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“When Do I Cross the Street?” Roberta’s Guilty Reflection

Irene A. Lietz

Introduction

Critical pedagogues in composition have long struggled with the difficult dance between challenging students to growth and learning and scaring them into retreat, even resistance, to their curriculum. This is particularly true when the curriculum involves themes related to identity-threatening issues such as race and racism, particularly for White students who, as racial identity experts note, may feel threatened, guilty, or in denial (Helms 50; Tatum 106). As the pedagogy has matured, critique and discussion of its goals and strategies has shifted from defense against charges of politics in the classroom (Hairston 698) and willful ignorance of student’s pragmatic goals (Durst 111) to closer study of aspects of critical pedagogy in rhetoric. Key among these are Ratcliffe’s seminal analysis that essentially asks what resistance looks like in the classroom, generating a list of eight kinds of resistances that, she argued, students could learn to recognize in their responses so that they could get past them (138–39). A little later, Trainor’s study provided rich description of predominantly white suburban high school students resisting critical pedagogy—challenging the field to consider the role of such students’ emotional attachment to and investment in color-blindness as well as other aspects of the citizenship curriculum that is the cultural norm. This article is also not an apology for critical pedagogy in composition. Instead, I would like to provide an application of the work of Ratcliffe and Trainor, but then begin to respond to some important next-step questions. For me, after reading Ratcliffe and Trainor, the question remains: What does the teacher *do* with student resistance? Should we just back away in deference to a student’s ‘pragmatic goals’ and protests of discomfort (Durst 111)? What are the ways that the instructor can draw the student through her resistance, help her get to the other side of cognitive dissonance (Harro 16), guilt (Tatum 105–113), and shame (Probyn 56) so that she can fully engage in a new critical understanding of the identity issues that shape and sometimes distort the rhetorical contexts and methods of her writing? Can our critical rhetoric of identity help students move past resistance to self-authorship (Magolda 69)?

In this article, I walk through an IRB-approved case study and discourse analysis of one of my student’s interviews that names her various triumphs and resistances, as Ratcliffe has defined them, while also considering their emotional aspects, as described by Trainor’s work. I also examine possible motives for her resistance, as theorized by Helms, Tatum, and Harro. Finally, using Brown and Gilligan, Magolda, Winans, and Lu, I discuss where the student’s particular experience seems to fall short of a sense of accomplishment and identity resolution for her, including a self-critique of my version of the pedagogy that points to some suggestions for strategies and institutional supports for teachers and students engaged in this kind of identity pedagogy.

Studying the responses of this student, here named Roberta, can contribute a case in point of the “local pedagogy” of our particular campus, a small, predominantly female liberal arts university in southwestern Pennsylvania (Winans 256). Specifically, Roberta

was a member of a race-themed writing class that sought to teach the classic modes of writing combined with critical race theory to encourage students to make a personal connection to their mainly expository writing and elevate it to higher levels of critical thinking, beyond the tired high-school level and talk-radio rhetoric. Roberta was one of five students I interviewed right after they finished their first-year race-themed writing class with me and again as seniors before they graduated. The project was intended to examine the effects of race-themed composition on their writing and their racial awareness.

I will first explain the motivation for the course's focus on race, then describe Roberta's comments from the first-year interview, followed by her comments from the senior interview. Then I will engage in some analysis of what I think is happening when these two interviews are viewed back to back. While I seem to have more questions than answers about Roberta's experience of the class, the details of her story offer clues to understanding the sources of her fears and apparent self-censorship, as well as hints of the kind of support such students and their teachers need. Roberta's interviews also raise questions about what we can fairly expect of or hope for students—and teachers—in a critical composition class. Ultimately, Roberta's story, as unresolved and unclear as it is at times, provides additional information about the struggles our students experience in critical pedagogy, particularly in studying racial identity, and it points to possible directions and questions for the future uses and study of this kind of learning and teaching experience.

Why Focus on Race in Particular?

