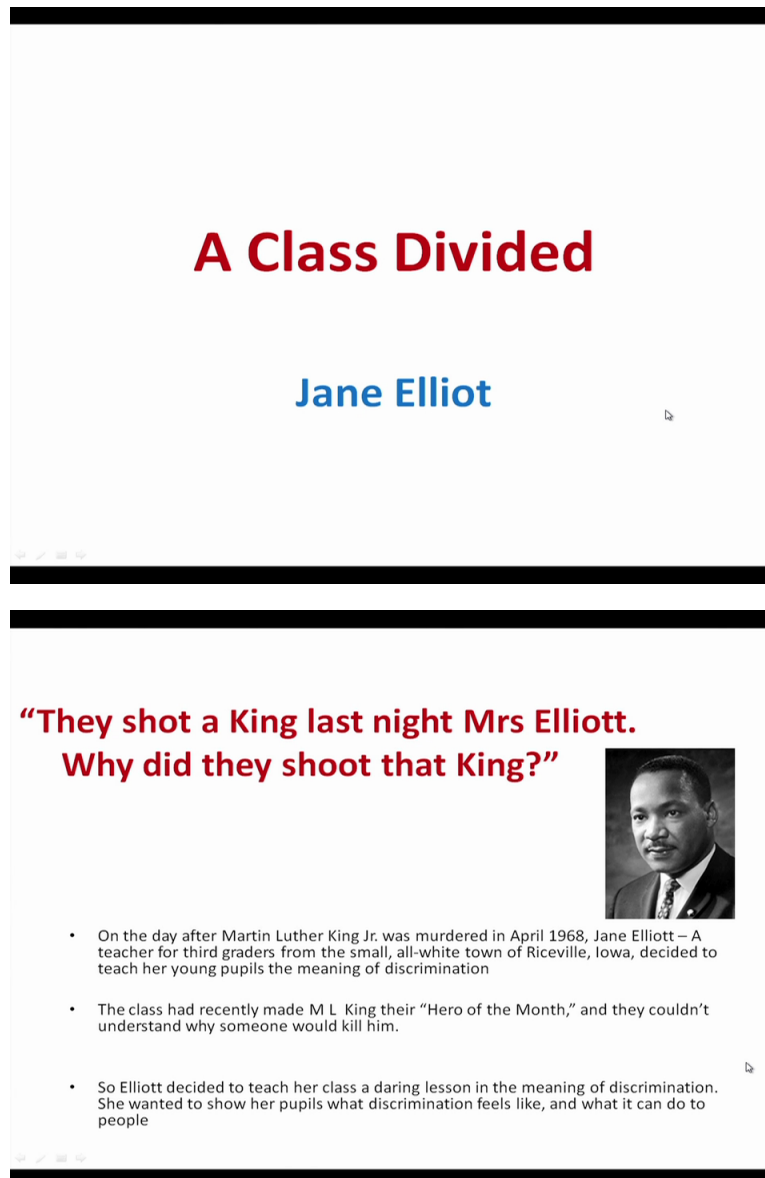


**Course on Great Experiments in Psychology**  
**Professor Rajlakshmi Guha**  
**Centre for Educational Technology**  
**Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur**  
**Module 4**  
**Lecture No 17**  
**A Class Divided**


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**A Class Divided**

**Jane Elliot**

**“They shot a King last night Mrs Elliott.  
Why did they shoot that King?”**



- On the day after Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered in April 1968, Jane Elliott – A teacher for third graders from the small, all-white town of Riceville, Iowa, decided to teach her young pupils the meaning of discrimination
- The class had recently made M L King their “Hero of the Month,” and they couldn’t understand why someone would kill him.
- So Elliott decided to teach her class a daring lesson in the meaning of discrimination. She wanted to show her pupils what discrimination feels like, and what it can do to people

Hello everybody welcome back in today’s class we are going to talk about an experiment in psychology which has not been conducted in the universities or it has not been conducted by a professor of psychology, but by a teacher who taught third graders in this town of Iowa and in town of Riceville in Iowa and this is one of the most enigmatic and wonderful teaching experiences that a teacher could give and this involves several psychology principles, so and

followed rigorous experimentation procedures. So I thought that you know we should discuss this in our class study on great experiments and studies in psychology. So this is a famous study done by Jane Elliott she is a student for third grader in Iowa and the story is named the study is named “the class divided”.

So it happened – in April 1968, the day after Martin Luther king Jr what short. So when Jane Elliott went to school next day a third graders asked her, “they short a King last night Mrs. Elliott, why did they showed that King?” And that is the time when Jane Elliott, the teacher for the third grader in an all-white town’s school in Riceville Iowa thought that she must explain to her students the reasons o principles of discrimination and she should teach her students how why and how you know we should fight against discrimination, how it feels like to be discriminated and she felt that you know just by saying this it would not work site would rather be important for the student to go through an experiential way to realize how it feels like to be discriminated and she felt that this would be a one-time experience which actually help the students to grow up better.

