

Race and the Implicit Aspects of Embodied Social Interaction

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Frantz Fanon was riding the train on a cold day. He was noticed. “Look a Negro!” declared a fellow passenger. “Look, a Negro! Maman, a Negro!” the young white boy notified his mother. Both the boy’s and Fanon’s bodies were trembling. “[T]he Negro is trembling with cold, the cold that chills the bones, the lovely little boy is trembling because he thinks the Negro is trembling with rage” (Fanon 2008: 93). In response to this perceived rage the young child runs into his mother’s arms. He is afraid the Negro would eat him.

What exactly is happening here? Much scholarship has been devoted to the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* (“The lived experience of the black man”). Most of it attends to Fanon’s reflection on the effect that moments like these have on Fanon (and thus, other black people in similar situations). In this chapter we ask how these moments affect the young white boy (and by extension those who are like him). We’ll attempt to discover what may have motivated this kind of engagement. What caused the boy to perceive Fanon as angry enough to eat him?

Implicit Bias and Racist Attitudes

One concept that claims to explain moments like this is the notion of implicit bias. What implicit biases the motivating force behind this boy’s evaluation of Fanon that day? The first part of this chapter will look at how implicit biases may be at work here (and what it would mean if this were the case). We’ll argue, however that there are gaps in the literature and that an overemphasis on mental states like beliefs makes it difficult to understand moments like this – especially when the actor in question is a child. In contrast, we will shift attention to an account that focuses on the embodied mind (especially in relation to the formation of such things as attitudes). Bodily processes, many of which are implicit, have a critical impact on the formation of race-related attitudes, manifest in moments like this one.

The implicit bias literature finds one of its primary roots in the field of social cognition. Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald – two of the primary architects of a popular tool used to measure implicit bias – recount how an understanding of implicit bias emerged during a revolutionary time in social psychology. This revolution “introduced new ways of understanding how much of human judgment and behavior are guided by processes that operate outside conscious awareness and conscious control” (Banaji and Greenwald 2013 : 17; also see Devine 1989; Kang et al. 2012). They believe this shift to unconscious functioning

has an impact on how we can understand human behavior and mental processes (memory, perception, etc.). The ‘signature’ of this new approach is the idea that unconscious thought, including unconscious attitudes, has a definite bearing on action, even if these thoughts are not readily retrievable.

On this view, attitudes hold things together in the mind and are involved in the management of preferences, which come in two different forms: reflective (conscious) preferences and automatic preferences. The latter are unconscious, and typically unfamiliar to their owner and difficult to explain (Banaji and Greenwald 2013 : 88). They include implicit biases/attitudes (Brownstein and Saul 2016: 8). These attitudes influence or modulate feelings, thoughts, judgments, and/or actions toward objects in the world (including people). In other words, these attitudes play an integral and pervasive (albeit largely unnoticed) role in the background of experience. Many social and cognitive scientists in this field argue that these implicit attitudes “shape all aspects of social life” (Beeghly and Madva 2020: 1).

There are many variations of the *Implicit Association Test* (IAT) (Greenwald et al. 1998; Banaji and Greenwald 2013), designed to measure implicit attitudes in different categories (e.g., consumer products, political values, etc.). We’ll focus on the ‘Race IAT’ and its measurement of implicit attitudes toward racial groups. Early results from this test suggested a general pattern of the pairing of pleasant words with white faces happening at a faster rate than the alternative. The conclusion was drawn that there was generally a more implicit attitudinal preference for white people compared to black people (Greenwald and Krieger 2006: 953). These interpreters found the rate of preference “a surprisingly high figure” (Banaji and Greenwald 2013: 77). It seemed to suggest that many Americans, including those who professed more egalitarian beliefs, suffered from an aversive type of racism. Many theorists have used this understanding of implicit attitudes to make sense of such things as police violence against people of color and discrimination in the justice system (e.g., Correll et al. 2014; Fridell 2016; Fridell and Lim 2016).

The IAT, and the implicit bias literature in general, is not without its detractors. One of the primary criticisms interrogates the legitimacy of the science that undergirds the test and its ability to measure implicit attitudes. Questions have been raised about whether implicit biases are a meaningful predictor of behavior (for a good review, see, e.g., Brownstein et al. 2020; Gawronski 2019). We will focus on the emphasis placed on individual psychology in this literature. One concern that emerges is that this emphasis takes attention away from the “more fundamental causes of injustice” (Beeghly and Madva 2020: 1). We want to interrogate the assumptions surrounding the dynamics of how these biases originate. The IAT suggests that the biases begin in the mind and work their way out in bodily behavior. It seemingly assumes there is a strong distinction between the mind (where the attitudes reside) and the body (where the influence of these attitudes *may* display itself). What follows from this assumption can confound genuine issues related to racist beliefs and their influence. For instance, what if the influence flows in multiple directions? What can a consideration of such dynamics tell us about the relationship between embodied actions, social contexts, and these implicit attitudes?

