ARTICLES

OPPRESSION *AND* PRIVILEGE: TOWARD A RELATIONAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF RACE*

Race is often one of the more controversial classroom topics addressed by sociologists. Unfortunately, current conceptualizations are limited by their tendency to focus only on racial "minorities" and the oppressive aspects of race. This approach overlooks how whites are affected by race and indeed receive privileges through race. Teaching from this model thus gives students an inadequate view. In this paper I outline the components of an alternative (relational) model that focuses on white privilege and on white supremacy, the ideology that upholds it, thereby providing a more realistic and more complete analysis. Then I discuss issues involved in teaching a relational model of race, including preparing to teach from this model, taking it into the classroom, and dealing with white students' reactions to this way of thinking.

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TEACHING ABOUT RACE MAY BE ONE OF THE most difficult tasks faced by sociologists. Race is one of the most emotionally laden and controversial issues facing contemporary society. Students and instructors are likely to enter the classroom with strong opinions and viewpoints about this topic. Traditionally, however, sociological thinking about race has been limited in focus. As currently conceptualized, "race" pertains to people of color,[1] leaving whites to view it as something that affects everyone except them. As a result of this conceptualization, we focus our attention only on the oppressive aspects of race; white privilege and the ideology that upholds it—white supremacy—are overlooked. This model carries over into our instruction, where we focus on "minorities" when teaching about race; thus white students are allowed to overlook their place in race relations and to maintain a false sense that race affects only other people.

A different way of thinking and teaching about race, however, has been presented piecemeal by writers across a variety of disciplines. In this paper I bring together this diverse literature into what I call a "relational" model—one that focuses on both the oppressive *and* the privileging aspects of race. Using the concepts of white privilege and white supremacy to show how race implicates everyone, this paradigm provides a more realistic account of race and its effects on people's lives. After outlining this model in contrast to the traditional view, I focus on issues involved in teaching about race as a relation: preparing to teach about race from this model, taking it into the classroom, and dealing with white students' reactions to this conceptualization.

CONCEPTUALIZING RACE

THE ABSENCE/PRESENCE MODEL[2]

I refer to the current widespread conceptualization of race as an "absence/presence" approach because it treats race as something possessed by people of color and as something that affects their lives. It depicts whites

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[1] I have adopted the phrase people of color in this paper, although I have some reservations about its use. For example, it overlooks differences between persons of color. Yet as Scheman (1993:218) points out, "[I]t is hard to find a respectful term for a category of existence which is an artifact of racism."

[2] I do not want to suggest that all sociologists teach about race using an absence/presence model. I assume that race/ethnicity specialists and sociologists concerned with the interrelationships between race, class, and gender are more likely to know and use the relational model (even if they do not call it by that name). Yet I do not believe that the relational model is the predominant way of approaching race. My informal survey of introductory and specialty textbooks, for example, shows little evidence of such a model. Aside from some discussion of white ethnics, virtually no explicit attention is given to whiteness as race.

(usually implicitly) as having no race and as people whose lives are not affected by race.

In this model, white is normal and natural (Dyer 1988; Levine 1994; Sleeter 1993; Wellman 1993), "while to be not-white is to occupy a racial category with all its attendant meanings" (Ware 1992:18). Our use of language illustrates this point. In discussions of whites, identifying adjectives are omitted; they seem strange when used (Scheman 1993). We commonly say, for example, "black lawyer," but the white law-yer is unmarked and is taken as generic (Anzaldua 1990; Flax 1993; Scheman 1993). White "is the race that need not speak its name" (Levine 1994:22).

As a result, because they are not people of color, many white people do not think racism affects them; they do not consider whiteness as a racial identity (Dyer 1988; Flax 1993; Katz and Ivey 1977; McIntosh 1992). Whites, as Omi and Winant (1993) point out, have had a "transparent" racial identity.[3] As a signifier of dominance, whiteness remains invisible (Brah 1992; Lorber 1994).

The absence/presence model gives students a false picture of race because it neglects to explore the concept of race privilege. Racial inequality is explained in ways that do not implicate white society; white responsibility for the persistence of racism is obscured (hooks 1994; Sleeter 1993). As a result, whites can look at racial discrimination with detachment (Feagin and Sikes 1994). Whites are "taught not to recognize" white privilege; racism, from this perspective, disadvantages others, but is not shown to advantage whites (McIntosh 1992:71). As a result, the power dimension of racism is lost.