So the class had actually what happened was that in that month they had named Martin Luther King as a hero of the month for the class and the students the young children of class grade 3 could not understand why somebody would kill him. So Elliot decided each class a daring lesson in the meaning of discrimination and how did she do that. She actually divided her class into two groups and based on the eye color, so she selected the she made the students of one group was the blue eyed group and the other was the brown eyed group.

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### **Jane Elliott...**


**“ The Blue Eyed /Brown Eyed workshop is not an experiment; it is an exercise or experience. I don't experiment with people without their permission. What I do with the exercise is attempt to create a microcosm of society in a small setting for a short time. If what happens during the exercise looks like an experiment, perhaps it's time to realize that we've been running an experiment on the people in the US for many years and it's way past time to put a stop you it. When society stops running the skin color experiment, I'll stop using the eye color exercise”**

So according to Jane Elliott the blue eyed brown eyed workshop is not an experiment, it is an exercise or experience. I do not experiment with people without the permission. What I do with the exercise is an attempted to create a microcosm of society in a small setting or short time. If what happens during the exercise looks like an experiment, perhaps it is time to realize that we have been running an experiment on the people in the US for many years and it is way past time to put a stop to it.

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### The test....

- Elliott divided her class by eye color — those with blue eyes and those with brown
- On the first day, the blue-eyed children were treated favourably and brown eyed children discriminately
- On the second day, the roles were reversed and the blue-eyed children were made to feel inferior while the brown eyes were designated the dominant group




<http://www.thesociologicalcinema.com/uploads/4/8/3/9/4839762/9110109.jpg?1411315765>

### Day 1

- She suggests that over two days, the class will be split into blue-eyed and brown-eyed students and that on the first day, blue-eyed people are better than brown-eyed people
- This means that they get extra recess
- can drink right from the fountain
- may have seconds at lunch and
- can play on the playground equipment

Brown-eyed students must use a paper cup to drink from the fountain, may not play with blue-eyed children, must stay off the playground equipment and wear collars around their necks to be easily identifiable

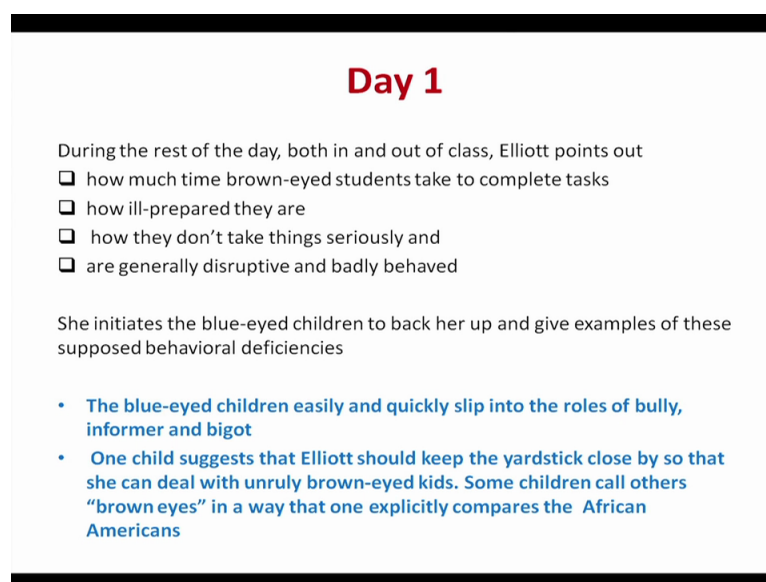


When society stops running the skin color experiment, I will stop using the eye color exercise. So basically then so she started with the blue eyed and she divided her class into a blue eyed group and a brown eyed group and after dividing them on the first day they were given different kind of treatment and so what is did she do on the one.

So she suggested at over the two days, the class will be split into a blue eyed and brown eyed students and that on the first day, the blue eyed people are she suggested that the blue eyed people are better than the brown eyed people and she provided instances and how they were better, how they were less argumentative, how they follow things better in class and she gave them extra privileges, so the blue eyed children in the class actually got extra privileges and what did that mean?

This this meant that they would get an extra recess, they could drink right from the fountain, they could have seconds help second helpings at lunch and could play in the playground with all the equipment, playground equipment and the brown eyed students, who were actually not in the preferential group, who are been discriminated against, would have to use a paper cup to drink from the fountain, may not play with the blue eyed children.

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**Day 1**

During the rest of the day, both in and out of class, Elliott points out

- how much time brown-eyed students take to complete tasks
- how ill-prepared they are
- how they don't take things seriously and
- are generally disruptive and badly behaved

She initiates the blue-eyed children to back her up and give examples of these supposed behavioral deficiencies

- **The blue-eyed children easily and quickly slip into the roles of bully, informer and bigot**
- **One child suggests that Elliott should keep the yardstick close by so that she can deal with unruly brown-eyed kids. Some children call others "brown eyes" in a way that one explicitly compares the African Americans**

So she was separating the 2 groups and they must stay of the playground equipment and wear collars around their necks to be easily identifiable. So what she did was, she made all the children wear collars, so the brown eyed children wear collars on the first day and thereafter during the rest of the day both in and out of class, Elliott pointed out at most of the time brown eyed students a more time to complete the task, they were more ill-prepared and they did not take task seriously and are generally and generally disruptive and badly behaved.

