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## *Pedagogy and Privilege*

### *The Challenges and Possibilities of Teaching Critically about Racism*

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#### **Abstract**

*This reflective paper examines both the challenges and possibilities of drawing teacher education candidates into critical examination of cultural, structural, historical, and discursive dimensions of racism in the North American context. It considers the importance of fostering both a critical consciousness and humility amongst undergraduate education students as part of the process of preparing them to read and act upon schools and societies in ethically and politically responsible ways. It delineates some of the challenges in attempting to do this and offers up for discussion a few practical strategies for teaching against, through, and about the resistance and denials that often accompany efforts to teach critically about racism in university settings.*



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As Peter McLaren has observed, “critical pedagogy is as diverse as its many adherents” (2003, p. 193). The many forms that critical pedagogy take have in common an aim to foster a critical consciousness in students that will enable them to question, challenge, and change structures of domination and states of hegemonic dominance. The many ways of embracing critical pedagogy and the many reasons for doing so share, moreover, the objective of challenging ‘epistemological naiveté’ as part of a larger effort to shape a more socially just world that is always ‘not yet’ (Kincheloe, 2008; Kress, 2011). There is both an optimistic dimension and paradoxical tension to critical pedagogy, acknowledging that schools are both, even simultaneously, sites of domination and liberation. This paper is a reflection upon my teaching about racism to undergraduate students in education courses. It is an attempt to take seriously the structural domination reproduced through the teaching of difficult knowledge and to do so by highlighting pedagogical approaches that have liberating potential. It delineates some of the challenges in attempting to infuse teacher education curricula with critical pedagogical principles and in trying to foster a critical consciousness in teacher education candidates that enables reading and acting upon the world and classrooms in ethically and politically responsible ways. In particular, it highlights several approaches for teaching through the resistance and denials that often accompany efforts to teach critically in university settings and aims to gently provoke further dialogue about the role of humility in guiding pedagogies for the privileged.

### **Incarcerating Effects of Denials and Resistance**

Proponents of critical pedagogy obviously want students to be critical thinkers (Gay & Kirkland, 2003); however, it often seems that students are more apt to question instructors’ efforts aimed at contesting power than they are those problematic truths which have been ingrained into their commonsense. Little wonder, since popular culture, state-sanctioned curriculum, and media continually construct and disseminate ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980) about race as a natural category of humanity, about racism as that which only bad people do, about what an exceptionally tolerant nation we live in, or about how distant we (as good individuals or as a multicultural nation) are from the acts or effects of racism. These regimes of truth (which we might also call empowered mythologies or even normalized lies) incarcerate in so far as they privilege limited, partial, or patently false understandings of the world. Such restricted understandings of the world make possible (and not only among students) problematic iterations of colour-blindness, assertions of race-neutral contexts, and what appears to be a growing perception of whites as victims of so-called reverse racism – as if whiteness has become just the most recent of a long list of downtrodden racialized identities (Giroux, 1997; James, 2007). Incarcerating regimes of truth about race and racism trap many racialized whites (in particular, although not exclusively) in prisons of illusion that obscure the physical, psychological, and material penalties of racism, the role of whiteness as a racialized category, and, perhaps most significantly, the benefits that are accrued by those empowered through racism.

Questions of how one teaches against, through, or strategically with such empowered illusions which prop up white supremacy and how teachers might provoke students to see, to deconstruct, and to positively transform such perceptually incarcerating power and privilege are central to a critical pedagogy of whiteness. Such pedagogies for the privileged are not new. Indeed, for generations, all sorts of pedagogical activities and tools (some might say gimmicks even) have been employed with the aim of opening the ostensibly closed eyes of the powerful and privileged. Some examples include Jane Elliot’s famous division of blue-eyed and brown-eyed elementary school children into inferior and superior ‘races’ captured in the 1960s film *Class*

*Divided* (Peters & Cobb, 1985), Peggy McIntosh's widely circulated list about the taken-for-granted privileges of whiteness such as those that come with the buying of skin-coloured band-aids (McIntosh, 2005), or the many strategies of imitation designed to increase awareness of injustice and to foster empathy for the oppressed (e.g., living in simulated homelessness, poverty, or on food rations so that one might understand what it would be like to 'walk in the shoes' of a less fortunate Other). My point here is not to provoke a debate about the merits or ethics of such activities, but rather to offer a reminder that teachers at different levels and of diverse racialized groups have been trying in various ways, and from well before the advent of critical pedagogy or other forms of liberatory theory and practice (e.g., social justice education, critical whiteness studies, and critical race theory) to help racialized whites 'to see' and 'to know' that we are indeed empowered and privileged by our socially constructed whiteness and hegemonic beliefs and practices.

Common to many of these critical approaches are aims to disrupt the various and plentiful denials of racism (which coincide with the denial and silencing of racialized non-whites) and to illustrate that racism affects imbalanced relations of power regardless (or even because of) people's good intentions (Gorski, 2009). Getting racialized whites (and, as well, able-bodied, middle-class, and heterosexual men) to simply acknowledge their privilege and power continues to be a huge challenge in many teacher education classrooms, including my own. An even greater challenge is to facilitate an understanding, among racialized white students especially, although not exclusively, that such power has not been accrued via egalitarian and meritocratic means and, moreover, that white supremacy also procures and bestows power, privilege, unfair advantage, and benefits (Memmi, 2000; Montgomery, 2008). It is not always difficult for racially privileged and empowered students to 'see' the effects of white supremacy in bodies, minds, and spirits that are beaten, broken, and tortured or in the lives of children tormented by racist name-calling, but it is frequently very difficult to help these same students 'see' the effects and consequences of white supremacy in the minds, bodies, cultures, occupations, homes, vacations, and bank accounts of racialized whites and in the most ordinary spaces, places, and peoples (Montgomery, 2008).