A relational approach, I contend, is a more useful and more realistic approach. Such a model treats race as an influence on the lives of whites *and* people of color; it depicts racial privilege as well as racial oppression.

A RELATIONAL MODEL OF RACE

To conceptualize race in relational terms is to recognize that definitions of all races are possible only in relation to other races (Glenn 1992; Wellman 1993). That is, "black" is meaningful only insofar as it is set apart from, and in contradistinction to, "white." This point is particularly obvious when people are referred to as "nonwhite" (a word that ignores the differences in experiences among people of color).

Viewing race (as well as class and gender)[4] in relational terms urges us to examine how race is experienced in our everyday lives, rather than seeing it simply as an abstract theoretical concept (Ng 1993). If race is regarded as something that gives some (white) people privileges even while it oppresses other people, then it is difficult to believe that race affects only people of color. As Frankenberg (1993:6) states: "To speak of whiteness...is to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism." This conceptualization urges us to look upward (as well as downward) in the power structure (Roman 1993), thus helping us to refocus attention on the power dynamics inherent in race and on the structural dimensions of race relations. When everyone is implicated in the structures of race, the power relations built on racial "difference" become clearer (Lerner 1990; Lorber 1994; Wellman 1993). This relationship is made clear, for example, by defining oppression as "attitudes, behaviors, and pervasive and systematic social arrangements by which members of one group are exploited and subordinated while members of another group are granted privileges" (Bohmer and Briggs 1991:155).

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[3] Omi and Winant (1993) believe that the increasing globalization of race is causing whites to lose their sense of racelessness. Others suggest that the increased visibility of people of color has challenged the taken-for-grantedness of being white (Blauner 1989; Feagin and Vera 1995; Helms 1990; Wellman 1993). Herek (1987) makes a similar argument about the term heterosexual; he maintains that heterosexuality is becoming more of a conscious label as gay men and lesbians come out and assert their identities. Heterosexuality no longer can be taken for granted because alternatives are becoming more visible.

[4] A number of resources provide relational views of class and gender. For relational views of class, see (for example) Lucal 1994, Marx 1978, Vanneman and Cannon 1987, and Wright 1979. On gender, see (for example) Flax 1990, Kimmel 1987, and Kimmel and Messner 1993.

When members of a dominant group come to see themselves as part of a group, they learn that they are only one segment of humanity and that their experiences are not universal (Frye 1983). A relational view encourages people to see that the conditions of their lives are connected to, and made possible by, the conditions of other people's lives (Russo 1991).

If we are to work from a relational conceptualization of race, we must explicate some of its concepts. The most important of these is that of "white privilege," outlined most eloquently by Peggy McIntosh. A corollary concept is "white supremacy," whose usefulness has been suggested by bell hooks. By adding these concepts to our consideration of race, we begin to see how race in fact implicates everyone.

White privilege. McIntosh (1992:71) defines white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets that [she] can count on cashing in everyday." These privileges range from the mundane ("flesh"-colored bandages) to the profound.

Some authors argue that not viewing oneself as having a race is an example of privilege (Frye 1983; hooks 1981; Levine 1994; Russo 1991; Terry 1981). Members of the dominant group use race to distinguish others from themselves (Penrose and Jackson 1994) and thus, as noted above, to ascribe race only to those others. Sleeter (1993:160) observes that "a paradox of white consciousness is the ability not to see what is very salient: the visible markers of social categories that privilege people of European ancestry." Because of the segregated structure of the material and discursive environments inhabited by most white people, racial privilege is lived but not seen; whites not uncommonly live much of their daily existence without coming into contact with people of color (Feagin and Vera 1995; Frankenberg 1993; Helms 1990).

