EVERYDAY RACISM
Anti-Racism Work and Writing Center Practice

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

James A. Baldwin

As we have drafted the chapters of this book, we have had the benefit of being in conversation not only with each other but also with the network of tutors and directors brought together and sustained by organizations like the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW), Summer Institute, and various regional writing center associations. Through those interactions, we have discovered that neither being a long-time activist nor a well-intentioned and principled individual inoculates any of us or the spaces in which we work against racism. Everyone has a story, many stories, to tell. And yet, conversations about race and racism in our culture are among the most puzzling and provocative discussions in which to engage. This work can neither be done perfectly nor completely; it is an ongoing process.

The racism in our writing centers, like racism across our institutions, communities, and across the social, political, and economic landscape of our lives, is not a series of aberrations, but the everyday manifestation of deeply embedded logics and patterns. When we make the choice to notice, mourn, and struggle against racism in our individual and professional lives, we are not alone. And when we realize in our own centers that, despite our careful attention to race and racism, despite our tutors' and our own best intentions, more work needs to be done, we are not alone then either.

We lost Krista, an African American student at a predominantly white private college who enrolled in and thrived in her Peer Tutoring in Writing course. She became fascinated with the field and began to talk with her teacher (the director of the college's writing center) about the possibility of a writing center career and about her desire to work as a tutor. When Krista did begin working in the center, however, the white tutors repeatedly failed to recognize her when she came to work. Each time she entered the writing center, she was asked by her colleagues if she
needed to schedule an appointment. Krista, who is also a single mother, ended her employment after another tutor, upon meeting Krista's son for the first time, exclaimed, "Jared will be an awesome basketball player someday!"

This story is interesting—and troubling—because of what it suggests about how dominant images of people of color in the white imagination are operative inside the writing center and that these images can impact how tutors recognize, receive, and respect (or not) one another. The tutors in this story were unable to conceive of an African American woman who possessed the knowledge, abilities, and skills to be a tutor. She must, they thought, need help. These tutors were well-intentioned: they wanted to help. They didn't consciously set out to dishonor Krista. The highly racialized lenses through which they were able to see her, however, distorted their vision. Even their attempts to recognize her strengths, and those of her son, were distorted by prevailing images of African American women and men distributed wholesale throughout dominant American culture. As principled and well-intentioned as the white tutors were, they interacted with Krista and with her son through the haze of a deeply internalized sense of white superiority.

Of course, tutors of color working in our writing centers need to worry not only about how their fellow tutors will perceive them; they also must worry, even more perhaps, about how they will be received by the writers they work with. Another example: An African American graduate student tutor sits down with a Russian undergraduate working on a paper for an upper-level writing requirement. The student has inherited a current events paper with what the tutor perceives as racist rhetoric. When the tutor pushes the student to think about her argument, the student pushes back: she thought her tutor was going to be one of the white tutors and wondered aloud about her tutor's qualifications. In response, the tutor offers both her qualifications and her life history.

Though this story shares with the previous one some implicit sense of what a "real" tutor looks like, it raises a number of additional questions we might consider: In what ways does the student's sense of her own whiteness intersect with her immigrant status to produce an expectation and desire for a white American tutor as the norm? What factors have eased and/or troubled this student's own assimilation into racial rules and order, both in America and in her country of origin?

The tutor's response is also troubling. She explains after the incident that she "chalked it up to a combination of immigrant inexperience and a lack of cultural knowledge." She tells us she rehearsed her credentials...
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for the writer in order to reassure her. If systemic racism works to
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ileges that accrue to them through racism, it also works to convince
people of color that they are not quite good enough—or at least that
they must continually demonstrate that they are good enough, because
their qualifications are always in doubt. People of color internalize
their own oppression much as whites internalize superiority. These
perceptions become the part of the lens through which we see the
everyday—and they make everyday racism seem normal, natural, only
to be expected.

Racism certainly has not always seemed normal to us. As children,
we may have deemed someone’s race worthy of notice, but we didn’t
always deem it worthy of judgment. That racist lesson is one we learned
through everyday interactions, and it is one we must actively work to
unlearn. As activist Beth Roy asserts:

Racism teaches white children to be silent. We notice racial differences
(“Why does Peter have such curly hair?”) and we are told it is impolite to
comment (“Hush! You’ll hurt his feelings”). We question injustices (“Why
don’t we let Mary, our housekeeper, eat dinner with us?”) and we are told
not to ask (“That’s just the way it is.”) or that our perception is wrong
(“You don’t want to eat with us.”). We seek connection (“Can’t I go play
basketball in the park?”) and we are told people of color are dangerous
(“No. That’s not a good neighborhood.”).

Eventually we stop asking, commenting, questioning. If we can’t speak
about race and we stop seeing social injustices, eventually we lose aware-
ness of injustice in general—those done to us and well as those done by
us. (Roy 13)

Perhaps we need not stop asking, commenting and questioning. In
Communities of Practice, Etienne Wenger writes, “Through engagement
in practice, we see first-hand the effects we have on the world and
discover how the world treats the likes of us. We explore our ability to
engage with one another, how we can participate in activities, what we
can and cannot do” (192). And as our epigraph reveals, “nothing can be
changed until it is faced.” So how do we want our tutors, how do we want
to engage with issues of racial identity as they present themselves in the
writing center? We should all be asking, by this point in the book, what
kinds of learning our current system of staff development offers, what
kinds of learning we want to promote, and what moves we want to make
with our tutors and the writers who use our centers.
Much of Wenger's understanding of a community of practice involves exploring the relationship between identity and social organization. Critical race theorists also recognize the power of that relationship and have argued convincingly that nothing shapes identity in more compelling ways than racial identity does. It is for this reason that, although we have talked about diversity throughout this book, we choose to foreground this discussion of race. When we imagine our writing centers as learning cultures, we enact a hopeful, participatory model for education, one that is poised to engage in transformative institutional work. As we change our own understandings of ourselves in relation to others, we become change-agents in our other, overlapping communities of practice. Wenger writes, "[L]earning—whatever form it takes—changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, to negotiate meaning" (226).

