

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS- OVERCOMING SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION TO ACHIEVE EQUITY: GETTING STARTED

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Presented at Community College League of California Annual Convention: *Eyes on the Horizon*. Nov. 15, 2018

Program Description: Conversations about equity/overcoming systemic oppression are difficult. The importance of the topic requires mindful planning and strategy to forge a path for colleges to have meaningful dialogue. We will start with square one: Getting started. Preparing to have the conversation and developing a strategy.

Learning Objectives:

1. Strategies from “So You Want to Talk About Race”. Understanding this is a long conversational process, and that “mistakes will be made” yet we need to invest the energy and keep trying
2. Understand intersectionality: gender, race, and class; with highlights from Angela Y. Davis and bell hooks
3. Become introduced and familiar with “white fragility” and its impact on conversations; particular to Equity framework

What is your “WHY?”



What does it mean to be:

- Nice?

- Polite?

What/how do you react to situations where X are publicly present?

X = unconscious bias

X = stereotypes

X = blatant discrimination/racism

Racism “any prejudice against someone because of their race, when those views are reinforced by systems of power” (Oluo, 2018, p. 26)

- Can be very subtle
- **“You do not have to ‘be racist’ to be a part of the racist system” (p.28)**
- System creates it, **not** the individual’s intent
- When a person of color is positioned to have to defend themselves from being discriminated against including proving their worthiness of humanity, they are coming from a power differential created by the system, not by an individual
- The system is designed to benefit those in economic/social power: this is an important distinction because there is an “important difference between systemic racism and anti-white bigotry” (p.35)
- Society needs to start talking about race without putting the “undue burden on people of color” to educate whom they are interacting (p. 43)

Is this about race? IF:

1. A person of color thinks it is about race...
2. It affects people of color disproportionately or differently...
3. It fits into a broader pattern of events that affects people of color disproportionately or differently...

...THEN it is about race (Oluo, 2018)

Concepts to keep in mind when starting to strategize having conversations that address race/equity on our campuses:

- Impact matters more than intent
- Intention is NOT better than impact
 - Justifications for “why” (intent) of speaker versus the impact on the receiver DO NOT Matter
 - What Matters: the receiver
- Feelings are going to surface because you **must focus on impact** if you are going to discuss race and create meaningful change
- This is not likely to go well despite all the effort, preparation, and planning you put into the event (Oluo, 2018)
 - DO IT ANYWAY (see Oluo, 2018)
 - Seriously: do it anyway

Concepts to keep in mind as we begin to strategize having conversations that address race/equity on our campuses:

- An important goal is to create the space by which people can examine, reflect, and learn new ways to interact; and become aware of how race is systemically woven into our system in ways that do not benefit people of color
- You will (not may) experience a variety of excuses, justifications, and emotional outbursts by participants. Their anger will be directed at YOU but *may not be about you*
- MAKE SURE YOU ARE READY FOR THIS
- If you are not ready, get ready for this **BEFORE** you start
- *If you are not sure, then involve experts who can better expertly guide the process to get it started*

To address Racism as a structure, one has to address/confront/explore individual behaviors which contribute to the dominant paradigm (Oluo, 2018):

- It will be uncomfortable for people who have not engaged in this work before
- Expect this discomfort to have varying degrees of disruption to the discussion
- It may need to be a series of discussions/workshops to lead to a place where conversation can be had
- You may need to involve experts to provide guidance during these conversations when **well meaning people** cannot facilitate the level of hostility/behavioral manifestations of confronting white privilege

IMPACT > INTENTION

- It may also go well and you may see change/transformation
- THEN: keep the work ongoing. It is not static but dynamic change that needs to be sustained

“Race alone is not all you need to focus on, but without it, any solution you come up with just won’t work” (Oluo, 2018, p. 21)

INTERSECTIONALITY

Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.2 and p.193:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social divisions, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and themselves.