These structures provide whites with socially sanctioned opportunities for not noticing how race works, for forgetting that it is there; people of color lack such an option (Feagin and Vera 1995; Flax 1990; Jackson and Penrose 1994). Having white skin, according to Barbara Smith, allows people to assimilate into the dominant culture in a way that most people of color cannot; this assimilation can have a cushioning effect not available to people of color (Bulkin, Pratt, and Smith 1984). It protects people from degrading, unpleasant, and otherwise distasteful experiences (McIntosh 1992). To recognize white privilege, whites would be required to give up their "racial innocence"; this process would likely increase white guilt about race and racism (Steele 1990).[5] As hooks points out,

> In a racially imperialist nation such as ours, it is the dominant race that reserves for itself the luxury of dismissing racial identity while the oppressed race is made daily aware of their [sic] racial identity. It is the dominant race that can make it seem that their experience is representative (1981:138).

Part of the privilege of whiteness, then, is the ability to choose to be oblivious to the effects of race (Helms 1990; hooks 1994).

Racial privilege also structures the way whites deal with people of color. Frye (1983:111) believes that racial privilege gives white people a choice between "hearing and not hearing" the voices of nonwhites. The normative cultural practices that constitute "whiteness" are most visible to those excluded and oppressed by them (Feagin and Vera 1995; Frankenberg 1993). Whites can believe themselves to be invisible to blacks, whereas "[a]ll black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they will be terrorized by whiteness" (hooks 1992:175). hooks (1992:175) adds, "I learned as a child that to be 'safe,' it was important to recognize the power of whiteness, even to fear it, and to avoid encounter." To be black, then, is to be made continually aware of one's racial status (Feagin and Sikes 1994; Gwaltney 1980; Levine 1994).

Kimmel and Messner (1993) offer a general explanation for whites' lack of racial consciousness: The mechanisms that give us

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[5] Steele, however, does not believe that whites' maneuvering around race makes blacks innocent in racial matters. He argues that blacks who focus on racism and neglect their personal responsibility for their positions are also using innocence. In his analysis, both sides must move beyond claims to racial innocence. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I include Steele's work in my analysis.)

privilege are often invisible to us. Class is invisible for middle-class people, gender for men, sexuality for heterosexuals, and race for whites (Herek 1987; Lorber 1994; Penelope 1993). As Frankenberg (1993:196) notes, "[T]he extent to which identities can be named seems to show an inverse relationship to power in the U.S. social structure....The self, where it is part of a dominant cultural group, does not have to name itself."

We are more inclined to see and feel the operation of mechanisms that marginalize and oppress us (Frankenberg 1993; Kimmel and Messner 1993; McIntosh 1992), to be more sensitive to identities that bring subordinate status than to those which provide dominant status (Bohmer and Briggs 1991; Coleman and Rainwater 1978; Deschamps 1982; Jackman and Jackman 1983). Members of subordinate groups are viewed as "particles of an entity" (implying that they are objects) and as determined by their group membership; dominant-group members regard themselves as "singular subjects" (Deschamps 1982). Hacker (1992:32) argues that "in the eyes of white America, being black encapsulates your identity. No other racial or national origin is seen as having so pervasive a personality or character." On the other hand, as Torres (1991:274) observes, "[S]ince they personify the cultural categories privileged in Western culture as human, those who are white, male and heterosexual can think of themselves as individuals."

Being white confers privileges in numerous ways. Most simply, it makes life easier. Most white privileges, says McIntosh (1992:76), keep her "from having to be angry." Race can be taken for granted because it does not seem to interfere with one's life. Hacker (1992:194–95) provides a compelling illustration of this mindset: "[W]hite Americans can drive across a continent, stopping for gas and meals and lodging without a second thought. For black Americans, the prospect of humiliation or worse can haunt every mile of the trip." As Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1993) observe, it is easy to believe that dominant-group membership is unimportant. It makes one's life better in often-invisible ways. Thus to include whiteness in our

models of race is to make privilege visible. It requires making whiteness visible.

White privilege exists regardless of a particular white person's attitudes. As Crawford (1993:44) writes with respect to membership in a privileged race, class, and sexuality, "Mundane life is *easier* for me." This is true whether or not one accepts this situation as morally right; it merely is. McIntosh (1992:81) explains: "A 'white' skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us" (also see Brittan and Maynard 1984; Hacker 1992; Flax 1993; Shearer 1994).

The ideological basis for the privileges of whiteness is white supremacy, the second component of a relational model of race. To understand how white privilege operates, we must expose the ideology of racial supremacy on which that system of privilege is based.