To understand the context for Roberta's interviews, it's helpful to examine the rationale for doing this kind of class at all. This critical pedagogy focus grows out of the theory of Freire, Shor, and others. Using some of Freire's own words in the introduction to the foundational text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Shaull writes that Freire's liberatory work positions education as a vehicle to "the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (15). Later picking up the theme of the role of education to help students explore their world and their relationship to it, Winans further notes that studying race specifically "helps white students develop a personal investment in their work that serves as a basis for their thinking more critically about how race affects the lives of all people and how it structures the world in which they live" (255). Multiple studies show that diversity experiences promote gains in critical thinking—at least for white students.¹

Our class was structured to be a beginning identity and diversity exploration by requiring that students write all of their first-year essays with a focus on some aspect of race experience, using readings, such as McIntosh's famous essay sometimes known as "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," the PBS series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (Adelman), Tatum's *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* and their own secondary source research as references. My hope was to accelerate an in-depth

1. The effect for African American students are not as clear, perhaps due to the small size of the study samples (Pascarella et al. 257-259).

writing experience of a single topic, reminiscent of the Harvard study on student writers' growth over a four-year college career (Sommers and Saltz).

The class pedagogy is built on the assumption that writing should not only prepare students for their subsequent writing experiences but also contribute in significant ways to students' growth and development as people. To that end, though controversial, unpredictable, and complex, talking about race is intended to help us advance intellectually, socially, and emotionally, to ask "questions about race and racism, but, more important, to help others move beyond fear, beyond anger, beyond denial to new understanding of what racism is, how it impacts all of us, and ultimately what we can do about it" (Tatum ix). That requires courage, Tatum affirms, because a new understanding of racial identity inevitably upsets the old identity. Thus the resistance that others, including Ratcliffe, Trainor, Banning, Fox, Rosenberg, and more have also described in English, rhetoric, communication, teacher training, and other kinds of classes.

Regardless of whether the theme of a class is race, as mine was, or another topic, they all are vehicles for teaching the purpose and the potential of writing. Critical pedagogy enables us to engage students in high-stakes writing assignments to teach them the power of writing; without that, we are selling students and writing short.

The worthiness of the outcomes, however, doesn't make it easy. Moreover, for a white woman raised in a white suburb who has come to an awareness of my own racial privilege relatively late in life, the race-themed composition class has pushed and pulled me into both identity and pedagogical adventures I neither anticipated nor was prepared for. I believe many of the questions that Roberta's experience raises for me are both unique to my positionality as a white female teacher, but also typical in some ways of the challenges faced by any well-intended teacher of critical pedagogy. That was my motivation for this study and this article: to share what I have found but also to present the dilemmas we as individual teachers and members of the profession must confront and ultimately resolve if we hope to gain these ideal outcomes. I believe Roberta's journey has much to tell us.

Intellectually Excited but Emotionally, Morally Outraged

Roberta looked alive from the first moment of class. She engaged with everything, comfortably revealing her surprise at the idea that racism still exists. She readily confessed what she hadn't realized and didn't know, willing to take in new information if it was reasonable and supported by evidence. In fact, it was the rational evidence that often carried the day with her; her emotions and passions followed, sometimes in spite of herself.

Though the course was racially themed, its primary purpose was to teach first year composition. This pedagogy is particularly well-suited to helping students learn to state a thesis or judgment, identify appropriate support, and organize the argument suitably for a particular audience. Four of the five interviewed, including Roberta, affirmed that the course helped them to build stronger arguments. Roberta named this process "critical thinking." She was intellectually stimulated by the course's expectation that she build an argument or "deeper conclusion" rather than "just facts." For example, to her profound surprise, the evidence of a racial bias in the sentencing guidelines for powder

and crack cocaine possession led her to consider what other factors might maintain racism in the current legal system, but with a caveat that reveals her own bias:

Even the fact that the crack-cocaine laws get such a harsher penalty than just powder cocaine, it doesn't necessarily mean that the people who made the laws were trying to be racist. They probably just viewed it as such a more dangerous drug, and that's why they did that. But the fact that there's such a racial disparity in the people being prosecuted and stuff, and that that's just getting ignored, even after multiple recommendations from the United States Sentencing Commission, and other various groups. I guess that that's what I found was the racist part of it.

