Culturally sustaining pedagogy in higher education: teaching so that Black Lives Matter

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to show how the principles of Black Lives Matter can be used to enact a culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) in higher education settings, particularly in small colleges that serve significant populations of students who are underrepresented in higher education.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on examples from college courses in media and society, organizational communication, and interpersonal communication, the case study shows application of the principles of Black Lives Matter in the college classroom at two different institutions in the urban Northeast USA, where the majority of the students are young people of color and/or first-generation college students.

Findings – The paper shows how founding principles of Black Lives Matter, particularly diversity, intersectionality, loving engagement, and empathy, can be used to guide concrete pedagogical practices. It provides examples of how to use Black Lives Matter as a framework to enhance and improve college teaching to make it more diverse and inclusive.

Research limitations/implications – This case study is based on the author's experiences teaching at two majority-minority colleges in Greater Boston, Massachusetts, USA. This paper is not the result of a systematic research study.

Practical implications – This paper has significant implications for how to enact CSP in higher education settings. This paper is valuable to those looking for specific strategies to include more diverse and inclusive teaching strategies. This research also shows both the utility and impact of Black Lives Matter when applied to higher education.

Social implications – This paper improves public understanding of Black Lives Matter as a social movement.

Originality/value – Since the Black Lives Matter movement is fairly new, there is limited academic research on it. Further, there has not been attention to how Black Lives Matter provides insight into pedagogy, particularly in higher education.

Keywords Teaching, Higher education, Organizations, Diversity, Black Lives Matter

Paper type Case study

Introduction

I had barely walked through the classroom door when my students shouted, "Did you see halftime last night?" "Did you see Bae? She was amazing!" "Why was Coldplay even there? The night belonged to Beyoncé!" It was the Tuesday after the Super Bowl, and their staccato questions and comments focused intently on Beyoncé's halftime show. Viewing the show at home, through the lens of the students I teach at a small college serving majority-minority undergraduate students in a large city in the Northeast USA, I was ready for these questions and comments. Beyoncé is a hero to many of my students. Given the interest, I led a discussion of her performance briefly that day. We discussed the significance of the outfits worn by Beyoncé's dancers, which echoed the Black Panthers. Many students were unfamiliar with the group's commitments and activism, so I shared clips from a documentary about the group (Nelson, 2015). The students made connections between Black Panthers and earlier class discussions of the Black Lives Matter movement. The topic for that Media & Society class was the impact of politics on media, so we discussed racialized and gendered aspects of Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson's 2004 performance in relation to political regulation of media (Eko, 2016; Billitteri, 2012).

This anecdote from my teaching is an example of how I have attempted to enact culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) through the application of the guiding principles of Black Lives Matter (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2010). This pedagogy is founded upon affirming the dignity, relevance, and importance of students' cultures to the process of learning. I have used the principles of Black Lives Matter as a way to apply this pedagogy to my teaching in media and communication courses. Black Lives Matter was founded by Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza in 2013. The movement resists the endemic racism in our society, highlights the continuing oppression of black people, and affirms the dignity and resilience of black people (Black Lives Matter, 2016). Because of its genesis in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin, as well as police killings of Michael Brown, Philando Castile, and Eric Garner, BLM is often viewed as a resistance movement to police brutality. Further, because the movement began with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter, many assume that it is an online activist group. While both of these are important aspects of its roots and ongoing work, Black Lives Matter is now a black liberation movement with chapters in communities across the USA that work on a range of issues that affect black people (Taylor, 2016a, b). A particular focus of Black Lives Matter is "to center those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements" (Black Lives Matter, 2016).

Beginning in 2015, student-led activism inspired by Black Lives Matter became an increasing presence on college campuses (Hartocollis and Bidgood, 2015; Somashekhar, 2015) and even spread to public school systems (Anderson, 2015). In contrast to this uptick, I was curious that on my own campuses, in which students of color make up a significant percentage of the overall student population, there was little engagement with Black Lives Matter beyond programming for Black History Month. The students did not bring it into their everyday conversations, on-campus activism, or classroom discussions.

From a faculty perspective, Marcia Chatelain and Frank Leon Roberts led the way in a small but growing number of Black Lives Matter college courses around the USA. The movement is also a burgeoning area of academic research (Bailey and Leonard, 2015; Ransby, 2015; Rickford, 2016; Taylor, 2016a, b). Given the dearth of discussion around Black Lives Matter on my campus, I began the process of engaging the movement as part of my pedagogical orientation to teaching at a majority-minority college. Although I was not sure that it was the proper role for me as a white faculty member, it seemed increasingly imperative that I incorporate Black Lives Matter – the contemporary struggle for equality and dignity amongst black people in the USA – into my pedagogical practice. Doing this was a small but significant way to support underrepresented students in my classroom teaching.