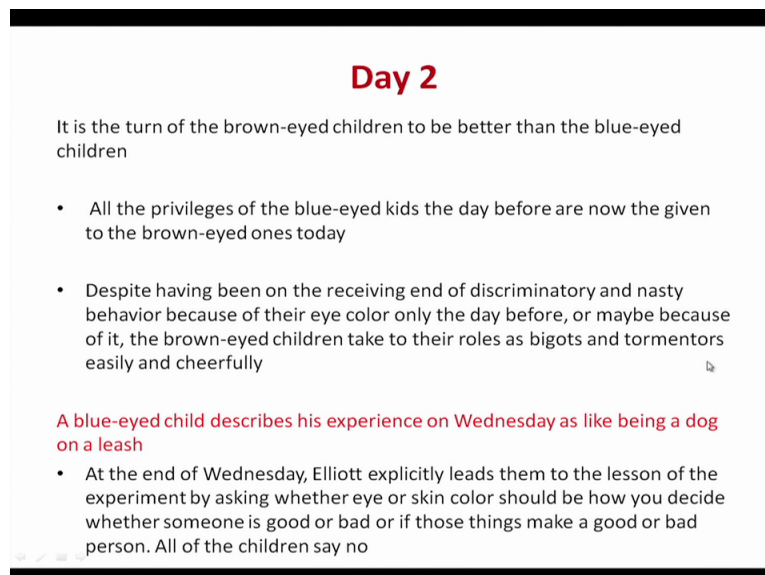
So this, these are the things she kept pointing, so these were teases that she kept giving to the children that see the brown eyed children are not doing the task properly, they are actually brown eyed people are not good, so brown eyed people cannot perform well, brown eyed

people do not take things seriously and they are generally disruptive and badly behaved and she would also initiated the blue eyed children give examples that of in what she was saying was true, so she would call up a student and say do not do think so? And do not you think this is correct? So you know so this was she did this to segregate two groups so these are children who were friends, who played with each other who did not...

These were all white children mind you, so it was not even a color that was actually in keeping them making them separate from each other, but the results of this simple discrimination of blue eyes and brown eyes segregating the groups of into by just the eye color, brought in strange behaviour among the children, so it was seen that the blue eyed children easily and quickly slipped into the roles of the bully, the informer and the bigot.

So they actually old one of them told Elliot that she should keep a yardstick goes by so that she can deal with unruly brown-eyed kids and mind you these are all third graders and some children called others brown eyed as if we know this was actually reflective of a of the prejudice that was on based on racial discrimination. So the African-American how one would label an African-American, it was just the same way as the children were referring the blue eyed children were referring to the brown eyed children you know and labelling them.

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**Day 2**

It is the turn of the brown-eyed children to be better than the blue-eyed children

- All the privileges of the blue-eyed kids the day before are now the given to the brown-eyed ones today
- Despite having been on the receiving end of discriminatory and nasty behavior because of their eye color only the day before, or maybe because of it, the brown-eyed children take to their roles as bigots and tormentors easily and cheerfully

**A blue-eyed child describes his experience on Wednesday as like being a dog on a leash**

- At the end of Wednesday, Elliott explicitly leads them to the lesson of the experiment by asking whether eye or skin color should be how you decide whether someone is good or bad or if those things make a good or bad person. All of the children say no

So then the next day as it was the children were again told that Jane Elliot told them that well I have you know made a mistake yesterday and I realize that actually the brown eyed children are way better than the blue eyed children and all the privileges that the blue eyed kids got the day before were now given to the brown eyed children only. So the brown eyed children were

now given preferential treatment and the blue eyed children were not given those preferences and privileges and they were asked to wear the collar so the roles were reversed.

And despite having been on the receiving end of discriminatory and nasty behaviour because of their eye color only the day before, or maybe because of it, the brown eyed children change their roles to becoming bigots and tormentors easily and cheerfully. So now they became more dominating, so the roles had changed, so the moment they were ordered for the were told that they were the better ones and the blue eyed were actually the good ones, there the roles also changed, so they became more dominating and they were more tormenting towards the same peers who were now the now the blue eyed children were on the receiving end and actually later on after some performance test also.

After the class was almost over the later on she discussed this experience so Jane Elliott told the children she ended the experiment by saying that well I think this is a bad day and I also don't like this day because, you know perhaps because I am also blue eyed and then she asked all the children about their experiences and a blue eyed child describes the experience on Wednesday that is the second day as like being a dog on a leash.