White supremacy. hooks (1989) calls for a reconceptualization of race, contending that it may be more useful to talk about "white supremacy" than about racism. Russo points out that the effect of such a rethinking would be to place

> the responsibility on white women and men, rather than focusing on people of color simply as victims of an amorphous racism. "White supremacy" as a concept forces us to look power directly in the face, and when we do that there is less room for denial, guilt, and paternalism in trying to change it (1991:299).

This is appropriate, as Rubin (1994) observes, because the basis for white privilege is a widespread and thoroughly internalized belief in white superiority. As Stanfield (1991:257) points out, racial inequality can be maintained only when the dominant population is "socialized firmly into feelings of superiority while the oppressed...are socialized into feelings of inferiority." The assumption that white people are superior facilitates the failure to see white privilege (Rubin 1994). From this viewpoint, whites' views of race rest "on their vested interest in justifying their power and privileges" (Sleeter 1993:158).

As Wellman (1993:243) argues, racism is a system of advantage based on race and "made up of socially acceptable ways for justifying, explaining, or ignoring one's privi-

leged position in the organization of racial advantage." Racism was created, and is maintained, by white people (Russo 1991). Jackson's (1987:12) definition, then, may be more useful for highlighting whites' involvement: Racism involves "the attempt by a dominant group to exclude a subordinate group from the material and symbolic rewards of status and power." Such a conceptualization of racism, along with the idea of white supremacy, makes it clear that whites are implicated in the complex process leading to the subordination of people of color. It shows how racism and white supremacy operate to produce privileges for whites and oppressive conditions for people of color.

Understanding racism in this way "presents a serious challenge to the notion of the United States as a just society where rewards are based solely on merit" (Tatum 1992:6). The "myth of meritocracy" is maintained because white people are acculturated to be oblivious to their advantages (McIntosh 1992). Therefore focusing on white privilege does not merely expose how race affects our lives. It also reveals that the notion of meritocracy is based in the ideology of white supremacy.

Whites' lack of racial awareness is complete except in one conspicuous case: White supremacists have long had a clearly articulated sense of racial identity (Feagin and Vera 1995). Therefore highlighting the concept of white supremacy contains a hazard. When most people hear that phrase, they visualize men parading around in white sheets, crosses burning, and/or neo-Nazi skinhead groups. They cannot apply the notion of white supremacy to themselves or to their thinking about race. Therefore it is important to present this concept carefully in the classroom.[6] White supremacy must be portrayed not as an extremist ideology, but as the "common sense" racial attitude in our society (Omi and Winant 1994).

In addition, although white supremacists draw attention to whiteness as a racial identity, their ideology does not include a focus on white privilege. Instead, they emphasize the notion that whites are superior, but that they (their jobs and educations) face threats from racial minorities. Racial rhetoric thus has been constructed so as to allow whites to view themselves as oppressed by race. This belief is not limited to white supremacists; it has manifested itself in the debate about issues such as affirmative action and "reverse discrimination." Because this analysis of race relations is increasingly popular, we must furnish our students with the relational model of race outlined above.

In teaching about race, it is no longer adequate to discuss the effects of racism only on people of color. We must make whiteness and white privilege visible, and acknowledge the basis of racial privilege in white supremacy.

Teaching about race from this perspective, however, presents certain difficulties. A relational model of race interferes with our taken-for-granted beliefs about race. It calls into question some fundamental ideals, such as meritocracy. It may make white students feel guilty, defensive, or outraged. It also may require instructors to rethink their own understanding of race, as well as how to teach about it; thus we must alter the way we present race to our students.

TEACHING RACE AS A RELATION

Below I offer some suggestions for rethinking race and for implementing that reconceptualization in the classroom. Although this set of resources is not exhaustive, it includes all of the works I have consulted in my own reconsideration of these issues.[7]

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[6] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I consider white supremacists and the debate about affirmative action and "reverse" discrimination. I think this debate provides a sound (though challenging) basis for discussion of issues raised by adopting a relational view of race. White students who view race as a source of oppression presumably will be resistant to the notion of white privilege; thus they will find it difficult to be moved by the relational model. I have not faced this problem in my classroom, and would be interested to hear how others deal with it.