In the course of writing this book, we have spent hundreds of hours in conversation. We have asked ourselves what kinds of learning have shaped us and how those influences affect our lives and practice. Because we are five white women, we are aware that there are experiences or observations that directors of color would be able to bring to this discussion that we simply cannot. We begin from where we are, listening to, facing and questioning the legacies each of us brings to this work. Even though we share many similarities in our thinking about race, we come to our very similar positions through very different histories, histories that include interracial families, hired household "help," and human rights activism. We have learned again that there is no way to talk about race without also talking about hopes, fears, pain, and pride. We are well aware of the variety of ways in which the work is painful. We also know the ways in which the work is profoundly satisfying, brings joy and a sense of authenticity, enables new and deeper friendships and loving relationships with family members of color, challenges us to think more and better, to do more meaningful work in our writing centers, and to live our principles more fully. We do not mean to suggest that beginning or carrying on a study of conversation about, or struggle against racism is easy or risk-free. We do mean to suggest that it is necessary to begin even though beginning may seem difficult and risky.

**WHY COMMIT TO THE WORK?**

As we think about the silence that we work against in this chapter and in our writing centers, we realize that it is this silence that enables racism to flourish, to a large extent, because structural inequalities are perceived a white people. Recent scholars' members recognize that we get to mission is one's directors. Consistently recognizing tutors, and divining advantages and everyday experiences of the very of us. Anti-racism work work is hard, especially ourselves as fair Racism is not so our hiring practices staff education. "textbook" IWC, their sites) is necessary. Or is it?

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nity of practice involves social organization. If that relationship and entity in more compelling reason that, although ok, we choose to frame our writing centers as a site for educational institutional work in relation to others, ping communities of whom it takes—changes to belong, to negotiate at hundreds of hours and time lines and practice. so there are experiences possible to bring to this place there we are, listening to brings to this work, thinking about race, by different histories, household “help,” and there is no way to talk about pain and pride. We are the work is painful. We also finding joy and tenderness and loving does us to think more about centers, and suggest that beginning to be anti-racist against racism is necessary to begin.

In this chapter, silence that enables structural inequalities are perceived as so normal, so natural, that they are invisible to most white people. All evidence (from our own and other centers, from recent scholarship) suggests that writing centers are sites where staff members recognize and, in many cases experience, racism. Imagining that we get to choose whether or not to make this work part of our mission is one more manifestation of the privilege we enjoy as white directors. Consequently, we believe that we must consciously and consistently recognize that racism is an everyday experience for students, tutors, and directors of color, and concomitantly, that the benefits and advantages that accrue to white people as a result of racism are an everyday experience for white students, tutors, and directors—like the five of us. We suggest that writing centers need to be involved in anti-racism work on their own campuses and beyond, even though the work is hard, especially when it may challenge our cherished views of ourselves as fair and impartial and our centers as inherently inclusive. Racism is not something we implicitly endorse, we tell ourselves, in our hiring practices, nor something we can explicitly address in our staff education. Establishing a canon that leads to the development of “textbook” IWCA writing centers (as we have heard people describe their sites) is not at odds with the goal of transforming our institutions. Or is it?

Because this kind of reflection is hard and continuous, we would not be surprised to hear: “I’m so busy talking with faculty, working on curriculum, training tutors, and negotiating with administrators. I don’t have time to be an anti-racist too.” Here’s a hard truth: Laments about a lack of time are never simply about a lack of time. They are statements about priorities. They are expressions of fear. They mask concerns about exposing inadequacies. We understand. Adding antiracism work to our writing center agenda might seem like a burden, a foolish choice, something only a glutton for punishment would take on. Because we are rarely encouraged by our institutional leaders to incorporate this work into our everyday, we avoid it, resist it. We can say it is about our time (I have enough to do already), our kind of institution (we don’t need this; or we need it badly, but I doubt anything would change), our personal and professional priorities (my work is in feminist theory), our defensiveness (I know I am not a racist), or our discomfort (I don’t know how to deal with this).

A common objection to studying and working against racism specifically is that there are other forms of oppression, such as sexism, classism, and homophobia for which critical race theory and anti-racism do not
account. While we acknowledge the importance of working for justice in these other crucial areas, we offer anti-racism work as a place to begin for what we believe to be compelling reasons: Racism cuts through multiple identities and magnifies the effects and impact of other manifestations of oppression. The experience of people of color who are also women, working class, and/or gay is markedly different from the experiences of whites who share those other identities. To study and talk deliberately and intentionally about racism suggests neither a denial of the suffering of whites under other forms of oppression nor does it preclude studying the ways in which multiple identities and forms of oppression overlap or intersect. To attempt that study, however, without accounting for racism is to reproduce it. Further, we argue, it behooves those of us who are committed to social justice to consider carefully the ways in which racism has often been used to prevent the formation of meaningful coalitions among oppressed groups (the differences between African-American and white feminists is a case in point). In fact, racism is the place to start, because until we are willing and equipped to address it, we will be unable to resist other forms of oppression that intersect with and are informed by it.

