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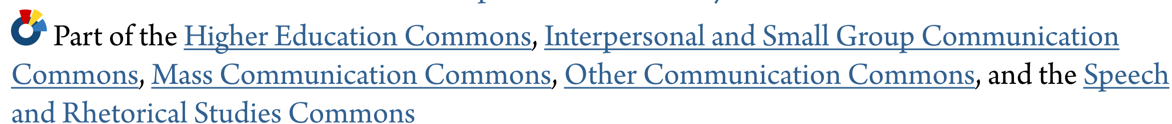
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Anti-racist Pedagogy in the Basic Course: Teaching Cultural Communication as if Whiteness Matters

Kristen P. Treinen
John T. Warren

> Rather than attempting to correct erroneous views that lend themselves to racism, whiteness theories begin with the recognition that because terms like black and white (or white/non-white or white/"other") are constructed in binary opposition, it is impossible to rescue blackness or brownness from its deviant status without deconstructing the whiteness against which such deviance is measured. (Thompson, 1997, p. 146).

Scene 1[1]

You stand in front of your students and introduce Boris, a friend of yours from Russia who happens to be a colleague in your departmental office. Your basic course students, a room filled with twenty-three white and very

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[1]We borrow this writing style from Kathleen B. Jones's "The Trouble With Authority," and Darlene M. Hantzis and Devoney Looser's "Of Safe(r) Spaces and "Right" Speech: Feminist Histories, Loyalties, and Theories, and the Dangers of Critique." We were inspired by their use of second person narrative and replicate it here.

bored first-year college students, stare up at you without taking their books out of their bag, looking up at the sound of your voice, or even bothering to act like they are listening. Boris is used to this, he will tell you later, noting that this was his sixth guest lecture this semester on cultural communication. You recall thinking that someone like Boris would personalize cultural communication — a making real of the issues in the textbook. He approaches the students and begins to weave a story about life in Russia and the students slowly start to transform — they perk up and become seduced by this storyteller.

You sit in the back of the room and smile as your students get caught up in Russian life — this exotic place they have heard about but only seen on television. During the course of the hour, Boris brings in course terms and concepts all while passing those ideas through his own life experiences. When the hour is over, you and Boris walk back to the office and again you are proud you asked him to come, for the students got more from him than they possibly could have gotten from you. After all, a lecture on culture is more interesting when they can hear the material applied to someone who is different than they are, you think. On the way back, Boris asks you a question: 'I'm glad I could help you out, but I always wonder if what I say ever really makes them think about the issues I just told them.' You looked surprised and respond that it went well and that they were attentive. He smiles and notes, 'yeah, but tomorrow I bet all they remember are the weird stories from the weird Russian.'

Scene 2

You are lecturing on informative speeches to your students. You assign the informative speech and ask students to begin brainstorming topics with each other. The next class period it becomes obvious that many of your students are struggling with a topic. The following semester you've come up with a new way to alleviate this stress (for your students and for you); this semester you are going to change the informative speech to a speech of information on diversity. Of course, you hope that your students will find it easier to choose a topic, but you have an ulterior motive, you hope that this speech will help your students to become more culturally aware and culturally sensitive. You require your students to "step-out" of their cultures/co-cultures and to research a culture that is different than their own. If they could not think of a topic, you provided each student with a list of cultural "others" they could present to the class. You were very happy with the outcome of the presentations because your students seemed genuinely interested in the speeches on different cultures.

The following semester you are discussing cultural communication with a friend. Your friend asks you if you have ever heard of Whiteness Studies. At first you're shocked and confused; you have a hard time believing that you have more privileges than other people do: you are a woman living in a patriarchal society. After several discussions, and readings about whiteness, you realize that the strategies you have used to create cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness in your classroom have been naive and misguided. You wonder how you can change your class to address these issues.

