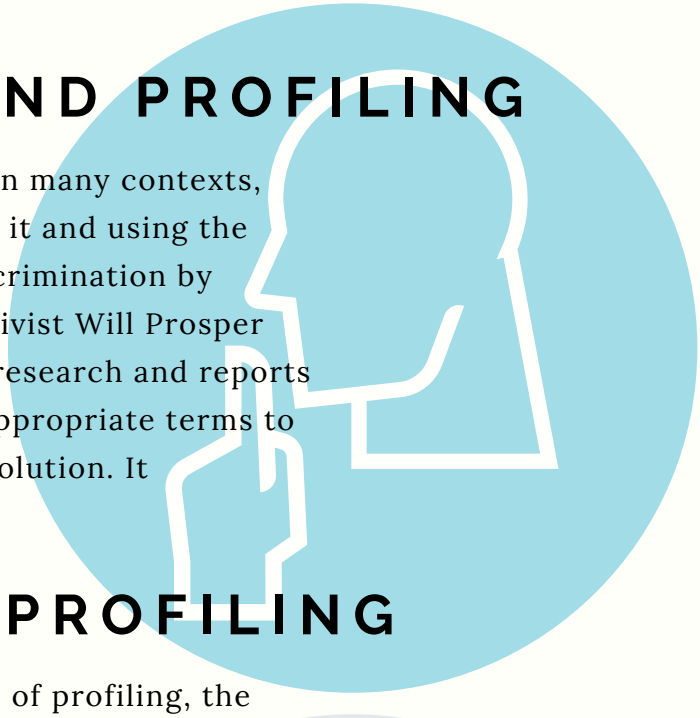
HOW ARE WE STUCK?

What is the impasse with profiling? It seems that we are stuck. This section aims to demystify why, how and where we seem to be stuck when it comes to resolving the societal, psychological and real issue that profiling is.

Profiling is an on-going issue, seemingly without resolution. This deadlock seems to occur for a variety of reasons. Some people do not want to acknowledge profiling, or talk about it. And when there is a willingness to talk, some deny its very existence, while others do not know how to begin talking about profiling. Even when people do know how to talk about profiling, it nevertheless remains a tremendously difficult task. Sometimes profiling and discrimination are at the intersection of conflicting values and priorities.

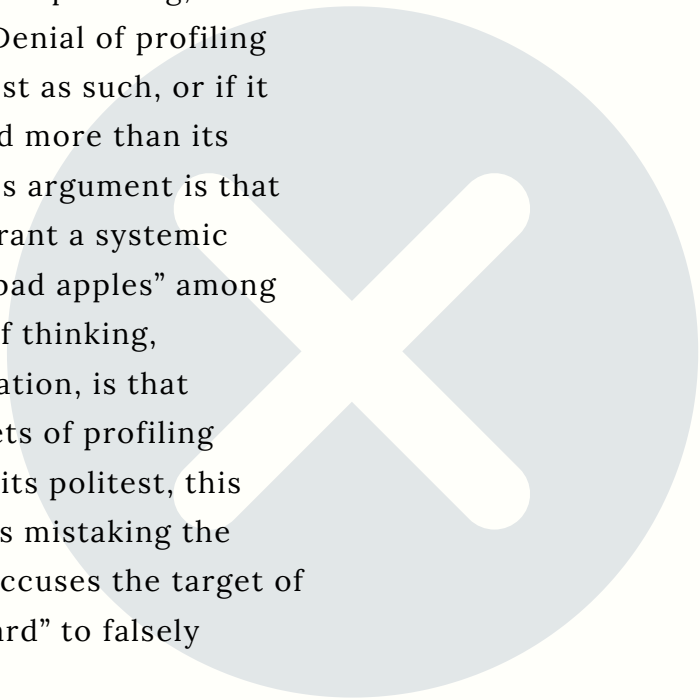
IN THIS SECTION

SILENCE AROUND PROFILING



Though profiling has been acknowledged in many contexts, there is still some reticence about naming it and using the term profiling to point to instances of discrimination by frontline representatives of the state. Activist Will Prosper points to how the term is glossed over in research and reports [1]. The inability to name things and use appropriate terms to describe a phenomenon, keeps it from resolution. It contributes to the impasse.

DENIAL OF PROFILING



While silence is one response to instances of profiling, the other is a more explicit response: denial. Denial of profiling involves stating that profiling does not exist as such, or if it does, accusations of profiling are amplified more than its actual prevalence. Another variation of this argument is that profiling is not widespread enough to warrant a systemic response, but is rather the case of a “few bad apples” among frontline state workers. Yet another line of thinking, especially evident in social media conversation, is that profiling does not exist, and that the targets of profiling merely perceive themselves as victims. At its politest, this argument frames the targets of profiling as mistaking the intentions of the profiler. At its worst, it accuses the target of consciously and actively using a “victim card” to falsely accuse frontline workers.