When it comes to opening the eyes and ears of those privileged and empowered students who seem content to ignore the apparently deafening chorus of marginalized voices pressing for social justice, critical pedagogy offers hopeful possibilities for engaging these privileged learners as allies and as subjects of struggle for equitable change. Yet, we should caution against those prominent and articulate folks who, no matter how noble their intentions may be, imply that it can be done in a massively transformative way (e.g., Obama, 2008). Such hopefulness often depends upon racism being viewed as individualized problems of psychological or moral deficit or as anomalous practices that can be easily eradicated or stopped wherever they are seen to start. The Canadian government's "Racism. Stop it!" campaign, which features a large hand making a stop gesture and overlaid with a map of multicultural Canada, is just one of many manifestations of this particularly prevalent conception of racism (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Such notions of stopping or eradicating racism mask the pervasive and banal structures of domination that necessarily place racism here, there, and all places in between. The erasure or subjugation of knowledge about racism as an everyday lived reality with consequences of *both* domination and subjugation functions to inoculate certain tolerant Selves from the overtly racist Other's presumed immorality. This creates the conditions in which it becomes possible to legitimately deny one's own role in reproducing racism and to then separate oneself from the responsibility of doing much (if anything) about said racism. To put it differently, the reduction of racism to the ideas and actions of flawed individuals or groups fosters arrogant fantasies of good and tolerant

multicultural communities, nations, and citizens (e.g., Hage, 2000; Mackey, 2002; Montgomery, 2005; Razack, 2002) and is itself a root cause for the reproduction of racism.

The insistence that racisms pervade everyday lived realities and are always relevant necessarily means that anti-racist strategies must not only entail personal responsibility and active participation in opposition to racism, but also investigation into the processes and practices of normalized domination which secure the perpetuation of racism. If the aim is to alleviate the consequences of racism (not merely to change the rhetoric), then those practices and conditions that enable and reproduce racism must be understood, challenged, and transformed. As many others have indicated, one of the most salient and common practices that contribute to the perpetuation of racism is its very denial (e.g., Henry & Tator, 2002; Jiwani, 2006; Lund & Carr, 2010; Raby, 2004). How can one foster the conditions of critical consciousness with respect to racism, when denials of racism are persistent and pervasive (and clearly persuasive to many)? The hopeful and optimistic dimension of critical pedagogy demands not only that we find ways to make a difference in disrupting such denials, but also that we begin from where our students are at, work with them with an understanding that the needs of privileged students are different from those of the oppressed, and enable these students as well to see themselves as empowered agents, capable of thinking about and acting toward emancipatory transformation (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Shor, 1993, p. 32). Such critical work in teacher education requires both conscientization and humility (Freire, 2000; Kincheloe, 2008, p. viii; Vagle, 2011; DiAngelo, 2010; Kress, 2011, p. 263; Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011).

### **A Critical Pedagogical Approach To Teaching Teachers About White Supremacy**

In resisting that technical-rational culture of professional education which would provide simplistic step-by-step processes for teaching about white supremacy, I nevertheless find myself responding to my teacher candidates' pleas to give them something they can actually use. Thus, my aim here (and in my classes) is to respect the vicissitudes of the educational act whilst encouraging contemplation and reflection upon particular strategies for teaching about and against racism. It is my hope that the ensuing description of a four-part activity that I have used in undergraduate sociology and teacher education classes will resonate with a degree of hopefulness for others aiming to teach from a critical perspective. The activity is intended to provide an opportunity to engage students with self-generating knowledge about both the pervasiveness of racism and also their relationship to the root causes, conditions, and consequences of racism. The overarching objective of this activity can perhaps best be described as creating the conditions for students to:

go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (Shor, 1992, p. 129)

The activity involves four parts, which I will describe below and which involve several key readings that are specific to whiteness and white supremacy. Although heavily weighted with reading and writing, this form of critical pedagogy nevertheless invites students to question dominant knowledge about race and racism and is dependent upon the participatory involvement of students in creating texts of their own thought and language in relation to racism (Shor, 1993).

## *PART 1: Creating Student Texts From Reading and Writing About White Privilege*

The first part of the assignment involves having students read and respond to a classic paper that speaks to taken-for-granted privileges of whiteness. I am referring here to Peggy McIntosh's essay entitled, "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack" which has been reproduced in many forms and in numerous edited collections (e.g., Rothenberg, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). In this widely circulated essay McIntosh addresses how she can take for granted positive representations of whiteness (in school curriculum, in media, and in positions of authority), acceptance of her financial reliability/employment credibility, and privileges like freedom of residential choice and freedom from the burden of representing the white race. I ask my students to read this essay during the first week of class and to respond to it with a three page written reflection and I ask them to do this before we have covered any other course material. As there are now numerous YouTube representations of McIntosh's article, I have alternatively taken to having students simply watch one or more of these short videos in class and respond in writing during the same class (e.g., itpaislinn, 2008). We do not discuss the reading (or the videos based on the reading) and I offer them no suggestions on how to respond. I request only that they endeavour to be honest, but otherwise tell them to write whatever they want, in any style they prefer, and that they will not be graded upon the content of this part of the assignment. I simply read what each student has written, write comments or questions on their papers that are intended provoke deeper thought and dialogue, record whether or not each has completed the assignment, return it to them the next week, and ask them to file it for later use. Invariably, they think this to be odd, and there is always a little puzzlement and sometimes some grumbling about why they are required to do an assignment that will not be marked; however, providing students with this opportunity to respond more or less freely to the reading is crucial to their eventual construction of meaning from it.

## *PART 2: Conceptualizing Race and Racism*

With its focus on conceptualizing and critically examining racism and its effects, part two of this activity aligns especially well with the notion of conscientization that is at the heart of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000). Conscientization refers to a critical consciousness-raising in which students are guided toward understanding that knowledge production is both complex and power-laden and that any transformative practices of freedom depend upon unlearning and challenging prevailing social norms, established truths, and everyday commonsense (Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 1998; Shor, 1993). For about six weeks after having filed their response to the McIntosh reading, we engage in dialogues pertaining to a series of readings, lectures, and films (e.g., Alderman, 2003) that outline a brief history of race-thinking, describe the extent to which biological notions of race persist, stress the salience of race as a real social category that gets reproduced through everyday social interactions, define racism as racialized practices of exclusion that produce both empowered and subjugated subjects, and illustrate that racism is not only what bad people do, that it is not necessarily intentional or deliberate, exceptional or abnormal, only about attitudes, or reducible to fear.

