

Discriminatory policy Among the Undergraduate Students to the Nature and scope to The Guide for College Teaching Approach

G. Sankar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vel Tech Dr. RR & Dr.SR Technical University, Avadi-
Chennai, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

This paper addresses racism and white privilege in America. Racism is generally discriminatory policy and behavior aimed at oppressing nonwhites whereas white privilege is the advantage gained by whites that is not due to ability or merit. It is argued that white privilege is largely invisible and that this allows the current unacceptable status quo to continue. A survey of items is offered as a tool to be used by college teachers to sensitize students to the nature and effects of white privilege.

Key words: Discriminate, racism, racial code words

Introduction

While racism has received considerable attention in the social sciences in the U.S., white privilege generally has not. The data revealing racist policies in American history are legion. White privilege, on the other hand, has been largely invisible. The purpose of this paper is to briefly illustrate the concept of white privilege and offer suggestions on how to make undergraduate college students more aware of its effects. White privilege is best conceptualized as the "other side of the racism coin." That is, while the study of racism focuses on the harmful effects of discriminatory policies

designed to oppress nonwhites, white privilege is a term used to show how whites benefit from whiteness, regardless of the effects of racism on nonwhites. It is far easier, for example, to speak out against overt racism (e.g., hate speech, discriminatory policies, racial profiling, etc.) than it is for whites to acknowledge the advantages they receive simply because of their color.

Examples of Racism

Before addressing white privilege specifically, it is important to summarize the nature of racism and its effects. While this certainly is not an exhaustive discussion of racism in America, it helps get the reader into the mind-set necessary to address white privilege. For a more detailed discussion of racist policies in criminal justice see Walker (2011).

Racism has been pervasive in American society. It has been insidious, harmful and resistant to change as well. Jensen (2012), for

example, points out that nonwhites are less likely to enjoy the following characteristics when compared to whites:

- . Attend primary and secondary schools with smaller class sizes;
- . Have access to computer technology in public schools and at home while in school;
- . Graduate college;
- . Earn larger salaries;
- . Keep a job during recessions;
- . Have access to adequate medical care;
- . Live in favorable housing (less dilapidation, less crime, etc.);
- . Spend a lower percentage of income on housing;
- . Have adequate access to home loans;
- . Own stocks;
- . Have retirement accounts;

Along the same lines, black income is only about three-fifths that of whites and black joblessness is twice as high. Also, black babies are twice as likely as white babies to die in the

first month of life (Jensen, 2012; United for a Fair Economy, 2004). Still others have found that black job applicants with no criminal record are less likely than white applicants with a criminal conviction to get called back by prospective employers (Jensen, 2012; Pager, 2003).

The origin of racism against nonwhites in North America goes back to the 1600s, but much of the recent damage is just as salient. For example, during the New Deal (1930s), the Social Security Act intentionally excluded people working on farms and servants from being covered. This effectively denied nonwhites the benefits that were routinely accorded to whites (Jackson, 1985). This support was generally taken for granted by whites and allowed them to pass down more resources to successive generations. It is not surprising that nonwhites typically had less ability to meet financial responsibilities. This white privilege was a strong boost for whites as they sought to: 1) save money, 2) pass down

money to their heirs, 3) provide for their children's education, 4) choose a place to live, etc. Similarly, another New Deal program (e.g., FHA) typically favored whites over nonwhites for home loans. This made it much easier for whites to buy homes and property and to leave them for their children. This type of white privilege gave a huge head start to whites starting out in life (Jackson, 1985).

Also, the U.S. has been loath to enforce fair housing rules on lenders and sellers. As a result, substandard inner-city housing was foisted upon nonwhites with higher rates of crime, pollution, weak and abusive police, etc. As a response, many whites who were averse to living among nonwhites, left for the suburbs and the access to white privileged home loans. This allowed whites to accumulate prime homes and property to be left as inheritances while nonwhites were left in the squalor of the broken inner-city. Eventually, the federal government began urban renewal projects that led to the confiscation of nonwhite=s property for the purpose of office

building and highway construction. This resulted in a population decline that led to less political power which in turn led to vulnerability to having prisons, garbage incinerators, and toxic waste dumps being placed in their neighborhoods (Bullard, 1999).