[7] Although I discovered this book too late to discuss it here, I also recommend Segrest's (1994) *Memoir of a Race Traitor*. Her account of her experiences as a white person doing antiracist work in the south includes a chapter titled "On Being White and Other Lies: A History of Racism in the United States." This book would be appropriate for upper-level courses.

WHAT TO READ

Many of the articles I cited above in presenting a relational approach to race are appropriate either as teaching tools or as preparatory materials for instructors. I discuss them here in terms of their content and their appropriateness for different uses. Obviously the usefulness and relevance of particular resources will vary. Instructors who are interested mainly in presenting race to introductory classes, for example, will have different needs than those who teach inequalities, minorities, or race relations.

For students, the archetypal article in this area is "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" (McIntosh 1992). McIntosh lists 46 white privileges; she says these are not intended to be generalizable, but I have found that students identify with them. I have used this article in introductory as well as upper-level courses.

In introductory classes I present McIntosh's list, along with definitions of oppression and privilege, to provide an alternative way of understanding race that is not covered in the textbook. Many white students say that they have never considered these privileges before and find it illuminating to talk about the list. I usually ask them to discuss the items that intrigue them. Some white students question the item, "I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives"; they comment that they *are* followed. I suggest that their age is likely to be the determining factor in this case. The last item on the list, "I can choose blemish cover or bandages in 'flesh' color and have them more or less match my skin," has also met with resistance. Some white students do not think this is an important issue; I ask them to consider why it could be. (In advanced classes, I ask students to read the entire article. I find it useful for drawing parallels between race, class, and gender inequalities.)

Several other articles similar to McIntosh's essay clarify how race actually operates in white people's lives. In "On Being White," Frye (1983) analyzes how white privilege works, focusing on definitions of whiteness and their implications. In "White Woman Feminist," Frye (1992) extends this analysis with the introduction of the term whiteliness (discussed below), which distinguishes between skin color and participation in the racial system. Pratt's essay (in Bulkin et al. 1984) "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" addresses the emergence of her consciousness as a white person.

The instructor who is able to spend more time on race, or who is teaching a course on race, can use a number of books. Feagin and Vera's (1995) *White Racism* is among the best for teaching a relational model. The authors analyze a number of recent racial incidents and consider how race implicates everyone. Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters* provides an account of white racial identities from in-depth interviews with women. Either of these would be appropriate for use in advanced classes.

Any of these sources, depending on the focus of the course, can help students begin to understand how race affects whites as well as people of color. Reading, however, is not likely in itself to convince students of the importance of this approach. Their experiences in the classroom also will be critical.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING

A number of articles provide resources for teaching race as a relational concept. Bohmer and Briggs's (1991) "Teaching Privileged Students about Gender, Race and Class Oppression" is quite useful. The authors advocate teaching about stratification from a relational perspective; they provide a number of strategies for doing so, such as encouraging students to describe what it means to them to hear that someone is oppressed or privileged. They also ask their students to produce a table showing different kinds of stratification and listing the groups privileged and oppressed by those structures of inequality. Thompson and Disch (1992) use journals and dyadic interactions between students to encourage awareness of differences. In one exercise, two students discuss with each other how they differ from one another.

Classroom climate is important to any instructor who teaches about inequality. It may be particularly important for teaching

race relationally because the topics of white privilege and supremacy are likely to provoke strong emotional reactions (discussed below) among students. This may be increasingly true during the current debate about affirmative action and other programs. Thompson and Disch (1992) and Tatum (1992) outline some of the discussion guidelines that they use when approaching issues of privilege and oppression. Thompson and Disch are concerned with building classroom trust and openness without making their classes into therapy sessions; Tatum identifies issues of confidentiality and respect for fellow students. She encourages students to speak from their own experiences rather than generalizing to those of others. Thompson and Disch emphasize to students the importance of sensitivity to difference, and state that insulting language is forbidden in their classrooms.

Articles by Roman (1993) and Sleeter (1993) also offer practical advice to white instructors attempting to teach about race in a different way.[8] Both of these authors deal with the instructor's point of view. Sleeter, who studied how white teachers present race to their students, found that few of the teachers saw whiteness as race, even after participating in a staff development project which included discussions of race and multicultural education. Her findings, placed in this context, are useful for understanding race from a critical perspective that questions whiteness. Sleeter encourages instructors to examine and critically assess white privilege for themselves as part of their effort to confront racism and privilege with their students. Roman (1993), writing as a postmodernist and a feminist, discusses the implications of teachers taking a critical stance on race.

