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Diane B. Paul

EVERYDAY RACISM

The concept of "everyday racism" emerged in the 1980s and was meant to identify as theoretically relevant the lived experience of racial oppression. Everyday racism is not about racists, but about racist practice, meaning racism as common societal behavior. Racial inequality perseveres even when the dominant ideology mutes reference to color, as witnessed in the United States following the successes of the civil rights movement. Some use the term "color-blind racism" to account for racist systems without legally sanctioned race-supremacy ideology.

Racism is easily recognized in its extreme forms (e.g., white youth beating up and killing dark-skinned people), or in its overt forms (e.g., throwing bananas at black players on European soccer fields). Everyday racism can be more coded (a white teacher saying to an African-American student: "How come you write so well?"); ingrained in institutional practice (appointing friends of friends for a position, as a result of which the workplace remains white); and not consciously intended (when lunch tables in a canteen or cafeteria are informally racially segregated and the white manager "naturally" joins the table with the white workers where only they will benefit from casually shared, relevant information and networking).

Everyday racism is a process of smaller and bigger day-to-day violations of the civil rights of ethnic minorities—and of their humanity and their dignity. Sometimes the meaning of the event remains contestable: Is it or is it not racial discrimination? It may take circumstantial evidence or inference from other experiences to understand the possible racial connotations. The outcome of an event is often more telling than the reported motive. Take the following example:

A 747 aircraft to Amsterdam has a business class section in the front, separated from economy class by a blue curtain with the sign "business class only." Various passengers sneak behind the curtain to use the business class lavatories right behind the divide. They happen to be white men. But when a young woman of color does the same thing, a flight attendant blocks her way, kindly explaining that she has to use the economy-class facilities. The entrance then gets sealed off with a food trolley.

Discrimination often operates through rules being applied differently or more strictly to people of color. But does this also apply to this particular case? Imagine the reply of the flight attendant: "We treat everybody equally." When told that others did the same thing, the response is: "Oh really, I did not notice." Did the young woman get caught because her brown skin color stands out? Did the white men get through because they blend in more easily in the predominantly white (male) business class, indicative of global institutionalized racial (and gender) inequality? This surely

must have happened on other flights, and whites too must have been sent back at times. Was the limit reached when a person of color started to take the same liberties? It could be shortsighted to quickly downplay the racial dimension of put-downs and other demotions with seemingly race-neutral arguments such as “it could have happened to anyone.”

The fact of the matter is that in this particular situation the woman of color was the only one to be put in her place. Perceiving the event as racially significant in its implications reveals how one event, where the person of color is the only one to receive less favorable treatment, links to both historical and contemporary patterns of racial discrimination. Any situation with random options between better or worse treatment can be a vehicle for racial discrimination, whether it occurs in or outside institutions, in schools, at work, through the media, at a shopping mall, or in the neighborhood.

At work, the accumulation of seemingly petty experiences of disrespect, humiliations, rejections, blocked opportunities, and hostilities symbolically signifies the “glass ceiling” or “concrete wall,” where color is a determining factor for upward mobility or for moving sideways, to the center of an organization. Because human beings communicate mostly through images and words, everyday racism is often expressed visually and discursively in what is being said or portrayed and how it is being said. In addition, facial expressions or avoidance of contact can “say” a lot too. Such behavior may even feel trivial or normal.

Everyday racism means that members of the dominant racial/ethnic group automatically favor members of their own group, not simply because they want to be with those they feel are their own, but because they believe, deep down, that white lives count more, that they are more human, that theirs is a superior culture and a higher form of civilization than others. Yet it would be incorrect to see everyday racism simply as a black-versus-white phenomenon. When dominated groups internalize the belief that European-derived cultures are superior, they may themselves become agents of everyday racism.

Everyday racism may cause ethnic minorities to anticipate racism in their contacts with members of the dominant group regardless of whether they are actually discriminated against on each occasion. This is a strategy of self-protection. Counter to the common-sense belief that people of color are overly sensitive to discrimination, research has indicated that most people of color are reluctant to label a given situation as racism before carefully considering all other possible explanations to account for unfair treatment. On the contrary, the common-sense belief that racism is a problem of the past makes members of the dominant group insensitive in recognizing when and how racism permeates everyday life.

Everyday racism adapts to the culture, norms, and values of a society as it operates through the prevalent structures of power in society. The more status or authority involved, the greater the damage resulting from common-sense prejudiced statements and discriminatory behavior. When members of a parliament or legislature make discriminatory statements or sanction discriminatory policies in the course of their normal everyday duties, the safety and civil rights of ethnic minorities and refugees are at stake. When teachers underestimate, discourage, or ignore ethnic-minority children, the futures of ethnic-minority generations are at stake. When employers discriminate against people of color, jobs, incomes, and career mobility are at stake.