Labor unions during this time also favored whites as well. Unions typically sought to restrict membership to whites while simultaneously seeking lavish benefits for its members (e.g., better working conditions, healthcare, pensions, etc.). This also exacerbated the inequality between whites and nonwhites.

The end result of this vicious and racist cycle of economic violence against nonwhites was that nonwhite neighborhoods were dilapidated, polluted, undervalued, stigmatized, had poor services (and in the case of police, abusive services), were undesirable, politically weak and essentially hopeless. This acted as a major impediment to getting ahead in life while at the same time providing a huge

privilege to whites who had the inverse situation in the comfortable suburbs.

Research has shown that of families with incomes of less than \$6000 per year, two-thirds are black while only 36% are white. This is yet another indicator that poverty cannot explain the deleterious effects of being black in America by illustrating the privilege of whiteness (Bunyan and Mohai, 1992). Race is significantly more powerful than socioeconomic class at explaining and predicting who is most likely to live near hazardous waste sites (Lee, 1993). In fact, if American blacks had the same access to nutrition, wealth, healthcare, and protection from environmental pollutants that whites take for granted, 75,000 fewer of them would die every year (Wray, 1992; Lipsitz, 2006).

Another area where it pays to be white concerns the issue of drug use and possession. While the prison population in the U.S. has dramatically increased since the initiation of the latest war on drugs in the early 1980s, the rate of growth has impacted nonwhites more than

whites. This is in spite of the fact that a 1990 study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse revealed that 15% of the United States' 13 million chronic drug abusers were black (compared to 13% black in the population) and 77% were white (compared to 68% white in the population). However, blacks were four times more likely to be arrested for drug violations than were whites (Bertram, et al., 1996). More shocking is the trend toward the persecution of blacks by drug law enforcement. That is, in 1984, blacks accounted for 10% of drug arrests, in 1988 the figure was 40% and in 1990 it reached 42%. Either black Americans suddenly decided to become severely chronic drug law violators or law enforcement became substantially more discriminatory toward them. The available data point to the latter. To make matters worse, blacks also are more likely than whites to receive longer sentences even when committing comparable crimes (Bertram et al., 1996). It is not argued here, however, that police, courts and corrections personnel are all

consciously choosing blacks to persecute with anti-drug laws while ignoring similarly-situated white offenders.

Nevertheless, the factors discussed thus far have produced financial and social catastrophes in black neighborhoods that whites largely have the privilege of avoiding. These economic catastrophes harm blacks (e.g., joblessness, housing discrimination, mortgage bias, police discrimination, etc.) so that selling and using drugs actually begin to "make sense" to some people. The poor opportunities to work, buy and own land, and accumulate wealth derails many blacks as they seek to better themselves. This, combined with the problem of the lack of intergenerational transfers of wealth, make it nearly impossible for black parents to exercise control over their children. Without the possibility of an inheritance, many black kids begin to respect the wishes of their delinquent peers more than they do their own parents (Lipsitz, 2012).

Even after all of this, the vicious cycle

continues. Black communities then become known as the "bad parts of town" whereas the predominately white suburbs are considered respectable. As a result, crime prevention strategies are designed to keep the suburbs protected. To do this, law enforcement vigorously attacks the drug problems in those communities thereby forcing the inevitable and unstoppable drug trade to move into black neighborhoods. The result? Whites drive to black neighborhoods to buy their illegal drugs and then escape back into the white privilege of the suburbs. So long as the suburbs remain pristine, the extreme social and economic stigma of the inner-cities is tolerable. The "dangerous classes" are allowed to sell and use drugs and otherwise victimize each other so long as they stay in their places (Lipsitz, 2012).

This is not to say that urban drug sellers are ignored. In fact, the process of targeting minority communities for drug enforcement is blatant and unapologetic. The police, not

wanting to agitate influential members of the white privileged suburbs, cannot direct their arrest activities at the residents in those communities. However, they have arrest quotas that must be met (although most police departments deny this). Therefore, they go to where open market street sales are highly visible and that takes them to inner-city black neighborhoods. These areas are inhabited by politically and economically powerless blacks who have poor job and education prospects and no place to go. Many of them see high risk drug sales as lucrative. The police have an easy time rounding up enough young blacks to meet their arrest and prosecution quotas. As an added benefit to the criminal justice industrial complex is the fact that these are people with few political connections and no money to afford competent defense counsel. They are far less likely to have charges reduced, dropped or ultimately expunged and they are much more likely to plead guilty because they know the system is rigged against them (Lipsitz, 2012)

What is White Privilege?

