

From Hostility to Hospitality: Anti-Racist Pedagogies in the Classroom

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**THE ~~MYTH~~
MISUNDERSTANDING OF
WHITE PRIVILEGE**

Outline

- Climate in the U.S
- Issues of racism and White Privilege
- Rethinking Race and Privilege in the Classroom-2 Case Studies
- Methodological Frameworks:
- Phenomenology-Sara Ahmed and Frank Fanon
- Liberatory Pedagogies-Paulo Freire
- Transformative and Dialogical-bel hooks
- Hospitality and an Ethics of Cosmopolitanism-Luce Irigaray
- What an Anti-Racist Pedagogy looks like

Overview

- Is it possible then to teach anti-racist pedagogy in such a way that people will not be violent toward one another? How do we as educators and academics begin to undo racism and future oppression through the classroom experience? How can we respond to the dilemma of “double-consciousness” that teachers experience when teaching pedagogies of diversity in the classroom?
- By using my own examples from my own classroom, I elucidate how I attempt to implement anti-racist pedagogy by creating spaces for dialogue where students are engaging in an authentic discourse. I hope put forth an alternative phenomenological pedagogy, one that connects issues of positionality with those of an embodied epistemology of difference.

Current Climate on College Campuses

- In September of 2017, more than 300 students marched with Black Students United conducted a sit-in at Cornell University with a list of demands to the University's president Martha Pollack. The sit-in was in response to the arrest of a Cornell student who was charged with assault after a Black student said he was punched by a group of White men who had called him the N-word. The students' list of 12 demands included mandatory coursework on "privilege and power," the hiring of additional mental health personnel of color, and the banning of the Psi Upsilon fraternity from campus and converting its building into a cultural center for Black students.



Examples of racist incidences on college campuses in the U.S

- In September of 2016 at the University of Missouri, White fraternity members allegedly shouted racial and sexist slurs at a Black student group.



East Tennessee University

- At East Tennessee State University, a White student placed himself into a Black Lives Matter rally wearing a gorilla costume and carrying a banana dangling from a rope, according to *Inside Higher Ed*.



American University

- At American University in Washington, D.C., hundreds of Black students protested after two Black women were the victims of racial incidents, with a banana thrown at one of them and a banana left at the door of the other.



Penn State University

- Further, a former Penn State student named Nicholas Tavella pleaded guilty to felony. He asked a student if he was from the Middle East, then grabbed him by the throat and threatened to put a bullet in his head. Tavella then invoked Donald Trump as his defense, claiming the presidential candidate inspired his hate crime.

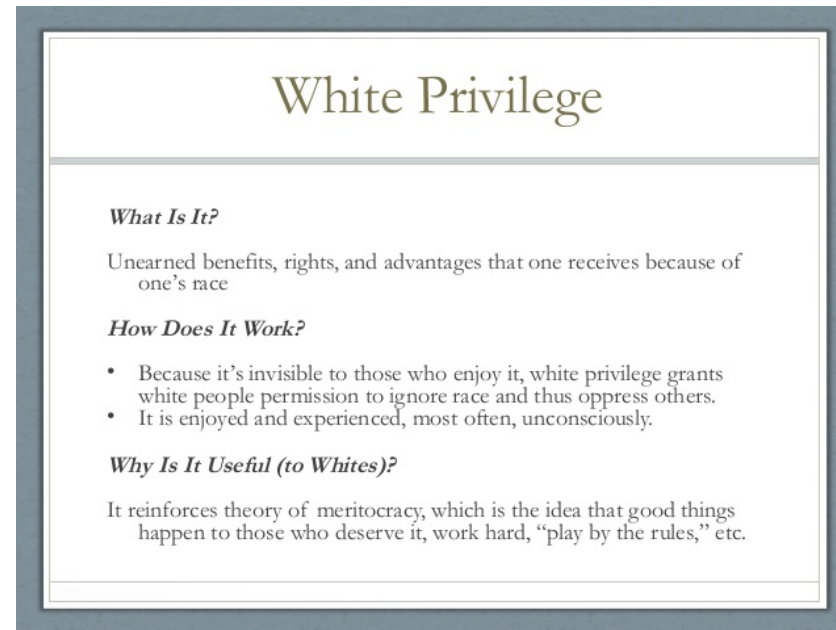


Charlottesville, University of Virginia and Heather Hayes



Issues of Racism and Privilege

- Does the political climate produce millennials that feel so free to be racist on social media and in public, or is it because of Trump, for example, that people are being more out with their racism, or is racism something that people are feeling more willing to express and then Trump is feeding on that and also stoking it? Or maybe it's unrelated to Trump.



