Identity Politics and the Politics of Learning: Challenges to Teaching in a Culture of Fake News, Alternative Facts, and Multiple Truths

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Abstract: How can faculty assist and equip students to become more "critical consumers" of the information they receive in a culture and climate of alternative facts and multiple truths? With increasing differences in political views informing "truth perspectives," the shift in what is quickly becoming normalized as a form of appropriate discourse has fostered a culture of entitlement that lends support to voicing critique without critical inquiry. In this article, we examine the multiple and intersecting systems of power and privilege. The recognition of contradictory subjective locations occupied by all the participants in the classroom, including the instructor, are discussed. As practitioners seeking more effective forms of dialogue and engagement, we challenge conventional hegemonic discourses of difference and stereotypical representations within learning by questioning identity politics within the politics of learning and by examining the clashes between discourse and policy in the university classroom.

Keywords: identity politics, power, privilege, difference, learning

In an overly saturated consumer-driven world, where visual identity is used as a marketing tool to sell products (Jhally, 2017) and convince the public that participation signals a type of political correctness within the global landscape of humanity, how might students be adequately prepared to respond to the echoing demands of identity politics within their own learning? How can students decipher what is real from what is constructed? How might students discern what is fake from what is intentionally created and represented under the guise of a diverse perspective? How might students delineate what constitutes as alternative facts from multiple truths served as providing an array of choices? How can faculty guide students to critically consider "how they think" when readily available information is neatly packaged as legitimate on the basis of being narratives representing a "true account of an experience" that several people attest to as "real"? Additionally, when should faculty draw the line denoting where "experience" is articulated as the foundation of a universal truth?

The discussion that follows reflects some of the challenges, concerns, and conflicts that emerged when teaching about difference and considering identity politics within the politics of learning in the university classroom context. The attention and emphasis on how students develop and exercise critical thinking skills as they tackle complex issues has been a central focus of current pedagogies and approaches to teaching. With the integration of real-life situations serving as cases for examination of how systems of power and privilege operate within society, faculty have attempted to identify attitudes and actions that influence discussions of policy and practice in society. Within the framework of this discussion, we examine some of the techniques and subsequent outcomes to help illuminate the ongoing struggles associated with the fabrication of facts and the acritical consumption of ideas and notions under highly opposed ideological world views that have created challenging spaces when attempting to explore or discuss different perspectives and/or viewpoints.

Our attempt to integrate different exercises and group activities into classroom explorations of identity politics and the politics of learning by examining the challenges to teaching in a culture of so-called fake news, alternative facts, and multiple truths necessitates a questioning of the learning

space for students in the classroom. We must be prepared to question whether the classroom should be a safe space for students to honestly articulate their perspectives without fear or concern of repudiation, regardless of what is stated. How might faculty recognize the value and impact of identity as entrenched within society, yet also create appropriate spaces for discourses of difference to be articulated, examined, and questioned without charges of censorship or alignment with and support of one political viewpoint or perspective? In a culture of fake news, alternative facts, and multiple truths, how might faculty raise awareness of identity politics within the politics of learning without being branded with various contentious labels (racist, elitist, etc.) or positions (conservative, moderate, liberal) espoused by different political factions (right, center, left) that are intended to narrowly classify and pigeonhole individuals into limited spaces?

The exercises and activities that we highlight in this article are intended as examples for instructors to utilize as a teaching tool in exploring sensitive or highly charged issues related to identity politics and difference. The feedback from these exercises will depend on the diversity of the student population served. Given the different locations and identities that will be represented by the participating students in a class, the hope is that after engaging in these exercises and activities, students may be more aware of different perspectives and viewpoints.

Demographics

Within the confines of a university classroom setting, the various strategies and activities highlighted in this article are intended to raise awareness, refine critical thinking skills, and create opportunities for engagement through discussion and active interaction among peers and between peers and instructors, with the goal of challenging dissenting discourses within the current political and social structure and seeking points of understanding to shift from a micro to a macro overview. The exercises are drawn from teaching in a public university designated as a Hispanic- and minority-serving institution that is invested in serving undergraduate student populations where at least half of the institution's degree-seeking students are low income and over 60% are first-generation college students. According to Schelbe et al. (2019), "first generation students begin college at a disadvantage compared to their peers in terms of social support, academic expectations, academic preparation, and access to resources" (p. 62). Furthermore, Schelbe et al. argued that "compared to their peers, first generation students begin college less confident and more unfamiliar of the coursework expectations in a university environment" and are "less academically engaged" (p. 62). Therefore, while the university may be a receptive space for diverse learners to engage and learn, first-generation students may also experience imposter syndrome in addition to feeling different because of their socioeconomic/class and racial identities. These learning exercises may hit too close to home, or in some cases reflect the lived realities/experiences of students' lives outside the university setting.