Roberta found the evidence so compelling in itself and the authority of the U.S. Sentencing Commission so obviously persuasive to a reasonable person that she felt forced to conclude that people who are maintaining the current guidelines are operating out of racism rather than an exculpating lack of information. But here is the rub: her excuses for the responsible lawmakers as operating out of concern for the greater danger of the drug indicates the kind of denial that Ratcliffe references:

Denial emerges when students or teachers refuse to acknowledge the existence of an idea or action. Denial also emerges when students or teachers acknowledge the existence of an idea or action but refuse to acknowledge any accountability—individual and/or systemic—for any privileges or obstacles afforded us by (the history of) this idea or action. (138)

This denial is more fully described in a study of Master's in Counseling students who "expressed thoughts that argued against the anxiety provoked during discussions regarding racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism by stating that those injustices did not exist" (Watt et al. 96). Roberta's response also rings of "deflection," i.e. shifting "the focus... toward less threatening targets, such as a parent or the school system" (Watt et al. 98). Exactly what threat was she experiencing? It seems to be the threat of needing to put less trust in the people in charge, realizing the kind of authority she had so long trusted, may not be trustworthy in their reactions to the known injustice of the disparate sentencing.

If I use Harro's cycle of socialization as a theoretical lens, Roberta was caught in the classic clash between institutional and cultural socialization, the ethical/moral training she had also received, and the factual evidence of defacto racism in the disparate drug penalties (16). Her cognitive dissonance carried her swiftly into denial that the lawmakers' failure to fix the sentencing guidelines could be anything but innocent or even civic-minded. Why? As Magolda summarizes in her own work on self-authorship, Laughlin and Creamer found that students who do not encounter much complexity during their college years (often associated with having identity privilege in race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation) "make important decisions through reliance on external authority" rather than on thorough consideration of multiple perspectives (72). For students like Roberta, who do not have to deal with the complexities of an identity that is challenged by the dominant norm, "[T]heir confidence to make decisions independently was more likely tied to commitment to unexamined choices rather than an internally generated set of criteria, and that one's relationship with an authority figure was more important than the person's own expertise in decision making" (Magolda 72). In addition to a developmental attachment to authority, Magolda's longitudinal study also illustrates the con-

nection between self-authorship and time to move beyond the academic emphasis on the intellect and incorporate emotional learning. As one of her study subjects explained, “In the college classroom there is a focus on intellect and not necessarily the feel of what is going on. It is a much more controlled environment. What you learn after college is how out of control the environment is. Life is about dealing with those particular out-of-control situations” (70).

In other words, while a rhetorical recognition of denial as a kind of resistance to critical pedagogy is helpful, adding an interdisciplinary dip into student development theory on self-authorship helps us characterize Roberta’s ready absolution of the legislators as a call for patience with students’ natural stages of letting go of authority and growing emotional complexity. Seeing Roberta’s denial through a self-authorship lens also shifts at least some of the responsibility from her shoulders to the teacher and the curriculum. Trainor’s work, discussed later in this article, points to deficiencies in our understanding of and approaches to the emotional gaps engendered in our school systems. Magolda’s work addresses pedagogical innovations to directly and pragmatically link self-authorship with the kinds of rhetorical outcomes we hope to see in Roberta and her classmates.

From a psychological perspective, Lyn Miel Brown and Carol Gilligan contend a person’s unwillingness to hold accountable those in whom she has placed trust may be because such action may conflict with the self-image she is cultivating. Brown and Gilligan described this dilemma in the case of their research subject “Neeti,” who sought to develop “a conventional, authoritative voice... modeling herself on the image of the perfectly nice and caring girl” (39). Perhaps we are seeing this ‘nice girl’ side of Roberta when she couldn’t dare to believe that the lawmakers might have deliberately crafted a law with racist effect; that would open a Pandora’s box of other issues that would need to be re-examined, even as she most likely struggled with a myriad of other first-year college student identity issues. Instead some students, and I include Roberta in this group, choose to silence themselves, to modulate their voices, as Neeti had, and “muffle” their resistance:

We know that women in particular, often speak in indirect discourse, in voices deeply encoded, deliberately or unwittingly opaque. As white heterosexual women living in the context of twentieth-century North America—as women whose families in childhood were working-class and Jewish, respectively—we know from our own experience about certain strategies of resistance, both the danger of an outspoken political resistance and the corrosive suffering of psychological resistance. (24)

Though she appeared to me, her teacher, to cope with the vicissitudes and vagaries of the race-themed course better than many of her peers, her resistance, even as benign as it might appear in her essay and in class discussion, signals a struggle with the concepts of the course and their inherent challenges to the adult identity she was developing.

When Roberta spoke to me about the lawmakers’ rejection of the Sentencing Commission’s recommendation to fix the disparate drug penalties for crack and powder cocaine, her voice rose with emotion. She was angry that they were falling short of her ethical standard, when even she, a first-year student, could see the injustice of the status quo. Probyn’s work on shame and writing offers another possible insight to Roberta’s confusing resistance to the call for action inherent in the class pedagogy, that Roberta’s passion for justice sets up her later shame about her expressed inability to do more

than put words to paper about it, as I will discuss later. Probyn comments that while all writers fear being exposed as incompetent or a sham, "The crucial element that turns sham into shame is the level of interest and desire involved. There is no shame in being a sham if you don't care what others think or if you don't care what you think. But if you do, shame threatens. To care intensely about what you are writing places the body within the ambit of the shameful: sheer disappointment in the self amplifies to a painful level" (131).

Roberta's strong orientation to justice was expressed in her commitment to a theology major, so the intellectual puzzle of how lawmakers could resist evidence of racial disparity also spoke to her sense of moral (dis)order. Gesturing in frustration, she questioned the opaque logic of their actions. In other words, she had all the precursors to feeling like a sham and experiencing shame at her later inability to go as far as she sensed she should in implementing social justice change.

The Personal Is Political

As Roberta reflected on her growth in her writing and understanding of racism, Roberta displayed admirable courage in moving from the romanticism of brainy, provocative research and logic that appealed to her sense of justice to amazingly open and honest critical analysis applied to her own life, including the personal pain of acknowledging her own possible racism. She bravely narrated just such an experience in a frank story about walking down the street at night as an African American approached and the resulting internal debate about whether or not it is racist to cross to the other side:

One of the examples that I was thinking about, was, if I'm walking down the sidewalk, and there's someone walking towards me, what differs in the fact that I don't feel safe? [I]f it's a White man walking towards me —if it's an adult male—he's bigger than I am, no matter what. If he had some sort of bad intentions, you know, he could still easily overpower me. And so could a Black man walking towards me.² But when do I cross the street? Do I cross the street for both of them because I don't trust them just because they could overpower me, or is it because it's a Black man? Does that make him more subject to causing the crime? That's what I realized: just because he's walking down the street. He could just be just on his way to doing something whatever, like going to the gym. Who knows? He's not doing anything bad, but in the back of my mind you still kind of think that, that maybe I trust him less than I would trust a White man. And that's just not fair to think that way at all.

Although any woman, regardless of her race, might express fear in a similar situation, Roberta suspected that at least some of her concern was based on racial criteria, whether she wanted that to be part of her psyche or not. So she was also afraid of the racism she had acquired. This may be key to understanding her ultimate hesitance, discussed later, to take any more definite step toward an active anti-racism commitment as part of her own racial identity.

Roberta also somewhat shamefacedly confessed her own fear of difference when she revealed that the whiteness of her teacher (me, in this case), contributed to her sense of

2. Editor's note: in this essay, the author capitalizes both Black and White to reflect how and when students used them as racially-marked terms for groups of people.

safety in telling that story on herself. She feared being misunderstood and committing a social faux pas, attesting to the phenomenon that Espinosa-Aguilar notes in her analysis of student resistance, that “students may not believe that our contestatory classrooms are truly safe environments for the expression of their views” (155). On the other hand, other researchers have noted that students “often mention that the homogeneity [of some all-white classes] makes it easier for them to talk openly about race” (Winans 260). As a white student with a white teacher in the privacy of my office, Roberta felt safe enough to admit that she questioned her own sincerity and ability to live with integrity as a racially aware person, even as she later argued the necessity of her generation taking up the anti-racist torch.