As an educator, I have always valued learning that is engaged and relevant to my student's lives. This means that the classroom should be a place where all people's backgrounds are seen as valid to the course subject matter. When I began teaching at more diverse institutions, I had to consider how to do this more effectively. This led me to culturally responsive pedagogy, which spoke to the student populations I taught at these institutions (Gay, 2010). However, I was less clear about what this theory might look like in practice and how to enact these values. The application of Black Lives Matter guiding principles has transformed my commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy into teaching that better reflects equality, diversity, and inclusion and, perhaps more importantly, prepares students for their future careers and communities. In this paper, I discuss my experience teaching at two different diverse colleges in which a majority of students are underrepresented amongst college students more generally. These two institutions have percentages of black students that are double to triple the national average of black students, who currently comprise 14.5 percent of all college students in the USA (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Goals and motivation

In this essay, I reflect on the development of my teaching over the last three years, as a white professor at majority-minority colleges who has sought to make my teaching relevant to my students' lives. In reflecting on these experiences, I show the utility of Black Lives Matter guiding principles in enacting a CSP in the college setting. This reflection is also fueled by conversations about the importance of white people standing up for racial justice. As Susana Morris of *Crunk Feminist Collective* wrote after the 2016 US Presidential election, "White people – so-called liberal, progressive, radical, dare I say "woke" white people – it's time for you to do your motherfucking work. Organize, mobilize, and strategize with and for *your* people. Work on uprooting white supremacy at your job, place of worship, and at the Thanksgiving table" (Morris, 2016a, b). I am a member of several online academic discussion groups where people of color forthrightly pointed out the needs for white people to educate themselves and take responsibility for racism so that the burden of the emotional labor of fighting racism does not also fall on those who are most harmed by racism. As a college professor, one of the most important places I can do this is in my classroom and on my campus.

Further, this is an attempt to enact allyship for racial justice. Allies are people who fight oppression by advocating with and for those who are oppressed (Washington and Evans, 1991). Being an ally requires that members of dominant groups give up their privilege to ignore race and work to challenge oppressive practices and assumptions (Wildman, 2014). Interestingly, many campuses that I have worked on have extensive ally training programs to support and affirm LGBTQ students. However, in my experience, there are no similar college-wide programs to support students of color. Higher education remains a space of white privilege, which Black Lives Matter aims to disrupt (Bender, 2017). Thus, allyship in this context requires, as Morris exhorts, that I do the work to figure out how to be an ally to the Black Lives Matter movement in my role as a professor.

One of the most impactful ways that I can do this is, first, to create courses that are founded upon and demonstrate racial equality and inclusion. Second, I can also write about how movements articulated and built people of color (including culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy and Black Lives Matter) can provide guidance. This is not to co-opt the meaning of these movements, but rather it is my attempt to put them to use through one of my primary daily contexts – teaching. The idea that people, particularly white people, might learn from the organizing and leadership of black people, is unfortunately uncommon. My adoption of Black Lives Matter's principles as CSP attempts to make this more common. This essay is about what I have learned from Black Lives Matter and the generative foundation it has provided to re-construct my pedagogy. The principles of Black Lives Matter, particularly diversity, intersectionality, loving engagement, and empathy, provide concrete strategies for more inclusive, effective college teaching.

In short, Black Lives Matter offers a way to constitute a CSP, particularly for and about those historically marginalized within US institutions of higher education and communication and media industries. To begin, I survey research on culturally responsive pedagogy, as well as CSP. In doing so, I consider the way that my location in higher education settings builds upon and extends theorizing about CSP. I then discuss how guiding principles of Black Lives Matter offer a way to enact CSP. Next, I explain how I apply this pedagogy in higher education. I provide examples from different courses to show both obvious and less apparent ways to shift one's teaching so that Black Lives Matter. Finally, I close by offering more general insights about how to enact a CSP based in Black Lives Matter, no matter the institution in which one works or the disciplines in which one teaches.

Literature review

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), theorized by Ladson-Billings (1995), includes three components: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness.

The theory has focused mostly on settings in which all or most of the students were underrepresented minorities (Hefflin, 2002). The vast majority of research in CRP is focused on application in primary and secondary schools, particularly in urban and minority neighborhoods (Gay, 2010; Hefflin, 2002; Milner, 2011; Young, 2010). CRP does not separate academic success from success in social contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Thus, teachers themselves work to identify and include educational content relevant to students (Hastie *et al.*, 2006). The focus of CRP is often about lesson planning and making decisions for students (Young, 2010; Milner, 2011). Another concern is how to bring in culturally responsive teaching materials within the stringent mandates of required curriculum and assessment (Hefflin, 2002; Sleeter, 2012).

