

Episode 1 - Part 2

Hello everyone. And welcome to episode one, part two of the heart podcast. I'm Dr. Milagros Castillo-Montoya and I'm co-hosting the heart podcast with Omar Romandia. Welcome everyone! Thanks so much for joining us. We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the territory of the Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Lenape Peoples, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations.

Omar, I'm excited to be continuing the conversation with Dr. Stewart and Dr. Harris. Part one of the first episode was really powerful. Several things that they said. Really stayed with me. And one of those things is that both of them mentioned that this is the only way they know how to teach. And that point emphasizes to me how much of anti-racist teaching is an embodied practice, particularly for faculty of color.

And this is a point that is supported in higher education research related to anti-racist teaching. But I found it really illuminating to hear it from their perspective. I couldn't agree more, Milagros. Like you, there were countless ideas that stood out to me specifically, Dr. Stewart's point that we are all a work in progress and that we should constantly work to grow in it.

Her growth mindset is directly in line with the purpose of our podcast, in which we aim to spread knowledge. To help others learn and to put anti-racist teaching practices into action. Right. Well, you know, something else that stood out to me from that first part of the first episode is how important context is to the enactment of antiracist teaching Dr. Stewart and Dr. Harris really made me think a lot about how the work of anti-racist teaching cannot be put squarely on the shoulders of anti-racist teachers, but instead the higher education institutional leaders must share the burden if they really want anti-racist teaching to occur and thrive at their institutions.

And for me, that means that academic leaders need to be committed to creating an ecosystem in which anti-racist teaching can be fostered and enacted. I'm so glad you mentioned that, Milagros. I feel as though anti-racist teaching is a collective effort that should be cultivated by individual change agents while the current state of affairs is far from perfect there is certainly plenty of room for growth. Well, let's continue the conversation with Dr. Stewart and Dr. Harris, shall we?

You are both amazing scholars doing work, using intersectionality as a lens in your scholarship. What influence do you see? And I think I've heard a few of those influences already, but I'm wondering if there might be something you might add about the influence of intersectionality as a frame for the way you think about your teaching.

Maybe I could ask Jessica to get us started on that. Yeah, this also was a difficult one to answer. I think because intersectionality for me is also embodied theory. Um, Because I used it and come to love it so much, but also because I strongly identify as a woman of color, um, and have these intersecting identities and feel that, uh, systems of sexism and racism and classism and genderism influenced me on a daily basis, especially when I'm in the classroom.

I actually think I'm a little bit more explicit with how intersectionality might influence what I'm doing. Intersectionality for me is embodied in CRT. Um, and so I've already mentioned, you know, I use different themes or I'm very intentional about whose scholarship I'm putting into the syllabus. Um, but I also am very, I've written about the misuse and the use of intersectionality in higher education.

And so, students know that I'm going to be very critical about how they're using intersectionality, because again, intersectionality like anti-racism and CRT has become kind of this buzz word, but also these really powerful frameworks to view higher education. But I think it's really, really important that we don't de-politicize the, the theory that we don't dilute its power by saying.

Oh, you know, the intersections of the intersectionality of identity. Like for some reason that just grinds my gears. I was tweeting about it the other day, where it's like, intersectionality of identity is not a thing. Right. Um, so I'm, I really pushed back where I really am in trying to make sure that students are understanding of intersectionality, maybe not correctly, because I don't think there's a correct way, but in a, in a more powerful way and a less diluted way. And one of the ways I do that is by having students read Crenshaw's 1989 article or 1991 article. Um, and, and not just using, you know, the MMDI.

Uh, which is a student development theory and saying, that's intersectionality. How do you bring that into the classroom? Like, what do you think those seminal pieces are doing that allows, you know, some of the deeper thinking around intersectionality to surface in your classroom? Yeah, absolutely. I immediately go to the three forms of intersectionality, which in my research on how we've used and misused, its scholars really don't use it three forums and people don't know that there's actually three forms of intersectionality that Crenshaw talks about in the 1991 article, which is, um, based on or centered on the rape and battery of women of color in the U S and these forms are structural intersectionality, representational, intersectionality, and political intersectionality.