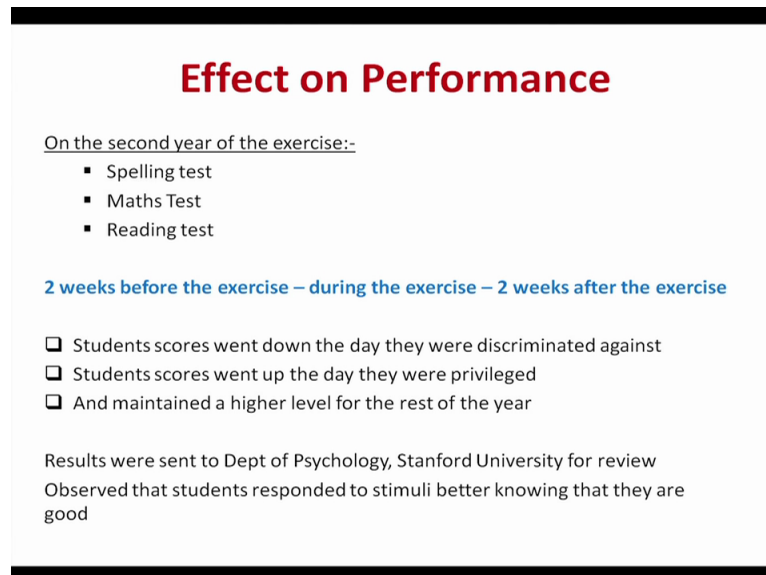
So that is the second day when he was being discriminated against and so these this was done on a Tuesday and Wednesday and at the end of Wednesday, Elliott explicitly led them to the lesson of the experiment by asking whether eye or skin color should be how one should decide whether someone is good or bad or even those things make a person a good or a bad person and all of the children said no.

Now this test, this was done in 1968 the first time so Jane Elliott did this after the day after the death of Martin Luther King Jr with and she practiced this exercise on discrimination, this experiential exercise on discrimination and its effects on human being in her class. Then she tried this exercise thereafter with several of the other classes every year and on the third time that she was doing this exercise with a third graders frontline actually recorded this whole session and later on they did a reunion 14 years later and they recorded the experience and what this whether this learning actually carried through to the children and then they learned or did not make them as you know how did it affect their ways of looking at proceeding people whether they were you know practising what was the prospective on discrimination.

So all these were assessed 14 years later and that video was also recorded so if you really wish to see this you just log on and you know you click onto a class divided is a very

interesting video and you will get to see the whole exercise that was done in 1970 and thereafter you know 14 years later also and now getting back to the experiment what Elliott did was she carried on some assessments before two weeks before the exercise during the exercise and two weeks after the exercise.

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**Effect on Performance**

On the second year of the exercise:-

- Spelling test
- Maths Test
- Reading test

**2 weeks before the exercise – during the exercise – 2 weeks after the exercise**

- Students scores went down the day they were discriminated against
- Students scores went up the day they were privileged
- And maintained a higher level for the rest of the year

Results were sent to Dept of Psychology, Stanford University for review  
Observed that students responded to stimuli better knowing that they are good

So they were spelling test, Math test and reading test and it was seen that students scores went down the day they were discriminated against. So the day that they felt that they were on a leash as a student describes or you know they were not getting privileges, they were not being they were being untreated you know in you know in a poor way in an ill way in an ill-mannered way, then that day their performance on the spelling test, Math test and reading test going down and the day they were getting the privileges or the day when they were being told that they were great people they were good people that day their scores went up and after that they maintain a high level for the rest of the year.

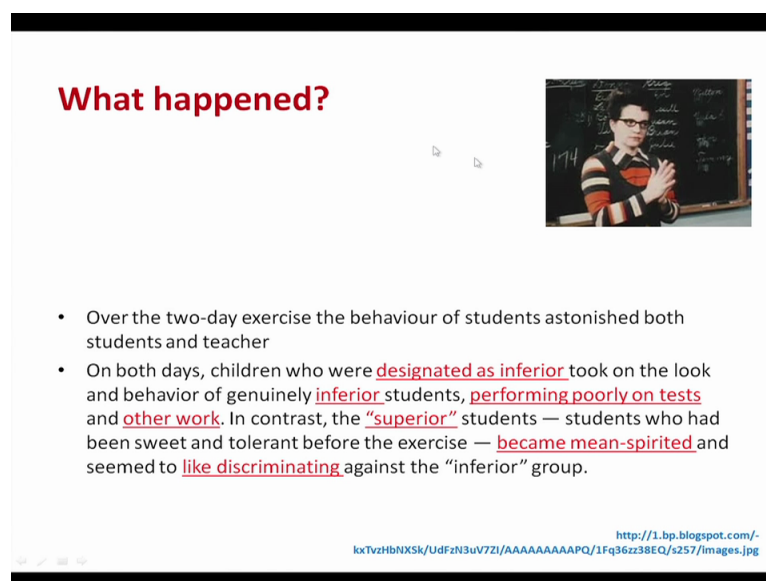
Now these results were actually sent to the Department of psychology, Stanford University and it was it was reviewed by some of the psychology professors there and they said that this was impossible at the performance was some effect on the economic performance of the students within 24 hours of time and that the academic performance have all gone up but this behaviour they said that it could not be explained. So probably the students responded the stimuli better knowing that they were they are good.

So probably you know that also gives us an awareness that you know if you if you give positive feedback to an individual your she feels better about it feels more confident and dust

and tries better knowing that I can do well and actually the other side of the story or the moment that you know we feel that we are not good, so we do not try that was actually done by Seligman in Martin Seligman in experiments on learned helplessness. So if you wish to look it up that is also another very interesting series on experiments.

