

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience (URGE; www.urgeoscience.org) is a community-wide journal-reading and policy-design curriculum to help Geoscientists unlearn racism and improve belonging, accessibility, justice, equity, and inclusion (BAJEDI) in our discipline. URGE's primary objectives are to (1) deepen the community's knowledge of the effects of racism on the participation and retention of black, brown, and indigenous people in Geoscience¹, (2) use the existing literature, expert opinion, and personal experiences to develop anti-racist policies and strategies^{2,3}, and (3) share, discuss, modify, implement, and assess anti-racist policies and strategies within a dynamic community network and on a national stage.

Refining Conversations Module

Paper Title: Race Talk: The Psychology of Racial Dialogues

Author: Derald Wing Sue

Summary:

- A five-year study analyzing dialogues about race (race talks) in higher education and breaking down observations to answer key questions:

What Are the Characteristics of Race Talk? (p. 664-665). *Common themes or situations during race talks identified from focus groups of People of Color (POC) and White people:*

- Hesitation to participate from POC and White students → can result in rhetorical incoherence (changes in speech such as articulation, quiet volume, mispronunciation, etc.) in responses from those who do speak
- Heightened emotions from participants
 - Ex: White students tend to become more anxious and apprehensive, and POC students tend to become more angry and frustrated
 - Ex: POC students interpret avoidant behaviors from White people as microaggressions; White students are offended or insulted when confronted
- Defensiveness can be a result of feeling that their different perspectives are being publicly challenged or invalidated
- May find ways to change or dilute the topic of race by comparing it to something else (gender, class, etc) or physically leaving/ending the conversation if participants become more uncomfortable
- Dismissed or discouraged emotions → acts of silencing
- Must establish appropriate dialogue during race talks by educators/moderators

How Do Societal Ground Rules (Norms) Impede Race Talk? (p. 665-667). *Identifies 3 social norms that actively prevent or inhibit honest race talks from occurring:*

- Politeness Protocol
 - When conversing with others in a public and diverse space, it is not socially acceptable to talk about potentially uncomfortable or heavy topics such as race.

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If race is brought up, it is either quickly silenced/avoided or discussed superficially.

- Participants who do want to discuss race more in-depth can be socially outcasted or labeled offensively depending on their identity and stance.
 - White people → “racist” or “bleeding heart liberal”
 - POC → “Uncle Tom” or “playing the race card”

- Academic Protocol
 - In academia, emotions are generally discouraged from intellectual discussions. Race talks tend to elicit strong emotions and vulnerability from participants because they are sharing lived experiences. However, anecdotes and feelings are generally dismissed because they are assumed to be illegitimate sources of data.

- Color-Blind Protocol
 - Color blindness is a belief that race does not matter and people should be judged based on their personality and internal characteristics.
 - Strategic color blindness is a strategy, usually used by White people, to avoid race talks. Organizations that adopted color blindness tend to have more discriminatory policies.
 - Following the color-blind protocol leads to minimizing racial differences or ignoring racial identities.

Why is Race Talk So Difficult and Uncomfortable for Participants? (p. 667-670)

- Impacts on POC students & faculty
 - Being victims or witnesses of microaggressions in the workplace/classroom is what usually starts the discussion of race
 - Evokes strong emotions
 - Struggle to guide the conversation because they are personally or emotionally exhausted or struggle to “remain neutral”
 - Usually discussed through a Western European lens → stereotypes of white women's tears and cold/angry/unempathetic POC students are perpetuated

- Impacts on White students & faculty
 - Unable to identify microaggressions, being uncomfortable/afraid leads to becoming defensive or silencing conversation
 - Identified fears that White people have which prevent race talks:
 - Appearing racist

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- Realizing their racism → acknowledging implicit biases and the harm they may have caused others because of it
- Confronting white privilege → diminishes the idea of meritocracy and forces to acknowledge an unfair advantage/superior position in society
- Taking personal responsibility to end racism

How Can Educators Facilitate Constructive Racial Dialogues? (p. 670)

- Take the time to learn and understand yourself as a racial/cultural being and acknowledge your own implicit biases, as well as develop expertise in race conversations.
- Be open and vulnerable with your students and acknowledge your own flaws/biases.
- Allow space for emotions and facilitate in validating and understanding the meaning behind the emotions.