INTERSECTIONALITY AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

- Social Inequality
- Power
 - *“Power relations are intertwined and mutually constructing. Race, class, gender, sexuality, dis[A]bility, ethnicity, nation, religion, and age are categories of analysis, terms that reference important social divisions. But they are also categories that gain meaning from power relations of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class exploitation” (p. 7)*
 - *4 domains of power: Interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, structural. Dynamics of each are interplaying and affecting/reinforcing*
- Relationality (Connectedness)
 - *Rejects binary either/or thinking*
 - *Embraces both/and framework*
- Social Context: *“being aware of that particular historical, intellectual, and political contexts shape what we think and do” (p.28)*
- Complexity
- Social Justice

bell hooks (2015)

- Stereotypes promoted and reinforced in the media are a disservice to black women
- “The misuse of the term matriarch has led many people to identify any woman present in a household where no male resides a matriarch” p.73
- Racist scholarship has not presented the work, life, political contributions of black women and men accurately
- In regards to the sexist patriarchy:
over emphasis on the male as oppressor often obscures the fact that men too are victimized. To be an oppressor is dehumanizing and anti-human in nature, as it is to be a victim... and denies all men the emotional life that would act as a humanizing self-affirming force in their lives (p.114)

Angela Davis (1983)

- Know and understand historical factors which have shaped society and racial interactions
- The relationship of slave owner's wife to slaves:
 - Complicit in rape/violence through their silence or instigation
 - Complicit in torture and death through silence or lies/instigation
- Feminism versus Black Feminism: Liberation and Suffrage
 - Betrayal by white feminists
 - The rise of racism of the late 1890- 1900's: more black lives lost in violent ways
 - Susan B. Anthony "self avowed capitulation to racism 'on grounds of expediency' to get white women the vote
 - Ultimately: Feminism then became "white" by its exclusion of black women

White Fragility

White Fragility is a process (Diangelo, 2018)

- White people have not had to build “racial stamina” because being white is built on white separatist, inequality which benefits white people
 - “Insulated from racial stress” (p.1)
 - Develops feeling of entitlement; deeply internalized, cannot recognize it

White Fragility is a process (Diangelo, 2018)

- When challenged about race and advantage of whiteness, become fragile
- Feel the challenge is about moral goodness/badness rather than about the **system of race and interconnectedness**
- Triggers responses of defensiveness: fear, anger, guilt. Manifested by silence, argumentativeness, or withdrawal

White Fragility is a process (Diangelo, 2018)

- Response serves to balance the equilibrium back to racial comfort
 - racial comfort = dominance of the racial hierarchy
- “it is a powerful means of white racial control and the protection of white advantage” (p. 2)
- Subconscious level, patterns learned and reinforced throughout lifetimes

Diangelo, 2018, p.122 White fragility functions to:

- Maintain white solidarity
- Close off self reflection
- Trivialize the reality of racism
- Silence the discussion
- Make white people the victims
- Hijack the conversation
- Protect a limited world view
- Take race off the table
- Protect white privilege
- Focus on the messenger, not the message
- Rally more resources to white people

White progressive (def.): “any white person who thinks he or she is not racist, or is less racist, or ‘in the choir’, or already ‘gets it’” (Diangelo, 2018, p.5)

- Diangelo believes that “white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color... because, to the degree that we think we have arrived, we will put our energy into making sure that others see us as having arrived” (p.5)
- White progressives get comfortable when the work needs to be committed and continuous:
 - Self awareness is ever evolving, not stagnant
 - Continue educating yourself/others
 - Build more relationships
 - Most importantly: engage in “actual antiracist practice” (p.5)

Recognize White Progressive pushback to engage in conversations about race (Diangelo, 2018):

- “I was taught to treat everyone the same”
- “I don’t see race”
- “I was raised to be color blind”
- I belong to “X” white ethnicity that has been discriminated against
- These comments are problematic because:
 - ...invalidates the person of color who is **not** being “treated the same”
 - Shuts down opportunity to hear/listen to the experiences of people of color
 - It is a part of the “white script” in the socialization process whereby white supremacy is upheld as a system/culture because unearned advantage goes unrecognized
 - Reflecting on your whiteness when a member of “X” white ethnicity still benefits you being from the dominant paradigm

“The racial status quo is comfortable for white people, and we will not move forward in race relations if we remain comfortable”

“The key to moving forward is what we do with our discomfort” Diangelo, 2018, p.14

- Increase capacity for discomfort
- Increase racial stamina to counter white fragility

Manifestations of White Fragility by White people when in discussion about race

Feelings expressed:

- Singled out
- Attacked
- Silenced
- Shamed
- Guilty
- Accused
- Insulted
- Judged Angry
- Scared
- Outraged

Behaviors expressed:

