Privileged irresponsibility as a barrier to achieving a meaningful life in a just society in South African Higher Education

Vivienne Bozalek
vbozalek@uwc.ac.za
University of the Western Cape
South Africa
Introduction

- Privileged irresponsibility
- How privileged irresponsibility is maintained
- Plumwood’s (1993; 2011) dualism
- South African project across historically black and white institutions
- Bringing students together across boundaries of difference – institution, profession, race, class
- Overcoming privileged irresponsibility
Tronto’s definitions of privileged irresponsibility

- 1990 – taken-for-granted privilege majority group, failing to acknowledge power – institutionalised racism
- 1993 – ways in which caring responsibilities/phases of care are unevenly balanced in society; ignoring hardships not noticing needs of subjugated/parochialism e.g. South Africa
- 2013 – getting a ‘pass’ out of the allocation of responsibilities; epistemological ignorance
Privileged irresponsibility

- Protection – get passes as doing more important work; job of shielding from risks and dangers
- Production – important work of acquiring economic resources – work ethic/neoliberalism
- Private care – exempts from care for distant others – necessary care vs personal service
- Personal responsibility – pulling oneself by one’s own bootstraps
Definition of Dualism

'In dualistic construction, as in hierarchy, the qualities (actual or supposed), the culture, the values and the areas of life associated with the dualised other are systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior’ (Plumwood, 1993:47) (our emphases)

This is also what Nancy Fraser would regard as ‘misrecognition’

Dualism is different from a dichotomy or distinction in that it is an hierarchical relationship in which equality is not possible.
Plumwood’s five characteristics of dualism

1. *Backgrounding (denial)* – making use of the other, using the other to service the masters’ needs but denying the dependence on the other – what Joan Tronto (1993) calls ‘privileged irresponsibility’

2. *Radical exclusion (hyperseparation)* – here difference is maximised and shared qualities minimised to achieve the maximum separation from the other
3. Incorporation (relational definition) – the inferior side of the duality is defined as a lack or negation and the superior side as the reference point, whose qualities are the primary and important ones

4. Instrumentalism (objectification) – those on the lower side must put aside their own interests to become a means to an end for the master and is thus objectified
Characteristics of dualism

5. *Homogenisation (stereotyping)* - here differences of the inferiorised group are disregarded – they are all seen as the same (e.g. all migrants differences denied just seen as alien)
How to address privileged irresponsibility?

• If these are the mechanisms through which privileged irresponsibility is maintained, what can be done to reverse this position so that people can acknowledge their privileges and that the servicing and caring for needs is more equally apportioned?
As a group of higher educators, we were concerned about the history of minimal inter-professional and inter-institutional contact between students from psychology, social work and occupational therapy (human service professions), particularly across historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions in South Africa.
How our project addressed dualisms

• Plumwood (1993) notes that to overcome the dualistic dynamic one needs both *continuity* and *difference*

• We thought about how best to provide opportunities for students to encounter each other intersubjectively illuminating their histories. realities and their needs to attempt mutual recognition – experiencing each other as both similar and different

• We used various mechanisms to do this – participatory learning and action (PLA) techniques, online discussions, performances, critical literature, group presentations, reflective essays
Inferiorisation and HEIs
Welcome to CSI2008: Community, Self and Identity

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT:

There are a number of you who have not yet submitted your essay. I have created a "late essay submission" topic. Please upload your essay here as soon as possible! Also we would like to hear from more people in the worksheet 3 - please fill this in! Thanks!

This is a collaborative E-Learning module between the universities of Stellenbosch and the Western Cape. The module engages students on the notions of community, self and identity.
Community mapping as a PLA technique

Step 1
Draw a picture/map of your home and neighbourhood including the resources that are there.

Step 2
Identify and label three things that you would like to change in relation to your experiences (could be physical or relate to attitudes, social issues). Put these in order by choosing to give the one you feel is most important the most tokens.