We realize that since writing centers are situated within institutions which are themselves implicated in the power structures that vitally or unwittingly foster racism, they cannot completely escape resembling and reproducing much of what students of color experience outside of our spaces. But writing centers are also spaces where people deliberately seek "opportunities for greater insight" (Tatum 201) into themselves and others. If we have communities of practice that are diverse in the places where meaning is negotiated, where fields of experience are shared, where people write, learn, and talk together, then we have, at least potentially, a set of conditions in which anti-racism work might productively begin.

And when each of us has begun, taking even the most tentative steps toward reading to understand race and racism, by opening conversations with tutors and student writers, with colleagues, we may feel uneasy. What if, we worry, people get mad at us, get mad at each other, what if the community of our writing center comes completely undone? We take heart, however, from Wenger's compelling argument that dissent and contestation, far from being antithetical to authentic community, are necessary to it. He writes, "[A] community of practice is neither a haven of togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from political and social relations. Disagreement, challenges, and competition e participation, passive conformation.

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competition can all be forms of participation. In fact, as a form of
participation, rebellion often reveals a greater commitment than does
passive conformity” (77).

We have asked ourselves, “What if I make a mistake? What if I say or
do the wrong thing?” And these questions sound familiar because they
are the same concerns our tutors express to us about tutoring. To them
we say: “Yes, you might make a mistake.” We say, “You’re learning.” We
say, “You know more than you think you know.” We say, “You don’t have
to have all the answers.” And we have to give ourselves the same permis-
son. We have to give our tutors the opportunity to learn with us and to
 teach us about race and racism.

We submit that, although we will make mistakes, we can and must
learn to see racism and respond responsibly to it. In the remaining sec-
tions of this chapter, we offer a brief overview of the ways that racism is
defined and categorized and suggest possibilities for restructing staff
education and writing center energy to engage more effectively in anti-
racist efforts in our own “sphere[s] of influence” (Tatum 204). And in
the appendix to this chapter (p.107), we provide further practical mate-
rials, including a reading list.

Understanding Racism

When we think of racism, we tend to think first of overt forms such
as the crossburnings of the Ku Klux Klan, of the black and white pho-
tographs of “colored” water fountains, or the explicitly racist lyrics of
white supremacist rock bands. Critical race theories, however, suggest
that racism is a more complex phenomenon than can be accounted for
by definitions that focus on individual thoughts, predispositions, and
actions. An alternative and more productive definition must account for
the adaptability of racism to assert itself in particular historical moments
and social contexts. The manifestations of racism have changed over
time, moving from legalized and highly explicit forms (slavery, mis-
cgenation, Jim Crow laws, etc.) to current masked or coded racism
deeply entrenched in institutional logics, structures, and systems. As
we’ve thought about and talked about and written about racism, it has
helped us to have language that identifies its varying forms. Relying on
that language and the ways that different, very complex types of racism
may be defined has, for example, made us more aware of the differences
between insitutional racism and racial prejudice, the latter seemingly
more obvious and personal, the former more insidious, far-reaching,
and therefore more difficult to address, especially from within.
We've seen such institutional racism in all its forms at work in our own home institutions, for example, in a university recently marked as the fifth most homogenous university in the nation by the Princeton Review. In its coverage of this story, the campus newspaper notes that minority enrollments have actually decreased by nearly 50% in the past three years. The rest of the article highlights the university's commitment to increasing diversity on campus and the recent "hiring of eight diverse professors," leaving out the question of why minority enrollments would be dropping so precipitously. In speaking with a tutor who is also an editor of the newspaper, we asked whether anyone had looked into the fact that the university only reached its all-time high of 14% minority enrollment by instituting a short-lived football team, a sport which was phased out three years ago. "Hmm..." she said, raising her eyebrows. Clearly, we couldn't have been the only ones on our campus to notice this troubling fact. But more often than not, instances of racism like this one receive only a "Hmm...," and a pause, most often by white students, faculty, and staff who are unsure of what else they might do or say.

We have worked to break that silence in our writing centers and in our institutions, and we've found that the first conversations need to start with a kind of naming and framing for ourselves and those we work with. Sometimes, anti-racism work involves naming assumptions, behaviors, policies, and institutional practices as racist. But this naming does not always involve direct confrontation or purposeful conflation. Just as when we tutor or teach, we need to have an array of strategies from which to draw. And just as when we tutor or teach, any of the range of strategies we might employ are meaningful unless they are framed by a grasp of the theories, philosophies, and scholarship that informed their development. We need to learn how to read and analyze what we see before us (the racially informed experiences of our everyday life and work) in order to make informed and productive decisions about what we will do. We need to know the ways of race and racism in order to discern the harms of anti-racism.

Anti-racist activists share a commonly held definition of racism supported by current critical theories of race, racial formation, and racism. The definition comes in several variations, but all of them contain the same essential ingredients: Racism is race prejudice magnified, enforced, and reproduced by systemic and institutional power.¹ Racism, according to this definition, is characterized most particularly by the abuse of power within the institutions and systems that shape all of our lives—including the high schools, colleges, and universities in which we learn, teach, and tutor. In order against racism, actions. According to the Commission/Mint Commission/Mint racist training, org were cubed" (3). 1

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into the Crossroads and the Tri-Council Coordinating
Collaborative Anti-Racism Initiative (both anti-
training, organizing, and activist groups) power is defined “as if it
were cubed” (3). Here’s what they say:

1. Power, at its first level, operates over people of color by oppressing,
marginalizing, denying access and opportunity, and dehu-
manizing them. (This level is often where even the most well-
meaning among us stop in our analysis of racism).