"The term ''racial profiling '' is starting to be like mental illness during murder trials ... it's just anything to either not go to jail or to get cash by suing the police."
-An anonymised social media user

"Systemic racism is simply a way for minorities to blame themselves for their wrongdoing."
-An anonymised social media user

DIFFICULTY OF DIALOGUE

It is a fact that many people, including activists, community members, social workers and the police have vigorously sought to speak about profiling, engage in dialogue and seek solutions and redressals. However, these conversations are anything but easy. People need opportunities and space for conversation, which are difficult to orchestrate. For some members of the community, trauma, anger and resentment may be barriers to having dialogue with the police community. For frontline workers, empathy and context may be a limiter. There may be an overall lack of appropriate language with which such conversations may be had.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

"To succeed, you must have tangible proof that there has been racial profiling ... Unless you have complete videos from the start of the event to the end, it will be your word against that of the police."
-An anonymised social media user

The deadlock around profiling also has a practical aspect. It relates to the practical difficulty of reliably detecting, and classifying profiling. In the absence of a sound mechanism, there are chances of genuinely sound police actions being wrongly classified as profiling (a false positive error) or a of cases of profiling not being correctly detected (a false negative error). In addition to identifying a mechanism that is reliable, it would need to also be practical for everyday implementation purposes. For example, an overly cumbersome process of identifying and classifying cases of profiling is not only unsustainable, but may actually undermine the whole effort to identify profiling. Such reliable and sustainable systems that are acceptable to everyone are difficult to come by.

CONFLICTING VALUES

Another aspect of the impasse is when two or more point of view that are independently valid, become contradictory to each other when implemented in the same context. A strong example of this is Quebec's Bill 21, a law that bans frontline government workers (such as police, judges and teachers among others) from wearing religious symbols while at work. Such a law is seen as discriminatory since it restricts employment opportunities for employees of some faiths, typically Muslim women, Jews and Sikh men, or forces them to compromise on their religious beliefs.

Supporters of the law, which include some political parties and many members of the Quebec public, hold that this law is not racial or discriminatory, but is merely a commitment to maintaining the distinction between the State and religion. Given Quebec's history and the emphasis of its Quiet Revolution, the eagerness to maintain this distinction is a valid and understandable one.

However, it remains a fact that commitment to the secular ideal negatively impacts some communities more than others. It privileges those religions that do not require a visible display of religious symbols. This in turn leads to arguments whether wearing a religious symbol amounts to compromising secular values, and if so in what ways. An impasse that involves conflicting values and priorities are the most difficult to negotiate since value systems run deeper than rational convictions and logical arguments.

"Bill 21 in Quebec is about excluding religion from public function, and is a goal of secularity (and quiet revolution), it is not racial; not discriminatory"
-An anonymised social media user

"Bill 21 privileges religions which do not need a visible display of a religious symbol, so it is discriminatory."
-An anonymised social media user

ROLE OF HUMAN NATURE

The last and perhaps most difficult aspect of the impasse around profiling is human nature. Public opinion offers recurring references to profiling being a two-way street. It is not only a case of state frontline workers profiling minorities and disadvantaged populations, but also that these communities make discriminatory judgements against the state workers. At a systemic level, this observation may be analyzed in terms of power and oppression: a disadvantaged group making discriminatory judgements and actions against the oppressor has much less negative impact that the other way around.

"Profiling is a two way street - groups of people profile the other."
-An anonymised social media user

"Othering and racism are human nature. We can't overlook that."
-An anonymised social media user

"Why are the police so racist? Because they are made up of humans, and humans are racists."
-An anonymised social media user

However, at a personal level, when people are unlikely to be operating from system perspectives, it is easy for a police officer or frontline state worker to feel wronged when such judgements are made against them by the community. This leads to a self-perpetuating cycle of stereotyping and mistrust.

Arguments are made that othering is inherent to how human beings think and function, and this cannot be overlooked. This may be interpreted as commitment to one's own community/race/language/group being prioritized over people who are outside one's in-group. It is easier perhaps to operate around identities than around issues. It takes conscious commitment to be inclusive or move beyond othering.

Finally, there is the well-documented issue of implicit bias. Psychological research has repeatedly shown that all human beings hold prejudices that they are not consciously aware of, including against particular races, groups, communities, and even body types. This inherent human aspect may explain to an extent why it is so difficult for people to acknowledge that they may be profiling others - they genuinely believe they are not! It is not clear from the research if making people aware of these implicit biases has any long term impacts on their actions. This leads us then, to an impasse. If human nature is flawed, and othering and implicit biases are inherent to our existence, how do we move forward?