White Privilege

What Is It?

Unearned benefits, rights, and advantages that one receives because of one's race

How Does It Work?

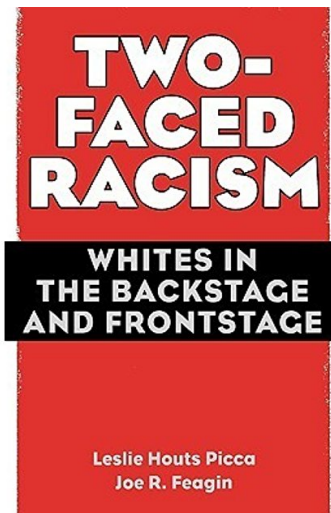
- Because it's invisible to those who enjoy it, white privilege grants white people permission to ignore race and thus oppress others.
- It is enjoyed and experienced, most often, unconsciously.

Why Is It Useful (to Whites)?

It reinforces theory of meritocracy, which is the idea that good things happen to those who deserve it, work hard, "play by the rules," etc.

Two Faced Racism

- A book by sociologist Joe Feagin of Texas A&M University and Leslie Picca of the University of Dayton called *Two-Faced Racism: Whites in the Backstage and Frontstage* develops a theory of “backstage” and “frontstage” racism, in which Whites have been taught to be more politically correct and less overtly racist in public, but still very much racist in private.



Rethinking Race and Privilege in the Classroom

- According to Beverly Daniel Tatum, who is a clinical psychologist and the former president of Spelman College regarding questions of privilege people do not choose to identify as White because they are not given attractive options. “You can be racist; you can be ignorant or you could be colorblind. Those are the ways that white people show up.”
- Dr Tatum says there has to be a fourth way. We have to let people know you can at least try to be anti-racist. That’s another identity option, because what white people do is they don’t even identify with their whiteness. They don’t see it as connected to them. And they don’t see it as something that benefits them, and so it’s kind of hard, because it’s an invisible identity that they’re not willing to get.

American Populism and the role of the teacher

- When violence as manifested in incidences such as what happened at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville becomes a common occurrence and xenophobic propaganda dominates the media and the public sphere, teachers cannot afford to be neutral.



Current Policies effecting U.S students

Donald Trump's plan to ban Muslims from entering the United States.

His policies for deportations of undocumented immigrants and DREAMERS.

His his violent, patronizing language and misogyny.

His statements describing Mexicans as “killers, criminals, and rapists”; his call to torture and kill the families of terrorists—these are real threats to real people, which should be denounced as intolerable to our ideas of freedom and equality.



Problem with a “Multicultural and a Diverse” Approach

- Discourses on multiculturalism and diversity are often used to promote dialogue on equity in a world in which conflicting ideologies and viewpoints are often at odds with each other.
- On what basis do pluralists think such “fair and tolerant” discussions take place?
- Courses and policies on multiculturalism and pluralism alone are not sufficient to address the history of racism and oppression that have often been codified through institutions of education and higher learning. Instead, these uncritical discourses only reinforce the point that in the absence of decentering dominant narratives in our classrooms, the inclusion of marginalized identities and experiences leaves oppressive structures intact and, in fact, insulates them from criticism (Samudzi, 2016).

Challenge to Teachers

- The challenge to multiculturalism then is to create a space where all voices can be heard.
- The question then becomes how do we as teachers, through our pedagogy, ethically confront the concrete political realities of our times? Furthermore, is it really the role of teachers to take on this daunting task?



Methodological Framework of a Liberatory Praxis Pedagogy

- Paulo Freire's (1969) educational philosophy emphasized that all knowledge should refuse to take the social and the cultural matrix as a given. All educational experiences for Freire, including those of teacher and student, have to be examined in order to deconstruct their ideological assumptions and biases.
- By providing conceptual tools to both teachers and students, he urged the critical interrogation and unlearning of race, class, and privilege. Freire called this process of learning and unlearning, action and reflection *praxis*. Its main objective is to “name” reality and act to change it. According to him, “to speak a true word is to transform the world” (p. 68). Acting and reflecting on the world in order to change it create a space of transformative thinking and a liberatory pedagogy (Rasheed, 2007a).

Paulo Freire's Concept of Praxis



People begin with a situation or question which they consider in relation to what they think makes for human flourishing.

They are guided by a moral disposition to act truly and rightly.

This enables them to engage with the situation as committed thinkers and actors.