Embodied and Socially Contextualized Interactions

The dominant view in the implicit bias literature “creates the impression that bias exists exclusively ‘in the head’ of individuals” (Beeghly and Madva 2020: 6), which is not necessarily remarkable in light of the cognitive orientation of those who initially spearheaded implicit bias research. However, this stress on both the individual agent and their (conscious or unconscious) mental states can distort the understanding of how implicit bias actually functions. Embodied cognition raises important questions about the problems that may arise when cognitivist,

internalist conceptions of mind are (over-)emphasized. We think that embodied cognition can help shed light on claims about the automaticity and inaccessibility of implicit biases. The framework we'll employ involves seeing embodied processes and social interactions as primary (Gallagher 2020). On this view, embodied interactions have a critical influence on how we perceive others. On embodied cognition approaches the 'body' is understood to be a lived or animate body, "the medium through which we engage with the world (ourselves, and others) but also the condition of our having a world" (Ngo 2017: xiv).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2012) enactive (i.e., action-oriented) phenomenology of the body's role in perception, and the critical analysis of his work is a good starting point. Merleau-Ponty combines the phenomenological concept of the lived body (*Leib*) with psychological studies of the body schema (found, for example, in Head 1920; Lhermitte 1939; Schilder 1935) to show that motor control processes, that remain implicit and mainly unconscious, shape the way that we perceive the world (Gallagher 2005). The body schema is a system of sensory-motor processes responsible for the regulation of bodily posture and movement, which generally functions without the conscious awareness of the individual. For Merleau-Ponty the body-in-action tends to efface itself in most of its purposive activities and allows the perceiving agent to move with ease through the world. This ease of movement is what renders conscious monitoring of the body unnecessary. Fanon takes Merleau-Ponty to be defining the body schema as the "slow construction of myself as a body in a spatial and temporal world. . . . It is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of myself and the world" (2008: 91). The body schema, on this view, facilitates a dialogue between the body and the world. It does this by conditioning/enabling an agent's dispositions toward the world, and these dispositions, in turn, have an influence on the individual's conscious self-image, including body-image.

While the body schema functions in a generally non-conscious way as we move through the world, there are times when perception of one's body comes to the surface, for example, in "limit situations" that involve a forced reflection brought on by pain, discomfort, pleasure, fatigue, some social circumstances, and so forth. Moments like these reveal complex and reciprocal relationships between the body schema, self-awareness, in the form of body image, and perception of the world. These are dynamical relations that are both impacted by, and help shape, interactions with the surrounding environment. Importantly, this includes social interactions. Embodied, enactive approaches to social cognition emphasize that our relations with others are not based on observational mindreading, but are primarily interactive in ways that involve grasping intentions and emotions in the faces, postures, gestures and actions of others. Enactive phenomenology understands the world in terms of pragmatic and social affordances, to use Gibson's (1979) term. We perceive others in terms of how we can interact with them.

The enactive phenomenology that follows Merleau-Ponty (starting, for example in Varela et al. 1991) provides much more detail, incorporating affordance-based ecological psychology, sensory-motor contingency accounts of perception (e.g., Noë 2004), interactionist accounts of social cognition (e.g., De Jaegher et al. 2010; Gallagher 2020; Ratcliffe 2007), and developmental accounts of intersubjectivity (e.g., Trevarthen 1979; Reddy 2008). That such action-oriented explanations are relevant to the topic of implicit racial bias can be seen in Fanon's initial critique and the subsequent development of critical phenomenology.

Fanon argues that there is actually something more basic than the body schema as Merleau-Ponty characterizes it. He calls it the historical-racial schema which is intersubjectively composed of "a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories."

Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by "residual sensations and perceptions

primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character,” but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more.

