

BRIDGE Conversation Hour: Race in the Time of COVID-19

4/20/2020

Notes

There have been numerous race-related issues that have arisen due to the global pandemic

- Increased xenophobia and anti-Asian racism being one of them
- But also, COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting different communities

It would be difficult to pack everything into one meeting, so if there is interest in follow-up around a specific topic, please reach out and let Anna Zhou (amzhou@psu.edu) know.

Today, the conversation was centered around anti-Asian discrimination/xenophobia. We began with discussing in broad strokes some of the issues on a national level, and then focused in on what is happening on a local level.

Context:

- Not limited to just America, but there has been increases in harassment, prejudice and racism on a national level
 - NY state attorney general has a special hotline to report anti-Asian discrimination for those in NY
 - Most extreme example reported: woman had acid poured over her in Brooklyn
 - Weekly reports from Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (who are tracking)
 - Verbal harassment, shunning are the most common
 - Intersection of race and gender - women are more likely to be harassed
 - PA in the latest report makes up 2.50% of the most recent reports (CA, NY have very high rates)
- “Chinese Virus”, “Kung flu” language used by the president is problematic
- Highlights the idea that Asian Americans are seen as “foreign”
 - Asian Americans feel the need to emphasize their “American-ness”
 - Backlash against Andrew Yang’s op-ed telling Asian Americans to solve the problem; wear red, blue and white etc.
 - Additional layer of “us” and “them” with international students/recent immigrants who may not have residency (internalized racism)
 - This is not the first time these themes have emerged with the Asian American populations: there are parallels with Pearl Harbor and Japanese internment camps, with Japanese Americans feeling the need to prove their patriotism

Local (to State College):

- No formal reports yet BUT

- There have been word-of-mouth reports about certain areas to avoid (e.g. North Atherton Walmart)
- People are being told to “go back to your own country” etc.
- Two Chinese students had their apartment egged
- Currently, there is a reporter at WPSU who is collecting anecdotes to report on anti-Asian discrimination/harassment

Conversation Topics:

Changes in the culture and normalcy in face masks:

- Impacts multiple communities
 - Asians are seen as carrying the virus or targeted because they are wearing masks
 - Blacks are perceived as suspicious/dangerous when wearing masks
- Will things changed now that the CDC put out guidelines to wear the masks? Even across the past few weeks there has been a drastic change in who is wearing masks out in public.
- The rhetoric has noticeably shifted
- Even among students in our department, Asian students feel more comfortable to wear masks now compared to before with the increased normalcy

The role of blame in the rise of xenophobia/anti-Asian discrimination:

- Students from China can feel offended when other students frame that the disease originated in China –even though we may perceive this as a fact we can’t say with certainty that this is true
 - It takes many years to really find and identify the origin of the outbreak (good example is the SARS outbreak)
- Sometimes, the question of where a virus originates can be politicized to lead to fear and xenophobia
 - Different media outlets from different countries may be disseminating different information
- Blame and origin of who’s bringing the virus in can lead to fear of being perceived as the “other” for Asian American students
- **As instructors, if students bring this type of concern, it is important to make sure that we do our due diligence and research the facts before addressing these types of concerns in the classroom**

Article that was discussed during the conversation hour:

<https://www.npr.org/2020/04/14/834109166/where-did-the-coronavirus-originate-virus-hunters-find-genetic-clues-in-bats>

How can we support students in the classroom?

- Open discussion if the class material/topic is relevant
- If class material is not relevant, make sure to validate students’ concerns; highlight that it is going on and express openness to discussion with students who want someone to talk to

Efficacy of Bystander Intervention

- BRIDGE's buddy system may be a good way to go about helping students who need someone there with them – just the presence of an additional person may help decrease the likelihood of being targeted
- Possible increase in harassment occurring online given social distancing and quarantine
 - In gaming platforms, problematic screennames can be reported
 - BRIDGE can maybe find resources on how to report online through various platforms
- There may be different types of intervention that are needed:
 - While a lot of the reports are harassment, there are anecdotes about people asking Asian individuals if they are Chinese, and if so, then they will kill them (not local to State College, thankfully)
 - Intervention for verbal harassment may differ drastically than threats of bodily harm – important to address what the differences are in intervening in different types of instances

What are some other ideas on how to support students on a local level?

- In addition to the buddy system, maybe have a number to call if they are being harassed
 - Difficult to tell if that person can drop everything, but maybe the one phone number can connect the person with many others who are in the area (phone tree)
 - University has systems in place for number to call when you feel unsafe
 - We can create something similar to an ally network, but more immediate
 - Whatsapp/Text group to ping when in need
- Many students are currently outside of State College – what are some ways that we can support them?
 - Provide remote support on reporting instances of discrimination – provide more general resources on reporting if they are outside of State College
 - Provide general resources

Creating a Resource Bank

Will be located on <https://sites.psu.edu/bridgediversityalliance/response-to-covid/>

If you have any resources, please send them along to Anna Zhou (amzhou@psu.edu)

- Create a running list of different resources for individuals (different webinars, educational materials, etc.)
- Good news articles that discuss race-related issues (e.g. there was an article on redlining that may be of interest)
- Provide resources such as community hotlines