The political landscape of the region in which our university is situated is in stark contrast to the perception and stereotypical expectation of a liberal democratic state with a strong emphasis on exercising individual freedoms. The local industries are primarily agriculture and oil. The region is known as the largest agricultural belt in North America, producing fruits and vegetables that are distributed across the United States. The economic status of residents differs widely between the migrant workers employed in the fields and the population of an expanding and growing middle-to-upper class, with many employed in the large oil companies in this region. The university serves as a space where individuals from the diverse regions of the county may come together for the first time in the classroom. The disparities in income and differences in religion, sociopolitical affiliations, and cultural traditions add another layer of competing and often conflicting viewpoints or perspectives. The existence of a strong conservative presence reinforced through affiliation with organized religion and an adherence to core family values and cultural traditions also significantly

influence the spaces for open dialogue on sexual identity, particularly as increased attention has surfaced with LGBTIQ+ rights. The interplay of these diverse standpoints and views reflects some of the dynamics that occur within society and emerge in classroom discussions and debates. A central theme that arises as various forms of representation are present and seeking a space to be heard is the claims of authenticity that are annunciated with expectations for individual agency, within classroom activities. The need to clearly understand how the right to speak and be heard is associated and aligned with the reality of individual experiences versus evidence-based data is the starting point for exploring how individual versus collective differences are framed and understood within the context of the broader society.

Who Gives It? Who Gets It? Representation, Authenticity, and Agency

The location of the speaker in relation to the subject, within the framework of who has an authentic, representative voice to speak on behalf of a group, has raised interconnecting issues of concern within classroom debates and discussions. The connection of "who speaks, who listens, and why" (hooks, 2003) to the right to express a collective response requires understanding of how these terms and categories operate within the context of identity and the politics of learning. Notions of representation are often identified by visual identity markers such as race (skin color/facial features, hair), dress (clothing), symbols (crosses, rainbow flags), and body art (tattoos) that position individuals as "legitimate speakers" for a particular ethnic or cultural group according to specific attributes. Whether the individual is representative and aligned with a specific group may be interrogated by members of the group when questions on the authenticity of the speaker's voice and right to articulate on behalf of the group are raised. Questions of representation and authenticity are often connected to the notion of agency in terms of the opportunity to speak (Spivak, 1999). Within classroom discussions, the right to speak and be heard, based on authentic group membership and affiliation, may trigger a dangerous standpoint for the speaker, whereby a minority group can become trapped by a singular form of representation. As Adichie (2009) has argued, there is a "danger of a single story," which locks our vision, and when we "show a people as only one thing … that is what they become." Although there is value in promoting authentic representation of any group, it is important that minority groups do not become trapped with a single stereotypical or limited form of representation. For example, Latinx students may be viewed as abiding by strict conservative religious values aligned with their cultural group. As with any group of people, there are individuals who share a common culture but may have moderate or less pronounced affiliations with specific aspects of their cultural identity. To use a blanket form of representation that classifies all group members as the same without any differences is harmful to the diversity of identity that flourishes within cultural groups. Students may be more inclined to recognize the trappings of group identity classifications when considering the age differences between members of the same cultural group and the diversity of thinking on acceptable cultural practices or embraced traditions or values.

Challenges of and to Faculty—When Does Identity Politics Matter?

As women of different colors, we live the intersectionality of race, class, sexuality, and gender. As educators, we continually draw from our own experiences inside and outside the classroom when we think about how we as a society understand and respond to issues of diversity in practice. From the micro level of the classroom, we recognize the importance of voicing concerns related to difference and the inequitable practices of academe. From the macro level, policies related to improving diversity in practice should not only open spaces for greater representation of diverse voices but also reinforce

the value and benefits of multiple contributions that foster growth and development to our knowledge economy, including the internationalization of academia.

As educators continue to create "communities of practice," where students begin to trust their own understanding and knowledge, it is essential that we not only acknowledge but also value and embrace the different social constructions of identity of our students. We must also be prepared to respond to the dynamics of power and privilege that impact how diverse groups are often represented and differently situated within the broader context of society. As endorsed in the current educational literature (Brown-McNair et al., 2020, Kendi, 2019), we believe it is essential to recognize the inherent complexities and multiplicities of identities within our community, as well as the value of the contributions that emanate from people with different experiences and perspectives framed by their context and location. Students and educators whose perspectives are shaped by their intersectionality are invaluable assets to educational institutions in response to the realities of an increasingly globalized world.

Yet, despite the attention to diversity and representation within academe, there remain silent actions and hidden expectations that define minority groups and their contributions within the ivory tower at all levels. An exploration of the different modes of how identity is represented, used, and often abused to serve or justify practices of inclusion and exclusion are raised in discussions of when and how identity politics matters. The following exploratory cases are drawn from real-life situations to assist in illustrating the complexity of viewpoints and perspectives on how identity is framed and understood by students in the classroom and extrapolated to the larger societal issues of difference within North American society.

Teaching From a Position of Knowledge Informed by Experience

Exercise 1: Identity Politics and Equity in Society
Does the hiring of women or people of color automatically ensure change in the distribution and exercising of power within an organizational structure? How many women or people of color are needed to ensure a balanced distribution of power within an organizational structure? Consider these questions in the following areas: Police Force, Judicial System, Health Care, and Higher Education.

Assignment to Students
Provide statistical information to illustrate the representation of different groups within each profession. Identify leading figures within each system and identify the level of power that these figures exercise in the discharge of their duties. Indicate whether these industries are considered heavily influenced by people based on specific socially constructed categories or classifications.