As a pedagogical framework, CRP aims to preserve students' cultures and counter negative effects of mainstream messages about those cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1992). The goal is to empower students "with knowledge and practices to operate successfully in mainstream society" (Osborne, 1996, p. 292). In order to sustain students who come from backgrounds very different than a teacher's own, engaging students' cultural capital is central (Goldenberg, 2013). CRP is an invitation to re-vision teaching practices to better align with students (Lopez, 2011). In critically assessing CRP, there is a danger that teachers may inadvertently use "stereotyped ideas about how and what […] [students] should learn" (Dutro *et al.*, 2008, p. 37). Even with preparation and knowledge, teachers cannot predict how and whether students will relate to the material. Therefore, developing teachers' cultural competence is important rather than solely focusing on students' cultural competence (Milner, 2011). The practice of CRP requires critical reflection by the educator to examine assumptions and biases.

A perhaps less prominent part of this theory is to challenge racism and other issues of social injustice (Young, 2010). Ladson-Billings (2014) expressed dismay that this critical, activist aspect of CRP has not been as widely adopted. This means engaging students to examine issues that affect their lives and communities. Using the pedagogy to create sociopolitical consciousness "allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). Students engage the relationship between dominant cultures and the cultural groups of which they are a part (Hyland, 2009), which can help them to identify and respond to inequities in their local communities and the larger culture (Milner, 2011).

Building on this, Paris (2012) calls for a CSP. This shift emphasizes cultural pluralism and equality as specific pedagogical goals, resisting political and educational practices that emphasize uniformity and homogenization. Thus, teaching should not just relate to students' diversity but "support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). As recognized by the scholars of CRP, this sustenance supports both traditional, evolving, and hybrid forms of cultural expression, whether mainstream or marginal, which should be the foundation upon which effective teaching is built (Au, 2011; Paris and Alim, 2014). This relates to concern, discussed earlier, about not relying on stereotypes in an effort to acknowledge culture in the classroom.

The original motivation of CRP was to improve student learning and achievement in schools. Since minority students continue to be underrepresented and underperform than their white counterparts in college contexts, this goal is equally relevant to higher education. Overall, black students earn only 10 percent of college degrees in the USA (Naylor *et al.*, 2015). Hurtado and Ruiz (2012) demonstrated that the underrepresentation of students of color creates a negative campus climate for them. Their research shows that underrepresented minorities report higher rates of both overt and subtle bias and discrimination, even at institutions that are not predominantly white (Hurtado and Ruiz, 2015). This translates into negative learning environment and retention. The authors argue, "Race still matters, and students need

opportunities to learn about and experience diversity in college if higher education is to advance the social progress of diverse communities and produce diverse leaders for the nation" (p. 4).

Further, black undergraduates face structural issues of endemic racism, which often translates into a curriculum that does not relate to them and does not support their success on campus (Harper *et al.*, 2016). This undermines their persistence to graduation and overall academic achievement on college campuses. Given this racial inequality in terms of retention, graduate rates, and academic achievement, it is imperative that professors do more to support the success of black students. Further, while academic achievement is important in college, my goal as a professor is to prepare students for their workplaces and communities. Therefore, it is important to help students understand their future careers and communities, while also preparing them to both contribute to and change them to be more diverse and inclusive. A CSP is perfectly suited to this.

Another important difference in applying CSP at the college level is control over curriculum. I have greater latitude to choose the materials I include in my courses, as well as the ability to change them in response to current events or student interest. A CSP in college understands learning as a co-constructed process between students and professor as co-learners. One way of enacting CSP is "centering culture and difference in the teaching process" (Gay, 2013, pp. 48-49). In my teaching, this means that I address the complex contexts in which media and communication are created, including political and economic influences, as well as the implications for people's identities. In addition, I highlight the extent to which communication, including media, is a part of dominant culture, reflecting white, upper middle class, masculine, heterosexual identities and values. Further, CSP offers the opportunity to have students identify how they respond to a particular text. Thus, I work to have students (and myself) articulate how their backgrounds and experiences – which often differ from those who created and/or are represented in the texts we are discussing – relate to their interpretations of these texts and their approach to creating media and crafting communication themselves.

