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The Game Metaphor: How To Teach Racists That There Is No Such Thing As Reverse Racism

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How do you explain to people who think there is reverse racism that reverse racism does not exist? Tim Wise has an essay about this, and you can find resources in [The Daily Dot](#), [Everyday Feminism](#), [The Daily Kos](#), and [Huffington Post](#) to explain why a person of color cannot be racist towards a white person. [\[1\]](#)

This semester some of my students had difficulty understanding this, however. Many of the above resources (and the explanations I tried to give) rely on concepts like structure, oppression, and systematic inequality. These ideas are unfamiliar to those who have grown up with modern forms of racism, particularly colorblindness. It is difficult to guide the racially unknowing, ignorant, and fragile (read: most white people) to an understanding of these ideas, so explanations rejecting reverse racism fall short.

I came up with a metaphor to do this. I call it the game metaphor. Its purpose is to show why there is no such thing as reverse racism without using any concepts or language that might confuse, trigger, or exclude modern racists.

The Game Metaphor

Imagine two people who play a game every day of their lives for ten years. The game has rules, but just by virtue of who the players are, one of them always loses and the other always wins. Even if the loser technically wins according to the rules of the game, still, in this world, this same person loses the game. The two play everyday and the loser always loses and the winner always wins, period.

Then, after ten years of always losing and winning, something weird happens. The one who always loses wins a game. The one who always wins says "wow, losing is hard." The one who always loses says, "you don't know what loss is."

Even though the one who always wins has lost, their loss is different than the loss that the one who always loses has experienced.

Saying that there is reverse racism is like saying that the loss the one who always wins experiences *that one time* is the same thing as the loss that the one who always loses has experienced *for ten years*. They are very different losses, almost to the point where we cannot use the same word to describe them.

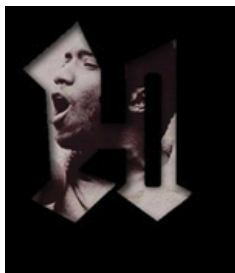
Even though the person who always wins loses, that loss is very different than the loss the loser has experienced for ten years. What it means for the person who always wins to 'lose' is a categorically different kind of 'loss' than the 'loss' which the one who always lost experiences. A perpetual winner's loss is a different kind of loss than the perpetual loser's loss. The loser's loss is Loss whereas the winner's loss is just loss. Why? Because of history. The loser has lost *systematically*, by virtue of who they are, not the rules of the game they're playing, for years and years.

This is why people of color cannot be racist against white people: whites have historically been the winners of social distribution--independently of the "rules" of society--whereas people of color have not, just by virtue of who they are. If people of color make particular gains on whites (like during Reconstruction or Civil Rights or affirmative action or the increasingly powerful Black Lives Matter critiques), this is not a "reversal." A reversal would require generations of white loss, trauma, and frustration from a systematic discrimination. For the same reasons, if people of color say something offensive about white people it cannot be racist. We have to use another word.

David I. Backer is an author, teacher, and activist. [For more about him, here is his blog.](#)

Notes

^[1] [Tim Wise, "Honky wanna cracker? Examining the myth of reverse racism"; Lily Workneh, "This Student Expertly Schools Her White Male Teacher On Racism"; Trey Sanchez, "Black Woman Explains Why Reverse Racism Is Not A Thing"; Jamie Utt, "8 Things White People Really Need To Know About Race"; S.E. Smith, "7 Reasons Why Reverse Racism Does Not Exist."](#)



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Hampton Institute

P.O. Box 4058
Clifton Park, New York 12065

Email: info@hamptoninstitution.org

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