One technique employed to discuss differences in opinions and facts is an inquiry-based method of teaching where the instructor poses a question and opens the floor for students to engage in a group discussion. This method of exploration is helpful when students have had a chance to discuss their thoughts and ideas in a small group and then present their thoughts to the larger classroom group. Discussing an event that has recently received attention in the news could be used as an example. Students may insist on taking an absolute stance that the statement is true because it was their experience. Faculty may begin to challenge students' assertion by asking, "How do you know this is true, what evidence do you have to substantiate this claim, where does this information come from, and how accurate is your source?" These preliminary first-level questions of inquiry are intended to (1) have the student take a step back from the statement; (2) have the student evaluate the reasoning

and sources on which the information is based; and (3) ask the student if there is evidence. Alongside these questions, faculty should also provide contextualization by offering historical evidence that may contribute to why students may think so definitively about their experience and how it has formed their understanding. Faculty should also discuss the structural inequities and institutionalized inequities that have flourished and impacted current practices and policies that influence how we, as a society, view and understand specific actions and situations.

An exercise on the invisible aspects of privilege may help illuminate the structural and institutionalized inequities that specific groups experience in society. Although there have been modifications to Peggy McIntosh's (1989) "White Privilege, Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," the basis of this exercise can help students understand some of the ways in which privilege may be invisible to those who possess it. Additionally, a simple inquiry of enumerating all the steps that one took prior to arriving to the lecture session on a specific day may help identify the invisibility of privileges that students collectively experience and the assumptions that they may hold based on how they believe institutional practices operate and are reinforced. Many students may be familiar with the DWB expression (driving while Black). This would be a good contemporary expression for a discussion on inequities embedded in current policies and practices.

Some students may experience difficulties in recognizing how their experience of a situation does not automatically become an irrefutable truth, simply because they had one encounter that serves to legitimate their claim. For these students, their experience is understood by them as universal. Often the experience of the student, by the very fact that it occurred, is deemed universal. The student's understanding is that they must be right about how they have classified this experience. Faculty can follow a similar pattern to that in the previous exercise by opening the discussion and asking if other people have had a similar experience and question why everyone does not see the same experience in the exact same way if it is indeed "universal." Faculty should discuss the issue of overgeneralization and caution students in using overly broad statements by asking for the basis of the claim—actual evidence or just one example. Examining diverse forms of representation may help people avoid seeing the way "experience informs reality" as a singular "truth." As O'Leary (2008, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) contended, "personal experience is not a self-authenticating claim to knowledge" (p. 135). Awareness of how we "see" and "reinforce" our views, perceptions, and attitudes must be at the forefront of how we have been "taught" to understand, interpret, and internalize "difference" (Correa & Wilkinson, 2017).

"Talk is Cheap, Action Speaks!" From the Classroom to the Streets

Contemporary discourses within an increasingly diverse and highly competitive marketplace have shifted significantly. Undeniably, policy initiatives that endorse the rights of learners to an education must be actively encouraged and acknowledged. However, it remains to be seen whether current policy initiatives truly meet practice effectively for all learners and improve overall outcomes. Unequivocally, not only must the politics of *who learns* be emphatically challenged but serious attention must be paid to *what is learned* to promote opportunity and social justice. Invariably, attention to how values are connected to learning will determine whose values are recognized, promoted, and entrenched within the school system, thus reflecting how equity in practice will occur. It is not sufficient to merely provide the appropriate politically correct rhetoric of equity that culminates in tokenized slogans about tolerance and respect; rather, one must challenge how diversity in practice will promote equity for those individuals such policies were designed to serve.

In educational districts across the nation, ongoing struggles to address inequity in schools continue to remain a prevalent concern. Although many school districts and local school boards have attempted to draw attention to *different ways of knowing* framed outside of the traditional dominant

discourses of White, middle class, male, Western, Judeo-Christian or Eurocentric norms and values, the inclusion of diversity unfortunately continues to linger on the periphery of learning practices. Most commonly, the monthly themed recognition events or holidays (such as Black History Month, Pride Parades, Religious Days of Observance) or the cultural diversity fairs (comprising ethnic songs, cultural foods, and folkloric dance) that are premised on raising awareness, fostering respect, and encouraging tolerance of differences often fail to address the structural inequalities of schools and society. It is crucial therefore, not only to *think about difference* but also to consider how difference can be structured into possibilities or opportunities for action. For example, when the curriculum is critically examined and the experiences of White males as a universal standard are challenged, the social practices of race and/or ethnicity in which everyone participates can be fully explored. Furthermore, as White groups accept recognition of themselves as a racial group, their participation in the resistance strategies and exclusionary practices that are embedded within the school system and society can be closely examined and deconstructed. It is important to acknowledge however, that although cosmetic modifications to an environment may initially appear as commitment to taking diversity to new heights, the lack of substantive change directed at practices that support inequity signal neither a paradigm shift in thinking nor alteration in attitude (Thomas, 2020).

