

**Tatum- Reflective Response**  
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**EDCI 755**

Beverly Tatum's title "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" is a perfect depiction of attitudes regarding race. I admire the author's willingness and courage to discuss race matters in such an insightful and straightforward manner. I found the book engaging and interesting. It accurately describes reality, yet at the same time is racially sensitive and considerate of Whites.

Tatum reaffirms some of the arguments in our reading in this course. The first part of the book is about "White Privilege." She explains that her notion of "white privilege" came into being when, upon being asked what her race was, one of her White American students answered, "I don't know, normal." My understanding of Tatum's definition of White Privilege is that society is designed to fit White people, which causes Whites to take a lot of things for granted, to take advantage of things, and not be sensitive to how other people may be affected by race. In short, to have white privilege is to not have to think about race.

Tatum suggests that ethnic minorities in America typically understand their cultures. She implies that Whites being considered normal makes others "abnormal." She also implies that this issue is a "White issue" that is directly linked to White supremacy and does not exist amongst ethnic minorities.

Tatum does not discuss the "normal" and "abnormal" within a certain culture. For example, one of my friends is an African American Muslim convert. We were discussing baby names recently and she told me that if she had a son she could not call him Muhammad because that is too Islamic and not "normal" according to her family's and her in-law's cultures. Their objection wasn't religion-based but merely because it was not "normal." They named all of their other children Islamic names, which fit into Black culture, as many Black names have Muslim origins. However, the name Muhammad in their culture was too "abnormal." This shows that there are "normal/abnormal" *within* a culture.

On another note, Tatum gives a clear explanation of how White supremacy still infests society. She states, "If a person of color is a victim of housing discrimination, the apartment that would otherwise have been rented to that person of color is still available for a White person. The White tenant is, knowingly or unknowingly, the beneficiary of racism, a system of advantage based on race. The unsuspecting tenant is not to blame for

the prior discrimination, but she benefits from it anyway" (Tatum, 1997, p. 9). The explanation that the author provides here is excellent for arguing that although they are not actively persecuting anyone, White people are still at an advantage and are at the top of the hierarchy.

Tatum also discusses stages of racial identity development amongst Black youth, which she argues can lead to an anti-educational stance. Tatum says,

“It is clear that an oppositional identity can interfere with academic achievement, and it may be tempting for educators to blame the adolescents themselves for their academic decline. However, the questions that educators and other concerned adults must ask are, How did academic achievement become defined as exclusively White behavior? What is it about the curriculum and the wider culture that reinforces the notion that academic excellence is an exclusively White domain?” (Tatum, 1997, p. 64).

In her argument Tatum blames the education system and society for a Black and Latino anti-educational stance. She offers statistics that emphasize the gap between the number of educated Whites and the number of Educated Blacks and Latinos. In light of what we have read and studied so far, we can not fully comprehend this issue without studying other factors that affect African American and Latino attitudes towards education. This requires a holistic study. It requires researching their families, cultures and societies. Granted, the purpose of this book does not seem to be to reform education but to raise awareness amongst people about racist behaviors that often go unidentified as such.

The author also gives a very persuasive argument for affirmative action by describing the biases that currently exist in the workforce. Whites consider themselves more intelligent than their Black supervisors whereas Blacks do not have such biases. She cites a survey performed on university students about their views on White and Black employees. The study found that the students think that “Blacks are not worse, but Whites are better” (as cited in Tatum, 1997, p. 119). The result of this study is appalling and it seems that affirmative action is the least that this nation can do to combat such racism and bias.

When I read the first two chapters of the book I had mixed feelings. My first impression was that the author was exaggerating the issue. She was basing her argument on some personal stories that were carefully selected. However the more I read the more I understood what she was trying to say. I think when I began reading I was thinking about it in the context of reforming education. Towards the end of the book I was thinking about it from the context of how to combat racism in general and how to be a race sensitive human being.

## Reference

Tatum, B. D. (2003). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? A psychologist explains the development of racial identity*. Basic Books: N.Y.