As we have found in our experience as communication educators and scholars, there is a need for educators to understand the implications and impact of whiteness in the classroom. The belief that educators must engage in a critique of whiteness is reinforced by several scholars (Nakayama, and Krizek, 1995; Sleeter, 1996; McIntyre, 1997; Scheurich, 1993; McIntosh, 1995; Giroux, 1997; Fine, Wies, Powell, and Wong, 1997). Whiteness Studies encourages educators to problematize the unexamined cultural center in order to better understand how whiteness affects our teaching, curriculum, and students. As Ferguson (1990) explains, the cultural center of power is often exercised from a hidden place, and whenever we try to find it, it moves somewhere else, "yet we know that this phantom center, elusive as it is, exerts a real, undeniable power over the entire framework of our culture, and over the ways we think about it" (p. 19). Whiteness Studies is designed to examine that elusive center of power and deconstruct it. Whiteness Studies are not a threat to other areas of cultural study; rather, it enhances the techniques and strategies we employ to teach multiculturalism in the basic communication course. Whiteness Studies is critical largely because the common ways we teach multicultural communication do not encourage students to examine how racism is systemic, or how white privilege impacts our understanding of diversity issues, nor does it locate white people in the discussion.

What we argue is typically missing in the basic course is an anti-racist pedagogy. An anti-racist pedagogy asks educators to understand the power and privilege inherent in whiteness, and asks educators to examine how whiteness affects their classrooms, students,

teaching strategies, and attitudes toward students of color. An anti-racist pedagogy begins when educators and students engage in self-reflection about what it means to be white, and how it "affects our thinking, our behaviors, our attitudes, and our decisions from the micro, personal level, to the macro, social level" (Scheurich, 1993, p.3). Whiteness Studies are "designed not to gaze outward at the margins but critically examine what lies at the center of racial institutional power: whiteness" (Warren, 1999, p. 185). Whiteness Studies can help instructors and students in the basic course approach racism in a new way. All too often we teach students that racism is something that puts 'others' at a disadvantage without teaching students about who concurrently is "advantaged" by racism. McIntosh (1995) characterizes this advantage as white privilege (p. 190). In this essay, we suggest a new way of addressing culture in the basic course. We offer a reframing of how cultural communication could be approached in the basic course through work in Whiteness Studies. Such a refocusing towards a critique of whiteness makes the basic course a possible site for transformation and social justice while promoting a more accurate understanding of the influence of racial power in cultural communication. Additionally, the basic course represents a powerful site for this kind of conversation due to its wide-ranging student audience and the unique effect of culture on communicative interaction.

In what follows, we build from Whiteness Studies to offer four modifications to the basic course, which are consistent with an anti-racist pedagogy. The first modification involves re-examining the way cultural communication is approached in the basic communication

course through a move from the margins to the center. Communication educators must begin to consider how the privilege of the "center" works in their classrooms and institutions. The second modification explores the danger of turning cultural communication into a study of the exotic cultural other. When studying culture and communication, often we engage our students in an examination of how "others" communicate without reflecting on the ways our communicative practices affect our daily lives. The third modification explores the ways the rhetoric of individualism reinforces inequality. The logic that we are all individuals, which underlines much of the work in the basic course ('look at people as individuals,' 'we should not stereotype'), taken to its extreme only maintains an illusion of a pre-established equality, as if race has no effect on our collective social world. Finally, we critique the notion that colorblindness is the appropriate way to handle issues of race in our classrooms. If educators continue to be "colorblind," we are sending a message to students that being black and brown is a fault or flaw that should be overlooked and/or ignored; it thus becomes hard for students of color to feel "worthy of notice" (Delpit, 1995, p. 177). We conclude by suggesting ways Whiteness Studies are appropriate to the basic course and offer some brief practical suggestions from our own experiences as a beginning implementation of this work. We make such suggestions with caution; we do not wish to imply that the suggestions we make here are the only possible solutions to the dilemma, nor do we wish to imply that such ideas radically subvert the cultural politics of the classroom. Rather, we wish them to begin the work this essay charges — to begin conversations about how to improve

the educational experiences of students in introductory communication courses.

REFRAMING CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE BASIC COURSE: FOUR MODIFICATIONS

From the Margins to the Center

> . . . most of the time white people speak about nothing but white people, it's just that we couch it in terms of 'people' in general.
>
> (Dyer, 1997, p. 3).