"Cancel Culture"—Challenging Practices—Power and Identity in Society

How are faculty expected to respond to teaching students to think critically without imposing their own personal political agenda? Furthermore, how should faculty respond when being accused of representing only one way of thinking, usually from the left perspective? How can faculty assist students in recognizing that "mainstream discourse" is the discourse of the right? During the COVID-19 pandemic, different situations have occurred in which individuals have had to align knowledge and their understanding with a mainstream/political discourse. This next exercise can be used as a discussion starter for identifying how identity can easily become infused and embedded into discourses to reinforce difference and politicize identity.

The use of social media during the pandemic increased as people turned to it to feel less lonely and as a way to connect with others (Molla, 2021). One consequence was the increase of cancel culture (Graham, 2020). According to Ng (2020), cancel culture is:

> The withdrawal of any kind of support (viewership, social media followers, purchases of products endorsed by the person, etc.) for those who are assessed to have said or done something unacceptable or highly problematic, generally from a social justice perspective, especially alert to sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, racism, bullying and other related issues. (p. 623)

Some argue that cancel culture is the 21st-century version of public shaming. Old-school public shaming usually took place in the center of town. By the 19th century the new medium of communicating information was newspapers, during the 20th century it was television, and today it happens on social media (Max, 2020). Robertson (2021) argued that cancel culture is "neither a liberal conspiracy to enforce progressive norms, or a right-wing straw man built to power the conservative outrage machine, but an ideologically neutral mechanism" (p. 4). Whether it was not going to church on Sunday, adultery, or stealing, not conforming to expected rules and regulations had consequences. This new version (Robertson, 2021), however, is different from the past in that "it's not simply informed by changing cultural and social norms; it creates them" (p. 11).

The influence of the #MeToo movement and #TimeIsUp have changed the playing field. Today, those who are often targeted are aligned in positions of relative power. They tend to be White

and male, though not always. Famous and powerful men who have been admired for their success have lost both their jobs and status due to cancel culture. Matt Lauer, Bill O'Reilly, Charlie Rose, Governor Andrew Cuomo, and most recently, Jon Gruden have all stepped down from their long and successful careers because of their behavior that has been deemed "unacceptable" within contemporary movements for social justice and equity. Semiramis (2019) has argued that "when we call them out we are not marginalizing them, we are just revoking their privilege" (p. 10). The naming of these inappropriate behaviors as a form of privilege is, however, problematic. Unacceptable behaviors by powerful individuals in society should not be aligned with privilege as a right endorsed by their power. Every member of society should be held to the same governing laws and standards. The unquestioning or avoidance of challenging inappropriate actions simply because these behaviors have become embedded and/or normalized as part of an acceptable culture or practice by those in power reinforces a two-tier system of justice. Therefore, the laws imposed on all citizens, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual identity, or ability should be the same.

Exercise 2: Cancel Culture
Show a clip from Netflix's *The Chair* (Peet & Wynn, 2021) in which students record Bill, the popular English professor, as he illustrates and dramatically emphasizes his point with a controversial example during a lecture and then share the episode via social media. The video clip viewed out of context of the lecture is spread to various students without any discussion of the point the professor is illustrating. As a result, Bill's academic career is in jeopardy.

Assignment to Students
Put the students into groups to discuss the following issues: (1) What consequences should Bill face due to his behavior? (2) What would have been the best way for Bill and the university to handle this situation? (3) Do you think Bill should ever be allowed to teach again? (4) Is the point of cancel culture to punish or reform? (5) Do you think cancel culture has gone too far?

It is important to note some of the recent work that has emerged in response to issues of cancel culture. According to Anna Sale, the author of *Let's Talk About Hard Things*, a useful mantra for hard conversations is needed. Karena Henrietta Montag (founder and codirector of Stronghold) begins her group sessions with "the idea that they are gathering to expect and accept a lack of closure" (Sanders, 2021). Stronghold is a collective of multiracial and intersectional individuals with backgrounds in restorative and transformative justice working to transform the harms of white supremacy and racism. With the increased use of social media in society, and particularly in the educational learning environment, it is valuable to seek different ways to introduce controversial topics into classroom discussions, specifically in terms of how social media has been used and has grown in relation to cancel culture (Graham, 2020).

Exercise 3: Teaching From a Position of the Personal as "NOT Political"
The following statements could be examined by the students in groups, highlighting how these statements may reinforce political agendas, reinforce fake news from fact, and engender greater hostility and/or hate towards specific cultural groups:

- "Disease names really do matter … we've seen certain disease names provoke backlash against members of particular religious or ethnic communities." —The World Health Organization (2015) in their discussion of best practices for naming new human infectious diseases.

- "The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than before." —President Trump's first tweet referring to the coronavirus as the Chinese Virus (Hswen et al., 2021).
- "Trump is going to f- you." —Solid8 CEO Michael Lofthouse to an Asian American family celebrating a birthday at a restaurant in Carmel (Serrano, 2020).
- "Anyone who complains that it's racist or xenophobic to call this virus the Chinese coronavirus or the Wuhan virus is a politically correct fool." —Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR; THV11 Digital, 2020).
- "When you encourage hate, it's not like a genie in the bottle where you can pull it out and push it back in whenever you want. There's too much perpetuating these belief systems to make them go away." —Manjusha Kulkarni, cofounder of Stop AAPI Hate and executive director of the Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Counsel (Tang, 2021).