I find during this period that breaking racism down into overlapping conceptual pieces and representing them in a simple visual diagram (see Fig. 1) is especially useful in helping students organize their thoughts about something that has been defined very differently for them for most of their lives, typically as intentional acts of discrimination based on beliefs about the inherent superiority and inferiority of supposed naturally-occurring races. The visual diagram helps, in other words, to disrupt those incarcerating regimes of truth (e.g., in dictionaries, textbooks, and

newspapers) positing racism to be merely about ignorance, prejudice, fear, thoughtlessness, or hatred and as carried out only by ‘men in white sheets’ and others maliciously plotting against racialized non-whites (Schmidt, 2005; Stovall, 2006).

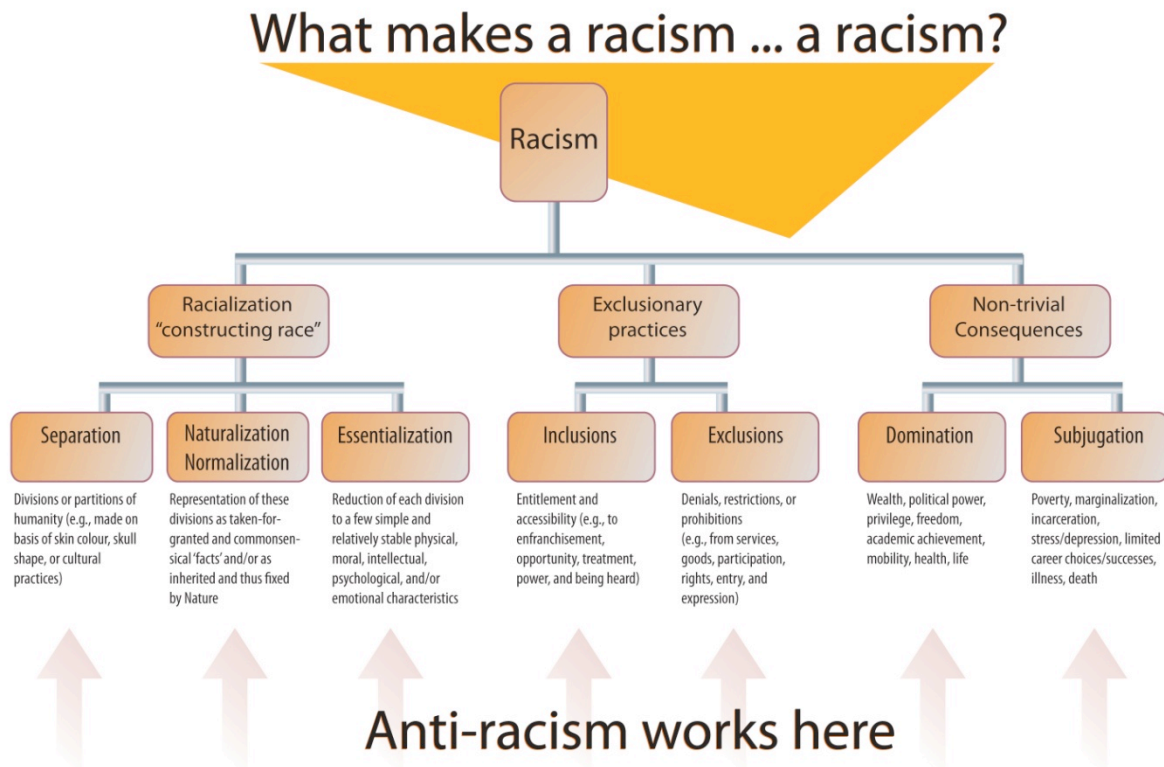


Figure 1. What makes a racism ... a racism?

I present this not as *the* conceptualization, but rather as *a* conceptualization that draws heavily from the work of Miles (1989), Goldberg (1993, 2002), and Stanley (1998, 2001, 2011) to take into account particularly important elements that conceptually distinguish racism from other, albeit related, forms of social oppression. This visual conceptualization draws attention to the salient point that racisms are about representational practices and performances that create and reproduce racialized categories, discriminatory practices of exclusion and inclusion (e.g., related to laws, curriculum, bodies, national belong, and the modes and means of production), and consequences of *both* subjugation and empowerment (thus refuting commonplace assertions that racism is merely a problem for, or about, the Other).

This visual model also illustrates locations at which vital opposition to racism (i.e., anti-racism) can, and does, happen (see Dei, 1996, 2000, 2005; Thompson, 1997). Students are encouraged to contemplate the civic courage and political commitment necessary to contest racism at any of the three conceptual dimensions, but also made aware that much of what gets called antiracism is actually only antiracialism, that is, a critique of racialization (Goldberg, 2008). Students are encouraged, therefore, to move beyond discussions of changing language or eliminating racialized categories toward a dialogue about transforming existing conditions and consequences of racism. The aim is to have students understand that multiple racisms operate in our lives, not merely our heads, that these multiple racisms impact upon such things as achievement in school, what career one

pursues, what school one attends, and who one chooses to play with, date, or marry (Lewis, 2003; Lichtenberg, 1998).