Have you ever been asked what your cultural background is? What did you say? Norwegian? Irish? German? Maybe you simply said, "American!" Have you ever asked a person of color what their cultural background is? If you answered no, why not? Maybe because you do not consider White the same as African American, Latino/a, or Native American. In other words, you may assume that a person of color has a cultural background; therefore, there is no need to ask. White people, on the other hand, are the invisible norm from which people of color are measured against and placed in opposition to. Many times cultural communication is approached in the basic course as an opportunity to study how different cultures communicate or how we [white people] might better communicate with cultural others. Notice how the words 'different' and 'others' implicitly set up a marker from which those *others* are measured as *different*. Whiteness Studies demands that one understands culture as a political system of power rela-

tions in which whiteness is the privileged center. This is very different from how the basic course typically operates, where a white student is the imagined audience and whiteness is often taken for granted and thus never critiqued. In describing how the invisibility of whiteness operates, Titone (1998) explains that "I was well instructed when it came to studying the educational research related to diversity. I learned to conceptualize 'the other' as a cultured being to respect and affirm 'them'"(p. 162). Yet, what we do not study is the issue of *other* in relation to *what*. Without addressing the norm against which "others" get judged, these others continue to get marginalized. At the same time, the power of the center, the norm that is whiteness, gets further entrenched.

Whiteness Studies demands that one understand culture as a political system of power relations in which whiteness is privileged, and where that privilege translates to cultural power. Whiteness scholars ask that we mark and understand the invisible center as real and culturally defined. They ask educators to expose "whiteness as a cultural construction as well as the strategies that embed its centrality" (Nakyama and Krizek, 1995, p. 297). Nakayama and Krizek explain that

> We must deconstruct it as the locus from which Other differences are calculated and organized. The purpose of such an inquiry is certainly not to re-center whiteness, but to expose its rhetoric. It is only upon examining this strategic rhetoric that we can begin to understand the influences it has on our everyday lives. (p. 297)

Whiteness functions as the unexamined center, which we argue needs to be examined, exposed, and dismantled.

Whiteness is difficult to see because it is taken for granted that people of color are raced and white people are not. Frankenberg (1993) found that "a significant number of young white women" in her study found that "being white felt like being cultureless" (p. 196). So, the question remains, what does it mean to be white? How can we begin to understand whiteness? We can begin to understand whiteness, Schuerich contends, when we admit that we are all a part of racialized groups "that is, all people are socially influenced in significant ways by their membership in racial groups" (Schuerich, 1993, p. 9). McIntosh (1995) explains that white privilege is an "invisible weightless [unearned] knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear and blank checks . . . . which I can count on cashing in each day" (p. 1-2). Whiteness is often seen as synonymous with the common, ordinary, and natural way of being human and thus whites do not perceive it as meaningful, or as something that has an impact in the classroom. We suggest White instructors of the basic course need to unpack their "knapsacks" of taken-for-granted privilege and allow that reflection to inform their pedagogy.

Whiteness Studies encourages communication educators to begin to consider how the privilege of the center works in their classrooms and institutions. By "going public" with our whiteness, educators can begin to engage in a dialogue and critique about what it means to be white with our colleagues and our students. The ex-

amination of whiteness should not perpetuate the racism that already exists in our society; instead, an examination of whiteness should deconstruct the center of privilege and power that is embedded in whiteness. Communication educators should help students engage in a critique of racism which names and marks whiteness as a historical and political center of power and privilege. As Warren (1999) suggests, "rather than making the center bigger, including more voices and more cultures, Whiteness Studies demands a critical examination of the center in the hope that the center will fall" (p. 197). Whiteness Studies is an integral, but often missing, component in the study of multiculturalism. It serves to critically interrogate racism and privilege, pushes for a more equitable society, and demands that we do not tokenize or exoticize non-whites.