White privilege is the hidden, almost invisible side of racism. Whereas overt racist actions and policies disadvantage nonwhites, white privilege is the latent benefit of being white. In addition to the copious privileges of whiteness discussed above, there are still other types of advantages that benefit whites that are beyond the reach of nonwhites.

First is the privilege of genealogy. It is clear that whites have the advantage of being descended from people who traditionally made the rules. Whites have the privilege of having largely come to the U.S. voluntarily as compared to blacks, able to secure land and homes, and legally able to own other human beings. This has afforded whites a major privilege, that of being able to define normality or of assuming that their perspectives are defined as the norm. All others, especially nonwhites, are different. White becomes normal and all other groups are "raced."

Cohen (1955) alluded to how white

normalcy manifests itself in school settings. In his theory of reaction formation, he argued that middle-class people (i.e. whites who are in control) are able to create middle-class measuring rods that define which behaviors are acceptable and those that are to be proscribed. In the U.S., people are taught to believe that if they do not pursue material gain (e.g., the American Dream) then they are lazy or shiftless. People are defined by how much they can earn, spend, consume and the types of materials they can show off. However, the institutional means (e.g., studying, saving, delaying gratification) of attaining the goal of middle-class status are severely blocked among the poor. Whereas the middle-class white child may have: 1) ample space at home, 2) parents to help with homework, 3) a desk, computer, learning software etc., and 4) a stress-free environment in which to study.

Most importantly, the lower-class black child lacks the cultural capital that is taken for granted in white families. Cultural capital is

another form of white privilege. Cultural capital represents social benefits that promote well-being. These include things such as 1) socialization on how to be respectful to white authority figures (e.g., teachers, police, judges, employers), 2) education, 3) intellect, 4) modes of speech (e.g., "Asounding white" instead of using Ebonics), 5) modes of dress (e.g., being neat instead of gangsta/disheveled, and 6) being taught how to resolve disputes diplomatically rather than with insults or aggression.

The problems that disadvantaged lower-class blacks will have in middle-class settings such as schools are predictable. The lower-class black youth has been indoctrinated by the materialistic American culture to have the same aspirations as other kids with reference to achieving middle-class status. He also wants a job, house, car, security, retirement account, adequate health care, and vacation time with a family. When he confronts middle-class/white America, however, he experiences extreme cultural shock and disadvantage (Merton, 1938).

Even though many inner-city schools are substandard and located in black neighborhoods, they still largely function according to middle-class rules. This disadvantage illustrates the middle-class measuring rods that white America has imposed on public-school systems. The criteria for success in this atmosphere includes: 1) ambition, 2) individual responsibility, 3) manners and courtesy, 4) neatness, 5) delayed gratification, 6) skills and achievement acquisition, 7) rationality and planning, 8) refraining from violence, and 9) respect for authority (Cohen, 1955).

Middle-class white kids are taught and socialized these values from an early age. This gives them a huge head start in life given that they will be evaluated according to the same standards. In the movie, "Don't Be a Menace," the Wayans brothers illustrate this type of white privilege to perfection. In one scene, ALoDogg, an inner-city black ghetto youth, wants to apply for a job in a middle-class firm. He

approaches the receptionist, a nicely dressed, proper and prim white lady of moderate temperament. As the pleasant music softly plays in the background, Loc Dogg approaches her to ask about the job. He screeches to her loudly, "Hey! I heard y'all niggers is hiring! Whassup?"

Did Loc Dogg approach the receptionist this way because he is mean-spirited? Has hormonal imbalances? Is genetically inferior? Of course not. He did this because he grew up without white privilege and consequently was deprived of the cultural capital and was devoid of the socialization necessary to teach him the proper way to meet the middle-class measuring rods. In short, he doesn't know how to compete in a middle-class environment following white privilege rules. Whites are the ones who define and decide what proper decorum and etiquette are in this type of interaction.