One criticism of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy is the difficulty in applying it (Young, 2010). Although the theoretical commitments of the pedagogy are clear, it is less clear what they actually look like in terms of concrete teaching practices. For the answer, I looked to the burgeoning movement for black dignity and autonomy, Black Lives Matter. In translating the theoretical commitments of CSP into the concrete context of college classes in media and communication, I have adopted the principles of Black Lives Matter, as articulated on the group's website (Black Lives Matter, 2016), as a way to enact CSP. These principles, formulated by the movement in 2016, are diversity, globalism, restorative justice, unapologetically black, collective value, transgender affirms, black women, black villages, empathy, black families, living engagement, queer affirming, and intergenerational.

Culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy began as a movement to center the backgrounds of minority students in a school system that generally treats their identities as irrelevant, if not inimical, to formal education. In expanding this pedagogy to higher education, we must reconfigure understanding of CSP as not just adding on to existing curriculum but requiring a radical commitment to pedagogy that is culturally sustaining, no matter the identities of students in our classrooms. Positioning Black Lives Matter as a tangible way to enact CSP has transformed my teaching. In using Black Lives Matter to inform my curriculum and classroom teaching, the movement's principles of diversity, loving engagement, empathy, and commitment to intersectionality help guide how I construct my courses and work with my students in the classroom. In essence, these are concrete principles through which I strive to enact a culturally relevant, sustaining pedagogy as a college professor. In the next section, I discuss what this looks like with specific examples from my teaching.

Black Lives Matter as CSP in college teaching

Diversity

According to Black Lives Matter, the principle of diversity is stated as "We are committed to acknowledging, respecting and celebrating difference(s) and commonalities" (Black Lives Matter, 2016). In translating this principle into a CSP, I have diversified perspectives and ideas that I engage with on a daily basis. This reflects the importance, within culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy, of teachers working to develop their own cultural competence. Black Lives Matter's focus on diversity has affected my teaching through a broadening and deepening of media I consume regularly. I have worked to seek out media written by and about black people, other people of color, as well as people with different religions, ethnicities, social classes, sexualities, and gender identities. My intent is not only to improve my understanding of experiences and perspectives different from my own but also as an important way of preparing courses that are culturally relevant. I regularly read and interact with writers from *The Root*, *Crunk Feminist Collective*, and *Africa is a Country*, as well as people of color in mainstream publications. By diversifying who I follow on Twitter to reflect diverse races and ethnicities, I aim to enact the Black Lives Matter's principle of diversity, which is evident in my curriculum choices.

BLM's guiding principle of diversity was a clarion call to radically transform standard course content and existing curriculum templates. I no longer looked to what colleagues were doing or materials shared with me in graduate school. I moved beyond prepared textbooks and instructional materials. Rather, I looked to my students as the starting point for course development. I considered their situations as fully and completely as I could, and I developed my courses from there. As I widened my consumption of diverse perspectives and consciously included the work of women and scholars of color, I also built in student engagement and participation as fundamental to my courses. I did a lot of work before the semester to find and organize content that reflected diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, geographic location, sexuality, gender identity, and class. This effort paid off as students came to see themselves – and people like them – represented in their college curriculum.

My 100-level Media and Society is a standard course that addresses industries, audiences, and effects. Nonetheless, the exemplars we engage in that class reflect a broad, deep commitment to diversity as articulated in the Black Lives Matter platform. We begin the course with an article that examines the role of social media in #BlackLivesMatter's creation and ongoing work (Stephen, 2015). Rather than a standard overview of course content and the first textbook chapter, this article serves as an interruption rather than introduction to mainstream curriculum. In my upper-division Organizational Communication course, Black Lives Matter also serves as a case study for organizing for social change. While Black Lives Matter is a well-known hashtag, students are often unfamiliar with its organizational culture and strategy. Thus, for homework, I assign my students to read and listen to interviews with the movement's founders (Garza, 2014; Shapiro, 2016), talks by leaders of the movement (Taylor, 2016a, b), as well as the website of the movement itself (Black Lives Matter, 2016). In a short writing assignment, and then class discussion, I ask students to connect the movement to important concepts in organizational communication such as identification, culture, and leadership. In my experience, students are particularly engaged to see how these issues manifest in a less typical organization that is focused on social change rather than corporate profits. Further, this focus also allows students to make connections between the values of Black Lives Matter and the way that these are enacted in the organizing of the movement itself.

Making Black Lives Matter an object of study does two important things in the classroom. First, it de-centers organizational communication as a managerial discourse that is racist, sexist, xenophobic, and heterosexist. Second, it centers Black Lives Matter as an important exemplar of organizing for social change. As a result, for black and non-black

students alike, this case study takes the experiences, and resulting organizing, of black people seriously as something from which we can learn and which is applicable to movement building in other contexts. This, again, demonstrates a culturally sustaining way of teaching organizational communication through the principles of Black Lives Matter.