While nearly all teacher candidates express a genuine desire to make the world a better place by fostering goals of freedom, democracy, equality, and justice and most are clearly sincere in their efforts to understand the complexities of racism, this is also the point at which I begin to get the most resistance. This is when I often see the emergence of defensive statements or claims of reverse discrimination such as ‘It’s much harder to get a job if you’re white today. Especially if you’re a guy, good luck to you!’ I would characterize this period in the course as one filled with destabilization, exhaustion, frustration, and even a percolating anger among some students who often give the impression that they are being compelled to learn something that is either of little relevance to their lives or unduly disrespectful of the good people they understand themselves to be. DiAngelo (2011) describes this as a state of “white fragility” in which “even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (p. 57). Indeed, students in similar courses have been known to insist that knowledge about white supremacy is being inappropriately imposed or unfairly “shoved down their throats” (Johnson, Rich, & Cargile, 2008) and that this justifies a harsh, even hostile, response on their part (Schick, 2005). Gentler responses, reflective of shaken confidence or moral and epistemological struggles are more typical in my experience. I recall one lecture in which I was delineating ways in which race, despite its superstitious and mythical properties, shapes self-understanding, interactions with others, institutional practices, and unequal access to material resources, when a white student at the front of the class cocked her head to the side, twisted her eyebrows into a puzzled and unconvinced pose, and slowly raised her hand while she asked ‘If what you say is true ... what do you say about the fact that my brother didn’t get into the teacher education program here because he is white?’ Whether they are asked sincerely from a place of intellectual struggle, as this question was, or from a place indicative of defensiveness, backlash, or denial, similar questions invariably come my way each time I begin to teach about race as social construction, when I disturb commonsensical understandings about students’ sense of national and/or personal innocence when it comes to racism, and most especially, when I explicitly name such racism as white supremacy.

### *PART 3: Teaching/Learning about Patterns of Denial*

In the midst of this resistance (which is quite predictable and consistent, but not absolute by any means) and roughly six weeks after they’ve completed their response to the McIntosh essay, I ask the students, for the second part to their assignment, to retrieve and reflect upon their initial response to the McIntosh article as they read, carefully consider, and respond to a second article which incorporates the words of students much like themselves. This second article describes the responses of about 140 teacher education candidates to a version of that same Peggy McIntosh reading (Solomon, Portelli, Daniels, & Campbella, 2005). It is a bit of an ambush, some might say, since this article specifically illustrates dominant strategies or discourses employed by white teacher education candidates to avoid, deny, or dismiss discussion about whiteness and the privilege associated with it. Solomon *et al* (2005) delineate patterns including “ideological incongruence” (e.g., teacher candidates express belief in equity initiatives while also critiquing them as “reverse-discrimination”), “negation of white capital” (e.g., teachers deny the existence of both white privilege and structural or systemic racism), and “liberalist notions of individualism and meritocracy” (e.g., teacher candidates deny historical context and work to preserve the assumption that everyone has access to same opportunities). The three patterns are illustrated with rich examples of transcribed responses from pre-service teachers who are similarly positioned to those in my classes.

These patterns of denial represented in the article map fairly consistently onto the patterns of denial expressed by my students. Many students are able to see these links and are often alarmed by them. After they have read the Solomon *et al* article and are in the process of writing about it (in relation to the McIntosh article) we construct together typologies of denial, not with the objective of putting students at ease, but rather with the aim of illustrating both the normalcy and enormity of the problem of denial. In societies in which tolerance, equality and democracy are dominant official ideological values and in which racism is officially and culturally condemned, it should be little surprise that people vigorously deny being racist or otherwise supportive of racism. My aim, in my teaching, is to organize these incarcerating denials into an accessible typology for and with students, illustrated with examples that come out of either their own writing or the writing of teacher education candidates much like themselves. This is about having students reflect upon the sheer normalcy of their responses. It is about illustrating the pervasiveness of normalized discourse about race and racism. It is also about provoking students to move past reluctance or refusal to understand their own complicity in the reproduction of white supremacy and toward a structural analysis of the relations of domination and exploitation in the larger world. Frontloading questions about these patterns of denial and inviting students to build a dialogue with their own words in relation to these patterns democratizes their education and situates it in their own knowledge and language, both of which are crucial to the goals of critical pedagogy (Shor, 1993). In what follows I outline three general types of denial constructed with and for students and offer an illustration of our collaborative efforts to make it the subject of concentrated in-class discussion.

**Reducing and containing racism.** There are multiple forms of denial that reduce or oversimplify racism and its effects. These denials effectively obscure the experiential knowledge of those subjected to the violence of racism and silence those who place racism not only in the heads of individual bigots, but in actual material/bodily conditions and lived consequences. These sorts of denials are captured in statements like, ‘I think it all boils down to fear’, ‘there is no place for this hatred in our schools’, or ‘racism is just another way of saying ignorance.’ Each of these sorts of statements represent the common notion of racism as that which resides merely in people’s heads and not in the material conditions of the social world (Lichtenberg, 1998) and they imply, moreover, that only intellectually, morally, socially, or psychologically flawed people ‘do’ racism.

A related pattern of denial reduces racism to an aberrant condition existing only in particular spatial and temporal locations. Racism is acknowledged, but only ‘out there’, ‘in that space’ (e.g., Germany, the United States, or urban centres), in ‘those people’ (neo-Nazis, KKK members, or less enlightened teacher education candidates), or in ‘those times’ (e.g., during financial crisis or wartime). Frequently viewed or heard expressions in my classes include, ‘It’s natural that bad economic times bring about more prejudice and racism’, ‘I don’t know why some people don’t get this [in the egalitarian way that I do]’, and ‘I come from a small town and there was no racism that I knew of’ (see also de Freitas & McAuley, 2008). These and other discursive patterns of reduction and containment recognize the existence of racism, but only as an anomaly or episodic occurrence, not an endemic condition. Without question one of the most common denials is typically voiced as: ‘In Canada we are more tolerant [than Americans] and so the problem of racism is not so severe.’ This both reflects and reproduces dominant mythologies of Canada as having successfully mitigated or vanquished problems of racism via multicultural policies and practices (e.g., Lund & Carr, 2010; Montgomery, 2005, 2006, 2008). Such discourses about Canadian tolerance not only help to construct racially privileged Canadians (including Canadian teacher education students) as innocent in relation to racism, but also tend to quickly silence those who



attempt to disrupt or complicate the notion of Canada as fair and just (St. Denis, 2011). Another consequence of such discursive denials is the continued reproduction of “racial arrogance” (DiAngelo, 2011). Arrogant positionality is reproduced when the presumed multicultural expertise of these teacher education students (an ‘expertise’ partly constructed from dominant fantasies of Canadian tolerance) leads to prescriptive declarations, which both contain racism to the past and insist that people (implicitly marked as less enlightened, moral, or knowledgeable than themselves) simply need to ‘move forward’, ‘focus on progress,’ or ‘get over it.’ Official multicultural policies and specific examples of non-whites achieving great success (for example, by being appointed Governor General of Canada or ascending to the presidency of the United States) are often used to reinforce the point that progress has been made. These discursive tendencies at once acknowledge and condemn racism, while positioning it as something from another, less egalitarian and tolerant, era.