Everyday racism is not a singular act in itself, but the accumulation of small inequities. Expressions of racism in one particular situation are related to all other racist practices and can be reduced to three strands of everyday racism, which interlock as a triangle of mutually dependent processes: (1) The *marginalization* of those identified as racially or ethnically different; (2) the *problematization* of other cultures and identities; and (3) symbolic or physical *repression* of (potential) resistance through humiliation or violence. Accusations of oversensitivity about discrimination, continuous ethnic jokes, ridicule in front of others, patronizing behavior, rudeness, and other attempts to humiliate and intimidate can all have the effect of discouraging action against discrimination.

Although the term *everyday racism* has such an informal ring that it may sound as if it concerns relatively harmless and unproblematic events, it has been shown that the psychological distress due to racism on a day-to-day basis can have chronic adverse effects on mental and physical health. The anticipation that discrimination can happen becomes in itself a source of stress. The same holds true for fretting over how to respond, whether the response has been effective, and whether victimization will follow. Studies have demonstrated a link between exposure to everyday racism and blood pressure. This is not to say that targets of racism are only victims, powerless or passive against the forces of exclusion. Throughout history, active community resistance against racial discrimination has emerged from anger about the indignities of everyday life.

Legal battles against racial discrimination are a mixed bag, even with progressive laws in place. The European Equal Treatment Law, for instance, follows the principle of a shared burden of proof. If the party who feels discriminated against provides “facts” that give reason to believe that racial discrimination may have occurred, it is the other party’s responsibility to prove that the accusation is not true. But what the “facts” are is a tricky issue. The accused party is likely to deny that anything happened and witnesses may refuse to cooperate out of fear of retaliation. As a result,

ethnic minorities often refrain from filing complaints, feeling their stories will not be believed anyway, or because they have doubts about the gains to be made. Studies have shown that testimonies and stories can provide relevant and detailed information about *what* happens and *how* racial injustices happen. The more these stories are voiced and circulated, the more sensitivity people develop for recognizing these everyday violations as forms of everyday racism.

SEE ALSO *Color-Blind Racism; Critical Race Theory; Institutional Racism; Orientalism; Racial Formations; Scientific Racism, History of.*

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Philomena Essed

EXPLOITATION

In the social sciences, the term *exploitation* is generally used to refer to economic relations of production or exchange in which a dominant social class or group benefits by using the labor or resources of a subordinate social class or group. The term has been used in analyses of social class, of colonialism and imperialism, and of racial and ethnic relations within nation-states.

In *Capital*, (1967 [1867]) Karl Marx defined exploitation as characterizing relations of production in which nonproducers control the access of direct producers to essential means of production (e.g., land, tools, or raw materials), thus allowing the systematic appropriation of a surplus of goods from direct producers by nonproducers. For Marx, exploitation is a feature of all class societies, and it can be measured by the difference between necessary labor (that performed to produce the laborers' own subsistence or its equivalent value) and surplus labor (that which produces the surplus appropriated by the nonproducers). Necessary labor is not defined as a minimum subsistence level required for survival.

Rather, the ratio between necessary and surplus labor, as well as the form of surplus appropriation, depends on the historically developed relations of production. The appropriation of surplus constitutes the basis for renewed exploitation because it reinforces the control of the exploiters and the dependence of the exploited.

Although Marxists have analyzed exploitation in a variety of class societies (e.g., slavery, feudalism), the concept is most fully developed in the analysis of capitalist relations of production. In capitalist societies, relations of production take on the appearance of relations of exchange. Labor power thus becomes a market commodity. Unlike other commodities, however, it has the ability to produce more value than is embodied in it. This is the surplus value appropriated by the capitalists.

The literature on colonialism and imperialism uses the concept of exploitation to define the relationships between the imperial nations (the core) and the colonized regions (the periphery). The spread of capitalist relations of production from the core to the periphery required the separation of farmers and artisans in the periphery from direct access to the means of production, thereby creating a class of laborers who must sell their labor power to survive. In *Unequal Development* (1976) Samir Amin coined the term "superexploitation" to describe how the low wages of the periphery have allowed transnational capitalists to extract a larger surplus than is possible in the core nations. A similar conception is contained in the works of Andre Gunder Frank (e.g., *Lumpenbourgeoisie, Lumpendevelopment* 1972), who saw colonial class structures as permitting "ultra-exploitation."

The role of racial or ethnic discrimination in imperialism has been explicitly addressed by several authors. Marx came to view anti-Irish sentiment as a major obstacle to working-class solidarity in England. In an 1870 letter he wrote:

The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nations and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker (*Selected Correspondence* 1975).

W. E. B. Du Bois embraced a Marxist analysis of imperialism in *The World and Africa* (1947), in which he argued that the British system of colonialism, which he saw as even more murderous than slavery, was based on the exploitation of native labor in their colonized homelands. Eric Williams also addressed exploitation in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), arguing that many of the largest fortunes of English capitalists had their origins in the exploitation of African slave labor in the American colonies.