

CRASHing the Matrix

Reducing ISM-induced delusions in Eugene

The new movie *Crash*, set in today's Los Angeles, depicts what I referred to in my interview ("We're All Infected," EW12/23/04): We are all infected with the memetic virus of racism. A meme is described as a virus of the mind. Like their biological cousins, memes are transmitted through any mode of human communication, and they mutate.



Simply stated, an ISM meme is transmitted through the English language, affecting your ability to see others as part of your human family and act accordingly. Think of ISMs like a form of herpes virus that attacks the underlying structure of humanity. Herpes infections like chicken pox cause inflammation and delusions, and destroy the integrity of healthy tissue. ISMs and their resulting systems of discrimination destroy the unity underlying any perceptible human differences: Class(ism), Race(ism), Addiction, Ability, Sex(ism), Heterosex(ism) (CRASH model, Calalang, Harris 2001).

I describe ISM (Individual Societal Structural Mentality) as a mentality that is vectored and incorporated through every structure in society and infects individuals. For every ISM there is an "invisible" structure of privilege supporting it – invisible in the sense that you are not meant to see it in operation, but you can train yourself to see it, much like seeing rain in your headlights at night, or dust in a dark room when you use a flashlight. It's always there; you simply need the right tool to see it.

Individuals can reduce their ISM-induced delusions through a process of self-education and self-actualization. Outside of prison, few men worry about the risk of being sexually assaulted walking across a parking lot to their car at night. For many women, it is a real possibility. Male privilege, which is part of the system of sexism, keeps men from seeing their hidden advantage in this regard.

Intersexed people are about 1 to 3 percent of human births currently. On this continent and in Africa before European contact, persons displaying the resulting sexual diversity held integral, often sacred roles in their societies. That they don't in this society is evidence of heterosexual privilege.

When Rush Limbaugh was found to have an illegal three-year supply of a prescription drug that he was addicted to (a felony), was he arrested? In this case you see the intersection of four kinds of privilege: male, white race, upper class, pharmaceutical addiction. If he had been of color, female, poor and in possession of a three-day supply of any street drug, would his legal treatment be the same? Would he be treated the same at any rehabilitation center in America? No.

I am from L.A., unabashedly, proudly. That city was founded before most of America. There were 44 "founding fathers," and only three of them were white. The white people weren't considered illegal or superior. As part of Mexico, slavery would be made illegal; slaves would be freed long before they were free in America, by a black-Indian president who was a former slave. When Alta California was forcibly brought into the U.S. and English became the official language, race relations changed dramatically. I'm not suggesting that English is the only language that vectors ISMs, but it spreads the ones we are most familiar with here.

In the movie *Crash*, you see the personal devil's bargain that everyone in the film makes with every level of racism: overt individual (Type I), covert individual (Type II), unconscious institutional (Type III), legal conscious institutional (Type IV), illegal conscious institutional (Type V) and socio-structural violence (Type VI). Different skills and strategies are needed to deal with an individual who is discriminating against you for their own personal reasons (Types I and II), or who is discriminating against you as part of an organization or institution (Types III-VI).

Einstein once described what we'd call ISMs as an "optical delusion of consciousness." He wrote, "This delusion is a prison, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons close to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from our prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all humanity and the whole of nature in its beauty."

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