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10 THINGS I WISH MY WHITE TEACHER KNEW

GUEST WRITER x DEC 14, 2016

by Joy Mohammed

If you think that race does not have an impact on the way that an educator teaches school children, please come on in and take a seat. I, a black student, owe a lot of my academic intelligence to my white teachers over the years, but I know that I have never felt that the expectation for my performance was lower than when I had a white instructor. Oh, the well-meaning microaggressions! It may have been me; as for my racist ass chemistry teacher, in particular, I am sure it was him. But there are a few things that I wish my white teacher knew:

1. IT'S NOT ALL YOUR FAULT.

Please do not think that students will learn about slavery and start to view you as a descendant of the overseer. And if they do, this is a great opportunity to share that all white people were not slave owners — some of you just got here. So since we got it out of the way that slavery was not your fault, can we talk about it, please? Talk about the subjugation of darker people, the indifference paid to the poor. Let's talk about the boy who was shot by the police and the mayor covered it up. Turn your classrooms into petri dishes of opinions and conversations for a child's mind. Do not tell them what to think, but challenge them to back up their one-dimensional views with facts and research. Yes, the ones they get from Instagram memes and ear hustling.

2. WORDS MEAN THINGS.

Words mean lots of different things. You need to be clear on what you say and how you say it. A linguistics study as performed by the University of Michigan that examined children who ask "Can I have a piece of cake?" versus children who ask "May I?" The study also showed that the kids who asked if they "can" have a different perception of their abilities and potential for success. This is juxtaposed to the children who ask "may" to be more submissive and tie their success to the permissiveness of others. Hmmmm. So what does this mean? Many Black kids, who were taught to ask "may," fear or respect authority on another level than the white child who thinks in the "cans." Put that in your toolbox for a rainy day.

3. THEY YELL.

And it is not personal. They were yelled at, they yell to you, they want to be heard. Everyone yells in black homes all the time. I have personally never been to a white home to witness this, but I think some of your mommas be yelling too. I have witnessed the legendary white whooping so please stop thumbing your noses at us.

Related: [Kentucky High School Suspends Black Hair Policy After Parent Speaks Out](#)

4. THEY AREN'T HERE TO ENTERTAIN YOU.

Please do not ask the children in your class to show you how to nae nae unless you are going to do it with them (Here's to you, Ron Clark). There is a lot of bad history surrounding blacks entertaining white people. Look it up. So since you ain't Sista Mary Clarence and I ain't Lauryn Hill, please spare us all the inspirational school year you think you are about to have surrounding song and dance. Moreover, our children are there to be educated by you, not to entertain you. If you want to brush up on your black culture, please see the latest Tyler Perry film starring Tyler Perry in about three or more roles.

The Ron Clark Academy



5. THEY AREN'T LIKE ALL THE OTHER KIDS.

Do not ever in your life think that you can educate inner city kids with techniques that were not designed for inner city kids. You are not Hillary Swank, and you cannot write us through our blackness. You will fail those kids, and you are a failure as a teacher. All children are unique all the time. Children may communicate and interact in a way that may be foreign to any way that you were ever treated. And it is not a poor reflection on their environment necessarily, but a reflection on you as a teacher to adapt to students needs.

6. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THEY LIKE YOU. ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THEIR PARENTS DON'T LIKE YOU.

Following up with what we said before, parents in general are supposed to be protective of their young. With racism being everywhere, students may be privy to some pretty racially charged conversations at home. I grew up with a family where there were four degrees between my parents and they referred to my teachers as “that white teacher.” And you did too.

The damage is in the micro-communication that a white teacher does not care about their young the way a black teacher will. There is also an unspoken rule of black people sticking together. That is why parents will request to move their student to the “black teachers” homeroom. Or maybe a parent will ask to move the student to the white teacher’s classroom because there is a perception of more structure or hostility. I don’t know! But I do know that your only defense against that type of thought is to get buy-in from your students, who afterward will defend their white teacher vehemently at home.

7. THEY NEED YOU.

Yes, you are their gatekeeper into whiteness. The reality is that black children need to learn to behave in a “white way” in order to avoid being mislabeled as ADHD, pre-juvenile, or some other nonsense. They need you to show them what the real difference between and inside voice and an outside voice. They need to understand that if you do not always say what you are thinking that you are not being fake, but polite. And they really need

to learn how to run shit. And yes, we stay taking notes. The reality is many of these children will end up working for a white person one day and they need to understand our differences.

8. THEIR COUSINS PROBABLY WON'T DO A DAMN THING.

This is pretty self-explanatory. Stop being so easily intimidated. Ain't no one trying to get shot by the police behind some classroom beef. Probably.



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9. THEY FEAR SOMEBODY OR SOMETHING.

If you cannot win the child over with your shiny hair or deep-sea eyes, you need to find out who is the person they care about the most. Get their phone number and kiss their ass, so that when you call Granny on them they already know that Granny no longer refers to you as "that white teacher" — you have a name and you have influence.

10. **BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL.**

This is the most important. I have seen young black girls pine over the white aesthetic of their educators and it makes me so upset. Not because I think white is ugly, but because while they complement their teacher's hair, skin and blue eyes, they are putting the things that make them so wonderfully black to the side. For example, I remember combing the hair of a white teacher while she inputs grades in her computer and I would compliment my teacher's hair. I was obsessed with the color, the texture, everything about it I wanted. The teacher agreed that her beauty was superior with silence. This is unacceptable.



Unacceptable.

As a white teacher, especially if you are teaching young black girls, you need to be ready and versed in *natural black is beautiful*. You need to come back with the “I wish I could wear my hair french braided for more than a hour,” or “I can’t Bantu knot my hair appropriately.” You must come with something to remind these girls that they are beautiful too! Because the media forgot, their moms who let them wear blue contacts forgot, and the beauty supply chains who do not carry our true texture forgot, too. Oh you didn’t know? I am here to tell you. Know it, understand it, breathe it. If you are going to teach black kids, know Black is Beautiful.

I would like to thank all of the white teachers who teach inner city and disadvantaged black youth with compassion, honesty, and fidelity. Despite insufficient pay, crumbling infrastructure, and mediocre materials. You da shit.

Joy Mohammed is a Nigerian-African American school counselor who lives in Detroit, Michigan, with her two children. In her non-existent free time she travels with her family, raises scholarship money for Detroit youth, does African Dance, and writes. Find her on Instagram: @pluswithminuslifestyle.

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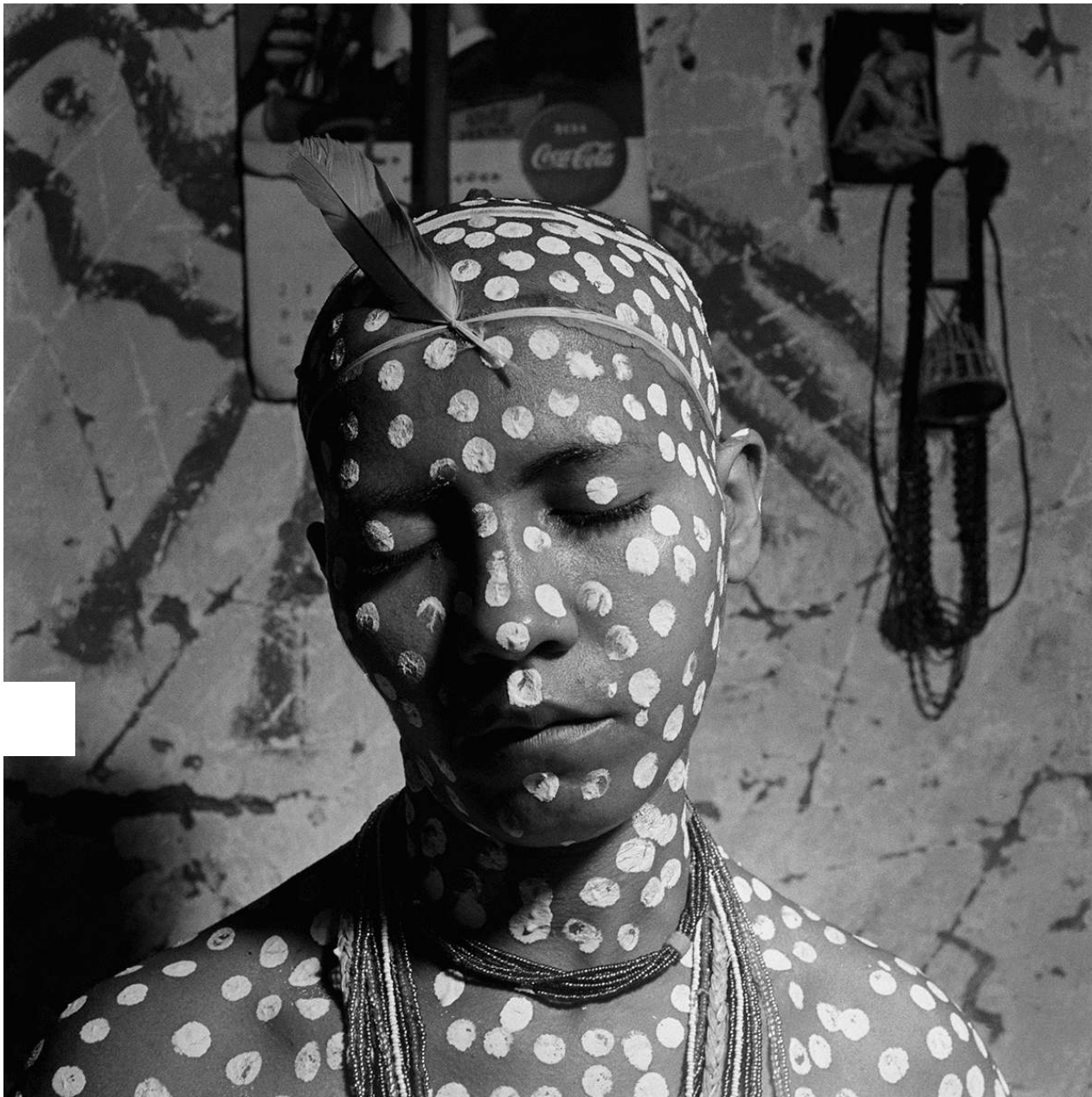
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[A Letter From a Black Scholar](#)

by [Leighia Fleming, M.A.](#)



As the year comes to an end it is a joyous occasion for many students and families. It's especially a very exciting time for our students of color. They have crossed a milestone that generations before paved the way for them to simply get to the door. For many black students graduating this year especially at a PWI (Predominately White institution) they will cross the stage and be small in numbers. The journey to get to the stage was one of heartache and pain that they faced not in the streets, but right here in the IVORY towers of our prestigious institutions. They faced discrimination from professors, neighbors in the residence hall belittled them, and they were part of the three percent the University uses to claim how diverse they school is and then places their pictures in every brochure. Students walking across the stage these upcoming months have dealt with the oppression not the same as their fathers or grandmothers, different but still their truths. I understand the struggle because I too felt the pain of being part of the 3 percent as I walked the stage 2 years ago to receive my Masters and years prior receiving my Bachelors. I hoped that times would change, but its 2015 and its all the same. So from ME to you I write this so that those who have not experienced this journey understand the impacts of their actions on college campuses. I ask that you share this simple letter, as these are the experiences of black students right here at our universities.

A Letter From ME

Because I am black that does not mean I am from Compton or that I can do the Dougie or the tootsie roll

Please know that when you see me in the classroom or walking around campus, I did not take your seat, I worked equally if not harder to earn a place in this room

When you see me around campus walking with my hair nice and silky smooth and the next day with a fro looking like kutta Kenta... no you can not touch my hair. It is okay to ask my why I wrap my hair, and why I may only wash it once every 2 weeks, but once I inform you it is NOT okay to shrug your nose and respond. "Oh girl that's nasty."

If you see me in basketball shorts, Jordan's, and a white tee: I am sorry to inform you but I do not play on the basketball team but if you still want my autograph I will gladly agree.

Professors- when you turn to me and say... "So how do you feel about that?" Know that I do not speak for my whole race, but I will. So when I do, do not get upset when the passion that steams from my voice, no I am not angry but I am just trying to educate you

When I sit quietly in class I am not stupid, I do understand, and matter of fact, I have a lot to say, its just that today, I don't want to be perceived as the angry black woman.

Please note that when a Biggie, Tupac, or 2 Chainz songs is playing and you get caught up in the lyrics at NO point should nigga come from your mouth

And if it slips and I look at you, a sorry is not acceptable but a change in your actions is, what I recommend

Lastly, I am not looking for handouts, I am just looking for someone to take the time and actually care about me, beyond the color of my skin, beyond the weave in my hair, beyond the dialect in my speech, beyond how many points I scored in the game last night. Yes, I am black. And I love being black. Yes, black is me but there is more than beyond what you see.

I am a child from a long history a history of slavery where my ancestors suffered for me to be free. I am a daughter or son of a mother who had to sacrifice her dreams for me to succeed. I am a student like the rest, my story is my story & the next person of color has their own. So before you judge me take the time to know my community and me. Because we each have a song, a tale, or story that will make the room fill with laughs, tears, joy & pain. So we ask you to please sit aside your prejudices, and stereotypes to engage and we will gladly explain that yes, we are black, we love being black, but there is way more than just what you see. There is more to us, there is more to me.

I ask that you reflect and ask yourself this simple question... What can I do better as new students come to my campus in August, how can I support them in a positive way so they know you are listening?

CONTRIBUTOR BIO:

I am 25 year old, black, female, Christian, Student Conduct junkie and REAL. I received my BA in Liberal Studies from Dominican University of CA, where I was a college athlete- GO PENGUINS! After realizing teaching wasn't my passion I applied to the University of San Francisco where I pursued my MA in Organizations & Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education and Student Affairs. I am currently the Assistant Director of Student Conduct, Rights & Responsibilities and Community Engagement at the University of San Francisco. It is my goal to speak transparency to students about the choices they make and how they not only affect their lives, but the lives of others. Outside of work I enjoy traveling, attending professional athletic events (GO GIANTS & NINERS), hitting the batting cages, and reading romance novels.

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A Letter to White Teachers of My Black Children

June 24, 2019

Dear White Teachers of My Black Children:

I am a Black mom.

I know it's sometimes hard to decide whether to say Black or African-American. I used to identify as African-American because I loved hearing the reference to my ancestral homeland in my description of myself. But then to say African-American reduces the majestic continent of Africa down to the status of a country. Africa is not a country, and so I now identify as a Black woman. I identify here specifically as a Black mom because I have two children who are now in high school. Raising them to be inquisitive, informed adults with a strong sense of identity and agency is an essential part of my life.

I am also an educator, so I understand the deep importance of guiding and shaping all of our children. I'm also intimately aware of all the cultural complexity surrounding our work. I know, too, that we have a long way to go before we're even close to treating all of our students equitably. This is why I'm writing to you today. I have much to say about what I wish you had been able to do for my children when they were in your elementary and middle school classrooms, and what I hope you will do for all children of color entering your classrooms.

Because I'm an educator, I know well what you — or at least the vast majority of you — learned in your pre-K-12 education and in your teacher-prep program. I also know what you didn't learn. As you grew up, you were most likely taught in school and at home that Abraham Lincoln was the great emancipator, that it was acceptable, right even, to refer to the people of the global majority as minorities, and that communities with higher percentages of Black families are in need of saving.

As a teacher, you most likely did not receive ongoing professional development about race and education in America. You're likely to have a vague understanding about issues of diversity and equity and inclusion with insufficient understanding of culturally responsive teaching and learning. On the other hand, you most likely received extensive training on implementation of state and national education standards, new curricular initiatives, and how to improve standardized test scores. In recent years, you might have received professional development about social emotional learning, but you'll have done so without exploring the **critical sociopolitical considerations** that are essential to strengthening your ability to teach well across race, class, and gender.

In high school, college, and your teacher-prep program, you no doubt were taught something about race in America, but it's highly unlikely that you learned the truth about Black experience. It's likely, for instance, that you've been taught little to nothing about the **pre-enslavement contributions of Black people** to the world, the horrors and impact of centuries of enslavement, post "Emancipation" Jim Crow laws and practices, and the many ongoing racially based **systemic injustices** such as mass incarceration, housing discrimination, wealth disparities, and lack of equal access to quality education, health care, and more.

I didn't learn about these things in school either, but thankfully, my parents made sure I learned about these important aspects of American life and history that are **absent from the textbooks and teacher's guides**.

Because it's unlikely that you learned about all of these things in school or in your home, it's even more unlikely that you teach about these matters now. I know that those of you who taught my children when they were younger didn't necessarily teach them about these issues. But here's the thing: they truly wanted to hear it from you, too. We have talked extensively about these matters at home, but my children's school experiences would have been far more valuable if you would have introduced them to the lives and works of Ellen and William Craft, Katherine Johnson, Lewis Hayden, Ida B. Wells and Denmark Vesey. They wanted to hear you tell them the truth about The Black Panther Party, the reasons behind the FBI's surveillance of Martin

Luther King, Jr., the painful facts about Columbus's experiences in the Americas, and the meaning of Juneteenth. And they didn't want to just hear a few tidbits about these essential and complex aspects of American life in February just because it was Black History Month.

What my children needed from you in school — what all students of color need from you in school — is a much deeper understanding of racial history and ongoing racial matters. If you are to teach them well — teach them as I know you want to teach them — you need deeper cultural knowledge and skills. If, for instance, you teach a social studies unit on immigration and you have your students present about the countries of their ancestors, Black children need you to think more deeply about how this assignment feels for them. One of the many things Black Americans lost as a result of the nation's involvement in enslavement is the knowledge of which African countries our ancestors came from. Although we now have some helpful information from Ancestry DNA, I, for instance, can't say for sure whether my African ancestors were Nigerian, Senegalese, Ghanaian, Congolese, Beninese, Togolese, Cameroonian, Malian, or from the Ivory Coast. And because we didn't have access to this information when my children were in elementary school, they ended up focusing only on their European heritage because our White ancestors are a lot easier to trace.

This can also be a tough and painful assignment for other students of color as well — especially for First Nations people whose ancestral stories are overlooked by misrepresented in the textbook versions of American history.

My guess is that you didn't think about all this in planning the unit. Going forward, I hope you will.

Because you were entrusted to partner with me in the education of my children, I wanted you to be curious about them with the same intensity with which you'd have them stand to pledge allegiance to the flag. I wanted you to wonder how they felt when they saw Mount Rushmore or the face of Andrew Jackson on the twenty-dollar bill they handed you with their field trip permission slip. I wanted you to wonder how they felt in your class after hearing about yet another unarmed Black life erased from this world by police brutality — all because the melanin we see as so beautiful looks like danger to others. Do you know how it felt for my children when you **didn't say anything** about racial injustices at the time of their occurrences? Do you know how it feels for your Black students today?

If your school is anything like the schools where I taught, you'll be expected to interact with your students' families at open houses, conferences, and literacy or math nights. On those nights, families are expected to come to

school, and are often judged harshly if they don't. I want you to think about this, think about why you are judging them harshly and what assumptions you are making. During parent teacher conferences, you will most likely not have a lot of time, so you'll probably default to talking *at* families about their children instead of engaging in dialogues *with families as partners*. I know it's hard. I've been there, too. But I'm asking you now, when it's time for conferences, when families show up to engage in conversation with you about the most precious people in their lives, please don't see your contract as a limitation. Use these moments as opportunities to connect, learn, and share.

As you well know, the dominant culture in the United States tries to suppress conversations on race. There are numerous reasons for this, most of them related to the maintenance of the power status quo. I'm asking you to help break this damaging practice — especially among adults in your school. There are certain conversations that take place in teachers' lounges about students and their families that I find both infuriating and heartbreaking. Too often, teachers are silent in the face of racist, prejudicial, biased, or stereotypical comments. I know it's uncomfortable to confront a colleague. I want you to consider, however, how uncomfortable it makes my family and all other families of color to know that there are people who we've entrusted with the care and teaching of our children who think of them as less than — less important, less worthy of our love and attention. When that moment arises next time — and it will arise — I want you to think of how uncomfortable the students are in that teacher's classroom, and I want you to speak up on their behalf. If a colleague says something derogatory about a child and/or that child's family, you must *speak up*. As Desmond Tutu said, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

My children are in high school now and have had the privilege of participating in advanced placement and honors courses in school. They have scored at proficient and advanced levels on standardized tests. They are amazing young people, and they have worked hard. But none of these accomplishments make them exceptional or in any way better than their schoolmates who have not had these same opportunities. It also doesn't make my husband and me exceptional or any better than the families of their schoolmates. Please consider the access and opportunities that are available to all students in your schools. Our job, if we are doing it right, is to celebrate every child where they are and move them forward with skill, love, courage, and grace. In a nation that claims to believe in educating all children to become engaged citizens, this practice of failing so many students of color, or tracking them based on implicit bias, or pushing them out of schools, or driving them into the criminal justice system, or ignoring them in hopes

they'll simply drop out — this adult behavior in schools perpetuates inequitable systems.

Finally, I know it's tempting to think that because you teach in a school with a high percentage of Black students, racism isn't an issue for you. Please know that proximity doesn't equal awareness. That would be like a male teacher saying, "I can't be sexist because I have female students." Know, too, that racial colorblindness isn't really a thing. While it's right to treat children equitably, it's also important to understand how race shapes lives in a racist system.

We all breathe in the smog of oppression, and the only way to expel it is to read, listen, reflect, ask questions and become better as a result of what we learn. I'm here asking you as educators to help lead the way. By improving equity in schools, by becoming truly inclusive learning communities with an effective anti-racist curriculum, we improve both individual lives and equity and justice in society. I'm here for you and I'm rooting for you. As Lilla Watson said, "... your liberation is bound up with mine."

With love, respect, and hope,

Afrika Afeni Mills

A Black Educator Mom

*Afrika Afeni Mills is the Senior Manager of Inclusive and Responsive Educational Practices and Instructional Coach for **BetterLesson**, an education organization designed to support teachers in developing the next generation of compassionate, resourceful, and iterative learners. She facilitates conference sessions frequently around the country.*

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**Mary Hitt** 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank You!!! This letter is profound and needs to be read by all educators and revisited often so that we remember and push ourselves to always connect with all students and have those conversations with families that may be difficult for some. Just open up and be willing to listen and understand ... educate oneself on what is real and not falsehoods we've grown up with. We are first and foremost all people who need to push out all our perceived thoughts when communicating with another human being. We all learn from one another. Celebrate each other!

**Dr. Moore** 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Dear Ms.Arika Afeni Mills

This is a powerful message and challenge to all teachers. Thank you for your keen insight and gentleness when delivering so a powerful message. Dr. Moore

**Teri** 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you for writing this! Thought provoking and so important! I am a white teacher who began my teaching career in a very diverse setting. I learned more in those five years than I could have imagined. That experience shaped me into the person I am today. That being said, I now teach in a predominantly white suburban high school. When white children's only exposure to people of color is the media, you understand how minds are polluted. Add in any prejudiced and racist ideas they may hear at home. What can we do to educate the white children living in communities with a serious lack of diversity? I see firsthand what happens when students don't have contextual experiences and it's not good.



April 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you for this. Do you recommend any primary age read aloud books for my new kindergarten class? It is never too early to inspire conversation, understanding, and celebration for each other!



Keri Findley 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you for this article. I've looked through the resources tab above, but I think I must be missing something. Could you perhaps point me in the direction of any list of appropriate picture books you've compiled on any of the topics you've mentioned. I use a lot of #classroombookaday time to address topics outside or alongside our adopted curriculum. It would be great to have a list of picture books to share with students (I teach fifth grade) that might share perspectives other than those most commonly heard. Thank you, in advance, for any help you can provide.



Beth 5 months ago · 0 Likes

This is exactly the kind of thing that helps us white teachers to turn good intentions to actual impact. Thank you for your courage and wisdom!



Brad 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you- as a middle and high school principal I'm always looking for resources that will support teachers all along the spectrum of racial equity awareness. Your words will be invaluable for those early on the journey and renewed my fire for the work this morning too. We have so much to learn, to do, and just so much more listening ahead. Sincere thanks.



Rick Froehbrodt 5 months ago · 1 Like

Thank you for this article. It is a good reminder to be cognizant of every voice in my multi-ethnic classroom. My upper grade teams does an immigration story project every other year to kick off the year. Migration is part of our standards. I try to be sensitive to those in the class who did not know their immigration story - or had no access to the complete story. Last time I did this I encouraged students to find out what information they could, but I felt like there was more I could do. I see this leading to some good questions about why some don't know their family journey and the possibility of some

conversations about forced migration and migration by choice. How would you approach this as a teacher?

Rick Froehbrodt, 5th grade teacher



Jenna Chandler-Ward 5 months ago · 0 Likes

We have a number of curricular resources listed under our resources link above. We also use resources from Teaching Tolerance, Teaching for Change, and Rethinking Schools -- all of which have addressed immigration. Great to hear you are considering all the complexities of your project.



Rick Froehbrodt 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thanks!



Tyrone Bates, Jr. 5 months ago · 1 Like

Afrika, what an excellent illustration of your experience. You did a great job of balancing a "call to action" and "action steps." I particularly was moved by the phrase "proximity doesn't equal awareness". Powerful!! Inspirational!!

Dr. Tyrone Bates, Jr.
CRTL Cohort Member



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thanks so much, Tyrone! :)



Nicole Hollins 5 months ago · 1 Like

Great article. Thank you. I whole-heartedly agree about having the uncomfortable conversations. As a white educator, I often feel uncomfortable around race issues, and therefore, avoid them. I need to learn to ask more questions. When I taught in a high Jewish populated area, I didn't feel uncomfortable asking questions of them and acknowledging my ignorance. I'm going to spend my last few week summer reflecting and reading up on some people and events you mentioned. Always learning and growing.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome!



Jon Pede 5 months ago · 1 Like

Thank you so much for this article. This past year I hit my 30th year as an educator. I am currently a school principal. If I could go back in time I would tell my younger self to “see” my students and their families and then see my own white privilege. I know I have so much more to learn and so much more to change in our world. Again thank you!



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome!



Kelly Amato 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Tell me how! I am a white teacher and I teach in a racially diverse classroom (not predominantly black) - I am willing to learn but I don't know how- How do I bring up these topics? How do I guide these conversations?



Jenna Chandler-Ward 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Check out our "where to start" list under the resources link above, and then select "foundational texts."



Laura Basone Bartolomeo 5 months ago · 1 Like

Great article! Thank you for your insight. I'm always looking for information on how I can become a better teacher. As a music teacher, this is my newest resource that I think will help me; directly related to my subject area. "Decolonizing the Music Room aims to use research to inform educators to help them develop culturally competent pedagogy."
<https://decolonizingthemusicroom.com> Resources from your article and from the comments are such a help. Thank you!



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thanks so much for sharing this resource! :)



Tiana Morton 5 months ago · 1 Like

I love every bit of this! I have been trying to share it, but it doesn't seem to be working. Is there a way to send it via email?



Jay 5 months ago · 1 Like

Excellent article



Hassan Robert Adeeb 5 months ago · 1 Like

Well stated. Well stated.



Leticia Hickman Barge 5 months ago · 1 Like

Since 1954....

Thank you from my Spirit~Heart ♡

These Truths so needed to be Voiced.

G~MaBarge' ♡



Vesta Hammond Udall 5 months ago · 1 Like

Beautifully expressed. I very humbly agree. Years ago, I was the first white teacher in an all black inner-city elementary school in my hometown of Jacksonville, Florida. This experience was one of the most important of my teaching career, and of my life. Since I was a small child my [intelligent] parents taught me that racial prejudice was wrong. In my career as an educator and in my life I have endeavored to teach others that the color of someone's skin is no indication of the value, quality and worth of that person. I can only hope that this concept prevails in our great country of diverse people.



Gregg Sturtevant 5 months ago · 1 Like

Very well said. Thank you for educating me this morning.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're so welcome! Thanks for taking the time to share your feedback! :)



Jodie 5 months ago · 1 Like

Thank you for this article. I am a (very) white-appearing woman with an ancestry that includes African. My great - great grandfather arrived in Nova Scotia via the “Freedom Train”. My mother was born and given away because of the fear that others might find out she had African ancestry. I am an educator in western Canada where we are just beginning to have a larger number of African students. 8 years ago, I discovered that very few of my kids even knew what the Civil Rights movement was/is. I have taken it upon myself to teach rhetoric using MLK’s work. I try very hard to help kids understand what led to this time and all of the time since. As a Canadian, we do not have the long history that some kids can relate to, but I am trying. Are there any reading you could recommend so that I can be more informed?



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you so much for reaching out and for sharing your story! I would recommend Carole Anderson’s *White Rage* and the teen version of the book called *We Are Not Yet Equal* by the same author. Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* is important to read, and I think Debby Irving’s *Waking Up White* and Ijeoma Oluo’s *So You Want to Talk About Race* are essential readings. Isabel Wilkerson’s *Warmth of Other Suns* is incredible, too. Definitely add Ibram X. Kendi’s *Stamped from the Beginning*.



Lori Rucker 5 months ago · 1 Like

Great article!!! As black second grade teacher, I remember being silenced as a student teacher when teaching 4th grade Social Studies (Middle Passage). We were going over the slave trade and how slavery helped (for lack of a better word) build and bring revenue to the 13 colonies. There was a small passage about an African named Olaudah Equiano who became enslaved as a child but

eventually earned his way to freedom as he got older. I was asked by my mentor teacher to teach about the slave trade and the middle passage. While planning for my big day to teach, I saw a "small passage" on Olaudah Equiano. I thought it would be a great idea to teach about him to let the 4th graders hear a different slave narrative. I wanted to include Equiano in my teaching to show the significance of how he earned his way to freedom. Well my mentor teacher did not want me to teach the students about Olaudah Equiano because she wanted to stay on schedule with the scope and sequence. As a teacher, I understand the importance of staying on task with the scope and sequence but there are times when it is important to have "teachable moments or WOW, I didn't know that moments.... let's dig a little deeper". The district that I teach in offers teachers access to plan the scope and sequence and give input. It is important for more diverse text to be included in the curriculum and not small passages in a text book that teachers can overlook. My district is slowly adding more diverse text but the next challenge is fighting for more money so that each student can have their own text. Right now we are having to make copies of the book off of a copy machine if we want to analyze the text deeper. Thanks for writing this letter and making your voice heard.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

This reminds me of an experience I had when teaching fifth grade at a school in Boston. We also studied The Middle Passage (thankfully we had a really great text from TCI: <https://www.teachtci.com/social-studies>), and when it was our turn to share work on the bulletin board outside of our classroom, students shared about what they learned. It made folks very uncomfortable, but it was important for the students to process what they learned.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome! Thank you so much for taking the time to share your feedback with me! :)



Susan 5 months ago · 1 Like

Thank you for writing this article. I am a 2nd grade teacher in Virginia. I want to know more. I hear you saying that we need to be more aware that we are unaware and we need to educate ourselves so we can teach all children. HOW do I do that? HOW do I instill a "truly inclusive learning community" in my classroom? I am aware that I need to be more aware. :) What I need to know now is HOW do I do that? What do I do in my classroom? What actions can I

take? What words do I use? I'm so afraid of offending someone that I don't know HOW to appropriately teach about critical sociopolitical considerations. I have a long list of concepts I'm supposed to teach, according to my state education office, and sometimes I don't even have enough time to teach those minimum standards. How can I possibly add more to the list of things I need to teach? Please help me understand so I can be an inclusive teacher. I want to truly and wholly teach ALL of my students. Thank you for any advice you might be able to offer.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Here's a link to the gallery walk slides from the Required Reading Reconsidered gallery walk that my colleague and I facilitate:
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/17W9zMOszwgBh2dNTUvYPA1m_7cO-br4oGKsHUo96bYc/edit?usp=sharing



Eve 5 months ago · 1 Like

Start reading Jennifer Gonzalez at Cult of Pedagogy. Follow the numerous excellent links in this article. Google “racially aware classroom”. Hire Ms. Mills as a consultant through her link at the bottom.

As a white educator, I need to do anything other than ask a Black womxn to do even more work to teach me when there is already so much out there to help me learn. I just need to want to learn it, and that's on me.




Franklin Willis 5 months ago · 1 Like

Brilliant article. As an educator and first time Dad of a young black boy you have clearly written out my fears and dreams for my son. I hope and pray that his future teachers will see the greatness in him. Thank you for sharing your thoughts.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome, and thank you for taking the time to share this feedback! 



Nikki 5 months ago · 1 Like

I really appreciate this article. Thank you. I teach kindergarten in private Christian school. I've long know I don't do enough in this area of cultural awareness. My default response to this idea is that I make deep personal connections with each student and his/her family. I do have time to listen and sit with all of them regularly. But it's not enough.... and I see how the verbal support of what they are being taught at home about race is so important. I struggle with how deep to go with my little ones. I love the idea of simply incorporating more biographies of people of color.... there struggles and triumphs. This is a good place to start. I also want to take advantage of the influence I have for the short time I have it to teach more deliberately on some of these specific issues you referenced. What are your thoughts regarding my 5-6 year olds. (Especially the ones who have never had to think about race at all) Thanks again for the article and the beautifully written advice.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thanks so much for your feedback! Teaching Tolerance has great resources. Here are a few:
<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards> (includes standards for K-2)
<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/film-kits/starting-small>
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/teaching-firstgraders-about-microaggressions-the-small-moments-add-up>



Jill 5 months ago · 1 Like

I taught K, 1 and 4. I am now a math coordinator. Your article was basically a check list of everything I wish I had known better, and consequently done better. I want to go back to my years in the classroom and focus on what really matters, the kids (the content can come after every kid feels that who they are is valued and honored by all in the school). Thank you for writing this so that I can use it to drive conversation with our teachers. @lifeofjill



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're so welcome, and thank you for taking the time to share your feedback! ❤️



Melinda Pantazis 5 months ago · 1 Like

I am a retired White teacher, and I wish I could have seen your letter when I was teaching. You raise so many questions and avenues to explore with students. I was often impressed by the cultural awareness and sensitivity of my Black and Hispanic students, and I couldn't figure out how to bring a measure of that understanding to my White students.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your feedback! 