There has been a worldwide rise in discrimination against people of Asian descent during COVID-19 (Hswen et al., 2021) This has been especially true in the United States where there have been more than 9,000 reported anti-Asian incidents since the pandemic started (Tang, 2021). In 2021, these incidents, which run from slurs to taunts to physical assaults, are on track to exceed the number of attacks against Asian Americans in 2020. As of August 2021, there have been 4,533 reported incidents. With 4 more months till the end of the year, it is reasonable to believe the number will exceed the 4,548 reported incidents in 2020. Not all reported incidents reach the definition of a hate crime. However, the current climate of fear of possible assaults on Asian Americans has had real-world impact. According to a recent survey by the Pew Report Center (Ruiz et al., 2021), Asian Americans were two times more likely than White households to admit they have not had enough food during the pandemic. Unlike for other races, this food insecurity arose not because of the pandemic and loss of wages but because they were afraid to go out. This same issue has been mirrored in the San Francisco Bay Area's Self-Help for the Elderly, a nonprofit assistance program. Daily food delivery to mainly Asian American seniors increased from 400 meals delivered per day pre-pandemic to 5,000 per day by August 2021 (Tang, 2021).

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2010), hate crimes targeting people of Asian descent rose by 70% in 2020 (Mangan, 2021). Hate crime statistics have been tracked in the United States since 1990. However, according to Pezzella et al. (2019), "hate crimes are notoriously underestimated" by the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (p. 1). This happens for two main reasons: Victims are less likely to report these types of crimes, and police agencies often mistakenly misclassify hate crimes as ordinary crimes.

Faculty must be vigilant and move beyond evidence-based knowledge alone to incorporate critical pedagogies that scrutinize and expose existing contradictions in different discourses. As Paulo Freire (1998) insightfully warned, when "trying to escape conflict, we preserve the status quo" (p. 45). Specifically, drawing connections between evidence-based knowledge and personal experience through concrete classroom examples can be one way faculty can assist students to critically question information that they read or images that they see.

Education and Media Representations of Diversity

The media has an impact on how diverse people are represented in society, as the images they make available play a role in how difference is defined, accepted, and reproduced in learning materials in

schools. Through advertising, the media has successfully created a sense of "normality" that everyone can purchase through the consumption of products. The institutional structure of our consumer society in the United States has oriented our culture (and its attitudes, values, and rituals) more toward the world of commodities (Jhally, 2003). Since advertising presents consumption as a way of life, it is imperative that consumers are able to think for themselves in order to learn how to analyze not just the meaning of advertising but also the place of the advertising industry in our society and our lives. Jhally (2003), in "Image-Based Culture—Advertising and Popular Culture," indicated that advertising is a communication system *through* and *about objects* because it does not merely tell us about things but rather relates to us how things are connected to important domains of our lives. In our multicultural society, not only do people see images of what constitutes being different through various media forms (such as television programs and magazines), but images of difference are also reinforced in opposition to ideas of normalcy viewed through daily practices and reinforced through education. Often the common shared experiences that all people encounter regardless of their race, ethnicity, social class, physical ability, or sexuality are represented from the dominant group's perspective. These representations are problematic since one group defines what is of value and how it should be framed for everyone (Correa & Wilkinson, 2017). Although these representations may conform to those groups that are typically evident within certain industries, the impact of such stereotypical thinking is quite devastating and rather limiting.

It is essential to recognize that many people of diverse backgrounds have assimilated and acculturated into a shared common Western culture in which they navigate rather successfully between two distinctly different worlds. When representations of nondominant groups are stereotypical, these representations of diversity are worrisome and even dangerous, not only for those who do not conform to them, but also for those who are part of the dominant culture and view these images as reflections of what life should be for other people. As students learn and succeed academically, it is essential that education provide appropriate spaces wherein their collective identities can be affirmed without distortion or oppressive images. Only when systemic patterns of inequality along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and disability are discussed can the relationship between discourse, practice, and power be fully interrogated with the potential for change to emerge. An examination and critique of how the cultural stories, history, and values of nondominant group members have been represented from the perspective of the dominant group will reveal the impact of whose discourse has framed knowledge as well as whose knowledge is valued and why. Furthermore, students will better understand not only the dynamic of whose voice speaks, who listens, and why, but they will be more equipped to advocate for diversity in practice, beyond rhetoric or tokenism.

Exercise 4
Do our visual abilities have an impact on our understanding of truth claims? How much can we trust what we see? Do our eyes always accurately capture an event?