You know, I don't want to lock myself in or others into how they use it, but really political intersectionality has allowed allowing me to think and teach in a manner that really explores how people are, are, um, are, I guess, imprisoned? That's, that's the word that comes to mind or, or stuck in a chasm when they have these multiple identities.

Right? So, it really talks about how anti-racist discourse really centers, men of color, black men, and how feminist discourse centers, white women. And then you have these women of color who are falling into a chasm and are upholding these discourses. Right. But aren't seen by these discourses. And so, the way that I, that influences me in the Academy in the classroom is to really acknowledge like who is speaking, who is not being seen by me, by their peers and also by the curriculum. Right? There's also structural intersectionality, which talks about we have all these ways in which the structures of higher education, the structures of the U S really benefit those who have privilege because we are mapping our resources onto the most privileged groups.

So, for instance, sexual violence resource centers, very much center on white women and white women's survivorhood. They don't account for intergenerational trauma. They don't

account for the ways that parents aren't often going to be disclosed to because there were maybe shame within the culture. Right?

And so, the way that I think about that in the classroom is again, like what is going on in the lives of students and how our resources that we're putting on our syllabus. Right? So, the center for accessible education, how are they not so accessible to these students of color, to these queer students, to these queer trans students of color.

Right? But I'm teaching. Um, and then finally, there's representational intersectionality, which really gets at how. You know, for the, for a short way to kind of condense it is how our culture, our society is riddled with stereotypes that the students are bringing into the classroom and very much stereotypes of their own cultural, own racial identity.

Right? And that they're adopting these and behaving in certain ways. And so, it's very much how do I dispel these stereotypes? How do I push against them? How do we talk about how do I allow students to talk about like, Whoa, my culture says and told me this, or socialized me in this way? And that's what I'm bringing into the classroom.

And this is what I'm, this is the meaning I'm making of this. So those were just some of the ways that I, I put intersectionality into the class a little bit more directly. That's fantastic. Thank you so much. Saran. What are your thoughts? Um, so a couple of things with, um, yeah, intersectionality, I think Professor Crenshaw would also argue that it's gotten the buzzword kind of, um, open air quotes a lot in terms of how it is applied in research, um, and how it is a name and, you know, uh, for the better parts of doing this research study that came out recently, um, with some of the sisters scholars and I, when we looked at 30 years of research and across these 680 articles, Some things that were pervasive that really were illuminated even through that research process, which took us about four years is that each of us really underwent so many critical changes within how we really were.

Um, I think that much more intentional about the way in which we not just teach, study research and became consumers off intersectional work. And we're deliberate in how we were going to assign, um, do our assessments, right. In that way, who were we naming now? I'll be very honest. I'm very, I'm biased to two categories of, um, research subjects, which are black woman, black, Caribbean woman in particular.

And when that happens, my expertise are definitively locked into that area. And I'm seeing this because in doing this. I am reminded that for us to teach in a way that is edifying and strengths-based focus, we are centering also aspects of who we are. So, in just talks about this theory becomes and this framing and the three prongs off the original framing becomes like embodied texts, embodied theory.

It's true. Um, it's to, uh, a strength of us, but it's also to a fault. And the reason why I would only say fault or challenge is really because. That's the, that's my prism. That's my lens. That's the way in which I look through things through and want to work through. And so, when I'm talking about research and literature and trying to pull on it, I do worry about myself falling into the exclusionary category to be quite honest, because I am centered on.

Black feminist exhibition, especially Afro Caribbean, feminist theories and how that censors and does not center in work and everything that belongs to that, the literature going back, whether it's colonial diasporic across the diaspora, post diaspora, et cetera. And so that's where my area is. And so, I find myself constantly.

