



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers  
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta



# Responding to Racism in Social Work Practice Placements

**Shantel Thomas**

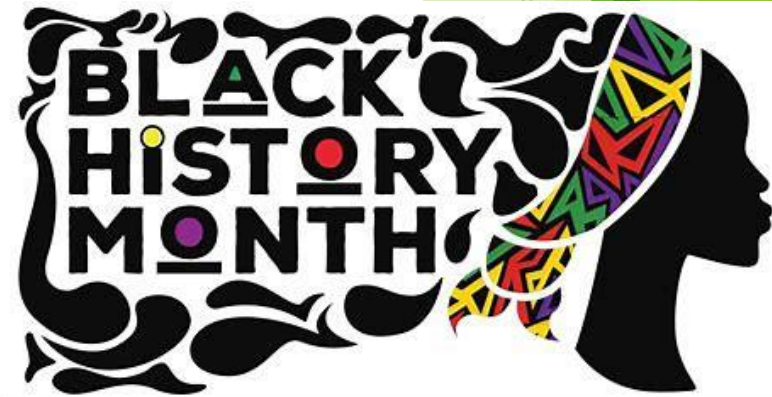
MSW, FHEA, PgCertHE, BA (Hons)

20<sup>th</sup> April 2023



# Session Overview

- ▶ Language
- ▶ Everyday, Systemic and Institutional Racism
- ▶ Whiteness and White privilege
- ▶ Anti-Racism and Allyship



# Who Am I?

- ▶ UK Anti-Racism Lead at the British Association of Social Workers (BASW)
- ▶ Course Lead – MA Social Work at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust
- ▶ Co-Developed and Deliver a Short Course entitled '*Becoming an Anti-Racist Practitioner – A Call to Allyship*'
- ▶ Qualified Social Worker – Practice Experience - Safeguarding children facing adverse childhood experiences with a particular interest in work with vulnerable children and those from black and diverse communities
- ▶ Co-written a chapter entitled '*Risk and Safety: a strength-based perspective in working with black families when there are safeguarding concerns*' in *Social Work in a Diverse Society: Transformative practice with black and ethnic minority individual and communities* with Prof. Claudia Bernard and contributed my practice knowledge to her book entitled - *Safeguarding Black Children*
- ▶ Doctoral Researcher at University of Sussex – Looking at how we embed Anti-Racist Leadership into the heart of Social Work – An Autoethnographic Study
- ▶ I use my position, passion, personal and professional 'living' experience of racism and oppression to be the voice for the 'unheard' and to represent the needs of diverse communities using a strength-based lens. Contact me on twitter @ShantelThomas77 or email: [Shantel.Thomas@basw.co.uk](mailto:Shantel.Thomas@basw.co.uk)



# Minimising Language and Everyday Racism (Micro- Aggressions)





*When I talk to white people about racism, their responses are so predictable I sometimes feel as though we are all reciting lines from a shared script. And on some level, we are, because we are all actors in a shared culture...it is white people's responsibility to be less fragile.*



**Robin Di'Angelo, (2018)**

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER



# WHITE FRAGILITY

WHY IT'S SO HARD

FOR WHITE PEOPLE TO  
TALK ABOUT RACISM

ROBIN DIANGELO



## A Note on Language...

- ▶ BAME - It's a clumsy acronym which categorises people as a homogenous group
- ▶ Black, Brown, White, Global majority
- ▶ Colour blindness - *"I don't see colour, I just see people"* OR *"there's only one race, the human race"*
- ▶ Minimising - *"all lives matter"*