Assignment for Students
Consider the questions listed in Exercise 4 in a group. After a discussion of these questions, students should provide a response to the images by answering these prompts: "How many faces do you see?" (Figure 1A) "What do you see? And how do you know what you see is correct?" (Figure 1B). "What happened to this shirt?" (Figure 1C)

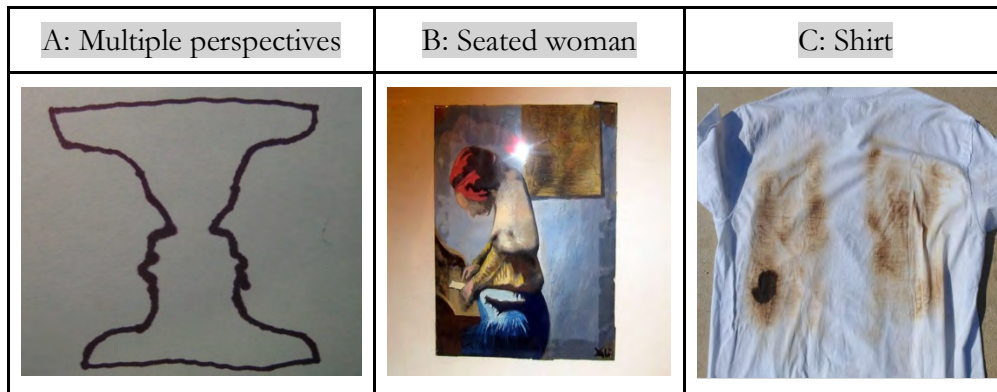| A: Multiple perspectives	B: Seated woman	C: Shirt

Figure 1. Panel A: "Multiple Perspectives" by eekim. Creative Commons CC0 2.0. Share-Alike License. Panel B: "NYC: Dali at Time Warner Center—Seated Woman" by wallyg. Licensed by CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. Panel C: "Scorched Shirt" by Hall. Licensed by Creative Commons 4.0.

The introductory questions to this exercise should prompt an array of student responses. After a class discussion on the images, faculty should reveal what happened to the shirt and the 89-year-old woman wearing it. Finlay's (2002) collaborative reflexivity offers students an opportunity "to hear, and take into account, multiple voices and conflicting opinions" (p. 218). Faculty can actively guide the process of reflections by explicitly instructing students to reflect in multiple ways (Finlay, 2002).

Abu el-haj (2006) has asserted that the ways we think about difference contribute to "shaping and structuring the relationship we have between discourse, practice, and power" (p. 3). The direct challenge to hegemonic practices that have been embedded in framing representations of the "other" is to elevate different voices to be heard, to shape and change how difference is viewed (West, 2008). Social learning theory clearly identifies the importance of observing and imitating as related to learning. For students who do not see clear representations of successful diverse people reflected at all levels of society, what message is being translated and learned by these students? Who are students expected to imitate and learn from as role models, if those who look like them are rarely represented, or when represented are reflected in stereotypical ways? The message of opportunity and potential becomes resoundingly clear. If students are to experience equity in practice, then from the classroom playground to the streets, representations of diverse successful individuals must be visibly apparent. Given how representations of difference are showcased in the media, students will need to be able to decipher stereotypical representations intended to convey a specific message, from images that provide a more accurate portrayal of diverse groups. In the same way that fake news, alternative facts, multiple truths, and diverse perspectives are presented as information, students must be able to skillfully acquire digital literacy skills to distinguish fake news from facts. Students who can discern what the messages "mean" and how they are constructed to guide individuals toward a specific way of thinking or seeing the world will be prepared to critically understand the information (whether in the form of media representation or text) that they consume (Eisner & Vicinus, 2008).

What Is Fake News and Who Has the "Power to Create Fact"?

Some politicians have used the idea of fake news to discount opposing media and endorse their own positions within the public domain. With ease of technology, quoted passages can be manipulated out of context to reinforce an idea or concept or be used with the intent of casting doubt, politically swaying people, or reinforcing a specific political agenda or purpose. Today, social media has created

new spaces for everyone to be active producers and consumers in the information age (Anderson & Correa, 2020). Technology enables everyone with access to share, create, and view information or news from anywhere, by anyone, at any time. People are connected across the entire world, and everyone can serve as producers or authors by creating, producing, and/or reproducing information online. As indicated by Anderson and Correa (2020), the task of separating what is real from what is fake becomes increasingly more difficult with the onslaught of new technologies. Scheppele (1989, as cited in Razack, 1998) stated, "those whose stories are believed have the power to create fact" (p. 37). In this way, the power entrenched in the process of creating fact exacerbates the difficulty for students and faculty to decipher fake news from alternative facts and/or multiple perspectives.

Fact or Opinion? Telling the "Truth" in the Classroom

Not all information that is created is equal. As stated by Anderson and Correa (2019), "opinion and fact can appear to look the same (presentational form/style), serve the same purpose (supportive evidence), be treated as the same (viewed as equally legitimate) and be held to the same standard (level of credibility)" (p. 441). Faculty often expect students of the technological era/generation to automatically possess strong media literacy skills. The Association of College & Research Libraries' (2016) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education can be utilized to teach standard, information literacy by asking students questions about the reliability of the information students come across. The framework expands upon previous information literacy standards and provides a deeper experience for students to interact with information sources within their disciplines.

> *Exercise 5: "Who am I listening to and why do I believe them?"*
> An exploration of sources can be a starting point for having students ask a series of critical questions when investigating possible "reliable sources." As discussed by Anderson and Correa (2020, p. 4), students should consider:
>
> 1) Is the information deemed "*fact or opinion*"?
> 2) Is the information presented as "*objective or subjective*"?
> 3) Is the viewpoint or perspective establishing, reinforcing or addressing a "*bias*"?
> 4) Is the viewpoint or perspective represented in a "*partial or impartial*" way?