(Fanon 2008: 91)

The body schema, which typically functions non-consciously or implicitly, crumbles under the gaze of the white man (or even the white boy), according to Fanon, and reveals in the black man a ‘racial epidermal schema’. The latter, which can also be characterized as a conscious body image, can disrupt the work of the body schema leading to its ‘collapse’. Even though Fanon takes some credit for stitching this ‘historical-racial schema’ together that day on the train, he notes that he received the thread from ‘the Other’ (the white man). It was in this moment, brought on by the declaration, ‘Maman, look, a Negro,’ that Fanon became consciously aware of his body in a specific way. The black man’s movements are under observation – by others and by himself. The racial-epidermal schema brings the body forcefully to consciousness, the focus of attention, which changes how one moves in the world. This is, for Fanon, a moment of involuntary reflection forced on him.

Cultural Permeation and Context

The idea that the thread of this historico-racial-epidermal schema is provided by the other, suggests that this situation is primarily an inter-relational one, or what Merleau-Ponty calls an intercorporeal relation. That is, it will not be sufficient to understand this situation simply in terms of implicit biases or mental attitudes in the head of the white man, or in this case, the white boy. To see this, consider a recent experiment that explicates some important features of what Merleau-Ponty calls intercorporeity.

In one sense, the experiment, conducted by Soliman and Glenberg (2014), has a relatively limited scope in that it focuses on a specific case of synchronic joint action. Despite this, they manage to explore some much larger implications. With respect to the limited scope, Soliman and Glenberg claim that when two people engage in a joint action that requires synchronic coordinated movement (cooperatively moving a wire back and forth to cut through a candle, in the experiment) a “joint body schema” is formed. The experiment is behaviorally simple, but neuroscientifically complex. We can summarize this complexity by saying that activation in specific areas of the brain that register peripersonal (i.e., reachable) space indicate an expansion of that space during the task, similar to the way that during tool use the body schema extends or, correlatively, peripersonal space expands. In effect the individual’s sense of peripersonal space expands to incorporate the other agent. On one reading, it may be simply that processes in each individual agent change – individual body schemas expand, altering subpersonal processes that generate an *individual* sense of joint agency and a feeling of being in sync with the other. On a more enactivist reading, the two bodies may form a larger dynamical intercorporeal action system, so that the joint body schema belongs only to this larger system. This latter interpretation is supported in studies of entrainment or sensorimotor synchronization (Glowinski et al. 2013; Repp and Su 2013).

This interesting finding is the basis for a much larger point that is relevant to the issue at hand. Specifically, Soliman and Glenberg go on to show that these effects (joint body schemas and expanded peripersonal space) are culturally relative. When they conduct the experiment with subjects from cultures characterized by social independence or individuality (e.g., North American) and then with subjects from interdependent cultures (e.g., Asian), they find that the

neuronal and behavioral details are different – the effects are stronger in subjects from interdependent cultures. This suggests, as Soliman and Glenberg note, that culture should not be viewed simply as a top-down effect on behavior, but as something that permeates embodied existence – and specifically reaches into body schematic processes.

[C]ulture enters the scene not as a self-contained layer on top of behavior, but as the sum of sensorimotor knowledge brought about by a bodily agent interacting in a social and physical context. As such, culture diffuses the web of sensorimotor knowledge, and can only be arbitrarily circumscribed from other knowledge.

(Soliman and Glenberg 2014: 209)

This idea of cultural permeation¹ clearly supports Fanon’s concept of a historico-racial schema, “woven out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” including the encounter with the young boy. Here we note that it is not just the boy’s gaze that decomposes Fanon’s body schema; there are words uttered; there are attitudes involved; and there are also witnesses, so there is a complicated context or social situation involved.

In this respect we want to emphasize the importance of context. Indeed, Bertram Gawronski (2019) argues that contextual factors are important for any understanding of implicit bias.

In fact, the available evidence suggests that contextual factors determine virtually every finding with implicit measures, including (a) their overall scores, (b) their temporal stability, (c) the prediction of future behavior, and (d) the effectiveness of interventions. Although the significance of contextual factors has been identified in the early years of research with implicit measures . . . contextual thinking has still not penetrated the mainstream narrative about implicit bias.

(2019: 584–585)

In Gawronski’s review, even as he stays relatively close to the mainstream cognitivist account involving mental states, traits, stored information, internal representations, and conceptual categories, he identifies a number of embodied and contextual factors that have been shown to affect the measure of racial bias, including the emotional states of the perceiver, the environment in which a given target person is encountered, and the social role of the perceiver.

If in fact, to understand implicit bias we need to consider not just the specifics of dynamical and embodied social interaction, but also context, and cultural permeation, then a focus on “in-the-head” mental states or mental attitudes is not enough. Practically speaking, whether it’s about adjusting our individual behaviors, or developing training policies for the police force, it is not just about changing minds – as if individual cognitive therapy might be the appropriate way to address the issue.² Rather, it also has to be about changing culture.