And this is what I was talking about at work in progress. I find myself constantly wanting to push my students to think in that way. What is their specialty do? Are they understanding and knowing who they are at the core and thereby researching, writing, knowing their purpose as well? And that's hard.

Because I am biased towards that lens and it's a very singular lens. It is Africa, Caribbean woman in particular and or experiences. Right. And what that signals for me constantly is trying to tap myself to be more open, more guided, more inclusive. Um, but going back to, is this enough? Can it be enough for white men studying white men it's enough, right.

And there is no shame on it. There is no feeling of inadequacy is when you look through these lens, you want to say to yourself, well, you know, this is my focus. This is all I can, this is all I can give you right now. And it's my specialty area. Cause it's all I think through work through and knew through.

Um, but I find that in our institutions, that imprisonment that Jess was saying. What professor Laurie patent has said. Davis has said is institutionalized, sanctioned violence on us, both in the political, structural, and representational that we're constantly having to go above and beyond work twice as much because the policies just aren't fit for us to do, do the research that we want to do.

Embodied in who we are. It's almost like we have to feel ashamed to do that. In many ways. I find that here at Yukon, I've phoned that previously at my institution as well, because doing that type of research for whatever reason, just isn't enough. And, um, I grapple with that as a tenured professor, trying to find that space of.

Saying that no, it is enough. It needs to be enough because had I been white and male hetero, it would be enough, but it is, I've found it's in so many instances, intersectionality isn't enough, um, saying that you're a CRT scholar, isn't enough. And I'm saying it not because of, or per view because of our lenses, but how we are also viewed in the Academy.

So, when you first asked about how the Academy's going to receive these scholars, the Academy is going to be the very, the very body, the very structural and political body. That is spoken about intersectionality that will reject these scholars, even with the happy talk I'm doing it because they can't solely focus on what they embody and what they want to do.

That's fascinating. Thank you so much for your insightful answers, for sure. I can pick up that the both of you bring not only a breadth of experience, but also a true passion for what you investigate, not only what you investigate, but how you, how you put it into practice, what experiences do you bring into the classroom and how do you think that came to influence your way of teaching and your way of practicing anti-racist teaching?

So, um, I think there was, um, I'm living in a couple of different countries in the world. Hence the global lens. I do have a lot of things and one particular country. I won't out them. I should probably, but I want, um, one particular country, I was called the N word. Um, walking down by a group of skinheads and I was studying at their most formidable institution and the actual countries in central Europe.

So, there's not too many. Right? And that was at that moment, I thought to myself and I was getting my second master's degree at the time. And I thought to myself, my goodness, I'm getting a second master's degree, but all I'm ever seen outwardly is the N word. Right? And what I mean, and the visceral is threat, not just the emotional, psychological threat, but the physical harm.

Um, so when I, at that point I had only studied business international relations. Cause those were my focus points. Education was not in it to be quite honest with you, but it was seemingly at that point I questioned everything about understanding why and what I'm supposed to be doing in an international plane, no matter, you know, going to their most prestigious institution, it didn't matter because, Oh, it's widely.

I would always be viewed through the eyes of these white supremacists, literally white supremacists. And so, at that point started this real shift in my entire educational pathway. Um, how could I leverage education for economic transformation and development in, um, global Southern countries to be quite honest.

So that was the pathway that really did that. And then when I got into the program, I started to really look through that. There was a course, um, that Professor Tuitt taught, it was a social historical, cultural just kind of helped me. I think you took it as well by, but he had us do our autobiographical journeys.

And I'd always tell people that that was the most pivotal assignment I've ever done to date because that autobiographical narrative that we had to do was then going to be deconstructed through a critical race lens. And essentially what it did was tear apart every style, not style, um, nostalgia and nostalgic memory of your educational beginnings.

