



The 20-Minute Talk:
Episode 4- Episode 4—Antiracism Conversations
at the Intersections
Anti-Racism Vodcast Series
Gilmara Villa Nova-Mitchell and Robert A. Lampley



TRANSCRIPTION

[Intro Music]

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Hello everyone and welcome to The Region III MAP Center's Anti-Racism Vodcast Series which aims to advance anti-racist efforts and support anti-racist activities within school communities across and beyond the MAP Center's 13-state Region with a succinct 20-minute discussion led by anti-racist practitioners.

Nickie Coomer: This Anti-Racism Vodcast episode is focused on the importance of anti-racist practices considering other intersecting oppressed identities including national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender non-conformity, and disability.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thanks, Nickie. So, my name is Tiffany Kyser and I serve as the Associate Director of Outreach and Engagement with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center which I'll refer to moving forward as the MAP Center. I have the privilege of serving as your host for today and I'm joined with my fellow co-host, Nickie Coomer, who just framed today's focus. Nickie is a Doctoral Research Assistant with the MAP Center.

Nickie Coomer: Great thanks, Tiffany. We're also thrilled to have two guests who not only are tremendous scholars and practitioners in educational equity work but also will lead us in affirming and deepening our understanding of anti-racism at the intersections in our school communities. So, joined with us today are Gilmara Villa Nova-Mitchell who is an Equity Consultant for The Heartland Area Education Agency in Iowa and Robert Lampley a Civil Rights Attorney in Ohio.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: So, I want to kick us off with Robert with the first prompt which is; *Why is intersectionality so important to understand when working to be anti-racist?* And then Gilmara, after Robert shares feel free to build off of Robert's insights.

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Robert Lampley: So, good morning, everyone. I think the first underlying idea of being anti-racist is understanding that racism is malleable and that we can deconstruct racism because it's something that's formed. And so, we have to really work to do some uncovering of what is at the root of racism and then helping to understand that people can change their ideas about race. And I think in terms of when we think about intersectionality, I think it's so important to understand how to work through anti-racism, is firstly just understanding that there is a stratification of oppression. And so, that there are multiple identities that people that face and suffer under racism that they hold. So, we look at gender, we look at gender expression, we look at sexual orientation, we look at all of these different things and how they shape the experience of those—that experience racism. And so, through that lens we're able to really uncover the things that we need to do in order to be anti-racist and so, it's like not engaging in work that doesn't really hit at the core of what's happening. So, you don't want to ignore all of these other converging things that may impact how people experience racism and it also really takes a full acknowledgement of the modalities of race and racism in our country to form a holistic strategy or approach to eradicating racism in this country. And so, at the core of eight—of anti-racism is really work looking at how we can structure things so that they truly look at the full experience of people. I think that when you want to be anti-racist, you want to be a person that is working within systems that look at the full picture of what's happening to people that experience racism. And so, I always use this analogy when I talk about racism, that it's a sore and that if we want to heal the sore, we can put a band-aid over it and then what happens is that we just are creating a barrier to its exposure. And so, to truly heal racism we have to dig into the core of that sore and we have to root out all of the different things that may impact, so the bacteria, anything that would help—to help, excuse me, anything that would help that sort to kind of fester and grow. And so, I think when you acknowledge intersectionality, you're also acknowledging the fact that this word is multi-layered, that it has these different components, and that a true response will be figuring out a way to have all of that exposed so that it can truly heal. Racism, you know, in our country it encompasses a lot of that—a lot of those identities at the margins. And so, again,



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it is about that ecosystem and so we can't really truly have some strategies for an ecosystem where we don't take in all the conditions of that ecosystem.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Got it thank you. Gilmara, any insights you want to build on top of that.

Gilmara Villa Nova-Mitchell: I think Robert did a really good job. The one thing I do want to add is that when we think about intersectionality and the combination of these different social and political elements that make us who we are and are a part of our identity, I think it's important to recognize that they can only—they cannot only create systems of disadvantage in how you're positioned but also of privilege depending on what's your identity. And so, I think a lot of times when we consider intersectionality we go straight to disadvantage and sometimes the combination of different social and political elements that make the individual who they are end up creating a system of privilege and advantage.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thank you for that, Gilmara. This idea of the complexity of our own multiple identities versus the complexity of possessing one or more historically marginalized identities is what you're getting at that this idea of multiple identities should not be conflated with intersectional identities or intersectionality. And so, as we move to engage in anti-racist practice in our school communities and beyond, I really appreciate the point of not shifting the gaze solely on those that are suffering multiple intersecting and overlapping oppressions because of being a purpose—a person of color at the intersection of other identities; sexual orientation, national origin, religion. i.e., if I am a Black, Muslim, Disabled, Queer person, how I show up as a person of color with non-Christian identities, with a disability, with not aligning to sort of heteronormative or heterosexuality is important because folks who also are persons of color may not possess those additional marginalized identities. And so, my experience or someone's experience, I should say, with those identities are different than someone else who might be a person—person of color with other identities.