**Placing the causes of, and responsibility for, racism elsewhere.** A second general type of denial links patterns of reduction and containment to patterns of blaming non-whites for their own oppression and attributing it to flawed individual character and/or cultural practices. Statements like ‘people have to take responsibility for their choices and not blame society’ or ‘there are some groups who don’t seem to want to work hard’ suggest that since Obama has made it, well, there must be something deficient about the many others who have not. These discourses deny not only the injustices faced by non-whites, but also the agency of non-whites who have lived the reality of that injustice. Both overt and subtle blaming the victim discourses depict the racialized other as inept, criminal, lazy, angry, deficient in some ways, or merely too different to be reasonably accommodated. They concomitantly shift responsibility for racism from historical and contemporary structures and institutions in which many are complicit to the shoulders of those who bear the heaviest and most direct costs of racism. Shifting some or all of the responsibility for racism is also apparent in didactically delivered assertions of unassailable truth about ‘their’ parents (e.g., ‘The problem is often the parents’ or ‘Their parents just don’t care’). Through the use of metaphors of emptiness or deficit, such discourses characterize low-income and culturally, linguistically, or racially diverse parents as deficient, but they also contribute to the creation of an ideal type (e.g., the white, middle-upper class, heteronormative, nuclear family) and thus limit the possibility that educators will see non-white racialized groups as equal partners in the educational enterprise (Lightfoot, 2004, p. 95; see also Kelm, 2003).

Shifting the responsibility for racism is also evident in claims such as ‘There weren’t any Blacks or First Nations people where I grew up and so racism wasn’t a problem’, which not only contain racism to larger urban cities, but also imply that racism is only a problem where non-whites have an obvious presence. Thus, these discursive patterns effectively blame non-whites for the problem of racism. Claims of familial egalitarianism (e.g., ‘my parents taught me to treat everyone equally’) or exclamations about the relevance of anti-racist critical pedagogy (e.g., ‘Why do we keep harping on this subject? I didn’t teach in residential schools!’) Similarly position white teacher education candidates as separate from both the institutions that reproduce racism and from the obligation to contemplate or engage in anti-racist practices (see also Trainer, 2005; Coquette & Taylor, 2007). Often revealed through such responses is a subtle conceit embedded in students’ own fantastical understanding of themselves as so deeply committed to principles of equity and social justice that they could not possibly be part of the problem (Young, 2011). These arrogating statements ignore legacies of white settler colonialism, perpetuate fantasies of Canadian goodness, and facilitate the reproduction of both a personal innocence and a presumed impenetrable morality amongst privileged teacher education candidates.

Discussions, readings, films, and assignments about racism often elicit responses such as, ‘It just doesn’t seem fair! Why are we picking on white people so much?!’, as if critiques of racism amount to an attack on their personhood or group membership. Bitterness and frustration about a perceived unfairness get depicted as ‘Will this political correctness ever end?’ or ‘Just how much are we expected to give up to accommodate others?’ As a critical anti-racist educator, I find one of the most challenging topics for classroom discussion is that which involves the discourse of so-called ‘reverse’ racism. Questions such as ‘Can’t other groups be racist too?’ deserve examination and dialogue, not decrees. For example, racialized name-calling can and does get directed toward racially privileged students and its effects can hardly be considered trivial. However, these intermittent cases must be contrasted with the racialized name-calling experiences of racialized minorities, which are exponentially more devastating by virtue of being embedded in historical and institutional contexts of racism (Varna-Joshi, Baker, & Tanaka, 2004). Racisms do not flow indiscriminately back and forth, impacting racialized non-whites one day and racialized whites on another (DiAngelo, 2011). They are not egalitarian in cause, practice, or consequence, but rather consistently empower particular groups at the expense of particular others. Thus, distinguishing between what might be referred to as episodic, individual, or overt/obvious racisms and those that might best be called historical, institutional, or banal/cultural can be helpful to students struggling with what often seems to them to be an obvious contradiction. While anyone can potentially experience episodic, individual, or overt/obvious racisms, dominant groups do not experience historical, institutional, or banal/cultural racisms. Marginalized and subordinated groups of people are especially vulnerable to all forms of racism.

**Negating white privilege/supremacy and the salience of race.** As many have noted, one of the most common forms of denial continues to be colour-blindness (e.g., Bonnett, 2000; Gándara, 2008; Lewis, 2004). Color-blind denial confuses the way things are and have been with the way things ought to be by insisting or presuming that the metaphorical playing field is now level (even if it is recognized that it once was not), and that, therefore, all one (anyone) needs to do to overcome any barriers is to work hard. Universalistic statements such as ‘We are all equal’, ‘What matters is how hard someone works not what colour he or she is’ are rather typical responses coinciding with assertions that all humanity should be afforded the same rights and privileges. Another common variant of this particular form of denial is, ‘I treat everyone the same, that’s how my parents raised me’, subtly positioning particular groups of parents (often racialized non-whites) as having raised their children less well (Lightfoot, 2004). In these discourses of denial, human differences are acknowledged as superficial and thus race is deemed to be something that is or should be irrelevant and invisible (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Dei, 1999). The effect often is to ignore the consequences of racism, to deny the existence of racisms altogether, or to dismiss knowledge that places the critique of white supremacy at the center of analysis by claiming that the problem is not racism, but something else like national integrity, culture, or class. Insisting on meritocracy as the main determinant of identity and expressing reservations about thinking in group terms, most white students resist understanding whiteness as a racialized category, seldom identify with whiteness or as white, and persistently deny that race matters. The insistence of colour-blindness often breaks down, however, when affirmative action programs are discussed for it is then that many students refer to these programs and other equity initiatives as discriminating against a suddenly visible white racial identity (Johnson et al., 2008).