And it ripped it apart, even in an international space where I've spent majority of my schooling outside of the United States. And so, what that did was signaled that all my goodness. Education on is pervasively, racist and colonialist. And there is before that we didn't have the lingo of anti-blackness then, but when I look back at it now well, most of us have gone through is essential and anti-blackness curriculum. And it was very pervasive in my curriculum going through a, you know, a former British colony and even into the United States and when I was in central Europe. And so, it tore all the nostalgia away and it ripped it apart. Um, for us to rebuild and for us to rebuild a narrative through a critical conscious lens.

And so, I thought about what that did and how it created, um, this kind of real answer to that day when I was called the N word, walking down those streets, and I thought, this is it. This is why I need to do this is to figure out one's purpose in really change in the status quo. And so, yeah, that's. Best parts of the journey and the continued journey I would argue.

Yeah, I love, I love hearing the journey Saran but also that the journey involves some of the similar people, same people. Um, so I think we'd like tiptoed around it, but Saran and I overlapped in our PhD program for a year, um, at the University of Denver. And we've mentioned a few people that I think have been influential to our research and our teaching and our time in the Academy.

So, Dr. Frank Tuitt and Dr. Lori Patton Davis. Um, and so I, you know, I bring a lot of stuff to the classroom, um, in the sense of my own stuff. And one thing that Dr. Tuitt immediately taught me and all of the students. And I actually don't think I ever had Dr. Tuitt as a professor, but he was somewhat of a supervisor when I worked in my internship at University of Denver, but he was very explicit and has written on the topic of, of being, you know, don't ask your students to self-reflect and share their own experiences if you're not also going to self-reflect and share your own experiences.

And so that is something that I bring into the classroom and I learned directly from his writing, um, the. I mean, basically the, I teach in the way that I teach because of the way that I was taught. Um, and it isn't actually very much like the negative experiences that have informed it. I have been very, very blessed in my academic, my educational trajectory to have amazing courses, amazing professors.

Um, I went to a Liberal Arts college, Occidental College in LA, and I still remember one of the most critical turning points was a course entitled Whiteness that was taught by Dr. Elmer Griffin. And it was dialogue based and it just blew my mind. We were reading James Baldwin and, and other influential writers.

And then from there, I went to my master's program and was taught by, um, Sue Rankin, Robert Reason, and Dr. Kimberly Griffin. And again, they're teaching. I wouldn't say it was anti-racist, but it was very much at that time, social justice focused because social justice was the buzzword at the moment.

Right? So that's interesting too, to see the trajectory. So social justice, and then I go to University of Denver and that was really the turning point because I had really the most critical and crucial person. Um, in my educational journey and in the reason that I teach in the way I do is Dr. Lori Patton Davis, because she just really like sticks her feet in teaching.

I mean, and in that syllabus and she has an unapologetic, you know, she says white, white supremacy. She tells you why she's saying and doing the things that she is doing, doing the things with the syllabus. And so, um, it really is about these. These individuals, these people of color, these professors of color that have taught me by doing, um, to, to teach, to teach in the manner that I teach.

I, I wish just, you know, side note, I guess, somewhat and not. I wish that, um, you know, conferences. We could, we could somehow talk more about teaching, but do it in a manner of like going to someone's course. Right? Like I want Lori Patton Davis and Frank to it to like join, teach a course session at ASHE.

Right. And that I learned so much more by doing and seeing, like, I'm not going to go to a. To a session on like, here's how you do this. Well, I want to sit in someone's class and I want to

learn, I miss that so much. So that is so true. Jess, Oh my goodness. That is so true. Yeah. A hundred percent. I agree with you.

And that is, that directly speaks to my, uh, my research heart, because I love. Um, doing research on college teaching. And the only way I get insight into it is getting in the classroom. Like almost all my research is inside of the classroom, because there's no other way from, from my perspective. Um, but interestingly that you bring them both up because there are next.

