

**Privilege in the Classroom case studies**  
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Mid-way through the term, a literature class is discussing a novel and engaging in a discussion of period gender and race relations as depicted in the book, about a mixed race (mulatto) and a white boy who are friends. The author describes the multiracial boy as not being much darker than his white friend, and the instructor wants to highlight the rare nature of their relationship. The instructor says, “So you can imagine that John is about the same color as David here,” pointing to one of the few students of color in the class. “And Jane is about the color of John’s friend. They would be hard to miss as an odd pair in the society of the time.”

Ana Martinez is taking a Spanish class as part of her liberal arts requirement, and to be better able to speak with her older and extended family relatives from Central America. Though her pronunciation is very good, she is struggling with grammatical details like verb conjugation. Nonetheless, other students in the class constantly ask her for help with their homework. The instructor seems suspicious of her non-fluency, and quickly chided Ana for referring to her “novia” (girlfriend) rather than “novio” (boyfriend).

In the second week of one of my graduate classes we were talking about cultural competence and gender differences. The class was comprised of approximately 15 women and 1 man. The man shared his belief that he did not feel women were oppressed anymore and claiming so would be inaccurate because in his own experience his wife made more money than he did and that would clearly be impossible if women were still oppressed in society. A woman in the class wanted to further this discussion, share her experiences, and explain that his personal experience was real to him but not characteristic of all society. Another woman in class agreed with his belief using her ability to be in graduate school as an example of the complete impossibility of sexism existing in society. Though the woman wishing to challenge these perspective had her had raised, the professor announced that the sexism discussion was not the focus of our class that day and moved forward to the next topic.