Chapter 7: The White Spaces of Dyslexic Difference: An intersectional Analysis
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Dyslexia is the most common 'specific learning difficulty' (SpLD) in the UK and is understood to affect roughly 10% of the population (BDA 2021). Within the student population of art and design Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the percentage is much greater. What this means is that dyslexia inclusion policy and practice has a more significant impact on the effectiveness of overall inclusion work, than it does for non-art and design HEIs. This chapter takes an intersectional approach to dyslexia inclusion policy and practice in art and design HEIs, and considers it in relation to the ongoing, unacceptable assessment differential between home black and home white students. In so doing, it departs from more usual approaches to dyslexia which tend to engage with it purely in terms of a binary difference between a distinct, undifferentiated dyslexic minority on the one hand, and a non-dyslexic normative majority on the other. A questioning of the validity of this approach is in part what this chapter explores.

The high proportion of dyslexic students in art and design HEIs is popularly understood to be a manifestation of a tendency for dyslexic people to be creative. For whatever reasons, dyslexic students do tend to be over-represented in art and design institutions and tend to gravitate towards practice-based or vocational courses. However, written assessments make up a significant proportion of most courses and this does tend to present challenges for many students who have experienced prior educational difficulties, including many dyslexic ones.

As a teacher of critical and contextual studies in an art and design HEI, encouraging students to carry out close textual analysis of popular representations is a key feature of my work. This has influenced my understanding that textual analysis is an important strategy in the development of insightful perspectives on the precise workings of exclusionary practice. It has informed the selection of textual analysis as

a primary research method for this chapter (Barker 2004 2012; Hall 1997; Rose 2012).

The chapter begins with a brief explanation of the context of dyslexia research, policy and practice in the UK. It then looks at some specific aspects of dyslexia policy and practice which are relevant to the concerns of this chapter. It then goes on to outline an intersectional approach as advocated by Crenshaw (1991). An examination of the role of IQ testing, both in formal dyslexia assessment and in the UK educational selection processes that discriminate against black people (Coard 2021; Hudson 1995) follows. The final section is a textual analysis of a 'dyslexia story' included on the websites of an important dyslexia charity. I suggest that this is indicative of the 'whiteness' (Ahmed 2007; Dyer 1997) of dominant dyslexia discourse and argue that it is necessary to ask the question: could HE dyslexia policy and practice be seen to be exclusionary in relation to home black students? I suggest that what is required, in order to respond to this question with conviction, is a rethinking of data collection practice, both in HEIs and in charitable organisations aiming to support dyslexic learners. The requirement of formal dyslexia assessment, in its current form, as a pre-requisite for the allocation of additional support for dyslexic learners also, I argue, needs to be rethought.

Both the terms 'black' and 'white' come with complex connotative meanings. They stand for the racial categorisations invented in eighteenth-century Europe, which were based upon the fallacy of an essential, genetic difference between races (Rutherford 2020). That race is a cultural construct makes it no less powerful, as a concept, than if it were the manifestation of some essential genetic difference. And, as it has been even more necessary, in recent times, to emphasise that black lives matter, so it is still necessary to foreground the importance of black educations. This chapter begins from a position that the identified assessment differential in HE between home black and home white students is a manifestation of structural and institutional inequalities. It is necessary to examine precise aspects of this in order to produce real change.

Context

Following the publication of Sir Jim Rose's 2009 report into dyslexia there has been a general consensus in the UK that dyslexia can be defined as a learning difficulty primarily affecting single word decoding and spelling (Rose 2009; Snowling 2019; Kirby 2019). As Rose states, it is understood to be caused by 'difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed' (2009 p.10). However there are many areas of disagreement about all aspect of dyslexia and a history of resistance to the validity of the term (Elliot & Grigorenko 2014; Elliot 2016). At the crux of this resistance is a belief that what is described as dyslexia cannot reliably be differentiated from the more general learning difficulties that also impede the development of expected literacy skills. Partly for this reason, dominant understandings of dyslexia, as a 'specific' learning difficulty, which requires a particular approach, are not universally acknowledged. The appropriateness of the additional support provided for dyslexic learners is therefore also sometimes questioned.

