White Noise
A Critical Examination of Whiteness in Higher Education

Tuesday, March 6, 2018
Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown
Freedom Ballroom E/F
Introduction

Dustin Evatt
he/him/his

Associate Director of Campus Activities
& Doctoral Student
Appalachian State University
Overview

• What is Whiteness?
• Why Study Whiteness?
• A Critical Theoretical Framework
• Critical Whiteness Studies
• Frameworks of Whiteness
• Whiteness in Higher Education
• Implications for Our Work
• Q&A
Whiteness is ...?
Overt White Supremacy (Socially Unacceptable)

- Racist Jokes
- Lynching
- Confederate Flags
- School-to-Prison Pipeline
- Not Believing Experiences of POC
- Denial of White Privilege
- Self-Proclaimed White Ally

Covert White Supremacy (Socially Accepted)

- N-Word
- KKK
- Hate Crimes
- Racial Slurs
- Swastikas
- Hiring Discrimination
- Expecting POC to Teach White People
- Racist Mascots
- Colorblindness
- White Savior Complex
- Bootstrap Theory
- Cultural Appropriation
- Racial Profiling
- Tokenism
-posted on twitter; original source unknown
Whiteness is...

• … dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on a variety levels (Frankenberg).

• … constructed as “normal” - an invisible social standard by which all other racial groups are judged, masking it as central to continuing racial domination (Omi & Winant, 1994).

• … conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone).
Why Study Whiteness?

• Whiteness is so deeply ingrained in our way of “being” in the world that it shapes actions, social practices, and defines the norm.

• It is a “hidden” issue in education.

• The ultimate goal is not to dismiss or refute the notion that Whiteness exists in higher education, but rather to illuminate it, so leaders can work to dismantle it.
Looking Through a Critical Lens
A Critical Theoretical Framework

- Sheds light on the systems and structures of power that maintain dominance and social injustices in society
- Unmasks the dominant ideology
- Dismantles and challenges hegemonic norms
- The ultimate goal is emancipation.
Paulo Freire

“Education never was, is not, and never can be neutral or indifferent in regard to the reproduction of the dominant ideology or the interrogation of it.”

(Pedagogy of Freedom, 1998)

- Critical Consciousness
- Dialogue
- Praxis (Reflection + Action)
- Politics of Education
Critical Race Theory

• It is imperative to situate critical theory in the context of current oppressive systems and structures within today’s society and to use a critical theoretical framework to illuminate, disrupt, and dismantle oppressive actions.

• Race affects every level of our social institutions and interpersonal interactions, whether consciously or subconsciously.

• Ideas about race need to be understood in relation to structures, institutional and cultural practices, and discourses, not simply as, "something which emanates from certain individual beings" (Hall, 1990).
Critical Race Theory: 
**Voices from the Margins**

**Double Consciousness**
- People of Color trying to accommodate and resist mainstream white society’s cultural and linguistic norms.

**Interest Convergence**
- The white majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits their interests to do so.

**Intersectionality**
- Race does not function independently of other modes of domination, such as classism or sexism.

**Counter-storytelling**
- Hegemonic Narrative; using narrative to illuminate and explore experiences of racial oppression
While at App State
I've been told I was only admitted because I'm BLACK

BLACK FACE
WHITE
White Privilege & Critical Whiteness
Critical Whiteness Studies

• Critical whiteness studies (CWS) moves beyond traditional discussions of white privilege. As Levine-Rasky (2000) notes, “…a general criticism of White privilege is that it focuses on the ‘who’ of Whiteness, rather than on ‘how’ Whiteness is created in the social order.”

• Leonardo (2004) also challenges discussions of privilege that frame it as if Whites are passively handed advantages in an ‘invisible knapsack’ rather than illuminating the hegemonic nature of Whiteness. While white privilege is a component of CWS discourse, one must view CWS through a systematic lens of hegemony and white dominance ideology.
White Privilege & Critical Whiteness

**White Privilege**
- Tends to center the discussion more on race-based privilege and individuals.
- **The bodies of white people** become the arenas for change and study in the white privilege approach.