The Boy

But what about the boy? Was his encounter with Fanon a limit-situation for him as well? Is there a historical-racial schema underneath his body schema? If so, does it collapse as well? Can we say that the boy’s implicit bias and his declaration are racist? If so, in what sense? Here, there is almost too much to take into account to explain the boy’s actions. We will focus on two interconnected factors: affectivity and the issue of development.

For both Fanon and the boy, affect, in the broadest sense, is playing a major role in the encounter. Fanon is cold and this manifests in his body – he is shivering. “[T]he Negro is trembling with

cold . . . the lovely little boy is trembling because he thinks the Negro is trembling with rage” (Fanon 2008: 93). The boy is shaking with fear, and it seems clear that there are resonance and looping effects that push along a set of responses and behaviors. The role of affect in perception and social cognition, often ignored in traditional cognitivist mindreading accounts, should not be underestimated (Colombetti 2014; Gallagher and Bower 2014; Ratcliffe 2008). To say the boy has a certain mental attitude, even an implicit one, is to tell only a small part of the story. The boy is reacting in an affective-embodied way to his encounter with a black man. Indeed, one might suggest that the trembling is part of, and not a small part, of his attitude.

Affect shapes our ability to cope with the surrounding world. In the broadest sense it includes emotion processes, but also more general and basic bodily, autonomic states such as hunger, fatigue, pain. Affect is a form of world-involving intentionality that can modulate bodily behavior without necessarily possessing informational-representational value of any kind. Affect works differently in different contexts. Some important differences may have to do with the way that affective factors are integrated with motoric/agentive factors – the kinetic and kinaesthetic feelings associated with body-schematic processes. In other contexts, even for highly intelligent adults, affect may interfere with our ability to make formal judgments. Consider a study by Danziger et al. (2011) which shows that hunger can bias cognitive processes. The study shows that the application of legal reasoning is not sufficient to explain a legal judgment. Whether the judge is hungry or satiated may play an important role. In one particular courtroom,

The percentage of favorable rulings drops gradually from ≈65% to nearly zero within each decision session [e.g., between breakfast and lunch] and returns abruptly to ≈65% after a [food] break. Our findings suggest that judicial rulings can be swayed by extraneous variables that should have no bearing on legal decisions.

(Danziger et al. 2011: 1)

Affective factors may be “extraneous” to the formal aspects of legal reasoning but are central to perception and behavior.

More directly related to the boy’s encounter with Fanon, there is good reason to believe that affect has direct relevance to how we perceive others. Think of the variety of affective possibilities when others are present: we may simply watch passers-by, we may peek into a room of familiar faces, we may be listening attentively, we may be in a heated quarrel, or accidentally meeting someone with whom we were recently quarreling, etc. Each instance comes along with a certain embodied affect, for example, tensing or loosening of posture or facial expression, folding one’s arms, gesturing with one’s hands, or trembling, etc. Bodily affects are also mediated by acquired habits of social behavior; they have a complexity and history that shape behavior. A habit or routine is “wedded to the lived body” (Ngo 2017: 1), and can become part of one’s affective repertoire. Moreover, agents “tend to embody the habits of the social groups to which [they] belong” (Lebouf 2020: 49). This idea motivates Beeghly and Madva to suggest that implicit biases “consist in bodily habits, rather than mental activity per se” (2020: 6). The child begins life under the influence of others, and in a broad culture where he picks up affections and attitudes from other bodies, and forms habits through active participation with these other bodies. The child thus takes up a history that has been heavily influenced by the habits of his social group.

These considerations already bring us to issues that concern development. One might ask how a child so young could possibly be racially biased. There is little consensus in the implicit bias literature. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that children as young as 6 years manifest implicit biases indistinguishable from those of adults (e.g., Banse et al. 2010; Gawronski 2019).

On the other hand, there is some indication that children can, as early as 6 years, openly report racial preferences. “These patterns suggest that children form *explicit* biases early on, but gradually learn that these biases are wrong, and not OK to say out loud” (Beeghly and Madva 2020: 4). This seems to suggest that the explicit ideas/attitudes of childhood become the implicit ideas/attitudes of adulthood, as adults become aware of the social pressures exerted on the overt expression of these ideas. This raises an interesting tension, however, since these same individuals are “immersed in a broadly prejudiced society” (Beeghly and Madva 2020: 4). It seems worth asking if something is missing in such accounts; namely, an explanation of how a broadly prejudiced society both promotes and forbids explicit racial bias. The explanation is not simply that concepts are accessible in the environment (Payne et al. 2017) and “children and adults tend to live in the same cultural environments” (Gawronski 2019: 584), although this goes in the right direction of cultural permeation.