The BLM principle of diversity enacts CSP in college courses in three distinctive ways. First, it ensures that non-white and other non-dominant media texts and mediamakers are at the heart of our study of media and communication. This means that students will discuss work about, and made by, as wide a variety of different kinds of people as possible, some of whom look like them. Also, this approach is committed to the representation of issues and experiences beyond those of importance or interest to white, male-dominated, upper class, heterosexual, cisgender media institutions and leaders. In other words, the experiences of my students matter, and I work hard to find media that engages and addresses their experiences. Finally, a true commitment to diversity, as articulated in the Black Lives Matter platform, requires not simply more balance and representation in terms of what is included on the syllabus, but also the syllabus must work to help the students understand and articulate the contributions of those considered marginal as important and valuable for all people. Issues of importance to so-called minority people and communities have insights and information important to all communities, and therefore deserve a place in mainstream media and communication courses.

Another easy, and perhaps obvious, way to enact a CSP is to make students' diverse experiences and identities central to learning in the course. In my Media and Society and Interpersonal Communication classes, I do this by having students contribute to the media texts we use in my courses. For both of these classes, students select media texts through which to apply their burgeoning knowledge in the course. For ease of analysis, students usually choose an advertisement, music video, episode of a television show, or scene from a feature film. This allows students to select a media text that they relate to and to provide serious analysis of its themes and apply relevant theorizing about media or interpersonal communication. This also flips the normal relationship between student and teacher regarding course content. When I share this assignment with students, I tell them that those who make the best case for their text – both its value as a media text or in illuminating interpersonal communication and their ability to connect their chosen text substantively through application of course concepts – will likely have their texts included in future iterations of the course. I discuss this further below.

In the last year, some examples of student work included music videos such as "If I Were a Boy" by Beyoncé and Lupe Fiasco's "Bad Bitch." In terms of television shows, students analyzed episodes of *Power, Orange is the New Black, Master of None*, and *Basketball Wives*. Students have also analyzed scenes from *Furious 7, Straight Outta Compton, Zootopia*, and *12 Years a Slave*. These media texts reflect Black Lives Matter's commitment to the centrality of black lives and experiences. In presenting these texts to the class, many students discussed both the importance of seeing people like themselves, their family members, and their friends as central to their selection of the text, as well as how these texts reflected and resonated with their own experiences of growing up black and/or in diverse neighborhoods. In some cases, students did not connect or agree with the representations in the media text. In either case, this provided the opportunity for class discussion about whose experiences are included in mainstream media, how, and why. In order to show the importance of representing the complex diversity of lives and experiences – especially black lives – I push students to reflect on how their identities are shaped by the media available to and about them.

Although these were not media texts I would have selected for analysis, they provide as good or better illumination of course themes. In addition to empowering students' critical consumption of media texts and application skills, this assignment also provides a diverse

selection of texts to use in future teaching. From a CSP perspective, this values my students' insights about media and communication and application of course concepts. The texts they choose then become part of the mainstream curriculum we discuss in subsequent courses. This assignment, and the discussions that stem from it, intervenes in a media landscape that often serves to diminish or distort the value of black lives through representations that marginalize or oppress. This provides the opportunity for students and teacher to disrupt this tendency somewhat, affirm the contributions of black lives to the media landscape, and underscore the importance of diverse representations.

Enacting diversity also means seeking out and sharing media texts with which they may not be familiar. Most of my students are from in or around Boston. Thus, media representations of Boston are a point of discussion. Movies like *Mystic River*, *The Town*, and *Black Mass* focus on Irish-American communities in Boston, mostly in relation to mob activity. These representations ignore the large and vibrant communities of color around Boston. In order to remedy this, I introduced my students to a web series, *Pineapple Diaries*, that focuses on a young Dominican-American woman living in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston and how she negotiates family, friends, and daily life. This was not a show that any of my students had heard of, but for many of them it resonated with their sense of self and place. In addition, I included clips from the television shows *Fresh off the Boat*, *Blackish*, *Transparent*, and the movie *Moonlight* to introduce them to perspectives and characters to which they may relate and to provide diverse representations to contemplate.

