

# The Three BIG Ism's: Race, Class, and Gender

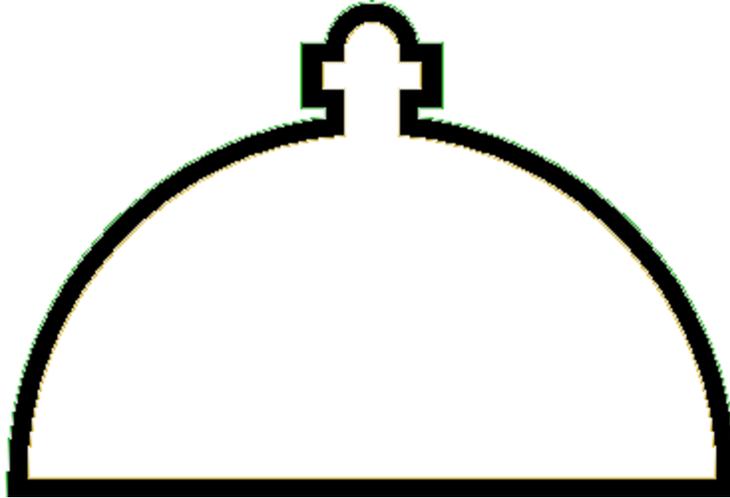
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# Race, Class, and Gender in the Notre Dame Classroom



## **Professor**

*Black, Female, \$\$*

## **Teaching Assistant**

*White, Female, \$\$\$\$*

### **Student A**

*White, Male, \$\$\$\$*

### **Student B**

*White, Male, \$*

### **Student C**

*Latino, Male, \$\$\$*

### **Student D**

*White, Female, \$\$\$*

### **Student E**

*White, Male, \$\$\$*

### **Student F**

*Black, Female, \$\$*

### **Student G**

*White, Female, \$\$*

### **Student H**

*White, Male, \$\$\$\$*

**Case Study 1:** [I am Jessica/Devon, and] I am one of those “low-income students.” Not poor – we always have plenty to eat and toys at Christmas and decent, if shabby, cars to get around in – but not comfortably middle-class either. We live primarily off my mother’s income, and women don’t get paid a lot where I am from...my father was ill for much of my childhood and inconsistently employed when he is home. I doubt that my parents could have saved money to send me to college if they had wanted to, but they didn’t want to: they saw no value in a college education. I knew I needed a scholarship to pay for my education or I wasn’t going to get one. I am going to graduate with *some* debt.

- How does your perception of the story change if you read it in the voice of an unnamed character, Jessica, or Devon?
- What challenges would this student face in achieving a college education?
- How might a professor help this/these students succeed?

**Case Study 2:** My discussion section is admittedly imbalanced. When I pose a question to the class, Ethan jumps in right away with a thoughtful response. He’s really a great student, and others in the classroom look to him to move our discussion forward. The problem is that by this point in the semester, it has become a learned response that Ethan will answer the question first. I want to bring my other students into the discussion, and I know there are other perspectives out there aside from that of, let’s face it, a conservative white guy. But he is at such an advanced level that I think other students are maybe a little intimidated. Plus, some students have already expressed that they don’t like to participate in class. How do I open up the discussion without shutting down his ideas?

- How should this TA respond to the imbalance of voices in the classroom?
- What could this TA have done to alleviate this problem earlier in the semester?

**Case Study 3:** The dreaded diversity discussion. That’s what we’re doing the next few weeks. Talking about the experiences of different social groups and how they encounter success and discrimination in the U.S. Being at the university I am at, most of my students come from privileged backgrounds. But I know a few of my students come from groups that will be part of the other side of that discussion. How do I, a young Latina without their privilege, have this discussion without appearing biased or excluding some of my students? I need good evaluations for this class if I want to get tenure.

- What strategies could this professor use to have a healthy discussion?
- What sorts of issues are at play with her concern about teaching evaluations?

*Case study 1 adapted from: “Campfire Stories: Students at the Crossroads of Race and Gender.”  
www.genderspectrum.org. Retrieved July 06, 2016.*

## **Difficult Conversations: Connecting to Curricula and Responding to Eruptions**

*Leading classroom discussion on difficult topics is a challenge, as is responding to unexpected “hot button” issues. This brief guide, adapted from resources at Vanderbilt and UCLA, seeks to help instructors feel more confident leading difficult dialogues based on course work, as well as provide some suggestions for responding to unexpected “hot button” issues that arise in the classroom.*

### **Preparing to Make Connections in the Curricula**

Before the course begins, think about what topics in your subject area may become controversial in the classroom. It is important to remember what is controversial to you may not be to your students, and vice versa. “Hot button” topics are extremely diverse, and may include any or all of the following: religion, race, gender, sexuality, evolution, immigration, and many more.