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Dr. Tiffany Kyser: So, I appreciate that. And the propensity if we're not aware of that to engage in harmful practices of othering others, right? And too, I think what—what I heard and what I appreciate it from you, Gilmara is this idea of not recognizing our own identities in particular our dominant or privileged identities while simultaneously possessing perhaps non-dominant identities or if I'm a white person who is able-bodied and straight, recognizing that the layers of engaging in anti-racist practice are different and unique for different contexts and situations. So, I appreciate that. Finally, the thing I'll say is that stands in a way of solidarity is what I'm hearing from the both of you. As not being aware of how other historically marginalized identities are deeply woven into the ideological, to Robert's point, root or roots of—of racist structures and institutions is—is really crucial. So, I appreciate that. Gilmara, on the second reflective prompt so we've talked a lot sort of a high level a little bit more abstract and so, want you to kind of help us think through: *What are some concrete or key practices that we can engage in to be anti-racist from your perspective?* And then Robert, I'll ask you to—to share any—any insights from that as well.

Gilmara Villa Nova-Mitchell: Sure. So, before I share some practices that I find helpful I want to build some background around what I'm going to say. There are beliefs I have about how—how we go about anti-racist work in our own lives. One is, there is no neutral on this bus. So, even if you are an individual filled with good intentions, as I believe most of people are, if you're not actively acting you are—you are helping oppressive systems staying place and there is no neutral on this bus or you are being anti-racist or you are not doing something to disrupt systems of inequity and racism. The other strong belief I hold is that there are two—there are two focuses for this work, and they are equally as important. One is the—the intro—the personal journey you have to embark when you want to become an anti-racist person. And that's really learning about your culture, your identity, your background, and your implicit biases and your blind spots and how you exclude others and what kinds of—of racism do you carry with you.



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And the other part of the journey is more the systems work and how are you going to tackle disrupting systems of oppression and racist practices? And so, these are two different kinds of work, but I think they are very interconnected. I do think we need to focus on both sides of the work when we are to become an anti-racist person. And so, the first step I always recommend to people, and I try to do myself, is to learn about history, the history of race in this country, white supremacy history, and understand how we have been dealing with the systems of oppression for hundreds of years and how they have been interwoven in everything, that it's part of our existence. Such as voting and the way we structure our political system, and our educational system and our health care system and so, really and our—our land possession opportunities you know. And understanding those things really help you position yourself in a way that you can make informed decisions when you are being a citizen, when you are voting, when you are trying to work with your banks, with your health care organizations, as a patient, you know, when you are attending school events for your families, kids.

Gilmara Villa Nova-Mitchell: And—and so, I do think that understanding the historical context of race oppression and white supremacy is the number one step. Then, as I said, understanding what you bring to the table in terms of racism and how do you exclude people from different races than yours and what kinds of experiences have led you to form some stereotypes, some blind spots that you are not intentional about mitigating the effects of when you approach others, include others. And so, I think that's really revealing this kind of work when you really take time to examine, you know, "I'm making some assumptions here about this person what could be happening?" and really dive deeper into that to understand that maybe there is a pattern here, maybe "I am racist, you know, and I don't even know about it". And so, understanding what you bring to the table and how you filter information about others and how you include and exclude them is really important. That's not easy work to do but it—there are lots of resources out there to identify your implicit bias. There's the I—The Implicit Association Test that Harvard has and it's completely free that you can take. And really keeping a journal every time, you struggle with a connection helps you so that you can start looking at the demographics and thinking, "Oh wow

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I do have an issue”. And part of that is really connecting and building strong trust in relationships with people who are different from you. So, I usually take inventory of my close relationships, my top—top five trusted people in my life to see what—what are the races? What are their gender identity? What is their sexual orientation? What is their ethnicity? Am I being inclusive in the way I select the people who have the most influence in my life? And—and it's really important that we stretch ourselves and go outside our comfort zone because our brain wants people who are like us to being our top five trusted circle. We want to have people who are different from us because they will add a perspective we don't have and help us advance our anti-racist work even further when they are having a huge impact in our decision making, in our, you know, brainstorming about daily issues that we run into.