2. Power, at its second level, ensures that whites will receive benefits
and advantages denied to people of color and that those privi-
eges will be invisible or seem natural and normal to us.

3. Power, at its third level, operates by socializing both whites and
people of color into acceptance of and obedience to “racial
rules.”

In sum, these theorists and activists understand that we are socialized
into (not born with) particular raced identities which are then used to
determine, categorize, evaluate, sort, promote, or reject us. This social-
ization, then, is the work of the vast array of systems and institutions
through which our social, political, intellectual, and spiritual lives are
conditioned.

For many of us, to think about racism in these ways is to be pro-
foundly unsettled, yet it may be accepting that unsettled feeling that will
help us identify and name the racism that surrounds us in our every-
day. So much, we believe, of what draws folks to writing center work is
our individual and collective investment in being careful, caring, and
reflective in teaching and talking with students about their writing. To
begin to realize and account for the possibility that racism is woven into
that identity too, wound through even those practices that we hope are
expressions of our most dearly-held principles, is to experience pro-
found dislocation. The understanding of racism offered above does not
invalidate that which is at the heart of our work in writing centers—the
principles and commitments to responsive practice. On the contrary,
when we try to engage with this understanding of racism, rather than
ignoring or dismissing it, our work is enhanced. This engagement also
implies the hard recognition that all of us are implicated, to one degree
or another, in such a power structure. However, this recognition is
essential if we are to think creatively and at multiple levels about how we work with students and tutors, how we teach tutors to work with writers and one another, and how we work within our institutions and our profession. Remember the notions of leadership we introduced in our first chapter? Structural leaders have a leadership role because of their positions within institutions, but functional leaders assume leadership roles out of a sense of mission, need, and purpose and require the participation of others to accomplish this purpose (Tagg 338). We are not the only ones who need to learn and revisit definitions of racism, but if we take on functional leadership roles, we, in writing centers, may be uniquely poised to “use the authority of [our] offices to achieve the mission of institutional transformation” (Tagg 339).

“TUTOR TRAINING” AND RACE

Our profession has done little to date to complicate tutors’ or our own understandings of racism in relation to our individual and professional identities, our teaching and tutoring work, or our institutions. Just as the label “tutor training” seems an outdated term for describing our work with tutors, so too do our available “tutor training” texts seem outdated in their abilities to suggest ways of incorporating meaningful considerations of race in our staff education practices. An examination of tutor education textbooks suggests a very particular and limited understanding of race in writing centers. Older texts, including standards like Muriel Harris’s Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference and The High School Writing Center: Establishing and Maintaining One, edited by Pamela B. Farrell, neglect to mention race or racism. Given their initial publication dates, we do not find this omission surprising, and it would not be quite so troubling except for the fact that these texts (especially Harris’s) continue to be influential in the field. The texts that follow them do little or nothing to redress the problem. Some recent ones follow the model set by yet another classic, Meyer and Smith’s The Practical Tutor, which includes a chapter addressing general matters of diversity. Unfortunately, such chapters tend to be framed in deficit terms. For example, McAndrew and Reigstad’s book, Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences, includes a chapter entitled “Tutoring Different People” (our emphasis). This chapter begins by addressing alternative grammars, then moves in sequence to “gender differences,” “multicultural and ESL writers and tutors,” “learning disabled writers,” and thence to “personalities and learning styles.” While McAndrew and Reigstad make some compelling moves in the chapter, including advocating the chapter and of who is “differ Rahm’s edited wise situates the in Emotionally C use of racial slurs.

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ple levels about how tutors to work with our institutions and explain to them how to implement the guidelines we introduced in our workshops. We are suggesting a very particular notion of what is "different" and, by extension, what is "normal" or "like us." Ralph's edited collection *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One* likewise situates the discussion of racism within a single chapter, "Teaching in Emotionally Charged Situations," and specifically addresses only the use of racial slurs within a discussion of offensive language.

When the white writers and editors of the textbooks mentioned above limit their exploration of racism to addressing simply language, they reflect a *commonsense* understanding of what racism is (simply a matter of individual prejudice) and how it operates. The framing or containing of racism within these texts is not unique to writing centers, but rather reflects misconceptions and under-education about race and racism that are broadly shared across all strata of American society as well as American higher education writ large. By asking for anti-racism work to appear in the everyday of a writing center, we seek to crack apart the artificial containment of racism within carefully managed, constrained, and negatively constructed narrative structures (chapters, paragraphs, sound bytes, hearsay, memes). Rather than clinging to narrow and under-theorized definitions and approaches, we advocate more sustained examinations of the ways and degrees to which writing centers might be contact zones in which there is an ongoing struggle to challenge the unequal distribution of power and access along racial lines.

All of us want to honor the multivocality inherent in writing center work. As students will be in dialogue with students in our writing center, why not have texts in dialogue with texts? We suggest, therefore, including readings by scholars of color (writers like bell hooks, Beverly Tatum, Elaine Richardson, Richard Rodriguez, Victor Villanueva, and Min-Zhan Lu, to name a few) to enhance and complicate the work of white scholars (Muriel Harris, Stephen North, and Kenneth Bruffee, for example). We also suggest readings that might enable directors and tutors to talk about whiteness and white privilege. (Paula Rothenberg’s "White Privilege: Essential Readings from the Other Side of Racism" comes to mind here.) All of us have, for example, used the following inventory (adapted from Peggy McIntosh’s "Unpacking the Invisible Backpack") of white privilege, revised for tutors in predominantly white institutions.