These questions are a starting point from which faculty can equip students to become "critical consumers" of the information they receive each day, so students can unpack the diverse types of information and/or knowledge they encounter online. Students must also carry responsibility to become critical consumers of the information that they can rapidly access (Eisner & Vicinus, 2008). The importance of investigating before consuming information is an essential skill that students should possess in a digital era. Often students retrieve information from sites without regard to where the information comes from and whose agenda or cause may be supported in the display of information offered online (Anderson & Correa, 2020). The propensity to embrace information unquestioningly and the outcome of unchallenged acceptance of information online can be demonstrated by first searching a broad topic and then checking site domains using www.whois.com (November, 2012). This step can help students understand who the site belongs to and what the specific agenda of the person or organization that owns the site may be interested in promoting.

Students may possess high levels of digital literacy, manifested in their comfort with technology, but they are still relatively new learners in terms of the rules and conventions of knowledge acquisition and application (Wineburg et al., 2019). The consequences of open, free-floating information can be highly problematic for students to ascertain the difference between "objective

truths" and "subjective constructions of truth" (Anderson & Correa, 2020). A review of information-seeking behaviors can shed light on some of the issues and challenges that arise when interacting with digital content and diverse media sources. Cooke (2017) highlighted some of the anticipated hurdles, challenges, and potential for self-filtering that students may need to consider with the onslaught of daily online information (Figure 2).

Information Seeking Behaviors	
Confirmation Bias	The idea that people look for news and information that confirms what they already believe. • **Validates an assumption** • **Prevents a person from moving forward to find other information**
Filter Bubble	Frequenting sites that are familiar and comfortable. • **Echo chamber** • **News feed is filled with "friends" that often think as we do**
Repetition Theory	The more it is heard, the more it is believed. • **"Sharing" gives power to the information** • **Harder to take away its credibility even if it is debunked**
Information Overload	Overwhelmed by amount of information available • **Inability to process and evaluate the information we come across each day** • **We auto filter because there is too much**
Information Avoidance	Purposely avoiding information that does not align with our views • **Choosing not to view information from specific sites or news stations** • **"I do not agree with their values, principles, or agenda. So I will not read their news stories."**
Satisficing	Satisfied by first result found • **Unmotivated to research further than the first result found** • **The most reliable sources are not always at the top of search result lists**

Figure 2. Information-seeking behaviors (Cooke, 2017).

"Post-truth is assumed to be the reason that fake news has taken such a hold in our society. People tend to prefer concepts and facts that appeal to their emotion rather than those that are strictly factual" (Cooke, 2017). Faculty can utilize information in the media to demonstrate the impact of how emotion rather than fact may be strongly adhered to by demonstrating the backfire effect and how confirmation bias operates seamlessly in daily practices of reading information online or engaging in social media.

Exercise 6: The Era of Trump! Normalizing Discourses & The Backfire Effect
How might instructors handle student claims of normalizing discourses that move beyond political correctness and societal attitudes of civility toward speaking freely in the name of honesty and a search for truth, where there is no need for a critical inquiry? Imagine the struggle for faculty when the most powerful person in the world creates more disinformation than information. Take the following examples:

- President Trump on the coronavirus during a White House meeting: "It's going to disappear. One day—like a miracle—it will disappear." (Victor et al., 2020)
- President Trump on the coronavirus: "There's a theory that, in April, when it gets warm—historically, that has been able to kill the virus. So we don't know yet; we're not sure yet. …" (Victor et al., 2020)
- President Trump at a rally for two incumbent Republican senators for Georgia on January 4, 2021: "The fact is we won the presidential election, we won it big. And we're going to win tomorrow. The Democrats are trying to steal the White House. You cannot let them steal the Senate." (Egan, 2021)

When having class discussions on issues that touch on political beliefs, it is not a question of who is right or who is wrong but rather "how we reached a specific conclusion, to understand the ways we think differently" (Hall & Correa, 2021). Research has suggested that people are more resistant to arguments against their political belief than non-partisan issues. People have a confirmation bias in that they will seek information that confirms a belief that they already hold and will resist information that does not fit in the same mold (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). The backfire effect occurs when individuals are presented with information that challenges their beliefs. As a result, individuals tend to cling even more strongly to the original view and resist changing based on the new information. Research using brain imaging has helped confirm the different neural pathways involved in confirmation bias and the backfire effect (Lewandowsky et al., 2012).

It is imperative that in social discourse, one can be open to others' ideas and arguments even if they are the opposite of one's beliefs (Kaplan et al., 2016). Fortunately, there are many resources available that help instructors understand and deal with confirmation bias and the backfire effect. According to Lewandowsky et al. (2012), "Even simple word changing can make information more acceptable by rendering it less threatening to a person's worldview" (p. 120). Helpful hints such as these are available in the article by Lewandowsky et al., which brings together data from many studies within different disciplines.