Ultimately, in her first-year interview, she admitted that while the course “opened my eyes to a lot of things,” she also felt “I’m just one person and that I can’t have an effect.” But then she went on to give a rational response to herself: “You know that’s not true. I vote, you know, and I’m just one vote. And if I thought it didn’t have an effect, why would I even go to the polls to vote?” But her commitment seemed hesitant, perhaps something she wished she could believe when she said, “I don’t know what I would do to stop it [racism] other than to stop it in my life and have that be, like, an example to others.” Then she backed away almost entirely, referring to my teaching about racism: “But to take such an active role as you are, it just seems like would be overwhelming. It seems really ideal to want to do something to stop it but I don’t think I could live in the Cultural House.” The Cultural House is a nearby university living option open to all students that the class visited for an interracial dialogue experience. Roberta explained how she didn’t believe she could sustain such attention to race and racism beyond our class experience, such as living at the Cultural House: “Just having to deal with it all the time, I guess, having to think about it all the time. I don’t know, maybe . . . I’m not sure. I don’t know if I would pursue racism education further. Not that I didn’t think it was interesting, but . . .” Then she stopped talking, waiting for another question from me, the interviewer.

At that moment at the end of her first year, Roberta looked burned out and defeated, confessing she was glad to be done with the course and its topic. I had hoped when we met again to talk in her senior year that she might have resolved some of her dilemma and perhaps found other support for doing what she felt was important but could not muster the ongoing energy for. In other words, I was looking for some confirmation that the experience of researching and writing the facts about race could help move students from being a bystander to being an agent of social change, as all good critical pedagogy intends. But the picture in her senior year was very mixed.

In that senior interview, Roberta said she felt she had changed over the course of college, that through our first-year class, some women’s studies classes, and her theology major she had acquired new understanding of oppression and prejudice. But she had not returned to the topic of race very much for the rest of her college career. She noted the silence in the curriculum about race at our university, saying that if a student didn’t want to talk about race, she could avoid it easily.

As at many predominantly white schools, she noted no hostility on campus, but she sensed a level of racial segregation. Black and White students sat separately in the cafeteria. She wasn’t sure she would feel welcome at the Black students’ table although we

didn't talk about testing that reality. Admittedly, it was not her fault that the curriculum or co-curricular experiences apparently did not engage her in further racial identity development, but she seemed relieved that no one challenged her insularity.

Having moved off-campus after her first year, she found more racial "intermingling," as she called it, in the neighborhoods in the university district and the east side of the city where many students lived. She had observed differences in the way the police treated student parties, noting how they "busted" two Black guys for being "trouble-makers" but only confiscated beers from the White underage girls, telling them to turn down their music and sending them home without any arrests. She relayed these stories with a knowing, resigned air, as if she had traveled a long way from her own pre-college White suburban experience in which she had trusted the police to be unbiased.

Roberta's critical awareness was strong enough to make her question her own assumptions, though she couldn't always resolve the conflicts. In her senior interview as she talked about whether she noticed race in her life, she told a story about how her Asian co-workers at a local restaurant reacted to her long-time Black friend:

When it comes to people when I hang out at work, I definitely notice our cultural differences a lot more. A lot of them were born in Indonesia or Burma. They have a lot of different ways of doing things. I'm always surprised like sometimes even they will say something. My one friend who is a Black guy, he lived next door in my junior year and then he moved a block away and so we hang out all the time. He came into the restaurant one day and they all said, 'Why are you hanging out with a black guy?' I don't know. I didn't think of it that way because we have a lot in common: he listens to the same kind of music and he's really good friends with my roommate, too. So I don't know. Sometimes I can notice the difference really easily and sometimes it's not a thing at all. Maybe it's because I've only been working for 8 months so that's kinda new, and he's a friend that I've had for three years now. I have a more comfortable relationship with him but sometimes [race is] more noticeable than others.