After you have identified potential “hot button” issues, reflect on how you might use questions about the issues to further your learning goals for the class. Design questions that require the class to think critically, examine different perspectives, and engage in civil dialogue.

Be transparent with your students. Advise them early on that the class will require them to explore “hot button” issues and that you see this as an opportunity for growth.

### **Responding to “Hot Button” Eruptions**

Perhaps the more challenging situation for an instructor is deciding how to respond to an unanticipated “hot button eruption.” An intentional or unintentional comment or action can quickly create a negative and hostile learning environment. It is imperative that instructors be able to recognize, prevent when possible, or interrupt these comments or actions. The following ground rules and suggestions can help you establish a healthy classroom climate.

- Invite students to get to know each other, build a sense of community
- Have the class establish and agree on ground rules for discussion. Discussion ground rules might include:
  - Always use a respectful tone
  - No interrupting or yelling
  - No name-calling or other character attacks
  - Ask questions when you do not understand; do not assume you know what others are thinking
  - Try to see the issue from the other person’s perspective before stating your opinion
  - Maintain confidentiality (what is said in the classroom stays in the classroom)

## Difficult Conversations (*continued*): Additional Strategies

### The Critical Incident Questionnaire

At the end of the day (or week, or unit, or other appropriate time period), set aside 10 minutes for the group to respond in writing to a few specific questions. (This may be especially helpful to do when a class session has been particularly difficult or tense).

- At what moment were you most engaged as a learner?
- At what moment were you most distanced as a learner?
- What action that anyone in the room took did you find most affirming or helpful?
- What action that anyone in the room took did you find most puzzling or confusing?
- What surprised you most?

Keep all responses anonymous. Collect them at the end of the period. Read and analyze the responses, and compile them according to similar themes and concerns. Report back to the group at the next meeting. Allow time for comments and discussion.

### The Five Minute Rule

The five minute rule is a way of taking an invisible or marginalized perspective and entertaining it respectfully for a short period of time.

**Rule:** Anyone who feels that a particular point of view is not being taken seriously has a right to point this out and call for this exercise to be used.

**Discussion:** The group then agrees to take five minutes to consider the merits of this perspective, refrain from criticizing it, and make every effort to believe it. Only those who can speak in support of it are allowed to speak, using the questions below as prompts. All critics must remain silent.

**Questions and prompts:**

What's interesting or helpful about this view?

What are some intriguing features that others might not have noticed?

What would be different if you believed this view, if you accepted it as true?

In what sense and under what conditions might this idea be true?

For further ideas about strategies you can use in your classroom review, see *Start Talking: A Handbook for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education*. Edited by Kay Landis, Anchorage AK University of Alaska Anchorage and Alaska Pacific University, 2008.

## Selected Resources on Race, Class, and Gender in the Classroom

### Books

- Brookfield, Stephen D., & Stephen Preskill. 2005. *Discussion As a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gay, Geneva. 2010. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Goodman, Diane J. 2011. *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gutiérrez y Muhs, Gabriella, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González, & Angela P. Harris (eds). 2012. *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Nash, Robert J., DeMethra LaSha Bradley, & Arthur W. Chickering. 2008. *How to Talk About Hot Topics on Campus*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

### Journal Articles

- Cannon, Lynn Weber. 1990. "Fostering Positive Race, Class, and Gender Dynamics in the Classroom." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 18(1/2): 126-134.
- Carbado, Devon W., Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, & Barbara Tomlinson. 2013. "Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory." *Du Bois Review* 10 (2): 303-312.
- Frederick, Peter. 1995. "Walking on Eggs: Mastering the Dreaded Diversity Discussion." *College Teaching* 43(3): 83-92.
- Hochreiter, Susanne. 2014. "Race, Class, Gender? Intersectionality Troubles." *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 4 (2): 401-408.
- Keels, Micere. 2013. "Getting Them Enrolled Is Only Half the Battle: College Success as a Function of Race or Ethnicity, Gender, and Class." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 83 (2/3): 310-322.
- Morales, Erica M. 2014. "Intersectional Impact: Black Students and Race, Gender and Class Microaggressions in Higher Education." *Race, Gender & Class* 21 (3/4): 48-66.

### Online

- Barre, Elizabeth. "Student Ratings of Instruction: A Literature Review."
- Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. "Teaching in Racially Diverse College Classrooms."
- Espinosa, Lorelle L., Matthew N. Gaertner, & Gary Orfield. "Race, Class, & College Access: Achieving Diversity in a Shifting Legal Landscape."
- UCLA Diversity & Faculty Development. "Diversity in the Classroom."
- University of Notre Dame. "Show Some Skin" Monologues available on YouTube.
- University of Washington Center for Teaching and Learning. "Discussing Racial Violence in the U.S.: Resources for Discussing Current Events."

## NOTES