She calls for "disinvestment" in white privilege by accounting for that privilege and discussing its implications for oneself. Before attempting to present these issues in the classroom, says Roman, instructors need to confront them in their own lives.

DEALING WITH (WHITE) STUDENTS' RE-ACTIONS

Because a relational model of race is likely to be new and challenging to students, an instructor should not be surprised if they display a variety of reactions. Students of color may feel empowered by this model; white students may not respond positively. Pratt acknowledges, "It is an exhausting process, this moving from the experience of the 'unknowing majority' (as Maya Angelou called it) into consciousness. It would be a lie to say this process is comforting" (Bulkin et al. 1984:12). Feagin and Vera (1995) point out that whites may need a critical event or experience to recognize how race operates in their lives. If they have this experience in the classroom, instructors must be ready to deal with it. For these reasons I provide some suggestions for dealing with students' responses.

As is often the case with sociology, an alternative perspective on race challenges most students' view of the world. The experiences of others, who have presented nontraditional frameworks for thinking about oppression and privilege, offer some insights into this issue. Students from privileged groups "are frequently hostile, or at best neutral, to presentations on race, class, and gender stratification; often they respond with guilt, anger, or resistance" (Bohmer and Briggs 1991:154). On the other hand, poor or working-class white students may find it difficult to see how being white has been a source of privilege to them:

> For people whose lives actually are privileged, it's possible to grasp the abstract idea that being white has advantaged them. To working-class families [and individuals] who struggle so hard just to manage each day, however, the notion that they're privileged seems absurd. (Rubin 1994:205)

As a result, depending on the makeup of the class, different tactics may be necessary to convince students that racial privi-

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[8] What about people of color teaching about white privilege? I assume they would face a different set of issues than I do as a white instructor. None of these issues, as far as I know, have been addressed in writings about whiteness as race. According to the arguments made in this paper, white privilege is seen more easily by people of color, so nonwhite instructors (and students) will have a different perspective on the issues involved. I would like to hear about the experiences of people of color who raise these issues in their classrooms.

leges exist. I have found that it can be helpful to begin by discussing class privileges because my mostly working- and lower middle-class white students find them easier to recognize. (Perhaps they feel that they lack these privileges.)

Tatum (1992) observes that a failure to address students' emotional reactions to course material can lead to resistance, which interferes with learning. Here, I discuss several approaches to these concerns.

One can focus students' attention on the structural nature of race and racism. Thompson and Disch (1992:8), for example, "encourage everyone in the class to feel anger at the oppressive system rather than guilt at their prejudiced responses." Students are made aware that they have learned their attitudes, since they were children, in a context over which they had little control (Thompson and Disch 1992). As Bohmer and Briggs (1991:157) state, "[B]eing privileged (or oppressed) is not a question of individual choice but is conferred on us by our group membership" (also see Brittan and Maynard 1984; Flax 1993).[9]

One can help students come to terms with this issue by discussing the structure of inequality systems. A great deal of effort goes into maintaining and justifying systems of superiority and inferiority, such as white supremacy (Berreman 1972); yet this work remains invisible. Feagin and Vera (1995) argue that whites incur material costs for sustaining this system. By discussing a variety of social institutions and how they are implicated in maintaining the racial status quo, one can make this work visible to students, help them understand what is at stake, and clarify how the present situation came to be.

This awareness, however, need not lead to a feeling of helplessness in the face of embedded structural arrangements. Recognition of one's privilege can lead to a desire for change. Russo (1991), in her article

about white feminists and antiracist work, provides an account of the issues involved in working toward change. She emphasizes that both analysis (changing consciousness) and action (doing antiracist work) are important. Tatum (1992) suggests providing students with examples of people who have been successful agents of change and assigning small groups of students to develop plans for "interrupting racism."