Roberta's story is signatory of a person in process of changing her social identity. With interesting complexity, she was clearly aware of the racism in her co-workers' reaction to her friend. But she hadn't noticed the assumption in her words that "even *they* will say something," as if members of all minority groups were homogenous in their racial awareness. Her co-workers' challenge to her relationship with her Black friend apparently triggered a subconscious insecurity: she questioned her own motives and defended the friendship as colorblind. Even as she relayed the story, though, she seemed to be suspicious of herself and her feelings, wanting to dismiss race as a factor in their friendship but aware of feeling social pressures to be simultaneously colorblind and yet critically aware.

She insisted that she had changed since our first-year class, noting her efforts and duty to see "the absolute value and dignity of each human life. As a White person, I'm trying to see that in everybody." She defined her identity in terms of personal action, saying, the class "has made me identify racism, acknowledge it, which changes it. Being around difference has changed me." She confessed,

Even though I don't want racial thoughts, I still have stereotypes. The more I know, the more I can stop myself and try to make a difference. Eventually it will be my generation in charge. No good comes from blindness. Maybe you're not personally doing it, but we

need to change the institutionalized racism. Our generation is a lot farther along but that doesn't mean all is fine. If it's part of society, we have to acknowledge it.

In other words, action was part of her credo, but as she said that, I wondered if being an astute observer of racial inequity sufficiently met her criterion for action in her mind.

Roberta epitomized for me the White student—or teacher—who believes it important to call out racism when she saw it and to name the evil among us so that we have some hope of someday eliminating it. Yet she seemed to be treading water in the same racial identity she described in her first year, i.e. she could not imagine herself acting against racism in any public way. If her major in theology did not expressly require a class that examined some aspect of racism, then she felt no compulsion to seek out ways to respond to the institutionalized racism that she was still confident existed: “It just didn't come up. I didn't get to take much outside of my major. My history class was of dystopia and utopias, so it wasn't actual history. So that also depends if I'd taken regular history like the civil war and race relations.” And though in her senior year interview, she said that her racial attitudes had profoundly changed and that the class had impacted her life in a major way, (although her concept of “history” still seems somewhat conventionally narrow), she apparently felt no more prepared than in her first-year interview to take action on her new-found attitudes. She almost shrugged her shoulders at me, as if the matter were out of her hands.

In many ways, Roberta seemed primed and ready, at the edge of an active commitment. When presented with the fork in the road between taking the responsibility to “Change, raise consciousness, interrupt, educate, take a stand, question, reframe,” and the alternative “Do nothing, don't make waves, promote the status quo,” she seemed ready to move in the direction of change (Harro 16). But she didn't feel she could go there, and I continue to wonder why.

The Emotional Gap

Without being overly critical of either Roberta or myself, I now believe that she and I, as well as the rest of the White people in the class, were caught in the gap between what we came to see as a necessary revision of our White identities and our emotional attachment to our past image of ourselves. We wanted/want to see ourselves innocent of the taint of racism because we are good, well-intentioned White people. We want/need to stay attached to families, friends, neighbors, schools, churches, communities, and institutions that maintain our White privilege, even as we want to abandon our White privilege. Intellectually we've made the shift, but emotionally we have not, leaving us guilty and conflicted.

On this point, there is much to learn from Trainor's study of students in an all-white high school English class. Trainor might point out that my course focused on the logos of composition and racism in U.S. society but did not address the gap between the intellectual complexity of what we were studying and the pathos of simplistic dictums for the value of hard work and a positive attitude. She describes this dilemma so vividly: students are emotionally attached to the hidden curriculum of good citizenship, independent achievement, hard work, stiff-lipped perseverance over adversity, equal opportunity, and deliberate color-blindness to avoid any hint of racist preference. This

narrative, she argues, is often reinforced by teachers' unwillingness to directly confront the dominant narrative as incomplete and limiting, which reinforces that difference and critical thinking are alien values that threaten our way of life and the happiness and harmony of our communities. Trainor generalizes this experience in our high schools, a claim that my students' early responses to the race-themed curriculum would bear out. Their responses are almost uniform as they talk about how they were taught to not notice color and that, while there were social cliques, everyone was treated equally, including the occasional student of color who was almost always a standout athlete, well-liked, and widely accepted.