There are more fundamental disagreements about what dyslexia is exactly and what the label actually describes. It is possible to trace a significant historical shift in understood meaning, since the initial usage of the term in 1887 (Snowling 2019; Soler 2009; Reid 2009; Elliot 2016). Understandings of dyslexia have altered, such that what was once thought to be a primarily visual learning difficulty (Soler 2009) is now widely understood to be a manifestation of problems with 'phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal information processing speed' (Rose 2009 p. 10). What is often not foregrounded is that, at different historical points, and in different educational and research contexts, the term dyslexia has been used in different ways.

Despite this, the concept 'dyslexia' has provided a discursive framework for research into the causes of what are often described as 'unexpected' difficulties in the development of reading and spelling skills and into what kinds of teaching and learning strategies help those who are struggling to learn to read and spell. In carrying out this work, researchers and educators must decide how a dyslexic individual is defined. In many cases, this means differentiating between those whose difficulties can be seen to be 'expected', and those whose difficulties cannot be explained by the circumstances and environments within which they are learning. As

Reid (2009) explains, there is no single test for dyslexia; a lack of consensus about how the range of tests used to make a 'diagnosis' should be interpreted; some lack of consistency about which tests should be used, as well as disagreement about when formal dyslexia assessment should take place. What this means is that the parameters of this discursive framework are particularly blurred.

Partly for the reasons outlined above, producing reliable data that can be generalized from is problematic (Deacon et al. 2012). It means that estimates about the proportion of the population who are dyslexic vary, and that it can be difficult to follow the quantifications of, for example, the probability of a genetic cause for dyslexia which, it is widely agreed, tends to run in families (Snowling 2019 pp.59-77). Attempts to systematically quantify the effects of the precise teaching and learning strategies advocated for dyslexic learners have encountered similar challenges (Snowling 2019).

In the UK, charitable organisations have played a significant part in providing support for those who consider they may be dyslexic and for the parents or carers of children who are struggling to learn to read and spell. They have been instrumental in galvanising successive UK governments to address the complexities outlined above. Many of the expert witnesses, whose ideas informed Rose's report, have connections to these organisations. They have helped to ensure that the widely understood moniker 'dyslexia' functions as an umbrella term for research, advocacy work and pedagogic practice explicitly focused on addressing learning difficulties that can have a profound affect on life chances and wellbeing. However there are still those who consider the term deeply problematic, and the work of these organisations difficult to justify.

Inclusion practice in most UK art and design HEIs recognises that many students begin their courses unclear about whether or not they are dyslexic. This is why access to formal dyslexia assessment is free, for home students, in many of them. But the process of assessing for dyslexia and of allocating additional support, via the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), is administratively time consuming. In many cases the effects of undiagnosed dyslexia have already been damaging. Anxiety in educational contexts is also very common (Carroll & Iles 2006). In addition, learning

to use the assistive technology recommended for dyslexic learners can become an additional burden. Dyslexic students who have had a formal dyslexia assessment before they begin their studies, and who have developed an understanding of their own successful learning strategies, have an advantage over students whose dyslexia assessment takes place during their course. It can be argued that for the latter what can develop is a significant 'hidden curriculum' (Skelton 1997).

In contrast to the free assessments available for home students in HEIs, the cost of private dyslexia assessment is significant. At the time of writing it is generally around £540 if carried out by a specialist teacher and £720 if carried out by an educational psychologist (BDA nd). This is a significant sum given that median weekly disposable income in the UK (year ending 2020) was £592 (ONS 2021). It can be argued that this may produce structural inequalities which prescribe very different experiences for subsections of dyslexic students. How this is implicated in the ongoing assessment differential between home black and home white students is not easy to ascertain.

It is difficult to access information about how many black students arrive at HEIs with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia compared to white students, because HE dyslexia inclusion data is not generally disaggregated. In addition, the use of the category 'BAME' (black Asian and minority ethnic) can obscure more significant assessment differentials for black students (Miller 2020). UK research into dyslexia and race is sparse. (Cameron & Greenland 2019; Hoyle & Hoyle 2010). In the US, Robinson (2013) suggests that black school students (particularly boys) are less likely to receive a diagnosis of dyslexia because of the racist assumptions that inform the lower expectations of their academic potential. Learning difficulties are perhaps 'expected' rather than 'unexpected' and so dyslexia is less likely to be considered. It is for these reasons that this chapter advocates an intersectional approach to dyslexia inclusion research, policy and practice.