Intersectionality
While diversity is important, it also requires attention to how issues of difference intersect. A second way that Black Lives Matter's principles can be used to enact CSP is through its commitment to intersectionality. Originally articulated by Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality acknowledges that systems of domination and subjugation by race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, and religion are connected. Although not a specific guiding principle of Black Lives Matter, taken together, many of the movement's guiding principles – unapologetically black, queer affirming, black families, black women, transgender affirming, intergenerational – reflect an understanding of racial justice and uplift as intimately connected with other aspects of identity and the political movements for black liberation (Taylor, 2016a, b). The movement's founders articulate an approach to understanding the struggle for the dignity of black lives as interconnected with gender, sexuality, religion, class, and other identity markers (Chatelain and Asoka, 2015). I use this intersectional approach in crafting CSP for the college classroom.

Because the BLM platform is inherently intersectional – highlighting gender, sexuality, dis/ability, age, and class – it thus offers the opportunity to talk about issues in complex, interconnected ways. In the case of "*Formation*," we used an intersectional approach to examine how identities overlap in Beyoncé and her media. Students worked in small groups to identify how issues of race and ethnicity, gender, national identity, economics and class, and marriage and family were represented within the video and performance of "*Formation*." They then brought their insights to the whole class. Their discussion focused not only on her critical messages about black nationalism, policing, and brutality against people of color, the students were also able to articulate that the reasons for Beyoncé's success were likely not, or not only, because of her black womanist message. Her relationship with Jay Z and her body both conform to social norms associated with able-bodied femininity. So, even as her message in "*Formation*" supports a black nationalism, it does so in a form of conventional heterosexuality and gender identity.

The relationship between Beyoncé's music and capitalist commerce was another important aspect of our unpacking of the *Formation* video and performance. The Super Bowl performance, in particular, was part of the Pepsi halftime show, a company with which

Beyoncé has a $50-million contract. Further, *Formation* was a surprise release available for download exclusively on Tidal, an online music platform founded by Jay Z and co-owned by Beyoncé. Beyond monthly subscriptions in order to listen to the artist-owned platform, the platform offers access to tickets and merchandise. Beyoncé's tours are a worldwide phenomenon, the most recent of which was 108 shows that grossed more than a million dollars per show. The case of Beyoncé is a compelling one for my students. She is unabashedly a huge role model and economic force. She is successful, and her success is due in part to her cisgender, heterosexual identity. At the same time, she is – in the terms of Black Lives Matter – unapologetically black. Thus, "In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a necessary prerequisite for wanting the same for others" (Black Lives Matter, 2016). In the case of Beyoncé, we discussed how her transgressive and progressive message – particularly in the face of white supremacism – is possible in part because of her self-representation as straight and feminine. Because of her mainstream sexuality and gender identities, she is able to push the envelope in terms of race and representation.

Loving engagement and empathy
The principles of diversity and the intersectionality of Black Lives Matter's platform provide important focus for my preparation for classes. In terms of the daily work of teaching, CSP and the principles of Black Lives Matter have also made me committed to spontaneous and critical engagement with the world outside of the classroom. Two principles from Black Lives Matter are essential here – loving engagement and empathy. Black Lives Matter (2016) defines loving engagement saying, "We are committed to embodying and practicing justice, liberation, and peace in our engagements with one another." In terms of empathy, the guiding principle of Black Lives Matter (2016) states, "We are committed to practicing empathy; we engage comrades with the intent to learn about and connect with their contexts."

This approach to teaching treats the classroom as a "beloved community" that aims to enable and empower all members. The students' presentation and analysis of media texts, discussed in the previous section, provides opportunity to build this beloved community through loving engagement and empathy. Because of the critical nature of the course content, as well as its place in the curriculum as an introductory course, the media and society course is one where students tend to develop critical approaches to the consumption of media texts for the first time. Because of this, they are often both quite critical of and disheartened by the lack of representation of diverse experiences and identities in the media. In their analysis of media texts, as well as class discussion of them, I aim to help them identify the ways in which media texts such as *Power*, *Basketball Wives*, and *Straight Outta Compton* provide both important representations of black lives as well as stereotypical and problematic representations of black experiences. This also includes discussion of why these texts are popular amongst black people and in US society more generally. We discuss how no media text represents people and their experiences perfectly, and that being able to identify what is powerful and problematic about these texts is an important media literacy skill. Earlier in the course, we also discuss the barriers people of color face in participating in and controlling the creation of media, which I then bring to discussion of how this impacts the representations we see in the student-selected media texts. Thus, I try to temper students' critical impulse with compassion for those attempting to represent black lives and experiences in an industry that is often hostile or ambivalent to such diversity.

