysis of the Federal Reserve Board, 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances



The Op-Ed Project

"The OpEd Project's mission is to change who writes history.

We are a community of thought leaders, journalists, commentary writers and activists who proactively share our skills, knowledge and connections across color, creed, class, age, ability, gender, orientation, and beyond. Through our programs we elevate the ideas and knowledge of underrepresented expert voices, including women, and to accelerate solutions to the world's biggest problems--problems that cannot be solved justly or sustainably without a diversity of voices, expertise, experience and identity. We have stunning results. We believe the best ideas, regardless of where they come from, should have a chance to be heard and to change the world."

Work remains for all of us...

“The COVID crisis convinced more people in power that they need to listen to what traditionally marginalized populations have to say. The uprisings for racial justice in the summer of 2020 deepened that conviction for many. This is undoubtedly good, but it also comes at a cost: many of us with lived experience—of poverty, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and more—are now exhausted from trying to maximize this moment of attention from the powers that be, especially when we are the only ones to shoulder the load.”

-Anthony Barrows, 8/22/22

“Lived Experience Makes the Work Better”

Behavioral Scientist



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A vision of success





A Call to Action

- **Educate yourself**

- *How to Be an Antiracist/Stamped from the Beginning* (Ibram X. Kendi)
- *White Fragility* (Robin DiAngelo)
- *So You Want to Talk About Race* (Ijeoma Oluo)

- **Speak up**

- Consider the questions you ask (and don't ask)
- Notice where you hold relative power

- **Help diversify the voices in the field**

- Fund BIPOC researchers and support BIPOC organizations
- Revisit traditional practices in our scholarly communities



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Buchanan, N. T., Perez, M., Prinstein, M. J., & Thurston, I. B. (2021). Upending racism in psychological science: Strategies to change how science is conducted, reported, reviewed, and disseminated. *American Psychologist*, 76(7), 1097.

Thank you!

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