Yeah. So, I'm so excited that, um, you're both bringing them up and giving them a warm introduction because Dr. Lori Patton Davis and Dr. Frank Tuitt, it will be co-teaching in a way, because there'll be the joining together, um, on the next episode. And so, we'll be learning from them about what they do. So, thank you for lifting them up and in this episode and getting our audience ready for their awesomeness next time around. I know Omar has one more question to ask. You, and then I'm going to wrap it up for us. This has been such a great conversation. Omar, you wanted to ask one more thing. Yes, thank you, both. Uh, Jessica and Saran for your thoughtful answers. Um, the, both of you touched on something that I found to be interesting, and it's something I'm delving more into in my research interest and it's how geography impacts the implementation, it can impact the implementation previous to my transition to UConn, I was working at a community college and anti-racist teaching was very much a buzz word, and I saw it. Used and implemented in different ways in Arizona, as opposed to what I'm seeing in the state of Connecticut and at UConn specifically.

Um, however, you know, I've, I've come to realize that anti-racist teaching has numerous gaps and specifically at educational institutions with Jessica, you mentioned that you experienced yourself at the University of Kansas, whether it's gaps in, you know, student development gaps in departments, even in the curriculum and what, what scene and you know, it's interesting because like that transformative experience, it's a process and it takes time and pulling from one of my adult learning classes, there's this disorienting dilemma that needs to take place for individuals to kind of be like in shock. And then they kind of like learn to reason and synthesize that experience and then they can do something with it.

Hopefully let's like best case scenario. Right? Um, and just thinking about 2020, like I think my disoriented miss my disorienting dilemma has been COVID-19 and I don't know if it's in the same way for the three of you, but, you know, it's, it's, uh, you know, it's just been so interesting to think back and it's like, okay, well we've survived these last nine months.

Like, what have we learned from it? You know, have we become better human beings? Like I definitely have come to value and love my friends and family more than ever before. And their health, it takes the meaning, like stay healthy or be safe to a whole new level. Um, and on that note, just to ask a contemporary question, how do the both of you believe that COVID-19 has impacted.

The field of anti-racist teaching. Sure. I think, um, you know, I don't know how to answer this question yet because I'm going to have to reflect if, and when we're no longer online teaching because of COVID. Um, I had to be, so in some ways I want to say it hasn't impacted

it. Like, of course it's impacted it, but when it comes to anti-racist teaching, it doesn't matter where you are in the sense of like online or not.

Um, you know, it, you should still be implementing as much as you can. Some of these tools that are going to lead to deconstructing racism and white supremacy. Um, and so that's, that's in one vein. I actually think in some ways it's made it even more interesting and maybe even more, I'm more able to influence or do these things because for one, for one thing, Um, now everybody has their pronouns or should have their pronouns right on the screen.

Right now, I have Jessica Harris, she, her, um, I also have been telling students and want to continue to tell students, put on what land you're occupying as well, right. To there. And so, it's just a kind of a heightened layer of being like, okay, well, how can we actually think about anti-racist teaching in a different manner online?

And so, I just want to say it's. It has changed it. I don't fully know how yet at this point, you know, I think just teaching in general, it has changed and shifted. Um, but I just want to stress that anti-racist teaching isn't geographically or physically bound, right. That we should be doing it. And we're trying to do it in every space that we can.

Um, and I think I'm going to be very transparent that absolutely with faculty who had to push their class online in March, April, May, even the summer, there should be some leeway there, but at this point we've been doing it for a while. And I think that there shouldn't be an excuse for A. not teaching in a manner that is serving students and B. isn't teaching in a manner that's anti-racist right.

Or deconstructing white supremacy. So definitely echo, um, everything Jess said. I would argue that anti-racist teaching is the full it's the full embodied experience as well. And I miss, I absolutely miss seeing that body language, the motive coding of students, um, when they are grimacing with a concept, a context and wrestling with, um, uh, reading.

And in many ways, this COVID-19 an online platform has provided the, I literal screen, a literal screen that they can hide from doing that. And as the professor, if they go all blank on the screen and even if they, their faces are there, you can't see the visceral reaction. What are you feeling? Having them sit within it and not even have to say it, but for it to be completely emotive.