Of Tacos, Veils, and Pow Wows: The Exotic Other

> With a different focus, this education initiative might move away from the "food and festivals" multicultural programs that serve culture up with an "ethnic" dish and traditional garb. These kinds of programs only render various cultures exotic and thus fail to impact the stability and power of the center. (Warren, 1999, p. 200)

We must account for the food, fun, and festival approach to multiculturalism in the basic course. Think back to multicultural and intercultural courses you have taught or taken as a student in the past. How was culture approached? Did you engage in "cultural experi-

ences" such as attending a Native American Pow-Wow, having a Mexican Fiesta, or attending an African American church? Sleeter (1996) maintains that "multicultural education is very often reduced to folksongs and folktales, food fairs, holiday celebrations, and information about famous people" (p. 145). These approaches to multiculturalism only serve to "otherize" people of color; stereotypes are reinforced rather than undermined. As Sleeter maintains "Anglos will romanticize piñatas and Mexican hat dances, and at the same time argue that characteristics of Mexican culture keep Mexican people from advancing (such as large families, adherence to Spanish language, external locus of control, lack of ambition-manana, etc.)" (p. 146). As a response, Whiteness Studies holds the white race accountable for their culture. This response is important because it is through the hidden norms of white culture that we criticize others.

Academic research often serves to 'otherize' people of color without considering the effect these studies have on the people being studied. In their article, "Multicultural Education Courses and the Student Teacher: Eliminating Stereotypical Attitudes in our Ethnically Diverse Classroom," Tran, Young, and DiLella (1994) conducted a study to examine the effects of a multicultural education course on the formation of attitudes toward three ethnic groups: European Americans, Mexican-Americans, and African Americans. This study was conducted during a multicultural education course and was an attempt to reduce "stereotyping attitudes" toward these groups. In order to reduce "stereotyping attitudes," the participants were asked to immerse themselves in a cultural activity and interact with members

of another culture. These cultural immersions included "neighborhood festivals," "ethnic churches," and "half-way houses." According to the study:

> Students, often reluctant, at first, to visit an African-American Baptist church, or work in a elementary school fair with Mexican, Asian, or Middle-Eastern students, speak or write about their experiences with joy and enlightenment as if they just began to empathize with their racially-different neighbors. From these experiences blossom less fearful, more sensitive students. (p. 276)

It is reassuring to know that these student teachers become less fearful and more sensitive to "other" cultures through a multicultural course, but does this process help the student teachers understand the role they play in the classroom when their classroom has students of color, or when they are teaching about diversity to white students?

The desire to use cultural communication to talk about others, pointing out the different communicative styles and cultural practices, has the pretense of educating students about the differences between differing cultures. But such a lesson also teaches the students about what those communicative practices are in relation to — to the white cultural practices embedded in the American educational system. This again normalizes whiteness but does so directly on the bodies of those non-white others we exoticize. A denial of this kind of study of culture is a denial of representations that continue to promote and reify the stereotypical understandings about those different. Such a redefinition of cultural communication means that easy

critiques of cultural practices (i.e., Middle-Eastern gender relations, Ebonics, or meritocracy) are replaced with discussions of these practices in cultural context with a reflection of how our own complex cultural practices can also fall victim to easy reductions (i.e., the politics of make-up, tanning, and the like).

Rather than asking our students to examine those mysterious others, as some research appears to ask us to do, we should instead recognize that such approaches can serve to otherize to such an extreme that we put others on display while at the same time positioning whiteness as absent, central, and normal. One useful way to envision how exoticizing occurs is to imagine how we might ask cultural others to study "whiteness." What would it look like to have a 'white' booth at the cultural fair? The seeming absurdity of such a question only demonstrates the ways our representations of culture frame marginalized others as exotic in comparison to the normalized white center of power. Any conversation of cultural others without an accompanying reflection on how such conversations situate whiteness only goes to otherize and exoticize those groups while strengthening whiteness' position of dominance. A change in the focus of multicultural studies within and outside the communication classroom will allow student to comprehend the complexities of one's cultural background. Failing to address whiteness in multicultural classrooms means failing to address that whiteness is a race and a cultural standpoint.