Laurie Repko 5 months ago · 1 Like

As a young, poor, white, college girl, I stepped into my first African-American studies class with a sense of nervousness and wonder as I have never again experienced as student or educator. The professor threatened us (few) white girls that if we were "attending to date their men, we can get our 'M.R.S. degrees' somewhere else!!" And while this was shocking, she was able to open a door for conversation on the first day that showed her passion for teaching the controversy of race and real-time racial relations in 1989. Professor Clark and I stayed in contact for years as she became a mentor and sounding board for me: an inner-city girl who was the first in her family breaking into academia.

Bell Hooks preaches the importance of teaching to transgress... and being white, I don't have the personal, marginalizing experiences to relate... but, Afrika, I now have your letter to add to my cache of texts which I will be using in my sophomore English classroom. With the blessings and guidance of my black parents, I will incite the questions, and we will examine the truths solicited through close, personal narratives of my students and their families whom I serve. Thanks for reminding us and inspiring us to keep drilling this cultural iceberg. Our classrooms are all laboratories where the grand experiment is always our own selves. Peace and gratitude to you!



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're so welcome, and thank you for taking the time to share your feedback! 



Zoë 5 months ago · 1 Like

Mrs. Mills,

As a white educator teaching predominantly students of color, I thank you for speaking truth to my efforts. I lack much. You are right that my, although otherwise exceptional, Teacher Education program did not provide enough investigation, examination or instruction on race and culturally responsive teaching practices. There was some instruction but without a truly rich investigation of accurate racial history there can be no real comprehension of what it means to be culturally responsive. I'm digging deeper. My family is too. We are all reading and sharing books amongst our family and friends. I'm sharing with colleagues. And I have a long way to go.

May I suggest for anyone interested that the Racial Equity Institute has a great program that really digs deep, as a start. Also, would you be interested in sharing some suggested reading? We have read a lot and are working on a list but would love to know what you suggest.

Most importantly, THANK YOU. There are educated people who can't see reason about this, feeling like it is an indictment (fragility is real), but you've so eloquently and personally composed this gentle but imperative plea.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're so welcome, and thank you for taking the time to share your feedback! 💖 I have heard of Bayard Love's Racial Equity Institute - I wasn't able to participate in the last two workshops, but I'm hoping to participate when he runs it again in Boston next month or in the fall.

For recommended reading, I facilitated a group discussion of Ijeoma Oluo's *So You Want to Talk About Race* last summer, and that was a powerful experience. I also really enjoyed Debby Irving's *Waking Up White*, Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* (we'll be discussing this book next month), and Beverly Daniel Tatum's *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*



Jacqueline Hilliard 5 months ago · 1 Like


Thank you, Afrika Afeni Mills for this letter. I wish I had it in my hands when I began teaching. I was a young insecure white teacher starting my career in the mid '70 in Middlebury, IN. The school culture was rural, conservative, and all white. An older male colleague approached me with hostile intent because I was teaching my fourth grade students about Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. He told me, "These kids do not need to learn this." I

was shocked by his anger towards me. I replied, "These kids need more than any others." He stomped away. I continued, encouraged by my students interest and remarks, "I never knew this." Neither had I. I was learning with them.

This experience was the force behind the creation of a unit called, "Missing Persons in History," when I began teaching in an urban school in the 90's. From January to March we learned about women and men who made great sacrifices to gain freedom and to contribute to a better life for all people in our country. Again, I learned things that I never knew.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome, and thank you for taking the time to share your feedback!  I am reminded of Jane Elliott reading about your experience in rural Indiana.



dkaroll 6 months ago · 0 Likes

Please provide a bibliography of texts and other resources that "get it right." Without them, teachers can have the best of intentions but still lack adequate material.



Daniel H. Yamada 6 months ago · 1 Like

Wow, such powerful words and written so well. It was like reading an exposition from a novel.

I am not white and I have taught in an all Black high school, an all Black middle school, a predominantly white high school and an all Hispanic high school. I have done this for forty years. Diversity of students was not a problem, it was system's lack of understanding how something should be taught. My contention was if you are a good teacher you can teach anywhere and teach anything, so wherever I was I taught and the students learned.



Afrika Afeni Mills 5 months ago · 0 Likes

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your feedback! 



wnolen 6 months ago · 1 Like

Wonderful letter....I must share with all of the educators I know...This isn't a letter just for White teachers, it is a letter for all teachers.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

Agreed. Although the target audience for this letter is White teachers, all teachers can benefit.



Sally 6 months ago · 1 Like

Love, love, love this! As a white teacher, I have tried to teach about these things and make sure that my students know that I'm aware of the inequities and that I am open and willing to hear about their personal experiences as it applies to learning. I will be the first to say I don't know everything about African American/Black culture and I'm positive I don't always say the right thing, but my goal is to always learn more and be more aware of the needs of my students and friends of color. Thank you for this piece!



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're so welcome! Thanks for your feedback!



Dee 6 months ago · 1 Like

Thank you for sharing such a straightforward post. Some of the things you mentioned I am doing well or making strides to do better; while others I need to give greater consideration. I will definitely continue to work toward becoming the teacher that all my kiddos need me to be. 😊



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome! Thank you for your feedback!



Betzabe Gonzalez 6 months ago · 1 Like

Wow!!! Very well expressed, If I was listening to her I'd give her a standing ovation. I've been thinking a lot about how to make my lessons and experiences more culturally responsive not only for the few Black students at our school but the 80% of our Hispanic population, whom sadly some of our teachers have given up on. As an educator, I have tried to guide my peers in a collaborative friendly manner, after all, I'm not their boss; most years this has been successful. This past year though, there was a lot of push back from novice and veteran teachers, perhaps the political environment has quietly spilled over into our classroom. Most especially when I've suggested culturally responsive ideas. It is a challenge, I believe that this is where principals play a major part in making such lessons a priority during PD time. Anyhow, AMAZING ARTICLE!!!!



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

A standing ovation? Wow! Thank you so much! I truly agree with you about the role of principals and PD. I hope you have colleagues at your school who see the importance of making these important shifts so you can continue to encourage and support one another.



CP 6 months ago · 1 Like

Thank You. As a white woman it is often difficult to have the discussions with my classes about the racial inequities and crimes against people of color. I DO IT, and I show concern over my students and their social dilemma. I claim the guilt for what society perpetuates and speak to ALL of my students about the fact that we ALL need to work to change what affects those around us even if we do not share the same identities. I often worry that a child will misrepresent my words and I will have to explain my purpose and point of view to someone who sees my skin color as a direct threat and misconstrues my discussions of what the reality is to mean that I accept that reality. When I speak about the fact that my son and a Black friend could be someplace they don't belong doing things they shouldn't be doing with people they shouldn't be around and the police show up- if the boys run I worry for his friend because I know what happens. I am speaking the reality we must fight against. I worry that my words are wrongly construed. Help me know how to discuss these things in a way that cannot be turned against me.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome! Developing and sustaining deep and meaningful relationships with folks when possible - getting to know one another and creating trust really helps to ensure that your actions/thoughts aren't misconstrued.



Jenna Chandler-Ward 6 months ago · 1 Like

We are glad you are here and asking these questions. Keep learning, and growing as an educator!



Jay Rehak 6 months ago · 1 Like

Thanks for the thought provoking essay. As a white male high school teacher all I can say is I will try harder to remember and articulate in the classroom much of what you have written. Thank you for your reflection.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome! I hope you have colleagues who can partner with you in this work so you can support one another and hold each other accountable.



Tracy Graham 6 months ago · 1 Like

This is such a wonderful read and a necessary article! Thank you for your candor and insight. As a fellow educator, in our great profession, for over 20 years and a mom of a young Black boy, I have seen the lack of high expectations AND the negative assumptions made about our children professionally and personally, so thank you for speaking so eloquently on our behalf.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're so welcome! Thank you for your feedback!



Kate Grace 6 months ago · 1 Like

The author's ability to remain hopeful boggles my mind. There is so much truth here that is not accepted nor understood by the white members of the dominant culture in the USA, even by the well intentioned. wE have such a long way to go...still. And the notion of white majority in the global perspective is so false. When the minority rules and declares itself the majority you know power can only be held by suppression and violence. My heart aches for people of color and my spirit lives in amazement that so many good hearts keep on loving and forgiving white ignorance and white efforts to keep power in white hands.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

Thanks for your feedback, Kate!



Deanna 6 months ago · 1 Like

Thank you so much for sharing this. I plan to share this letter with my colleagues, as well as my Equity Team members.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome, and thanks so much for sharing!



Sandi 6 months ago · 1 Like

I love all of this except "Do you know how it felt for my children when you didn't say anything about racial injustices at the time of their occurrences?" All people of color do not want to discuss racial injustices at school. Some of us want to go to school to learn and leave.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

I hear you on this, Sandi. Your comment reminds me of one of the students on the America to Me docu-series (Jada). I think it's important, though, for teachers to be aware when students do want to talk about racial injustices, and that they are prepared to do so. Even something as simple as offering a moment of silence, or just saying, "I'm here for you if you want to talk" would be an important step.



Susan Drakeford 6 months ago · 1 Like

Thank you for writing this! I will seek out as many learning opportunities as I can so that I can continue to grow and learn so that I can best serve my students who are black. This is so important.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome! Thanks so much for your feedback!



Ms. Nique 6 months ago · 1 Like

Omg... This was more than deep, it was accurate in totality, it vividly spoke the truths of so many black mother's/parents yet talked directly to our children's experience. Queenster Afrika touched specifically on the matters of not just being a black mother but as a educator, often times we're only given one side but here we see them both. I generally feel most teachers have the best intentions but as Afrika pointed out if you've not looked into additional programs you're falling into that continuous trap which keeps us divided and oppressed... POWERFUL read. Thanks Queenster♥



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome! Thanks so much for your feedback and for my new nickname. Queenster. Love it!



Jennifer Palmer 6 months ago · 1 Like

I had the privilege of teaching at an ALL Black prep school. All. Of. This. Every word.

I'm humbled by this piece. I pray that I was as aware as possible, that I taught "my" kids well and fully. I can only say for sure that I love them like they're my own babies to this day, and that I'm in touch with most of them.

I hope they learned as much from me as I did and continue to do from them.

Thank you for this beautiful piece.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're so welcome, and thank you so much for your feedback! It was so nice to read about your love for your students, and how you've maintained your connection with so many of them. Building and sustaining relationships and communities of trust and love are so key!



Matt Curry 6 months ago · 1 Like

Thank you for articulating this in a manner that should inspire and encourage white, and black people to inform, or re-educate themselves on what diversity should mean in their classrooms, homes, communities, towns, and cities...etc.



Afrika Afeni Mills 6 months ago · 0 Likes

You're very welcome! Thank you for your feedback!

TEACHING WHILE WHITE © 2017



ARTICLE

Teaching While White

These two educators argue that truly serving all students means confronting racism, privilege and injustice.

By Molly Tansey | April 30, 2015



Topic: Race & Ethnicity, Rights & Activism

Editor's Note: This blog was co-written by Molly Tansey and Melissa Katz and originally published on April 15, 2015, by the Young Teachers Collective.

This past summer Mia McKenzie of Black Girl Dangerous published a piece entitled “All the White Teachers I Wish I Never Had.” In the piece, she discusses how during her early school years her entire world was Black, filled with family, friends and teachers who supported her academic curiosity.

“As a very bright, gifted Black girl, having Black teachers, mostly Black women, who saw my giftedness and encouraged and nurtured it, meant everything. These were teachers who could look at me and see themselves. They could see their children, their hopes, their dreams. These were teachers who could be as proud of me when I did well as my own

family was, who could understand me when I talked about my life, and who knew how to protect the spirit of a gifted Blackgirlchild in a world they knew would try to tear her apart every chance it got.”

Ideally, every young student of color would have a teacher who looked like them and could understand all of the little things about their lives that are hidden to everyone else. Promoting a diverse teaching force is absolutely essential to the success of so many children. But we still find ourselves in a system where students of color make up more than half of the student population, but teachers of color only account for eighteen percent of the work force.

Let that sink in. Before we can even discuss what it means to be a white teacher who truly serves their students, we have to explore the implications of those numbers. Those numbers mean that the majority of students of color can go through their entire school careers having only one or two teachers that look like them. Imagine for a second that nearly every single person whose responsibility it is to impart formal knowledge does not look like you? Not only is that message harmful, but it is just one of many damaging messages students of color are forced to endure. So while I understand that there are good white teachers, that's not the only issue here. White educators are not teaching in isolation. Our overwhelming presence in schools and classrooms across the country in and of itself requires that we reevaluate the way we engage with students. Because the reality is that regardless of our intentions, we are capable of inflicting harm, both by what we do and what we don't do. For too many students of color, white teachers can be just another point of "white authority" in their lives, especially if their experiences, voices, and perspectives aren't valued.

Furthermore, in a school system where students are being placed under immense amounts of pressure to do well on standardized tests, and where they have to stand by and watch as their community schools are systematically eliminated, it is more important than ever that they are able to come into a classroom that feels safe. They need to know that regardless of their grades and scores, we are still here for them . . . that we continue to believe they are capable of great things. They need to be shown kindness and compassion. They need to have a safe place to have hard conversations and explore all of the issues that feel relevant to them. They need to be heard, but even more crucially? They need to feel loved. This may seem simple. You may be thinking, well duh. But every single white teacher in America has been raised in a society that feeds us stereotypes of people of color and undermines their humanity, that continuously devalues Black life, and that created an entire socio-economic system based on the subjugation of others. You cannot grow up white in this society without developing deeply embedded biases.

When our own privilege has been built up by oppressing those who look like our students, being a good teacher takes on an entirely different meaning.

So how do we make sure that we really are validating students' experiences, hearing their voices, and ensuring that their perspectives are valued? How can we be the educators they need us to be? Too often, white educators feel as though not talking about race and privilege is the best route to take, inside and outside of the classroom. As white educators, we have to step outside of our comfort zones and have these conversations—embrace feeling uncomfortable and push ourselves to stay in this place to have conversations that matter. These issues affect the everyday lives of students, but even further they impact the very way that students are able to engage in the classroom. Ignoring that reality, or suppressing these topics when they come up, is doing a disservice to your students and yourself. Conversations about race and privilege will never be perfect, or easy, but there is a beauty in understanding that they can teach you just as much, if not more, than you can teach them.

Supporting students of color in your classroom, though, is about more than having conversations about race and privilege. It is about having high expectations for every single student that walks through your door. And when a student isn't doing well in class or has disengaged almost entirely? It's about working hard to figure out the root causes of the problem before ever considering discipline and punishment. We cannot be furthering the reach of the school-to-prison pipeline. In fact, when students of color face harsher punishment for the same infractions as white students, and those infractions can lead them straight into the juvenile justice system, we need to be actively working against it. Supporting students of color in your classroom means finding and presenting texts that they can see themselves in, that reflect their own lived experiences, whatever those may be. It's about helping them fill in all of the stories that are missing from their history textbooks—the stories that show strength and resilience and that challenge the dominant narrative. It's about going out of your way to make sure you are not the only person in front of them imparting knowledge. It is understanding that as a white educator teaching students of color you have limitations. Mitigate those limitations. Bring in people from outside when you can. You will not always be the best person for them to have hard conversations with. Recognizing that and providing them the space to explore those issues without you is crucial. Supporting them will sometimes mean stepping back, and that's okay.

But, and this is important, there is a flip side to the conversation about teaching while white. We cannot talk about the way we educate students of color without talking about the way in which we educate white students. We have to teach all students — especially our white students — to think critically about issues of privilege, race, justice, and oppression. We need to have hard conversations with our white students as much as we need to have them with students of color.

Sharing everything that gets left out of history textbooks, having them read books by people who do not look like them and whose experiences do not reflect their own, helping them challenge stereotypes — all of these are crucial, but they're almost always left out of the discussion on educating in majority white districts and classrooms. But it is imperative that we do what we can to ensure our white students walk out of our classrooms with a perspective of the world that interrogates issues like institutional racism and structural oppression, as well as the tools they need to take action and challenge them.

Further, what we expect of our students we must also expect of ourselves. As white teachers, we have a responsibility to examine and think critically about race, justice, and our own privilege, and most importantly — how these play out in the classroom as teachers. As educators for social justice, we need to be having these conversations with our white colleagues, too. We need to push them just as much as we push ourselves, and as Melinda Anderson points out, this needs to start in our teacher education programs. Before we can ever hope to be good educators inside the classroom, we have to educate ourselves outside the classroom. And we cannot rely on teachers of color to be our source of that education. It is not their responsibility to teach us about issues of race, privilege, justice, and oppression. We have to do that. We have to find resources, do research, ask questions, and challenge our own assumptions. This is just the beginning of an extremely important conversation. It is our hope that this piece will spark a dialogue amongst white educators about how we can do better. Trust us, we understand how incredibly overwhelming these conversations can be, but our students deserve no less. Because, quite frankly, if we're not doing all of this, then we're not doing our jobs.

—

Further resources: Training Module: Developing Cultural Competency Among School Staff provided by Philly Tag At the Urban Teaching Matters Conference in New Jersey last Month hosted by the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, one of the workshops focused on being a white teacher in an urban area. The question at the center of the workshop was: how can white teachers effectively teach students of color? Below are some suggestions for white teachers looking to foster future discussions around the issues of race in the classroom:

- Need to move past personal concerns about being “labeled racist” and go to larger institutional discussions
- It's ok to screw up, but acknowledge the privilege you're entering the conversation with and don't pretend to be someone you're not in the conversation

- Colorblindness can be used as a shield for to acknowledging power and privilege\ not acknowledge systematic differences and oppression
- Wrestle with your own guilt of unearned privilege on your own time; face it and feel the guilt and then move on and use it to explore the structural implications behind norms
- Racism = racial prejudice + power, both structural and institutional
- Don't look at students in front of you as having deficits: deficit model as in "your life doesn't look like mine"
- Acknowledge your assumptions when entering the classroom
- Listen to learn, don't just listen to respond

Additionally, below are questions on critical multicultural education from the "Looking Within: Tackling injustice in pre-service education" at NYCORE (New York Collective of Radical Educators) Conference that could be helpful in fostering more discussions around the issues of race in the classroom:

1. How can we maintain our integrity and humanity as educators within a sociopolitical, historical, and cultural context of institutionalized oppression and hegemony that work to preserve unequal power structures in our society?
2. What are the possibilities for working toward equity and justice within an education system that reinforces and reproduces social inequalities?
3. In what ways are we complicit with systems of oppression? How do we contribute to or collude with oppressive practices in classrooms, schools, and the system at large?
4. In what ways are we engaged, individually and collectively, in the struggle against oppressive systems? How can we stay grounded and critically hopeful through our acts of resistance?
5. What historical and current examples of resistance, anti-oppression, and liberation exist within marginalized communities and how can these tools be utilized within our role as teachers?

Reading list:

1. *Raising Race Questions: Whiteness and Inquiry in Education* by Ali Michael
2. *Promoting Racial Literacy in Schools: Differences that Make a Difference* by Howard Carlton Stevenson, Jr.
3. *Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People's Children* by Lisa Delpit
4. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* by Lisa Delpit

5. *The Dream-Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings
6. *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools* by Jeffrey M. Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell
7. *Disposable Youth, Racialized Memories, and the Culture of Cruelty* by Henry Giroux
8. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* by Bell Hooks
9. *The Latinization of U.S. Schools: Successful Teaching and Learning in Shifting Cultural Contexts* by Jason Irizarry
10. *Holler if You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students* by Gregory Michie
11. *This is Not a Test: A New Narrative on Race, Class and Education* by Jose Vilson
12. *Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice* by Wayne Au

Conferences/Organizations with relevant workshops:

- NYCORE (New York Collection of Radical Educators)
- Philly TAG
- Rethinking Schools
- Free Minds, Free People
- Education for Liberation Network
- Penn GSE Summit Series

Tansey is a graduate of the University of Virginia who will enter the master's in teaching program at the University of Georgia in fall 2015.

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FOUR WAYS TEACHERS CAN SUPPORT STUDENTS OF COLOR



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Listen to my interview with Dena Simmons (or read the [transcript](#)
(<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/episode-64/>)):



64: Four Ways Teachers Can Support Students of Color

00:00:00

The difference between teachers and their students has never been so stark. A [recent report](#)

 [\(https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014051.pdf\)](https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014051.pdf)

from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that since 2014, white students no longer make up the majority in American schools. Future projections show the white population shrinking to a smaller and smaller proportion of the whole, and the combined populations of students from other ethnic groups increasing so that together, they make up a steadily growing majority.

By contrast, teachers in the U.S. are [overwhelmingly white](#)

 [\(https://aacte.org/news-room/aacte-in-the-news/347-student-diversity-is-up-but-teachers-are-mostly-white\)](https://aacte.org/news-room/aacte-in-the-news/347-student-diversity-is-up-but-teachers-are-mostly-white)

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What this tells me is that the life experiences of most of the people in charge of our classrooms have been pretty different from the experiences of most of their students.

And that matters.

It matters because our work is not strictly academic. Not by a long shot. In order for our students to perform well academically, they need to feel safe, both physically and psychologically. They need to feel a sense of belonging. They need to feel seen and valued for who they are. For our students of color, finding this safe, accepting place is rare, especially if most of their teachers have a dramatically different background from their own. This problem can be even more pronounced for students of color who attend schools where their peers are also mostly white.

This does not mean that all white teachers are racists or that they are deliberately doing things to hurt their students of color. But what IS happening, far too often, is that teachers are doing things that harm these students' self-perception without even realizing it.

Dena Simmons

(<https://twitter.com/DenaSimmons>).

, the director of education at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (<http://ei.yale.edu/>).

, understands this problem far too well.

In her 2015 TED talk, "How Students of Color Confront Impostor Syndrome," she tells the story of how, as a young black girl, she left the Bronx neighborhood where she lived with her single mother and two sisters to attend a prestigious boarding school in Connecticut. Although she got an excellent education there and followed that up with a series of impressive academic and professional accomplishments, she always felt out of place, torn between the world she'd grown up in and her identity as an accomplished scholar. "Eternal impostor syndrome," she calls it.

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This struggle was made much harder by many of her teachers, in the things they said to her and the messages they sent, messages that basically told Dena that who she was was not okay.

Later in life Dena returned to the Bronx to teach middle school, and she was determined to create the kind of atmosphere she wished she'd had, one that values each student's unique identity and history. In her TED talk, she gives us a glimpse of how that worked.

Now, we pick up where that TED talk left off, with some specific advice about what teachers can do to help their students of color not just survive, but thrive in the classroom, with a fully developed, strong sense of pride in who they are, where they came from, and what they're capable of.

1. TEACH STUDENTS OF COLOR TO LOVE THEMSELVES

“There’s nothing more revolutionary than teaching our young people in general to love themselves,” Simmons says, “and particularly young people of color, because they don’t have to look too far to see negative images of themselves displayed throughout the media. We can teach our young people to love themselves by centering our instruction on their lives, their realities and their experiences, and using their lives as cultural reference to our instruction.”

Here are some things teachers can do to nurture this self-love and pride in their students:

- **Really get to know your students.** This is the first step toward helping students

love themselves. This should be done in both formal and informal ways. A

simple survey can help you gather information quickly, and spending time with students outside of class can help you see them in a different light. In her

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school, Simmons occasionally attended gym class with her students and invited them to have lunch with her off-campus.

- **Create ways for students to bring pieces of their lives into the classroom.** By allowing students to share in school the things they value outside of school, we demonstrate that every aspect of who they are is important. One way Simmons did this was to have students create personalized playlists of their favorite (school-appropriate) music that could be played during certain class activities.
- **Honor their language.** When teachers attempt to “fix” students’ language to make it more standardized, they often communicate to students that their way of speaking is wrong. Instead, we could explain that students need to become bilingual, that using academically standard language (<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/code-switching/>).

will open doors for them in some contexts. This approach honors where students come from and acknowledges the value of their home vernacular. Simmons advises teachers to have an honest conversation with students: “How we speak when we are outside is how we speak. It’s totally fine. Then there’s a way we speak in the classroom, and that just makes us bilingual as opposed to right and wrong. When you say to someone, ‘Cut it out,’ you’re saying, ‘Cut out who you are,’ and we don’t want to do that.”

- **Tell them you love them.** “When I was in the classroom,” Simmons says, “I actually had posters that would say, ‘Ms. Simmons loves you,’ and it wasn’t uncommon to walk into my classroom and for me and a student to share I love you’s with each other. When we do that, we create a space for our students of color to know that their schooling values their experiences, and it values who they are.”

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2. INVITE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO BECOME PARTNERS IN EDUCATING STUDENTS



Dena Simmons (photo by Ryan Lash)

“When you partner with communities, when you partner with families,” Simmons explains, “students really internalize that they matter. They internalize that their communities matter, and they also begin to understand that they have a role in developing and engaging in their communities. What I learned when I had to leave the Bronx to go to boarding school was that the Bronx had nothing to offer me. How painful it was to think of the place that

raised me, the place that I called home was actually not good. And so I had to spend some time reshiftng and reframing how I thought about the Bronx, that the Bronx was something to return to as opposed to something to leave. And I think educators, in the process of seeing their communities and their families as assets, begin to shift from deficit-based mindset to an asset-based mindset.”

- **Take inventory.** Using a community development approach called asset mapping (<https://www.vistacampus.gov/what-asset-mapping>).

, build a list of all the various resources you could take advantage of, partnerships you could form with parents and community members to enrich the education of your students.

- **Use community resources as curriculum.** Find ways to tie local resources to the things you’re teaching in class. You can invite community members in as guest speakers or take students on field trips to local establishments. Doing this gives students a sense of pride in their neighborhood and helps them see home as an abundant place.

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- **Keep parents involved through multiple channels.** Invite parents to attend classroom events, use digital and non-digital means to let parents know what's going on in class and what they can do to help. If what you're doing now isn't working, try something else. Ask families what would work for them until you find an effective approach.

3. EXPOSE STUDENTS TO ROLE MODELS OF COLOR

Growing up, Simmons says most of the role models she saw in the media were white. “So in many ways, I would say implicitly I learned to favor whiteness. I learned to think that everything white was better ... I think that is true for many people of color.” By making sure all of our students—not just students of color—are exposed to a variety of diverse role models, we help them broaden their own goals and see what's possible for everyone.

- **Invite guest speakers and mentors of color into the classroom.** Find ways to arrange visits or guest presentations people of color who work in all sorts of industries. These guests can come from your local area or, with the help of video conferencing, anywhere else in the world.
- **Make sure your classroom or school library has a variety of texts that include positive, diverse characters.** The site [We Need Diverse Books](https://diversebooks.org/) (<https://diversebooks.org/>).

maintains a growing list of books that meet this need. [Canerow](https://canerow.squarespace.com/books/) (<https://canerow.squarespace.com/books/>).

is also building a similar list, and their blog expands the definition of “text” to other forms of media like music and film.

- **Support efforts to improve teacher diversity.** Currently, there is a [shortage of teachers of color](#)

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(<http://neatoday.org/2014/05/16/nea-report-lack-of-teacher-diversity-jeopardizes-student-achievement-2/>).

in the U.S., which further limits our students' interactions with professional role models of color. [This report](#)

(<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Partee-TeachersOfColor-report2.pdf>).

by the Center for American Progress outlines steps that can be taken by states, districts, school leaders, and universities to attract, train, and retain teachers of color. If you are a classroom teacher and have no direct impact in this area, what you can do is learn more about the problem and support efforts in your own school to improve it.

4. DISRUPT THE SINGLE NARRATIVE OF STUDENTS OF COLOR

"I think a lot of times when teachers go back home, and they talk to their friends, the stories they tell about their students only perpetuate the status quo, what it means to be a kid of color," says Simmons. "These single narratives are perpetuated, and in many ways, I think are problematic because they're incomplete, they flatten the wholeness of our students." The concept of the single narrative is illustrated beautifully by Chimamanda Adichie in her TED talk, [The Danger of a Single Story](#).

(https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/).

, which I strongly recommend you watch to fully understand this idea.

We are all part of this conversation, with many of us only perpetuating the existing narrative about our students of color in the anecdotes we share about them. So how do we disrupt that? How do we work to change that narrative so society at large begins to see our students of color with more complexity, and so the students see themselves differently?

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- **Empower students to tell their own stories.** Look for ways to let students share their own diverse experiences, whether it's through spoken word, in conversations, or in more finished products like written pieces, podcasts, videos, or other multimedia.
- **Pay attention to your own storytelling, your own language.** When you are retelling a story of something one of your students did, ask yourself if the story is contributing to a negative narrative, if it perpetuates a stereotype about a particular group of students. And check your language: When you talk about certain groups of students, do you say “these kids,” or “our kids”? A subtle shift in language represents a major change in thinking.
- **Challenge others.** When your colleagues tell these kinds of single-narrative stories, dig for context. Ask about the strengths of the students being described. Push for the full picture.

SMALL CHANGES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

None of the actions outlined here are simple, and none of them offer a quick fix. But implementing them consistently, with the belief that this work is important, will make your classroom a place where students of color will flourish. ♥

You can find Dena Simmons on Twitter at [@denasimmons](https://twitter.com/DenaSimmons) (<https://twitter.com/DenaSimmons>).

. If you enjoyed her TED talk above, check out her other two, [It's 10pm. Do you know where your children are?](https://youtu.be/8VjplfrwB7g) (<https://youtu.be/8VjplfrwB7g>).

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Karen Kelsky

Founder and President at The Professor Is In

How to Support Students of Color



January 31, 2017

Want more advice from Karen Kelsky? [Browse The Professor Is In archives](#) or check out [The Quick and Relatively Painless Guide to Your Academic Job Search](#).

I am a white tenure-track faculty member, and I consider myself a progressive. I want to be an ally to my students of color, but I'm not sure how. I don't want to make mistakes and offend anyone. Is it better for me to say nothing, if I'm not an expert on race? I feel so helpless. Do you have any advice?

I will answer this as best I can, with the goal of opening up further dialogue. I want to be clear that I am a white person addressing this column to other white people who are teaching. I do not mean to exclude anyone, or to claim authority about the experiences or needs of people of color. It is my firm conviction that the time has come for white people to speak up about racism.

the shoulders of people of color. I am drawing inspiration here from a group I am involved with, [Showing Up for Racial Justice](#), a national organization dedicated to mobilizing white people in anti-racism work. You can probably find a local chapter in your town, and I urge you to do so, as SURJ is not only a resource for training and information but also a location to connect with like-minded people, which is essential at a time when faculty are increasingly called upon to protect vulnerable students.

The following list of suggestions is by no means exhaustive, and I am sure it has many gaps. I want to be transparent that, in my work now running [The Professor Is In](#), I am not currently teaching and so the advice below is based on the work I did in my previous academic career, on suggestions of friends who are currently teaching, and on my reading of the important work by scholars such as [Tressie McMillan Cottom](#), [Eric Anthony Grollman](#) and the writers at the [Fight the Tower](#) blog.

Finally, a prefatory note: if you are employed on a contingent basis, you may not feel safe taking many of these actions. All faculty are increasingly vulnerable to surveillance and attacks by right-wing watchdog groups. One contingent faculty member I know wore a Black Lives Matter shirt to class, which infuriated some students, who then retaliated on her teaching evaluations. She was not rehired. It is incumbent on tenured professors to take the lead on this work, and to protect the contingent faculty members who do as well.

Don't tell students of color not to worry. Your students of color may well feel traumatized right now, and may have trouble focusing in class in the same way that they did prior to the election. If they communicate that to you directly or indirectly, the most important thing you can do is listen. Don't talk over them or tell them not to worry. If you are white, you are not experiencing the same level of psychic and physical aggressions upon your safety and well being as your students may be feeling. Let them be the experts of their own experience. Your first, and most important, job is to listen and acknowledge their fear, distress, and anxiety.

Be visible in your support of students of color. Put a Black Lives Matter sign on your office door, or wear a Black Lives Matter T-shirt or pin to teach. Put flyers up about anti-racism activism on your office door, and make sure to announce the events in class. [Safety pins are OK](#) as far as they go, but that is not far enough. Invite speakers into your class who can help students know their rights. The multicultural-affairs office on your campus might offer in-class speakers, so avail yourself of them.

On a more administrative level, if your institution has a training program to become a "certified" safe-space faculty member, do the training. When you get a certificate or sticker, put it on your office door or wall. It sends a signal. Get involved with the multicultural center on

Encourage a mix of views. People of color are not one single undifferentiated group. Having an inclusive classroom doesn't mean calling on one brown face and moving on. It means allowing for a whole spectrum of competing perspectives to interrupt and enrich the flow of discussion. It will get complicated and intersectional. People used to simple categories and binaries may get impatient and frustrated. Please don't make one student of color speak for his or her entire race or culture.

In any actual classroom situation, different students will have different viewpoints, based on gender, class, sexuality, place of origin, and so on. Your international students will have a different experience than your American students, for example. International students from Muslim countries are under increasingly immediate threat of harassment and deportation. Educate yourself about the issues so that you can be a source for accurate, fact-based information.

Make your syllabus inclusive. Does your syllabus prominently include works by people of color? It's very easy to fall back on outdated, exclusionary custom when choosing readings, and it takes conscious effort to break away from it. Do that work. It matters. Nobody will trust you as an ally if the readings you assign thoughtlessly recenter white voices and white academic authority.

Invite speakers of color to your class to speak on any pertinent class topic. Students benefit from seeing scholars of color working in their fields as role models, and may rarely get that opportunity. However, also be aware that scholars of color are routinely overburdened with such requests for "extra" (uncompensated, uncredited) service, so make such requests in a sensitive, professionally appropriate way, acknowledging that it is a request for their extra labor. You may have to ask several people, and when you do ask, think about ways you can make the event professionally meaningful for your speaker as well.

Support students of color in classroom discussion. That can take a variety of forms. Most of your students are probably white but make sure they don't dominate discussion to the exclusion of others. That often requires classroom-management techniques, and if you need to work with your campus teaching center to learn those strategies, do it.

When students of color speak up, recognize that they may be attacked for voicing challenging opinions, and use your authority in the classroom to back them up. Students of color routinely feel silenced by the white majority in college classrooms, and depend on leadership from the front of the room to be heard. That doesn't mean automatically agreeing with everything they — or any students — say. It does mean making sure they are not verbally assaulted by defensive white students who assume their opinions and comfort will always have primacy. Is that easy?

