Cognitive Dissonance and the Reproduction of the Black Achievement Gaps in the US by Mai Abdul Rahman. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2022, 201 pp., $78.40, (eBook)

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  In *Cognitive Dissonance and the Reproduction of the Black Achievement Gaps in the US,* scholar Mai Abdul Rahman highlights the way that America's dominant racial belief system biases the perspectives of public-school educators' and reproduces the Black student achievement gap. More specifically, many educators avoid the discomfort associated with cognitive dissonance and the process of growth. Instead, educators choose to evade information that goes against the dominant white racial ideology and informs them that change is needed to improve their students' outcomes. Abdul Rahman uses secondary data and a combination of recent and historical research to analyze the US public school system. The 14-chapter book is organized into 5 parts: introduction and theoretical frame, historical facts, cognitive dissonance, justification, and plan for improvement.

  The first two chapters introduce the books main arguments, theoretical framework, and provide a preview of the upcoming chapters. Abdul Rahman says, "The educational process is deliberate. And the moral character and perspective of educators cannot be divorced from the educational process… Public school educators are either social liberators or agents of oppression" (1). This quote illuminates that public schools and educators are not neutral actors. Instead, their actions actively perpetuate or disrupt historical ideologies that impact Black student achievement. Chapters 3 through 5 provide history, facts, and context that work together to demonstrate that whiteness and anti-Black racism were central to the founding of US public schools. Chapter 4 carefully describes the countless ways that white Americans fought to prevent school desegregation and preserve educational resources for white students. In chapter 5 Abdul Rahman documents how the US government has repeatedly concluded that public schools fail Black students, while simultaneously offering only half measures that do not address the root causes of educational inequality. The chapter concludes by discussing the role of white school teachers in disadvantaging students; she writes, "Like the rest of America's dominant class, White school teachers internalize racial perspectives and implicit and subtle biases" (47). In this quote Abdul Rahman connects the country's dominant racial perspective to the mindset of public-school educators, while providing a quick preview of the upcoming chapters.

  Chapters 6 and 7 examine and offer solutions for, the contemporary problem of cognitive dissonance. According to Rahman, "Cognitive dissonance allows individuals to subdue positive and contradictory information to protect deep-seated social beliefs, ideologies, and values" (50). When applied to the educational setting, cognitive dissonance, encourages teachers to ignore and avoid information that could help them improve their teaching, and instead choose to cling to snippets of information that reinforce their belief system. Chapter 7 highlights the multitude of ways that schools and educators operate with the help of contradictory belief systems. They claim, race neutrality, while systematically subjecting Black students to zero tolerance policies that have manufactured the school to prison pipeline and high dropout rates.

  The author follows with two persuasive chapters, that highlight public schools' purpose of providing the opportunity for social mobility to all students. The author furthers this point by showing belief and faith in white educators' ability to change. Abdul Rahman says that, "White educators' dispositional barriers are not fixed, and can be changed" (90), meaning that while

more Black educators are needed to increase Black student achievement, a more productive process includes addressing the racial ideologies of white educators while simultaneously hiring more non-white educators.

Although earlier chapters provide insight into how to improve current circumstances, chapters 10 through 13 offer detailed insights into how to address school bias. In chapter 10 Abdul Rahman describes reflexivity as a process that educators and institutions should implement to detect underlying perspectives that corrupt school practices. Reflexivity requires educators to generate authentic questions, responses, and solutions by looking within themselves, the schoolhouse practices, and norms to learn from past failures. By examining their own motivations and preconceived notions, educators are able to learn from themselves. In Chapter 11 the author includes tables and graphics to help the reader identify and visualize current failings, steps to transition away school failings, and steps to moving to an improved state. Chapters 12 and 13 focus on building a school community that is positive, inclusive, and focused on social justice. She emphasizes the importance of the public school system by highlighting its ability to curb the spread of racism and social division.

A real strength of this book is that it recognizes that the solutions are imbedded in the failures. Additionally, the author encourages the reader to begin the process of reflexivity by posing strong probing questions throughout the book. These questions are important as they force the reader to contemplate and self-reflect, even if only for a second or two. No book can do everything, but the author could have strengthened her argument by highlighting some current schools and educators that have succeeded in narrowing the achievement gap. Overall, this work is valuable to the field of education because it demonstrates that the dominant white racial belief system biases public school educators and reproduces the Black student achievement gap. Given the subject matter and the solution-based approach of this book, its contents could be useful to not only scholars but also to public-school administrators, teachers, and parents who hope to improve their students' learning outcomes.