In another scene, two black teens are innocently shopping in a convenience store owned by an Asian couple. The Asian wife follows the blacks through the store incessantly

demanding that they "buy something or get out!" She clearly believes they are untrustworthy and prone to shoplifting. During this time, a professionally dressed white man is stealing items from every aisle but remains undetected by the Asian couple because he simply does not fit the "shoplifter profile." While these two movie scenes are hyperbolic parodies, the point from them is valid. Black males from "the hood" must endure life in middle-class white America without the benefit of white privilege. The constant psychological strain that this causes is enormous and relentless. What is even stranger is that so many whites wonder why they are often angry and rebel by committing crimes at a higher rate.

Given the magnitude of the obstacles placed in the way of lower-class blacks, success in school becomes problematic as well. Middle-class measuring rods created and evaluated by white America are relatively easy for whites to follow. When the rules are made by whites, for whites, it is easy, for example, to believe in

individual responsibility while simultaneously eschewing communal responsibility.

Whites have convinced themselves that the playing field is level for everyone and if you have ambition and work hard you will succeed. However, as we have seen, the playing field is not level at all, leaving lower-class blacks at a competitive disadvantage. Blacks are told that if they fail it is because they are defective. The emphasis on individual responsibility makes it all the more painful to seek government assistance in order to survive. This of course helps to explain the self-hating that many poor blacks exhibit because they are told that everyone should make it on their own merit. The worst part is that whites genuinely believe that they make it on their own merit and not with the aid of white privilege. This is another reason college students must be made aware of that privilege.

Historically, whiteness also has helped to create the myth of the meritocracy. This is the white delusion that encourages members of

society to believe that people have an equal chance at success and will attain it if they follow the Protestant work ethic requiring study, saving, paying one's dues, and following white rules. Part of the meritocratic delusion is the concept of rugged individualism. Here, people are duped into believing that since the early westward expanding pioneers made it without the help of the state then everyone today should do the same. No matter one's lot in life, people should pick themselves up "by the bootstraps." If, for example, a person looks to government for help then it is because of personal defects such as learned helplessness, laziness, greed, low self-control, or even genetic inferiority. To accept aid from government is seen as a cause of intergenerational dependency that will emasculate people and destroy the enterprising spirit by turning the masses into wards of the state. In America, people of color, being devoid of white privilege, are keenly aware of the ludicrousness of this reasoning. They already know that the system was created specifically

with the intent of keeping resources in the hands of the powerful, predominantly white elitists. By promoting the myth of meritocracy, white America can more easily assuage its collective guilt for creating and perpetuating acute inequality between races. If, after all, people get ahead strictly as a result of their own merit, then people of color who fall behind must obviously be defective and unworthy of our concern. It follows, then, that government social programs for the poor should be both de-emphasized and drastically slashed in order to reduce the surplus population in American society. To continue to redistribute resources to the surplus population is dysgenic in nature and promotes the devolution of the human species. This forms the basis of Social Darwinism (McNamee, 2009).

Celebrating Diversity!

White America has adopted a ruse as a way of ignoring the problems of inequality and systemic racism called the "celebration of diversity." The ostensible goal of celebrating diversity is to give equal opportunity to

everyone regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, handicap status, sexual preference, etc. This is only a superficial goal of course because the real goal of celebrating diversity is to create the impression of fairness and equal opportunity while simultaneously ensuring that there is no meaningful redistribution of resources away from the white ruling elite.

The white privilege scam of celebrating diversity goes like this. The horrible manifestations of racism in the areas of housing discrimination, home loans, racial profiling by the police, the imposition of middle-class measuring rods, inequality of income, early death, and environmental racism, are to all be forgiven because whites are willing to hire a couple of highly educated nonwhites in the workplace. Imagine the CEO of a firm going on the loudspeaker at his place of business to address the workers as follows:

Ladies and gentlemen of White
Supremacy Incorporated (WSI), I

have spectacular news! In an effort to promote equality and to offset the unfairness of past American policies and government action, we have sought out, screened, and now hired two new employees. These are not just any new employees, however. No indeed; we have hired both a highly educated, upper middle-class black guy as well as an Oriental. As an added diversity bonus, the Oriental is female. We hereby proclaim this corporation and America to be post-racial as this is proof of a level playing field. We will have a Celebration of Diversity party on Friday complete with ice cream, cake and party favors. Feel free to wear blue jeans and a Hawaiian shirt on that day.

