

# Dr. Monnica Williams Sheds Light on the Negative Mental Health Impacts of Racial Trauma

By Melissa Scrivani (/Stories?Author=57d776acf7e0ab046f2054fb) · Life (/Stories/Category/Life)



Dr. Monnica Williams speaks about the psychological consequences and intersectionality of racism and war on drugs Apr. 4, 2018 at 6 pm in CHEM 203. (Natalija Marosz/The Daily Campus)

Dr. Monnica Williams, an associate professor in UConn's Department of Psychological Sciences and Psychiatry, led a discussion titled "From Hate Crimes to Microaggressions: #RacialTraumaIsReal" Wednesday evening in the Chemistry Building. The lecture was centered around race relations, hate crimes, the war on drugs and how all of these things can impact mental

health. The event was co-sponsored by UConn Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) and the Culture and Mental Health Disparities lab, which Williams is the director of.

The discussion focused heavily on topics such as race, racism, trauma and drugs. “We are socialized not to talk about many of these issues,” Williams explained.

Williams explained that when we think of racism, we often think of extremist groups such as the KKK or discrimination such as segregation, things that were mainly in the past. But racism today is just as impactful and relevant. Racial traumas occur every day and often happen in ways that we don’t necessarily think of, including community violence, murder of loved ones, medical experiences, incarceration and living in war zones.

These kinds of racial traumas can have very serious negative impacts on mental health and can have different impacts on different groups of people. Hispanic Americans who experience racism have a higher chance of developing major depressive disorder (MDD) while African Americans have a higher chance of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Other mental health consequences of racism include stress, anxiety and substance abuse. The effects of racial profiling and trauma can leave lasting impacts on mental health for people of color, and it can carry over between generations.

Microaggressions, which are small discriminatory statements that are not always noticeably racist, can also impact mental health and often cause anxiety and uncertainty for people of color. There are many instances of therapists telling people of color that their race has nothing to do with their mental health, which is a microaggression in itself.

Williams discussed that racism is real and systematic, and while racism can happen to anyone, it is much more likely to impact people of color. African Americans specifically are the most likely to experience racism in the United States.

“The darker your skin, the more likely you are to experience racism,” Williams said.

Williams also discussed the impacts that social media have on racism. Racism has been relevant in the media for centuries. Williams showed images of “lynching postcards” from the late 1800s that displayed graphic images of lynched African Americans. Today, security tapes of African Americans being shot and killed by police officers are often displayed on the news.

“Nothing has really changed at all,” Williams said. She explained how violence against black people has been used as entertainment in the media for years, and asked the question, “Why aren’t there pictures of dead white people?” The answer is that black people have never been treated with the same level of respect.

The trauma of this police violence often displayed on social media can be devastating. African American men in particular are heavily subject to profiling by law enforcements. Black people are three times more likely than white people to be killed by a police officer and 97 percent of these killings result in no officer charges.

“I think we can safely say there is no justice for these people,” Williams said.

The war on drugs in America is also heavily targeted towards people of color. Opioids were pinned on Asian Americans, cocaine was pinned on African Americans and marijuana was pinned on Hispanic Americans. This leads to the question, is it a war on drugs or a war on people of color?

As for what people can do to help these issues, Williams stressed the importance of accepting that racial trauma is real and psychologically harmful. It is important to acknowledge these mental health consequences and believe people who say racial trauma has impacted them. Embrace all cultural identities and call out acts of racism, even microaggressions.

“I thought the discussion was really informative about the kinds of racism that goes on around us that we might not even be aware of,” said second-semester ACES Sara Da Silva.

“I’m obviously aware of racism, but this dove into the full extent of its impacts,” added second-semester sports management major Kess Elmore. “They teach us about racism in school, but never about the mental health impacts it could have.”

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