Given the complexity of dyslexia discourse, this chapter's focus is a very precise intersectional concern: the impact of current dyslexia policy and practice upon the ongoing assessment differential between UK home black and home white students. This is not to suggest that this is the only inclusion concern related to current

dyslexia policy and practice, only that the complexity of the field means that a narrow focus may be productive. The aim is merely to initiate a debate at this juncture and to consider how alterations in dyslexia data collection and inclusive practice might be used as part of wider inclusion work.

An Intersectional Approach

Kimberlé Crenshaw's development of an intersectional approach arose in response to the lack of engagement with the experiences of black women in both anti-racist and feminist discourses. This means, as Crenshaw teaches us, that the effects of racism and sexism are more significant for black women, because there is no effective framework for their resistance. Crenshaw does not aim to offer a 'totalizing theory of identity' (1991 p. 1244). What she suggests is that the disempowerment of black women is different to that of white women. She also argues that representations of black women in popular culture perpetrate stereotypical understandings which further obscure the specificity of their intersectional experiences. This chapter applies this model to consider a different intersectional concern.

Crenshaw's work has been at the forefront of resistance to discriminatory practice in the US and beyond. It is particularly important because it shines a light on the way that resistance understood in binary terms - ie black/white or man/woman - while often strategically effective in the short term, does not contribute to a wider critique of the way structural inequalities continue. Crenshaw identifies three intersectional categories: the structural, the political and the representational (1991 p. 1245). This tripartite categorisation has been used to inform the selection of several aspects of educational practice in relation to dyslexia. And to frame a perspective on current dyslexia inclusion work. The aim is to draw out the way that this could contribute to exclusionary practice in relation to home black students in art and design HEIs.

IQ Testing

Formal dyslexia assessment involves the use of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests. Indeed, in many cases, dyslexia diagnoses is predicated upon a discrepancy

between the results of IQ tests and the results of other tests used to assess the learnt literacy skills of 'accurate and fluent word reading and spelling' (Rose 2009 p. 10). For advocates of IQ testing, it is possible to differentiate between an aptitude for learning (ie an innate ability to learn) and actual learning achievement. This belief underpins the use of IQ testing in dyslexia assessment, where it is used to differentiate between those whose literacy skills correlate with their IQ (non-dyslexic) and those for whom there is a discrepancy (dyslexic). However there are fundamental ethical issues with both the idea of innate intelligence and with the idea that intelligence can be objectively measured and numerically quantified. These ethical issues are partly to do with the historical context of the development of them and the motives of those who developed them.

The first intelligence tests were published by Alfred Binet in France in 1905 (Beit-Hallahmi 1994). They were adopted by the English eugenicist Francis Galton who believed that intelligence was innate and entirely hereditary. He developed a scale of intelligence which placed Europeans at the top and those of African descent at the bottom. Galton required a method of assessing intelligence in order to substantiate his hypothesis. He found this in the work of Binet. Galton also believed that those of low intelligence should be prevented from reproducing in order to improve the human race. The eugenics movement, set up to promulgate this aim, was widely supported in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Britannica 2021).

Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests were put to work in various deeply problematic political contexts. The apotheosis of this was the mass killing of those with low IQ in Nazi Germany. Here the establishment of a state system for removing anyone understood to 'pollute' the 'gene pool' of the 'master race' included those defined as 'feebleminded' (Reddy 2008). There were similar concerns expressed about the 'gene pool' in Britain and the US, and eugenicists in both countries had an effect on legislation. In the state of Virginia, for example, an act was passed that sanctioned forced sterilisation for those with low IQ. (Dombrowski 2021). In the UK, a similar act came very close to becoming law although the relevant amendment was removed at its last stages through parliament. The work of British and American eugenicists was however inscribed in the 1944 education reform act, in the form of the 11+ exam. This selective, IQ test, which most children sat in the final year of primary school

dictated the type of education a child would receive. Though the ethical implications of selective schooling are clearly very far away from the ethical implications of mass killing and forced sterilisation, the same fundamental ideas inform both. These are that intelligence is innate and inherited and that it is possible to objectively measure it using the kinds of intelligence tests invented by Binet.