It is precisely the reasoning behind the celebration of diversity that allows whites to remain oblivious to racial inequality and systemic racism. Whites can pat themselves on the back for hiring the Ablack guy and the Oriental female@ and they are able to successfully neutralize the guilt that would be manifest if they were truly race conscious. Not only are whites not race conscious, but they actually pride themselves on being "colorblind." It is not uncommon, for example, to hear white undergraduate college students who become distressed while discussing these issues, say things such as, "I am colorblind. I do not see race," "we are all just human beings," "let's focus on how we are similar," "why are nonwhites so sensitive all the time about race," "why do nonwhites focus so much on racial differences; isn't that racist too?" Whites clearly have a vested interest in ignoring, or at least obfuscating, any distinctions to be made about race. As long as "we are all just humans," and "people who fail do so because they are

defective," whites do not have to confront the systemic racism in America and the extremely hard work that must be done to bring about economic and social justice.

The Bell Curve and Defective Nonwhites

In 1994, Herrnstein and Murray published *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* where they essentially argued that blacks who failed to achieve the American Dream do so because they are genetically inferior and inherit deficient IQs from their defective parents. These types of publications give license to whites to justify the continuation of the racist policies discussed above. After all, if blacks are failing as a result of flawed genetics and defective wiring, then it really makes no sense to seek redistributive policies that will help them and the poor in general. As noted above, to do so would simply be promoting dysgenics. In other words, if we increase welfare spending it is not a way of alleviating the harms caused by centuries of racist policies, but, rather, simply a way of

propping up inferior people (i.e., atavists) and will lead to a severe weakening of the U.S. population by relaxing the effects of natural selection. This terrifies white America because redistributive welfare policies will inevitably lead to a proliferation of the "dangerous classes" that will become so numerous that they will swamp the nation, particularly at the voting booths.

Intergenerational Transmission of White

Privilege

White privilege also perpetuates itself through the media, literature, entertainment and language. The raw material to make this happen includes slang terminology (e.g., "he was blacklisted," the Washington Redskins, the Prince of Darkness, etc.), movies, cartoons, ethnic jokes, books, history lessons (e.g., Andrew Jackson as the "Indian fighter") and so forth. Such things help create and reinforce racial hierarchies (Barrett and Roediger, 2012). Whites also are quick to reward nonwhites who have learned how to act white. These "model

minorities" are those who have learned and internalized the racial hierarchies and understand that whites are on top of it and so long as they are not as bad as blacks, they too can be deemed acceptable in American society. Asian-Americans currently occupy this role but Hispanics are moving up as well (Carbado and Gulati, 2013).

In 1980, the U.S. Census Bureau created two categories of whites: Hispanic and non-Hispanic. This was the culmination of decades of struggle by Latinos to be accepted in the "white club." Throughout the 1900s, Mexican-Americans fought in courts, legislatures and throughout society to avoid being considered colored. To be tossed in with blacks as colored would have been catastrophic from a social justice standpoint. American society and the courts granted Mexican-Americans the status of "quasi-white." This meant that while they clearly were not equal to European whites, they at least belonged to something of a parallel universe of whiteness. In

essence, white privileged America told Mexican-Americans that so long as they accept white supremacist policies and recognize the inferiority of blacks they at least have a chance to be accepted as quasi-white and can enjoy some of the rewards of that privilege (Foley, 2012).

White Privilege to Divide and Conquer

Being white also gives one the advantage of being able to divide and conquer those who dare upset the white supremacist status quo. For example, the white elite powerbrokers pit union members against average Americans. Americans of all races are warned that victories by organized labor will drive up the cost of products. Unions also are blamed for businesses going bankrupt. The argument is that if unions succeed in improving working conditions, wages and pensions, then businesses will not be able to afford to stay open. Therefore, common folk are to be fearful and oppose unionization when, in reality, unions and nonunion members of middle America would be far better off siding

with each other against the elite who cling to obscene amounts of the nation's wealth. Legions of "Reagan Democrats" abandoned progressive policies in the 1980s based upon this type of fear-mongering coming from those who seek to destroy organize labor.