In order to develop my classroom as a beloved community, I design assignments that encourage students to see one another as valuable collaborators who can help each other improve their work. For example, I have Media and Society students present initial analyses of their media texts before the final paper is due. Thus, the presentations are of their work in progress. This makes the presentations valuable to the presenter, who gets ideas and

feedback for the analysis. It also makes the audience an integral part of the presentation, as they are called upon to provide constructive, specific input to help students develop their analyses. In preparing students for this assignment, we spend time talking about how texts have many meanings and readings, and that we can create better work by incorporating diverse perspectives into our analyses. This reflects Black Lives Matters' commitment to diversity. Drawing on BLM principles of loving engagement and empathy, we discuss both the vulnerability and importance of sharing ideas orally, as well as the difficulty of hearing ideas with which we may disagree. We also discuss the importance of offering feedback in a way that affirms and humanizes. This frames the presentations as important moments of professional growth, both in terms of doing something that may be difficult and also providing useful, effective feedback.

I have also become more comfortable with letting the class help to dictate what we spend time on and how we proceed in the course. An example of loving engagement as pedagogical flexibility, as I discussed in the opening paragraph, was responding to intense student interest in Beyoncé's *Formation*. Because of this and the cultural controversy it created, I integrated study of it later in the course. Students were assigned to view *Formation*, the halftime show, and read articles about its impact on black storytelling (McFadden, 2016; King, 2016). One student watching on a computer in the college's learning commons was told to turn it off since it was not related to school. It was with no small amount of self-righteousness and indignation that she said, "This *is* my homework. I am watching this *for class*." When the student recounted the story to us at our next class meeting, I could see and hear the pride she felt at being able to devote serious time and attention to the study of Beyoncé and the messages she created about black womanhood. This pride was the direct result of treating student interest, experiences, and context with loving engagement.

In the aftermath of Donald Trump's presidential victory, my commitment to CSP and its application through the BLM guiding principles of empathy became even more urgent. In the semester following Trump's election, and the week of his inauguration, I began teaching an interpersonal communication course. Interpersonal communication is often taught in an apolitical manner and emphasizes romantic and family communication. Yet, it was impossible for me to ignore the larger political environment in which I was teaching. The guiding principle of empathy requires attention to others and their contexts (Black Lives Matter, 2016). Thus, approaching this course through the lens of CSP, it was important and even imperative to enact this empathy. I realized that my teaching has been ineluctably changed through my commitment to CSP and application of BLM principles. It was no longer an add-on to enhance my teaching, but rather an integrated commitment (of course imperfect and always ongoing) to centering experiences other than my own within my teaching, in order to reflect and enhance diversity in my courses.

From a pedagogical perspective, this means always pursuing justice, liberation, and peace as goals of my teaching. As I worked to craft an assignment to synthesize the first unit of the interpersonal communication course, including foundational concepts such as self-concept and self-esteem, perception of others, and diversity, I knew that I had to address the difficulty of post-election interpersonal conversations. I wondered, what does it mean to have caring, thoughtful interpersonal conversations with one another after this divisive election? How can we use the skills provided by an interpersonal communication to engage this personally difficult political context in which we find ourselves? I realized that this is an important way to make interpersonal communication – a course that can become myopic and self-absorbed if one is not pedagogically careful – align with CSP, particularly Black Lives Matter's principles of loving engagement and empathy. Although not necessarily the most obvious fit, I viewed this course as another opportunity to enact a CSP through the application of Black Lives Matter founding principles. These two

principle of loving engagement and empathy led me to create an assignment that contextualizes interpersonal communication foundations, and thus the course itself, as relevant to the political moment.

Conclusion

In the previous section, I provide examples of using Black Lives Matter to enact CSP in my college teaching. I critically engage in teaching so that students with marginalized identities see themselves, their experiences, and their futures as central to the study and practice of media and communication. I make an explicit effort to engage issues of identity in courses that, in their titles and descriptions, do not focus on diversity, equality, and inclusion. I applaud courses focused solely on Black Lives Matter, as well as area and ethnic studies courses, women's, gender, and sexuality studies, and disability studies courses, which provide focused spaces to learn about diversity and identity. However, attention to diversity and identity must not be relegated only to these specialty courses, which students may inadvertently or purposefully think are not relevant to them. Thus, a CSP approach is important in general education and major courses in primary, secondary, and post-secondary contexts that do not, on their face, necessarily require such attention.

A foundation of many media and communication classes is that forms of shared meaning (whether mediated, interpersonal, or organizational communication) do not necessarily reflect reality. From the perspective of Black Lives Matter, in my classes, they learn how media tend to distort our perceptions through mistaken and mendacious representations of black people (Brooks and Hébert, 2006; Taylor, 2016a, b). As such, it is important for students, no matter their background, to consider ways to make media and communication reflect the realities of, and be responsive to, people and experiences outside of dominant groups. While the examples I include here are focused on media and communication, the articulation of CSP through application of the principles of Black Lives Matter has great relevance beyond these disciplines.