1. I can feel secure in the knowledge that my success or failure in any class I take will not be attributed to my race.
2. I can feel secure in the knowledge that I will not be asked by any professor to speak for my race.
3. I can feel assured that no one will assume that I was only admitted to this institution because of affirmative action.
4. I can feel assured that my classmates and professors will believe that I earned admission to this institution.
5. I can feel assured that in almost every class I take I will be introduced to and given the opportunity to study the history, literature, and discoveries of people who look like me.
6. I can feel assured that most people will not assume I am at this institution on an athletic scholarship.
7. I can feel assured that most people will not assume I am a science or math major based on my race.
8. I can feel assured that professors will not doubt the authorship of my writing on the basis of my race.
9. My home language and the language in which I am expected to speak and write for class are comfortably similar.
10. I can feel assured that when a professor identifies "errors" in my papers, he or she will not attribute them to my race or to my "dialect."
11. When I am tutoring or mentoring or assisting a professor, I can be assured that other students and faculty will recognize and respect my qualifications and credentials.
12. I don't have to worry about whether or not people like me based on my race.
13. I don't have to worry about whether or not or when to try "passing" for someone of another race.
14. When I see images in mainstream popular culture that are meant to suggest beauty, I see images of people of my race.
15. I can feel assured that my friends and acquaintances won't make assumptions about how I am in bed based on my race.
16. If someone says something I think is racist in my presence, I may choose whether or not to respond. I do not feel an obligation to intervene on behalf of myself or my family or home community.
17. I can be assured that most of my professors, fellow students, and the staff and administrators of my institution will be people of my race.
18. I can be assured that if I need to speak to an authority figure at my school, that person will be of my race.
19. I can be late to class or to my job (or tutorial) at the writing center without fear that my lateness will be attributed to my race.

20. If I have doubts, I ask.

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20. If I have a negative encounter in class or out of class, with students, faculty, or staff, I don’t need to wonder or worry whether what happened had racial overtones.

After filling out the inventory, tutors write a reflection. Writing shared by one staff of graduate student tutors sounds like this:

Nearly four years ago, I found myself at a different graduate institution thinking about these questions of race, achievement and societal stereotypes, wondering and hoping about whether my experience would change as I advanced professionally and as discussions of privilege became more visible. Unfortunately, I have discovered that the structures that support social injustice have only become more visible in the position I am in now as a graduate student in a doctoral program.

These questions reinforce how difficult it is for me to address race and racism. In a course I am in this semester, one student said in class that despite three other white students and myself are “nice and open people,” she would never share experiences with us because we are white. She is someone I consider a friend and respect as a peer in my department. Her remark jolted me immensely.

As a women’s studies PhD student, I find myself responding to this “list” in somewhat surprising ways. Surprising, most especially... the cruel realities of the different types of oppressive systems at work in this list feel more raw than ever. As a White, educated, middle-class student, the responsibility I feel as an educator and writing center tutor seems more intense.

We don’t claim that using this inventory will magically transform the writing center, but we do believe that it might be a valuable tool to use to begin confronting white privilege. Other considerations for staff education might be fiction or non-fiction that represents the mix of cultures on your campus, or selections from student authors, tutors and others, writing back to racism and/or to readings about racism. Here’s an example of what can happen when a diverse staff of tutors bring their own rich backgrounds into dialogue with the work of diverse scholars who are, because of the structure of the course, in dialogue with one another. These are also examples of the kind of writing we talked about earlier, writing that engages identity formation, writing that combines past, present and future selves.
Kathryn writes about her final paper for the tutoring class:

I took a risk [during our workshop] by explaining my racist family to the tutors, hoping that they would understand and not judge me because of my parents’ beliefs. I am not racist; as I said in my paper, “Luckily, I was smart enough to figure out that my parents did not have all the answers.” In this paper, I wanted to explain where I came from, but also where I was going . . .

Although writing about this topic challenged me, I know that it was hardly a struggle by comparison. We had read about [the struggles] of other people: Gloria Anzaldúa . . . bell hooks [. . . and] Min-Zhan Lu . . . They made my difficulties seem insignificant, because I’d never experienced anything as difficult as these people. I had a new respect for people who have dealt with such struggles, and I felt ready to work with people who may have had serious problems in their lives.

At this point, Kathryn has engaged with the readings, but has had very little exposure to her own racial construction. We see her tentatively reaching toward a future self, one less constrained by her past, one that is on a more hopeful trajectory. She has taken first steps toward unlearning what she’s been taught. A few months later, Kathryn hears this from Susan, a tutor from Ghana, who reads the following response to bell hooks’ “When I Was a Young Soldier for the Revolution”:

“In all my writing classes, I was the only black student.” These words by bell hooks practically jumped off the page and back-handed me across the face. I’ve heard black kids say they are the only black students in their class but only to each other, never out loud, never written down for the whole world to see. I always noticed if I was the only black, but I was never sure if others did, too. I never brought it up because of the fear of being labeled “the militant black girl.” I don’t want to be perceived as having a chip on my shoulder.

