



Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-Being

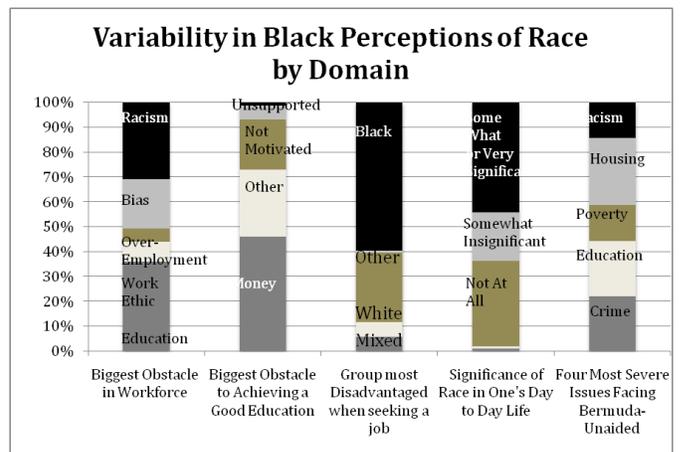
Race: Now You See It, Now You Don't

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In our study of the economic well-being of Bermuda's young Black men, some key questions were what role race and/or racism played in their lives and did racism block their opportunities? We concluded that race had an elusive, "now you see it, now you do not" impact on the unemployment, earnings and education outcomes of young Black men, and Black men themselves sometimes saw race as an important factor in their lives and sometimes they did not.

In our qualitative interviews, Black male high school students often did not perceive racism as a serious obstacle, in terms of their professional opportunities. Yet we measured large racial disparities in unemployment, earnings and educational attainment outcomes between young Black males and their White counterparts. Moreover, other studies support the idea that race is an important source of the disparities in economic outcomes. For example, Scott (2003)¹ revealed that Black Bermudians who do enter professional careers frequently speak of a 'glass ceiling' at middle management, defining the glass ceiling in Bermuda as "racism; prejudice; real; limitations; intentional; historical." Similarly respondents in a 2008 study² of Bermuda's race relations saw race as a barrier to equal treatment in the workplace and overwhelmingly felt that blacks were the group most disadvantaged when seeking a job. Citizens Uprooting

Racism in Bermuda (CURB) sponsored the study of 400 Bermudians and both Black and White Bermudians felt that race was significant in one's daily life.



Black Bermudians did not see race as a big obstacle to achieving a good education, yet they put educational opportunity on a short list of areas where discrimination affected their life outcomes (not shown above). Although they ranked race as the fourth most serious problem behind housing, crime and education the respondents did see race as something they talked about in their daily lives and as a problem that should be a political priority. The chart below summarizes some of this variability in how Bermuda's Blacks perceived race in the CURB study.

Untangling Racism: Rival Explanations For Racial Disparity

This same “now you see race, now you do not see race” pattern also emerged in our study on the relative impact of race on earnings disparities in the following respects. Age, health, education, marital status, industry of employment and other variables that affected earnings were highly correlated with race, making it difficult to disentangle them and determine the independent role race played in economic outcomes.

Figure 2 below gives us some sense of the impact of race on the predicted earnings of White and Black Bermudian males. The first bars show that the predicted earnings of Black and White males are equal (\$25,000) when the analysis is limited to demographic factors. Here differences in the average age, health or marital status of Black and White males are not great enough to make a difference in the predicted earnings of the two groups. Because the bars are equal, this model produces a “now you do not see race” result. However, race does play a role in the remaining bars.