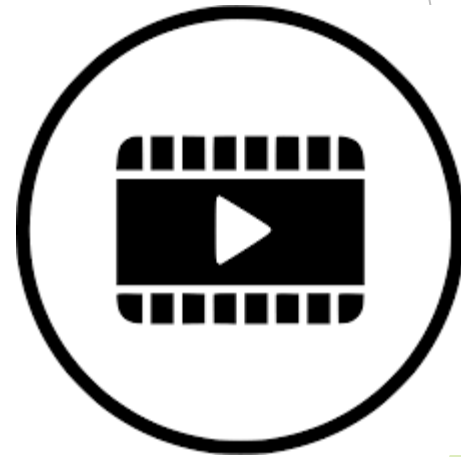
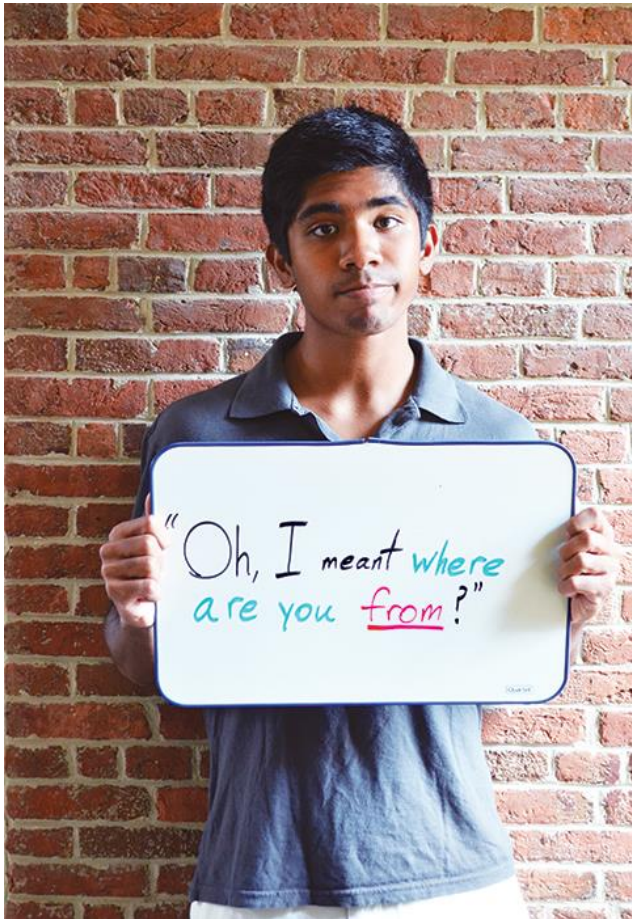
# Examples of micro-aggression?



- ▶ TV Shows featuring mostly white people
- ▶ Buildings named after white, upper class men
- ▶ “Where are you *really* from?”
- ▶ “You speak good English”
- ▶ “Everyone can succeed in this society if they work hard”
- ▶ “Are you the cleaner?”



# Lets talk about micro-aggression



<https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/landing-page/trauma-attuned-system/>



Let's discuss...



# Whiteness and White Privilege



*White privilege is an absence of the consequences of racism. An absence of structural discrimination. An absence of your race being viewed as a problem, first and foremost.*



**Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017)**

THE NO.1 *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLER

**Reni Eddo-Lodge**

**WHY I'M  
NO LONGER  
TALKING  
TO WHITE  
PEOPLE  
ABOUT  
RACE**

Includes a  
new chapter,  
AFTERMATH

BLOOMSBURY

# Concepts of Whiteness...

- ▶ **Whiteness** - A racial identity created by upper-class colonialists to distinguish themselves from indentured servants and slaves. A guarantee against being enslaved.
- ▶ **White Supremacy** - A system of exploitation to maintain wealth, power and white privilege.
- ▶ **White Privilege** - An unacknowledged system of favouritism and advantage granted to white people as the beneficiaries of historical conquest. Benefits include preferential treatment, exemption from group oppression and immunity from perpetuating social inequity



# Systemic Racism - some statistics...

- ▶ Black children are 3.5 times more likely to be excluded from school
- ▶ Black young people are 4 times more likely to be arrested than their white peers
- ▶ Black people are more than 10 times likely to be stopped and searched than white people
- ▶ 46% of Black households in the UK are in poverty compared to 20% of white households
- ▶ Black people see more than twice the unemployment levels than white people
- ▶ Black women are more than 5 times to die in pregnancy than white women