Both of these writers engage one another from their respective subject positions. Susan sees herself as “other” in her daily (college) life, while Kathryn acknowledges what has been her privilege of only seeing self in her consideration of race. Here’s another rich complication. Like Amy, both of these tutors had the opportunity to look back at what others had written over the past fifteen years, and discovered this entry from a 2002 workshop. The student, Alan, had a difficult time writing his paper. He was interested in bell hooks’ discussion of her voices in “When I was a Young Soldier,” in Min-Zhan Lu’s essay “From Silence
For most of any given day I find that my voice is inauthentic, unsure and wavering in its speech. Simple thoughts are difficult for me to explain, basic communication is tedious and what’s more than all this, I feel unreal, ephemeral as if I do not speak at all.

I shall classify this quivering speech mentioned above as *Affectation*, because indeed it is so. The reasons for this are that when I communicate in this way, it is always to white people. Now in my mind I have three options, *Ebonics, Affectation,* or speak the way I write, *Arrogance.* I usually choose affected because it sounds more like the way white folk communicate, at least to me. Yet not all white people, just some, it’s casual, has very little pretense, so I try to imitate it to better communicate with my fellow man and fail miserably. It has gotten to the point where I notice it, loathe it, and try to rid my mouth and tongue of it. I seem to be losing, however, for it looks as if this way of speaking has embedded itself into my muscle memory.

The next manner of speaking is *Ebonics,* which is the way blacks and others in ghettos throughout the states communicate. We folla at each other wit a kinda speech that is relaxed, faced wit mad muthafuckin’ swear, but is direct and to the point. There ain’t much room for fuckin’ around, either make your point or get fucked up for bullshittin’ a nigga. This is where I can just let my muthafuckin’ balls and chill the fuck out. I feel that this is my true voice, I feel that it makes me, me. It’s like I just say, fuck all you muthafuckas, this is my tongue. Ride wit it, or get rode on.

The third and final is *Arrogance,* flashing my mind at every turn. Sliding phrases and metaphors from great black thinkers into banal conversation, just to show I’m not like you, nor do I care to be. I find that this is what I revert to when angered by a member of the race in charge, I belittle them, insult their culture, and rue the day that Europeans came and stole us from our homes, raped our wives, and made creatures like myself, almost a member of neither race; something you can’t rightly place.

Mind you this is only what happens when I try to talk to white, non-ghetto people. My voice is not one or the other all the time, it is not
homogeneous it is heterogeneous. It is a mixed bag of cultures all vying for the forefront. My mouth is often muddled because I’ve adopted not just the speech, but the culture behind it, and when that happens, you become a partial member of said culture, and those new words that come with it are now a part of you. Yet it is not as easy as saying choose one and stick with it. I feel like I sell out my people every time I opt out of an Ebonics word for something else. I feel like the world finds me ignorant anytime I use Ebonics in place of standard, middle class white English. And I also know that most if not all of you cannot speak Crioulo, so fuck that.

Alan is responding to the course readings, but are those readings about the violence done to students when their languages/cultures are in conflict as powerful for the tutors (for us?) as hearing this kind of writing from a peer? What kinds of risks does Alan take in writing? What kinds of risks do white tutors take in responding to that writing? But what kinds of risks do we take if we don’t write about race, if we don’t respond to everyday lived experience, if we don’t share and listen and process our everyday experiences of race?

So how do we work toward helping us and our tutors accomplish this work? We return again to the learning culture inventory in chapter four to help us think about that. As we plan to explore “values, assumptions, belief, and expectations,” we might include tutors when we decide what readings and activities will be included in our syllabi. We might ask the writers who use our centers to attend staff education meetings to speak back to the ways they are characterized in their classes and coursework. We might keep stories of our individual processes and take time for reflection by creating opportunities for us, as managers, and our tutors to write about, to rely, in Wenger’s sense of the term (to participate in a community of practice by writing an account of the community), our growing communal understanding of race, racism, and whiteness. We might challenge our assumptions about hiring. As we mentioned in chapter four, instead of looking in typical places for tutors, we might actively recruit students who reflect the racial and ethnic make-up of our student population; perhaps we might even do better than our institutions do at creating a diverse and inclusive staff. Here are some ways we might accomplish that. Visit orientation sessions for incoming students of color. Ask tutors. They can be our best allies in recruiting a more diverse staff. Remind them to pay attention to our dedicated writing center users who have already proven through their actions that they are committed to the mission of the writing center; to the student.
cultures all vying for...ve adopted not just happens, you become is that come with it worse one and stick it out of an Ebonics re ignorant anytime English. And I also so fuck that.

I am those readings languages/cultures as hearing this kind can take in writing? ding to that writing? bout race, if we don't share and listen and tutors accomplish this story in chapter four values, assumptions, when we decide what bi. We might ask the in meetings to speak ises and coursework, s and take time for ters, and our tutors term (to participate of the community), cism, and whiteness.

As we mentioned in for tutors, we might 1 ethnic make-up of do better than our staff. Here are some lessons for incoming allies in recruiting on our dedicated through their actions that enter; to the student in the residence hall who is a particularly focused listener; to the student government representative who is a careful responder. Finally, we can look to the vast expertise our tutors bring to the writing center. Is there a theater major on staff? How about turning him or her on to Augusto Boal’s book, *Theater of the Oppressed* for exercises to address everyday racism? Is there a music major on staff? How about asking that tutor to put together a presentation on world music or on white colonization of African-American music? We have also found a variety of ways to move this work out of the writing center as well. We have held campus-wide “Write up a Storm” fund-raisers for New Orleans schools. Our tutors have applied for and received student diversity grants to promote racial understanding. In short, given a pro-learning culture, the possibilities are limitless.