The 1944 education act was widely supported in the UK, because it delivered free secondary school education for most children. But the tripartite system it introduced, which established three categories of school - grammar, secondary modern and technical, provided very different educational experiences. The 11+ exam, which dictated the type of school each child would attend, was developed using the work of Cyril Burt. Burt was a member of the British Eugenics Society and a key exponent of Galton's ideas. His position was clear: as intelligence was inherited, innate and remained essentially unchanged throughout a person's life, the results of the 11+ exam could be understood to define a child's lifelong academic potential. Burt was later revealed to have falsified his data on the heredity of intelligence (Dorfman 1978) but his ideas have had a lasting effect on the development of the British education system and continue to do so. Many schools still use IQ tests in their selection processes.

Burt's ideas also had a profound effect on the experiences of children who were understood to be 'educationally sub-normal'. This term had a precise meaning based on IQ levels. Burt was appointed in 1913 as the first educational psychologist employed by London County Council. His remit included the identification of educationally sub-normal children, then described as 'feeble-minded' (London County Council 1959). As part of his role, Burt wrote a series of reports and his ideas were reiterated in subsequent reports in 1937, 1946 and in 1957 when 'remedial education centres' were established to train teachers to socialise 'backward' children (London County Council 1959). Burt's ideas shaped the conservative, UK educational policy of the next 30 years, particularly in relation to the education of those children whose IQ test results were understood to place them outside of normative learning expectations.

To return to the concern of this chapter: the educational experiences of home black students (students who in most cases have navigated a UK state educational system) this context is important. It was relevant to the educational experiences of many black children throughout the 1960s and this induced Bernard Coard to write 'How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System' (2021) in 1971. Coard's book produced a damning critique of the woefully inadequate education provided for black children in the UK, a far greater proportion of whom were identified as being 'educationally subnormal'. Burt's ideas can be seen to have provided the structures used to ensure that black children were not only denied an adequate education but incarcerated in racist institutions that utilized fundamentally flawed testing procedures (Hudson 1995). Tests designed to identify what was understood to be innate intelligence but were actually a reiteration of the eugenicist beliefs that informed the development of them.

It has long been known that black students perform less well in IQ tests than white students (Hudson 1995). But as Hudson states, 'the issue is not the existence of score differences between racial groups, which are unquestionable, but what, if anything, such differences mean' (1995 p. 3). As Hudson points out, 'the belief in the intellectual inferiority of persons of colour is a core assumption of ideological racism' (1995 p. 3). He painstakingly and convincingly argues that it is not possible to remove the cultural context of the production of IQ tests, which were developed to support a racist hypothesis and then used to substantiate fictitious research. The cultural references, the language used and a whole range of inferred and connotative meanings were and are communicated by these powerful sources. It is this that explains the score differences. UK educational selection processes developed in the 1940s and based upon IQ tests are clear examples, I would argue, of 'structural or institutional racism' (Hudson 1995 p. 4). That IQ tests are still being used to select and categorise children in UK schools currently is deeply problematic. How this has a bearing on the attainment differential between home black and home white students in art and design HEIs is not easy to quantify.

This context must also be considered in relation to the use of IQ tests for formal dyslexia assessment. If fewer black students are categorised as dyslexic using the discrepancy between IQ tests and the tests used to identify learnt levels of single

word decoding and spelling, then it must be concluded that they are discriminatory. There is some evidence in the research literature that this 'discrepancy definition' of dyslexia is being more actively questioned. In Snowling's more recent work, it is absent as a defining feature of dyslexia (2019). This is in-line with Rose's understanding that dyslexia exists as a continuum of difference, and that it can be present at all levels of intelligence. But IQ testing remains an integral part of many formal dyslexia assessments. The implications of the fact that fewer black students would meet the criteria for dyslexia does raise important questions about the equity of support systems based upon these assessments.