Roberta's high school experience in a suburb of Cleveland was no different. So it could be that Roberta's struggle with the gap between her expressed belief in racial equality, but her fatigue in examining lived race critically, was a form of fallout from courses like ours that do not directly help students cope with the emotional gap between their carefully constructed color-blind identities and conflicting information from Others' lived experience. We need to work harder to bring together the intellectual and emotional experiences engendered in our writing classes, particularly when critical pedagogy successfully brings students to new awareness that seems to demand some public social remedy on the part of members of the dominant groups.

But that leaves many questions unanswered. Roberta had "challenged the essentialized notions of identity that are often caught in the dichotomy of innocence and guilt," as Winans calls for our pedagogies to do (Winans 258). She knew she was basically a moral person who could also fall into stereotypical thinking as a result of the "smog" of racism in our society, as Tatum describes it (6). She knew her classmates were seeing the world too narrowly when they provided their interracial friendships as evidence of their own lack of bias. She did not flinch at the questions posed by her Asian co-workers that challenged her own long-time friendship with a Black man. And she readily recognized her potential privilege in the differential treatment received by other partying white students given police reprieves that nearby black students did not enjoy. Her worldview was complicated and nuanced, which should have helped her navigate treacherous waters of a guilt/innocence dichotomy. But the evidence of her interviews would suggest that a student's intellectually nuanced view and a teacher's pedagogical strategies that both recognize the emotional legacy of racism in our schools position us to "stand under" others' views or localize the pedagogy (see Trainor 140, Winans 262, Ratcliffe 28-30). That is, as laudable as these attitudes and strategies seem, they do not take us far enough yet.

By distancing herself from the reactions of her classmates, Roberta tried to establish repeatedly that she was not racist, that she was a good White person. But then, what is a good White person? Is thinking differently enough? At what point does thinking need to commit externally to some action, such as the interruption of jokes in the "backstage" of same-race groups, as Picca and Feagin have described ("Introduction" x). Isn't it necessary, as Lu and Horner conclude, that "we can use experience to not simply affirm our state of being but to raise questions about that material being, to critique and bring about changes in the conditions of our existence, and in turn, to transform our experience" (261)? Roberta seemed to have difficulty moving beyond her particular material experience to "politicize" it, as Lu and Horner call for, as a way to make it transformative (261). In another article, Lu refers to Anzaldúa's metaphorical "border-

lands,” the potentially transformative space between the known and the new world or knowledge, where static awareness can move to a more active consciousness: the painful struggle to birth new understanding “enables a border resident to act on rather than merely react to the conditions of her or his life, turning awareness of the situation into ‘inner changes’ which in turn bring about ‘changes in society’” (Lu “Conflict” 888). But Roberta claimed that this kind of movement from the personal to public action was “too overwhelming,” a position too hard to sustain, which left her caught between the rock of racism and the hard place of an activist, anti-racist, white identity.

Perhaps in trying to establish a place for herself in academic discourse, Roberta may have also fallen into the gap between home/society, her past experiences in talking about race through the lens of colorblindness, and the pressure of the class to adopt an anti-racist identity. This identity conflict is similar to that again described by Lu, in which she tried to reconcile the conflicting discourses of her progressive and Western-educated home with the contrasting worker identity of 1950’s revolutionary China, as taught in her school (“From Silence” 445), a conflict that ultimately silenced her. As a result, Lu struggled in her reading and writing, believing that she was supposed to keep her two worlds discrete, an impossible task as she strove to establish a unified identity for herself. In this same article, she later explained how she might have worked her way between the two conflicting discourses to a stance of her own, but could only do that with more study and more exposure to other voices that could show her how to negotiate this new identity.