Don't be defensive. Students of color may be critical of newly energized, anti-Trump activism from white people. The Women's March on Washington gave new visibility to a lot of excellent and very accessible writing on intersectionality and the ways that white activism sidelines the voices and concerns of people of color. Read such work and educate yourself. [Here is one.](#) If your feelings are hurt that students express skepticism about your beloved protest or liberal political opinion, stop and ask yourself why that is, and why your feelings are more important than their critique. This [reactivity](#), known as “white fragility,” is one of the primary ways that white privilege operates, and it takes hard and dedicated work to stop making yourself, your needs, your opinions, and your feelings the most important element of all your interactions.

The work ahead of us is hard and long. Alliances are essential but difficult. You will make mistakes and feel bad. People will get mad at you. You will get called on your racism. This doesn't make you a bad person. If you've read this far, you're trying to do better, and that's an important step. As an instructor or a graduate student on a college or university campus, you have an invaluable role to play in building bridges among the communities who are resisting Trump and his dangerous, authoritarian agendas. Now is the time.

Share your additional thoughts, experiences, and suggestions in the comments below. The most important thing for any instructor is to educate yourself. Here is [a good list of books](#) to start.

Dear Readers: Have a question about the academic job market and/or professionalization? Send it to The Professor Is In! Karen welcomes any and all questions related to the job market, preparing for the job market while in graduate school, coping with the adjunct struggle, and assistant professorhood. Send questions to gettenure@gmail.com.



[Karen Kelsky](#) is a career consultant who runs the website The Professor Is In. She's been a tenured professor at two public universities (Oregon and Illinois) and has advised many undergraduate and graduate students, as well as mentored junior faculty. She answers reader questions as a contributor to Vitae.

For more advice, order Dr. Karen's new book, [The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. Into a Job](#).

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Career Advice

White Teachers Need to See Color. Here's Why.

We can't pretend like race isn't an issue in our classrooms.



[Joy Mohammed](#) on August 15, 2019



When I first started writing, I wrote a piece called [10 Things I Wish my White Teacher Knew](#). I took some time to reflect on my school years as a black girl with mostly white teachers in Metro Detroit. I got a lot of positive feedback. One teacher said, "I loved your piece!" I thanked her and I told her she was a remarkable teacher, and our students were lucky to have her. She responded, "I don't see color, I just see kids." I knew she meant no harm, so I smiled. But it bothers me to this day I didn't ask her to reevaluate her approach. So, I have been thinking about the eleventh thing I wish my white teacher knew: You need to see color.

You need to see color because there is nothing wrong with color.

The cure for racism in education is not colorblindness. Colorblindness erases the student's individuality in the educational space. The statement is a [microaggression](#), or a statement with an undercurrent of prejudice, which says that your racial and cultural identity is not a factor. Our students are grappling with their identity and race is a part of that. The way our world is set up, black and brown kids have to be taught self-love on purpose. So, provide opportunities which allow them to broadcast their racial and ethnic identities, and be proud of it! It's okay to say things like "black is beautiful," and for a white educator to facilitate a discussion on race. It just has to

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How to Deal With Student Racism

You need to see color so that you can lift up students' perspectives.

If you are a white teacher in a minority classroom, you may not understand your students' perspective on certain issues. For example, the flag demonstration [#takeaknee](#)—Kaepernick says he is taking a knee to bring light to police brutality and injustice. However, there is another loud voice which says he is disrespecting troops. This “narrative switching” is very popular tool for white supremacists. Historically, when people of color stepped “out of order” people in power changed the narrative. So much that minorities were branded as troublemakers, even to their own people.

Teachers, it is important that you understand the dichotomy of your reality and theirs, and color is necessary for that. You don't have to agree with your students' perspectives. However, it is necessary that we understand black and brown children may experience and interpret events differently than yourself. When you try to change that narrative, you erase their unique experiences which shape them—you whitewash them. Do not find yourself on the wrong side of this issue. Allow open conversations so children can speak truth to power. Model how in America people can have different perspectives and coexist.

You need to see color because your black and brown students do not have the luxury to unsee color.

Minority students are taught to be constantly aware of themselves and others. I remember when I had my first job interview. My mom took me shopping. We had a hard time finding a nice suit that was professional, but that didn't appear too aggressive. Then a harder time wearing ballet flats because I did not want to appear to be domineering. Every person of color has a similar story where an elder takes time to talk about the way their physical appearance is interpreted by white people. Do white people talk about how to make themselves appear more culturally aware in interviews?

Too often we minorities quiet ourselves to not appear too black or ethnic out of fear that we will be seen as undesirable. As a white teacher of minority students you should create a space where your students are not worried about you judging them for being themselves; i.e getting loud, laughing infectiously, even blowing hot air out of their mouths. Take their words at face value and adopt a policy of [assuming positive intent](#), even if your logic or history has taught you otherwise.

Teachers need to see color because it is one of the things that make your students unique.

Every time a white teacher says, “I don't see color,” you abandon a child in an educational void by refusing to recognize them for who they are. Additionally you fail to prepare them to enter a world who will see their color as a factor to their success and abilities. As more white teachers travel into predominantly black schools to teach,

2

Join us in our [WeAreTeachers HELPLINE group on Facebook](#) to talk about your teaching questions, including those around teaching and race.



WHITE TEACHERS NEED TO SEE COLOR.

== Here's Why. ==



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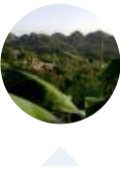
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White Fragility

by
Robin DiAngelo

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. This paper explicates the dynamics of White Fragility.

I am a white woman. I am standing beside a black woman. We are facing a group of white people who are seated in front of us. We are in their workplace, and have been hired by their employer to lead them in a dialogue about race. The room is filled with tension and charged with hostility. I have just presented a definition of racism that includes the acknowledgment that whites hold social and institutional power over people of color. A white man is pounding his fist on the table. His face is red and he is furious. As he pounds he yells, "White people have been discriminated against for 25 years! A white person can't get a job anymore!" I look around the room and see 40 employed people, all white. There are no people

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of color in this workplace. Something is happening here, and it isn't based in the racial reality of the workplace. I am feeling unnerved by this man's disconnection with that reality, and his lack of sensitivity to the impact this is having on my co-facilitator, the only person of color in the room. Why is this white man so angry? Why is he being so careless about the impact of his anger? Why are all the other white people either sitting in silent agreement with him or tuning out? We have, after all, only articulated a definition of racism.

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress.¹ Fine (1997) identifies this insulation when she observes "... how Whiteness accrues privilege and status; gets itself surrounded by protective pillows of resources and/or benefits of the doubt; how Whiteness repels gossip and voyeurism and instead demands dignity" (p. 57). Whites are rarely without these "protective pillows," and when they are, it is usually temporary and by choice. This insulated environment of racial privilege builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress.

For many white people, a single required multicultural education course taken in college, or required "cultural competency training" in their workplace, is the only time they may encounter a direct and sustained challenge to their racial understandings. But even in this arena, not all multicultural courses or training programs talk directly about racism, much less address white privilege. It is far more the norm for these courses and programs to use racially coded language such as "urban," "inner city," and "disadvantaged" but to rarely use "white" or "over-advantaged" or "privileged." This racially coded language reproduces racist images and perspectives while it simultaneously reproduces the comfortable illusion that race and its problems are what "they" have, not us. Reasons why the facilitators of these courses and trainings may not directly name the dynamics and beneficiaries of racism range from the lack of a valid analysis of racism by white facilitators, personal and economic survival strategies for facilitators of color, and the overall pressure from management to keep the content comfortable and palatable for whites. However, if and when an educational program does directly address racism and the privileging of whites, common white responses include anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance (all of which reinforce the pressure on facilitators to avoid directly addressing racism). So-called progressive whites may not respond with anger, but may still insulate themselves via claims that they are beyond the need for engaging with the content because they "already had a class on this" or "already know this." These reactions are often seen in anti-racist education endeavors as

1. Although white racial insulation is somewhat mediated by social class (with poor and working class urban whites being generally less racially insulated than suburban or rural whites), the larger social environment insulates and protects whites as a group through institutions, cultural representations, media, school textbooks, movies, advertising, dominant discourses, etc.

forms of resistance to the challenge of internalized dominance (Whitehead & Wittig, 2005; Horton & Scott, 2004; McGowan, 2000, O'Donnell, 1998). These reactions do indeed function as resistance, but it may be useful to also conceptualize them as the result of the reduced psychosocial stamina that racial insulation inculcates. I call this lack of racial stamina "White Fragility."

Although mainstream definitions of racism are typically some variation of individual "race prejudice", which anyone of any race can have, Whiteness scholars define racism as encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color (Hilliard, 1992). This unequal distribution benefits whites and disadvantages people of color overall and as a group. Racism is not fluid in the U.S.; it does not flow back and forth, one day benefiting whites and another day (or even era) benefiting people of color. The direction of power between whites and people of color is historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society (Mills, 1999; Feagin, 2006). Whiteness itself refers to the specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate white people over people of color. This definition counters the dominant representation of racism in mainstream education as isolated in discrete behaviors that some individuals may or may not demonstrate, and goes beyond naming specific privileges (McIntosh, 1988). Whites are theorized as actively shaped, affected, defined, and elevated through their racialization and the individual and collective consciousness' formed within it (Frankenberg, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Tatum, 1997). Recognizing that the terms I am using are not "theory neutral 'descriptors' but theory-laden constructs inseparable from systems of injustice" (Allen, 1996, p.95), I use the terms white and Whiteness to describe a social process. Frankenberg (1993) defines Whiteness as multi-dimensional:

Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'Whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p.1)

Frankenberg and other theorists (Fine, 1997; Dyer, 1997; Sleeter, 1993; Van Dijk, 1993) use Whiteness to signify a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced, and which are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of domination. Whiteness is thus conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone). Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people. Whiteness Studies begin with the premise that racism and white privilege exist in both traditional and modern forms, and rather than work to prove its existence, work to reveal it. This article

will explore the dynamics of one aspect of Whiteness and its effects, White Fragility.

Triggers

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. These interruptions can take a variety of forms and come from a range of sources, including:

- Suggesting that a white person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity);
- People of color talking directly about their racial perspectives (challenge to white racial codes);
- People of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of white people in regards to race (challenge to white racial expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort);
- People of color not being willing to tell their stories or answer questions about their racial experiences (challenge to colonialist relations);
- A fellow white not providing agreement with one's interpretations (challenge to white solidarity);
- Receiving feedback that one's behavior had a racist impact (challenge to white liberalism);
- Suggesting that group membership is significant (challenge to individualism);
- An acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (challenge to meritocracy);
- Being presented with a person of color in a position of leadership (challenge to white authority);
- Being presented with information about other racial groups through, for example, movies in which people of color drive the action but are not in stereotypical roles, or multicultural education (challenge to white centrality).

In a white dominant environment, each of these challenges becomes exceptional. In turn, whites are often at a loss for how to respond in constructive ways. Whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1993) may be useful here. According to Bourdieu, *habitus* is a socialized subjectivity; a set of dispositions which generate practi-

ces and perceptions. As such, habitus only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment. Based on the previous conditions and experiences that produce it, habitus produces and reproduces thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions. Strategies of response to “disequilibrium” in the habitus are not based on conscious intentionality but rather result from unconscious dispositions towards practice, and depend on the power position the agent occupies in the social structure. White Fragility may be conceptualized as a product of the habitus, a response or “condition” produced and reproduced by the continual social and material advantages of the white structural position.

Omi & Winant posit the U.S. racial order as an “unstable equilibrium,” kept equilibrated by the State, but still unstable due to continual conflicts of interests and challenges to the racial order (pp. 78-9). Using Omi & Winant’s concept of unstable racial equilibrium, white privilege can be thought of as unstable racial equilibrium at the level of habitus. When any of the above triggers (challenges in the habitus) occur, the resulting disequilibrium becomes intolerable. Because White Fragility finds its support in and is a function of white privilege, fragility and privilege result in responses that function to restore equilibrium and return the resources “lost” via the challenge - resistance towards the trigger, shutting down and/or tuning out, indulgence in emotional incapacitation such as guilt or “hurt feelings”, exiting, or a combination of these responses.

Factors that inculcate White Fragility

Segregation

The first factor leading to White Fragility is the segregated lives which most white people live (Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003). Even if whites live in physical proximity to people of color (and this would be exceptional outside of an urban or temporarily mixed class neighborhood), segregation occurs on multiple levels, including representational and informational. Because whites live primarily segregated lives in a white-dominated society, they receive little or no authentic information about racism and are thus unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity. Growing up in segregated environments (schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, media images and historical perspectives), white interests and perspectives are almost always central. An inability to see or consider significance in the perspectives of people of color results (Collins, 2000).

Further, white people are taught not to feel any loss over the absence of people of color in their lives and in fact, this absence is what defines their schools and neighborhoods as “good;” whites come to understand that a “good school” or “good neighborhood” is coded language for “white” (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003). The quality of white space being in large part measured via the absence of people of color (and Blacks in particular) is a profound message indeed, one that is deeply internalized and reinforced daily through normalized discourses about good

schools and neighborhoods. This dynamic of gain rather than loss via racial segregation may be the most profound aspect of white racial socialization of all. Yet, while discourses about what makes a space good are tacitly understood as racially coded, this coding is explicitly denied by whites.

Universalism & Individualism

Whites are taught to see their perspectives as objective and representative of reality (McIntosh, 1988). The belief in objectivity, coupled with positioning white people as outside of culture (and thus the norm for humanity), allows whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience. This is evidenced through an unracialized identity or location, which functions as a kind of blindness; an inability to think about Whiteness as an identity or as a “state” of being that would or could have an impact on one’s life. In this position, Whiteness is not recognized or named by white people, and a universal reference point is assumed. White people are just people. Within this construction, whites can represent humanity, while people of color, who are never just people but always most particularly black people, Asian people, etc., can only represent their own racialized experiences (Dyer, 1992).

The discourse of universalism functions similarly to the discourse of individualism but instead of declaring that we all need to see each other as individuals (everyone is different), the person declares that we all need to see each other as human beings (everyone is the same). Of course we are all humans, and I do not critique universalism in general, but when applied to racism, universalism functions to deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white. Further, universalism assumes that whites and people of color have the same realities, the same experiences in the same contexts (i.e. I feel comfortable in this majority white classroom, so you must too), the same responses from others, and assumes that the same doors are open to all. Acknowledging racism as a system of privilege conferred on whites challenges claims to universalism.

At the same time that whites are taught to see their interests and perspectives as universal, they are also taught to value the individual and to see themselves as individuals rather than as part of a racially socialized group. Individualism erases history and hides the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today. It allows whites to view themselves as unique and original, outside of socialization and unaffected by the relentless racial messages in the culture. Individualism also allows whites to distance themselves from the actions of their racial group and demand to be granted the benefit of the doubt, as individuals, in all cases. A corollary to this unracialized identity is the ability to recognize Whiteness as something that is significant and that operates in society, but to not see how it relates to one’s own life. In this form, a white person recognizes Whiteness as real, but as the individual problem of other “bad” white people (DiAngelo, 2010a).

Given the ideology of individualism, whites often respond defensively when linked to other whites as a group or “accused” of collectively benefiting from racism, because as individuals, each white person is “different” from any other white person and expects to be seen as such. This narcissism is not necessarily the result of a consciously held belief that whites are superior to others (although that may play a role), but a result of the white racial insulation ubiquitous in dominant culture (Dawkins, 2004; Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003); a general white inability to see non-white perspectives as significant, except in sporadic and impotent reflexes, which have little or no long-term momentum or political usefulness (Rich, 1979).

Whites invoke these seemingly contradictory discourses—we are either all unique or we are all the same—interchangeably. Both discourses work to deny white privilege and the significance of race. Further, on the cultural level, being an individual or being a human outside of a racial group is a privilege only afforded to white people. In other words, people of color are almost always seen as “having a race” and described in racial terms (“the black man”) but whites rarely are (“the man”), allowing whites to see themselves as objective and non-racialized. In turn, being seen (and seeing ourselves) as individuals outside of race frees whites from the psychic burden of race in a wholly racialized society. Race and racism become their problems, not ours. Challenging these frameworks becomes a kind of unwelcome shock to the system.

The disavowal of race as an organizing factor, both of individual white consciousness and the institutions of society at large, is necessary to support current structures of capitalism and domination, for without it, the correlation between the distribution of social resources and unearned white privilege would be evident (Flax, 1998). The existence of structural inequality undermines the claim that privilege is simply a reflection of hard work and virtue. Therefore, inequality must be hidden or justified as resulting from lack of effort (Mills, 1997; Ryan, 2001). Individualism accomplishes both of these tasks. At the same time, the individual presented as outside these relations cannot exist without its disavowed other. Thus, an essential dichotomy is formed between specifically raced others and the unracialized individual. Whites have deep investments in race, for the abstract depends on the particular (Flax, 1998); they need raced others as the backdrop against which they may rise (Morrison, 1992). Exposing this dichotomy destabilizes white identity.

Entitlement to racial comfort

In the dominant position, whites are almost always racially comfortable and thus have developed unchallenged expectations to remain so (DiAngelo, 2006b). Whites have not had to build tolerance for racial discomfort and thus when racial discomfort arises, whites typically respond as if something is “wrong,” and blame the person or event that triggered the discomfort (usually a person of color).

This blame results in a socially-sanctioned array of counter-moves against the perceived source of the discomfort, including: penalization; retaliation; isolation; ostracization; and refusal to continue engagement. White insistence on racial comfort ensures that racism will not be faced. This insistence also functions to punish those who break white codes of comfort. Whites often confuse comfort with safety and state that we don't feel safe when what we really mean is that we don't feel comfortable. This trivializes our history of brutality towards people of color and perverts the reality of that history. Because we don't think complexly about racism, we don't ask ourselves what safety means from a position of societal dominance, or the impact on people of color, given our history, for whites to complain about our safety when we are merely *talking* about racism.

Racial Arrogance

Ideological racism includes strongly positive images of the white self as well as strongly negative images of racial "others" (Feagin, 2000, p. 33). This self-image engenders a self-perpetuating sense of entitlement because many whites believe their financial and professional successes are the result of their own efforts while ignoring the fact of white privilege. Because most whites have not been trained to think complexly about racism in schools (Derman-Sparks, Ramsey & Olsen Edwards, 2006; Sleeter, 1993) or mainstream discourse, and because it benefits white dominance not to do so, we have a very limited understanding of racism. Yet dominance leads to racial arrogance, and in this racial arrogance, whites have no compunction about debating the knowledge of people who have thought complexly about race. Whites generally feel free to dismiss these informed perspectives rather than have the humility to acknowledge that they are unfamiliar, reflect on them further, or seek more information. This intelligence and expertise are often trivialized and countered with simplistic platitudes (i.e. "People just need to...").

Because of white social, economic and political power within a white dominant culture, whites are positioned to legitimize people of color's assertions of racism. Yet whites are the least likely to see, understand, or be invested in validating those assertions and being honest about their consequences, which leads whites to claim that they disagree with perspectives that challenge their worldview, when in fact, they don't understand the perspective. Thus, they confuse not understanding with not agreeing. This racial arrogance, coupled with the need for racial comfort, also has whites insisting that people of color explain white racism in the "right" way. The right way is generally politely and rationally, without any show of emotional upset. When explained in a way that white people can see and understand, racism's validity may be granted (references to dynamics of racism that white people do not understand are usually rejected out of hand). However, whites are usually more receptive to validating white racism if that racism is constructed as residing in individual white people other than themselves.

Racial Belonging

White people enjoy a deeply internalized, largely unconscious sense of racial belonging in U.S. society (DiAngelo, 2006b; McIntosh, 1988). This racial belonging is instilled via the whiteness embedded in the culture at large. Everywhere we look, we see our own racial image reflected back to us – in our heroes and heroines, in standards of beauty, in our role-models and teachers, in our textbooks and historical memory, in the media, in religious iconography including the image of god himself, etc. In virtually any situation or image deemed valuable in dominant society, whites belong. Indeed, it is rare for most whites to experience a sense of not belonging, and such experiences are usually very temporary, easily avoidable situations. Racial belonging becomes deeply internalized and taken for granted. In dominant society, interruption of racial belonging is rare and thus destabilizing and frightening to whites.

Whites consistently choose and enjoy racial segregation. Living, working, and playing in racial segregation is unremarkable as long as it is not named or made explicitly intentional. For example, in many anti-racist endeavors, a common exercise is to separate into caucus groups by race in order to discuss issues specific to your racial group, and without the pressure or stress of other groups' presence. Generally, people of color appreciate this opportunity for racial fellowship, but white people typically become very uncomfortable, agitated and upset – even though this temporary separation is in the service of addressing racism. Responses include a disorienting sense of themselves as not just people, but most particularly white people; a curious sense of loss about this contrived and temporary separation which they don't feel about the real and on-going segregation in their daily lives; and anxiety about not knowing what is going on in the groups of color. The irony, again, is that most whites live in racial segregation every day, and in fact, are the group most likely to intentionally choose that segregation (albeit obscured in racially coded language such as seeking “good schools” and “good neighborhoods”). This segregation is unremarkable until it is named as deliberate – i.e. “We are now going to separate by race for a short exercise.” I posit that it is the intentionality that is so disquieting – as long as we don't mean to separate, as long as it “just happens” that we live segregated lives, we can maintain a (fragile) identity of racial innocence.

Psychic freedom

Because race is constructed as residing in people of color, whites don't bear the social burden of race. We move easily through our society without a sense of ourselves as racialized subjects (Dyer, 1997). We see race as operating when people of color are present, but all-white spaces as “pure” spaces – untainted by race *vis à vis* the absence of the carriers of race (and thereby the racial polluters) – people of color. This perspective is perfectly captured in a familiar white statement, “I was lucky. I grew up in an all-white neighborhood so I didn't learn anything about ra-

cism.” In this discursive move, whiteness gains its meaning through its purported lack of encounter with non-whiteness (Nakayama & Martin, 1999). Because racial segregation is deemed socially valuable while simultaneously unracial and unremarkable, we rarely, if ever, have to think about race and racism, and receive no penalty for not thinking about it. In fact, whites are more likely to be penalized (primarily by other whites) for bringing race up in a social justice context than for ignoring it (however, it is acceptable to bring race up indirectly and in ways that reinforce racist attitudes, i.e. warning other whites to stay away from certain neighborhoods, etc.). This frees whites from carrying the psychic burden of race. Race is for people of color to think about – it is what happens to “them” – they can bring it up if it is an issue for them (although if they do, we can dismiss it as a personal problem, the “race card”, or the reason for their problems). This allows whites to devote much more psychological energy to other issues, and prevents us from developing the stamina to sustain attention on an issue as charged and uncomfortable as race.

Constant messages that we are more valuable – through representation in everything

Living in a white dominant context, we receive constant messages that we are better and more important than people of color. These messages operate on multiple levels and are conveyed in a range of ways. For example: our centrality in history textbooks, historical representations and perspectives; our centrality in media and advertising (for example, a recent Vogue magazine cover boldly stated, “The World’s Next Top Models” and every woman on the front cover was white); our teachers, role-models, heroes and heroines; everyday discourse on “good” neighborhoods and schools and who is in them; popular TV shows centered around friendship circles that are all white; religious iconography that depicts god, Adam and Eve, and other key figures as white, commentary on new stories about how shocking any crime is that occurs in white suburbs; and, the lack of a sense of loss about the absence of people of color in most white people’s lives. While one may explicitly reject the notion that one is inherently better than another, one cannot avoid internalizing the message of white superiority, as it is ubiquitous in mainstream culture (Tatum, 1997; Doane, 1997).

What does White Fragility look like?

A large body of research about children and race demonstrates that children start to construct ideas about race very early; a sense of white superiority and knowledge of racial power codes appears to develop as early as pre-school (Clark, 1963; Derman-Sparks, Ramsey, & Olsen Edwards, 2006). Marty (1999) states,

As in other Western nations, white children born in the United States inherit the moral predicament of living in a white supremacist society. Raised to experience

their racially based advantages as fair and normal, white children receive little if any instruction regarding the predicament they face, let alone any guidance in how to resolve it. Therefore, they experience or learn about racial tension without understanding Euro-Americans' historical responsibility for it and knowing virtually nothing about their contemporary roles in perpetuating it (p. 51).

At the same time that it is ubiquitous, white superiority also remains unnamed and explicitly denied by most whites. If white children become adults who explicitly oppose racism, as do many, they often organize their identity around a denial of the racially based privileges they hold that reinforce racist disadvantage for others. What is particularly problematic about this contradiction is that white moral objection to racism increases white resistance to acknowledging complicity with it. In a white supremacist context, white identity in large part rests upon a foundation of (superficial) racial toleration and acceptance. Whites who position themselves as liberal often opt to protect what they perceive as their moral reputations, rather than recognize or change their participation in systems of inequity and domination. In so responding, whites invoke the power to choose when, how, and how much to address or challenge racism. Thus, pointing out white advantage will often trigger patterns of confusion, defensiveness and righteous indignation. When confronted with a challenge to white racial codes, many white liberals use the speech of self-defense (Van Dijk, 1992). This discourse enables defenders to protect their moral character against what they perceive as accusation and attack while deflecting any recognition of culpability or need of accountability. Focusing on restoring their moral standing through these tactics, whites are able to avoid the question of white privilege (Marty, 1999, Van Dijk, 1992).

Those who lead whites in discussions of race may find the discourse of self-defense familiar. Via this discourse, whites position themselves as victimized, slammed, blamed, attacked, and being used as "punching bag[s]" (DiAngelo, 2006c). Whites who describe interactions in this way are responding to the articulation of counter narratives; nothing physically out of the ordinary has ever occurred in any inter-racial discussion that I am aware of. These self-defense claims work on multiple levels to: position the speakers as morally superior while obscuring the true power of their social locations; blame others with less social power for their discomfort; falsely position that discomfort as dangerous; and reinscribe racist imagery. This discourse of victimization also enables whites to avoid responsibility for the racial power and privilege they wield. By positioning themselves as victims of anti-racist efforts, they cannot be the beneficiaries of white privilege. Claiming that *they* have been treated unfairly via a challenge to their position or an expectation that they listen to the perspectives and experiences of people of color, they are able to demand that more social resources (such as time and attention) be channeled in their direction to help them cope with this mistreatment.

A cogent example of White Fragility occurred recently during a workplace anti-racism training I co-facilitated with an inter-racial team. One of the white

participants left the session and went back to her desk, upset at receiving (what appeared to the training team as) sensitive and diplomatic feedback on how some of her statements had impacted several people of color in the room. At break, several other white participants approached us (the trainers) and reported that they had talked to the woman at her desk, and she was very upset that her statements had been challenged. They wanted to alert us to the fact that she literally “might be having a heart-attack.” Upon questioning from us, they clarified that they meant this *literally*. These co-workers were sincere in their fear that the young woman might actually physically die as a result of the feedback. Of course, when news of the woman’s potentially fatal condition reached the rest of the participant group, all attention was immediately focused back onto her and away from the impact she had had on the people of color. As Vodde (2001) states, “If privilege is defined as a legitimization of one’s entitlement to resources, it can also be defined as permission to escape or avoid any challenges to this entitlement” (p. 3).

The language of violence that many whites use to describe anti-racist endeavors is not without significance, as it is another example of the way that White Fragility distorts and perverts reality. By employing terms that connote physical abuse, whites tap into the classic discourse of people of color (particularly African Americans) as dangerous and violent. This discourse perverts the actual direction of danger that exists between whites and others. The history of brutal, extensive, institutionalized and ongoing violence perpetrated by whites against people of color—slavery, genocide, lynching, whipping, forced sterilization and medical experimentation to mention a few—becomes profoundly trivialized when whites claim they don’t feel safe or are under attack when in the rare situation of merely talking about race with people of color. The use of this discourse illustrates how fragile and ill-equipped most white people are to confront racial tensions, and their subsequent projection of this tension onto people of color (Morrison, 1992). Goldberg (1993) argues that the questions surrounding racial discourse should not focus so much on how true stereotypes are, but how the truth claims they offer are a part of a larger worldview that authorizes and normalizes forms of domination and control. Further, it is relevant to ask: Under what conditions are those truth-claims clung to most tenaciously?

Bonilla-Silva (2006) documents a manifestation of White Fragility in his study of color-blind white racism. He states, “Because the new racial climate in America forbids the open expression of racially based feelings, views, and positions, when whites discuss issues that make them uncomfortable, they become almost incomprehensible – I, I, I, I don’t mean, you know, but...-” (p. 68). Probing forbidden racial issues results in verbal incoherence - digressions, long pauses, repetition, and self-corrections. He suggests that this incoherent talk is a function of talking about race in a world that insists race does not matter. This incoherence is one demonstration that many white people are unprepared to engage, even on a preliminary level, in an exploration of their racial perspectives that could lead to a shift in their understanding of racism. This lack of preparedness results in the

maintenance of white power because the ability to determine which narratives are authorized and which are suppressed is the foundation of cultural domination (Banks, 1996; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1990). Further, this lack of preparedness has further implications, for if whites cannot engage with an exploration of alternate racial perspectives, they can only reinscribe white perspectives as universal.

However, an assertion that whites do not engage with dynamics of racial discourse is somewhat misleading. White people do notice the racial locations of racial others and discuss this freely among themselves, albeit often in coded ways. Their refusal to directly acknowledge this race talk results in a kind of split consciousness that leads to the incoherence Bonilla-Silva documents above (Feagin, 2000; Flax, 1998; hooks, 1992; Morrison, 1992). This denial also guarantees that the racial misinformation that circulates in the culture and frames their perspectives will be left unexamined. The continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement in a culture infused with racial disparity limits the ability to form authentic connections across racial lines, and results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place.

Conclusion

White people often believe that multicultural / anti-racist education is only necessary for those who interact with “minorities” or in “diverse” environments. However, the dynamics discussed here suggest that it is critical that all white people build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race. When whites posit race as non-operative because there are few, if any, people of color in their immediate environments, Whiteness is reinscribed ever more deeply (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). When whites only notice “raced others,” we reinscribe Whiteness by continuing to posit Whiteness as universal and non-Whiteness as other. Further, if we can’t listen to or comprehend the perspectives of people of color, we cannot bridge cross-racial divides. A continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement results in a perpetual cycle that works to hold racism in place.

While anti-racist efforts ultimately seek to transform institutionalized racism, anti-racist education may be most effective by starting at the micro level. The goal is to generate the development of perspectives and skills that enable all people, regardless of racial location, to be active initiators of change. Since all individuals who live within a racist system are enmeshed in its relations, this means that all are responsible for either perpetuating or transforming that system. However, although all individuals play a role in keeping the system active, the responsibility for change is not equally shared. White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; hooks, 1995; Wise, 2003). Conversations about Whiteness might best happen within the context of a larger conversation about racism. It is useful to start at the micro level of analysis, and move to the macro, from the individual out to the

interpersonal, societal and institutional. Starting with the individual and moving outward to the ultimate framework for racism – Whiteness – allows for the pacing that is necessary for many white people for approaching the challenging study of race. In this way, a discourse on Whiteness becomes part of a process rather than an event (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

Many white people have never been given direct or complex information about racism before, and often cannot explicitly see, feel, or understand it (Trepagnier, 2006; Weber, 2001). People of color are generally much more aware of racism on a personal level, but due to the wider society's silence and denial of it, often do not have a macro-level framework from which to analyze their experiences (Sue, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Further, dominant society "assigns" different roles to different groups of color (Smith, 2005), and a critical consciousness about racism varies not only between individuals within groups, but also between groups. For example, many African Americans relate having been "prepared" by parents to live in a racist society, while many Asian heritage people say that racism was never directly discussed in their homes (hooks, 1989; Lee, 1996). A macro-level analysis may offer a framework to understand different interpretations and performances across and between racial groups. In this way, all parties benefit and efforts are not solely focused on whites (which works to re-center Whiteness).

Talking directly about white power and privilege, in addition to providing much needed information and shared definitions, is also in itself a powerful interruption of common (and oppressive) discursive patterns around race. At the same time, white people often need to reflect upon racial information and be allowed to make connections between the information and their own lives. Educators can encourage and support white participants in making their engagement a point of analysis. White Fragility doesn't always manifest in overt ways; silence and withdrawal are also functions of fragility. Who speaks, who doesn't speak, when, for how long, and with what emotional valence are all keys to understanding the relational patterns that hold oppression in place (Gee, 1999; Powell, 1997). Viewing white anger, defensiveness, silence, and withdrawal in response to issues of race through the framework of White Fragility may help frame the problem as an issue of stamina-building, and thereby guide our interventions accordingly.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Microaggressive Impact on Education and Teaching: Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race in the Classroom

I was teaching a sophomore class in urban education and lecturing on the "achievement gap" between Black and White students. Our topic for discussion dealt with analyzing a collection of brief biographical sketches of Black Americans who described how race impacted their lives and the special hardships they encountered in education. Usually students in my class are very talkative, but today the responses were tepid and brief. It felt like pulling teeth to get any type of response. I kept asking questions and making comments in an attempt to generate interest and to fill the long silences. Finally, one of the White female students stated that "I'm not sure this is a race issue, because as a woman, I've experienced low expectations from my teachers as well." Another White male student chimed in by asking "Isn't it a social class issue?" Another White female student immediately agreed, and went into a long monologue concerning how class issues are always neglected in discussions of social justice. She concluded by asking "Why is everything always about race?"

I could sense the energy in the classroom rise and felt eager to discuss these important issues when one of the few Black female students angrily confronted the White female with these words: "You have no idea what it's like to be Black! I don't care if you are poor or not, but you have White skin. Do you know what that means? Don't tell me that being Black isn't different from being White." A Latina student also added to the rejoinder by stating "You will never understand. Whites don't have to understand. Why are White people so scared to talk about race? Why do you always have to push it aside?" The two White female students seemed baffled and became obviously defensive. After an attempt to clarify their points, both White female students seemed to only inflame the dialogue. One of the female students began to cry, and the second student indignantly got up, stated she was not going to be insulted, and left the classroom.

As a White male professor, I felt paralyzed. This was truly "the classroom from hell." What had just happened? I was concerned about losing control of the classroom dynamics and immediately tried to calm the students down. I told them to respect one another, and to address these issues in a rational, calm, and objective manner. We could not let our emotions get the better of us. Because of the volatility of the situation, I suggested that we table the discussion and go on to another topic.