The final section of this chapter consists of a textual analysis (Barker 2004 2012; Hall 1997; Rose 2012) of an indicative 'dyslexia story' contained on the website of an important dyslexia charity. Charitable organisations have played a significant role in the development of both dominant discourses of dyslexia in the UK and government, judicial and educational policy and practice in relation to it. The textual analysis draws attention to the fundamental whiteness (Ahmed,2007; Dyer 1997) of dyslexia as discursive formation. It also foregrounds the stereotypical (Dyer 1999) nature of the narratives of achievement that are (re)presented. The aim is to provide a reading of what I consider to be an indicative example of dominant dyslexia discourse with a view to opening up dialogue about representations of dyslexia more generally. Harriet Cameron's discourse analysis provides a framework for my reading (Cameron and Nunkoosing 2012; Cameron 2015; Cameron and Billington 2015; Cameron 2016).

For Cameron, discourses of dyslexia can be categorised into six main sub-discourses: 'innate deficit, an excuse for stupidity or laziness, as difference, as disability, as social construction, and as identity' (2015 p. ii). Her research identifies the following 'key subject positions taken up, offered or resisted in the texts: being intelligent/ able, being a survivor, being 'just who I am', being a hard-worker, being worthy/ deserving, being disabled, being a fraud, and being deficient.' (2015 p. ii). My reading of the indicative example below identifies both implicit and explicit references to these sub-discourses and subject positions.

Textual Analysis

There seems to be a marked consistency in the way that dyslexic people are represented by organisations which are aiming to produce positive or supportive images of dyslexic learners. Representations tend to engage with, and refute, the negative sub-discourses Cameron identifies, particularly 'excuse for stupidity or laziness'. They tend to emphasise the positive sub-discourses of 'hard-working', 'intelligent' and 'positivity in the face of adversity'. These accord with Atkinson's (2001) analysis of 'pedagogised' identity formation, and what Cameron's work also explores: a more universal discursive construction of a 'good student' (2015). They also attempt to navigate the 'othering' that can occur in relation to dyslexic learners. Broadhead's (2014) analysis looks at pedagogised othering in relation to Access students in art and design HEIs but it is applicable to dyslexic ones also. What charitable organisations help to discursively construct is the idea of the 'good' dyslexic learner.

For example, X, a white teacher in his thirties, whose 'dyslexia story' is shared on the website of an important dyslexia charity (Charity A) discovered he was dyslexic as an adult. He believes that his dyslexia is part of what has made him an excellent teacher. He describes himself as 'determined and conscientious' and provides a moving account of how he has succeeded in his chosen career and of his own creativity. He refers to his educational achievements and his very high non-verbal reasoning score (subsection of IQ). His path to success includes general support in primary school for his reading difficulties and then, following formal dyslexia assessment, more specialist support at his University. The University support came from both his lecturers and his dyslexia support tutor, the latter funded by the DSA. X references the positive part assistive technology has played in his own achievements and his ambitions for the future. His advice for someone coming to terms with their dyslexia is to see it as a gift, work on strengths and use humour.

The example described above can be seen to be an articulation of what Cameron identifies as the key subject positions negotiated by the dyslexic learner. We can see that, on the one hand, positive subject positions have been taken up: ie 'being intelligent/able, being a survivor, being 'just who I am', being a hard-worker, being worthy/ deserving' (2015 p.ii). The negative subject positions of 'fraud' and 'being

deficient' are demonstrably engaged with and implicitly refuted by X's narrative. In relation to the latter by reference to the dyslexia assessment, X's history of learning difficulties and his disinclination to read. With the former, X's intelligence is confirmed by his first-class degree and his very high non-verbal reasoning score (subsection of IQ). His hard-working , positive attitude supports the idea that he deserves the success he has achieved.

On the pages of Charity A's website there are many similar dyslexia stories. They communicate moving and convincingly authentic narratives of achievement. They attempt to lay bare the very real barriers to learning that dyslexia can present and there are frequently stories articulated with a refreshing honesty. They are clearly aimed at empowering those who have struggled to learn, by providing role-models to aspire to and paths of achievement to emulate. But Charity A does not collate information about the ethnic identity of those who benefit from the work that they do (emailed personal communication, February 16, 2021). This is a serious omission, particularly because the narratives of achievement presented on Charity A's website demonstrate many of the marked characteristics that Dyer (1999) identifies as constituting a stereotype. This stereotypical, good dyslexic learner also tends to be white.