White teacher education students, when confronted with new and complex knowledge about racism, consistently resist this knowledge in ways that protect their personal and racialized identity and the hegemonic domination that empowers them (Goldstein, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Schick, 2000). These denials take many forms including the fear of looking or being called

racist (so that the fear of tarnishing one's reputation displaces concerns with acting against racism). Often too, white teacher education candidates express a fear for their own safety or career if they were to take up what they deem to be such 'controversial topics' in the classroom. 'My town is quite conservative and so I don't feel safe talking about this stuff' or 'Classrooms and teachers should be neutral when it comes to such controversies' exemplify patterns of this kind. Entrenched in a position that views the classroom space as necessarily neutral and apolitical, the real and pervasive effects of racism get ignored when the topic of racism is deemed optional by virtue of its supposed contentiousness and overtly politicized essence.

By now, typologies of denial similar to those outlined briefly above are rather well-documented (e.g., Case & Hemmings, 2005; James, 2007; Johnson et al., 2008; Picower, 2009), but I am not sure that they are explicitly discussed, critically examined, and constructed *with students* as frequently as they might be. Most teacher education students (including racialized non-white students) have never formally learned complex information about racism. Making their encounter and engagement with this difficult knowledge the focus of the analysis is an important step in helping them to move beyond platitudes and simplistic notions of privilege. In small groups and then in whole class discussion, these students construct and critically examine typologies of denial and do so while writing a short 3-4 page essay that incorporates their initial response to the McIntosh article and their engagement with the article by Solomon *et al.* Again, this second writing assignment is one which encourages students to write freely (as opposed to technically) and to put their language into their own hands (Freire, 2001).

#### *PART 4: Moving Beyond White Privilege*

Since my goal is not to dwell in guilt or shame with respect to white privilege or whiteness as a racialized identity, but rather to encourage a structural analysis of white supremacy, there are two more articles which I require my students to read and respond to as the final part to an activity involving unlearning, re-learning, and re-writing racism (Freire, 2001, p. 149). Both of these readings are intended to move students beyond the limiting white privilege/guilt/resentment discourses and toward a critical consciousness of the structural and global dimensions of white supremacy. Typically I will ask students to read and respond to these two additional readings in an essay of between 5-6 pages making it the longest of the 3 writing assignments. The first of these is a reading by Zeus Leonardo (2009) that is overtly critical of the 'white privilege' discourse and specifically of McIntosh's famous essay on the subject. Leonardo contends that the discourse of white privilege focuses almost exclusively on advantages received, while neglecting the processes of appropriation. He insists that we put history back into the equation to show how white supremacy makes white privilege possible so that we can discern what history of domination led to the current and persisting state(s) of dominance. To illustrate the point, he develops his own list in response to McIntosh's. So, for example, where McIntosh (2005) writes on her list that she can take for granted that she will have: "neighbors ...[who are] neutral and pleasant" (p. 110), Leonardo (2009) adds "because redlining and other real estate practices, with the help of the Federal Housing Agency, secured the ejection of the black and brown body from white spaces" (p. 88). Where McIntosh writes that she, as a white woman, can take for granted that she "can choose blemish cover or bandages in 'flesh' color" to match her skin (p. 111), Leonardo adds "because of centuries of denigration of darker peoples and images associated with them" (p. 88), to which I then add 'and also because racialized whites have tended to own and control the means of production of things like bandages.'

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The second reading, which students are to respond to in this fourth part of the assignment, illustrates how the everyday taken-for-granted act of consuming cheap French fries is embedded in a complex nexus of social, political, historical, geographical, and economical relations that reinscribe and reproduce white supremacy (Apple, 1997). By showing how education and life for children in an unnamed “Asian” country is eroded as a direct consequence of the demand for corporate products such as French fries, the article by Michael Apple demonstrates how our ordinary ways of understanding our daily activities inside and outside of schools can make it very difficult to appreciate the subtle, yet powerful, ways in which we participate regularly in the subordination and oppression of others across the globe. The very explicit links Apple makes between the privileged and the marginalized, the local and the global, and between seemingly benign acts of consumption and the reproduction of white supremacy reverberate with continued relevance nearly 15 years after the initial publication of the article.

The subtleties and consequences of such global dimensions of social inequality can also be illustrated effectively via documentary films that demonstrate how the fish and weapons industries along the shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania (Sauper, 2004), the diamond industry in Sierra Leone (Pahuja & Kramer, 2007), or the banana industry in Honduras (Lower, 2003) position subjects in the ‘west’ as complicit, via everyday banal activities, in reasserting global supremacies of multiple kinds. These films, and Apple’s article, also effectively counter assumptions about choice that are widely held amongst the privileged and empowered by demonstrating, on one hand, that the oppressed (e.g., the poor, racialized non-whites, and so-called illegal refugees) cannot necessarily opt out of oppressions and, on the other hand, that the privileged and empowered (e.g., racialized whites) do not necessarily consciously choose to oppress or to be complicit in structures of oppression such as white supremacy.