The Privilege of Individualism

> Among Whites, the idea that each person is largely the source or origin of herself or himself, that is, individualism, is considered a natural facet of life . . . . individualism is seen as a naturally occurring, transhistorical, transcultural condition to which all humans naturally aspire. (Scheurich, 1993, p. 6)

In the basic course, as in other classes, we teach our students about racism, prejudice, and stereotypes in an attempt to help students see that their communicative practices may have negative consequences. We believe it is valuable to encourage our students to be more open-minded, accepting and culturally sensitive. Not only do we want our students to be more culturally sensitive, but we also desire that our students will become responsible and competent communicators. However, there is a significant consequence to teaching only these aspects of communicative competence to our students: a lack of accountability. We ask our students to understand what racism, prejudice, and stereotypes mean, and we ask our students to be tolerant and respectful of people who are different from them, but we seldom ask our students to reflect upon their own involvement and implication in the system of racism. Our students are taught to view racism as an individual problem that puts 'others' at a disadvantage, instead of being taught about the corollary of white privilege and the advantages which result for whites (McIntosh, 1995, p. 190).

If basic course instructors continue to teach their students that racism is an individual problem, students will not have to implicate themselves in the system of

racism. An absence of self-reflexivity will ensure that racism will continue to be seen as "someone else's problem." Sleeter (1996) explains that "most white teachers greatly minimize the extent and impact of racial (as well as the forms of) discrimination, viewing it as isolated expressions of prejudice that hurt a person's feelings" (p. 141). Discrimination and racism get interpreted as isolated acts "by prejudiced individuals" (Sleeter, 1996, p. 142) and therefore never considered as part of a larger racist system.

Because racism is often thought of as individual acts of unkindness, we neglect to examine the role we whites play in a larger system of racism. Racism is not an individual problem which can be attributed to the mysterious "them" who engage in racism. Thompson (1997) explains that "racism is a *system* of privilege and oppression, a network of traditions, legitimating standards, material, and ideological apparatus that together serve to perpetuate hierarchical social relations based on race" (p. 9). As Thompson asserts, racism is a systemic problem found in our classrooms, textbooks, and institutions; however, racism is often presented as an individual problem. Scheurich further offers that

> [h]ighly educated Whites usually think of racism in terms of the overt behaviors of individuals that can be readily be [sic] identified and labeled. A person who does not behave in these identifiable ways is not considered to be a racist. Within this perspective, racism is a label for individuals but not for social groups. (p. 6)

An individual approach to racism only serves to perpetuate inequality. It places blame at the door of the

person of color who cannot make it and says, 'if you had only worked harder you could have made it.' The presentation of racism as an individual problem ignores the fact that we all function within a system; we all gain privilege and suffer inequality in a synchronous relationship. Sleeter (1996) describes how European-Americans defend the individualistic view of the American system "because it portrays the system as open to those who are willing to work hard and pull themselves over barriers of poverty and discrimination"(p. 138). It is a statement of *privilege* to gain all the systemic benefits of whiteness and then pretend that 'I got them all because I earned them.' Believing in an individualistic society allows us to blame the people who do not gain these privileges for not working hard enough or for being inferior. If people really want to have privilege, they are expected to work harder, and to pull themselves up by the bootstraps (Ryan, 1976).

Our educational system reflects the individualistic ideology of the dominant society and perpetuates the notion that discrimination and oppression are results of individual acts of racism. McIntosh (1997) asserts that her "schooling gave [her] no training in seeing [her]self as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture" (p. 190). We need to think more about her concern here, particularly as it relates to a learned ignorance of systematic issues. An exclusive focus on individual actions and behaviors is problematic. It drastically reduces a complex and historically constructed system to one's own interpretations and one's own actions. As long as racism is presented as an individual problem, we do not have to be accountable for our actions unless we intend or inflict harm on an-

other. How often do we ask our students in the basic course to explain how they are invested in, or benefit from, systematic racism? As educators we have a responsibility to explain to our students that the "system" of racism allows for the oppression of the "other," and allows those with privilege and power to flourish.