If we all, directors and tutors, recognize differences, as Kathryn Valentine has noted, “not simply to appreciate them but to draw on them as resources for making meaning and understanding the context in which we work and live” then the writing center will work, according to Valentine, “to facilitate students’ ability to use diversity as a productive resource—as a resource for learning and representation, and not a characteristic which marks some of our students but not others.”

**RACISM IS REAL 2: RECOGNIZING RACISM ACROSS OUR INSTITUTIONS**

We note that one of the ways we might engage in anti-racism work in our writing centers is to broker considerations of race and racism across institutional boundaries. “Broker” is a word and a concept we take from Etienne Wenger, who writes that “[b]rokers are able to make new connections across communities of practice, enable coordination, and—if they are good brokers—open new possibilities for meaning” (109).

As the IWCA 2005 Summer Institute participants worked through stories of racism in small groups, they began to tell their own stories. Here is one of those:

Raul was a Latino tutor who had worked in the writing center for a year or so. During the course of a semester, it became evident to him, to all of the other tutors, and to the Director that a faculty member had warned his students not to work with Raul. The faculty member had directed them fairly explicitly to work with the white tutors in the writing center. If you were this writing center director, what would you, as the broker, do?
Having read our book to this point, you will realize that we are advocating a repositioning of the relationship that we, writing center directors, imagine (and maintain) between our institutions and ourselves. We are inviting you to think of yourself as a leader not only of your writing center, but also within your institution. Anti-racist leadership is difficult. We worry about what will happen to us if we begin to name racism when we see it. We might also begin to worry about what will happen to our writing centers. What is the right response to the faculty member who directs his students to avoid the tutor of color—the professor who seems incapable of recognizing and honoring the gifts, the leadership, the intelligence, the credentials of students of color?

One of the reasons, perhaps, that our fear of addressing racism—in this case, racial prejudice—handcuffs us is that we tend to imagine intervening as necessarily involving confrontation in a zero sum game. However, change-agent work can be approached in other ways. Many anti-racism activists advocate a change model that distinguishes between "transactional" change and "transformational" change. Transactional change is the model with which we are most familiar: it is confrontation, involves negotiation (you give me that and I’ll give you this), or demands (you give me this or else) (2005 Understanding and Dismantling Racism). Transformational change engages other ways of thinking and acting. It is collaborative, process-oriented, holistic in the sense that it requires an attentiveness to the systemic and institutional context from which conflict emerges. Sound familiar? Sounds like writing center work, doesn’t it? What happens in the boundaries between institutional sites, we wonder, when we begin to apply our core professional values, principles, and what we know of best practices in the writing center to anti-racism work across our institutions? Our individual experience suggests that disaster does not ensue. Instead, we’ve learned that what we know as writing center directors translates quite well to reflective leadership outside of our writing centers.

No one, we think, can or should do anti-racism work alone—the idea is oxymoronic. Look across your campus. Who are the people, which are the programs that are most likely to also be thinking and working on anti-racism? Faced with this situation, who could you go to for advice? Is there a faculty member in sociology who studies race and racism? Is there a director of multicultural studies who works regularly with faculty and students of color, and who might have encountered racism among the white faculty before? Who in administration seems most committed to diversity? We can, seek others. Engaging in a acknowledgment of the People of color, no matter how small, makes the People who do not have legitimacy with theirs, and may also legitimate the condition of meaningful support not because of a long history of appropriation of the history of people of color, but to transform institutions of racial domination. Resisting Power, To use the metaphor, Guiney and Torn, the canary in the coal mine, resuscitate rather.

Writing centers as gatekeepers of the canary. In fact, this phenomenon is individual student institutional leader, our focus on centers, can get in institutional structures our campuses and center’s potential as well.

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to diversity? We can take these people to lunch. Make friends. Forge alli-
ances. Seek opportunities to collaborate with them.
Engaging in anti-racism work in the writing center requires, however,
acknowledging the complexity of the racial order on our campuses.
People of color may legitimately wonder at our motivations for begin-
ning and may suspect our intentions and ability to follow through.
People who direct programs for students of color across campus may
legitimately wonder whether we are setting our program up in competi-
tion with theirs or seeking to exploit them or their programs. They
may also legitimately wonder whether we have created and continue to
create the conditions in the writing center necessary for the safety and
meaningful support of students of color. These concerns are legitimate
not because the writing center director, as an individual, is suspect, but
because of a long, frustrating, and material history of white domination
and appropriation of resources. These concerns are legitimate because
of a long history of whites expecting or demanding assimilation from
people of color rather than being willing to change themselves or to
transform institutions built for whites and, at least in part, in service
of racial domination. In their book, The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race,
Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy, Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres
use the metaphor of the miner's canary to explain this last concern.
Guinier and Torres suggest that education's response to the death and
dying of the canary (students of color) is to try to change the canary, to
resuscitate rather than to decontaminate the mine or build a new one.
Writing centers are deeply implicated, because of our traditional role
as gatekeeper of academic literacy, in institutional efforts to change
the canary. In fact, writing centers may be particularly susceptible to
this phenomenon because of our traditional emphasis on working with
individual students rather than on curriculum, faculty development, or
institutional leadership, for example. As we noted earlier in this chap-
ter, our focus on one-to-one instruction, while a trademark of writing
centers, can get in the way of our ability to see this work as part of the
institutional structures and hierarchies that enable racism to flourish on
our campuses and may prevent us as well from embracing the writing
center's potential in supporting anti-racism efforts cross-institutionally
as well.
Not merely in spite of, but because of these challenges, we think the
work is worth doing. Attempting anti-racism activism in and through our
writing centers calls on our principles, our disciplinary knowledge, our
particular orientations toward peer pedagogies as well as our creativity
and our sense of wonder at the knowledge others possess and share. Creating our writing centers as institutional spaces that depend on the presence, engagement, and histories of individuals within a diverse community and on an honest accounting of struggles for justice just might be, we think, a means by which we articulate and re-articulate the degree to which writing centers matter to our institutions and in the struggle for social justice.