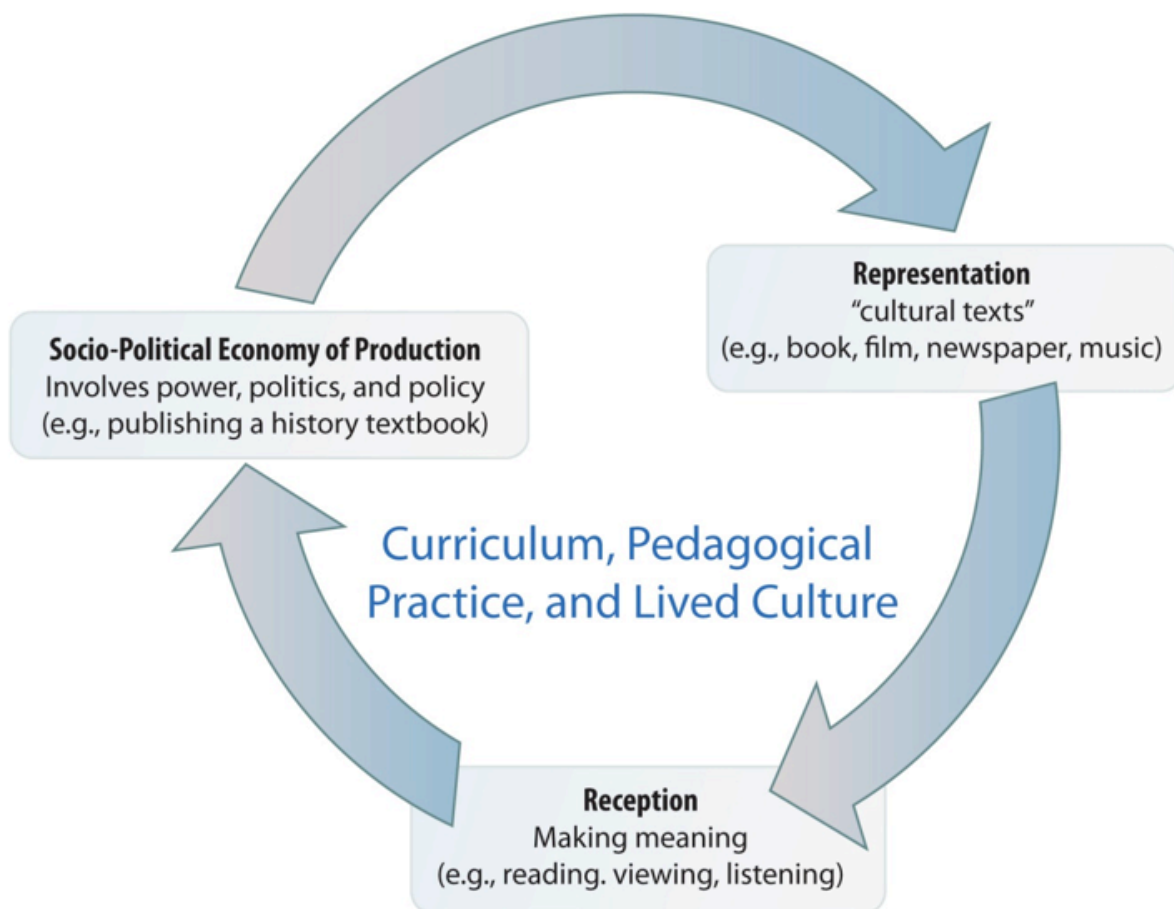
Critical pedagogy depends upon the insight and critical perspective demonstrated in articles such as Apple’s and the documentary films cited above, all of which highlight the role of meaning making processes that legitimize particular ‘truths’ and stories (e.g., ‘I am simply eating French fries’) while subjugating other knowledges and narratives that are crucial to understanding social inequality (e.g., ‘The act of consuming these potatoes is connected to the destruction of possibility for a better future for thousands of children’). Such resources help to vividly illustrate for students the key insight that domination gets maintained not through “the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family” (McLaren, 2003, p. 202). These scholarly articles and documentary films (presented here as examples, not prescriptive texts) compel students and teachers alike to understand the normalized practices which give shape to the many ‘truths’ that become widely accepted as commonsensical (see also Tupper & Cappello, 2008).

Vitally important to helping students move beyond defensiveness and toward a critique of structures and practices that reproduce such inequalities is an explanation of what critique means. While crucial to exploratory speculative research in all fields and to the academic freedom at the heart of higher learning, it is nevertheless often understood to mean a call for rejection, abolition, debasement, or destruction of its object. For example, critiques of patriarchal systems are often construed by students to be man-hating while critiques of racism are often interpreted to mean that white people are evil or immoral. I think it is safe to say that the act of eating cheap French fries does not mean that the consumer is inherently sinister or maliciously focused on stripping young people in poor regions of future life and educational opportunities, but the taken-for-granted act of consuming a cheap French fry does make one complicit in such effects. Defining critique not as

that which condemns, but rather as that which attempts to comprehend the complexities, connections, and subtle power relations pertaining to an object or context of analysis provides an avenue for students to shift from feeling personally violated to interrogation of taken-for-granted knowledge and truth. Critical pedagogy is very much about changing the conditions of knowledge production so that none can find easy sanctuary in ignorance. Once epistemological naiveté is fractured (i.e., once racism is ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ by the racially empowered and privileged), it no longer remains possible to claim innocence or to deny ‘seeing’ racism (Roy, 2001, p. 7).

A simple sketch of the circuit of cultural production (see Fig. 2) has also proven especially effective in helping students understand how they, as the good people they know themselves to be, can nevertheless be so very complicit in take-for-granted practices that reassert white supremacy and its complex relationship with other forms of oppression in local, national, and global contexts (e.g., patriarchy and capitalist exploitation). The diagram draws from the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies to simply illustrate how knowledge gets produced, represented, received, and circulated (Johnson, 1995). It works to make the effects of global capitalism more intelligible (Nicholson-Goodman, 2011) and provides requisite media literacy to contemplate multiple possibilities for disrupting specific taken-for-granted knowledge (e.g., about race as a biological category, about racism as simply what bad people do, or about the act of eating French fries as inconsequential). A critically engaged pedagogy must draw attention to the educational force of mass and popular culture and to the production and exchange of meanings (Giroux, 2007); it must also elevate critical consciousness about self and other as it draws connections between cultural practices and the global dimensions of racism and oppression. A critical pedagogy that does not incorporate critiques of media, of self, of everyday practices, or of beloved rituals and institutions (e.g., ‘our’ nation and its foundational stories, ‘our’ heroes, ‘our’ consumption practices, ‘our’ favorite TV shows, or ‘our’ favourite places to go) will fail to sufficiently prepare students to recognize, let alone move to transform, the complex ways in which racisms impact schools and societies.

## CIRCUIT OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION: HOW “TRUTH” (E.G., ABOUT RACE AND RACISM) GETS CONSTRUCTED.