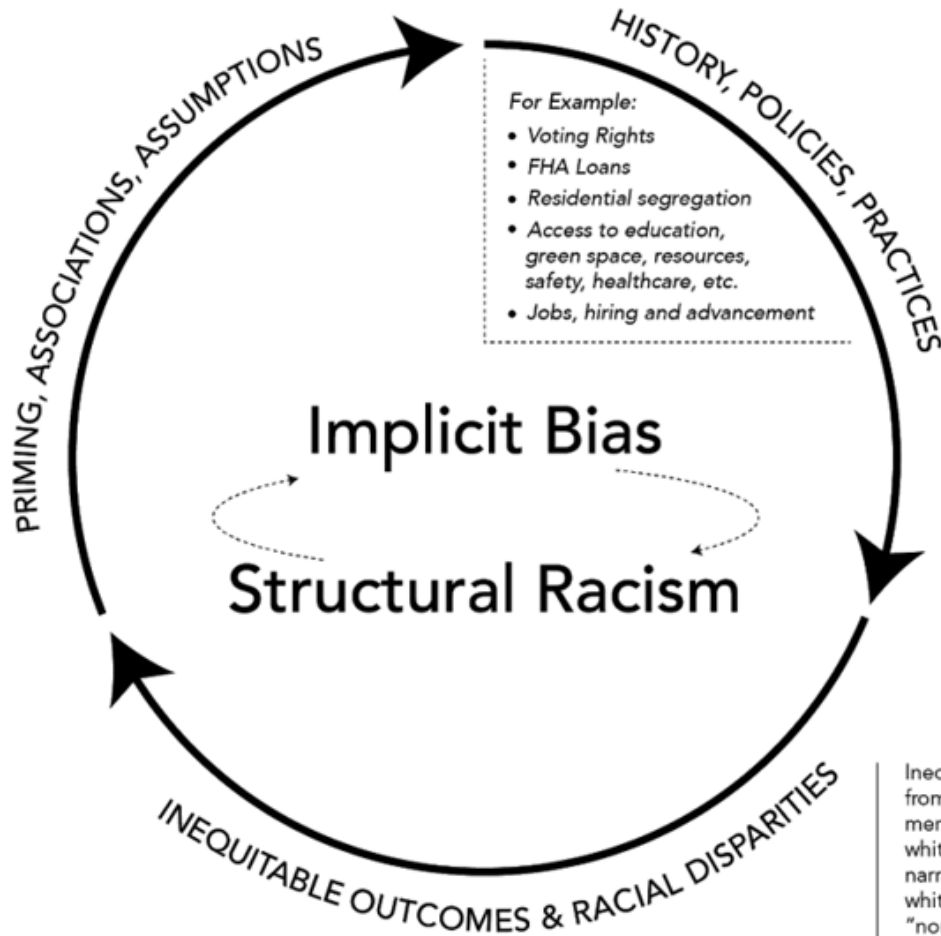
# Systemic racism - some statistics...



- ▶ Black social work students are more likely to take longer to pass their placement (Fairtlough et al, 2014; Tedam, 2015)
- ▶ Black and minoritised newly qualified social workers are more likely to fail their ASYE (Carter, 2012; Samuel, 2021)
- ▶ Black and minoritised social workers are more likely to be subject to fitness to practice investigations (Spillet, 2014, 2018; Samuel, 2020)
- ▶ Black and minoritised social workers are less likely to progress to senior leadership roles (DfE, 2019; Bernard, 2020)
- ▶ A White Male is six times as likely to be a Senior Manager as a Black Female (Spillet, 2014, 2018)
- ▶ Workplace racism is described as a barrier for black and minority ethnic workers progressing in their career. (Brockmann et al. 2001; Acker, 2006; Kline 2012; Love 2019)