X's story is an indicative example of the narratives of achievement that are included on the webpages and publicity material of many dyslexia organisations. These stereotypical representations of positive dyslexic identities can be seen to be discursively constructed via a negotiation with the sub-discourses Cameron identifies. For Dyer, 'it is not stereotypes, as an aspect of human thought and representation, that are wrong, but who controls and defines them, what interests they serve' (1999). It is clear that it is important to ask questions about this: Who are the imagined and actual viewers of these representations? Does this representational practice have an impact on who chooses to use the support provided by dyslexia charities? Could this have implications for the ongoing assessment differential between black and white students in art and design HEIs?

Charity A does seem to have recognised that it is necessary for its representational practice to include black people and people of colour. At the time of writing, of the

128 images on its pages, 35 contain what could be read as a representation of a black or person of colour. This is nearly 27%. However these are individual images rather than part of a detailed dyslexia story, and if we look at the list of 25 people explicitly defined as 'Charity A people' (whose images are, incidentally, not included on the webpage) all seem to identify as white. The lack of representations of black people or people of colour on the webpages of another important dyslexia charity (Charity B) is starker. Of the 39 images that contain people, 37 could be read as containing representations of white people and one as containing a person who may or may not be viewed as white. Only one representation could be read as a black person. This represents a percentage of roughly 5% representations of people of colour and 2.5% if we are taking as our focus of analysis only those who appear to be black.

For Ahmed (2007) the inclusion of some black people within discursive or physical white spaces merely emphasises the whiteness of the normative stereotypes that are being maintained. As she argues 'the effect of this "around whiteness" is the institutionalization of a certain "likeness", which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up this space.' (2007 p.157). Her focus is the universities within which she works so there is no sense that dyslexia organisations are unique in the whiteness of their frameworks and the way that they function to 'institutionalize "likeness". Ahmed's work helps to frame the questions that must be asked about the charitable work of organisations like Charity A and B. What is significant is that, in relation to the 2010 Equality Act, charities are bound by regulatory practices that are different to other organisations (Charity Commission 2013). In some cases, they are not required to consider their working practices in relation to other inclusion categories.

For Charity A, it might be possible to read the current percentage of website representations of black people and people of colour as inclusive. The inclusion of two black people in their list of 10 'ambassadors' can be seen to be another positive step. But 'Charity A people' all appear to be white and perhaps more importantly, it is not possible (currently) to find out how many black people and people of colour benefit from Charity A's work because they do not collate data on the ethnic identity of those who use their services (emailed personal communication, February 16,

2021). Addressing the lack of representations of black dyslexic narratives of achievement is a small part of the solutions required. It would be one way to start addressing the issues as identified in this section. However it is the institutional and structural inequalities that are more difficult to address and require, I would argue, a more fundamental rethinking.

Conclusion

This chapter has taken an intersectional approach to dyslexic difference. Applying Crenshaw, it has considered some structural, institutional and representational aspects of educational policy and practice in the UK. It has begun to address the question: could dyslexia policy and practice be exclusionary, in relation to home black students, in art and design HEIs? I have suggested that what is required to respond to this question with conviction, is an alteration in data collection practice, both in HEIs, and in charitable organisations which seek to support dyslexic learners. I have suggested that there could be a significant 'hidden curriculum' (Skelton 1997) for some students who have formal dyslexia assessment carried out during their course rather than prior to it and that disaggregated, dyslexia data may shed light upon this. Though the aim of this chapter is to open up a dialogue about how dyslexia policy and practice could impact on home black students, I have not suggested that this is the only sub-section of dyslexic students who may be negatively impacted by structural, representational and institutional inequalities. Only that a precise and delineated focus aids the discussion of a complex intersectional concern.

That an important and influential dyslexia charity does not currently collate inclusion data in relation to ethnic identity is deeply problematic. Given the structural and institutional inequalities of a UK education system built upon the ideas of eugenicists like Cyril Burt, as well as a situation where dyslexia is identified using IQ tests known to discriminate against black people (Hudson 1995; Coard 2021), this has to change. I would argue that it is fair to suggest that dyslexia policy and practice in UK art and design HEIs, where dyslexic students make up a more significant proportion of overall student population, may be having an ongoing impact on the continuing

assessment differentials between home black and home white students. More research, and action in response to the findings, is required as a matter of urgency.

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