



Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race

Wing Sue, Derald
Wiley, John & Sons, Inc., 2015

Book Review

Tags: anti-racism | diversity | racial dialogue | teaching about race

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This is a book finding its time, perhaps just in time. A sequel to *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (2010), *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence* offers the fruits of a ten-year period of research and observation of participants engaged in difficult conversations on race, racism, Whiteness, and White privilege. The purpose is fivefold: (1) to uncover the reasons that race talk is difficult, (2) to expose the explicit and hidden rules that govern how race is discussed in U.S. society, (3) to illuminate the detrimental consequences of a failure to honestly dialogue about race, (4) to outline the benefits of successful conversations on race, and (5) to propose solutions in overcoming obstacles to honest racial dialogues (xii). Sue accomplishes this purpose with clarity of style and balanced tone.

The first section defines race talk, its characteristics and dynamics, and then explores in chapter three the conflicting race realities in *White Talk and Back Talk*. “Race talk is truly a clash of different racial realities in which people of color and Whites perceive race issues in opposition to one another” (xiii). Through vignettes, questions, and psychologically adept analysis, Sue offers a compelling view of the ideological, psychological, and historical factors that do create radically opposed racial realities. He gently uncovers the realities whites are disinclined to see, and demonstrates the lived realities of people of color – all while shaming none. I particularly valued his argument for and demonstration of the importance of emotions in the classroom, with any redress of race talk requiring truly receiving and sitting with the wisdom that arises *within* emotional connection and disconnection.

The second section highlights the hidden ground rules embedded in society, academic settings, and one's self that serve as barriers to honest race talk. Here you can find guidance and modeling for academic habits that consistently cloak racial realities. The third and fourth sections address, separately, why it is difficult to honestly talk about race. For people of color, "What are the consequences for saying what I mean?" and "To speak or not to speak, that is the question." For whites, "I'm not racist!" and "I'm not White, I'm Italian." Group considerations are also examined, difficult dialogues between groups of color.

The final section invites reflection by parents and teachers talking about race with children; namely, "taking responsibility for change means overcoming the inertia and feeling of powerlessness on a personal level" (214). Racial awakening happens in encounters that challenge preconceived notions, so Sue encourages such encounters with guidelines: (1) learn about people of color from sources within the group; (2) learn from healthy and strong people of the culture; (3) learn from experiential reality; (4) learn from constant vigilance of your biases and fears; and (5) learn from being committed to personal action against racism. To encourage you to get the book, I particularly appreciated Sue's list of *ineffective* strategies, "Five Things Not to Do," followed by eleven potentially positive actions. A lengthy volume, *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence* should be required reading for educators of all levels.

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/race-talk-and-the-conspiracy-of-silence-understanding-and-facilitating-difficult-dialogues-on-race/