

Racism is an adamant problem in our nation, one that is so rooted into the foundation of our systems that it's hard to see. In our current climate this racism is coming to a forefront more than it has in many years. With movements such as Black Lives Matter, BLM, the recognition of systematic racism and brutality by those in charge has been highlighted and no action has gone unnoticed. With heavy focus on police brutality towards minorities it's important to also focus on other systems and the racism within them. The focus of this paper will be the impact white doctors have on black patients within the United States.

When thinking of the word law, many people picture rules set into place by the government in order to protect or restrain citizens. However, everything in life has laws. Each society follows a set of rules: norms, customs and traditions all fall under this category. All social institutions such as family, polity, crime, corporation, and individuals all have requirements and comprise of different laws.¹ Within the healthcare system there are laws both placed by higher power and some made by the customs and norms of their social institution. Author Paul R. Jones wrote about a study on black college students and health-related stereotype threats that predict health services delays.² John Reid, a black diabetic, presented to the doctors a toe infection and was advised to amputate it when there are less invasive alternatives that exist.³ He stated:

I think it was very disrespectful. As a matter of fact, I think [the doctor] was looking down on me... She just decided that this guy was a minority [and] we're going to do whatever we feel like

¹ Sagheer, S. (2020, April 18). Relationship between Sociology and Law. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.sociologygroup.com/relationship-sociology-law/>

² Jones, P. R. (2013, June). Health-Related Stereotype Threat Predicts Health Services Delays Among Blacks. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3806300/>

³ Cohen E. Does your doctor judge you based on your color? CNN health.com. 2009 Jul 26; Retrieved from CNN health.com website: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/HEALTH/07/23/doctors.attitude.race.weight/>.

doing without consulting you.... She just felt like minorities are all the same—they don't know anything, they're not intelligent, they're not educated.⁴

Black patients often are associated with stereotypes and perceived differently than white patients. It was found that half of white medical trainees believe that black people have: thicker skin, less sensitive nerve endings, their blood coagulates faster and feels less pain than white people.⁵ It is stereotypes like this that cause inadequate treatment of minorities'. You'd think, with all the science and equipment we have doctors would be able to adequately help each patient. However, even if we have the most advanced technology in the world, systematic racism will continue to take the win if not dealt with. According to a study published by the *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science*, half of trainees surveyed held one or more false beliefs about black patients.⁶ Why are these students not being corrected? These myths about black people's differences lead to inadequate medical treatment. For example, another study in 2016 showed that black people were less likely to be treated for pain appropriately and 22% likely to not be treated at all.⁷

Another question that comes to mind is where does this unequal treatment stem from? Which is honestly a stupid question considering racism has never not been around. However, some specific reasons for these perceptions from doctors are: socioeconomic status, educational

⁴Jones, P. R. (2013, June). Health-Related Stereotype Threat Predicts Health Services Delays Among Blacks. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3806300/>

⁵Sabin, J. (2020, January 06). How we fail black patients in pain. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/how-we-fail-black-patients-pain>

⁶ Sabin, J. (2020, January 06). How we fail black patients in pain. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/how-we-fail-black-patients-pain>

⁷ Sabin, J. (2020, January 06). How we fail black patients in pain. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/how-we-fail-black-patients-pain>

disparities, history of medical maltreatment, cultural mistrust, and of course... the color of your skin.⁸ This blossoms a distrust for doctors from blacks and develops cultural stereotypes held by blacks. A chain reaction takes place once there is no more trust; lack of willingness to go to doctor, continue to go untreated, your life expectancy lowers.

To explain the power dynamic within the healthcare system, Avery Gordon's quote from *Ghostly Matters* is a strong explanation: "'Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine... from blatant white supremacy and state terror to 'furniture without memories.'"⁹ The doctors, nurses, and head of departments hold the power within the healthcare system. They are put into such a position that we people put our lives in their hands and expect to be able to trust them. However, they are using their innate power to continue to oppress and hurt a demographic of people. This leads me into Saidiya Hartman's view on power; Hartman focuses on the power of domination and brutal power. She's focusing on these spectacular and terrifying moments of power being taken. Power is materialized within the law itself and you cannot touch it. This is a way power is enforced and maintained. Medical professionals have this innate and invisible power that hasn't been questioned... until recently.

What role does the state play within the healthcare system? Rarely any and the role it does play doesn't help anyone besides the 1%. Unlike everywhere else, America does not have a universal healthcare system, leaving an estimated 8.5% citizens uninsured. When it comes to the safety of blacks within the medical system, there is no protection from the states. Patients, as stated before, are expected to trust doctors and what they are saying. We as a country are still

⁸Jones, P. R. (2013, June). Health-Related Stereotype Threat Predicts Health Services Delays Among Blacks. Retrieved October 02, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3806300/>

⁹ Gordon, A. (2011). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

fighting to have black people be able to walk down the street without being murdered, it's gonna take some time for us to get to equality within our healthcare system. That is why it is important to bring attention to the injustice black Americans face on a daily basis, even in places made for safety and help. There are however laws in place against discrimination based on ethnicity, disability, gender, etc. But no one listens to it of course.