Greenwald and Krieger (2006) suggest that there are several important early influences on attitudes (including affective experiences). They argue that these influences may have an important impact on the implicit attitudes of individuals, and that this explains “why implicit attitudes generally reveal more bias [than explicit attitudes]” (Greenwald and Krieger 2006: 959). At least part of the explanation is that bodily affect is present in social perception from early infancy, as demonstrated in studies of infant cognition and imitation. As part of primary intersubjective interactions during the first year, affective tuning occurs as early as five to seven months (Gopnik and Meltzoff 1997; Trevarthen 1979). This type of communicative process can happen non-consciously; children can easily pick up attitudes expressed in their care-givers’ postures, facial expressions, gestures, and vocal intonations. It’s not by explicit instruction, but by communication of specific attitudes in non-conscious bodily expressions (Darwall 1998: 265), which define social affordances (what I can do with others) and disaffordances (what I cannot do with others).

The developmental processes underpinning our understanding of and attitudes toward others are extensive. *Primary intersubjectivity* involves early developing sensory-motor capacities for face-to-face interactions that start in the first year of life and typically involve embodied affective processes of give and take between infant and caregiver. These capacities allow us to engage with others by perceptually attuning to their bodily postures, movements, gestures, facial expressions, gaze direction, vocal intonation, etc. We are able to pick up on the other’s intention and emotional expression, and we can respond with our own bodily movements and actions (Trevarthen 1979). *Secondary intersubjectivity*, starting with possibilities of joint attention around 9 months of age, involves interactions and joint actions in social and pragmatic contexts (Trevarthen and Hubley 1978; see Gallagher 2020). Both primary and secondary intersubjectivity persist throughout the life span.

It is through these capabilities established in primary and secondary intersubjectivities that children begin to learn from others what is ‘reasonably’ expected of them in social situations. Further enculturation comes through narrative practices. Children learn many narratives in interaction with others. At 2–3 years children appropriate the narratives of others for their own (Bruner 1996; Nelson 2003a, 2003b; Trevarthen 2013), so that their own narratives are shaped by the attitudes and actions of others, and by the broader narratives in their culture and society. Children learn from narratives (if defined broadly, this would include not just bedtime stories, but television, movies and other media); they learn not only what actions are suited to particular situations but also what reasons for acting are or are not acceptable (Gallagher and Hutto 2008). Through an education in narratives (sometimes enacted in play) children absorb the values and attitudes and learn how to judge an action’s appropriateness. They learn what others ought to do, think and feel, often indexed to the sort of people they are and what social roles they play.

That is, they learn the *norms* associated with the social roles that pervade our everyday environments, and that are continuous with primary and secondary intersubjective interactions (Gua-jardo and Watson 2002: 307). This is the child's historical-racial schema, described by Fanon as intersubjectively composed of "a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories." In effect children stitch their world together into a habitus that they live through their bodies.

Considering processes of embodied intersubjectivity, contextualized interaction, habit formation, and narrative practices, suggests that biases are more than simply internal mental states. In the first instance the body is already in a formative relationship with these biases well before these moments of demonstration. Lebouf argues,

On an embodied view of implicit bias, to harbor an implicit bias simply means to 'use the body' in a biased way. This does not mean that we actively or consciously choose to use our bodies in biased ways. . . . On an embodied conception . . . what it means to be implicitly biased is to interact with the world – whether directly with other persons or with the objects associated with them – according to patterns that are barely in the background of our awareness.

(Lebouf 2020: 48)

This is also the child's body schema, developed in the "slow construction of . . . a body in a spatial and temporal world" that structures self and world (Fanon 2008: 91).

Embodied Racism

Where exactly does racism reside? The implicit bias literature argues that explicit racism can be seen in overt actions of individuals (e.g. shouting out a racial slur), whereas the implicit kind of racism consists of a set of unconscious ideas that hide in the head of the individual. An account based on embodied cognition endorses a different view. Although racism is neither exclusively conscious, nor entirely non-conscious, and, as Ngo argues, it "sit[s] in the grey region of acquired orientation" (2017: 26), on an embodied cognition account it is not an abstract thing, but is inscribed and circumscribed in bodies, habits, affective attitudes, interactions, narratives, and more generally in cultural practices. Racial attitudes are among those that are learned through bodily and cultural practices. As a result, racism will be "deeply embedded in our bodily habits of movement, gesture, perception, and orientation" (Ngo 2017: 1). In agreement with Fanon, Ngo argues that "the experience of racism and racialization intrudes into this [body-schematic] coordination straining the fluidity of the experience of the body" (2017: 66).