Roberta did not have the advantage of additional study in writing or talking about race. She did not find allies, models, or mentors in our class or in the rest of her college experience. Like the others in this study, Roberta reported very little additional experience in racial dialogue beyond our class. This is in no way her fault, but a failure on the part of my curriculum perhaps, and even more I believe, our university, as I will discuss a little later.

Remaining Tensions

The unfinished and incomplete nags at me, and I contend, at other white students like Roberta who accept the challenge of engaging with an anti-racist critical pedagogy but find it hard to commit to activism. In addition to the emotional and intellectual gaps discussed earlier, there are so many unfinished projects and loose ends in this kind of course-based project. What does one do, for example, with the residuals of having been raised white in a world that privileges white? When prejudiced thoughts emerge unbidden and uncontrolled, how does a white person—student or teacher—continue to justify herself without some accountability for her racist thoughts, in spite of herself? By the end of the course, it was clear to Roberta that there was more work to be done; the disappointment of the course for both of us was that she did not see a way for her to sustain herself in that work. What’s more, at this point in my evaluation of this project, I believe it is naive to expect to make greater progress than this in a single semester, especially in a first-year course.

Perhaps that is a harsh evaluation of what we were involved in. Granted, we deserve credit for having conversations and exploring territory that the majority of white Amer-

ica avoids. But it's hard to find the line of "well done" or "good enough" when the African American students who have been involved in this course in other semesters are clearly more inclined to respond, "Really?" After all, how long can people of color wait for us to figure this out? The costs of not figuring this out are enormous, overwhelming, and unacceptable.

In response to those who maintain this is too hard or too political, particularly for first-year students, I ask: even if it is an unfinished product, if we can guide these students with disciplinary integrity in a process of learning to write in ways that bring them to greater relationship with others different from themselves while increasing their own self-awareness and voice, shouldn't we? If this kind of course can be a vehicle of social change or greater civil engagement, shouldn't it be? In fact, without obligating every teacher to be a critical pedagogue, don't we agree that we have a responsibility to open pathways for our students towards greater skill *and* inter-personal competency, whatever the pedagogy or methodology?

To me, Roberta's story demonstrates several things. Using a race-themed pedagogy does indeed prompt growth in writing and critical thinking, as well as deep student engagement in real-world issues that impact students' personal and professional lives. However, it is not without its complications or unresolved questions. For example, what are we to do when even our best students and teachers who are honestly struggling to create change are unable to sustain an anti-racist project longer than one sixteen-week course? What obligation does the white student or the white teacher have to recognize the need to act for the sake of greater justice? What level of accountability do we hold for student outcomes that do not result in revised world views of their privilege? How do we respect our white students' developmental pace of learning and their free choice to be who they believe they should be, while we also try to lead, encourage, support, and even prod them and ourselves into action, and help them (and us) move beyond perpetual guilt?

I believe the even more pressing questions lie within our institutional structures. How can we—our institutions of higher education—claim to prepare students to live competently in an increasingly diverse society yet leave students and teachers to struggle in isolated, one-shot, short-term experiences that have little hope of a satisfactory or effective end? Especially among those schools that profess social justice and civic engagement as desirable core curriculum outcomes, as mine and many do, how is it ethical to leave students (or teachers) hanging untethered, blowing in the wind, without mechanisms of support, such as scaffolded diversity experiences, robust diversity in student enrollment and faculty employment, more substantial dialogue on campuses among speakers and topics that challenge privilege, particularly white privilege, more courageous institutional self-assessment of assumptions, assignments, policies and procedures that effect *de facto* racism, and more?

The difficulties that Roberta faced are symptomatic not only of her courageous battle with white socialization, but they also provide a clarion call for us all to do better by her and all of our students, as well as by her teachers who are currently operating largely in isolation.

We cannot and should not back down when we encounter resistance from students because it is merely a reflection of the work we have yet to do. I am grateful for the

Robertas of our world who are willing to learn with us and grateful for this professional community that believes in the importance of this work. And I continue to hope that as we come to understand the kinds of responses we get from our students, we, as a profession, can eventually puzzle this out in more complete and satisfactory ways.



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