Students must be encouraged to extend their reach and seek media sources beyond the usual or familiar sources they tend to use to those that they may be more apprehensive about viewing or considering. Instructors can model the importance of multiple sources by integrating these practices into their own teaching (Hall & Correa, 2021). For example, instructors can select two different newspapers or utilize alternative news outlets to compare how the same issue is discussed on different or even competing media platforms.

Illusionary Practices of Equity: Challenging Rhetoric in Practice

Students are often caught in in-between spaces where their visible mark of difference immediately excludes them from the corridors of power vested first in the traditional classroom and later in the workplace. Although there is great passion to educate for justice in a profoundly unjust world, it is crucial that continued efforts towards diversity in practice be ongoing. In the same manner that it is counter-productive to provide students with limited imagery of diverse people and their accomplishments, it can be equally destabilizing to offer business incentives or apprenticeship options without a long-term sustainability plan embedded with financial support. Without long-term commitment, many new diversity initiatives serve as examples of "illusionary practices of equity" (Correa, 2010). In such cases the efforts to promote diversity operate as a temporary solution to the "difference" problem or concern. Rather than invest in sustainable opportunities, people are driven

by the mentality of competition and survival of the fittest. In such a marketplace, how can a new small diverse business industry honestly compete?

Whether the platform of equal standards or the position that acceptance of diversity necessitates modification of the same or equal treatment in relation to differences should be endorsed, the question of whether education is viewed as a tool of empowerment that reinforces, legitimates, and reproduces the status quo must be openly discussed. Whereas contemporary debates about educational justice may advocate equal standards for all students, opponents will respond that education that is fair and just must recognize and respond to group differences. Regardless of either educational position, at the most fundamental level the realization that education is not neutral (although assumed to be neutral from the perspective of the dominant group) challenges the essence and core assumptions that undermine the dominant values associated with the production of knowledge and the perspective from which knowledge has historically been contextualized.

The recognition that cultural knowledge is one means by which students can automatically validate who they are and what they know has generated significant attention to the need for and integration of multicultural education within many schools. Although the shift toward integrating diversity into the curriculum through multicultural education may operate to appease advocates who argue for a just system of education that encompasses the multiplicity of experiences within the learning process, others may be less inclined to endorse such an approach. Even though multicultural education may encourage questioning of the traditional canons of truth that have been grounded in the knowledge and experiences of the dominant group (Banks,1997), the lack of understanding to properly implement multicultural education may serve to further maintain the status quo rather than subvert educational inequities (Bissondath, 2002). For instance, when knowledge and experiences of specific groups are presented without a proper framework for understanding their different practices or values, the message translated to learners may unconsciously culminate in negative associations or feelings of inferiority in regard to unfamiliar or misunderstood behaviors or traditions. In such cases, rather than embracing the diversity of cultural traditions and practices, students may inadvertently position themselves in ways that reinstitute the existing power structure. Thus, unless students not only see themselves, their culture, stories, histories, and values reflected in the curriculum but also understand and draw connections to these diverse perspectives, the potential of multicultural education may be lost.

The persistent marginalization or exclusion of diverse students within the curriculum may result in the denial of opportunities for students to fully participate as equally valued members of their social community. Although the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1992) may create opportunities for social action, this level of recognition may be limited by assumptions about difference. Here multicultural education may tend to focus too narrowly on visible aspects of culture that overlook the deeper issues of power, privilege, and domination embedded within the dominant group's narratives and institutional structures. Students may suffer from unwritten exclusionary practices embedded within institutional parameters, but the language of difference can also be equally problematic. The concentration on differences may help support binary divisions of us versus them that can contribute to greater separation between groups. Although individual identity includes specific characteristics, it must also be equally stressed that a collective identity can cross gender, race, sexuality, class, and disability lines. Here difference must be understood as relational. If difference continues to be treated as a form of property that is lodged in the bodies of individuals rather than as an aspect related to a context, then identities become fixated entities in which those who are viewed as different will be forced to remain on the periphery in relation to those viewed as the same.

In this article, we have discussed the value of integrating real-life situations into classroom discussion to underscore the importance of examining how systems of power and privilege operate within society. We have identified strategies and techniques to illuminate the ongoing struggles

associated with the fabrication of facts and acritical consumption of ideas and notions under highly opposed ideological world views that have created challenging spaces when attempting to explore or discuss different perspectives and/or viewpoints. We recognize that the shift in attitudes and actions that influences discussions of policy and practice in society requires time and recognition of how invisible privileges are entrenched and aligned within institutional structures that replicate benefits for some at the expense of others. The value and recognition of diverse identities to learning have been highlighted, as well as the problematic use of identity politics to limit discussion with essentializing claims related to voice, representation, authenticity, and agency within contemporary discourses of difference. The naming of different practices that reinforce comfortable ways of knowing and understanding has been explored to challenge the ways people continue to internalize information and support the sources they embrace as legitimate forms of knowledge production. Ultimately, we recognize that challenges will remain in a culture of fake news, alternative facts, and multiple truths. However, as faculty, we believe that reflective strategies for discussing and exploring different viewpoints and perspectives will ensure that our students are equipped with skills and abilities to critically question the information they consume and are prepared to challenge others and themselves as they consider identity politics, difference, power, and privilege within the politics of their own learning.

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