Nearly all college courses, whether in the liberal arts or in professional programs, can be approached through the lens of CSP. The examples that I have provided here are not expensive or difficult and do not require specialized training. Faculty members have the opportunity to cultivate CSP to prepare students to work and live in communities that are diverse and to flourish and help others flourish in such settings. For example, a class in biology, from the perspective of CSP and the principles of Black Lives Matter, could engage the way that medical care routinely marginalizes black people, through not attending to their pain, not addressing diseases that disproportionately affect black people, and other issues of racism in medicine. In a philosophy class, classes in ethics or epistemology offer the opportunity to consider how canonical thinkers ignore and/or subjugate the dignity of black people and their experiences. Whether in biology or philosophy, just as in communication, it is both essential and easy to give students the opportunity to consider how universal perspectives often reflect the point of view of white, cisgender, upper middle class, straight men. Further, as with communication, classes in biology and philosophy can also integrate more diverse perspectives through the inclusion of black authors in course readings. I hope that future work will articulate how a CSP, through the principles of Black Lives Matter, can be enacted in other disciplines.

CSP is obviously important in higher education institutions where a majority of students belong to groups that are underrepresented on college campuses. However, this approach is also important in predominantly white institutions (PWIs). The fact that an institution is predominantly white does not change the fact that the world, and the USA, is increasingly diverse and therefore students need to engage with and be prepared to understand this diversity. The problem that professors using CSP in predominantly white institutions may face is the mistaken perception that such content is not relevant to white people and also that it represents a political and ideological pedagogy. (Of course, all pedagogy is political and ideological, but pedagogy that aligns with existing power structures is more likely, and

mistakenly, to be viewed as apolitical and neutral.) In such institutions, it will be more difficult to work with students to reflect and create the diversity that CSP entails. Though not the focus of my work here, future scholarship should consider how best to apply CSP in such settings. Nonetheless, it is critical that faculty members and students at PWIs reckon with the contributions of non-dominant groups and they challenges they face.

In addition, it is important to consider how the lessons of CSP and Black Lives Matter's principles might also be relevant beyond the classroom, whether college or K-12. The insights that I have shared here also provide the opportunity to consider how we might create organizations that better reflect and respond to the realities of black people and their experiences. A culturally sustaining approach, through the application of Black Lives Matter's principles, offers a new way to consider possibilities for radical revisioning of work, government, community, and other contexts through application of diversity, intersectionality, empathy, and loving engagement, as discussed in this manuscript in the context of the college classroom.

Finally, although inspired and guided by the principles of Black Lives Matter, the examples and insights I share here are not only about black lives. The principles respond to how those with identities that fall outside dominant groups are devalued and erased from institutions of cultural and political power. Although not the focus of this paper, the application of CSP through the application of Black Lives Matter's principles has also allowed me to teach non-black students, whose identities are marginal within higher education, more effectively. The principles discussed here speak to those who do not speak English as a first language, who have a disability, who are the first in their family to go to college, who are immigrants, and those who are gay, lesbian, and transgender. Further, because many of my students fit into more than one of these categories, the principles of diversity and intersectionality are particularly important in terms of practicing a pedagogy that acknowledges and celebrates their identities.

A recent interview with the award-winning director of the music video *Formation* and the television show *Insecure*, two important texts representing women of color in 2016, asked Melina Matsoukas, about her goals in her work. She responded, "to change the world, you know? To really make the voices that we don't get to hear heard, and the images and the stories that we don't get to see seen. I would like to normalize that" (Morris, 2016a, b). The statement was startling to me because it so closely resonates with why I choose to teach and, especially, why I am committed to enacting CSP through the application of Black Lives Matter's principles. The teaching that I do attempts to change the world by normalizing those considered marginal to the study and practice of communication and media.

In the last three years, Black Lives Matter has become an increasingly powerful force in my teaching, as I have attempted to enact in CSP in a higher education setting with large numbers of students who identify as marginal in terms of class, gender identity, ethnicity, sexuality, and/or race. Black Lives Matter's principles serve as important inspiration for the texts I choose, the discussions I facilitate, the assignments I give to my students, and the media and scholarship that I consume. This led me to create courses that are more diverse and inclusive and that help students to live and work in diverse contexts. While my journey to teach so that Black Lives Matter is ongoing and imperfect, the principles of the movement provide trenchant guidance to enact CSP.

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