Dominant narratives about race (family, media, society) coupled with racialized structural arrangements and differential outcomes by race all prime us to believe that people of color are inferior to white people, create and maintain harmful associations, and lead us to make harmful assumptions, consciously and unconsciously, about people of color



Race is created to justify enslaving people from Africa (economic engine of country)

Policies and practices that consolidate and protect power bestow unearned economic, social, cultural, and political **advantage** to people called "white," and unearned **disadvantage** to people of color

National narrative (ideology, belief system) about people of color being "less than" human (and less than white) justifies mistreatment and inequality (white supremacy)

Inequitable outcomes and experiences resulting from policy decisions in health, housing, employment, education, and life expectancy - reinforces white supremacist beliefs and ideology; dominant narrative uses disparate outcomes as evidence of white superiority, promotes whiteness as "normal" and desirable and justifies inequality

*Injustice  
anywhere is a  
threat to justice  
everywhere.*



*Our lives begin to  
end, the day we  
become silent about  
things that matter.*

*I have a dream that one day, my  
four little children will live in a  
nation where they will not be  
judged by the colour of their skin,  
but by the content of their  
character.*



**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. - 1929-1968**



# Anti- Racism and Allyship

## White Supremacy



- Accepts, and in some cases promotes, theories designed to justify white dominance and racial hierarchy typically associated with 'scientific racism'.
- Fear/loathing/exoticisation of the non-white other which may be overt or covert.
- Characterised by the 'white gaze'.
- Belief that we live in a meritocracy.
- Uncritical/favourable view of empire and colonialism - the white man's burden.
- Subscribes to scientific racism.
- \*Black underachievement is seen to be due to their dysfunctionality/pathology.
- Whiteness and its proxies' function as badges of honour
- White privilege is rationalised as the natural order.
- Onus on black People to accept their place.

## White Indifference



- Passionate defender of western universalism, academic freedom and the right to offend.
- Belief in meritocracy but also recognises that some (deserving) disadvantaged people need help.
- Characterised by a refusal to take a serious look at racism and views anti-racist initiatives as ideological endeavours linked to culture wars and political correctness.
- Self-concept is based on being rational and moral, which results in avoidance of responsibility for discriminatory behaviour!
- Willing to 'tolerate'/'fetishize'/'pity the 'non-white' other.
- Happy to make tokenistic gestures, but total refusal to accept one's own complicity in the (re)production of racism.
- Whiteness is denied, so it functions as an absent/invisible/mythical norm leaving white privilege intact.
- Onus on Black People to build up their 'resilience'.

## White Awareness



- Belief that racism is real and that it is a product of 'prejudice plus power'
- Characterised by a desire to critically reflect.
- Functions like a mental illness that only white people have (Katz) hence focus on 'discovering' unconscious bias and cognitive distortions.
- Desire to engage with 'black issues and people, but only in limited spaces (committees, training events)
- This may be as a result of feeling guilty of historic racism and/or a desire to make some amends.
- White privilege is recognised and becomes a source of shame and embarrassment.
- Most activity however restricted to self-development and deployment of politically correct language.
- Onus on white people to overcome unconscious bias.

## White Allyship



- Racism is a complex interaction between structural, ideological, institutional and behavioural processes, but it can be overcome.
- Characterised by the desire to take responsibility for change, which is not restricted to behaviour alone.
- Focus on paradigm shifts and concrete interventions
- Dynamic and creative solutions through co-creation.
- Rejection of deficit models and acceptance of the link between white privilege and educational outcomes.
- Share power, privilege, risk and vulnerability.
- Actively divesting from histories, systems and structures that reproduce racism.
- Onus on white to build sustained partnerships with black people.

Note: \*The term 'black' here is used to denote all those people who are positioned outside of whiteness and as a result experience racial disadvantage. The degree of racial disadvantage will vary as a result of other factors primarily associated with gender, class, ethnicity.