So this shows that you know if you give positive feedback loop people they perform better on the other hand if you give constantly you put down a person so or you know if the person start feeling that I am helpless cannot do any better then he will not even try and that was actually these experiments were conducted by Martin Seligman it on learned helplessness.

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**What happened?**

- Over the two-day exercise the behaviour of students astonished both students and teacher
- On both days, children who were **designated as inferior** took on the look and behavior of genuinely **inferior** students, **performing poorly on tests** and **other work**. In contrast, the **“superior”** students — students who had been sweet and tolerant before the exercise — **became mean-spirited** and seemed to **like discriminating** against the “inferior” group.

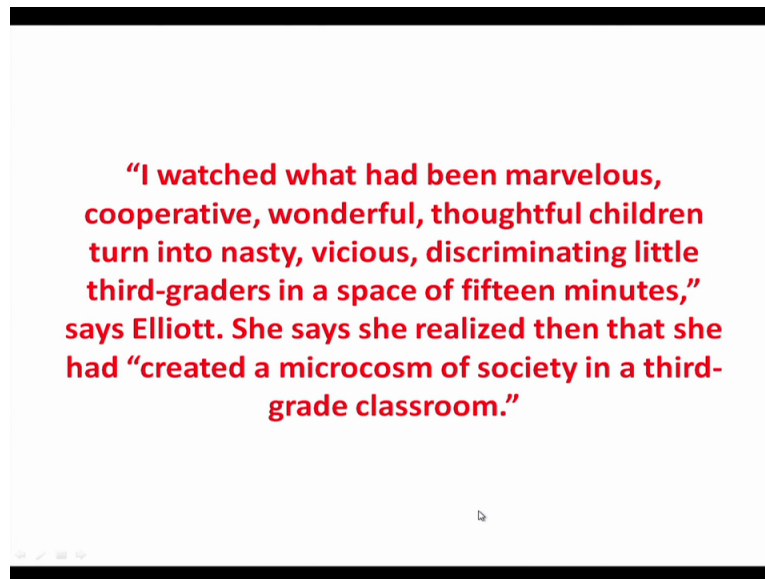
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So getting back to this, so what did Jane Elliott show over the through this exercise that the behaviour of the students astonished both the students and the teacher. So even they themselves were really astonished by their own behaviour the children and on both the days are children who were designated as inferior took on the look and behaviour of genuinely inferior students, performing poorly on in test as we saw and another work.

In contrast the superior students who actually were told that they are better than the others they become more sweet and tolerant before the exercise and became mean-spirited and seem to like discriminating against the inferior group. So they their behaviour was better towards the authority so who was actually a bring them but it was mean and discriminating towards the inferior group.

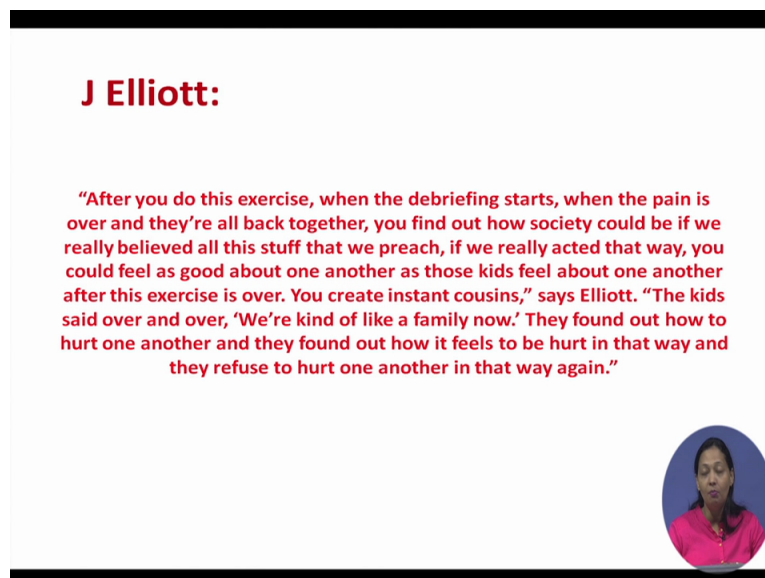


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So just imagine that this is just a reflection of how things work in society so as Elliott correctly pointed out at this was a microcosm of the society. So according to Elliott "I watched what had been marvelous, cooperative, wonderful, thoughtful children turn into nasty, vicious, discriminating little third graders in the space of 15 minutes" she says she realize then that she had "created a microcosm of society in a third grade classroom."