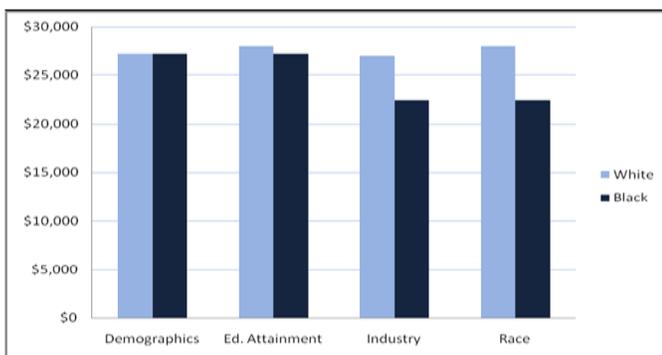


Figure 2: Predicted Earnings for Young Bermudians by Race

A second model (captured by the second set of bars) adds average Black-White educational differences to the demographic differences discussed above and here a significant gap in predicted earnings emerges. Specifically, the predicted earnings for Black males remain unchanged but the earnings for White males increases by \$800. This means that about 14 percent of the racial gap in the predicted earnings of young Bermudian men is

associated with higher levels of educational attainment among White males.

A third model (the third set of bars) added industry of employment and here the predicted earnings of Black Bermudian men fell to \$24,000 while those of White Bermudian men remained unchanged. This suggests that an additional \$3,200 (about 57 percent) of the predicted earnings gap between Black and White males was associated with the higher proportion of the former who worked in low-paying industries (such as hotels and retail trade) and the higher proportion of the latter who worked in high-paying jobs in international or business services companies.

The fourth and final model estimated the association between race and earnings and here the predicted earnings of Black Bermudian men were unchanged but those of White Bermudian men grew by an additional \$1,600. (The fourth set of bars in Figure 2.)

Together, these results indicate that more than half the racial disparity in earnings could be linked to the racial composition of employment, meaning Black males primarily work in industries like construction and most White males primarily work in financial services. Another 14 percent could be linked to educational differences between the groups and a residual portion linked to race or racism.

What Do the Results Mean?

Why were Bermuda's young Black men over-represented in low-paying industries and under-represented in high-paying industries? Our research concluded that there were at least three possible explanations: discrimination by employers, occupational segregation by workers and employers, and differences in the distribution of “soft skills” across racial groups in the island's workforce. Some employers do discriminate against Black workers. Some employers prefer women in certain roles and some employees, especially men, avoid traditional “female” jobs. Some workers,

especially young males, lack the habits of dress, speech, and deportment that make customers and coworkers feel comfortable in the workplace. That discrimination is only one of several possible explanations that echoes the "now you see it, now you do not" results in survey work about how Bermudians perceive race and racism.

We conclude that results point to pragmatic policymaking. Precisely because there are multiple pathways through which race may play a role in the economic disparities between young Black Bermudian males and their same-age peers, Bermudians should approach these disparities in multiple ways. Specifically this means the following:

Recommendations

1. Address occupational segregation by promoting collaborations among schools, the government, youth serving organizations and members of the business community that expose disconnected and unemployed youth to a variety of job opportunities.
2. Address discrimination in industries employing few young Black Bermudian males by designing and implementing training programs targeting those youth. Such efforts should also address soft skills gaps so that Black Bermudian males are able to interact with customers and co-workers according to the norms dictated by the workplace.
3. Address educational attainment gaps by encouraging families to devote more time to helping their sons articulate their goals and find the resources they need to actualize them and improving career and college guidance departments in the Bermudian public secondary schools. Similar school-based efforts can be used to implement dropout prevention programs.
4. Bermudians should continue a candid public conversations about race using a variety of media and forums, including additional CURB reports.

Endnotes

¹ Scott, M. (2003). *Bermuda And Its Racially Divided Workplace*. Unpublished Thesis. Mt. St. Vincent University.

² Research.bm. (2008). *Measuring Perceptions of Race & Race Relations in Bermuda*. Presentation for Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda.

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Opinions, conclusions, recommendations and points of view expressed in this brief represent a consensus of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the funders of the study on which this brief is based.

For a full discussion on this topic, please see chapters one and four of our research study which may be found at www.crfcfw.columbia.edu/pub/Bermuda_full.pdf.