Appendix

AntI-I

Definitions

Racial Prejudice: racial difference: stages of anti-rac

Racism: Racial, and/or,

Institutional: Unequal treatment with regard to accession or omission

Systemic Racism: Effective practices that are political, and etc

Manifestations

Unconscious or racism that we are anti-racists is if actively working or uncomfortable from another pe

False Attribution: individuals or groups terms (while exc) providing that a child is uneducated or un among children


Appendix

Anti-Racism Work

Definitions of Racism

The following definitions come from a worksheet titled "Understanding and Naming Racism" and were developed for an anti-racism training for teachers in the St. Cloud, Minnesota school district. They are intended to give a sense of the complexity and ubiquity of modern racism, but also and more importantly perhaps, to provide language for naming those everyday experiences through which racism in individual and institutional forms circulates and reproduces.

Definitions

Racial Prejudice: Dislike, distrust, or fear of others based on perceived racial differences. Individual racial prejudice is learned and, at the early stages of anti-racist awareness, is often unconscious.

Racism: Racial prejudice in combination with community, institutional, and/or systemic power.

Institutional Racism: Visible and often invisible differential and unequal treatment of constituencies based on race. Inequalities with regard to access, power, and inclusion that are sanctioned by commission or omission by an institution.

Systemic Racism: The web of ideas, institutions, individual and collective practices that, taken together, ensure the perpetuation of social, political, and economic inequality along racial lines.

Manifestations

Unconscious or Unintentional Racism: Learned and deeply internalized racism that we carry with us through our days. Some part of our work as anti-racists is interior work: becoming conscious of our prejudices and actively working to transform ourselves. For example: feeling nervous or uncomfortable when encountering an individual or group of people from another perceived racial group.

False Attribution: The tendency to explain the actions or inactions of individuals or groups from perceived races other than our own in negative terms (while excusing our own actions or inactions). For example: assuming that a child of color is struggling academically because her parents are uneducated or uncaring or conversely assuming that academic excellence among children of color is anomalous (abnormal or unusual).
**Triangulation:** Assuming racial prejudices are shared among whites. For example: expressing negative, derogatory or racist views to other whites and assuming that they will all agree.

**Unsolicited Nominations:** Expecting or asking people of color to speak for their race.

**Racialized Neglect:** Providing unequal and inferior service, support, communication, and/or care to people of color. For example: calling on, praising, or offering academic enhancement opportunities to white children in a classroom with more frequency than children of color.

**Racialized Gatekeeping:** Actively or implicitly preventing or obstructing people of color from obtaining services, benefits, or privileges that are normally or regularly available to whites. For example: regular tracking of students of color into remedial courses or programs. Or making exceptions to regular practices or procedures for whites, but not for people of color.

**Individual physical racial violence:** Physical assault motivated by race.

**Symbolic racial violence:** Verbal assault motivated by race or racism communicated and reproduced through signs and symbols (for example: the association of black men with violence and hyper-sexuality through media representations in film, television, and print).

**Group or community sanctioned violence:** Physical and/or symbolic assault motivated by race and participated in or sanctioned by a group or community.

**White Anti-Racism**


There are three main ways in which whites come to the work of anti-racism:

**Activist Networks:** Many whites are introduced to anti-racism through activist networks on a range of social and political issues.

**Growing Empathy:** Many whites come to anti-racism by developing empathy for people of color through a variety of “approximating experiences.”

**Turning Points:** Many whites come to anti-racism through a turning point in their lives typically spawned by a dramatic or cathartic event.

Most white anti-racism factors that have drawn O’Brien’s interest are experiences that are experienced what it must be like

**Overlapping Approaches:** Some form of (i.e. sexism or a Borrowed Approach family member)

**Global Approximations:** Ideals or demo

**Cautionary Notes About**

One of the most telling examples of empathy is one comparison and many tend to disguise under racism.

Also, white anti-racism that because they feel experiences of people that are beyond their behalf.

**Short List of Readings**


Frederickson, George M. *University Press*.


Most white anti-racists will recognize some combination of the above factors that have drawn them to the movement.

O’Brien identifies three forms of “approximating experiences.” These are experiences that enable whites to feel some understanding of what it must be like to experience racism as a person of color.

Overlapping Approximation: Drawing analogies between racism and some form of oppression that a white person might experience (i.e., sexism or sexual violence).

Borrowed Approximation: Witnessing racism as a close friend, lover, or family member of a person of color.

Global Approximation: Noticing contradictions between strongly held ideals or democratic principles and the fact of racism.

Cautionary Notes About Empathy

One of the mistakes that many white anti-racists make is to assume that empathy is enough. Several critical race scholars have noted that comparisons and analogies between racism and other forms of oppression tend to disguise the disproportionate suffering of people of color under racism.

Also, white anti-racists sometimes also make the mistake of assuming that because they feel empathy, they actually do comprehend the lived experiences of people of color and are therefore qualified to speak on their behalf.

SHORT LIST OF READINGS