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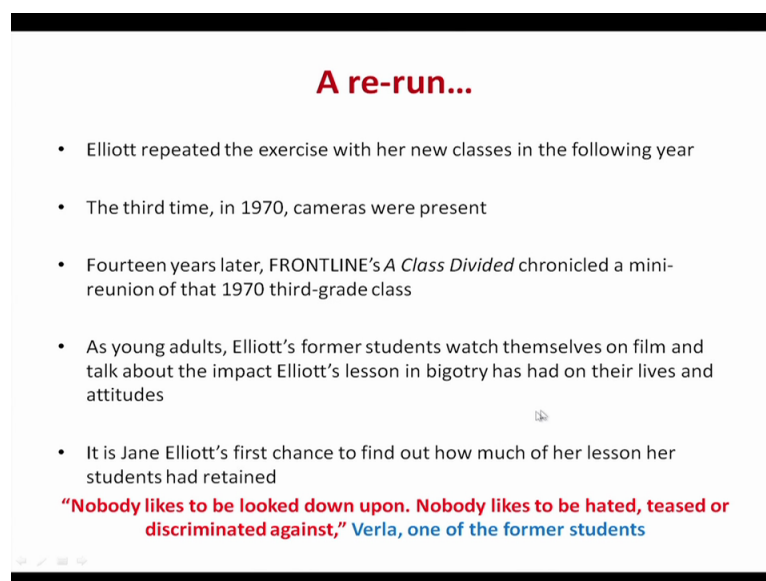


So that is how even in reality things work and you know when the (16:49) started after the exercise and when the pain is over and they are all back together, Elliott points out to find out how society could be if we really believe all the stuff that we preach, if we really acted that

way, you could feel as good about one another, those kids feel about one another after this exercise is over. You create instant cousins.

The kids said over and over we are kind of like a family now and they found out how to hurt one another and they found out how it feels to be hurt in that way and they refused to hurt one another in that way again.” And you know this review was done after 14 years again and when they were interacting they share their opinions how they felt, in fact some of their spouses also accompanied them to their reunion and this was know they discussed how they felt and how they reacted over the last 14 - 15 years of time.

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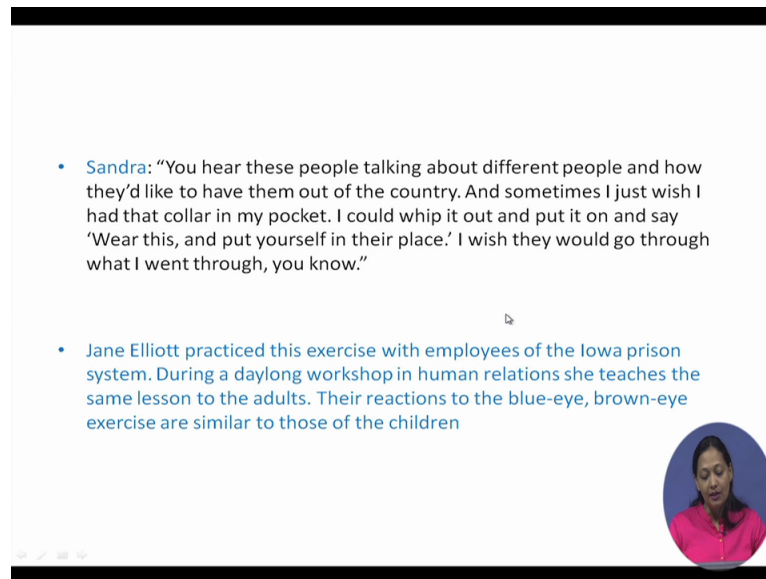
**A re-run...**

- Elliott repeated the exercise with her new classes in the following year
- The third time, in 1970, cameras were present
- Fourteen years later, FRONTLINE's *A Class Divided* chronicled a mini-reunion of that 1970 third-grade class
- As young adults, Elliott's former students watch themselves on film and talk about the impact Elliott's lesson in bigotry has had on their lives and attitudes
- It is Jane Elliott's first chance to find out how much of her lesson her students had retained

**"Nobody likes to be looked down upon. Nobody likes to be hated, teased or discriminated against," Verla, one of the former students**

So as I mentioned that this rerun was done when the frontline cameras were present in 1970 third class third-grade class later on they were actually shown to this group the serious again when I need after the reunion and how the students saw what did they say after 14 years, so as were, one of the former student says “nobody likes to be looked down upon. Nobody likes to be hated, teased or discriminated against” and Sandra says “you hear these people talking about different people and how they would like to have them out of the country.

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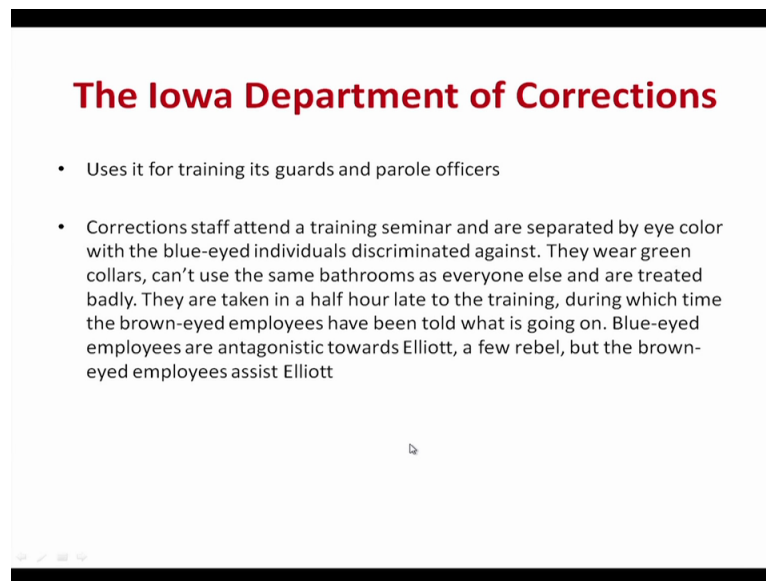
- Sandra: “You hear these people talking about different people and how they’d like to have them out of the country. And sometimes I just wish I had that collar in my pocket. I could whip it out and put it on and say ‘Wear this, and put yourself in their place.’ I wish they would go through what I went through, you know.”
- Jane Elliott practiced this exercise with employees of the Iowa prison system. During a daylong workshop in human relations she teaches the same lesson to the adults. Their reactions to the blue-eye, brown-eye exercise are similar to those of the children