**Critical Whiteness**
- Theorizes whiteness as a system existing within a social, political, historical, and economic context.
- The sphere of focus is **structures along with individuals and their identities**.

This is not to imply that a white privilege perspective does not consider social structures. McIntosh (1988), in her *Invisible Knapsack* essay, talks about systems of class and male privilege relative to whiteness. However, **white privilege focuses more on people than structures**.
Critique of Critical Whiteness Studies

• White people have once again become the central focus of theorizing, replacing the proper object of concern – white racial domination.

• Studying whiteness requires particular care in order that it not make white fashionable or **takeover space within the academy** for marginalized scholars.

• A critical theory of whiteness should not place Whites on a **pedestal for admiration** and respect, rather it turns a critical eye towards the consciousness and practices of those in the racially dominant position of a white supremacist society.

• The ultimate purpose is **to remove the cloak of normality** and universality that continues to secure racial dominance for whites (Lewis, 2004).
Critical Frameworks of Whiteness

“Epistemology of ignorance” (Mills, 1997)
Ideology

- Systems of belief, often tacit and taken-for-granted, which serve to perpetuate unequal forms of social relations (Crossley, 2005).

- Ideologies provide frameworks for understanding our social existence and are most effective when they are invisible, “common sense” understandings that naturalize the social world and thus justify the status quo (Hall, 1990).

- In the context of racial discourse, Whiteness serves as the ideology upon which we come to understand others and ourselves. Whiteness is a fundamental feature of the way society is reproduced, and hence it does not deviate from the norm.
Colorblind Ideology

• Refuse to acknowledge racial differences. Many whites believe that we should all be colorblind and that even talking about race or racial groups is racist in that it perpetuates racial classification (Gilroy, 2000).

• It stigmatizes attempts to raise questions about redressing racial inequality through accusations such as "playing the race card" or "identity politics." (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Crenshaw, 1997).

• Analyzing this frame is crucial because this discourse ultimately leads whites back into complicity with structural and institutional dimensions of inequality (Frankenberg, 1993).
Hegemony

• “The ideal representation of the interests of the privileged groups as universal interests, which are then accepted by the masses as the natural political and social order” (Orlowski, 2001, p. 2).

• Hegemony shapes how people view life itself through organizing values, rituals, and meaning.

• Individuals are always being socialized and acculturated into whiteness (Owen, 2007).

• A “normally functioning” society becomes defined as one that is structured by whiteness.
Hegemonic Structuration

- Whiteness is that it structures society. Structure refers to the ordering of the elements of a social system so that “the ordering serves as a binding force across space and time” (Owen, 2007, p. 207).

- The ordering defines the perceived horizon of thought and action, and it provides the resources for social reproduction.

- Whiteness places elements into a hierarchical relationship of superiority and subordination. The structuring property of whiteness locates whites in a structural position of superiority and advantage and non-whites in a structural position of inferiority, subordination and disadvantage (racial stratification).
Matrix of Social Reproduction
Two Public Universities Offering Classes On What They Call The "Problem Of Whiteness" - Outnumbered
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LSN9agMsre
Power

• “Power over”
  o Enforcement of one’s own intentions over those of others and is only conceivable in a social relation (Giddens, 1981).
  o Dominance and coercion are used repeatedly before other alternatives are sought. One side fights for power over another (Giddens).

• “Power with”
  o Relational and collective and involves people working together.
  o Emerges organically from the participants involved and grows stronger the more it is put to use.
Property as Power

- At the beginning of America’s history, the distinction between who could **have** property and who could **be** property was paramount (Harris, 1993).

*Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*

1. Rights of disposition (rewards for conformity of white norms)
2. Rights to use and enjoyment (enrichment programs disproportionately populated)
3. Reputation and status property (association of “urban” schools)
4. Absolute right to exclude (desegregation via racial tracking in programs)

“Black students often come to the university in the role of intruders - who have been granted special permission to be there” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60)
Implications for Our Work

Whiteness in Higher Education
How Whiteness Manifests in Higher Education

- Disproportionately high representation of whites in higher education, especially in four-year institutions (Brown et al., 2003).
- Go along to get along attitude
- Institutional stance on racism that is reactive instead of proactive
- Exclusion of diversity or inclusion in the mission statement
- Concentration of institutional power in white (often male) administrators
- Minimal representation of Faculty of Color
- Reliance on ‘traditional pedagogies’ that disregard teaching across racial difference (Gusa, 2010).
Implications for Research

- Critical Whiteness (Colorblind Ideology & White Supremacy)
- White Identity Development
- Critical Leadership
Tolerance is Not Enough

• There are initiatives aimed at ‘increasing tolerance’ in higher education, but these do not address systems or structures. Tolerance does not imply an analysis of racial oppression, and this highlights the fallacy of the political correctness movement.

• There is a misconception that if white people refrained from saying offensive words, racial problems would disappear (Feagin & O’Brien, 2003).

• To move beyond tolerance, it is necessary to understand racism as systemic and make the invisible visible by highlighting the ways in which society structures and recreates the un-meritocratic privileges whites enjoy (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000).
Move Past White Fragility

• “A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 57).
Whites use semantic games, such as prefacing statements with ‘I’m not a racist but’ or ‘Some of my best friends are...’ to not appear racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). Bonilla-Silva argues that such statements functionally allow us to continue espousing racist views that are less offensive than using overt racist language.

Sincere fictions are sincere because the respondents truly believe them, but they are fictions because they are divorced from a historical and contemporary reality (e.g. claims of ‘reverse racism’) (Feagin and O’Brien, 2003).

Sincere fictions and semantic games have similar social functions: minimizing the power of racism and recreating white supremacy.
Develop Critical Consciousness

• Critical consciousness takes self-reflection to another level by including a deep “understanding of power relations and social construction including White privilege, heterosexism, poverty, misogyny, and ethnocentrism” (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006, p. 213).

• The goal of critical consciousness is to develop an awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action.
Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognizing Privileged Identity</th>
<th>Contemplating Privileged Identity</th>
<th>Addressing Privileged Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Intellectualization</td>
<td>Benevolence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflection</td>
<td>Principium</td>
<td>Minimization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationalization</td>
<td>False Envy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Engage in Critical Leadership

- Involves the process of **deconstructing and then reconstructing** personal, institutional, and social frameworks, practices, and structures in the interests of liberation and justice (Freire, 1970; Leonardo, 2004).

- “Leaders for social justice are committed to lifelong learning and growth, to recognizing and eliminating prejudice and oppression, to increasing awareness, to facilitating change, and to building inclusive communities” (Brown, 2004, p. 92).

- Since leadership is contextual and socially constructed, **leaders can use their socialized power to influence the actions of their followers.**
Critical Leadership Engagement

Praxis
(Critical reflection + action)

Socialization & Context

Critical Consciousness

Dialogue

Social Activism
A Call to Action

• White higher education leaders often take it upon themselves to champion social justice causes on behalf of "the other," which can be problematic.

• Whites must work to disrupt the structures of whiteness only on the basis of the insight and knowledge of those marginalized and oppressed by those structures.

• Stop centering ourselves (white people) in conversations about race.

• Do not expect to be praised for talking about race - we can avoid pitfalls of feeling “attacked” or “bashed” when our assumptions are challenged.

• Do not be silent but learn how to listen.

• Being called a racist is not worse than being the target of racism.
Q&A


References


Thank you!

Dustin Evatt
Associate Director of Campus Activities
Appalachian State University
evattwd@appstate.edu