Robert Lampley: That was such a rich response to that question. And so, I don't have much to add but when we think about this idea of, you know, having a seat at the table, I always like to tell people that when we think about equity, when we think about being anti-racist, we first have to say, “Wait a minute, let's take a step back.” Because when we just offer people a seat at the table typically that's only offering them a same kind of inclusivity and a system that hasn't changed. So, it could be part of this kind of, you know, attempt to provide some type of access but that access isn't really effectual because it's in the same kind of oppressive system. So, I like to think about having people invited to form the table. So, asking, “What do we need? Do we need a long table? A short table? A table that accounts for people who may not be able to reach, you know, high enough, you know?”. As we are kind of forming our idea of inclusivity, I think it really takes a look at what intersectionality is so that we can include a form and a place in which people really can do some work together. And in addition to all of those wonderful things that were brought out in terms of about how we include people's understanding, you know, who's dominant and who's not dominant in these type of relationships, as we are trying to do anti-racist work, it's just really important to not only ask marginalized people what they need but also provide them with an opportunity to fully participate in the work. And I think that more times than not it becomes a volunteer project as people are trying to do kind of anti-racist work.

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And that is problematic because it centers them in terms of their actions and what they're doing for people, and it doesn't allow them to kind of draw back and ask what's needed but it—it really just refocuses the energy in a way in which I think is—is really harmful. And I think anything that's going to be anti-racist is going to be centered on having a vantage point from those in which you are trying to help. And—and being at the—the margins with them in terms of understanding who they truly are and then what you can and how the practices you can engage in that will truly help to, you know, make things, you know, more equitable and more power sharing. And I think that's one of the big things too is that we have power, but we have to really understand how we can distribute that in ways in which is confirming to people's identities and also really honors who they are as people in terms of facing—their facing and combating and fighting against their own oppression.

Nickie Coomer: Thank you both for your comments and your, you know, the opportunity to really deepen our understandings of what not only what intersectionality is in anti-racist work but also what—how to get there right what the steps may be in in moving toward intersectional anti-racist action. So, something I heard from both Robert and Gilmara are—is this idea of, I guess, like the line right between systems and then into individuals and how to engage in action that can really travel that line right between our microsocial interactions and then into macro spheres that really address institutions. And I think getting, you know, in between those spaces right, between personal and hyper local and then into institutional change is really relevant to this idea that there's, you know, the spaces that we occupy that are maybe marginalized but also subordinating other folks as well, right? So how—you know really what that means the—the complexity of—of marginalization through different identities and embodied experiences. So, thank you so much. Thank you both so much for the opportunity to really think about that, dive into it, and then think through what action may look like



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Nickie Coomer: Alright so as we move forward to wrap up our conversation, I just want to highlight some resources that are in our Online Equity Resource Library at greatlightsequity.org for an array of resources and supports related to anti-racist practice. So, one of the resources that you'll find on our website is our, "Virtual Little Library for Staying Connected", produced and developed by Dr. Taucia Gonzalez and Hunter Brown. We also have on our website this is a relatively new feature, we have resources from our Equity Fellows coupled with a short course and a short assessment at the end of the course. So, if you're looking for some professional learning opportunities relative to the expertise of our Equity Fellows you can find that on our website. And then lastly, we have our podcast series that are also developed both by our in-house staff as well as our Equity Fellows. You can find this on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcast. So also, don't forget to follow us on social media. We have a Twitter account as well as a Facebook account and you can find us on Twitter @GreatLakesE-A-C or GreatLakesEAC. And please feel free to share what you learned here today by tweeting at us and tagging it with #MAPEquity. And also, don't forget to like us on Facebook to keep—to keep abreast of our upcoming events as well as resources.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Yeah, thanks Nickie. And I just want to close us out by thanking Gilmarra and Robert for your time, your expertise, your labor. We deeply appreciate you being a part of The 20-minute Talk.

Nickie Coomer: This resource was brought to you by the Midwest and Plains Equity Center. To find out about other Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance resources visit our website at www.greatlakesequity.org. To subscribe to our publications, click on the "subscribe to our publication" link located on the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center website. The Midwest and Plains equity Assistance Center project of the Great Lakes Equity Center is funded by the United States Department of Education to provide technical assistance resources, and professional learning opportunities related to equity, civil rights, and systemic school reform throughout our 13-state region. The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant

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