The outcome is a process.

the good

phronēsis

praxis

interaction

The Pedagogy of Naming

- After reading Paulo Frere, I began to conduct an exercise with my students to name issues of oppression in their own lives and in the larger society to understand implicit bias. In offering examples of personal stories of oppression, they almost never include oppression pertaining to issues of diversity, i.e., race, sexuality, and/or class.



Misunderstanding of implicit bias

- Often my students' understanding of diversity is a “surface diversity,” i.e. “the presence of different ‘looking’ people, without a sincere acknowledgement of different ideologies or perspectives” (Samudzi, 2016) Moreover, even in their own understanding of diversity, the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, and disability is never discussed.

Examples of “perceived” implicit bias from my students

- We had a quiz one day, and he thought it would be funny to make all the word problems with my name in them- but they all had a negative “story” to them. One of them was something like “K failed math and now she works at a fast food restaurant, calculate the number....” (you get the point). This was an instance that I was oppressed.
- When I was in middle school I lived in a Hispanic community, being Caucasian I was often confused when the other students would always speak Spanish to one another. In many instances I was left out and looked down among because the other girls thought I would be stuck up. I was left out and lonely for a period of time. I felt like I didn’t matter among my peers. I eventually made friends with some of the girls through a group project. The girls and I found out that we had common interests and were allot alike. Lucky my experience turned into a positive one, I even learned some Spanish from my new friends in the progress.
- I was taking an elective course and it required a lot of studying. My grandfather passed away during the course and I was very upset missed a few days of class and my teacher was not understanding even with the note. I ended up having to drop the class. While I do agree that education should be one of a student's top priority's life does happen sometimes and teachers need to be understanding of certain situations.

My Students and the Invisibility of Privilege



Post-election Trump Climate in the Classroom

- This particular Fall 2016 semester, I noticed something stronger than the usual resistance to issues of marginalization that were brought up in class. The uneasiness generally associated with talking about issues such as privilege had hostility associated with it.
- In articulating their discomfort with issues on “Black Lives Matter” <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/06/the-fbi-has-identified-a-new-domestic-terrorist-threat-and-its-black-identity-extremists/> students were responding with comments that were overtly and uncomfortably racist, sexist, or homophobic, almost making me wonder if the current climate was emboldening some students to voice views that they historically would have refrained or hesitated to admit in a classroom space.

Two Classroom Case studies

- To illustrate I will share examples of two classes—one undergraduate and the other doctoral—that were conducted post-election. The interactions elucidates the resistance my students were struggling with, I faced as a faculty, and ultimately the anti-racist conceptual tools I provided to my students in order to deconstruct the structures of how privilege and race operated in public spaces.

Background of my university

- I teach at a small liberal arts college in an affluent suburb. My students are from neighboring towns that can be classified as middle- to upper middle-class and predominantly White. For quite a few of them, I am the first teacher who has even brought up issues of privilege and encouraged them to think through their own oppression. My courses shed light on how social and cultural factors, like race, gender, and social class, exist in the everyday world of schooling. Students are engaged in readings that expose the inequities existing in schools. They are also asked to reflect critically on their own schooling experiences. This means taking a hard and a self-reflective look at how racism, classism, and sexism offer undeserved privilege to some, while others—in spite of their expertise and experiences—are not recognized, ignored, or oppressed.

Undergraduate class for pre-service teacher educators: Example #1.

- It was the day after the election. I walked into my 11:00 a.m. undergraduate class and asked how everyone was feeling. The responses ranged from “I’m fine” to “studying for midterms.” Not one person had mentioned the results of our democratic elections from the day before. I smiled and asked them again if there was anything they wanted to share or articulate in class about any recent events that seemed to have affected them or their lives in a profound way. My undergraduate class had been struggling the whole semester trying to understand the concept of privilege, specifically as it related to issues of race, economics, sexual orientation, and disability.

Email from Student

- This resistance was demonstrated by one email I received after teaching “Black Lives Matter.” The email said:
- “Hello Professor, I just wanted you to know that the last class really upset me, but not in the way I believe you wanted us to be, especially with that video at the end. I feel this class is becoming a left-wing politics class as opposed to an education class. I feel as if I’m supposed to carry some kind of white privilege whenever I enter the classroom. This makes me less motivated and frankly, a bit insulted. I just wanted to express that and I hope you don’t find me rude but if your future classes are going to be that upsetting, I don’t think I can continue. I hope you understand what I’m trying to say and I know it’s not your intention to make me uncomfortable, but this is how I feel.”