While I continued to lecture as if nothing had happened, I experienced a deep sense of failure and was concerned with the impact of this situation in our class. It was later substantiated when the student who broke out in tears dropped the course, and the one who left the room bitterly complained to the Dean, blaming me for handling the situation poorly. I was haunted by this classroom experience, did not understand what had happened, and felt at a loss of what to do. Nothing in my education had prepared me for handling this explosive difficult dialogue on race.

The above example is one that is reenacted frequently in classrooms throughout the United States, especially when topics revolve around those of race and racism. Studies reveal that many difficult dialogues on race are triggered by racial microaggressions not only in classroom settings, but in many public and private forums (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Sue, Rivera, Capodilupo, Lin, & Torino, 2009; Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009; Young, 2004). Difficult racial dialogues are perceived quite differently between people of color and Whites. For students of color, race is an intimate part of their identities and avoiding topics related to it, dismissing it, negating it, or having it assailed create emotional reactions that may be brewed over in silence, or result in lashing out toward offenders (Young, 2004). For many White students,

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however, race is invisible—they seldom think about or investigate it, and they become defensive about their own privilege. Ultimately, this can lead to denial or minimization of race as an important aspect of life (Bolgatz, 2005). Let us briefly identify the issues illustrated in the example.

First, it is apparent that all three well-intentioned White students did not realize that they were delivering racial microaggressions toward students of color. In addressing how race influenced Blacks, the White students seemed to dilute its importance by refocusing the topic on gender and class issues. They did not realize that they were (1) assailing the racial identities of Black students, and (2) denying or invalidating their racial experiences and realities (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009) through their microaggressive comments. As you recall, both of these communications have been identified as forms of racial microaggressions. Further, by equating racial bias with gender/class biases, the legitimacy of racism and its detrimental impact on the lives of people of color is diminished, pushed aside, and considered unimportant. Again, as with all microaggressions, there is a difference between the legitimacy of the topics (importance of gender and class factors), and the hidden demeaning and invalidating messages that are sent. The White students were unaware that they might be delivering microaggressions.

Second, the invisibility of these interactional dynamics—what triggered the intense reaction of students of color (racial microaggressions)—is often outside the level of conscious awareness of the White students, and even the professor. When critical consciousness is missing and when the interpersonal dynamics are unclear, puzzlement and confusion reign supreme. The White students and professor are at a loss to understand what just happened, and what was responsible for the emotive reactions and statements of students of color. Thus, they are not in a position to respond in a helpful or enlightened manner. The White students are left with the feeling of being personally attacked and only vaguely sense that something they did or said offended students of color. But other than their own defensiveness, anxiety, and feeling hurt from the exchange, they have little understanding of their own roles in the difficult dialogue (Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009). The professor also realizes something is amiss (tentativeness in discussing racial topics, anxiety, heated exchanges, crying and leaving the room), but is at a loss to determine its meaning and how to respond appropriately (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009).

Third, difficult dialogues on race are seldom completed or resolved in such a way as to be a meaningful learning experience. Indeed, classroom interactions on topics of race, gender, and sexual orientation often deteriorate into

monologues rather than develop into true dialogues (Sue & Constantine, 2007). There is no attempt to reach out to others, to hear their points of view, and to digest the meanings; instead, defensiveness, anger, and an attacking shouting match occur between participants (Young, 2003). Students seem more motivated to press their views (stating and restating their positions, and talking over each other) rather than attempting to listen to another's point of view. If sufficient emotional intensity is reached, students may leave the classroom, break down in tears (Accapadi, 2007), and not participate further in racial dialogues; the professor, on the other hand, may admonish students to respect one another, to control their emotions, or to "table the discussion." These avoidance maneuvers are intended to end the dialogue or to place *extreme restrictions on how to talk about race*.

Fourth, the unsuccessful outcome of difficult dialogues on race represents a major setback and failure in understanding and improving race relations. It can actually lead to a hardening of racially biased views on the part of White students (people of color are oversensitive and can't control their emotions), and it leaves the students of color pained, hurt, and invalidated, reinforcing beliefs that Whites cannot understand or be trusted. Further, by leaving the topic untouched and unresolved it will continue to represent the "elephant in the room" and negatively affect the learning environment by teaching students to avoid race topics. As a result, many students of color find the classroom situation oppressive and intolerable, reflecting the power and privilege of White students and professors to control the dialogue. While White students can avoid issues of race by leaving the situation or avoiding it, students of color have no such privilege. They must deal with race on a day-to-day basis; escape and leaving the situation are not options open to them.

Last, the White professor reflected upon how his training had never prepared him to facilitate these emotional interactions among students, or even between himself and his students. It is clear that the professor was baffled by the interaction and was unaware and unable to recognize racial microaggressions. While educators are often prepared to teach in classrooms by stressing knowledge acquisition and cognitive analysis, topics of race and racism are more than intellectual exercises because they involve taboos, and nested feelings of anxiety, fear, guilt, and anger. As we shall shortly see, facilitating difficult dialogues on race requires professors to (a) be aware of their own values, biases, and assumptions about human behavior, (b) understand the worldview of the culturally diverse students, and (c) possess a repertoire of teaching or facilitation strategies to aid students in self-reflection and learning.

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MICROAGGRESSIONS IN EDUCATION

It is becoming increasingly clear that many inequities in education are due to lower expectations, stereotypes, and a hostile invalidating climate for people of color, women, and LGBTs (Bell, 2002; Cadinu, Maass, Rosabianca, & Kiesner, 2005; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009). In the last chapter we analyzed how microaggressions operate systemically in worksites and their effects can be found in the hiring, retention, and promotion of employees. This is also true with respect to pre-K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and professional graduate programs. The underrepresentation of women in science and engineering in elementary levels, secondary schools, and in professorial positions in colleges/universities may speak to possible discrimination. The low representation of minority faculty can also be the insidious operation of aversive forms of racism. Not only may such forces operate in an educational institution, affecting which teachers, staff, and administrators are hired, but a similar framework can be applied to students as well.

Microaggressions can affect the student body composition through recruitment (which students are selected), retention (which students drop out), and promotion (graduation rates) of students of color. If racial, gender, and sexual-orientation microaggressions present a hostile and invalidating learning climate, these groups are likely to suffer in any number of ways. Women, for example, have been found to experience stereotype threat because of gender microaggressions, may underperform in math and sciences despite having high abilities, and/or may become segregated in their career paths or vocational selections by well-intentioned educators (Bell, 2003; Gore, 2000; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). Such factors speak to educational inequities that are present systemically and may inundate the classroom environment.

Educational Disparities among Marginalized Groups

Despite parents of color encouraging their sons and daughters to develop educational and career goals, racism and poverty continue to create disparities, especially among African American, Latina/o, and American Indian students. The high school graduation rates for African Americans are significantly below those of Whites and even worse for those going to college (14.3% vs. 24.3%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005b); Latinas/os have fared poorly as approximately two of five aged 25 or older have not completed high school, and more than 25% have less than a ninth-grade education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003); and Native Americans show an astounding pattern of dropping out beginning

in the fourth grade, resulting in low rates of completing elementary and secondary schools and college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Although Asian Americans are often perceived as a "successful minority" with higher educational levels, the statistics mask a bimodal distribution of this group; a large number of Asian subgroups have a large undereducated mass (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005a). Only 40% of Hmongs have completed high school and fewer than 14% of Tongans, Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmongs 25 years and older have a bachelor's degree.

Looking beyond these gross measures of academic achievement, it is undeniable that a large discrepancy exists between the academic performance of students of color and their White counterparts. American Indian children do well during the first four years of school, but by the end of fourth grade they begin to "drop out" and by the seventh grade significant decreases in academic performance are evident (Juntunen et al., 2001). Black students during middle and high school years evidence a separation of self-esteem from academic performance that results in loss of interest in schoolwork and resulting poor acquisition of knowledge and skills. Behavioral problems in schools, higher pregnancy rates among African American and Latina girls, and increasing alienation from school curriculum all contribute to poorer academic performance. Students of color are also many times more likely to be suspended from school and to receive harsher consequences than their White peers (Monroe, 2005).

For years, educators have attempted to understand the causes of "the achievement gap" in an attempt to close it. They have recognized that the inability to complete an education perpetuates the cycle of poverty, lack of job opportunities in the larger society, and detrimental psychological consequences associated with low self-esteem and subjective well-being (Sue & Sue, 2008). Appropriate intervention strategies can only arise, however, when the causes for school failure are identified. The causes of high drop-out rates and lower academic achievement among students of color are probably multidimensional and may vary from group to group. Explanations for the poorer academic performance of students of color, however, seem to fall into two camps: (1) causation resides internally, within the individual, group, or culture, and (2) causation resides externally in the system or the academic/classroom and societal environment.

Internal Causation—Individual Focus

We have already identified two major forms of microaggressions that seem to form a worldview with hidden assumptions and messages: (1) the myth

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croaggressions that seem d messages: (1) the myth

of meritocracy and (2) pathologizing cultural/communication styles of marginalized groups. Both take a person- or group-focused approach to explaining the poor academic performance of marginalized groups. The explanations can range from genetic speculations that biology determines intelligence and abilities (math/science capabilities are deficient in women) to factors associated with incompatible group characteristics and values. Educators and especially teachers often hold both conscious and unconscious stereotypes or preconceived notions that students of color are less capable and motivated, that parents are uninvolved in the educational welfare of their children, and/or that their cultural values are at odds with educational values (Sue & Sue, 2008).

School personnel, for example, often attribute the poor performance of African Americans to internal attributes or to their parents. One teacher stated: "The parents are the problem! They [African American children] have absolutely no social skills, such as not knowing how to walk, sit in a chair . . . it's cultural" (Harry, Klinger, & Hart, 2005, p. 105). With respect to Native American students, some have argued that Indian cultural values and beliefs are incompatible with those of the educational system, and that this is the culprit for their achievement gap. Likewise, many educators believe that much of the educational difficulties of Latinos are due primarily to their language, Spanish, which prevents them from acquiring the ability to speak "good standard English" (Hayes, 2006).

Although these explanations may contain some grain of truth, they all assume internal causation and have the unintended consequence of blaming the victim; the problem resides in the genes of the group, in their culture, or in their language. The genetic deficiency and inferiority models have been used to explain why African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Spanish Indian families perform poorly on intellectual tasks (Samuda, 1998). The culturally deficient model described marginalized groups in our society as deficient, disadvantaged, or deprived (Sue & Sue, 2008; Thomas & Sillen, 1972). Logically, the terms *deprived* or *deficient* suggest that people of color lack the advantages of middle-class culture (education, formal language, books, values, and traditions) to perform well in classes. While the cultural deprivation theories were proposed by well-intentioned White educators as a means of combating racist and sexist biological explanations, they only worsened our understanding by shifting the blame from genetics to a more acceptable one, culture.

At first glance, the phrase "culturally impoverished" appears more benign and less harmful. But explanations of cultural deprivation suffer from several

problems. First, we can ask the question, how can any individual or group be culturally deprived or "lack a culture"? Such a phrase is contradictory because everyone inherits a culture and no one was born "culturally naked." Second, it causes conceptual and theoretical confusions that may adversely affect educational policy and practice. If African American family values and behaviors are at the root of the problem, then it opens the floodgates for us to infuse White Eurocentric notions into the family values of the Black community. Third, a hidden microaggressive assumption is that cultural deprivation is used synonymously with deviations from and superiority of White middle-class values. In essence, these models and explanations send the same message: People of color and many other marginalized groups lack the right culture! White Eurocentric norms, masculine norms, and heterosexist norms become the worldview that reflects racial, gender, and sexual-orientation microaggressions in the educational setting.

A society based upon the concept of "individualism"—that one's lot in life is based upon individual effort, abilities, and skills—is said to be oriented toward explaining behavior from a person-focused perspective. Three philosophical outlooks derive from an internal explanation of behavior or outcome: (1) stress is placed upon understanding individual motives, values, feelings, and goals; (2) causal attribution of success or failure is determined by the skills or inadequacies of the person; and (3) there is a strong belief in the relationship between abilities, effort, and success in education. Educational performance, educational attainment, and educational outcome of students of color, women, and LGBTs, for example, are the result of their own internal attributes. Success is explained as outstanding attributes, and failure is attributed to personal or group deficiencies.

External Causation—System Focus

While individual responsibility for achievement in school is an important factor in explaining academic performance, ignoring external forces (prejudice, discrimination, poverty, etc.) to explain academic disparities in education may result in blaming the victim. Many microaggressions originate from a myth of meritocracy ("any one can succeed in life if they work hard enough" and "the playing field is level"), and the failure to consider powerful external forces that affect outcome. Native American students report that educational curriculum, teaching and learning styles, and the classroom climate are unwelcoming, and ignore their cultural and social differences. They feel "pushed out" and mistrusted by teachers and liken the educational experience

to forced compliance or being "civilized" (Deyhle & Swisher, 1999). Latina/o students, especially immigrants, must deal not only with racism, but acculturative stress, poverty, high unemployment, and culture-conflicts (Hovey, 2000). It is reported that this confluence of external factors not only saps the energies of Latina/o students for learning in the classroom, but predisposes them to higher rates of mental disorders such as depression and attempted suicide (Tortolero & Roberts, 2001). Dealing with family distress, discrimination in the school and community, and social isolation may result in increased gang activities as well (Baca & Koss-Chiomo, 1997).

Likewise, gay and lesbian youths, especially those out of the closet, face discrimination and harassment in the schools at a high rate. They are more likely to have been involved in a fight that required medical attention (Russell, Franz, & Driscoll, 2001). Their tendency to be exposed to violence in schools is frighteningly high: a Massachusetts high school study revealed that LGB students are more likely to be confronted with a weapon in school (32.7 vs. 7.1%), and to avoid going to school because of safety concerns (25.1 vs. 5.1%). Furthermore, they were more likely to attempt suicide not because of their sexual orientation, but because their school, home, and social environments have proven hostile and invalidating (Russell & Joyner, 2001).

Given these brief examples, it is clear that systems forces can be powerful and influential in determining the academic outcome of students. A singular belief that people are "masters of their own fate" unfairly blames marginalized populations for their inability to achieve more in school or society. It fails to consider the operations of racism, sexism, and heterosexism in determining the outcome of school performance and achievement in other areas of life. Whether educators view the locus of responsibility as residing in the person or the system has major impact upon how they define a problem (achievement gap), the attributions made, and the strategies chosen to solve it. Poor academic performance of African Americans, for example, may be attributed to the group's inadequacies or shortcomings (person-focused), thus changing them (assimilation or acculturation) is seen as the solution. If, however, a system analysis is employed, racial discrimination and the lack of opportunities are identified as the culprits, and systemic intervention is recommended (Jones, 1997). Neither approach taken to the extreme tells the whole story. However, the values of individualism and autonomy undergird our beliefs in individual responsibility and self-reliance, making it difficult for many educators to see how their assumptions of equal access and opportunity may not apply to many devalued groups in our society. Systemic barriers to minority achievement

can be found in the following culture-bound and culturally biased forces operating in schools at all levels.

How microaggressions make their appearance in the larger educational setting can be analyzed from a broader systemic level, as we have seen in Chapter 10. Racial, gender, and sexual-orientation microaggressions can be manifested in many areas:

- Faculty, administrators, staff, and students on an interactional level may unwittingly invalidate, insult, or assail the identities of people of color, women, and LGBT's.
- Microaggressions can make their appearance in the curriculum (culturally biased or culture-bound textbooks, lectures, teaching materials, etc.) that ignore or portray marginalized groups in unflattering ways.
- Low numerical minority representation among teachers and administrators may act as a symbolic cue signaling a threat to a group's social identity.
- The campus climate may be unwelcoming, not only through the actions of individuals (harassment, racist/sexist/heterosexist jokes, etc.), but also environmentally (foods served in cafeterias, music played at school events, what and how events are celebrated, how classrooms or buildings are decorated, etc.).
- Teaching and learning styles may clash with one another because of differences in how groups learn.
- The types of support services offered by the school may come from a primarily White European perspective that may be antagonistic to the life values and experiences of certain groups (student personnel services, counseling and guidance services, etc.).
- The programs, policies, and practices may be oppressive and unfair to many marginalized groups and serve to oppress rather than liberate.

MICROAGGRESSIONS AND DIFFICULT DIALOGUES ON RACE IN THE CLASSROOM

One of the most important educational forums in understanding how microaggressions affect learning is in the classroom, where students spend a large portion of their time. Some have made a distinction between schooling and education (Cokley, 2006; Shujaa, 2003), in which the former is the process and activities of going to and being in school while the latter is the by-product

of the experience. To people of color, it is believed that schooling can either serve the interests of the group or betray it. These scholars have observed that the educational curriculum has become racialized (Sue, 2003) and that schooling can often be used as a tool to perpetuate and maintain the prevailing power arrangements and structures, whereas education is a means of transmitting eurocentric values, beliefs, customs, traditions, language, and arts/crafts of the dominant society (Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006; Shujaa, 2003). The ultimate result is the (mis)education of students of color, in which education becomes a form of "domestication" (Cokley, 2006). These statements have considerable support when one realizes the many inaccuracies taught in our curriculum and imposed upon students of color as well as their White classmates: Columbus discovered America, the internment of Japanese Americans was necessary for national security, and the enslavement of Black people was justified because "living under unnatural conditions of freedom" made them prone to anxiety.

Earlier, we indicated that power is in a group's ability to define reality and that schooling/education is a major socialization portal (Sue, 2003). Through omission, fabrication, distortion, or selective emphasis, the history and contributions of White Western civilizations are reinforced and elevated to superior status and imposed upon all students. The result is perpetuation of myths and inaccuracies about persons of color. Microaggressions are reflections of a worldview of superiority-inferiority, normality-abnormality, and desirable-undesirable ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. If we address the issue of race and racism, schooling and education may unintentionally reflect racial biases and oppress students of color while elevating the status of their White classmates and White teachers. When left unchallenged, they reinforce the attitudes, beliefs, and Eurocentric knowledge of Whites, while denigrating, demeaning, and invalidating those of students of color. When challenged, however, they can lead to difficult dialogues on race and represent a clash of racial realities. Many educators believe that classroom dialogues on race may represent a major tool in combating racism and helping to make racial microaggressions visible (Blum, 1998; Bolgatz, 2005; Sue & Constantine, 2007; Watt, 2007; Willow, 2008; Young, 2004; Young & Davis-Russell, 2002). We turn our attention now to analyzing the meaning and significance of difficult dialogues on race, but it is important to note that dialogues on gender and sexual orientation may share very similar manifestations and dynamics.

RACIAL DIALOGUES IN THE CLASSROOM

The increasing diversity in the United States is perhaps reflected most in our classrooms, where students of all colors represent a microcosm of race relations in our society. The increased interracial interactions often means greater opportunities for microaggressions to occur between students of color and their White classmates, between professors and their students, and in exposure to biased curricular topics and orientations. In a revealing study (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009), researchers found that these interactions often polarized students and teachers rather than contribute to mutual respect and understanding about race and race relations.

Many educators believe that effectively facilitating difficult dialogues on race in the classroom represents a golden opportunity to reduce and dispel prejudice and stereotypes, bridge ethnic divides, decrease mistrust and misunderstandings, increase empathy and compassion for others, and promote goodwill and understanding (President's Initiative on Race, 1998; Willow, 2008; Young, 2004). Unfortunately, racial dialogues in classrooms have frequently produced directly the opposite effect. They have resulted in disastrous consequences such as hardening of biases and prejudices; evoking strong feelings of anger, hostility, and rage; increasing misunderstanding; and blocking learning opportunities (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009). Yet, skillfully handled by enlightened teachers, difficult dialogues on race can prove to be an opportunity for growth, improved communication, and learning (Young, 2003; Sanchez-Hucles, & Jones, 2005).

Given the potential educational importance of being able to effectively facilitate difficult dialogues on race, the following questions may be imperative for educators to address: (1) What triggers (causes) a difficult dialogue on race? (2) Why is it so difficult for us to honestly dialogue about race, gender, and sexual orientation? (3) What makes a dialogue on race difficult? (4) Why do students and teachers alike become so guarded and uncomfortable when racial topics are raised in and outside of the classroom? (5) How can educators learn to become comfortable when addressing race issues, and what effective strategies can be used to facilitate a difficult dialogue?

Microaggressive Triggers to Difficult Racial Dialogues

Studies seem to suggest strongly that many difficult dialogues on race are caused by racial microaggressions that make their appearance in the classroom

(Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue, Lin, et al., 2009). In many cases they are delivered by White students and professors, either through a comment, tone of voice, nonverbals, insinuations, or the content of the course (curriculum). The microaggressions are found offensive by students of color, who may directly or indirectly confront perpetrators who attempt to avoid the topic and/or react defensively because they feel falsely accused of racism. While difficult racial dialogues can be triggered by other causes, it seems that racial microaggressions are the most common and prevalent instigator. Some of the most common racial microaggressions identified in the classroom are consistent with the thematic ones found in other formulations and studies in general (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). Examples in classroom situations for four of them—"ascription of intelligence," "alien in one's own land," "denial of racial reality," and "assumption of criminality"—are given below. The following student quotes are taken from Sue, Lin, et al. (2009).

1. *Ascription of intelligence*—The following was reported by a Black student about a classroom incident where a fellow classmate asked her a question. She relates the following:

"I started to explain, and the White girl said, 'Well, what she means is'—and she tried to talk for me. That I don't know what I'm talking about. I can't even articulate my own, my own idea. And I had to tell her, I can speak for myself, I can articulate my idea better than you can, you know? And only—I could not believe that she tried to speak for me." (p. 186).

The Black student was outraged and insulted because the White student assumed she was incapable of expressing her own ideas and wanted to do it for her.

2. *Alien in one's own land*—Although he did not show it, one Asian American male expressed controlled rage at another White female student because she assumed he could not speak or understand English well (perpetual foreigner association).

"But she looked at me and spoke extra slow, like to explain what the professor had just said. And I was kind of like, okay. So when I spoke and I spoke in regular speech, she was kind of shocked . . . um, like wondering if I actually speak English."

3. *Denial of racial reality*—The following classroom incidents were reported to happen continually and would often trigger a difficult dialogue.

As in our opening case example, the student of color's racial reality is negated or invalidated:

"... [They] keep rejecting whatever you say in class, it doesn't matter what you say, [they'd] disagree. They'll say [racial related matter] it's either irrelevant, it's not clear enough, um, I don't understand what you're saying, stuff like that..."

Many students reported how when bringing up topics of race or culture, they would be met with responses from White classmates like *"not everything is racial, you know"* or nonverbals (rolling of the eyeballs) that *"scream at you, here we go again."* Another informant states, *"When I share personal experiences of discrimination in class, they always want to find another reason for the behavior"* (p. 186).

4. Assumption of criminality—This was a common experience for African Americans students who witnessed White classmates not sitting next to them, or becoming extra vigilant with their personal belongings when they approached. They felt that White students communicated a fear of them, or that they might steal: *"They don't trust us, we're criminals, dope pushers and thieves"* (p. 186). Another Black student reported becoming angry at comments from White classmates after watching a counseling session with a Black client.

"Some of the students started to comment automatically on... like, well, what if he gets violent? Like, it just was kind of like entertained by the professor, like, oh, well, you need to make sure where you sit is close to an exit, and you gotta do this and you gotta do that. But I thought to a larger picture as to like this man, he was older and he just was resistant, but he wasn't violent." (p. 186)

Impediments to Honest Racial Dialogues

If racial dialogues are often caused by microaggressions, it becomes important to understand why it is so difficult to clarify communications between the participants. As we indicated earlier, students of color find such communications offensive. Yet, it would be beneficial to understand how White students perceive, interpret, and react when difficult dialogues on race present themselves. Why do many White students find it so difficult to honestly dialogue on racial topics? What are the barriers that get in their way? What are they afraid of? Likewise, these questions can also be addressed to White teachers as well. Understanding the dynamics of racial dialogues can have many educational benefits: (1) it will aid educators to recognize and anticipate their appearance

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in classrooms and other settings; (2) recognition of the intense emotions of White students may allow educators a deeper understanding of affective resistances; and (3) knowledge and understanding of difficult dialogues on race may lead to the development of intervention strategies that prove successful and unsuccessful in overcoming resistances, thus making such experiences a learning opportunity for all students (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009).

In a series of studies exploring the perspective of both White students and White educators on why difficult dialogues on race are difficult, it was found that both students and teachers shared similar fears (Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009; Sue, Torino, et al., 2009). We first discuss difficult racial dialogues from the perspective of White students and then from that of White teachers.

White Students' Perspectives

It has been hypothesized that many Whites find dialogues on race difficult for four primary reasons: (1) fear of being perceived as racist, (2) fear of realizing one's racism, (3) fear of confronting White privilege, and (4) fear of taking actions to end racism (Sue & Constantine, 2007; Watt, 2007; Willow, 2008). While they may unintentionally deliver a microaggression during an interracial encounter, the challenge from the target group evokes anxiety and dread in Whites who attempt to deny the implications for their actions. Unwittingly, the form of the denial may result in additional microaggressions (denial of individual racism or denial of the racial reality of targets). In one study designed to investigate these conclusions, it was found that White students identified several reasons about why racial dialogues were difficult for them (Sue & Constantine, 2007; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009).

Fear of Appearing Racist

One of the most dominant fears expressed by White students was that whatever they said or did in a racial dialogue might give people the mistaken impression that they were racist. The fear was quite overwhelming and hindered their abilities to participate in an honest and authentic manner, made them tentative in their responses, and more often than not they either remained silent or took a very passive approach to the topic. In classroom interactions they would refuse to participate or make only superficial observations. Some quotes from students illustrate their concerns and feelings: ". . . if I talk about race, I'm going to reveal my racism," ". . . fear of revealing my own biases," and ". . . if I express any confusion or if I have any questions, they're sometimes construed

as close-mindedness or an ignorance on my part." . . . "I wanted to say something, but I also felt very nervous. When I did finally speak, my thoughts weren't clear and I am sure difficult to follow" (Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009). Ironically, rather than making themselves appear less biased, their behaviors were read by students of color as indicating attempts to conceal racist attitudes and beliefs. It has been conjectured that the fear of appearing racist is only a superficial level of defense by Whites because it really masks a deeper fear—fear of actually being racist (Sue & Constantine, 2007). This conclusion seems supported by another dominant concern of White students.

Denial of Whiteness and White Privilege

White students expressed resentment toward being blamed for racism and the association of Whiteness with privilege, power, and advantage. They appeared to react defensively to being called "White" and seemed aware of the negative associations with light skin color. Some even disavowed being White by claiming to identify with only an ethnic group: "I'm not White, I'm German." "I'm not White, I'm Irish Catholic." One White female student expressed her strong objections to such associations: *"White people this and White people that, because honestly, I don't really identify with—I definitely feel like I need to almost justify myself when those things come up . . . societal problems are out of my hands."* Defensiveness seemed central to their reactions.

White students had considerable difficulty entertaining the notion that their light skin color automatically advantaged them in this society and that darker skin color disadvantaged others. They would often ward off such suggestions with statements like, "Don't blame me, my parents didn't own slaves." "Don't blame me; I didn't take land from Native Americans." It was difficult for many White students to realize that despite not being the primary culprits in perpetrating these wrongs, they still benefited from the historical injustices and structural arrangements of their ancestors. The anger, resentment, denial, and guilt expressed by White students made them want to avoid conversations on race. Again, a deeper exploration of these resistances revealed an additional level of discomfort many had difficulty facing: If indeed they benefitted from White privilege, then two challenges confront them. First, they must now question the myth of meritocracy and the likelihood that their lot in life was attained not just through their own efforts, but by a biased system that favored them. Second, if one accepts the notion of "unfair advantage" due to White privilege, what implications does it have for one's life and what will Whites do about it?

Color Blindness

As we have indicated earlier, the issue of color blindness is a double-edged sword (Purdie-Vaughns, Davis, Steele, & Dittmann, 2008; Thomas & Plant, 2008). In an attempt to appear unbiased, many Whites have adopted the stance that the color of one's skin is unimportant in American society. To see and acknowledge race or color is to potentially appear prejudiced and bigoted. Yet, many people of color find such a philosophy not only disingenuous, but an indicator of bias on the part of the person making such a claim. In classroom situations, White students may find topics on race difficult and uncomfortable because it may run counter to their beliefs that "we are all God's children," "we are all the same under the skin," and "we are all human beings or Americans." Professing color blindness has several perceived advantages for White students. First, it allows them not to acknowledge race and racial differences in classroom dialogues. Second, they can maintain the illusion that they are unbiased and do not discriminate against others. Third, if race is unimportant, then everyone has equal access and opportunity.

No Right to Dialogue on Race

Many students felt they had not experienced racism as students of color did, and thus had no right or credibility to talk about race matters. When asked about their reluctance to engage in racial conversations, many indicated that speaking to racism requires having been a victim. Others indicated they had limited contact with people of color, their knowledge was limited, and they felt uncomfortable speaking on such a topic. They indicated they did not possess a "valid voice" on the topic and were reluctant to participate: "... if you haven't experienced racism, you know, as a victim, then you don't necessarily have a right to talk about race." Again, this rationale seemed to be protective rather than real. It allows students to avoid exploring their own thoughts and reactions related to race issues, and to deceive themselves into believing that they play no role in the creation and maintenance of racism.

These four barriers to difficult dialogues on race were often accompanied by intense and extreme debilitating emotions that interfered with students' ability to attend, participate, and be open about their thoughts and feelings. An overwhelming number reported feeling **anxious and intimidated** about classroom conversations on race. They described fear and dread when racial topics were raised: "I tried hard to say something thoughtful and it's hard for me to say, and my heart was pounding when I said it." Another reaction was that of **helplessness**. This feeling very much related to an inability to understand

or cope with feelings evoked from a classroom dialogue. A White student describes her reaction: *"And then it sort of turned into, you know, a lot of the Students of Color kind of venting their frustrations, which is, you know, completely understandable, but at the same time, I felt so helpless, like, I really don't know what to do right now."* These students were likely to acknowledge the existence of racial injustice, but felt at a loss of how to speak to it. Consistent with the fear of appearing racist, some students felt **misunderstood** when they made comments. When addressing the topic of "antisocial behavior and violence," one White student recalls listing risk factors and mentioned the Black community. She reports being confronted by Black students and unfairly accused of stereotyping. The incident was so upsetting that she failed to participate during the rest of the class.

White Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers and educators are in a unique position to help students understand racial issues, especially when such interactions arise in the classroom (Young, 2004). When difficult racial dialogues occur in the classroom, they are no longer purely abstract intellectual constructs, but their appearances are concrete and real for students and teachers alike (Bell, 2003). They represent a microcosm of race relation difficulties in our society. In the hands of a skilled facilitator, difficult dialogues on race can represent a potential learning opportunity for personal growth and understanding, improved communication, and racial harmony (Young & Davis-Russell, 2002). Because the majority of teachers in the United States are predominantly White, their roles are crucial in facilitating successful racial dialogues in the classroom. Unfortunately, studies seem to suggest that White educators are often (1) ill-prepared to recognize and understand the dynamics of racial microaggressions as causes to difficult dialogues, (2) confused as to what constitutes a difficult dialogue, and (3) at a loss of how to intervene when they occur (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009).

Teacher Fears

One of the greatest fears and concerns for teachers around race dialogues is loss of classroom control and the emotionally charged nature of the interactions. The loss of control is often related to the feeling of helplessness, inability to determine the nature of the conflict, and the lack of knowledge of how best to properly intervene (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009). These three are compounded

by an acknowledgment by teachers about their own personal limitations and intense anxieties, similar to those expressed by White students (fear of appearing racist, fear of realizing their biases, and resistance to recognizing their own prejudices). In addition, they noted the following concerns.

1. *Inability to recognize racial microaggressions and uncertainty and confusion about the characteristics of a difficult dialogue.* When a difficult racial dialogue is occurring, many White teachers admit to being mystified and uncertain about the interactional dynamics. They know something is amiss, that tension has increased in the classroom, and that students of color and White students have taken a confrontational stance. They are at a loss to explain the dynamics and often misdiagnose the problem.

2. *Trouble understanding and dealing with intense student emotions and their own.* In many respects, White teachers overidentify with the feelings of White students because many of the emotions expressed are similar to the ones they experience. Fear, anxiety, anger, defensiveness, guilt, and helplessness can occur quickly and in a "garbled fashion" that interferes with understanding and teaching. The teacher may become overwhelmed and flooded with feelings that constrict their perceptions and ability to respond appropriately. The teacher may try to dilute, diminish, or "cut off the dialogue" for fear that it will turn into a physical fight among students.

3. *Fear of losing classroom control.* Teachers are expected to manage classroom interactions, to maintain a conducive learning environment, and to make sure proper respect exists among all students. Difficult dialogues on race can produce intense confrontations between students and result in intense hostility. Several teachers spoke about being paralyzed when students became so upset that they leave the room, or burst into tears.

4. *Deep sense of personal failure and inadequacies.* Avoidance by teachers of race topics is often motivated by past experiences of failure and personal questioning about one's teaching competencies. The sense of disappointment in themselves occurred because of their unsuccessful attempts to facilitate racial dialogues.

5. *Feelings of incompetence and lack of knowledge and skills to effectively intervene.* A very common admission from teachers was that of not possessing the experience, knowledge, or teaching strategies to facilitate a difficult dialogue on race. In coping with race topics, they admitted to ignoring it in class, making sure it was discussed only on a cognitive level, or playing a passive role in class and "letting students take over."

Disturbingly, these overall findings indicate that White educators are no more immune to having difficulties with racial dialogues than their White students. In one study, it was found that even the most experienced teachers were ill-prepared to productively and successfully facilitate racial discussions and interactions (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009). It is important to note that both students of color and White students were unanimous in attributing a successful or failed facilitation to the cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills of the teacher (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009).

The Way Forward

What Must Educators Do to Become Effective Facilitators of Difficult Dialogues on Race?: Overcoming Microaggressions

If the above conclusions are correct, then it bodes ill for race education in the United States unless educators seriously explore their own biases and prejudices, confront their own fears and apprehensions, and actively develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills to successfully facilitate difficult racial dialogues. A number of personal/professional developmental issues and strategies have been identified as potentially helpful (Bell, 2003; Bolgatz, 2005; Sue, Lin, et al., 2009; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2009; Sue, Torino, et al., 2009; Watt, 2007; Willow, 2008; Winter, 1977; Young, 2004).