Racism's effect on the motor capacities of the body may not be the same for every body, however. After all, "[i]n a world where racism exists, racialized bodies come predetermined . . . with coded meanings" (Ngo 2017: 16), while a racist body may feel quite at home. As the (black) body is observed walking down the street, watching him suspiciously is not merely a cognitive response to the social milieu, but the very watching enacts the suspicion and reinforces that social milieu. According to Ngo:

Discursive representations come into being through their enactment and embodiment. . . . The ease with which such gestures are enacted in response to the racialized 'other' – that is to say, the extent to which they are not anomalous or exceptional in the history of one's body schema, but rather coherent and consistent with it – supports the ascription of habit.

(2017: 17, 24)

Such habits find their support in the historical-racial schema that holds the world together. Implicit attitudes, because they resonate with the habitual body, do not appear as aberrant, and because they are drawn from the social environment, they do not appear aberrant in society: “Where norms and expectations about different kinds of people are communicated to us in subtle and not so subtle ways. Biases thus reflect inequalities and norms in society at large” (Beeghly and Madva 2020: 7). Accordingly, instead of hiding in the head, racial biases emerge out of a complex relationship between the living body and the world, and may already be on display in one’s bodily habits as one moves through the world.

“Look, a Negro! Maman, a Negro!” The declaration was revelatory, for both Fanon and the young boy. Fanon’s articulation of this moment problematizes any conclusion that places implicit (racial) biases exclusively “in the head.” It frustrates the strict distinction between ideas (in the head) and the expression of those ideas (through the body). Such a distinction leads to some misleading conclusions about racism/racist actions. Color-coded bodies play a critical role in the development and experience of racist actions. They show up so often in the world and often without great fanfare (like this moment on the train) because “the racializing schema is already present – and indeed already operative – on a pre-conscious, pre-reflective level, in situations where race is not already explicitly thematized” (Ngo 2017: 69). It is worth noting how early this schema was available to the boy, already settling (settled) into his body. His body was primed to respond to the encounter with a black body in this way.

If the encounter disrupted Fanon’s body schema, did it have the same effect on the little boy? There seems to be a related counterpart to Fanon’s weaving of a ‘thousand details, anecdotes, and stories’ being weaved into the little boy. When the boy announces Fanon’s presence, the boy seems to know what it means to have spotted a ‘Negro.’ At least, he knows he is not one. The boy responds to Fanon’s bodily movement as the world has taught him to. His response – running into his mother’s arms – is a reasonable expectation in light of the culture that has permeated his development. Fanon, however, is just trembling because he is cold. The boy’s response resonates this bodily effect, but he trembles because he is afraid Fanon will eat him. The intersubjective resonance that is always potentially empathic is broken or disrupted. The historical-racial schema has facilitated this fracture; the narrative has intervened.³ The young boy’s mother dismisses the moment as innocent. She reassures Fanon that he too is civilized (i.e., not a cannibal) (Fanon 2008: 85). Does she mean that the boy’s behavior was just an aberration rather than the habitual response reflective of the broader civilized world?

Notes

- 1 The concept of cultural permeation is contrasted with cognitive penetration. See Hutto et al. (2020). For a good discussion of cognitive penetration in the context of implicit bias, see Siegel (2020).
- 2 Consider the study by Lai et al. (2014), which examined the effects of 18 different interventions, almost all of them purely cognitive (e.g., having white subjects consider different perspectives via imagining thoughts, feelings, and actions of Black individuals). Half of the interventions were ineffective. In a follow-up study (Lai et al. 2016) compared nine of the most effective interventions to reveal that none of them resulted in stable reductions over time (see Gawronski 2019 who relates this to ignoring context).
- 3 The question of sincerity may not be a helpful one in interpreting this moment. Ngo argues that fear does not exclude the possibility of sincerity and/or vice versa (Ngo 2017: 17). The question of whether he really thought he was going to be eaten is not critical here. That is, sincerity does not diminish the

impact of the racist action. The historical-racial schema is a problem whether or not someone genuinely ascribes to it.

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