Response to Edith Gnanadass and Shantih E. Clemans

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I want to thank my two colleagues for engaging so passionately and accurately with my work, and for problematizing all the omissions and blindnesses I carry. Their critiques are spot on and add nuance and context to a "fast and furious" analysis! As a 70-year old who is currently battling his employer for his speaking out on institutional racism, I am aware that my time for action is limited. The perception of time slipping away certainly fuels a tendency to strip things down to essentials. So I love how these two critiques illustrate why questions of identity are best addressed in conversations between those representing as much intersectionality as can be arranged. One of my core beliefs as a teacher is that introducing the question of race in a predominantly white institution (and indeed in any context) is best accomplished by a multiracial teaching team. That's pretty much the only way that all the complexities of racial identity can be addressed. And the context within which whiteness is named and critiqued is so crucial. Although my piece contains some broad strokes advice, I am quite prepared to reverse or contradict these if something about the situation requires me to experiment radically with methodology.

But, of course, as Edith Gnanadass so pertinently points out, a full explanation of structural inequities requires the permanent reality of intersectionality to be centered; otherwise "we as ABE researchers and practitioners, will once again default to centering whiteness and the white experience while pushing all other racial identities and experiences to the margins and reducing racial relations and racism to the "white-and" binary paradigm of race." In fact, one of the ways that white supremacy maintains its power is by creating such a binary. The central idea of white supremacy is that only whiteness confers superior reasoning ability and calm, logical analysis, and that's why whites should always be in the position of making decisions for the rest of the collective. Once that essentializing idea is challenged, decentered and displaced, then the structures based upon on it start to seem less automatically legitimate.

Both Edith Gnanadass and Shantih Clemans point out my tendency to speak in broad brush strokes as I essentialize the notion of whiteness. I love this correction. In a fully realized analysis, intersectional identities would be at the center of conversation. In the predominantly white contexts in which I work, getting people to even acknowledge whiteness as a category of racial identity is the hardest part of my work. So a pretty unremitting focus on whiteness as a category is needed if anyone is going to even consider the possibility that they have any kind of racial identity.

The audiences I spend most of my time working with are teachers from across the disciplines in different 2- and 4-year colleges. Usually I'm asked to speak on diversity or inclusion, which is usually framed by the institution as widening access to bring more bodies of color on campus. Whilst I agree that this is obviously crucial, my concern is that when students, faculty and staff of color arrive in a white racialized environment, they experience the marginalization and alienation so well described in Feagin's (2013) white racial frame. Denying the reality of white supremacy and perpetuating the myth that we are all good white people (Sullivan, 2014) who don't see color and treat everyone the same, is a typical way that predominantly white institutions address racist incidents on campus. If anyone is interested to read my analysis of how institutions manage diversity so as to avoid focusing on institutional racism fuelled by white supremacy they can find it at Brookfield (2018).

In my own case, I am a white educator who has been asked to get white instructors to acknowledge (a) that they have a racial identity and (b) that this identity is highly significant in framing how they teach and talk to students of different identities, how they define problematic behaviour in students, and how they assess what counts as legitimate learning. I usually begin this kind of staff and professional development by conducting

a *sliDo* poll inviting people to register how they feel as they enter the event. A large number of attendees typically check the boxes I create that state that they are "sick of white bashing" and "resent being forced to spend too much time being made to focus on a manufactured problem that doesn't really exist in a post-racial world." I'll also typically have postings praising President Trump on the anonymous backchannelchat.com page I create for the event.

I have found that the most effective first step in getting a white audience like this to admit that there might actually be something worth listening to, is through narrative disclosure. Ideally, this would be done by a panel of white instructors from the institution who would talk in the way Shantih Clemans does so engagingly about the "bumpy, beautiful and powerful" journey of recognizing their white racial identities. If a panel like this is unavailable then there's no other option for me but to talk about my own experiences (Brookfield, 2015).

Space doesn't really permit me to go into much detail on questions of methodology that Shantih Clemans so rightly calls for, but if any readers are interested in exploring how I go about teaching race, my book *Teaching Race: Helping Students Unmask and Challenge Racism* (2019) focuses exclusively on practical strategies and approaches to this work.

References

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