Reflection and Resistance: Implementing a Methodology of Praxis (Paulo Freire)

- In response to her email, I asked the student if she would volunteer to write a reflective piece on her own analysis of why she felt so angry and uncomfortable in class while considering how epistemic oppression might play out against and within these parameters.
- By creating such spaces of reflection and resistance in the classroom for this particular student and others like her, I could help her explore an alternate relationship to the other by re-orienting her own relationship to privilege in terms of her own positionality. Despite our diverging views and ideologies, I was using the students' resistance as an opportunity to facilitate a discussion about oppression and privilege offering this particular student the conceptual tools to examine and problematize issues of race, identity, and otherness.

Doctoral Course on Race and Diversity. Example #2

- In my doctoral class on philosophies of race and diversity, we had just finished studying decolonization and the problematics surrounding imperialist conceptions of race.
- The class was comprised of a majority of intellectually curious, academically strong young professionals ranging from teacher educators to administrators to superintendents. The composition of the class was predominantly a homogeneous non-diverse student body who seemed unfazed when I walked into class and asked if there was anything they wanted to talk about. To my surprise, the same answers greeted me: “No” or “I have a question pertaining to the upcoming test.” No one brought up the election. Coincidentally, we were scheduled to discuss Islamophobia in that class.

Intersectionality as a Methodological Framework

- I faced a twofold challenge. First, I wanted to show the relevance of these issues in the construction of their own identities and in relation to their own realities. Second, I wanted to undertake the task of deconstructing their hostility and anger in the class to a place where I could constructively work with them as well as provide them with anti-racist pedagogic tools to understand their conceptual framework. Simultaneously, I was being acutely aware of my own intersectional racialized identity: as a Muslim, a woman, and a faculty of color positioned in a place of academic privilege. The lens of *intersectionality* in this context is important because it refers to the critical insight on the part of my students and myself that issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age are interconnected to one's formation of identity.

Dialogical Pedagogy

- On extensive back-and-forth dialogue with them, it became clearer to me that these students did not seem to fit the racist, xenophobic, and homophobic stereotype of Trump supporters—a belief which, until then, I held with embarrassment.
- For both my undergraduate and doctoral students, I did not fit their stereotype of the “radical, terrorist Muslim” waging war on them or being oppressed by my religion.
- Through my own anecdotes as a Muslim talking about the Muslim ban and how it affected me personally, my students became exposed to an example of racism that problematized entrenched societal perspectives which dehumanize and marginalize people of color and other vulnerable groups in the media.

Pedagogies of Interruption, Fanon and a Phenomenology of Race

- Frank Fanon asks us to think of the ‘historic-racial’ schema, which is ‘below it’. In this sense, Sara Ahmed explained that for Fanon, race “interrupts” the corporeal schema. Alternatively, we could say that “the corporeal schema” is already racialized; in other words, race does not just interrupt such a schema but structures its mode of operation. As Fanon’s work showed, after all, bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which make the world “White,” a world that is inherited or already given before the point of an individual’s arrival (Ahmed, 2007).

Conclusion: Positionality and the Politics of Interruption

- In a way, articulating my experience gave my students a different viewing point, and further interrupted how racialized identities are oriented. Engaging with my students in an intersectional post-election dialogue on issues we might vehemently oppose created specific pedagogical tools to deconstruct our differences from a re-orientation of hostility to one of hospitality.

- My personal narratives infused with theoretical underpinnings offered my students an insight into my own ‘interrupted’ experience with racialization.
- At the same time, they were also provided with an alternative viewpoint that led them to rethink and re-orient their relationship to problematic stereotypes and ahistorical sound bites, that they were often exposed to in the media and the larger public space.
- These dialogic exchanges with my students also offered me a space to negotiate my place of privilege from a place of power as an academic and a racialized identity—a Muslim woman of color. All the while, this was helping my students unlearn their own place of privilege in relation to me and to each other as well as to society at large.

What an Anti-Racist Pedagogy Looks Like

- Consequently, learning as a racialized pedagogy, on the part of my students, involved acquiring the tools to articulate discomfort within an anti-racist context.
- In my role as a professor, I was compelled to reflect on how to talk about privilege without alienating my students or pigeonholing them, as Michael (in Love, 2016) said, into one of the undesirable categories of Whiteness in which they do not fit and that, more importantly, do not reflect their viewpoint.
- Students need to understand how their knowledge will connect to their own lives and their own oppressions in order to engage with the material

Why an Antic-Racist Pedagogy is Important