*The heartbeat of antiracism is self-reflection, recognition, admission and fundamentally self critique...one either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist OR confronts racial inequities as an antiracist - there is no in-between safe space of 'non-racist' - the claim of 'non-racist' neutrality is a mask for racism.*

**Ibram.X.Kendi (2019)**



**HOW  
TO BE  
AN**

**ANTIRACIST**

**IBRAM X. KENDI**





**ANTI**  
AN INTRODUCTION TO  
**RACIST**  
ACTION & ACTIVISM  
**ALLY**

SOPHIE WILLIAMS  
@OFFICIALMILLENMIABLACK





# THE ANTI-RACIST SOCIAL WORKER



STORIES OF ACTIVISM BY SOCIAL CARE  
AND ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Edited by Tanya Moore and Glory Simango

HIDDEN  
NARRATIVES  
FROM SOCIAL  
WORKERS  
OF COLOUR

From Black & Other  
Global Majority  
Communities



OUTLANDERS



Compiled & Edited by  
Wayne Reid & Siobhan Maclean




*I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better. Do the best you can until you know better and when you know better, DO BETTER!*



**Maya  
Angelou -  
1928-2014**

# Personal Pledge



*The things I can  
do to become an  
anti-racist ally  
are...*



*Do your little bit of good  
where you are; it's those little  
bits of good put together that  
overwhelm the world.*



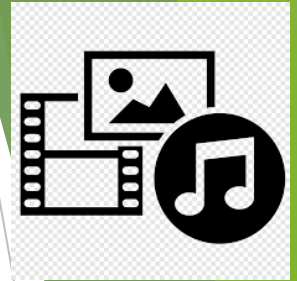
**Desmond  
Tutu - 1931 -  
2021**

# References



- ▶ Barnardo's (2020) *How Systemic Racism Effects Young People in the UK* <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/how-systemic-racism-affects-young-people-uk>
- ▶ Bernard, C (2022) *Intersectionality for Social Workers*. Routledge
- ▶ Eddo-Lodge, R. (2020). *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- ▶ DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.
- ▶ Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. One world.
- ▶ Williams, S. (2020) *Anti Racist Ally: An Introduction to Action and Activism*. HQ

# Resources



- ▶ **Tavistock Policy Seminar: *Whiteness - A problem for our time.*** Recording of the Tavistock Policy Seminar with Helen Morgan, examining white privilege and white fragility from a psychoanalytic perspective. This presentation is rooted in the assumption that the problem of racism is a problem of whiteness and that an examination of this construct of whiteness needs to be central to seeking a solution to this destructive dynamic.  
[https://clicks.eventbrite.com/f/a/PkTWP4aCvR3jg6WTue9ZPA~/AAQxAAQA~/RgRh5sRcP0QraHR0cHM6Ly93d3cueW91dHViZS5jb20vd2F0Y2g\\_dj01bjFwUkx0ZExGc1cDc3BjQgpgAtyQBWDx2h6yUhxsB3Vpc2Uuc2ltc0Bjb3JhbWJhYWYub3JnLnVrWAQAAAAA](https://clicks.eventbrite.com/f/a/PkTWP4aCvR3jg6WTue9ZPA~/AAQxAAQA~/RgRh5sRcP0QraHR0cHM6Ly93d3cueW91dHViZS5jb20vd2F0Y2g_dj01bjFwUkx0ZExGc1cDc3BjQgpgAtyQBWDx2h6yUhxsB3Vpc2Uuc2ltc0Bjb3JhbWJhYWYub3JnLnVrWAQAAAAA)
- ▶ **Learning tool - *Critical conversations in social work supervision***  
[https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PT\\_Critical-conversations-in-social-work-supervision\\_Final.pdf](https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PT_Critical-conversations-in-social-work-supervision_Final.pdf)
- ▶ **Article** - This article is thought provoking and has some useful ideas to navigate/ give organisations a map through Structural racism.  
<https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2020/july/we-dont-need-conversations-we-need-systemic-change>