And sometimes I just wish I had that collar in my pocket. So she is referring to this exercise that she had carried on in her third-grade, so this is you know these are some of the quotes from the reunion. I could whip it out and put it on and say where this and put yourself in their place” so these children had grown up to be more mature and they basically because they have been in the same discriminated position earlier. “So I wish they would go through what I went through and you know”.

So Jane Elliot has been after you know starting this lesson with third graders she actually got this to a larger perspective and she started doing this practising this in the as training sessions for several other organisations as well and one of them being the Iowa prison system and in a during a day-long workshop in human relations she teaches the same lesson to the adults and she still does not.

So she has a website of her own and you can look it up and they are reactions to the blue eye brown eye exercise strangely are similar like those of the children. So it does not really matter whether they are third graders or they are training officers and guards in the Department of corrections. So if you just see this video is very interesting because you know you are how they start the discrimination.

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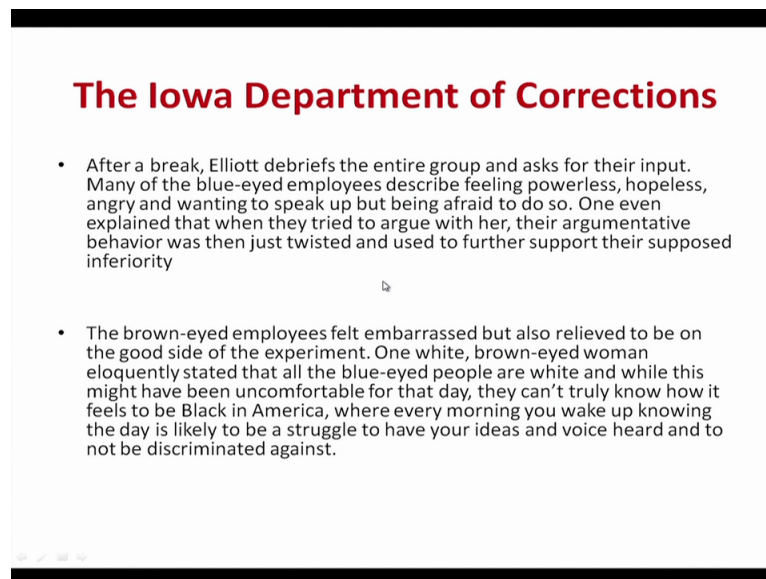


So this was also recorded you know one of her training sessions in Iowa Department of corrections and here this corrections staff attend the training seminar and they separated by their eye color with blue eyed individuals being discriminated against and the blue eyed individuals have to wear green collars. They cannot use the bathroom as everyone else and are treated badly and they are made to the outside while the Brown eyed people are taken into the workshop and they made to wait outside then even after half an hour's time when they get in all of them are not they do not have seats and they are the Brown eyed people, most of them also do are not going to not they do not allow them to sit beside the Brown eyed people.

So then so with over the session Elliott constantly keeps pointing out, how inefficient the blue eyed people are, how badly they you know they did not follow the orders, so this exercise that she carries out with the Iowa prison guards and parole officers is one on she says that the workshop is initially that the workshop is on listening skills and she every time, she points out during the exercise that this is you know the blue eyed people do not listen active and they are not good listener and they do not follow orders, they cannot follow things properly, they do not follow instructions, so continuously there is lot of ridicule and rebuke.

So if you if you just watch this video you will see that you know what actually happens is, she is discriminating against this group and you know she is making them feel tormented, she made she makes them feel less and you know they cannot the moment they rebuke try to retaliate and strangely it is only one part of the group who tries to retaliate and she suppresses the retaliation, while the others they keep quiet.

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## The Iowa Department of Corrections

- After a break, Elliott debriefs the entire group and asks for their input. Many of the blue-eyed employees describe feeling powerless, hopeless, angry and wanting to speak up but being afraid to do so. One even explained that when they tried to argue with her, their argumentative behavior was then just twisted and used to further support their supposed inferiority
- The brown-eyed employees felt embarrassed but also relieved to be on the good side of the experiment. One white, brown-eyed woman eloquently stated that all the blue-eyed people are white and while this might have been uncomfortable for that day, they can't truly know how it feels to be Black in America, where every morning you wake up knowing the day is likely to be a struggle to have your ideas and voice heard and to not be discriminated against.