Some strategies for altering the present structure of race are identified in "How to Be a Race Traitor" (Ignatiev 1994a), which appears in an issue of *The Utne Reader*. That issue also includes a thought-provoking interview, "Treason to Whiteness Is Loyalty to Humanity," with Noel Ignatiev (1994b), the editor of *Race Traitor* magazine. One of "six ways to fight being white," says Ignatiev, is to "[a]nswer an anti-black slur with, 'Oh, you probably said that because you think I'm white. That's a mistake people often make because I look white.' Reply 'me, too' to charges that 'people on welfare don't want to work, they just want to stay home and have babies'" (Ignatiev 1994a:85). Although students may not be ready to take this kind of action, these strategies should make them talk and allow them to suggest some actions that they are willing to take.

Building on the fact that race is a social construction, Frye (1992) also offers a way to help students deal with their reactions to white privilege and supremacy. She distinguishes between being white and being "whitely." For Frye, "whiteliness" is a "deeply ingrained way of being in the world" (1992:151) that she compares to being masculine or feminine. One cannot help being white (or male or female), but one can make decisions about the extent to which she or he embraces the system of racism. To be whitely is to take race for granted and to be oblivious to its privileging effects. One can have light-colored skin without being whitely, however. By pointing out the contingent nature of the relationship between skin color and enacting race, Frye provides a means for subverting privilege.

By providing students with readings on racial privilege, preparing to address white privilege and supremacy in class, and being ready for students' reactions to this new

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[9] Another resource for dealing with responses to racism and white privilege is Jody Shearer's (1994) *Enter the River: Healing Steps from White Privilege toward Racial Reconciliation.* Although this book is grounded in the social sciences, its focus is a religiously based (Mennonite) program for healing what Shearer calls the "disease" of racism.

conceptualization of race, I think one can present a relational model of race to students. I also believe that such an approach to race is more adequate and more realistic than that offered by the traditional absence/presence model.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have brought together a number of works that contain elements of a relational approach to race. As far as I know, no one previously has attempted to integrate these pieces conceptually. Taken together, they provide an outline for a relational model of race that is important in teaching sociology. I maintain that this model is useful and realistic because it shows that race influences everyone: whites as well as people of other colors.[10]

The absence/presence model of race focuses attention only on people of color, concentrates on the oppressive aspects of race, and leaves racial power invisible; a relational model shows how race is also a source of privilege and a system that is based on power differences.[11] Directing attention to racial privilege illuminates what has thus far remained obscured: that white people also have racial identities and that the invisibility of whiteness has discernible effects on the functioning of race in the social world. The relational model clarifies how racial privilege

and the ideology of white supremacy implicate whites in racial inequality.

Students need to understand that race has both oppressive and privileging aspects. In using the concepts of white privilege and white supremacy to show how race involves everyone, the relational model provides a valuable counter to the tendency to focus only on racial "minorities" when teaching about race. Although using this model presents some challenges to instructors, it also gives them another approach to dealing with this controversial topic.

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[10] Some people may question the merits of reconceptualizing race in this manner because others (e.g., Miles 1989; Reynolds and Lieberman 1993) have advocated eliminating the concept of "race" altogether. Calls to eliminate race, however, overlook this fact: Although race is socially constructed, it is also an important way in which we organize experiences and structure the world. As Jackson and Penrose (1994:4) point out, "[T]he scientific disavowal of the 'racial' differentiation of human populations has not been followed by a similar repudiation of its social significance within either political discourse or popular culture" (also see Brah 1992; Frye 1992; Omi and Winant 1994). "Race" has meaning because we have given it meaning and continue to do so (Brittan and Maynard 1984). Therefore, although the ultimate goal may be to dismantle "race" as a concept, for now it is more practical to focus on the everyday experience of race and to understand how it structures all of our lives and the world in which we live.

[11] I realize that by reconceptualizing race as an issue involving whites one risks recentering whites in the discourse. That is, recent attention to difference has led to the questioning of dominant discourses and has

called attention to other voices (in this context, people of color), but the risk of focusing on whiteness when teaching about race is that one may recenter white discourse and again silence people of color. This is not my intention. Instead I would argue that focusing on white privilege—as well as on the oppressions experienced by people of color—provides a more realistic view of race. This reconceptualization provides for an evaluation of white privilege and white supremacy rather than taking it for granted and leaving it invisible. By including a discussion of white privilege and supremacy when teaching about race, one moves away from the victim blaming so prevalent in conceptualizations of race and focuses attention where it belongs: on structural arrangements that systematically privilege whites and oppress people of color.

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