One important center of power and privilege is our own classrooms (Delpit, 1995, p. 24). A culture of power exists throughout the curriculum and structure of our schools. According to Anderson, Bentley, Gallegos, Herr, and Savvedra (1998),

> A classroom contains a culture of power to the extent that social relations in the classroom reproduce social relations in the wider society. For example, the curriculum tends to reflect the dominant culture (middle class, male, European-American, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.) -- that is, men tend to demand their privileged position in the public sphere and dominate discussions; a hierarchical system is reproduced throughout the student-teacher relationship, evaluation procedures, and so on. (p. 276)

The culture of power in the basic course can be seen in the way we teach our students how to deliver an effective public speech: an effective public speech as envisioned by Aristotle. In our experience, the basic course asks students to deliver highly structured speeches that are modeled after the white, elite men who invented the process for men like them. Not only is the structure, organization, and delivery of a speech modeled after the dominant class, it is also a reflection of the way the dominant society engages in public discourse.

Communication educators can begin to deconstruct and de-center the "culture of power" in our classrooms.

An examination of whiteness in the basic course will demand that our students understand culture as a political system of power relations in which whiteness is the privileged center, and that privilege means more power. In these and other ways, the basic course so often imagines white students. For instance, basic communication textbooks generally (if culture is included at all) have a chapter on culture and communication, while still others attempt to incorporate culture in all chapters, usually relegating this weaving to a paragraph here or there. While we argue that these are necessary and beneficial elements to a communication textbook, we also assert that these textbooks place whiteness as the invisible norm, while people from other cultures or other countries are posited as the exotic other (for instance: Lucas, 1995; Wood, 1998; Samovar and Mills, 1998; Gronbeck, McKerrow, Ehninger, and Monroe, 1997). We have yet to see a textbook seriously scrutinize the communicative and political effects of whiteness without reinforcing the normality of whiteness.

Color Evasion: An Ignorance of Difference

> Colorblindness treats race as if it did not matter, invoking an idea according to which color *ought* not to matter, a world in which color is not a difference that makes a difference. . . colorblindness also involves a refusal to see racism as anything more than prejudice." (Thompson, 1997, p. 14)

As instructors, we are taught in our coursework or in training to be more culturally aware and more culturally sensitive toward the students we will teach. Warren (1999) maintains that "multicultural education

has traditionally been based on examining racial others, in an effort to expand the curriculum to include racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 197). Few educators would argue that expanding the curriculum to include racial and ethnic minorities and creating more culturally sensitive and culturally aware teachers is a problem; however, if engaging students in the examination of the "other" leads to ignoring important social and cultural difference, the practice then perpetuates racism rather than working to undermine it. Playing off the double meaning of ignorance (stupidity and purposive ignoring), to claim colorblindness is both an inaccurate response to difference, where one actually believes or claims to believe they are color-blind, and an ignorant response implying that being different is deficient.

Rains (1998) argues that the *color-blind* response often is used in a sweeping and generalizable way. It goes something like this: "'You know, some of my best friends are (a color/ethnicity), but I don't see color . . . . I treat all my friends the same.' For the white person, this type of response is supposed to be politically correct, and nondiscriminatory." Rains goes on to explain that *race-neutrality* is often more personally directed and typically goes like this: "'Gee, I don't think of you as (color/ethnicity)." Rains explains that a race-neutral response is often thought to be a sort of compliment for the person of color (p. 91). In reality, the race-neutral response creates a false sense of equality. This response is used to alleviate the possibility that the white person will implicate him/herself as a racist, as if not-seeing color logically correlates to an anti-racist attitude. A person with this response is attempting to take away the possibility that he/she is overtly racist. Rains main-

tains that this benign response is "both unconscious defensiveness and denial." Rains continues maintaining that "the unconscious defensiveness works to safeguard the reactor from harmful definitions or accusations" (p. 92). Being politically correct is perceived as the right thing to do, and as a result many people fear being seen as racist if they see color. By engaging in race neutrality, a white person tries to erase their responsibility for racism, allowing their own privilege to be uncritiqued.