1. Possess a Working Definition and Understanding of Racial Microaggressions and Difficult Dialogues

When critical consciousness and awareness of race issues, racial microaggressions, and racial dialogues are absent, it leads to disorientation, confusion, and bafflement that prevent problem definition and intervention. Thus it is imperative that educators possess a working definition and enlightened understanding of the cases, manifestation, and dynamics of racial microaggressions and difficult dialogues on race. As we have already spent considerable time on the former, I briefly supply one on the latter. Note, however, that the following definition of difficult dialogues is complex and must be understood in terms of lived reality to have true meaning.

Broadly defined, difficult dialogues on race represent potentially threatening conversations or interactions between members of different racial or ethnic

(Continued)

groups when they (a) involve an unequal status relationship of power and privilege, (b) highlight major differences in worldviews, personalities, and perspectives, (c) are challenged publicly, (d) are found to be offensive to others, (e) may reveal biases and prejudices, and (f) trigger intense emotional responses (Sue & Constantine, 2007; Young, 2003). Any individual or group engaged in a difficult dialogue may feel at risk for potentially disclosing intimate thoughts, beliefs or feelings related to the topic of race. (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009, p. 184)

2. Understanding Self as a Racial/Cultural Being by Making the "Invisible, Visible"

Being an effective facilitator cannot occur unless the person is aware of her or his own values, biases, and assumptions about human behavior. Questions that he or she must constantly work on exploring include: What does it mean to be White, Black/African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latino/Hispanic American, or Native American?

3. Intellectually Acknowledge One's Own Cultural Conditioning and Biases

On an intellectual/cognitive level, teachers must be able to acknowledge and accept the fact that they are products of the cultural conditioning of this society and, as such, they have inherited the biases, fears, and stereotypes of their ancestors.

This honest acknowledgment does several things: (1) it frees the teacher from the constant guardedness and vigilance exercised in denying their own racism, sexism, and other biases; (2) the teacher can use it to model truthfulness, openness, and honesty to students on conversations about race and racism; (3) it can communicate courage in making the teacher vulnerable by taking a risk to share with students their own biases, limitations, and attempts to deal with racism; and (4) it may encourage other students to approach the topic with honesty, because their own teacher is equally "flawed."

4. Emotional Comfort in Dealing with Race and Racism

On an emotional level, it is to the advantage of teachers if they are comfortable in discussing issues of race and racism, and/or being open, honest, and vulnerable to exploring their own biases and those of students. If students sense teachers are uncomfortable, it will only add fuel to their own discomfort and defenses. Attaining comfort means practice outside of the classroom, lived experience in interacting with people or groups

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different from the teacher. It requires experience in dialoguing with people who differ from the teacher in terms of race, culture, and ethnicity. It ultimately means the teacher must be proactive in placing himself or herself in "uncomfortable" and new situations.

5. Understanding and Making Sense of One's Own Emotions

Because very few teachers can have experiences with all groups who differ from them in worldviews, they will always feel discomfort and confusion when different diversity/multicultural issues arise. These feelings are natural and should not be avoided; rather making sense of them is important. Being able to monitor them and infer meaning to feelings and emotional reactions and those of students are important in facilitating dialogues. It has been found that emotive responses often serve as "emotional roadblocks" to having a successful difficult dialogue. Feelings have diagnostic significance. For example, these feelings often have hidden meanings:

- I FEEL GUILTY. "I could be doing more."
- I FEEL ANGRY. "I don't like to feel I'm wrong."
- I FEEL DEFENSIVE. "Why blame me, I do enough already!"
- I FEEL TURNED OFF. "I have other priorities in life."
- I FEEL HELPLESS. "The problem is too big . . . what can I do?"
- I FEEL AFRAID. "I'm going to lose something" or "I don't know what will happen."

Unless a teacher gets beyond his or her own feeling level or that of students, blockages in learning will occur. If a teacher experiences these feelings, it helps to acknowledge them even when they do not make immediate sense. Teaching and encouraging students to do so as well will lessen their detrimental impact.

6. Control the Process and Not the Content

When a heated dialogue occurs on race, the duel between students is nearly always at the content level. When referring to dreams, Freud took the stance that the manifest content (conscious level) is not the "real" or latent content of the unconscious. Some common statements when racism is discussed, expressed by both White students and students of color, are:

- "So what, we women are oppressed too!"
- "My family didn't own slaves. I had nothing to do with the incarceration of Japanese Americans or the taking away of lands from Native Americans."

(Continued)

- "Excuse me, sir, but prejudice and oppression were and are part of every society in the world ad infinitum, not just the United States."
- "We Italians (Irish; Polish; Koreans) experienced severe discrimination when we arrived here. Did my family harp on the prejudice? We excelled despite the prejudice. Why? Because the basic founding principles of this country made it possible!"
- "I resent you calling me White. You are equally guilty of stereotyping. We are all human beings and we are all unique."

These emotive reactions are defensive maneuvers used to avoid feelings of guilt and blame. Unmask the difficult dialogue by (1) acknowledging the accuracy of statements (when appropriate), (2) intervening in the process rather than the content, (3) helping students see the difference between intention and impact, and (4) moving to the feeling tone level of the communication.

While these statements are to the greatest extent "true," they can hinder a successful dialogue by covering up the real dialogue. By agreeing with the statement, it no longer becomes the distraction and allows the facilitator to focus on the real issues, feelings, and conflicts in worldview. Avoid being "sucked into the dialogue" by taking sides in the debate of content. Rather intervene in the process by directing students to examine their own reactions and feelings. Encourage them to explore how their feelings may be saying something about them.

The blame game creates monologues. Help students differentiate between their intention and the impact. When a White female student says "So what, we women are oppressed as well!" Help them distinguish between intention and impact. Refocus the dialogue to feelings. "I wonder if you can tell me how and what you are feeling." Teacher: "John (Black student) has just agreed with you that women are an oppressed group. Does that make you feel better? (Usually the student says "no".) "No, I wonder why not?" (Try to help the student to explore why the feelings are still there. If there is continued difficulty, enlist speculation from the whole class. The last option is that you, the teacher, make the observation or interpretation.)

7. Do Not Be Passive or Allow the Dialogue to Be Brewed Over in Silence

When a difficult dialogue occurs and an impasse seems to have been reached, do not allow it to be brewed over in silence. The facilitator has

(Continued)

(Continued)

three options: (1) tell the class that you want the group to take it up at the next meeting, after everyone has had time to process their thoughts and feelings; (2) personally intervene by using interpersonal recall, microtraining, or any number of relationship models that attempt to have students listen, observe, and reflect or paraphrase back to one another; or (3) enlist the aid of the class members. This latter technique is very useful because it actively involves other members of the class by asking: "What do you see happening between John and Mary?"

8. Express Your Appreciation to the Participating Students

It is important to recognize, validate, and express appreciation to students for their courage, openness, and willingness to risk participating in a difficult dialogue. This strategy should be employed throughout the class.

- "Mary, I know this has been a very emotional experience for you, but I value your courage in sharing with the group your personal thoughts and feelings. I hope I can be equally brave when topics of sexism or homophobia are brought up in this class."
- "As a class, we have just experienced a difficult dialogue. I admire you all for not 'running away' but facing it squarely. I hope you all will continue to feel free about bringing up these topics. Real courage is being honest and risking offending others when the situation is not safe. Today, that is what I saw happen with several of you and for that, the class should be grateful."

These suggestions for dealing with racial microaggressions in the classroom and for successful facilitation of difficult dialogues on race may be equally applicable to conversations on gender, sexual orientation, and other difficult topics. Education holds one of the primary keys to combating and overcoming the harm delivered to people of color, women, LGBTs, and other marginalized groups. Unfortunately, few teachers or educators are sufficiently trained in antiracism, antisexism, and antiheterosexism strategies. If our society is to become truly inclusive and allow for equal access and opportunity, then our educational systems must reflect a multicultural philosophy and stance that is operationalized into the policies and practices of schools, the curriculum, teaching/learning styles, and in the teachers who educate our children.



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Women of Color in the Academy: Where's Our Authority in the Classroom?

JUANITA JOHNSON-BAILEY AND MING-YEH LEE

Feminist pedagogy has revolutionized the academy and has powerfully informed and transformed teaching and learning. By addressing the power issues that are inherent in the classroom, feminist pedagogy has asked academicians to examine their individual practices, curriculum, and perspectives for subjugation by gender, race, and class. Furthermore, feminist pedagogy has encouraged teaching practices that empower students because it asks teachers to develop styles that are nonauthoritative and nurturing. There is no one-size-fits-all feminist pedagogy, however, and the combination of feminist pedagogy and women of color can make for a dangerous liaison.

A Search for Place and Importance inside the Academy

In the fall of 1995 we both ventured into a women's studies classroom at a Southern research university to begin our academic lives as teachers. The undergraduate course, *Multicultural Perspectives on Women's Lives*, was one that we developed and would coteach every quarter for the next two years, building the student enrollment from a low of eight to a high of 150 students. Within the confines of the course, we not only honed our battle skills but also began what has become a career-long balancing act between our belief in feminist pedagogy and

the reality of being women of color in a hostile academic environment.

In those early days we were often the only women of color in a sea of white women and men who felt free to vocalize their surprise that we were their instructors and free to speculate openly about whether we belonged. Based on our after-class debriefings and our teaching journals, we chose three incidents to represent our early teaching dilemmas: being interviewed by a student before he would consent to take our class, receiving evaluations that centered on how we dared to be different and not fit the stereotypes that students had of Asians and African Americans, and coteaching with another women's studies professor with disastrous results. Implicit in each incident are points of conflicts between feminist pedagogy and the lived classroom experiences of women of color professors. Succinctly expressed, these situations were incidents in which the nurturing and caring teaching environment of the feminist classroom was intruded upon by the racism and sexism of our larger society. In an effort to express our perspective, we will discuss how these three experiences have shaped our academic lives.

The first incident began quite innocently. During our first year of teaching, we received a call from the director of women's studies, who said that a prospective student wanted to

meet with us. We naively agreed to the meeting without asking about the student or the nature of the inquiry. As it turned out, a young white male student wanted to see our *vitas* and ask us a few questions before he would agree to be taught by us. Although it turned out to be a quite affable meeting, with us politely fielding his questions on socialist and Marxist theory, we still are not quite certain why we endured this affront. Even eight years later, when we discuss this we are surprised by his arrogance and remain stunned that we both agreed to be subjected to such treatment, while smiling throughout the process. Maybe it was our newness to the academy or our gendered need to please that made us agree to this bizarre meeting. However, the one factor that we cannot explain or rationalize away is why our seasoned director set up such a meeting. For us, this incident illustrated several points: that our place in the academy was a tenuous one that was not undergirded by institutional power, that we should be prepared to have our knowledge base questioned, and that our authority would often be challenged.

The second incident turned out to be a recurring and persistent theme in our student evaluations. We learned that, despite our classroom demeanor and teaching methods, which we varied and experimented with in those early days, students always perceived us as gendered and racialized beings. For example, they commented on our evaluations and to us that "Ming-yeh did not smile enough," "was not pleasant but was talkative," and "was not like other Asians." Several students found it problematic that Juanita was not "nurturing" or "motherly." What the students were saying is that we did not fit their comfortably held stereotypes.

The third incident was the most devastating and shook us to the core of our feminist pedagogical roots. In our last and final quarter of teaching together, we invited another women's studies professor to coteach with us. It was our way of introducing other colleagues to the course, because the course's popularity necessitated that several sections be developed. Although we were teaching a course that we had

developed and taught for two years, the new professor attempted to relegate us to second-class status by publicly making condescending and derogatory remarks during class sessions. In addition, even though all the students knew that this white woman professor was new to the course, they deferred to her as the expert on the subject matter and on occasion would ask her to explain a situation to us or to intercede with us on their behalf. The students made it clear that she had the power and that we did not. After two weeks of this behavior, we divided the course by subject content, chose our special topic areas, and never again occupied the classroom simultaneously with her. We had innocently assumed that the rhetoric of sisterhood and fairness that was touted among university liberals and progressives was practiced. What we learned from that coteaching experience was that some of our colleagues saw us through the same eyes with which our students beheld us: the eyes of white supremacy.

MING-YEH'S JOURNEY

After two years of working as a teaching assistant and with terminal degree in hand, I accepted a full teaching position at an urban, West Coast teaching college. My experience of working with Juanita was great prejob training on racism and sexism, but it did not fully equip me to handle all the isms that are perpetuated at my institution. Although the demographic makeup of this university on the West Coast is much more diverse compared with those in universities in other regions of the country, students here consistently demonstrate attitudes of superiority, distrust, or resistance toward me when they see that I am young, Asian, and speak with an accent. I had an older white female student tell me on the first day of class that I was "such an intelligent young woman" who looked exactly like one of her Chinese American high school students. One Asian male student stormed out of the classroom after my lecture on Carol Gilligan's foundational study on women's moral development. Although the student reported to my department chair that

he would never take a class taught by me again because I did not know anything about teaching, to this day, I am still unsure of what really drove him away. I can only assume that it was the woman-centered curriculum.

When students see me, their immediate reaction is often that I am either a teaching assistant or a lecturer, so most of the time they address me as Ms. Lee instead of Dr. Lee, despite the "Ed.D." that I put next to my name on the syllabus or mention in my introduction on the first day of class. That students directly challenge and question my authority affirms my belief that neither teaching nor knowledge dissemination is neutral; when students hear and see me, they have made their judgment about what kind of teacher I am and the ways in which they want to relate to me (Banks).

JUANITA'S JOURNEY

My years of teaching with Ming-yeh are past, but unfortunately my experiences have stayed the same. Teaching graduate students in women's studies has not been different from teaching undergraduates. My environment, which is predominately white and where diversity means having some black students and colleagues, remains a place where I am the "other." It is a political location where the feminist pedagogical landscape remains more treacherous for me than for my students.

As a teacher who returned to higher education thirty years after receiving my undergraduate degree, I find teaching a joyous act—especially when working with adult students, who give me a special charge. The academy, however, is not the democratic setting that I imagined. No matter how often I try to provide the idealized climate that Malcolm Knowles described, I am faced with students who conflate my critique of whiteness and the courses I teach that examine oppression into a hatred of whites and of white men in particular. Such claims are made in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary: my close relationship with my white male mentor, an eight-year history of working with and traveling with white

graduate assistants, and collegial and personal relationships with a close-knit circle of diverse women professors. Perhaps the most heart-breaking example of my mistreatment occurred early in my professional teaching career. On this occasion a new student approached me in the hall and asked me to come into a classroom to render assistance. On arriving in the classroom, I discovered that the student wanted me to clean up a spill. She assumed that I was the housekeeper and had apparently overlooked my briefcase and my best professorial navy blue suit. As I stood there stunned, she stood there looking at me as if I should start cleaning. Speechlessness consumed me, and in what is a rare act for me, I silently exited the room. Sometimes, as I pass a housekeeper in the hall, I recall this incident and I remember that the African American housekeeping staff and I always greet each other and know each other by name because we realize that the invisibility and indifference of this environment bind us in an intimate and sorrowful way.

Because of these incidents, I enter my classrooms with an embarrassing amount of trepidation. I long for teaching situations like the ones that Stephen D. Brookfield describes in which the teacher facilitates and the respect seems bidirectional. The feminist pedagogy I know is one in which there is no sane and orderly negotiation of the themes of knowledge, mastery, voice, positionality, and authority (Maher and Tetreault *Feminist*). As a woman of color professor, the feminist pedagogy of my experience leaves me asking, where's our authority in the classroom?

Understanding, Embracing, and Struggling with Feminist Pedagogy

The literature abounds with definitions of feminist pedagogy (Belenky, Clinchy, Golberger, and Tarule; Boxer; Fisher; Golberger, Tarule, Clinchy, and Belenky; hooks *Teaching*; Maher and Tetreault *Feminist*; Weiler). For our discussion, we define feminist pedagogy as a method of teaching and learning that employs a politi-

cal framework that attends to or encourages consciousness raising, activism, and a caring and safe environment. Implicit in this form of teaching, which is rooted in social justice, is an understanding of the universality of gender oppression and a critique of Western rationality, androcentric theories, structured inequalities, and unequal societal power relations. In addition, the practices that flow from feminist pedagogy center on connected teaching (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule), which involves the teacher and students jointly in constructing knowledge, engaging in self-reflection, and practicing self-revelation.

This definition of feminist pedagogy has been a wellspring to our praxis. The pedagogical practices and tenets recommended by feminist pedagogy have provided a sound political and ethical framework for our academic classrooms. This feminist pedagogy, however, is the one of our dreams. As Rose Chepyator-Thomson reminds us, this is not a perfect world, and many factors enter into how we want to and intend to practice: "Education, an apparent instrument of anything 'good' to be passed on from generation to generation, depends on whose educational knowledge and whose 'goodness' is being passed on and who is doing the passing" (10).

Therefore, there is no generic feminist pedagogy. The feminist pedagogy of our practices is one that is informed and honed by our positionalities as a Taiwanese woman assistant professor and as an African American woman associate professor. Such a pedagogy must take into account not only how our cultures shape our practices but also how our colleagues and especially our students respond to what they perceive as our cultural "uniqueness" and accompanying mandatory racialized and gendered agendas.

This "otherness," as Simone de Beauvoir has stated, is defined against the norm of maleness and in today's context is additionally extrapolated and defined in contrast to the normalcy of whiteness. Phyllis Baker and Martha Copp state the dilemma more succinctly: "Faculty members who violate the white male, able-bodied

stereotype must also experience students' contradictory expectations regarding gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical abilities" (42). Baker and Copp go on to note that students actually see professors who do not fit their stereotypes as inferior and that they also see the professors' various positionalities as "liabilities." We have pondered the issues of mastery, voice, positionality, and authority, as set forth by Frances A. Maher and Mary T. Tetreault in their groundbreaking text *The Feminist Classroom*. In this exploration of feminist pedagogy they describe many circumstances that we have encountered. However, the dailiness of our feminist practices, the cognizance of our social positions, and the perceptions of us have forced us to grapple with biases against nonnative English speakers and stereotypes that compound what traditional feminist pedagogues describe as the dilemmas of the feminist classroom. These issues are tangible in our classrooms and often manifest themselves in student resistance. To explore how we manage our classrooms and practice our pedagogies, we examine the themes set forth by Maher and Tetreault ("Learning") from our perspectives as women of color professors.

MASTERY

Mastery, as defined by Laurie Finke, is the comprehension of ideas presented by experts on the subject matter. The traditional purveyors of ideas in Western society are white and male. In the academy, only 4.5 percent of all faculty positions are held by women of color, with African American women representing less than 1 percent of college faculty (Bowman, Kite, Branscombe, and Williams; Menges and Exum). Women are concentrated in the junior ranks of faculty tiers, and most African American women work at historically black colleges and universities. Given the scarcity of women in the academic ranks, students are not accustomed to seeing them as sources of knowledge, let alone as people who generate or produce that knowledge.

Examples abound in our collective and in-

dividual practices of students who challenge the information imparted in our classes and students who ask for complete citations, even though the information is found in texts written by white males. Our "otherness" seems to be a filter or barrier that complicates, distorts, or perhaps delegitimizes the information. Further complicating the issue of mastery is the presentation of unfamiliar material that criticizes or questions traditionally accepted knowledge. According to Baker and Copp, controversial class content seems to add a layer of difficulty that impedes students' willingness to accept and process new information. For example, as junior faculty, we have used the same syllabi as senior professors and have encountered claims of "talking too much about gender and race" or of selecting materials that are biased against whites. The senior white male and female faculty who had used the identical course materials told us that they had never received such complaints. The literature supports our supposition that students react to the messenger and the message. In Juanita Johnson-Bailey and Ronald M. Cervero's study of classroom power dynamics, it was noted that teachers of color received more challenges to their knowledge despite their academic rank, gender, or personal teaching style.

VOICE

Voice, as conceptualized by Gilligan and by Maher and Tetreault (*Feminist*), refers to the ability of students to represent their own interests and to speak for themselves.¹ As a concept, voice can occur on both the internal level (psychological) and the external level (the actual spoken word). According to a feminist pedagogical perspective, the teacher should endeavor to encourage students to come to voice by providing a safe environment in which no voice dominates—including the teacher's voice. A feminist classroom should be a place where students are free to express their innermost thoughts and to openly reflect on their personal experiences while using those reflections as a way to connect with the course content.

A broad spectrum of feminist literature embraces the notion that the ideal classroom is a refuge for all students and is a site of caring, but these concepts of safety and caring are questioned by women of color. It is hooks (*Teaching; Talking Back*) who reminds us that safety is a different issue for women of color than for white women. We maintain that the classroom is rarely a safe space for women of color, as students or teachers, because the classroom is merely a microcosm of our larger society and is therefore representative of the hierarchical systems that order the nonacademic world. Furthermore, we believe that when the "other" is the teacher, the class environment can become a "contested terrain" (Vargas 360), where battles for voice can occur between the teacher and the students. The struggle for academic place and airspace is fraught with unique challenges when women of color in predominantly white environments teach about difference (Rains; Romney, Tatum, and Jones; Williams, Dunlap, and McCandles). Commonly, an inordinate amount of stress and student resistance occurs in this intense setting (Romney, Tatum, and Jones). According to Michelle Williams, Michelle Dunlap, and Terry McCandles, student resistance, in the form of talking back, hostile nonverbal behavior, inappropriate chatting, and rigid body language, can be a means of silencing uncomfortable dialogue. It is also a way to challenge or interrupt the voice of the teacher, thereby making the classroom an unsafe and stressful place for the teacher who is the "other."

An important component of the safe classroom is the idea of the teacher as a caretaker. The belief that an ethic of care as described by Gilligan should be a guiding principle for feminist praxis also takes on a different meaning for women of color. Implicit in the notion of being cared for is the concept of privilege. Only those who are privileged are cared for, and the caring is usually done by those who are less privileged. Historically, women of color have been the caretakers for our society. Audrey Thompson cautions that too often caring is presented as a color-blind notion that masks the white-

ness of the problem or the situation. Will students be predisposed to care for their women of color professors when society tells them that women of color are the "strong" ones who are capable of surviving against all odds? Who is concerned for the needs of women of color in the classroom when our traditional Western perspective warns against such thinking? To further complicate the examination of caring in the safe and secure place of the classroom, we ask, can a woman of color teacher confront and examine oppressive power structures while simultaneously providing a caring atmosphere for her students who may benefit, however unwittingly or unwillingly, from those oppressive structures?

A final layer to examine in this discussion of voice is the position of nonnative English speakers. As a nonnative English speaker, Ming-yeh is often confronted by students who find what they perceive as an accent to be a communication barrier. The research on the attitudes and perceptions of students toward nonnative English speakers reveals overwhelmingly that students accept or reject the messages of nonnative speakers according to their preconceived ideas of the speakers' group membership rather than on objective measures, such as the speakers' competence or academic background (Rubin and Smith; Rubin). In addition, students hold a prejudiced view that nonnative English speakers make poor instructors, so students routinely attempt to complete the sentences of such teachers, more readily interrupt them, and commonly restate their ideas in an effort to reframe the language according to the students' cultural frame.

For nonnative English speakers, voice can be an even more crucial site of struggle (Hase). As Donald L. Rubin and Kim Smith point out, "Language variation is a powerful prompt for cuing listeners' cultural stereotypes about speakers" (339). Rose Chepyator-Thomson, a Kenyan-born professor, asserts that even after a decade of teaching successfully in a European-American school, students continue to comment on her accent. One student referred to this in a course evaluation: "The teacher's English was hard to

understand. This makes learning and understanding difficult [and it is] frustrating when paying tuition to have to struggle just to understand her speaking" (14).

For women of color, voice is a different phenomenon than the one routinely referenced in the feminist pedagogy literature that encourages feminist pedagogues to help students come to voice. Although Paulo Freire maintains that it is incumbent on those who wish to engage in liberatory education to use a dialogical model to decolonize their students' minds, where does a feminist educator of color find her place in this complicated feminist pedagogical quagmire as she herself struggles to claim and exercise her own voice?

POSITIONALITY

Positionality refers to the place assigned to a person based on group membership, such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and age. However, this theme is more context specific than the themes of mastery, voice, or authority because it involves the interlocking nature of the multilayered positionalities of teachers and students. The positionalities of the actors in the classroom shape the teaching and learning environment. One major factor that affects positionality, particularly for women of color, is the stereotype assigned to women of color by our society.

In a study conducted by Johnson-Bailey and Cervero it was found that students consistently regarded women of color as racialized and gendered beings while failing to accord a race or gender status to white male instructors. This phenomenon of not seeing white males as "raced" beings occurred even when the white male instructors presented progressive social justice agendas and taught course content that centered on race. When the teachers were from marginalized groups, however, the students could not separate the teachers from their "otherness." Most students in the study could not reach beyond their idea of the teacher's position in the larger societal context. It was surmised that in the students' internal dialogue,

white males as professors are the norm, represent rational thought, and fit almost invisibly into the atmosphere of the classroom, while women of color are the highly visible "other" and act as interlopers.

Adding to the racial dilemma of otherness is the difficulty imposed by the otherness of gender. Overall, women are seen as different from men and are assigned characteristics based on this position. Women in Western society are to be pleasant and kind, nurturing and soft-spoken, obedient and cooperative (Gilligan; Humm; Richardson, Taylor, and Whittier; Tong). Women are expected to manifest these traits regardless of their positions. So, women professors are to mind the p's and q's of their gendered characteristics in their practices. According to feminist educators (Boxer; Fisher; hooks *Talking Back*; Maher and Tetreault *Feminist*), women teachers should be nurturing, friendly, warm, and respectful of authority. These exemplary teaching characteristics are complicated when layers of race and ethnicity are added (Brown, Cervero, and Johnson-Bailey; Maher and Tetreault "Learning"; Tisdell). In contrast, the ideal teacher, who is coincidentally male, is authoritative, critical, and objective.

Because the professor is supposed to exude authority and supreme knowledge, women are caught in a precarious and contradictory situation. For women of color the classroom is even more treacherous because race adds another layer of supposed attributes. Our specific ethnic backgrounds present us thusly: Asian women are docile, smiling, deferential, and exotic creatures, and African American women are argumentative and emasculating (Amott and Mattheae). These stereotypes follow us into the classroom and cause our students to see us through veils of societally imposed biases.

In her own study and in one with Leonard Gordon, Rose Weitz found that the teacher's race influenced students' assessments of the teacher's classroom behavior and that students assigned different emotional evaluations to the same trait depending on the teacher's race. White, Hispanic, African American, and Jewish women teachers were evaluated according to

different standards, with the evaluative measures showing more leniency toward the white women and less toward the women of color. Lucila Vargas concluded that the students' biased perceptions not only predisposed them to find fault with women of color but also hampered them in overlooking the teacher's mistakes, no matter how trivial.

Although women of color professors should stand center stage in the classroom because of their earned status as professors, the cultural statuses of women and women of color strongly influence our experiences and our world. While our positionalities are simultaneously points of celebration that inform our research by providing us with an outsider's critique that we find integral to our research, we also recognize that our positionalities force us into daily negotiations in which our white counterparts may rarely engage.

AUTHORITY

Authority centers on the notion of the teacher and student as actors in the classroom. From our perspective, authority involves a teacher's ability to influence the classroom environment. More directly, it involves the power that the teacher has to negotiate the teaching/learning setting. We interpret power through the lens provided by Michel Foucault and readily recognize the ambiguous and diffuse nature of power.

For women of color who practice feminist pedagogy, authority can be difficult to gain because students tend to be more resistant when women of color are in positions of authority than when someone else is (Chepyator-Thomson; Johnson-Bailey and Cervero; Omolade; Smith; Vargas; Williams, Dunlap, and McCandles). Such resistance, although not always conscious, is reported throughout the literature as significantly impacting the teaching/learning environment. At best, student resistance is operationalized as apathy, and in the extreme, as open hostility. Moreover, student resistance is not always a weapon aimed at the teacher. Student resistance can be a self-defense mecha-

nism to protect the safe classroom environment that is being challenged by new and uncomfortable ways of thinking.

The classroom is a study in how power is accorded and exercised in our society. Students use subtle means to keep their vested power and attempt to enforce and replicate the status quo in the classroom. We are not categorizing this as negative but instead consider it a natural behavior in a hierarchical society. It is in this atmosphere of diffusive power relations that women of color as feminist educators find themselves—the land of cognitive dissonance, where they are caught between the ideal of feminist pedagogical theory and the reality of prescribed places in the world. Our conscience and training remind us that we should not be concerned with acquiring and maintaining power. Yet, our experience tells us that we do not have the luxury given to our white counterparts, who can rely on students to respect them and not to push too far beyond the boundaries of this new world where the teacher is ceding power to the students. Indeed, white women teachers have power to cede. They have some privilege and authority given to them by the larger society. They cannot divest themselves of this authority no matter how neutral and non-authoritarian they make their classrooms.

Women of color, however, although artificially vested in the robes of power with the accompanying markers, degrees, publications, and academic rank, are often seen as academic imposters (Chepyator-Thomson; hooks *Talking Back*; Omolade; Vargas). Additionally, women of color academicians, though part of a power system, have little power to control and affect the larger academic environment. In fact, the students, who often look more like those traditionally in power than do women professors of color, have more power. Our all-too-familiar experiences of being questioned, such as facing student appeals and complaints without enjoying the direct support of university administration, tell us this is so.

Finally, we view authority through the eyes of the adult educator. As adult educators who attempt to practice feminist pedagogy, the

idea of authority is made even more complex by the field's mandate to facilitate rather than teach as authority figures. We acknowledge the importance of the concept of facilitation to our discipline (Apps; Brookfield; Knowles), and, indeed, we view the facilitator's role as a compatible and important component of feminist pedagogy. Yet we also understand and acknowledge the difficulty of using facilitation to conduct and negotiate our classrooms when we are not necessarily seen as having authority. When we facilitate and abandon the active authority role of the teacher, we provide students with the opportunity to control and order the environment. When this occurs, students often recreate the larger social context, where places are allotted along gender, class, and race lines and where authority goes to those who resemble the "norm." The replication of the rank order of the outside world can put professors and students of color at a disadvantage. Our predicament is aptly expressed by Smith: "I am alone but in charge. But am I really in charge? What shapes students' perceptions of their teachers? Why am I concerned about their perceptions? Can I be an authority and a minority in practice and theory? In theory, I am both; however, in practice I am often, foremost, a minority" (69).

Recommendations for Educators

What recommendations can be drawn from our experiences in practicing feminist pedagogy as women of color faculty? And how have our positionalities as Taiwanese and African American women informed our practice of feminist pedagogy?

QUESTIONING STUDENTS AND USING GROUP DEBRIEFING

By offering opportunities for collective debriefing on the verbal and nonverbal dynamics in class, students can see the taken-for-granted power structures. For example, when male students take extensive class discussion time, we may invite the class to observe the interactive speaking patterns: Who listens? Whose

comments are being attended? Or, as part of our introduction on the first day, we may make students aware of their own stereotypes by addressing pivotal questions: Have you ever been taught by women of color before? How can a teacher's gender and racial background affect the course? How do you perceive us—an African American woman and Asian immigrant woman—as instructors? How can your perceptions affect our credibility and power as teachers in the classroom? These questions usually help sensitize students to their own stereotypes about us and create a reflective opportunity to explore the impact of sexism and racism.

In addition to articulating questions directly related to power structures, we purposely create different class dynamics by inviting white male and female guest speakers. Often we find that students relate to guest lecturers differently; they tend to be more respectful, submissive, and cooperative. Given such experiences, we encourage students to collectively reflect on the different behaviors they demonstrate and then discuss their rationale behind the varying interactions. We believe that this debriefing process allows students to reflect on, attend to, and make sense of their here-and-now behaviors as opposed to forcing them into accepting our interpretation of the classroom dynamics. Many teachable moments may emerge as a result of using group debriefing.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO MANAGE SENSITIVE DISCUSSIONS

A guiding principle of feminist pedagogy centers on creating a safe and caring environment so that the students can freely and fully share their emotions and inner thoughts. Given the power structures that permeate most classrooms, however, those spaces are hardly refuges for students or teachers of color. Technology can be particularly effective in engaging students in dialogues on sensitive issues by increasing students' comfort levels. For instance, in online discussions, students can participate in dialogue freely or professors can use interactive software that offers predetermined

questions that engage participating members in dialogue.² These devices can create a more equitable, color- and gender-blind setting because students can participate in discussions anonymously, without worrying about being judged.

CLAIMING OUR AUTHORITY

Feminist pedagogy literature, as informed by Freire's critical pedagogy, often suggests that instructors can democratize the teaching setting by sharing power with students. Unfortunately, the power structures of the classrooms often mirror those of the society, in that women of color who teach have limited power in affecting the classroom. So when students perceive us as having less authority and power than they do, to what extent should we share power with them? What purpose does sharing power serve when students are privileged by the social structures and, hence, have more power than women of color professors? If the instructors share power to resist the existing power structures, should women of color instructors work first to establish authority?

Instead of sharing our limited power and authority, we believe it is essential to first claim our power and authority in the class. It is never easy to purposely claim authority in classrooms, particularly when our students see us as academic imposters or feel threatened by our position. The methods we use are simple techniques. For example, in a classroom setting, we purposely choose to stand or take the center seat. When in front of students, we address each other formally as "doctor" rather than by first names. We never rely on facilitation as the primary strategy, but engage people through a combination of multiple methods, including lectures. We monitor classroom discussions closely by encouraging silent members to voice (sometimes through writing) and by monitoring and possibly censuring class members who monopolize discussions.

These actions, although completely contradicted by our gender socialization and training in women's studies and adult education, are in-

formed by our unique reality as women of color faculty. Taking the active role of authority could be educational and inspirational for students who rarely see women of color assume the roles of experts or leaders in public arenas. The ultimate goal of claiming our authority is to use it to address the racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression that permeate the classroom.

FACILITATING THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING NEW AND CONTRADICTIONARY KNOWLEDGE

As discussed by Peggy McIntosh, whites are often taught to ignore the oppression of others. Education is another institution in which oppressive social structures are reproduced through the generation and dissemination of Eurocentric knowledge. Therefore, when students eventually encounter knowledge and opinions contradictory to their traditionally accepted Eurocentric ideology, many manifest emotions ranging from guilt, anger, betrayal, and resistance to denial. We believe it is crucial to acknowledge students' difficulty in processing new and contradictory knowledge. In an attempt to facilitate the learning, in addition to sharing our similar personal experiences we also provide materials and activities that address both the cognitive and the affective component of the learning process. Being aware of how the interlocking systems operate and one's role in those systems is a major transformational learning experience, which could cause pain, anger, and distress in students. Faculty members interested in equity and social justice education need to see this transformational experience as an emotionally embedded growth process for adults.

