

**A MYTH: CREATING
SAFE SPACES FOR
DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RACE AND
RACISM IN CRITICAL GRADUATE
SOCIAL WORK CLASSROOMS**

**BY
NOREEN COLLEY, MSW, RSW
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CHOOSING THE RESEARCH TOPIC

Choosing the topic is the most important step of the research process.

The process was influenced by:

- My lived experience within the critical graduate social work classroom
- Recognizing that what occurs on the micro level translates into macro levels of social work practice



THE NEXT STEPS

Examining the literature

- Ask lots of questions
- G A P S?? What's missing?

Theoretical Perspectives

- a.) Critical Race Theory (CRT)
 - Centers race; emphasizes the voices and experiences of people of color
 - Challenges dominant epistemologies


THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A Fanonian Theory

- Rules and guidelines created within the classroom based on mutual respect and minimal conflict, promote safety for people of color and white people: **A MYTH**
- In fact, the term “safety” is misleading because:
 - it creates a false sense of security and false expectations
 - it confuses safety to mean comfort which often means that white individuals are the ones made to feel safe

A FANONIAN PERSPECTIVE

“anger, hostility frustration, and pain *are not to be avoided under the banner of safety*, which only produces a “culture of silence” (Freire, 1993, emphasis added). They are attributes that are to be recognized on the part of both whites and people of color in order to engage in a process that is creative enough to establish new forms of social existence, where both parties are transformed.” (Leonardo & Porter, 2010, p. 149).



OPERATIONALIZING THE TERMS: KEY WORDS OF STUDY

1. Re-defining SAFETY

2. RACE: conceptualized in relational terms

3. Listening for the SILENCES created in the critical social work classroom around race dialogues

- “the most powerful rhetoric for maintaining an existing scheme of privilege will be silent” (Crenshaw, 1997, p.260).

DESIGN AND METHODS

Research Methodology


- The phenomenological research approach
- Qualitative study

Data Collection: Purposeful sampling


Participants: 4 women of color who were current or recent graduates (within 5 years) of York University's Masters of Social Work Program and 1 race conscious white woman.

FINDINGS

Themes

- a) Internal dialogues and Fear
 - b) Verbal and Nonverbal Racial Microaggressions in the classroom
 - c) Power and White Privilege: The Function of Silence & Hierarchy of Oppressions
 - d) Multiple Roles in the Classroom: 'Not Just a Student
 - e) Racial Dialogues in the Classroom: A Relational Responsibility
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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase knowledge & education about race and racism in the critical graduate social work program
 2. Having allies
 3. The responsibility of the instructor as facilitator and guide: encouraging students to look deeper into difficult moments
 4. Redefining Safety in the Classroom: taking risks, facing fears, sitting with discomfort and unlearning what we think we know about the other
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IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

- CRT and the Fanonian Perspective have the potential to change the attitudes of students and instructors to engage in racial dialogues beyond the classroom
- Better equips ALL students to ally with racialized clients in the social work field
- Graduate faculty of social work programs can evaluate whether or not their knowledge base, curriculum and practices reflect commitments to social justice and anti-oppressive social work practice

MY PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

Inviting....

Your thoughts, comments and questions!

*Remember to enjoy
the journey!*