Educators and students who claim they do not see race have bought into the logic that racial difference (or the acknowledgment of racial difference) is inherently racist. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains the great harm that teachers can do when they engage in color-blindness:

> My own experience with white teachers, both preservice and veteran, indicate that many are uncomfortable acknowledging any student difference and particularly racial differences. Thus some teachers make such statements as "I don't really see color, I just see children" or "I don't care if they're red, green, or polka dot, I just treat them all like children." However, these attempts at colorblindness mask a "dysconscious racism," an "uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequities and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given." This is not to suggest that these teachers are racist in the conventional sense, they do not consciously deprive or punish African American children on the basis of their race, but at the same time they are not unconscious of the ways in which children are disadvantaged in the classroom. Their "dysconsciousness" comes into play when they fail to challenge the status quo, when they accept the given as the inevitable. (p. 31-32)

These teachers believe that to notice or call attention to difference and how that difference has altered who we are in the world, is somehow worse than ignoring it. Colorblindness allows people to maintain an illusion that race has not affected who we are. Promoting colorblindness in the classroom both ensures that students (and teachers) will never critique race in meaningful ways while also maintaining the belief that it is good that race does not matter. Engaging in color-blindness is significantly problematic. We argue that race does matter and that meaningful reflections on how and in what ways it matters are always better than living an illusion of imagined equality. Asking students to engage in color-blindness or race-neutrality ensures that they will not examine the impact race has on their daily lives (Warren, 1999, p. 189).

Promoting color-blindness in the basic course (and beyond) ignores the historical content of racism, and how race has shaped who we are in society. Sleeter (1996) explains that "white people in general find it difficult to appreciate the impact of colonization and slavery on both oppressed groups as well as whites; we tend to prefer to regard everyone as descendants of immigrants" (p. 140). If communication educators continue to ignore the impact of colonization and slavery on the power structures of today, we will allow our white students and students of color to continue to believe that privilege based on skin color does not exist, that individuals have an equal opportunity when it comes to social, political, and economic promise. Color-blindness in the basic course makes race, and real talk about race, taboo; that is the most destructive thing we, as communication educators, can do.

CONCLUSIONS: POSSIBILITY IN LIGHT OF WHITENESS

Scene 1 Revisited

The single most important thing Whiteness Studies has provided me with is a sense of responsibility. This responsibility manifests itself in two key ways. First, I must approach my life differently. I must speak responsibly—I must never think that my voice is free from the historical legacy of racism and it is my job to deconstruct that which I say. I must listen responsibly—I must always question the stories I hear about myself and others. I must always ask how race is affecting what I hear and how I think about what I hear. I must always (re)evaluate what I encounter to make sure that I am consistent in my attempts to resist the influences of whiteness. Second, I must approach my teaching differently. No more is it sufficient to ask the person of color to come in and lecture on culture, providing the exotic for my white students' eyes. When I did that, Boris' message was turned into a day off—a story time about the bread lines in Russia or some other tale that lost the real power of his message. I also said something about myself and my own whiteness — I told my students that I was unable to talk to them about culture. Perhaps they learned that whiteness was not a culture, which then demanded a 'cultured' person to come in a talk to them. Perhaps I taught them that my whiteness was not part of racism and the system of privileges and disadvantage of which Boris spoke. Perhaps, worst of all, they learned that racism was not their problem — that it was an

interesting issue tied in a package of stories that never had to do with their own lives, their own actions, their own racist everyday behaviors. So today, I don't ask a Boris to come talk to my students — I tell them this *story and make culture and whiteness about all of us.*

Scene 2 Revisited

I used to treat all my students the same, as if color did not matter, as if difference was a bad thing. I used to ask my students to examine cultures other than their own. So, what have I learned from Whiteness Studies? Whiteness Studies have given me a new lens with which to examine racism. I no longer ask my students to 'gaze' upon the cultural other, instead I ask my students to 'gaze' inward and understand what role they play in the system of oppression. I ask my students to understand how whiteness is related to cultural studies and the impact that it has on their communicative practices. I have also learned that these discussions are not easy; they are complex and often uncomfortable (for my students and for myself). However, if I continue to ignore or avoid the impact whiteness has on racism, then I continue to perpetuate racism. If I continue to ignore my whiteness, I will continue to encourage my students to engage in color-blind practices, color evasion, and presenting the cultural other as exotic. This is equivalent to perpetuating the system of racism — to choose not to change.