SELECTING CULTURALLY DIVERSE MATERIALS

Curriculum development is a political decision, in that it involves the inclusion and the exclusion of certain materials. This political decision is often informed by an individual instructor's positionality. The development of a curriculum that acknowledges the cultural background of

diverse learner populations should incorporate various cultural perspectives. A culturally diverse curriculum may broaden students' knowledge base and understanding as they relate to who they are within their integrated multiple identities and how they relate to others in society. It is also crucial for instructors to select materials that portray various populations' experiences and materials that center the curriculum around a group's lived experiences. As instructors we need to ask, how often do the readings for class actually reflect diverse experiences? Are my students' images or experiences represented in the selected readings? If a group's images are presented in the readings, do the readings serve to empower the group or to perpetuate stereotypes about the group? We need to be conscious of whose interests are served by the selected curriculum and materials.

Summary

Overall, the four themes of mastery, voice, positionality, and authority provided the means for exploring our feminist pedagogical practices. Within these four major themes are many underexplored subthemes, such as student resistance, professor imposterism, and the antifeminism inherent in academia's androcentric rationality. Our introductory tales about the student who needed to interview us, the student evaluations that underscored our "otherness," and the colleague who saw with the eyes of supremacy are examples that were provided to explore, critique, and present feminist pedagogy as a different phenomenon for women of color. Regardless of what we have described as flaws or areas of concern, we embrace feminist pedagogy as our preferred means of practice and continue to see it as the best way of providing and creating an inclusive classroom environment. Feminist pedagogy emerged from our experiential backgrounds of having been different and displaced in our academic environments—both as students and as faculty. As a practice, our feminist pedagogy preceded our theoretical development of feminist theory and was based on our need to

disrupt what we had encountered as the normal academic environment.

The recommendations that we share here emerged from our experiences in practicing feminist pedagogy while uniquely constrained by our positionalities as women of color. Above all, our classrooms are places where we make space for knowledge production, where we make space for all voices—including our own—and where we make space for deferred and unexpressed dreams. This is our truest definition of feminist pedagogy.

NOTES

1. "Voice" as used in this article does not include the concept of claiming expertise in one's area of study. Issues such as expertise and legitimacy of knowledge claims are included in the discussion of mastery.

2. In our practices, we have used WebCT to conduct anonymous interactive discussions. However, to override the system's usual format, the WebCT feature that will allow anonymity must be preset. When anonymous discussions are used, students cannot receive credit for their online participation. It is also necessary to carefully monitor these "cloaked" discussions, because these types of discussion more readily allow for abusive and insensitive comments. One author of this article prefers to have a comments box in the front of the class. Each student is required to place an index card, distributed on the first day of class, in the box at the beginning of each week. The cards can be left blank or may contain questions or comments submitted anonymously or with the student's name, but the professor never reveals a questioner's name to the class.

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Black at Higher Education

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Abstract This is an exploratory paper, drawing on the author's experiences as well as those of three other black lecturers in Higher Education (HE). Three interviews were carried out, asking the same five questions around themes of concern to the author. These are about the learning and teaching approaches used by these lecturers; their experiences of racism in HE; the professional role that they feel they play in HE; their strategies for the empowerment of black students and finally the meaning of academic 'success' from their perspective. The individual narratives that emerge are explored and commonalities between them and with the author's own experiences and hopes are identified. It is the desire of this work to add to the scholarship on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Pedagogy and to emphasise the need for more counter-hegemonic narratives from the 'black' experience in HE. This is explored through the voices of these academics as they recount their strategies for a more equitable student experience in the classroom, on modules and on curricula, based on their lived experience and shared history of racism.

Keywords Black, students, racism, lecturer, HE, white

1. Introduction

It might be argued that the common mainstream view in academia these days is that we are ethically sound, civilised and humane. Therefore, racism based on the colour of the skin is believed to be something of the past. Much seminal work [1-4] has advanced academic thinking about issues of identity linked to race, ethnicity, gender and class and it can be re-assuring to think that we have now emerged better balanced and more equal as a society today. Why was it then that I still found myself experiencing instances of inequality of treatment as a black lecturer in HE? Some of these were very subtle ones, of the kind identified by Rollock [5] as 'racial microaggressions'. They are powerful, often daily reminders that racism is still prevalent in the academic community. Others were more institutional, of the kind identified by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU).

This paper uses the phrase 'Black at Higher Education' for two main reasons. The first one being that the 'at' in the

phrase reinforces the commitment and attachment that I and my black colleagues have for HE. The second reason is to link with anti-racist work across the Atlantic and was inspired by the films 'Black at Yale' and 'Still Black, at Yale'. The films powerfully show how the experiences of racism by Yale black students in 1974 (captured by the student film maker Warrington Hudlin) had not necessarily shifted thirty years on in 2004 [6], when black students at this Ivy League university still felt that they were being considered 'suspicious' on campus by white staff and students, among other negative race-related experiences.

I argue that a cultural shift needs to happen everywhere, particularly in post-1992 English universities where the focus of my research is and where I am currently employed. These are former polytechnics and colleges of HE converted to universities by the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992. Carter et al. [7] had previously revealed that post-1992 universities may have had more instances of discriminatory practices towards BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) staff than pre-1992 longer established universities.

To begin with, there are not enough BME academics in the UK today and this is quite worrying, considering how multicultural the country is. The ECU [8] has reported that the proportion of UK BME national academics increased from 5.9% in 2003/04 to 7.0% in 2009/10, which compares quite poorly with the estimated figure of 16.7% for the country's BME population in 2009 [9]. In addition, BME staff are even less represented in the higher ranking echelons of academia. The ECU report a figure of 5.7% for BME professors. Goulbourne [10] also challenges the view that institutional racism is a thing of the past in UK universities today, pointing out that there were only 50 black professors (including only 10 black women) out of 14,385 – a situation that has not changed for the past 8 years. This is equivalent to 0.35% of the total professoriate in the UK. Goulbourne's article also argues that black talented students feel discouraged from participating in and achieving at university, as well as eventually wanting to be academics. Mirza [11] also points out how black women who successfully enter HE as students, do not end up entering it as employees. There have also been qualitative findings about BME academics' feelings of invisibility and devaluation [12]. In addition, black graduates seem to be twice as unemployed and with

markedly fewer firsts and 2:1s than their white counterparts, making it even less likely for them to secure graduate employment in the highly competitive world of today. Even when all variables are taken into account, such as prior attainment, disability, gender, deprivation, subject of study, type of higher education institution, term-time accommodation, and age 'there remained an "unexplained difference" between students from ethnic minority communities and white UK and Irish students.' [13]

As a response to these worrying trends and findings from recent literature, this paper reports on small scale exploratory work with three black academics, like myself, reflecting on their subjective experience of race and racism in academia today. It also addresses how these professional colleagues might be engaged in a 'black pedagogy' as separate from (but enhancing of) 'white pedagogy', in a bid to expand on the model of 'culturally relevant pedagogy' of Ladson-Billings' [14]. It is also informed by the critical pedagogy work of Canaan, Amsler and hooks [15-17]. Their work, which starts with an exploration of the unequal world in which we live, challenges us to question the status quo, so that a better, more equal world can be hoped for by both student and teacher. Indeed, Canaan's thesis is that 'a better world is not just possible, it is essential.' This hones in the deeper philosophical considerations that I felt I needed to get from my research, as ultimately I am engaged in a 'pedagogy of hope'.

Alongside critical pedagogy, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has also had tremendous impact on raising consciousness on race and racism, such as Gillborn's work [18]. Consequently, 'storying' [19] of the lived experience of a fellow black academic in the same institution as mine and with whom I had reflective interactive dialogue, became a way for me to explore my concerns and see how they matched with what my three colleagues were telling me.

These concerns led to the central question of 'am I still, black at HE?', or 'what is the subjective reality of being 'black at HE'?'

2. Frameworks and literature

In this paper, critical pedagogy and CRT are my theoretical and ethical frameworks. Alongside these frameworks, Critical White Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis, as well as post-colonial literary criticism enhance the central view of there being many worlds in the one we know today and that the HE community is in need of more inclusive epistemologies of knowledge.

In the social science literature on whiteness and anti-racism [20-22], much has been done in the classroom to unpick the discourses with engrained ideologies that white students hide behind, in order to claim that racism has either been eradicated in today's 'multicultural society', or, simply is part of a 'confrontational' other. As Rebollo-Gill et al. state [23:383]: 'By the time they reach our classrooms, most white students are invested in a system of white privilege that

provides them with opportunities based on their skin colour, and, most importantly, that denies the reality of this privilege.'

In a previous article, using Popular Education methods of empowerment in the classroom, I argue that white students (especially those who are socially privileged) need to be encouraged to access the black perspective on language and linguistics. There seemed to be a culture of 'deprivation' among the white English Literature students I taught who did not seem to have been introduced to African and Asian literature in English, and who, consequently, did not engage with colonialism and racism from a black perspective. Marx [24] and Ladson-Billings [25] advise that, because most educators are white, the effect of whiteness needs to be explored, particularly in the face of statistics about educational failure among BME children. A more inclusive approach would after all empower all students to become 'change agents', as experienced by Chatterton [26: 37]: 'What I saw in my students was proof of a huge amount of talent and commitment which, if directed towards social justice, can have a real impact on the immediate surrounding world.'

It seems to me that, whilst recognising the presence of racism at a personal and institutional level, as well as the impact of whiteness in education, we owe it to ourselves as educators to pursue a deliberate course of action. Critical pedagogy lets us do that. It is defined by Burbules et al. [27:5] as: 'An effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students and about the way belief systems become internalised to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life.'

Indeed, for Freire [28], Education is about recognising oppression and how one's place into that system is not about being fatalistically accepting of the status-quo, but equipped to construct a discourse of 'counter hegemonic' practices in schools. Both Freire and Giroux [29] saw schools as being reproduction 'machines' of dominant capitalistic ideologies stripping the individual learner from his or her basic freedom.

CRT gives one the tools for addressing inequalities from the perspective of the 'oppressed'. It looks at the 'lived experience' of black people to uncover the racism at play, ingrained in the way ideology operates in society [30]. Issues surrounding voice and who speaks for whom are central to the research methodologies of CRT academics. For example, the narrative of a young black man leads Ellis [31] to her self-critique of being a white privileged scholar with authority to speak on behalf of others in her narrative about issues of race. Qualitative CRT research, through interviews and narratives, fits well with the quest in this paper for documenting the shared lived experience between my black colleagues and I, as stated by Gillborn [32:126]: 'This way of doing research reveals the pathways for common understandings of the lived experience between the

researcher and the researched.’

In addition, this paper is framed by an understanding of the world in its post-colonial, post-modernist phase and as needing to be represented in a fairer way, as a ‘one world’ with many enlightening worlds within it. The teacher, within this understanding, needs to have a balanced and critical world view. He or she becomes a facilitator of learning that empowers students (black and white) to free themselves from the shackles of inequality, exacerbated by the (structurally constructed) remnants of a colonial and imperialistic past. Indeed, teachers need to give voice to (and speak the voice of) the ‘subaltern’ in their day to day activities with students. Young [33:160-1] stresses the importance of a more inclusive epistemology of knowledge: ‘Said’s emphasis on the question of representation has at best been balanced by attention to the reality which that representation missed or excluded: not only the suppressed ‘voice of the Other’, but also the history of the subaltern, both in terms of the objective experience and history of subaltern or dominated, marginalised groups, and in terms of the subjective experience of the effects of colonialism and domination, an area most searchingly investigated by the founding father of modern colonial critiques, Frantz Fanon.’

Similarly, Spivak [34] argues that the voice of the black minority woman is equally under-represented, whilst Ahmad [35:25] argues that there is no specific ‘third world’ but ‘one world’ in which ‘we are not each other’s civilisational others’. The story of the subaltern, within this understanding, ceases with time from being a marker of the ‘other’, less equal and less civilised, and becomes our story, all of us, especially those in education. It seems clear to me that there is an even more urgent need for empowering methodologies, like CRT, that give voice to scholarship from the black perspective.

Indeed, this question of ‘the suppressed voice’ of the ‘subaltern’ is not unique to literary theory only. It was also systematically raised as an issue for education researchers working on race inequality in HE, as early as the 1980s. In a quest to tackle what they called the ‘brown-on-brown research taboo’, Reyes et al. [36:306] expressed feelings of being ‘tired of reading about ourselves in the social science literature written by non-minorities, we want to speak for ourselves, to define, label, describe and interpret our own condition from the “inside out”. We feel strongly about providing a balance to the existing literature and research on Chicanos.’

Reyes et al. had already been concerned with the various ‘guises’ of racism in HE. Their qualitative interviews led them to a model for covert and overt racism in academia in the US, based on three syndromes: Tokenism, Typecasting and the one-minority-per-pot syndrome. Each syndrome, respectively, implied that academic institutions either regarded black academics as; lacking in academic credentials when hired; more suited to ethnically related fields, or finally, worth demeaning publicly. This is totally in line with some of the findings of the ECU’s comprehensive literature review of research on the experiences of BME staff in HE, in both

the UK and the US.

When I interviewed Black Lecturer 3 (BL3), he talked about how being a historian was ‘suspect’ because Asians in the UK tended to study science and technology, or, if not academically-inclined, worked as administrators in London universities. This ‘typecasting’ syndrome can, in turn, impact negatively on black people’s credibility as academics, as reported by the ECU [37:28]: ‘Research evidence suggests that BME staff in higher education in the UK feel marginalised and in many ways invisible in UK HEIs.’

If manifestations of racism keep persisting in academia unhindered and unexposed, then ‘we will find ourselves a generation from now still ‘facing the same “old wolf” in yet another fleecy robe’ [see again 36:312 and 38].

3. Research Methodology and Design of the Research

The approach taken for this exploratory piece of research started with my own concerns as a black scholar and translating those into five areas worth reflecting on with like-minded academics in HE today. These concerns stem from my own experience as a black lecturer in HE, as well as dialogues with colleagues, reflections, readings and writings on the topics of race, education and pedagogy. They also come from my own trajectory in an HE system that I entered in 1980, left it for a while to work in the Adult Education sector (between 1994 and 2004) and re-entered it, expecting somehow to not feel ‘still, black’. This is why I identify with the ‘Black (and still, black) at Yale’ films, as well as with the 1980s research by Reyes et al in the US that map well against my own trajectory.

I used purposive sampling and chose three like-minded scholars who have a ‘black’ perspective on their work in HE, particularly in the classroom. These three academics seemed to me to be ‘successful’ at their job and committed to working in the system positively, for the sake of their students mostly, but also for their own scholarship. Because I knew two of them very well, I was aware that these academics had a positive outlook and believed that their place was certainly in the post-1992 HE system. In a way, I was interested in finding out what lessons can be gained from black academics, like myself, who have survived and done very well for themselves and for their students within this sector. In addition, apart from being permanently employed in HE, respected by their students and contributing to scholarship and research in their disciplines, their success with students (black and white) struck me as being also akin to what Ladson-Billings found was a key ingredient for her ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’- [see again 14:118]: ‘My research on successful teachers of African American students allowed me to build the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy where we could see that success in a classroom of African American students rests on three propositions: focus on student learning, development of cultural competence and promotion of socio-political consciousness.’

As it will transpire later in the analysis section, the three academics interviewed were particularly focused on those three propositions quoted above.

Although these three academics are from different non-white ethnicities (Anglo-Indian, African-Caribbean and South Asian), they (and I) call their perspective 'black' in the political sense of it not being a white-only perspective. This is based on their (and my) shared understanding of a post-colonial world and the experience of racism. This socio-political construct of 'Blackness' does not essentialise race, but rather raises consciousness of a UK divided along colour lines, with global echoes, such as in Post-Apartheid South Africa [39]. These lecturers are indeed perceived as visibly non-white and have experienced the impact of colour-based racism in academia. They also have strong feminist and anti-racist perspectives, crucially in their learning and teaching practice. The term 'black' becomes, therefore, an inclusive term based on shared personal experiences of racism and the impact of these on lecturers' perspectives. These perspectives are greatly needed in HE so that they can effectively help develop more critical, inclusive and empowering pedagogies and curricula, for the benefit of all students, black and white. For example, in terms of employability, global consciousness and competency, which are essential graduate attributes for succeeding in today's world [40], can only be enhanced from the knowledge and wisdom of black lecturers, working alongside their white counterparts, on an equal footing.

Incidentally, the term BME was contested by these lecturers when talking about racism as it was felt to be trying to objectify the shared personal experiences of non-white people and lumping them together with minority ethnic white people who have not gone through the dehumanizing experience of colour-based racism. This article, therefore, uses the term BME only when reporting on trends and official statistics that are nevertheless very useful to have in the UK.

In addition to being active and successful at their jobs, they were of different genders (two female and one male), locations (southern and northern England), positions (lecturer, senior lecturer and principal lecturer) and ages (30s, 40s and 50s) in three different post-1992 universities (one with mostly white students and staff and two with large intakes of BME students and some BME staff), in different cities in the UK today (London and two northern cities).

The concerns that I had and that I explored with them were translated into five key interview questions as follows:

- (1) Learning and Teaching approaches
- (2) Racism in HE (experienced or perceived)
- (3) Empowerment of black students
- (4) Role as a black lecturer
- (5) Success in HE

These questions were introduced to them by email stating the overall research question, as follows:

'I have been concerned for a while about the experiences of successful BME academic staff currently employed in HE. My research question stems from this concern and simply is:

What is it like to be black at HE in England? I hope to carry out a small-scale piece of research, conducting a structured interview with three academics who are from a non-white perspective.'

I carried out three completely separate and individual structured interviews with them, exactly along the lines of those five concerns of mine, as I was interested in getting answers to my own questions as well. I stuck to exactly the same questions but, at the same time, allowed for the stories to emerge. This was feasible, as two of them knew me very well and one of them was selected for sharing the same anti-racist and feminist perspectives as the rest of us. These interviews were completely anonymised and the identity of the academics entirely obscured. I also shared the transcripts with them to allow for maximum transparency and accuracy of content. I stressed that what I was interested in was a story and an exploration of commonalities with my own experiences. This was an exploration of the subjective experience of three carefully selected and like-minded academics who may help me find answers to those concerns of mine, or, illuminate for me a way towards theorising further at a later date.

I transcribed the stories that they told me and analysed them, using a mix of thematic and text analysis, counting how often content words of concern occurred in their narratives within the identified themes.

For the sake of the anonymised transcription and analysis of the material produced, I used a code of identification based on the initials of 'black lecturer' (BL) and steered away from giving them pseudonyms. The power of Language is such that names can become subjective labels of identity imposed by the researcher on people that he/she is working with.

In this paper, extracts from the interviews are presented, preceded by a statement, for each of the three lecturers, highlighting the themes emerging from the text analysis of each of the five key questions asked. This way, the relation between narrative and text analysis is made, whereby the narrative extracts support and illustrate the overall concerns expressed in each text.

In foundational Sociolinguistics research, various variables of speech (such as words or sounds) are counted and quantified to report on the trends associated with different types of discourses [41,42]. Labov was also instrumental in introducing the notion of Critical Discourse Analysis, inclusive of minority discourses, to traditional linguistics research, in a quest to prove that less equal varieties of speech or discourses (such as those used by working class and/or African American speakers in his research) were highly structured and had as much validity and complexity as those of the more 'powerful' standard dialects or discourses. In his examination of non-standard speech and narrative structure, Labov introduced the 'change from below' concept. In his work, minority narratives, deemed less equal, and their speech patterns, have the power to change the 'dominant' language. As a sociolinguist at source, I cannot help also but give credibility to the discourse

of those deemed less equal, including my own discourse, in the hope that this might influence mainstream 'hegemonic' HE thinking. Critical Discourse Analysis, in its emphasis on inclusive language interpretation, joins in with CRT in its emphasis on the power of the personal story. It also allows the researcher to begin theorising about likely 'changes from below' that might influence the dominant view.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Learning and Teaching (L&T) Approaches

On the question of L&T approaches used, three key themes emerged from the text analysis of the narratives. These were: Own culture, self and own knowledge (BL1); Student-centredness (BL2) and Inclusion (BL3).

BL1 felt that students' learning was dependent on an understanding of their history, via, very often, her own history. She, being the younger and fairly new black lecturer, more than the other two lecturers, focused more on the need to use her personal story as an example in her classes.

'I bring in my culture, my race, books for different cultural and racial perspectives. I use myself as an example. When I use myself as a learning and teaching resource, It's me. If I teach a subject it's about how it was for me as a black youth. Black history, which history? And whose history?'

BL2, the more experienced senior lecturer and in her 40s, was more concerned with making her teaching student-centred, in order to empower all students. She teaches very ethnically diverse students and is more centred around 'their' story, whilst still thinking back at her own negative experiences of education. Parts of her narrative give importance to an affinity with her students which is important, I think, when trying to empower minority students, in a mixed-race class:

'In class I try to be inclusive because I didn't feel I was included or confident enough when I was a student. I'm conscious of who is in my group and of who is silent. I have cultural affinity with the students to bring out the black experience.'

BL3 talked about L&T with a multi-perspective approach embedding ethnicity, class and gender, in a continuum from schools to HE. He, being at a more senior level in a London university, and older, had a more strategic view and, for example, narrated his role in giving birth to a key module that transformed many pupils and students over the years.

'Had a module called 'Britain and the wider world', met interesting people – many cultures and pluralism and many histories, so I got the perspective from Sociology plus my historical content and knowledge This was a flagship module which every history student did for 12 years. Gave multiperspectivity and included gender, social class, cultural diversity and relationships. This was done in schools before it was done in HE and gave synergy between frontline research and HE, via a 2-way intellectual conversation.'

One can see a combined story emerging from the text

analysis and the extracts above, with the emphasis that BL1 puts on starting with herself in the 'white' classroom, to BL2, giving voice to all of her 'diverse' students (consciously aware of those who are silent), and, finally, BL3, making links between his own knowledge and that of other perspectives that he embraced and embedded into the curriculum. It is clear that all three academics are concerned about ensuring that their L&T approaches embed the views of their students, as well as their own and of the many (perhaps untold, otherwise) 'histories' that exist around them. Student-centred methods, spanning from using self, to encouraging student potential, to changing the curriculum for full inclusion, are at the heart of the narratives of these academics, who ultimately use their own creative knowledge, supported by the lived experiences that they have had, to build on to the knowledge of their students.

To me the theme of inclusion in HE pedagogy is slightly altered here by including the subjective experience of the lecturer in shaping classroom L&T, modules and the curriculum.

4.2 Racism in HE

On the second question worded 'Have you experienced racism in HE? And how did you cope with it?', the following three themes emerged with three key foci: Defining the racism perceived (BL1); Challenging racism (BL2) and Awareness of exclusion (BL3).

The text analysis of the narrative of BL1 revealed a focus on being a self-aware black academic, including when dealing with other staff. She had experienced some form of racism, as in, for example, when she talked about an incident in a university, other than hers, when she was shown the kitchen, as soon as she asked for the staff room. She talked about how, having survived racism in her life, had given her vigour in re-asserting herself and re-defining the labels in other similar encounters:

'My response to a senior manager (as I'm the only black academic there) who said 'you're the only coloured member of staff' (in 2010) was: "Oh that's interesting, I've spoken to my admin. and I know I'm the only black academic". It was just a level of lack of awareness.'

This coping strategy seemed to me to be in line with a dialogue I had with another black colleague who said that, in a mostly white HE institution, we cope by being 'white' most of the time, but also remind others, on occasions such as the one related by BL1, that we are also grounded, at a deeper level, in the 'story' of being black. That story is not just about colour, but is also structurally about history, conceptualisations of power and the expression of all of that through language, so that the word 'black' becomes critical. The label becomes all the more significant in this context.

BL2 narrated with a focus around race and its essentialism, including by other white colleagues. She remembered a key moment in her early life as an academic when she had been put under undue pressure to teach on race-specific modules because of her colour, and, had confronted that issue by these

words, retold in the interview.

‘I was expected to teach subjects on Race and Racism. As if we have natural knowledge based on experience. I refused to do it. “Will you do a lecture on Race?” “What makes you think I know more about it? I’ll have to read the books you’re reading.” But that doesn’t mean I have expertise in all topics and shouldn’t be expected to teach on any race-specific courses just because I’m black.’

This extract links to the ‘typecasting’ and ‘tokenism’ of the 1980s research by US scholars Reyes et al. [see 36] and the ECU research by UK scholars. It seems to me that part of the success of BL2 is that she managed to re-define the terms of her expertise in L&T by advancing the thesis that black lecturers can teach other subjects.

The text analysis of BL3’s response to this question revealed that he was mostly concerned with the differences between the north and the south of the country in terms of the racism that he experienced - the north being institutional and the south subtle and personal. He told stories about how, even in the ethnically diverse university where he works, white colleagues, for example, seldom invited him for a drink. It is interesting also that he considers his own promotion to Senior Management to be purely accidental – ‘Accidentally, I managed to push upwards.’ – An extract from his text summarises his perception of racism in HE across regions:

‘When I worked in North Yorkshire, it was unusual to have black people in those positions, which was like a step back for me from London. Yes there is racism. In the North it’s inhibition through lack of promotion and in the South it’s more complex and not just based on ethnicity. In HEIs, people can’t show the true colours, so it’s about my perception... Even when you have compassionate colleagues and experience a kind of socialist glue, there is something deeper there, a kind of tribalism in many places – cliques. Racism is when you feel excluded – plenty of policies but the cleaners are black and those on the desk are Asian.’

This extract struck a chord with me as I remember working in HE, in the north (in the 1980s) and then in London (in the early 1990s), and, I remember those subtle ways of feeling excluded from day to day activities, even social events, in London. I socialised more with students than I did with my colleagues. One of them made the following remark to me ‘you are being very ambitious’ (for applying for a basic lectureship) even though he was the one without the PhD, unlike me. However, in the north, I was the only black doctoral student who was given the opportunity to give substitute lectures in sociolinguistics by my (Scottish) supervisor. I remember the outrage that that created in one of his colleagues. Did I also accidentally ‘push upwards’?

In the dialogues of these lecturers, there is no doubt that the experience of racism is real. It seems to be embedded and to manifest itself quite openly (until it is sometimes challenged at a personal level). These views fully support Gillborn’s analysis that racism is ever present for black people in education.

4.3 Empowerment of Black Students

On the third question worded ‘give one example of empowerment of black students from your learning and teaching’, two key themes emerged around; Black Britishness and identity (BL1 and BL3 mostly) and Improvement of prospects for black students (all and BL2).

For BL1 the most important concerns were about witnessing the ‘dream’ of biculturalism and becoming strong whilst different, ‘like Obama’. She discussed how she recognises those of her black students who are ‘not feeling strong from the pain of the past’ and tells them to remember that:

‘Martin Luther King had a dream “and so what is your dream now? With Obama, what is the dream you see now? Let’s hold hands as we’ve gone past a stage.” The formation of racism is so complex today and hatred is internalised and becomes internalised racism. So instead of harking back to America, look at the strength of being black now or biculturality, black and British with a very different reality of Britain.’

This might be seen as exemplifying Richards’ argument [see again 19] that the binary distinction serves the needs of the oppressor and that it is time for all of us to find the ‘paradoxical’ space that articulates who we are, outside of the power-based conceptualised world of binary distinctions. Like the universal and intelligent ‘trickster’ in his story, he argues that we need to subvert the perceived reality of there being a world of one (white) and the ‘other’ (black).

For BL2, the text analysis revealed a strong anti-racist stance and giving black students a positive and different role model. She recounts how one black student said to her ‘you don’t make me feel insecure’ and how being black has made her easier to approach. ‘They select me. Equal in my esteem and appreciated in my different anti-racist and feminist voice.’ She also states that she wants:

‘black students to be better than they are, complete work and so I guide them in reading and curriculum issues. Through engagement to believe in themselves and helping them with academic and personal issues, I try to develop a positive way of looking at themselves.’

This is by no means easy in the university where she teaches and where countless black students take up academic study against the odds, having had poor grades in their prior attainment. Hers is a particularly challenging situation and the rewards she reaps from having turned round many students are constantly at the forefront of her L&T and commitment to equal access. She told the story of having knocked on the council flat door of a black female student who she had not seen in class for a while, after she failed an assignment. After a heart-to-heart dialogue, she managed to get the student back on-course, engaging her and helping her do the work necessary for fulfillment of a good degree.

For BL3, it was more about the contribution of black men and the passing on of the positive experience to children. He particularly, as was seen before, stresses the continuity between school and HE education, having had a strong

school background, before his days in academia. He is particularly noted for his awareness of impact on student teachers who he sees as agents for changing the early years' curriculum and states that:

'there are few black men in Primary Education. One black man I taught said "I teach Britishness and the wider world to my children." He was pleased to be making a contribution in his school.'

This in itself is what BL3 did when he had a career in schools and he was especially committed to seeing that continuation of his 'flagship module'. It is interesting how this lecturer, who accidentally managed to 'push upwards' (as seen in the previous section) and is now a senior manager in HE, is still concerned about what children are learning in school and is passing on his legacy to the next generation of teachers.

4.4 Role as a Black Lecturer

On the fourth question of 'what do you think is your role as a black lecturer in HE'; three themes emerged, to do with Anti-racist and feminist stances (BL2 and BL3); Empowerment of black students (BL1) Assertiveness of black lecturers in HE (all).

In the text analysis of BL1, there emerged a sense of having overcome pain and transforming it into strengths which has led her to want her students to be empowered and strong. She recounted how it is important to not live with the pain of the abuse of racism and to come out of it a stronger person, so that 'we can make an impact now and start to shift the students'. An extract from her narrative encapsulates the essence of her understanding of her important role in HE:

'I'm analysing my journey recognising my strengths and seeing myself as a resource because of the pain of the past. I don't live on the pain anymore. I've learnt from it.' And later on adds: 'My PhD is going to be about me. How I tackle racism is different. I got my strength from coming through it!'

We know, indeed, from the previous section, that this lecturer calmly re-labels reality when confronted with racism and has ceased to feel personally hurt, through the articulation of simple but powerful messages.

Her statement in the extract above is about how the personal has been transcended and changed into something more hopeful that can be used as a positive tool for the next generation. She stated how she often reminds her students about how 'a hundred years ago, we wasn't allowed to read and look at us now!' and that this in itself should encourage them to pursue achievement positively, almost as a counter reaction to a prevalent interpellation in HE of 'black students don't achieve as well as white students.'

For BL2, the text analysis revealed a need for there being an anti-racist perspective, different and allowing BME students to have high aspirations. She talked about how the diverse students in her classes needed to learn from each other too and that she can be a conduit for that by

'selecting the materials and L&T approach, engaging

students with learning and valuing student experience in learning. Empowering students individually by drawing on their cultural differences which are valuable to knowledge-making in class.'

She saw her role very much as a facilitator of knowledge among students. She also likened these cultural differences with the way she aspires to be respected within her place of work, stating that:

'ultimately, I aspire to be seen as valuable and as important to the department as anyone else. Equal to all. I also want the institute to acknowledge that I am different and to respect that.'

The text analysis of BL3 revealed a link to the feminist perspective and an awareness of white domination which can harm students' and staff's perceptions, as in:

'We are in need of a healthy revisionism, just like how the feminist movement changed things in the 1960s. In a white-dominated society, good history is needed, that challenges embedded perceptions and develops critical thinking for certain students. I challenge usual perceptions that students have about black presence in HE.'

He then related an incident when he challenged a white student in his class and asked him to consider for a moment the historical fact that, after all, 'black people were here before the English arrived' and quoted to him from 'Staying Power' [43] within the context of the history of the Adrian Wall, when the Romans brought black people over to England to help with their building work. BL3, because of his untypical position in HE, is also acutely aware of how typecasting operates in HE and states that.

'many students/people have a perception that Asian men in education are in scientific disciplines rather than the (softer bounded) humanities/education. So I break the mould as I'm not the type associated with people that can and should be involved in teaching and learning for this subject. I lend weight to the legitimacy of these other perspectives.'

He is the archetypal 'trickster' in the story of Richards [see again 19], challenging authority and accepted wisdoms about who should teach what, and, consequently, illuminating an alternative route for his students.

4.5 Success in HE

On the final question about what constitutes success in HE from a black perspective, three key themes emerged from the three narratives: Success in Learning and Teaching (BL1); Supportive networks and partnerships (BL2) and Critiquing the current HE system (BL3).

The text analysis of BL1's narrative pointed to her awareness of herself as a powerful lecturer with dynamic impact on her students. She is the only lecturer in the sample who did not make reference to the building of supportive networks and partnerships, perhaps because she is at the start of her career, and still working on a PhD which takes up most of her spare time. She is at a crucial stage of establishing herself as a lecturer and has classroom teaching at the forefront of her thinking, perhaps more than is the case for

the other two more experienced and older lecturers. She is also aware of the power she has to mould her students' thinking and enjoys the attention she has as a successful teacher. She states, for example, when defining her success, that it is about

'the power I have standing in the classroom as an educator. Able to impact, shape, challenge, renew. It's a powerful role. Students love me teaching and they want to have me. My teaching is dynamic.'

For BL2, the text analysis of the narrative revealed a more advanced stage in academia with the need to develop networks, talks at conferences and introduce new modules with like-minded HE professionals. The best passage from her narrative stressed the need to achieve beyond the contracted teaching job in one institution and she stated that the

'core of success is collegial supportive networks within and across HE institutions. There are key networks for L&T, race, international and national where there is a strong black voice of academics coming together, developing conferences and meetings for learning together. This way you can achieve. My confidence came from being encouraged to go to conferences and write. I value myself as an academic and seek beyond my institution for people like us. Kind of 'Academic mentoring'. I want to achieve in writing, developing curriculum, compiling interesting modules that centre race and gender debates. Politically, modules need to make sense to put anti-racist and anti-sexist hats on my students and critical thinking and then applying that in everyday life in society.'