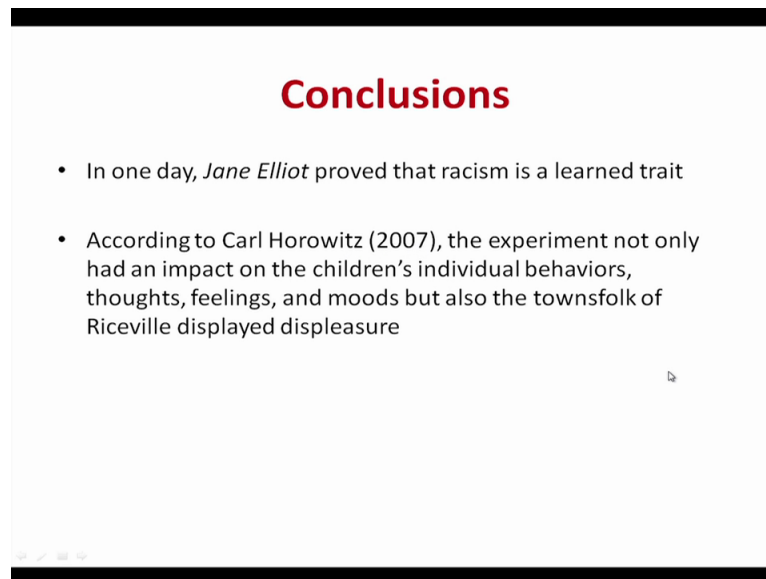
And then after a break Elliot debrief the entire group and asked for the input and many of the blue eyed employees described feeling powerless, hopeless, angry and wanting to speak up but being afraid to do so. One even explains in one of these sessions the recorded sessions I am talking about the recorded session that you will actually get to see from the frontline videos and there they explain one individual explains that, when they try to argue with her, their argumentative behaviour is then just twisted and used to further support their supposed inferiority. So it is it is like you know see he is arguing, that just means that, see because he is inferior he is arguing, so it is just twisted and put forth against them against the individual.

So the Brown eyed employees actually felt embarrassed and one of them said that, I am relieved that I do not have blue eyes and one White Brown eyed women stated that all the blue eyed people are white and while this might have been uncomfortable, they cannot truly know how it feels to be black in America, where every morning you wake up knowing that days going to be a struggle and to have your ideas and voices heard and not be discriminated against. So you know people in this Iowa prison experiment with regards and parole officer, there also they go through this same feeling as the children went through or in the third graders went through.

So this you know this exercise actually shows that you know racism is learned trait, so the moment how we are actually you know how we behave with an individual the you know that brings in the reactionary measure and that is how you can actually implant these ideas on an individual, so it is not only for racism, I would say that this exercise, this experiment of Jane Elliot is very important in our context as well.

So when we are talking about communalism, when you talking about discrimination or prejudice in any form, this exercise really gives us an insight that you know people who have gone through the sufferings themselves, you know would be able to empathise with the individuals who are going through such sufferings now. What happens is or on the other side of the pitcher we also see in society at you know there are people who feel that because I have gone through this torment earlier it may why not now let him face this trouble.

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So that also is a learned behaviour and it is the responsibility of each individual who see to put himself the other's shoes and especially if we have teachers here or you know we are all we could all teach a lesson to ourselves to begin with on this experiment through this experiment on discrimination as to you know how we can internalise this in ourselves and according to Carl Horowitz into 2007, this experiment not only had an impact on the children's individual behaviours, thoughts, feelings and moods but also of the people of Riceville and this actually they really showed less displeasure over time.

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## Conclusions

- These experiments point to the predictability of evil; that process by which ordinary individuals can do wicked things so long as they have the proper framework in which to rationalize them. The most important message that the experiment reveals is that the children believed and trusted what their teacher told them in much the same manner in which they believe and trust what their parents teach them. Changing the racist attitudes and behaviors in the world must start with parental guidance. The belief of how other people perceived them led the participants to believe it about themselves

So to conclude these experiments point to the predictability of evil, so we can actually train individuals to be evil, so that is learned behaviour, so nobody is evil by birth, nobody is evil by as an innate response, but it is learnt. The process which by which ordinarily individuals can do wicked things so long as they have the proper framework in which to rationalise them. The most important message that the experiment reveals is that the children believed and trusted what the teacher told them in much the same manner in which we believed and trust what their parents teach them.

Changing the racist attitude and behaviour in the world and in this case are talk about discrimination as a whole, it is not only about racism but any form of discrimination and you know discriminating attitude and behaviours it starts with parental guidance and the belief of how other people perceive them lead the participant to believe it about themselves, nation is learned and she also showed that you know if you give a preferential treatment or if you give a positive treatment towards people if you make them feel good the performance also increases and that strangely can be explained by psychologist. So you know I believe that this is this this though it is not one of the written and published experiment in psychology, but this definitely finds place in our lecture series and I believe each of us should take a personal lesson from this teaching. Thank you.