The basic course has the potential to reach every student at a college or university. It is, therefore, an ideal place for a critical examination of whiteness. In this essay, we offer four modifications to the basic

course through work in Whiteness Studies that encourage an anti-racist pedagogy. A re-examination of the methods used to approach cultural communication in the basic communication course through a move from the margins to the center is necessary to consider how the privilege of the center works to maintain its power. The second modification attempts to explore the danger of turning cultural communication into a study of the exotic and mysterious cultural others. Next, in the basic course we need to explore how the rhetoric of the individual reinforces inequality. The logic that we are all individuals, which underlines much of the work in the basic course (look at people as individuals — don't stereotype), perpetuates the illusion of a pre-established equality, as if race has not had an effect on our collective social world. Finally, we argue that engaging in color-blindness sends the message that being a person of color is a problem that should be overlooked or ignored in order to ensure equality.

The basic course is an appropriate and needed space to expose our students to the systemic nature of racism. Students need to learn that racism is a system that consists of political, economic, and social components. American racism started with the colonization of North America, and continued with slavery. Racism and whiteness have become so "naturalized" that many basic course instructors and students do not question whether they are actually acting in racist ways or how they might be working to promote inequality. It is far too easy for students to ignore their complicity in our racist society. Through communication theory and an anti-racist pedagogy, educators can investigate the impact whiteness has on our communicative practices as well

as engage in a concentrated effort at locating and critiquing whiteness as the social/cultural center of power. An anti-racist pedagogy enables students and instructors to engage in a dialogue that deconstructs the existing power and privilege that is so invisible in our society. Through Whiteness Studies, educators and students in the basic course will no longer study the 'other' without examining the taken for granted normalcy of the culture of power. This is a much needed improvement because students and educators may begin to understand that "existential reality is not the product of divine intervention (that is, "the way things just are"); instead social reality is made by men and women" (Rodriguez, 1998, p. 35). Because racism and systems of privilege are socially constructed, they can also be deconstructed. We suggest that reconstructing our understandings of whiteness is a critical first step towards altering the basic course in the interest of greater equality and justice.

At the risk of ending with easy answers to the complex array of problems detailed above, we also worry that ending without any tangible possibilities for classroom practice might leave one feeling a bit overwhelmed. As a beginning to opening up conversations on the possible ways one might go about undermining the invisibility of whiteness in the basic course, we would like to share three brief examples of how we have worked to incorporate this material into our classrooms. First, we begin our courses by framing our teaching of the basic course with standpoint theory, establishing each class member of the course as always already a product and producer of culture. Thus, we begin with a locating of our voices in culture, noting that each of us

have varying degrees of cultural power based on age, race, gender, sexuality, education, and other factors. As white teachers, we locate our positions as educated, as institutional agents granted with the power to grade, and as individuals from the culture of power. This is further extended by the first speech assignment where we ask our students to again examine their own cultural positions through speeches of introduction.

Second, we both include Peggy McIntosh's essay "White Privilege, Male Privilege" as required reading, asking students to critically investigate her claims. While this is often students' first interaction with an academic essay, we find they generally are able to work through the essay in mature and sophisticated ways. Specifically, we ask students to consider the 46 privileges McIntosh lists based on her whiteness. With which of these do students agree? Which do they find problematic? After a class conversation on the essay, we ask students to generate their own lists of privilege. We find that reading this essay and doing this classroom work allow the conversation of culture to focus both inward toward the cultural center, while also making space to examine racism as a system.

A final example of interrupting the reproduction of whiteness in our classrooms lies in our own cultural confessions (Kanpol, 1998). Barry Kanpol (1998) argues that confession is a pedagogical tool that creates the conditions for the possibility of critical transformation in the classroom — an owning up of our own responsibilities in resisting the maintenance of systems of inequality (p. 67). In other words, we narrate our own experiences in coming to see ourselves as participants and police of the systems of racial dominance. We

narrate our struggle. We tell our students what it means to see ourselves as oppressors. We do this in order to both "own up" to our privilege, as well as attempt to create ground upon which our students can stand as they begin their own journey of self-reflection. As white teachers, this process of self-narration is an ethical choice in service of creating possibility for our students and ourselves.

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