The scholarly (black) community of practice that BL2 talks about is indeed growing by the day and the hope is that it will bring about changes and alleviate concerns about there being a tendency to focus on perpetuating the status-quo of a dominant ideology – or 'whitearchy', as she calls it - that does not see (full) equality as an advantage and pays lip service to it.

For BL3, The key words in the text analysis gave a sense of success being about resisting measures that do not fully yet encourage compassion and the need for a transformative education system. BL3 is concerned about how the education system has become less and less committed to the human experience and more and more attached to figures. He states that

'my measures of success are to be a more prominent ambassador for the university and knowledge generation. Make partnerships between the universities, carry ideas and have a project. Be able to change people and the way they frame things. Managerialism in HE doesn't value compassion which maybe an issue for black people and others. A culture of measures which produces values which don't fit with education. If education is transformative, then it must be more than league tables and measurement.'

This is the lecturer who started the whole interview by stating 'I taught slavery from a black perspective before it was on the National Curriculum, for which I contributed to getting it written in there in the 1990s.' He has mentioned the

need to get back to a revision of the curriculum and the system of education again, embedding even more perspectives than the ones he had the opportunity to include and roll out. To me, he is the future, because of his past. On the other hand, it is encouraging to know that, as seen in the previous narrative of BL2, that a community of practice is gathering momentum, both nationally and internationally.

5. Conclusions

In addition to the results above, I carried out a count of content words in the whole narratives of the lecturers, to get a feel for their overall individual philosophy and concerns regarding the central theme of being 'Black at HE'. This overall text analysis revealed that:

(1) BL1 is concerned with 'black students and pain (including her own) and how that leads to a dream focusing on the learning now' (Most used words: Black, Students, Pain, Dream, Learning, Now)

(2) BL2 is concerned overall with 'black students and their modules by virtue of her race. She refused and challenged this 'typecasting' guise of racism, growing HE connections.

BL3 has contributed to curricula, including the National Curriculum for schools in England, making sure that the black voice and experience were (and still are) embedded in it. He aspires to changing the current system that tends to give importance to measures of success based on figures only.

There is a sense again that these lecturers are commonly concerned (like I am) with success, L&T practice; including classroom teaching, curricula and systems. Their personal experience and how that leads to anti-racist modules and approach' (Most used words: Black, Students, Experience, Anti-racist, Modules, Approach)

(3) BL3 is concerned with 'black people and perspectives and how that leads to deconstructing Britishness, history and measures' (Most used words: Black, People, Perspectives, Britishness, History, Measures)

There is a sense that these lecturers are commonly concerned (like I am) with blackness and students/people but also with wider aspects of the L&T practice; including classroom teaching, curricula and systems. Their personal (success) stories and their commitment to HE link with my own commitments for a 'pedagogy of hope'. I felt in tune with the 'now learning' (in the classroom) of BL1, to the modular approach and content/design of BL2, to the need for introducing measures that reshuffle thinking altogether and history of BL3. In that sense, these three pedagogues are having an impact at three crucial levels of HE and their perspectives are, therefore, very important. They seemed to be building onto each other's experience and bringing into their practice three varied, but integrated ways of doing a successful job. In general, the 'dream' of BL1 (a keyword in the whole of her text) is supported by the two more experienced academic on either side of her, as well as by myself.

When BL1 says: ‘Black history, which history? And whose history?’ perhaps she is also (unknowingly, of course) trying to make links with BL3’s strategic concerns for a more equal curriculum and education system, via BL2’s supportive networks and associations with like-minded people. They, with me, know that race is a construct originating from the plantations era and the pseudo-scientific world of the 18th and 19th centuries, but in the lived experience of day to day work, it still carries enormous weight, as seen in the incidents narrated by my colleagues and I.

In terms of critical pedagogy, there seems to be ‘grounded hope’ at play [44] as a progressive pedagogy of hope, that promotes agency, may well be what sustains these lecturers (and me) in a white-dominated HE system.

BL1 has gone through the pain of the abusive nature of racism and has learned to instill strength in her students, ensuring they survive positively her own ‘storied’ abuse and that of their forebears. She takes refuge in knowing that the love they have for her dynamic teaching will stimulate them to pursue achievement in HE. Her strategy is one of critical resilience in the face of adversity.

BL2 has been positioned as black and asked to teach race words in the extracts suggest very clearly that these three academics have a common pedagogical purpose for empowerment, student-centredness and critical thinking, thus arming students with the tools to want to change themselves and the world/s around them. They themselves, as academics, have experienced racism in its ‘guises’ and have transformed their lived experience, in the classroom and in HE, into one of profound concern for full inclusion and development of critical thinking. They also all seemed to be engaged in a critical, feminist and anti-racist approach to Education, whether in the classroom, in the design of modules or in the influence they had on policy (including national policy). Are they all, with me, playing the role of the subversive ‘trickster’ or is it what ‘black pedagogy’ is all about? Or is it even what Ladson-Billings calls ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’? Whatever the label I give to myself and to these colleagues, I know for certain that there is an even stronger need for me now to document further the experiences of ‘black’ academics in HE.

Much work still needs to be done to have in place a system where black lecturers are neither marginalised nor typecast, but rather, encouraged to deploy themselves entirely as positive role models for all, black and white, in the daily professional life of HE institutions. Until this happens, we must continue to reveal the stories beneath the apparent silence on race and racism in HE today, so that we contribute our part to the building of a true inclusive world for ourselves and for our students. This might also have the desired outcomes that many concerned HE professionals have been asking about, regarding addressing the attainment gap of BME students. To me, the attainment gap cannot begin to be addressed until we dig down beneath the surface of how black lecturers are perceived and treated in HE, how some manage to survive successfully ‘against the odds’ and what

benefits they consequently bring to HE curricula, pedagogies and epistemologies of knowledge. The latter is all the more important for today’s post-colonial world where globalization and internationalization are key to the success of all universities and their students.

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Supporting Graduate Students of Color in Educational Administration Preparation Programs: Faculty Perspectives on Best Practices, Possibilities, and Problems

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Overview: *This article presents findings from a study that examined faculty perspectives on how individual faculty members and institutions support graduate students of color in educational administration preparation programs.*

Purpose: *The purpose of this study was to identify strategies that faculty members and institutions employ to support graduate students of color. The authors were also interested in understanding challenges that face individuals and institutions as they seek to provide such support.*

Data Sources: *Data were collected through a series of focus group sessions and from individual interviews conducted with a diverse sample of faculty members during a 3-year period.*

Findings: *Findings suggested that effective support for graduate students of color in educational administration preparation programs entails proactive yet thoughtful, individual, and institutional work in four areas: (a) recognizing and engaging issues of race in educational administration preparation programs, (b) effective and race-sensitive mentorship, (c) creation and sustenance of multi-tiered and multi-purpose support networks, and (d) establishment of formal and informal support structures.*

Keywords: *administrator preparation; graduate students of color; race and educational administration*

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004) projections for the year 2050, the non-Hispanic, White population of the United States is likely to increase by 7%. This modest increase is in stark contrast to projected increases among people of Hispanic origin (projected to increase by 188%), the Asian population (projected to increase by 213%), and the Black population

(projected to increase by 71%). The same study also projects that by 2050, the non-Hispanic, White population will comprise only 50.1% of the country's total population, a sharp decline from the 77.1% of the population who reported their race as White in the 2000 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).¹ However, as the nation's population grows increasingly diverse, schoolteachers and educational administrators are increasingly White. Although some educators and institutions have begun efforts to reconcile this inequity, Gay (1997) estimated that the number of teachers of color has declined from 12% in the 1970s to 6% in the 1990s and that statistics for school administrators of color are similarly discouraging. The 2003-2004 School and Staffing Survey estimated the total distribution of "minority" principals in public schools at 17.6%, although the minority student population was estimated at 39.7% (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006). Although these statistical projections make a compelling case for the necessity of reconsidering how educators and educational institutions engage issues of race, these numbers only tell part of the story and hide important trends in social dynamics.

Several scholars have argued that the United States is sharply divided along racial, gender, and social class lines (Delpit, 1995; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; West, 1998). "These divisions are clearly associated with exclusion, marginalization, and other negative outcomes, including unequal educational opportunity and achievement, and lead to disenfranchisement of large numbers of African American, Hispanic, American Indian, women, and poor students in our schools" (Lomotey, 1995, p. 297). By the year 2020, demographers predict that students of color will make up 46% of the U.S. school-age population (Miller, 1995). As this demographic shift will be phenotypically substantive, it will also be geographically widespread (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006). High concentrations of students of color will no longer be confined to the rural South or urban North but will instead be dispersed throughout the U.S. public school system.

In response to growing awareness of the need for more diversity within the ranks of America's school leaders, educational administration scholars have called for proactive measures and policies designed to attract people of color into school administration and into the professoriate (e.g., Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Jackson, 1988; Leonard, 1988; Marshall, 1989; Marshall & Oliva, 2005; Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Yet despite some promising work and compelling recommendations by particularly committed individual scholars, a vast majority of educational administration faculty members remain silent on issues of race, making unclear the scope of the field's commitment to diversity. This

silence, and the concomitant lack of scrutiny and/or complacency that it implies, is no longer acceptable (Young & Laible, 2000). The inverse trajectories of national demographic trends and demographic trends among teachers and educational administrators have serious implications for universities, colleges of education, and educational administration preparation programs that demand immediate attention. In particular, educational administration scholars must begin to explore and interrogate the racial dynamics of their programs to respond to the needs of a changing student population (Scheurich & Laible, 1995; Young & Laible, 2000).

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a greater understanding of racial issues in educational administration preparation programs by identifying strategies that faculty members and institutions employ to support graduate students of color. In doing so, we sought to learn both about successful support practices and about challenges that face individuals and institutions as they seek to provide such support. This twofold purpose demands in-depth investigation of several interrelated and context-specific issues. Accordingly, we chose a qualitative methodology and conducted semistructured interviews with a diverse sample of educational administration faculty from institutions across the United States. Data were also collected from focus groups comprised of a diverse sample of educational administration faculty members from different institutions. The following multi-faceted research questions guided data collection and subsequent analysis:

1. How do individual faculty members in university-based educational administration preparation programs support graduate students of color?
2. How do university-based educational institutions and units (i.e., programs, departments, colleges, and universities) support graduate students of color?
3. What facilitates and/or impedes individual faculty members' and educational institutions' efforts to support graduate students of color in educational administration preparation programs?

We began this research with a broad and interdisciplinary survey of literature related to supporting graduate students of color in higher education. The subsequent section presents themes gleaned from this review and connects them with research conducted specifically on supporting graduate students of color in educational administration preparation programs. Following the literature review, we offer a brief discussion of research methods employed in gathering and analyzing data from faculty members. The article concludes with a presentation of findings and a Discussion section that links our research to extant literature and considers directions for future scholarship and implications for practice.

FACULTY SUPPORT FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS OF COLOR IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS

During the first 75 years of the 20th century, much of the scholarship and teaching within the field of educational administration focused on the creation of a “science of administration” that could inform the preparation and practice of school leaders (Brooks & Miles, 2006a, 2006b; Campbell, Fleming, Newell, & Bennion, 1987; Cooper & Boyd, 1987). Yet as the field preoccupied itself with attempts to establish a theoretic, scientific, and technical knowledge base, these efforts “focused on the establishment and enforcement of performance standards rather than on equity standards” (Grogan, 1999, p. 518). Administrators, and the programs and faculty who trained them, implicitly (and at times explicitly) legitimized the notion that ignoring issues of race was tantamount to effective school leadership and administration (Jackson, 1988). As a result, although there are studies of faculty–student relationships in educational administration preparation programs (e.g., Crow & Matthews, 1998; Daresh, 2004; Grogan & Crow, 2004), few explore racial dynamics and even fewer are based on primary research.² However, since the 1970s a dramatic shift of orientation has taken place among faculty in educational administration preparation programs suggesting that times may be changing.

McCarthy and Kuh’s (1997) longitudinal study of educational administration faculty provides perhaps the most comprehensive examination of faculty perspectives and attitudes toward their work to date. The authors administered surveys to educational administration program faculty from across the nation in 1972, 1986, and again in 1994. Analyses of these data suggested that during those 22 years, faculty increasingly came to recognize that lack of racial diversity and inequity was a major issue in the field. When asked to relate their “perceptions of problems in their profession,” respondents’ returns show a remarkable trend toward heightened sensitivity toward issues of race. In 1972, 37% of professors of educational administration reported that the small portion of minorities in the profession was either rather serious or very serious, but by 1994 that number had swelled to 57%. Although there is a dearth of additional research to corroborate and expand McCarthy and Kuh’s (1997) findings (or that explores faculty behavior *in situ*), compelling evidence suggests that faculty in educational administration preparation programs are increasingly sensitive to issues of race and are committed to raising collective awareness of these issues among fellow scholars and practitioners alike (Tillman et al., 2003; Young et al., 2002).

Moreover, the intensity of conversations about issues of race, social justice, and equity in the field of educational administration have recently escalated to such a degree that (a) major national and international conferences traditionally devoted to strictly "race neutral" or "nonracial" themes have recently focused on disseminating and promoting research on diversity;³ (b) substantive race-centered empirical and conceptual research appears in leading academic journals and in works from major publishers with increasing frequency (e.g., Dantley & Tillman, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Grogan, 1999; Marshall, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2005; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Young & Petersen, 2002); (c) several university-based educational administration preparation programs have reconceptualized their work around themes such as social justice and equity (Jackson & Kelley, 2002); and (d) one of the major recommendations of the landmark National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration work called for the following: "Programs for recruitment and placement of ethnic minorities and women should be initiated by universities, school boards, state and federal governments, and the private sector" (Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988, p. xvii).

Although there is a need to further explore faculty attitudes toward concepts such as race and equity, it seems reasonable to suggest that a growing number of university faculty in educational administration preparation programs are committed to undertaking proactive measures that challenge longstanding ideological hegemony through their teaching, service, and research. Still, although there is promise in heightened awareness, there is little cause for celebration. As Young et al. (2002) pointed out, for a transformation to take hold as anything other than disconnected and random acts of isolated reform, faculty in educational administration preparation programs must first address the underlying epistemological, pedagogical, and philosophic assumptions that inform their practice: "We must have as a foundation for all of our actions a commitment to the development of leaders who can lead schools that are high performing for all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and so on" (p. 155).

Furthermore, it seems unlikely that a conceptual "refocus" will be enough. Promoting race sensitivity is insufficient to ensure that social justice is practiced (Cambron-McCabe, 2005; Hafner, 2005; Larson & Murtadha, 2002). Both faculty and the aspiring academics and practitioners whom they prepare must take into account the social, political, economic, and policy milieus in which they work—in university and in school—and then learn to operationalize and concretize abstract concepts such as advocacy and equity. Given the aforementioned demographic trends, increasing pressures on school leaders, and emerging demands on the field of educational administration, faculty,

programs, colleges of education, and indeed universities, which do not address issues of race holistically and systematically, will remain “narrow, ill informed, and will not address the issue” (Young et al., 2002, p. 156).

Faculty Engaging Issues of Race: From Awareness to Intent...to Action?

According to Margolis and Romero (1998) and Altbach and Lomotey (1991), the question, “What constitutes effective support for graduate students of color?” is complex and difficult to answer. These authors, and others, indicate that effective support includes an interrelated set of complex and protean factors. Such factors include (a) the diversity and alignment of curricular offerings, (b) recruitment and retention of faculty of color, (c) procurement and availability of financial assistance, (d) effective mentoring, provision of networking opportunities, and (e) assistance interpreting the hidden curriculum of educational institutions and graduate programs that can reproduce and perpetuate inequality (Freeman, 1999). Certainly, such a list fails to relate the dynamic and complex nature of these (and still other) related concerns. In the context of this research, we are most interested in understanding how faculty members perceive and engage these issues in their efforts to support graduate students of color in their programs.

It is unlikely that simply raising faculty members’ awareness to the factors cited in the previous paragraph will enable them to better meet the needs of graduate students of color or provide them adequate support. Although basic acknowledgement and understanding are important, they can only be a foundation on which more substantive interpersonal and institutional support structures and activities must be built. Coupling awareness with personal commitment to a race-conscious or anti-racist approach to practice is an important second step for each faculty member to consider (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Scheurich, 2002; Scheurich & Laible, 1995; Young & Laible, 2000). Yet individual faculty commitment to engaging issues of race must be concomitant to more widespread institutional norms. Indeed, support will be most effective if an educational organization instills an ethic of proactive redundancy toward issues of equity in general, and issues of race in particular (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). It is also important that policies and procedures are in place to protect and encourage faculty to support graduate students of color. Faculty in nonsupportive or hostile work environments may jeopardize their own employment or face other formal and informal sanctions by drawing attention to issues of inequity and inequality (Tillman, 1998).

Individual and Institutional Support for Graduate Students of Color: Innovative Ideas and Best Practices

Traditionally, there is a fundamental dichotomy in terms of supporting graduate students—are there certain “best practices” that apply to *all* graduate students, or do graduate students of color need specific and *different* forms of support to facilitate and promote their success? Although there is probably a modicum of truth in both positions, a growing number of scholars recognize that a “difference-blind” (Larson & Murtadha, 2002) approach is insufficient in that it fails to address extant inequities that permeate educational institutions and all levels of society (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Many scholars who are discussed in this section argue that although there may be some effective support strategies that transcend race, support for graduate students of color is essentially and fundamentally different than the support that White students need and receive. Based on our review of the literature, support for graduate students of color can be conceptualized as occurring in five distinct yet interrelated phases of a student’s program: (a) recruitment, (b) orientation and induction, (c) faculty and peer mentoring, (d) in-program experiences, and (e) opportunities for career socialization and advancement.

Recruitment. It is insufficient to recruit graduate students of color using traditional means such as on-campus recruitment fairs, because access to on-campus events may exclude entire communities because of both proximity and cultural unease. Several studies have found that availability of transportation may be a barrier to recruiting graduate students of color and that people of color may view college campuses as a hostile or indifferent environment (Isaac, 1998). Likewise, recruitment methods such as mass mailing or posting program literature in schoolhouses may be ineffective because there may be cross-linguistic barriers and cross-cultural unease (Fordham, 1996). For example, among members of some communities, there is long-standing skepticism among educators of color that they will be adequately supported, represented, and valued in traditionally White universities (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Potential students may also not seek admission to university graduate programs because of a belief that even with the credentials of an advanced degree, they may not succeed because of institutionalized bias or they may feel that making such a decision will alienate them from their community (Fordham, 1996). Indeed, in some communities, the decision to pursue an advanced degree at a traditionally White university is viewed as accepting the choice to abandon one’s culture and adopt that of the White establishment. Put differently, in some communities of color, there

is a steep cultural and social price to pay for "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

More effective recruitment strategies reach out to potential graduate students of color by holding events in schools and neighborhoods traditionally underrepresented and by staffing these events with people of color who can speak to the forms of support offered by the institution and by particular programs and professors. Rather than employ status-quo recruitment strategies, universities should instead consider that communities often have their own sophisticated and vibrant social communication networks. However, "discovering" and then "tapping into" these networks and engaging them via traditional recruitment is not only inappropriate but will likely prove at best ineffective and at worst offensive or exploitative (Ogbu, 1978). It is important to respect and honor the traditions and customs of communities and act accordingly after seeking counsel from individual community allies and formal organizations (Hall, 1990). In addition, effective recruitment of graduate students of color entails adequate pre-admission support, including detailed explanations of application processes and formal financial and social support programs employed by the institution (Elam, 1989; Isaac, 1998).

Orientation and induction. Once a student of color applies for and is accepted into a graduate program, additional forms of support are necessary to encourage success and retention. Universities should provide graduate students of color campus-wide, college-wide, and programmatic orientations that specifically address the particular needs and questions of students of color (Haring, 1999; Isaac, 1998). Furthermore, the effective orientation will not be a one-time, beginning-of-the-program experience but will necessarily introduce students to subsequent and complementary forms of ongoing support (Robinson, 1999). For example, an orientation in the first semester of a student's program should include announcements about race-sensitive student and student-faculty support or interest groups, additional resources, and an extensive schedule of future events that students may attend that will allow them to ask questions that arise throughout their studies (Laden, 1999). It is also important that graduate students and faculty of color play a significant role in the development, implementation, and assessment of the orientation program and that the orientation address racial dynamics of social, academic, and professional issues (Granados & Lopez, 1999).

Faculty and peer mentoring. Graduate students of color will have a better chance of succeeding in their programs if faculty members assume roles beyond those of the traditional academic advisor and if graduate students of color are able to enter into meaningful intellectual and interpersonal

relationships with other graduate students (Freeman, 1999; Granados & Lopez, 1999; Robinson, 1999). Faculty *mentoring* is not just *advising* but, rather, a “dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career and development of both” (Healy, 1997, as cited in Haring, 1999, p. 8). An effective mentor–protégé relationship is empathetic rather than sympathetic—a proactive partnership wherein each participant commits to an equal share of responsibility and commitment to the others’ success. This holds for both faculty–student mentoring relationships and also for student–student mentoring relationships, each of which provide opportunities for access to different kinds of experiences and information about academic and social expectations of the institution and the profession. In their interdisciplinary review of mentoring research, Hansford, Ehrich, and Tennent (2004) noted that when planning and implementing a formal mentoring program, organizations should

be aware of the growing body of research literature on mentoring, the need for program support at various levels, the importance of mentor training, the careful selection of participants, and the need for ongoing evaluations. If resources (both human and financial) are to be invested in mentoring programs, those responsible for planning and implementing programs must be willing to commit time, resources, and energy to such programs. Indeed, all parties have a responsibility to make mentoring work so that it can be a positive force for individuals and their organizations. (p. 536)

Still, despite these potential benefits, Hansford et al. (2004) mentioned that there is also a dark side of mentoring. Brown et al. (1999) cautioned that for mentors and mentoring programs designed to support graduate students of color to succeed, they must debunk and confront several myths:

1. *The myth that any senior person can mentor any junior person.* Faculty–graduate student mentoring relationships should be carefully chosen and entered into freely by each partner. As mentoring is a dynamic reciprocal relationship between two engaged partners, it requires a degree of care and commitment rather than a casual or “strictly business” approach.
2. *The myth that engaging with students during class, seminars, and scheduled office hours constitutes a sufficient commitment.* Instead, mentoring entails an additional set of commitments, which includes social and academic advocacy, career counseling, and a commitment to providing opportunities that can contribute to the mutual success of mentor and protégé.
3. *The myth that mentoring is only extra advising.* Again, advising is not mentoring. The former is a formal academic arrangement focused on program completion that may or may not be entered into freely; the latter requires a more substantive personal and professional commitment. It is certainly possible, for example, that someone could be an excellent advisor and a poor mentor.

4. *The myth that students of color can only be mentored by faculty of color.* This assumption is problematic for at least two reasons. First, as scholars of color are not well-represented in many educational administration faculty units, faculty of color may carry an inordinately large advising/mentoring load in relation to other faculty members. Second, leaving faculty of color to serve as mentors for graduate students of color is an absolution of responsibility and an implicit form of racism. Supporting graduate students of color is the responsibility of all faculty members, regardless of race.
5. *The myth that a mentor and protégé's research interests, philosophical positionality, and "polisocioecoracial" experiences must be a perfect match* (Brown et al., 1999, p. 114). An empathetic approach to the relationship and a commitment to an ethic of care, ethic of critique, ethic of community, an ethic of profession (Brooks & Normore, 2004; Furman, 2004; Starrat, 1997), and a reciprocal approach to success is at least as important.

In-program experiences. Jackson and Kelley (2002) suggested "a number of approaches have been developed to support the structure and pedagogy of administrator preparation programs" (p. 196), including the use of (a) problem-based learning instructional strategies, (b) cohort groups, (c) collaborative partnerships between preparation programs and external resources, (d) field experiences, and (e) technology.

Furthermore, graduate students of color must be supported throughout the duration of their academic program, including specialized attention at the coursework, comprehensive examination, dissertation, and possibly internship phases of their programs (Isaac, 1998). Curricula that do not represent perspectives from scholars of color and that do not adequately address issues of racial equity are likely to discourage graduate students of color and impart the implicit message that their views will not be respected or valued. To ameliorate the establishment or perpetuation of a "hidden curriculum" in educational leadership programs, faculty should be sure to examine and evaluate the materials that they use in courses and consider how certain viewpoints and perspectives may be marginalized (Grogan, 1999; McLaren, 1989). In addition, as educational administration scholar Michael Dantley noted during an interview published in the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Division A Newsletter (Brooks, 2005), if faculty members do not make an effort to effectively support graduate students of color as they begin to conceptualize their dissertation research, the possibility exists that their perspectives and research may not be legitimized.

Opportunities for career socialization and advancement. Research on the socialization of graduate students of color indicates that mentors must be aware of the way that various forms of marginalization interact with issues of race in their institutions. For example, a rich vein of inquiry

suggests that “race and gender are interlocking sources of marginalization in higher education” (Turner & Thompson, 1993, p. 356). These dynamics, and still others, place women graduate students of color at an accumulative disadvantage in relation to majority women and minority men (Clark & Corcoran, 1986). Moreover, although minority women face more numerous and complicated barriers than many of their peers, it does not get easier as these women advance toward graduation—the forces that facilitate failure take many forms throughout the socialization process. This demands that committed mentors and their protégés of color not rest once initial socialization into the program is over; rather, they must *both* constantly evaluate the student’s personal, organizational, and career socialization in the various and shifting social environments in which they have their socialization experiences, such as classrooms, departmental offices, and conferences (Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Menges & Exum, 1983; Nettles, 1990).

Effective support for graduate students of color includes opportunities for career advancement such as attendance at national conferences, publication opportunities, internship experiences, and chances to network with practitioners, scholars, and other graduate students of color within the university and nationally. Although many forms of support related to socialization and advancement are informal, interpersonal, and build organically from the dyadic mentoring relationship, there are also several promising and effective programmatic models (Crow & Matthews, 1998; Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Among these are the Puente Project, a California community college program that “addresses the needs of first-generation Latino college students from a cultural context” (Laden, 1999, p. 56) and the Holmes Scholars Network, “a national mentoring program for graduate students from racial and cultural groups currently underrepresented in the education professoriate who are preparing to become college or university faculty in teacher education” (Lamb, 1999, p. 150). Though a nascent program, educational administration graduate students of color can now benefit from such a national-level network. In 2003, the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) established the Barbara L. Jackson Scholars Network, which is designed

to create a network of graduate students of color who are studying in UCEA members’ educational leadership doctoral programs and who are planning to enter the professoriate. This goal is accomplished by providing a system of support for students of color across UCEA member institutions that will offer them specialized support as they continue as they pursue their degrees and then enter professorial roles. (UCEA, 2006)

These initiatives have helped to establish effective networks for students of color that assist them in attaining career goals. Of course, many universities, colleges, and programs offer various other forms of financial, social, and academic support. Although many of these are effective, such forms of support can suffer from a lack of sustainability or can be disconnected random acts of improvement rather than a coherent and integrated component of a strategic plan to support graduate students of color.

METHOD

Data were collected using a qualitative methodology, primarily because the nature of the research demanded an integrated and comprehensive examination of multiple perspectives and data (Fielding & Lee, 1998; Silverman, 2001). We used two data collection techniques: focus groups and individual interviews. In the course of three consecutive years, we facilitated a total of four focus group sessions. These sessions included a total of 35 different faculty members and were conducted as three groups of 8 participants and one group of 11. In an effort to include a plurality of perspectives in each focus group, participants were purposively selected based on the following selection criteria. First, each focus group included three or four scholars whose research expertise included (a) issues of race and (b) leadership preparation. Second, focus groups also included faculty who were diverse with respect to the following:

1. *Years of experience.* Each focus group included faculty with 1 to 5 years of experience, faculty with 5 to 10 years of experience, and faculty with an excess of 10 years of experience.
2. *Race.* Each focus group included at least 2 participants who self-identified as African American, White, non-Hispanic, and Latino/a. Two focus groups included self-identified Native American participants, one focus group included an Asian American participant, and 5 participants did not self-identify.
3. *Gender.* The focus group sample included 19 men and 16 women.
4. *Institutional type.* Although a majority of participants ($n = 28$) in this study were faculty at Carnegie Classified Research Extensive institutions, each focus group included faculty at non-Research Extensive institutions. All participants were from institutions that conferred a doctorate in educational leadership/administration.
5. *Academic rank.* Each focus group included faculty at the rank of Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor.
6. *Administrative/instructional assignment.* Although each focus group included a majority of participants who held full-time faculty research, teaching, and/or service lines, each group also included faculty who held positions such as program coordinator, department chair, associate dean, dean, and university president.

Focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and lasted between 70 and 90 minutes each.

In addition to these focus groups, we conducted 15 semistructured interviews with professors of educational administration, both face-to-face and via telephone. Eight of these interviews were with individuals who were also members of one of the four focus groups. The 7 remaining interview participants were selected through a form of network sampling (Silverman, 2001). These 7 interviewees were recommended by focus group participants as being faculty whose research and/or professional experiences made them knowledgeable on the topic of supporting graduate students of color. Considered as a whole, interviewees were likewise diverse with respect to the same criteria used to select initial focus group participants. The interviewee sample included 5 untenured assistant professors, 5 associate professors, and 5 full professors. Seven of these reported that they also held a formal administrative assignment such as program coordinator, department chair, or dean. Five interviewees self-identified as African American, 7 as non-Hispanic White, 2 as Latino/a, and 1 as Asian American. Eight interviewees were women and 7 were men.

Interviews and focus group sessions both began with the broad question, "What constitutes effective support for graduate students of color?" and were followed by prompts related to the following issues identified through our literature review, when necessary: (a) diversity and alignment of educational administration curriculum offerings, (b) recruitment and retention of graduate students and faculty of color, (c) procurement and availability of financial assistance for graduate students of color, (d) faculty and peer mentoring, (e) provision of professional and academic networking opportunities, (f) assistance interpreting the hidden curriculum of educational institutions and graduate programs, and (h) orientation and induction experiences.

Data were initially sorted using the categories listed above, and then within each of these categories, we explored the data using an inductive and iterative process of thematic coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After identifying descriptive themes and subthemes within each of these categories, we then sought to identify patterns across categories that might suggest theoretical foci that would help us understand these issues as interrelated phenomena (Richards, 2005). For example, an initial analysis guided by our review of literature suggested that strategic faculty support for graduate students of color was important, a more specific pattern of creating and sustaining multi-tiered and multi-purpose support networks emerged as we analyzed data. This and other analyses suggested a subtle, yet important, conceptual re-orientation that ultimately led to the development of four emergent categories, each of which is explained in the Findings section: (a) recognizing

and engaging issues of race in educational administration preparation programs, (b) race and mentorship, (c) creating and sustaining multi-tiered and multi-purpose support networks, and (d) establishing and sustaining formal and informal support structures.

To establish trustworthiness in this study, we used both participant member checks and triangulation of data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007). Transcripts and analysis within focus groups were shared with participants to check for accuracy and also to gain perspective on descriptive and interpretive work at various points throughout the research process. We shared preliminary and more advanced analyses with participants for feedback and commentary. Respondents confirmed that analytic categories were consistent with their perspective, thereby increasing trustworthiness (Silverman, 2001).

FINDINGS

In preface to our presentation of findings centered on how faculty in educational administration preparation programs support graduate students of color, it is important to point out that all interviewees suggested that certain activities and dispositions helped facilitate success for all graduate students, regardless of race. This foundation consisted of supporting students by making them aware of financial resources, counseling them in academic affairs, and helping them achieve career ambitions. Furthermore, faculty noted frequently that an overarching ethic of care in the faculty–student relationship and attention to individual needs undergirds specific and personalized support efforts. However, interviewees also explained that for graduate students of color, faculty members’ efforts to build, and build on, this foundation was a more complicated endeavor, requiring focused attention to particular issues. Our analyses of data suggested that faculty support for graduate students of color could be conceptually organized into four themes: (a) recognizing and engaging issues of race in educational administration preparation programs, (b) race and mentorship, (c) creating and sustaining multi-tiered and multi-purpose support networks, and (d) establishing and sustaining formal and informal support structures.

Recognizing and Engaging Issues of Race

Interviewees reported that before graduate students of color can receive effective support, faculty members, graduate students, and administrators must first recognize and then engage issues of race, both personally and institutionally. Often, issues of race are simply not recognized in educational

administration preparation programs. Respondents explained that this was because of a variety of reasons. As one participant explained, "In many faculty units, issues of race are essentially invisible due to a lack of diversity among program participants." Because graduate students of color are in the demographic minority and faculty of color are not well-represented in educational administration preparation programs, issues of race are sidestepped, seen as unimportant, or shrugged away as superfluous to meeting the needs of a predominantly White student population. "Since they are White and most everyone around them are White, many faculty just don't think it's an important issue," noted one African American senior faculty member. White faculty who make their peers uncomfortable by raising issues of race may encounter institutional and interpersonal resistance in their efforts to raise the consciousness of their peers. One White faculty member explained that when raising issues of race among her peers, "it's not that everything is bad, it's that everything is dangerous." Interviewees feared informal sanctions, marginalization, and the real or imagined threat of jeopardizing their chances of securing tenure and promotion as impediments to raising issues of race with peers, students, and administrators. "It isn't safe to talk about race in higher education," one African American interviewee said, a sentiment echoed by a White interviewee in the following:

White faculty don't get [issues of race], don't try to learn about it, and they don't see it as important. They refuse to learn about it, but they know they feel threatened when the issues arise, so there can be negative consequences of studying or talking about race.

However, underrepresentation is not only evident in the diversity of students in the classroom or among the color of faces around faculty meeting tables but also in the intellectual content of instructional materials and research agendas of students and faculty. The curricula of educational administration preparation programs commonly include little or no scholarship from (or concerning) minority perspectives. Interviewees explained that although the field has made modest progress in this respect during the past 20 years, many "classics" are still used in preparation programs that completely ignore the social context of educational administration generally, and issues of race in particular. As a veteran African American university administrator and educational administration scholar explained, certain racist ideas still perpetuate a problematic mythology in the knowledge base and among students and educational administration faculty.

Twenty or thirty years ago, it was very common for students in teacher education programs to be exposed to works [which] argued that students of

African descent didn't have the training or the capacity of their White counterparts. That contributed substantially to the perceptions of people who were preparing to be teachers, and some ultimately administrators, about students of African descent and other students of color. For the most part, those works are no longer used in schools of education, but those attitudes still exist in schools of education about the capacity of students of African descent and others students of color to be as successful in the classroom or the university level and in the workplace, in the K-12 workplace.