- Crying
- Physically leaving
- Emotionally withdrawing
- Arguing
- Denying
- Focusing on intentions
- Seeking absolution
- Avoiding

(Diangelo, 2018, p.119)

Justifications for the Manifestations of White Fragility by White people when in discussion about race (Diangelo, 2018, p.119-120)

- I know people of color
- I marched in the 60's
- I already know all this
- You are judging me
- You don't know me
- You are generalizing
- That is just your opinion
- I disagree
- The real oppression is class [or gender, or anything other than race]
- You are an elitist
- I just said one little innocent thing
- Some people find offense where there is none
- You don't do this the right way
- You're playing the race card
- This is not welcoming to me
- You're being racist against me
- You are making me feel guilty
- You hurt my feelings
- You misunderstood me
- I don't feel safe
- The problem is your tone
- I can't say anything right
- That was not my intention
- I have suffered, too

Being aware of white fragility as it is in play by white women and white men (Diangelo, 2018)

■ “White women’s tears”

- Reinforce racism rather than correct it; Laden with historical significance to violent acts against black men (being tortured or murdered)
- Creates attention for the white women in a victimization way, demanding time and attention away from the issue of correcting racism. Serves to uphold the racist structure. Requires energy by all.
- Although it comes across as innocent, it is very politicized
- People of color are abandoned during this interaction– awkward space of comforting the aggressor
- **Example of car wreck: first responder issuing comfort to the driver of the car instead of the victim lying injured and ignored**

■ Recognize the tears for what they are: get comfortable getting uncomfortable! Do not indulge

■ “Tears demonstrate racial insulation and privilege” (p.136)

Being aware of white fragility as it is in play by white women and white men (Diangelo, 2018)

MEN:

- Verbal conversational dominance: first and last word, most words
- Disingenuous invalidation of racial inequality “just playing the devil’s advocate”
- Having all the answers “people just need to...” or “read this book...” which intellectualizes/distances the issue of race
- Claim reverse racism and play the victim
- Accuse others of playing the race card
- Withdrawing, silent
- Hostility
- Channel switching such as class is the real oppression
- Correcting others’s racial analysis (people of color/white women)
- “Pompously” disregarding the examples of experiences of people of color and explaining away the racism as another issue

Being aware of white fragility as it is in play by white women and white men (Diangelo, 2018)

WHITE WOMEN'S TEARS AFFECT ON WHITE MEN:

- White men still the pinnacle of the race/gender hierarchy
 - *Remember: it is possible to be involved in a racist system without individually being a “racist”*
- Determine whose pain is legitimate and not
- White men coming to the rescue of white women in these settings reinforces patriarchy; saviors

Chapter 10 of Diangelo's book: The rules of engagement regarding feedback

Two acceptable ways to respond to when you are confronted on your behavior:

“1. How, where, and when you give me feedback is irrelevant– it is the feedback I want and need. Understanding that it is hard to give, I will take it anyway I can get it. From my position of social, cultural, and institutional white power and privilege, I am perfectly safe and I can handle it. If I cannot handle it, *it's on me* to build my racial stamina.

2. Thank you.”

(Diangelo, 2018, p.125)

To summarize, as you prepare to start talking about race/equity:

- IMPACT is greater than intention. ALWAYS!
- No tokenism– be aware of anyone’s IMPACT of having someone be the representative of their race during discussions. Disrupt it.
- Do your homework– read!!
It is YOUR work to do, not the work of those oppressed by white/patriarchy to educate you
- Become aware of white fragility. Be prepared to address it
Rehearse your reactions and understand that you will still be caught off guard at times
Be ready for tears and to mitigate other’s reactions to them

Recommended topics to explore:

- Critical Race Theory

From Communication Studies:

- Sapir Whorf Hypothesis (and Anthropology)
- Agenda Setting Theory
- Muted Group Theory

From Psychology:

- Psycholinguistics

Higher Education

- Discriminatory patterns workload issues/climate
- Discriminatory evaluations of faculty

From the Status Of Women in California:

- 2018 special focus on Women in the Workforce
[https://www.msmu.edu/media/website/content-assets/msmuedu/home/academics/financial-aid/documents/StatusOfWomenCA2018_WEBFINAL\[5\].pdf](https://www.msmu.edu/media/website/content-assets/msmuedu/home/academics/financial-aid/documents/StatusOfWomenCA2018_WEBFINAL[5].pdf)

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