And I miss that, I miss seeing that I miss understanding that I missed the body vibe of that and vibing what. But I can't in Jamaica vibing our students to understand the communal space, the environment, and has the learning environment been disrupted. It is very, I've found that COVID has made it difficult to, to check the temperature of the room and the space, because it's, it's just hard.

It was hard before, but it is impossible sometime when it's cloaked and our screens are off and you're like, you can't really get to them. You're like, I want to test the temperature, but you're not letting me test it. And I can't push you because if I push you too hard, you're going to be like, Whoa, lady!

Whoa! So. I can't do that in this space. And I have not figured out how to do it in this space. So that's one thing, big piece of it is the body language is missing. That emotional connection is really missing. The dissonance of that emotional connection is missing as well. Um, but I will echo exactly what Jess said that it should be.

It should be happening regardless and integrative. But the other piece about this that's combated, which I think some of us may have experienced. Um, I'm doing a photo voice study with some colleagues in the Caribbean. I'm looking at Caribbean, um, adult learners, and we're discovering this loss of self and loss of their former selves and the need for grieving and how grief has become so personified and synonymous in a COVID era.

And there is an interesting trend that I'm seeing in that students who are trying to also go through this process with us are grieving, but they don't know what they're grieving. So, they're angry, they're anxious, they're fearful. And you're seeing all those tenets and you're trying to reach, but the reach is that much more difficult in on a screen.

Seems like there's a lot of emotional connection. That's also part of the teaching. That's hard to do via a screen, you know, and, and I really appreciate you bringing that to the table. Well, we're wrapping up our podcast at this point, and I want to close out with just asking you very. Brief piece of advice that you would give our audience and our audience might be all on, you know, different ranges of skill, talents, knowledge.

What's one thing that you would share with our audience, particularly for someone who wants to enact antiracist teaching with a focus on intersectionality. What's one thing you want to leave the audience with? I'll start with Jessica please. Um, this is the one thing I didn't really think of, but I would.

You know, I would read, I would read works by Derek Bell by Kimberlé Crenshaw, by Mari Matsuda. I'm sure. Also, Ibram X. Kendi who has written a book on anti-racist teaching, but also from there, you don't have to adhere to any one definition or any one reading it's really find what works for you. Find what speaks to you, find what works for the students that you're, you're interacting with.

And so, read, do the work. I would say, in addition to all the critical scholarship that gestures named, which are profound, you must do the self-work to know why exactly you're going to do this. Or else we've, we've been both taught that our intent will not equalize our impact and we can actually cause much more harm.

And so, if we're going to do this work, you got to first understand why you're doing this. What's your purpose in doing is your intentionality in doing this and doing the hard work? And once you solidified that, say it out loud, please say it out loud. Hear yourself. Say it before you go on, say it in front of a classroom.

Filled with mains that you can do a lot of impact on. So, I would say that really doing the self-work, the hard work to understand what is your purpose in doing anti-racist teaching first. Thank you so much. That's valuable advice all around and. So grateful to both of you for all the wisdom that you dropped on this episode, Dr. Stewart, Dr. Harris, thank you so much for being a part of this first episode and Omar, thank you for co-hosting with me. You're

fantastic. And I really love the questions you added to the conversation. It's been a pleasure! Thanks to all of you.

If you want to learn more, check out our podcast website at cetl.uconn.edu.

There you will find the HEART Podcast banner and a list of resources noted during this episode and stay tuned for our next episode, focused on how intersectionality can be a lens for anti-racist teaching within STEM. This next episode will air on Wednesday, February 24th, and features Dr. Stephanie Santos from the University of Connecticut, as well as Dr. Nicole Joseph and Dr. Luis Leyva from Vanderbilt University.

Before we close out, we want to express our deep appreciation to our guests, Dr. Stewart and Dr. Harris. And also thank our colleagues at the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University of Connecticut for all of their support and assistance with this podcast, because it takes a village and it takes hard work.