*Figure 2. Circuit of Cultural Production: How ‘Truth’ (e.g., About Race and Racism) Gets Constructed*

In response to this diagram and the preceding activities, one student astutely acknowledged the interlocking relationship between cultural production, white supremacy, and the persistent inequalities in Canada: “If unpacking the invisible knapsack is in the direction of social justice, it is necessary to interrogate how various meaning systems, spaces and actors interact to secure white privilege within our imagined, multicultural nation” (Walkland, 2008, cited with permission). This is significant particularly because it counters the dominant understanding of Canada as the quintessential model of success in promoting and effecting racial tolerance and equality. Walkland’s is not an atypical response, although I would not want to leave the false impression that all students respond so eloquently. To the contrary, most find it exceptionally difficult to decouple attachments to dominant discourses of egalitarianism, universalism, and meritocracy. Many students, however, also develop more sophisticated understandings of racism that go beyond mere lists of privilege or those celebratory multicultural models, which imagine that racism can be stopped simply through the provision of knowledge about ‘other cultures.’

## What Is The Place Of Humility In Critical Pedagogy?

I have described here a four-part critical approach that engages undergraduate education students in meaningful contemplation about the pervasiveness of white supremacy and the persistent denials that enable its reproduction. The approach entails having students read McIntosh's classic essay on white privilege, a second article that analyzes students' responses to the same McIntosh essay, a third reading offering a substantive critique of McIntosh's argument about white privilege, and a fourth article which illustrates how even the most banal acts of good-hearted people are embedded in structures of domination that reproduce white supremacy. Discussions and reflective writing assignments about these readings, simple diagrams conceptualizing both racism and the circuit of cultural production, and the collaborative examination of various typologies of denial which contribute to the reproduction of racism all help to provide theoretical understanding about the root causes, conditions, and pervasive consequences of racism. The texts and corresponding assignments are difficult and run counter to many students' expectations that being a well-intentioned teacher with a few good techniques will suffice in making them good culturally responsive teachers. The approach undermines the conceit of the good teacher by demonstrating how teaching and learning about difficult knowledge (such as racism) must be connected to something bigger than one's own ego, one's own abilities and effort, and even one's own noble aspirations and goals. It affects a hopeful degree of critical consciousness by drawing teacher education candidates into critical examination of their complicated complicity in the causes, conditions and consequences of multiple racisms.

Critical pedagogy entails interrogation of persistent domination and imbalanced relations of power, disruption of hegemonic systems and states of normalized oppression, and liberatory transformation of the world (Kincheloe, 2008). To effect such change is to challenge incarcerating regimes of truth with more open and expanding explanations of the complex world in which we live and to do so as part of an educational initiation into an inheritance of the human condition (Oakshott, 1989). It is to humbly recognize, moreover, that schooling, including even critical pedagogy itself, is a part of the very world that oppresses and so is always implicated in these normalized oppressions even as it occupies a hope-filled position within the world (e.g., Gur-Ze'ev, 1998). If critical pedagogy is to foster, promote, and effect change by disrupting or dismantling institutionalized racism (and other interlocking forms of social oppression) then it is to encourage negotiated understandings of the world, engage with divergent sources of knowledge, and to stress a reflexive awareness of limitations and fallibility of the "Self" as part of a larger project to oppose social oppression. That is, integral to critical pedagogy (or all good education for that matter) is that it is carried out with humility (Freire, 2001; Hare, 1993). Humility deconstructs privilege and its smugness and so is crucial to affecting real and transformative change with respect to the world's oppressive structures of dominance and domination. To practice humility as a critical pedagogue is to supplant righteousness and egoism with critical assessment and a spirit of generosity and to vigilantly remind oneself that not "everything important lies in our awareness" (Powell, 1997, p. 10). The point of humility is to engage with and take seriously diverse and even contradictory knowledge claims, to enable dialogue, "to learn and relearn again and again", and "to know with those whom we help to know" (Freire, 2001, p. 145), including the privileged amongst us.

The problematic resistance encountered by critical educators cannot be overcome by edict or proclamation, nor can it be reduced to the flawed character of our privileged students. The racial arrogance that enables resistance and denials is less about individual imperfections and more about hegemonic meaning-making and socialization processes. No matter how disappointed

critical educators might be about students' narrow understanding of racism, it is worth reflecting on the complex conditions of knowledge production that have made such disappointing conditions possible in the first place. I recall a particularly challenging period in my university teaching career when one of my own good teachers shared the following helpful (and hopeful) metaphor with me: Teaching and learning about difficult knowledge constitutes a journey (not a destination), each of us (students and teachers alike) is at a different point on that journey, and not one of us has reached a utopian destination where we know all there is to know about racism (T. Stanley, personal communication, September 2005). Many privileged students in teacher education programs begin from, or enter into, positions in which they are confined by individualized guilt, anger, or hubris. The pedagogical approach described in this paper compels privileged students in particular to move from such positions toward more complex understandings about racism and critical investigations into how unequal and institutionalized relations of power are created, sustained, and reproduced.

In our collective quest to engage all learners in the struggle for a more equitable and just world, we would do well to recognize that the needs of privileged students are not necessarily the same as the needs of oppressed or marginalized students (Allen & Rossatto, 2009). This is not to suggest that privileged students ought to be treated with indulgence, spared from unsettling knowledge, protected from discomfiting pedagogical contexts, or have preserved what is often a blissful happiness in the interest of "getting along" (Ahmed, 2007/2008). In fact, there are compelling arguments for the necessity of discomfiting privileged students and, especially, for utilizing an engagement with any discomfort, moral outrage, and other emotions in the pedagogical approach itself (e.g., Boler & Zembylas, 2003; de Freitas & McAuley, 2008). It is to suggest that critical educators can consistently and humbly evaluate "the moral undertones of our pedagogies" while paying explicit pedagogic attention to students' responses and emotions during these very difficult discussions of racism and its consequences (Zembylas, 2011). The challenge for critical pedagogy in relation to whiteness and white supremacy is thus to forge a positionality that is "neither enemy nor ally but a concrete subject of struggle" in which educators at all levels humbly reflect on the imperative for these processes to be guided by the voices and leadership of the racially oppressed, subordinated, and marginalized (Leonardo, 2009, p. 186). Liberation from the incarcerating conditions and consequences of normalized white supremacy depend upon it.

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