Step 3
Share in your group, explaining your picture/map and the reasons for wanting things to change.
Community mapping as a PLA technique
“I have learnt about more about another culture and community. In South Africa, as we grow to learn about ourselves and others, we are constantly reminded of the diversity that is unique to our country- the eleven languages; the turbulent histories; and the many races to name but a few. Our diversity is a fact. However, it is not often that we are literally thrown together with people from diverse backgrounds to actually have first-hand experience of diversity” (‘Samantha’)
Lack of housing
Unemployment
Alcohol Abuse
Shebeen

Clinic: are mostly overcrowded.
Service Rendering not sufficient

High rate of teenage pregnancy
Netbal Field
Exposure to substance abuse

Dad
Mom

School

Brother
not quite white
TELL ME YOUR RACE THEN I WILL GIVE YOU YOUR IDENTITY
Students’ representations of shame

• As I reflect today and as I did at the workshop, I found this to be a particularly difficult task, as I realised that I had intense feelings of shame and guilt about my more privileged background and current situation. When I was drawing my community map I consciously asked myself, Should I include all the resources, I find at my leisure, as I felt a sense of guilt (White SU Psychology female student)
Students’ representations of shame

• Very basically, after looking at my drawings again after a week, there is only one element that stood out and that is: privilege. I live in a privileged community with enough resources (private hospitals and neighbourhood watches) for the ‘class’ it caters for. Strangely enough, this is not how I always saw my life. I was guilt ridden after making my pretty coloured drawings and glancing over to the other side of the spectrum - poor communities, bad infrastructure, badly resourced hospitals and police stations. (White SU Psychology female student)
Students’ representations of shame

- recreational facilities were virtually non-existent, there is a dire lack of adequate housing, unemployment is ubiquitous, and public services and facilities .....basic needs, in fact civic rights; like access to clean running water and adequate sanitary facilities, overcrowding, and of course violence; gang violence in particular is rife. I discovered that conservative gendered stereotypes, xenophobia, and racism were (shamefully) quite characteristic of members (however, not all members) of my community, where ‘other people’ are simply seen as encroaching on ‘our’ territory. I must admit that I felt hesitant to expand on my illustrations to my group, mainly because I did not know them, and also due to my fearing that I might offend them with potentially unfounded ‘subjective facts’ (coloured male social work UWC student)
Students’ representations of shame

• The workshop was quite interesting; it amazed me at how similar the communities were that my fellow group members lived in. Violence, poverty and overcrowding were visible in all the communities that were presented. My community was a bit embarrassing as there were a lot of issues that I was embarrassed about and that I did not want anybody to know of. Issues such as been known to have a shebeen in every second road and that contributed to the high rates of violence, rape and child drug trafficking. (coloured female social work UWC student)
The politics of shame in addressing dualisms

- Shame part of micropolitics of everyday life
- Shame has the potential to silence, isolate and exclude (Bartky, 1996; Locke, 2007; McConaghy, 2000)
- Need to politicise emotions in education (Zembylas, 2007)
- the politics of shame refers to both the acknowledgement of collective responsibility through connections (Young, 2011), the affirmation of structural disadvantage and confrontation of privilege.
Did the course address privileged responsibility and the mechanisms of dualism?

• 'critical reconstruction of identity normally involves not only affirming and rebuilding subordinated identities, but also reconstructing master identities' (Plumwood, 1993, 67)

• Backgrounding – hearing lives awareness

• Radical exclusion – PLA parity, visceral physicality

• Incorporation – interrogate assumptions SA power

• Instrumentalism – ends in themselves with own needs

• Homogenisation- uniqueness complexity
Addressing dualisms

• **Backgrounding** – recognise contributions of meeting needs and acknowledge centrality of dependency

• **Radical exclusion** – reclaim denied area of overlap, provide opportunities for engagement

• **Incorporation** – review identities from both sides, affirming and reclaiming subordinate resistance and reconstituting identities

• **Instrumentalism** – see the other as an end in him/herself, as having needs in their own right

• **Homogenisation** – seeing the diversity and uniqueness of those who have been otherised
Shame, dualism and privileged irresponsibility

• Locke (2007:156) asks: Will more of a self-critical stance in itself lead to living more justly?
• This course goes a little way to addressing privileged irresponsibility – notion of pedagogies of discomfort where no one escapes rethinking their academic selves
• Both Tronto’s and Young’s work on responsibility provide us with ideas of how to address this
Community, self and identity
Educating South African university students for citizenship

Leibowitz, Swartz, Bozalek, Carolissen, Nicholls, Rohleder

http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/product.php?productid=2299
Discerning Critical Hope in Educational Practices
References

Any questions?

• For further communication contact
• Viv Bozalek vbozalek@uwc.ac.za