Along the same lines, powerful white classes seek to pit modestly educated whites and people of color against undocumented workers. Terms such as "illegal aliens" are used to scare middle and lower-class whites concerning the brown invaders from south of the border. Anti-immigrant rhetoric blames migrants for importing communicable diseases, gang members, and drugs as well as for Balkanizing communities in the U.S. with their foreign customs and language. Anti-welfare propaganda is used to scare nativist Americans into believing that the social safety net will burst if millions of Mexican and Central American immigrants are allowed to "infest the country." Along the same lines, white culture

and media promote images of crime designed to keep the masses divided. Criminals are typically portrayed as street offenders and disproportionately nonwhite. We are taught to be fearful of the aggressive thugs in the streets while simultaneously encouraged to ignore the crimes of the powerful such as white-collar and political crimes. This further guarantees that white supremacist control of wealth is not disturbed. This is what Karl Marx referred to as the "false consciousness" (Tucker, 1978).

Racists All Wear Pointed Hoods Don't They?

White privilege gives whites the advantage of defining exactly what racism looks like. The goal of whiteness is to create the perception that racism manifests itself in isolated individual acts or the acts of lunatic groups. Whites routinely pride themselves for their "compassionate" and "progressive" opposition to the White Aryan Brotherhood, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Neo-Nazis. By lashing out at these racist villains, whites are "proving" they have identified the enemies and are

staunchly seeking to marginalize them. How, after all, can someone accuse whites of being racist if they are so opposed to these white supremacist groups? Excoriating individual members of these fringe racist groups, however, is self-serving to whites. By doing so they are obfuscating the fact that real racism can only survive when there is cultural, social, and legal support for it (Davis, 2012). It also covers up the fact that systemic racism is running rampant and is being unconsciously condoned by otherwise well-intentioned whites. This is another reason why white privilege must be made obvious to the future generation of leaders as well as college students. In one study, 70% of whites thought that blacks have the same opportunities to live a middle-class life as do Caucasians. Similarly, in 1990, more than one-half of whites saw blacks as innately lazy, less intelligent and less patriotic than whites (Landry, 1991). This illustrates the dire need to bring white privilege to the forefront of discussion in the college setting.

Criminal Justice Stigma and White Privilege

Finally, white privilege gives whites the freedom from the constant fear of being targeted by the criminal justice system based upon the color of their skin. When a black male, for example, is driving (particularly if he is in the "wrong" neighborhood), he has to psychologically maintain a state of hypervigilance. He has to worry about whether each lane change, turn, signal, and speed is within the boundaries of acceptability to white America's hired status quo enforcers (i.e., the police) or whether he will be targeted for enforcement. Whereas whites have the freedom to completely avoid black neighborhoods, blacks inevitably face the stressors of constantly being reminded that they live in a country set up to benefit whites. This takes an enormous psychological toll on blacks and it is a stressor not faced by whites. This again gives a competitive edge to whites and they need to be made aware of their advantaged status (Rothenberg, 2012)

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, the question becomes how can we get future generations of students made aware of the impact of systemic racism?

The only way to do this is to continually raise these issues in college classes. Students, particularly whites, have to be made aware not only of the harmful effects of overt racism but must also come to see the privileges they have been given that are completely independent of their merits, abilities, intellect or hard work.

One caveat is in order first, however. It is essential to point out that whiteness, while an unearned privilege that is granted in America, is not the only one available. In fact, there are copious categories of privilege available. For example, a person is privileged over others if the person is: 1) heterosexual, 2) male, 3) Christian, 4) upper-class, 5) physically able, 6) mentally healthy, and 7) educated. A white person, for example, who is gay, atheist, female, handicapped, has a mental illness, and is

undereducated, is not better off than a wealthy black who is a college graduate. In sum, we all have times, places, and circumstances where we are the oppressor and at other times we may be the oppressed. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that whiteness confers upon its recipients, advantages, preferences, vital cultural capital and access to resources that simply are not available to those who have not been admitted to the club. This is true even though biologists and geneticists have eschewed the physical existence of races and come to the realization that the concept of race is a social construct created and perpetuated by those with the economic and political power to do so (Painter, 2012).

This "survey" is not meant to be administered in its entirety as this would demoralize and fatigue respondents. These items should be sampled by college teachers and used as tools to initiate meaningful debate with students in class. Many of these items have been excerpted from

disparate sources (e.g., Wise, 2011; McIntosh, 1990) over a period of several years. Some others were created by the author and students from various criminal justice courses.

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