Interviewees agreed with this sentiment and expressed frustration that a basic awareness of racial issues was not widespread in their own programs and in the field of educational administration. For although recognition is a necessary condition for action to follow, it must become a pervasive orientation that informs the work of individuals and organizational units if issues of race are to be meaningfully engaged and sustained by changes in institutional norms, programs, and policies. One interviewee lamented, "I'm often the only person who raises equity issues in meetings. People roll their eyes or answer with complete silence when I talk about it now." She continued by concluding, "This is why nothing is institutionalized except silence and racism."

Still, several faculty members expressed hope that recognition of issues of race had improved during their time as faculty or administrators and felt that the field of educational administration had made progress in diversifying its curriculum and knowledge base during the previous two decades. One faculty member explained that "it's better, but it's so far from where it needs to be." Other interviewees also suggested that there was little cause to celebrate. Indeed, as one faculty member noted, "There can be no rest" when seeking to engage issues of race because forms of marginalization and oppression change over time.

Oppression isn't static or monolithic. We have this idea of "here's the oppression and we're going to fight it and it is going to be vanquished or changed or dismantled," but oppression itself is adaptive and so you make advances on one front and the oppression doesn't stay in the shape it was when you were fighting it. It may give a little where you were making inroads but change and reestablish itself in some other place in order to survive. When you make a sort of "final attack" and then make an in-road in one place, then the system simply adapts to oppress you in some other way, and you know a lot of it is apparently benign.

Senior faculty in particular agreed with this perspective, and suggested that it is insufficient to include a multi-cultural course in the curriculum, rewrite a mission statement to include the word *diversity*, or simply hold conversations about equity. Engaging issues of race means that individuals

and organizations must pay acute attention to all facets of practice. As one senior faculty member explained, in addition to formal meetings and policy formulation, this includes informal encounters such as “the 5-minute conversations, but it also means the formal structures, the policies, the procedures. Every place you have access to advance this agenda you need to do it.” In summary, recognizing and engaging issues of race in educational administration preparation programs is not meaningful unless basic recognition of racial issues develops into a pervasive personal and organizational commitment to a race-conscious pedagogy of practice. Furthermore, this awareness must be accompanied by an ongoing and proactive dedication to acting on that vision by addressing a lack of diversity among student and faculty populations and revising curricula to include a plurality of diverse perspectives on educational administration.

Race and Mentorship: A Necessary and Complicated Set of Issues

The potential for institutional and interpersonal racial dynamics (both formal and informal) to come into play during the recruitment, program of study, dissertation, and job search phases of a student of color’s experience in graduate school are great. Although it can be argued that all graduate students, regardless of race, must overcome issues of socialization on entering graduate school, interviewees explained that people of color are more likely to begin their programs lacking the social, political, and cultural capital necessary for success. The following responses are typical of our data:

The mentor–mentee relationship is important for all students but for students of color, it’s critical—it’s make or break for the student of color.

For [students of color], no mentor, no career.

There’s so much that a student of color needs. They don’t know the system like White kids, who understand it from a position of privilege and know how to work things to their advantage—students of color they need everything a White student needs and much, much more.

The attendant alienation and ennui that can accompany this experience makes the presence of a proactive and race-conscious mentor all the more important for graduate students of color. Certainly, students of color learn institutional mores and norms as they progress through their programs of study, but they can be at an initial disadvantage and must often behave in ways that are to them counterintuitive or that demand they act outside the boundaries of their own values, beliefs, and knowledge bases. As one faculty member of color

reflected on his experience as a graduate student: "The things I knew about people, about community, and about education were not valued. I was an outlier and it was very lonely."

Interviewees explained that effective race-conscious mentors must be open and honest in raising issues of race, they must be willing to advocate on behalf of students both interpersonally and institutionally, and they must seek to create opportunities for students of color in all phases of their program and after graduation. "You have to be comprehensive," one faculty member explained, "you can't take anything for granted." As several faculty members explained, this can be difficult but is necessary given long-entrenched social and cultural barriers that students of color face in institutions of higher education and in K-20 settings. The following narrative, offered by a senior faculty member of color recalling their own experience as a graduate student, was typical of other narratives offered by scholars of color:

When I first got [to graduate school], I had been assigned to an advisor who was a Black woman. When I arrived on campus, she was packing her books because she had been denied tenure. So when I actually started taking classes, there were no African American faculty in the School of Education. I started observing some things on the campus and particularly in my department. Access to professors in PhD programs was perhaps the most important factor in determining your ultimate success. Let me tell you why. White male students share race and gender with the majority of the faculty, which means that it is not inappropriate for them to go to lunch together, to go to dinner, to go over to the faculty member's home, to spend time with them in the office because of the fact that they share gender and race. If you have these White male students who socialize in school, who have these entrees to socialize with the professors, mostly White male professors, and as a result, they get information about research assistantships, teaching assistantships, professional meetings, and opportunities to co-write papers and to do research with their advisors, and so that is a dilemma and it's a challenge that we have to struggle against.

This lack of support and institutionalized racism makes the experience of graduate school a battle rather than an exploration of what one interviewee called "the world of ideas." Importantly, race-conscious mentors must seek to broaden the boundaries of what is accepted as legitimate knowledge in this world of ideas. As a senior faculty member explained,

A doctoral student ought to be able to pursue research into areas concerning issues of race without it being a problem. There may not be a body of research that can inform their study because their interest is underrepresented in the literature. Many African American students find themselves detoured or derailed from what they really want to study because many times their advisors are not

aware that there is substantive and important literature outside the traditional resources of educational administration. They don't know what the literature says in terms of, for example, critical theories of African American identity, so they can't even begin to conceive of how that could inform a dissertation on leadership. Instead of looking at the dissertation as a learning process, some professors seek to maintain the status quo by trying to dissuade graduate students from studying what they really want to examine.

It is incumbent on a race-conscious mentor to support graduate students of color without intellectual coercion, and to help guide them although allowing for exploration of issues of race as a legitimate scholarly pursuit. Interviewees explained that often this called for the mentor to not only help the student with their research but also necessitated advocacy on behalf of the student with other committee members and faculty. One faculty member explained,

I have to intervene sometimes: with other faculty, with financial aid people, with other students, etc. Of course, I do it as carefully as possible and there are some battles that students have to fight on their own, but there are some moments in which being "Dr. So-and-so" is the only resolution. I don't like it, but it's the way things are.

Race-conscious mentors remain involved in, or at least aware of, extracurricular aspects of their students' success as well. As one faculty member put it,

I keep 'em straight. I have their cell-phone numbers and I call them late at night. College comes with many temptations, but they can be more dangerous for students of color than for Caucasian students because of where they might go and what they might do. It's outside the mainstream and that might cause problems.

According to interviewees, this awareness also meant helping students of color with job searches, introducing them to scholars of color in educational administration, and supporting them as they enter the field, as they may be moving into another situation made more difficult by institutional or interpersonal racism. Support can take many forms, including co-authoring research articles, helping those who enter K-12 settings by conducting research in their schools or districts, and providing a sympathetic ear or a critical eye to racial problems of practice. One White faculty member explained, "You have to show students of color that their perspectives matter in academe. They certainly do, but it is often hidden in educational administration programs."

However, with regard to mentorship, all respondents cautioned that a "trap" awaits faculty of color if their White peers do not adequately and

proactively support graduate students of color as effective race-conscious mentors. In such cases, faculty of color can be left to assume inordinately large advising roles as graduate students of color commonly gravitate to them seeking empathy. As several respondents explained, this situation puts faculty of color in a compromising position in which they feel compelled to take on graduate students of color but are not rewarded for extra work by the institution. The following quotes were typical of comments made by faculty of color:

The [students of color] actually come to me a lot and I, at times, have up to 60 master's students that I'm advising, aside from the doctoral students. It takes a lot of my time, but I feel that I need to be available to them.

So there I am, stuck because I recognize a need to support these people and to help them and to guide their experience and all that, but at the same time here I am overseeing 40 studies in addition to my own agenda.

I certainly have the largest number of students of color, there is no question about that.

Many faculty of color reported similar inordinate demands. Another respondent, an African American woman, explained how her situation placed even greater demands on her. In addition to advising and mentoring a disproportionate percentage of African American graduate students, she also found that regardless of race, many women sought her out as an informal mentor in whom they could confide. In addition, she reported that as the only qualitative researcher in her department, any doctoral student doing a qualitative dissertation, regardless of gender or race, attempted to recruit her onto their committee. These factors compounded her loads with respect to service and teaching, and her institution and peers made no effort to help her cope with these demands. Still, she felt compelled to help as many as she could. "After all," she said, "who will help them if I don't? They will be lost. And if that happens, what am I doing here?"

Creating and Sustaining Multi-Tiered and Multi-Purpose Networks

Respondents suggested that there was a need to create and sustain multi-tiered and multi-purpose networks to best facilitate success for graduate students of color in educational administration preparation programs. By *multi-tiered*, we mean support structures should be developed within the program, department, college, university, community, state, region, nation,

and across international lines. As one faculty member put it, "It has to be at all levels to be equitable. There need to be allies, advocates, and friends throughout the system, who will do concrete things to advocate for students of color." By *multi-purpose*, participants suggested that there are a variety of social, academic, and professional forms of support for students. "Students of color have particular social and professional needs. We must meet all of them. If we can't, we have failed," one respondent argued. These networks are often informal, but in some instances, faculty, students, and administrators have taken the initiative to garner institutional or extra-institutional support for network-facilitation programs. One participant explained how they had participated in an effort to create such a network using institutional and extra-institutional resources.

We had a 6-week online mentoring institute where students actually participated with scholars of color all across the country. I was a mentor and an evaluator, so I had two roles. This was done online. When we got to AERA, we had a full hour mini-session sponsored by the Professional Development Committee, where we brought the students together again to talk about their needs, their experiences on the 6-week online mentoring experience.

Both the AERA and the scholar's institution supported this program financially and logistically.

Other respondents discussed the promise of a recently created, national-level mentoring program for graduate students of color in educational administration, the Barbara Jackson Scholars Program sponsored by the UCEA. As one faculty member suggested, although the program was only a few years old, it was already becoming "a vehicle for building a network of doctorate students of color, and then eventually that network [of students] will evolve into a network of scholars." Several interviewees mentioned the Jackson Scholars program and suggested that the program offered a rare opportunity for many graduate students of color in educational administration preparation program to

learn about jobs...learn about other students' work...learn the work of established and up-and-coming professors of color that are already in the field...and it can be a place where they discover people who look like them, a place where they can talk about their apprehensions, and about their programs and compare experiences.

Several respondents explained that networks and programs such as the Jackson Scholars program will ultimately be most useful when they operate not only within academic and professional domains but also if they serve a boundary-spanning function by reaching out to local communities,

practitioners, and organizations whose presence is not as strong in the field of educational administration. As one participant said, “There are amazing groups out there doing great things. We need to reach out to them.” For example, national organizations that participants mentioned included the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Indian Education Association (NIEA), and National Association of Asian American Professionals (NAAAP). Many participants also suggested the potential for research universities to create vibrant networks that include historically Black colleges and universities, Latino-serving institutions, and tribally controlled community colleges.

Interviewees explained that although graduate students of color often need academic and intellectual support, faculty should not neglect day-to-day issues. As one interviewee explained, it is important for graduate students of color to get “together with individuals with whom they can identify culturally or ethnically on some level, who may not serve as their mentors, but who can provide sort of a window to what is possible” in spaces as near as their academic program and as far reaching as international research conferences.

Establishing, Coordinating, and Sustaining Formal and Informal Support Structures

Interviewees frequently pointed out that support structures, including but not limited to multi-tiered and multi-purpose networks, could work effectively whether they were formally recognized programs and policies or informal practices carried out by individuals and coalitions of like-minded folk. “You’d be amazed at how many people and organizations exist to support students of color, but they don’t talk—they don’t coordinate. They don’t know each other exist.” Importantly, respondents suggested that the most effective support efforts succeeded because they were part of an overarching strategic plan with a central commitment to enhancing the individual experiences of a diverse student population. As one interviewee said, “Even if the big-idea support programs for graduate students of color don’t last, they often allow people to make connections. Some do sustain and are great. We should emulate those.” Organizational units that ignored issues of race, engaged in piecemeal support, or relied on one or two key faculty members were cited as less effective than more systematic efforts. As previously mentioned, meaningful support takes place throughout the graduate experience, and each phase of the graduate student experience can be affected by formal and informal support.

Respondents suggested that formal support structures were important to the success of graduate students of color in each phase of their programs of

study. "It's crucial throughout," one respondent noted, echoing the sentiment of most. Proactive recruitment strategies such as holding informational fairs at off-campus community events, scholarship and fellowship opportunities, and purposeful hiring of a diverse staff to coordinate recruitment activities were mentioned frequently as particularly effective in attracting graduate students of color to programs. As one respondent explained with much fervor, "Get folks of color involved! If you are really interested in increasing diversity, put your wallet where your mouth is. Invite them in. Hire them!" Faculty members who worked in the few institutions that employed this strategy—purposeful hiring of a diverse and well-supported staff to coordinate recruitment activities—reported that it was particularly successful and showed great potential. "We've seen a tremendous increase in our number of applicants, and in our number of admissions," explained one dean, who spoke for several. Interviewees suggested many other formal support structures that directly supported graduate student of color, as follows:

1. substantive and race-sensitive orientation programs,
2. faculty–student study and reading groups centered on issues of diversity (including cohorts),
3. introduction to a diverse curriculum,
4. systematic introduction to faculty and graduate students of color in other fields of inquiry at the university,
5. race-sensitive multi-disciplinary research colloquia, and
6. financial support to attend at national-level conferences.

Although each of these promising practices suggests positive possibilities, faculty observed that as stand-alone programs, they held little hope of being effective. Instead, faculty, their organizational units, and their universities need to keep "equity goals central," as one faculty member repeatedly insisted, to their overarching strategic plans, purposes, and processes to truly support their graduate students of color: "Unless the fight for equity becomes an institutional norm, it won't make a difference—inclusion needs to replace exclusion at a macro level."

Faculty explained that informal support structures were also important to facilitating success for graduate students of color, yet they were most effective when they complemented a comprehensive formal program rather than replaced a formal program. Informal support takes many forms. Following are some typical faculty explanations of how they supported graduate students of color:

I meet once a month with all of my advisees, and we do mock dissertation defenses, mock thesis defenses, mock comprehensive exam defenses, for people who were preparing to do those defenses, so they were prepared when

they went to do the actual defense, and we also used it as an opportunity to praise students who had just recently accomplished things.

I told all of my students that if they went to AERA, I would provide them with dinner, and now I take about 30 students to dinner at AERA every year because they are continuing that tradition. We're continuing that tradition.

I get [students of color] together with individuals with whom they can identify culturally or ethnically on some level, who may not serve as their mentors, but who can provide sort of a window to what is possible.

Other respondents detailed additional informal forms of support such as helping graduate students of color find a place where they could get their hair cut because, as one faculty member explained, "Ethnic barbers can be hard to find if you don't know where to look," and introducing graduate students of color to one another.

Interestingly, although many respondents suggested that there is a need to formalize the informal support for graduate students of color that mainly comes out of individual professor's time and energy, others advised caution. Several interviewees expressed skepticism at making formal some of the informal support that they routinely supplied students. One fear was that the original intent of the effort would be lost if it became a "program" and had to justify its existence or funding through quantitative measures (racial quotas, reports on participation, etc.). For example, one respondent invited over graduate students of color for a potluck dinner twice a semester. Although they were certain that they could obtain institutional funding to support such events, they were hesitant and ultimately refrained from pursuing such support, as they might need to suddenly hassle with budgets, provide reports on activities, advertise, and do other duties outside the original intent of the endeavor.

DISCUSSION

In contrast to a dominant ideology in the United States that espouses the belief of widespread opportunity, individual responsibility, an equitable application of justice, and encourages us to treat all people as individuals, many scholars have argued that race influences social perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in ways that place members of certain racial minority groups at a disadvantage (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006). Research suggests that this inequity occurs in formal and informal educational settings throughout the United States (Delpit, 1995; Miller, 1995) and that race influences attitudes and behaviors of educational administrators in the nation's public

schools (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Lomotey, 1995; Marshall & Oliva, 2005; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Young & Laible, 2000). Although higher education scholars have investigated and interrogated the influence of race on students in postsecondary settings (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991), few studies have focused on issues of race manifest in educational administration programs, and none have examined faculty perspectives associated with supporting graduate students of color in university-based programs. This study contributed to our understanding of these issues and identified strategies that faculty members and institutions might establish, sustain, and evaluate as they seek to improve their individual and collective support for graduate students of color in educational administration preparation programs.

Findings from this study are in keeping with research in other postsecondary settings in suggesting that a color-blind approach to supporting graduate students of color is at least incomplete and is likely to send students both implicit and explicit messages that their perspectives are not valued or that they are not welcome in institutions of higher education (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991; Brown et al., 1999; Nettles, 1990). This message is conveyed implicitly through curricula that exclude the work of scholars of color, through weak peer and faculty mentoring, through a lack of financial commitment and social resources, and through the absence of scholars and administrators of color among program faculty. Moreover, analyses of the data in this study were similar to research conducted by Ogbu (1978) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986), who found that race-negative messages begin long before the student arrives on campus, especially in traditionally marginalized communities and with respect to predominantly White colleges and universities and colleges. Faculty in this study explained that overcoming these negative messages through proactive community outreach and recruitment is essential, as many potentially outstanding graduate students of color never apply to institutions where they feel, or may actually not be, welcome (Margolis & Romero, 1998).

To help ameliorate these negative social forces, faculty interviewed in this study explained that although race-responsive recruitment is a critical issue, there is also a great deal of work to be done to improve support for graduate students of color once they are admitted to a program. This begins with a need for all faculty, administrators, and graduate students to raise their level of awareness as to what constitutes effective support for graduate students of color (Jackson, 1988; Laden, 1999). However, as many scholars have pointed out, awareness is insufficient—in order for substantive change to occur action must follow. In particular, participants noted a need for university-based educational administration faculty and programs to make a

paradigmatic shift *away* from impersonal advising and *toward* authentic mentoring graduate students of color. This seemingly subtle distinction is actually substantial in that mentors and protégés are equally vested in each other's success, although advisors direct advisees from a position of relative authority (Robinson, 1999). For educational administration students, effective faculty and peer mentoring also includes providing ongoing socialization and networking opportunities in the interrelated domains of (a) K-12 educational settings; (b) the programmatic, departmental, college, and university levels; and (c) the educational administration professoriate.

Importantly, faculty interviewed in this study explained that supporting graduate students of color in educational administration preparation programs is not just something that happens between a mentor and protégé. Instead, outstanding mentors help graduate students of color establish and sustain multi-purpose and multi-tiered support networks. This means that well-supported graduate students of color should be able to turn to peer and faculty within the academic units with which they are most directly associated and also throughout all levels of the university. Several universities and educational administration preparation programs have developed effective induction and mentoring programs to support their graduate students of color (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). However, support within the walls of the program or university is insufficient. Multi-purpose and multi-tier support networks should extend both into local educational communities and also connect to scholars and practitioners at the national and international levels (Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Programs such as the Holmes Scholars Network and, more specifically, the UCEA Barbara L. Jackson Scholars program show great early promise and have even more potential as effective support structures but must continue to provide sustained networking, scholarship, and mentoring experiences as they develop and grow.

Data from this study suggested that although it is important to create support structures such as induction, outreach, and mentoring programs, it is equally important that these formal forms of support are complemented by informal support from peers and faculty throughout the various networks that support a graduate student of color (Hansford et al., 2004). Activities such as a mentor and protégé going to lunch together, invitations to a peer or faculty member's home, casual conversations about career possibilities, and authentic compassion from genuinely concerned and race-conscious colleagues are important forms of support (Brooks, 2005).

As a final discussion point, it is important to recognize that raising awareness of issues of race in educational administration preparation programs is not easy work and can result in unintended negative consequences for faculty members and students (Tillman, 1998). Advancing conversations and

advocating for race-sensitive curricula, policies, and practices can be contentious work, yet as participants in this study attested, it is necessary work (Young & Laible, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Justice Blackmun wrote in the 1979 Bakke case, "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race" (*Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke*, 1978, p. 2806). Indeed, according to scholars, such as Levin (1999), Grogan (1999), Cambron-McCabe (2005), Larson and Murtadha (2002), and to faculty members interviewed in this research, a color-blind approach within educational administration preparation programs seems more likely to perpetuate the inequity and exclusion embodied in the statistics that we presented in the introduction. Participants in this study suggested that although the work can be difficult, even dangerous, the time has come to acknowledge inequity and to engage it with an effective and sustained agenda of programmatic and personal action.

As educational administration faculty continue (or begin) to recruit educators of color into educational administration preparation programs that have been traditionally and predominantly populated by White students, organized by White faculty, and informed by a concomitant knowledge base, faculty must be race-conscious and proactive if educational administration preparation reform is to move from empty (though well-intended) rhetoric and toward substantive and equitable reform (Scheurich & Laible, 1995). Put differently, to effectively support graduate students of color, faculty must move thoughtfully and boldly from awareness to advocacy, and finally into action. Faculty committed to facilitating and enacting such change must increase awareness and concern among colleagues, graduate students of color, and White graduate students regarding issues of race and focus on understanding how best to support the success of future leaders of color. Given long-standing bias embedded in both scholarship and practice, faculty in educational administration preparation programs have an obligation to move beyond abstractions and heightened awareness and into substantive research and action (Young & Laible, 2000).

This research identified salient issues that face graduate students of color in educational administration preparation programs from the perspective of program faculty. Although the study revealed positive and inspiring work on behalf of some faculty members and organizational units and suggests that the field has made modest progress with respect to raising issues of race, it also calls into question whether educational administration graduate

programs offer adequate support to aspiring leaders and scholars of color and whether or not faculty and institutions are acting or are just “aware” (Grogan, 1999). Importantly, this research also suggests that faculty members who would practice a race-conscious or antiracist pedagogy in their research, teaching, and service activities do so at a potential risk to their academic careers. Setting aside the important ethical and equity implications of these conditions, the study also raised another issue—how long can a field that has long struggled to recruit students of color into its ranks remain viable if the ontological, institutional, and interpersonal norms remain hostile to the students that it must serve continue? It seems clear that if faculty in educational administration preparation programs refuse to take account of issues of race in their teaching, service, and research, their programs face the prospect of rendering themselves obsolete (Brooks, 2007; Grogan, 1999; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Marshall & Oliva, 2005; Young & Laible, 2000). The time has come for faculty in educational administration preparation programs to join the conversation on race in higher education and take seriously the call to work against long-standing negative effects of a legacy of implicit and explicit racism in educational administration programs (Jackson, 1988). Although some meaningful conceptual and empirical strides have been made in recognizing impediments to graduate students of color in educational leadership programs, there remains a great deal of work to be done.

Farmer (1993) argued that “in the academic community, much is written about racism, race dynamics, and racial attitudes, yet little is done about these same issues personally, departmentally, or institutionally. Race is viewed abstractly” (p. 201). Participants in this study suggested that faculty must move beyond recognition of issues and instead proactively engage issues of racial bias in their work and in the institutions they serve. They must strive to understand how issues of race impact their work as mentors and move beyond traditional models of advising to form meaningful mentor–protégé relationships. They must help create and sustain multi-tiered and multi-purpose support networks for graduate students of color that connect them to the worlds of both practice and scholarship. Furthermore, applauding the work of a few individual activists and race-conscious is not enough and it is not an advocacy. Faculty, administration, and graduate students—of color and White students—must *all* recognize that establishing and sustaining formal and informal support structures is difficult but necessary work that may or not be rewarded within the current systems of their university or in their fields of practice. Finally, it is imperative to recognize that confronting issues of race demands not only strength but also endurance—if change is to take hold in educational administration programs, all stakeholders must join the

effort to support graduate students of color, sustain it over time, and hold fast in the face of tremendous institutionalized and interpersonal obstacles.

NOTES

1. "Census 2000 showed that the U.S. population on April 1, 2000 was 281.4 million. Of the total, 216.9 million, or 77.1%, reported White. This number includes 211.5 million people, or 75.1%, who reported only White in addition to 5.5 million people, or 1.9%, who reported White as well as one or more other races. Census 2000 asked separate questions on race and Hispanic or Latino origin. Hispanics who reported their race as White, either alone or in combination with one or more other races, are included in the numbers for Whites" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

2. A few notable exceptions are Mendez-Morse (2004), Tillman (1998, 2002), and Tillman et al. (2003).

3. See Brooks (2002) for a discussion of these themes.

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EDUCATION

What Is Faculty Diversity Worth to a University?

The “invisible labor” done by professors of color is not usually rewarded with tenure and promotion. But it is more important now than ever.

PATRICIA A. MATTHEW NOVEMBER 23, 2016



JIM COLE / AP

The spate of racialized attacks on college campuses after the election are, in some ways, the flip side of the protests that sprung up across the country starting last fall. Then, students of color called for their schools to develop more inclusive climates—with big stories breaking from campuses like the University of Missouri and Princeton—and pressed elite institutions to confront the racist histories of the leaders they enshrine. Such activism took place on campuses that don’t have such high profiles, too.

To put it simply, in the parlance of social media, the students protesting are woke AF—and one of the things they want are more faculty of color. It’s a complicated request in many ways. This is in part because a call for a more diverse professoriate suggests that faculty of color, simply by being brown and on campus, can serve the institution in unique ways. In turn, when faculty of color are hired, they are often

expected to occupy a certain set of roles: to serve as mentors, inspirations, and guides—to be the racial conscience of their institutions while not ruffling too many of the wrong feathers.

Those like me who pay attention to diversity in higher education call this work “invisible labor”—not because no one sees it but because institutions don’t value it with the currency they typically use to reward faculty work: reappointment, tenure, and promotion. Chances are a faculty member of color is not going to get a sabbatical or a grant from her institution because she contributes to the diversity mission her university probably has posted somewhere on its website. She certainly isn’t going to get tenure for it.

Although I have tenure now, as a new, African American faculty member I know I was strongly advised by my senior colleagues and administrators to keep my service to that so-called diversity mission to a minimum, and it was advice that I was happy to follow. I was happy to follow that advice even if it meant keeping as low a profile as possible and declining requests to take on important projects that I knew would not count when I came up for tenure.

I’m not sure what choices I would make now. For example, earlier this year, I got a lot of attention for a series of tweets that focused on how I have learned to talk to students of color, particularly black students, during a time when the extrajudicial deaths of black men and women are getting more attention than they have in the past. In those tweets, I mentioned that my colleagues and I put together a reader with articles and essays that we thought would offer useful context for our students for a Ferguson event we had planned. It reminded me of the importance of such service.

There’s not a lot of room in my teaching or research for this kind of work. I write and teach about 19th-century British literature, and the colleagues I worked with on the reader are not historians or sociologists. We worked outside of our expertise as a service to our institution. To date, I’ve personally received more than 200 requests for the reader from professors and student-service administrators from all kinds of institutions: high-school libraries, Ivy League professors, community-college faculty, and people who want to read it for their own edification. The thing I hear most often is that they want to do something for their students but they feel ill-equipped to do so because the issue falls out of their area of expertise.

I get requests from students, too. Those are the ones I'm most interested in—the student in a small midwestern town who wants to help his classmates understand why folks are chanting Black Lives Matter; the student who's seeking more context after being assigned Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*; the student who explained to me that she is chairing a committee on her New England campus that is focused on racial reconciliation. So, every few days, I put aside time to do this work that probably doesn't count to the people who assess my scholarly productivity. It isn't a conference paper or a peer-reviewed journal essay or a scholarly monograph. It's labor that is invisible except to those eager to be as woke as those students who have been protesting; and it's labor that keeps me mindful of what role I can play right now as students of color and their white counterparts learn to understand one another in and out of the classroom.

This imbalance—this extra burden on minority faculty—has ever been thus. Women of color, for example, tend to take on more service than their male counterparts. Similarly, for me and other nonwhite faculty members I know, much, if not most, of this service revolves around supporting students of color—sponsoring campus groups, providing additional guidance (especially for first-generation college students), and intervening on their behalf with administrative officers. On top of that, we're also called on to “diversify” campus committees and to represent the views of a variety of ethnic groups in even the most informal conversations. And while advice about how to manage the pressure is readily available, it's hard to take the long view and think about tenure and promotion when college students need, and are seeking, guidance as they challenge their institutions to make diversity a priority in word and in deed.

The stakes are even higher now. They are higher because service that might have been seen as extra can now feel essential. Black faculty report feeling more vulnerable, and the invisible labor is hyper visible in this post-Ferguson, post-Obama moment. All too often, when deans, provosts, and presidents call for panels, workshops, and university discussions, there's a faculty member of color who has to wrestle with how to contribute (or with whether or not they want to) while still doing the work their colleagues get to do without the same burden. The stakes are higher because ethnic-studies and women's-studies departments are being effectively dismantled. Their faculty must take time away from their own research and teaching to fight as legislatures target them and administrators try to cut their budgets or fire the tenure-line faculty in their departments.

And they are higher because this generation of college students was educated in a No Child Left Behind culture, which means they have been rewarded for paraphrasing and summarizing instead of wrestling with ideas and interpretations. College may well be the first time many of these students have been required to think “critically,” and they are being asked to do so while the world is on fire and social media is there to capture it.

In my diversity research, I am particularly interested in how the academy is structurally hostile to meaningful diversity. Specifically, I look at the ways colleges bring faculty of color to campus with no clear plan about how to support them once they arrive. I wonder, for example, in the consumer-based model of higher education, what happens to the Latina assistant professor of history in a room full of white students who are hearing for the first time that the history they have learned is complex in ways that implicate them? Or the black sociologist charged with teaching urban studies to kids who grew up with the invisible safety nets of the suburbs? In political-science courses across the country, faculty of color are, in all likelihood, discussing the election of Donald Trump in classrooms with students who might think all his rhetoric is just talk. If, generally speaking, classes that ask students to reexamine their assumptions about race and racism are challenging, what is in place to protect faculty who lead difficult class conversations in this particularly volatile moment?

Extensive research shows that angry students don't just act out in class but also punish faculty of color on student evaluations that are used in personnel reviews. Now, as colleges and universities have conversations with students demanding more inclusive campuses—and as the country has elected a president whose campaign relied on rhetoric of exclusivity—is an ideal moment to consider how faculty of color fit into the equation. This equation includes what these faculty members contribute while noting what those efforts cost them.

It's something I wrestle with when I talk to young faculty members and their administrators. I want them to understand the value of their very presence on their campuses, and I want them to take to the long view—to do the work that will secure their positions on campus. But that long view can feel like a luxury at a time of protests, community discussions, and teach-ins.

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We want to hear what you think about this article. Submit a letter to the editor or write to letters@theatlantic.com.

THE CHRONICLE
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GRADUATE STUDENTS

Diversifying a Discipline

In 2015, Penn State produced an unprecedented number of black, female Ph.D.s in philosophy. Here's how.

By Vimal Patel | MARCH 27, 2016

✓ PREMIUM



André Chung for The Chronicle

Ronke Oke earned a doctorate in philosophy from Pennsylvania State U. last year.

Seven years ago, Ronke A. Oke felt as if she no longer belonged in philosophy.

For Ms. Oke, earning a master's degree at the University of Memphis had been difficult, and she considered quitting the discipline and not going for her Ph.D. Her experience at Memphis stood in stark contrast to her undergraduate years at Spelman College, a historically black institution.

At Spelman, Ms. Oke, who is black, could imagine herself as a philosopher. Most of her professors were black women. She was not yet aware of philosophy's reputation as an old boys' club. And she felt free to pursue the types of questions about race and identity she was passionate about without constantly feeling that she had to justify her work.

In graduate school, that changed. She learned "what philosophy is and who it's for," she says. Most damaging, a professor told her she didn't have the writing ability to make it in philosophy. "My morale was completely defeated," Ms. Oke says.

Such feelings of isolation and not belonging in graduate school often take a toll on women and members of minority groups, leading many to drop out or decline to pursue doctoral degrees. In the humanities, these problems are perhaps most acute in philosophy, which as a field has been criticized for being unwelcoming to women. High-profile cases of sexual harassment involving philosophy professors at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Miami, and Northwestern University have deepened those concerns.

According to the latest federal data, of the 370 American citizens and permanent residents who earned Ph.D.s in philosophy and ethics in 2014, just 15, or 4 percent, were African-American. Of philosophy doctoral recipients overall, less than one-third were women. Only one other humanities field, music theory and composition, had a lower proportion of women.

Ms. Oke is among the small population of philosophy Ph.D.s who are both black and female. Despite her doubts, she soldiered on in the discipline, finding the support she needed and a home at Pennsylvania State University.

She wasn't alone. Four other black women earned philosophy Ph.D.s from Penn State's program this past year. It's a striking number, given that only about 40 black women have ever earned philosophy doctorates in the United States, according to an estimate by Kathryn T. Gines, a Penn State faculty member.

For Penn State, the 2015 cohort represents a high-water mark for a department that has made diversity a key goal. The faculty is dedicated to the idea that philosophy needs new voices, has revised recruitment practices, and, perhaps most important, has revamped the way it teaches the discipline.

The Penn State department is "decolonizing the philosophy canon," says Robert L. Bernasconi, a professor there who has worked closely with Ms. Oke. That broadly means rethinking the curriculum so it doesn't gloss over — as the discipline has



Nabil K. Mark for The Chronicle

Penn State is “decolonizing the philosophy canon,” says Professor Robert Bernasconi (right, with William Paris, a Ph.D. candidate). The faculty’s attitude makes the discipline more welcoming to minorities, he says, and gives all students a better education.

tended to do — the racist views of thinkers like Locke and Kant. The faculty’s attitude makes the discipline more welcoming to minorities, he says, and gives all students a better education.

Penn State’s department, which has expertise in Continental philosophy, has also added critical philosophy of race as an academic focus, a subfield that’s growing but still seeks broad acceptance.

The experiences of the black female Ph.D. recipients at Penn State offer a glimpse into how graduate programs can recruit, retain,

and produce more female and minority Ph.D.s: a priority increasing in importance as universities face calls to diversify their faculty.

The Ph.D.s’ experiences also show how difficult it is to create a wider culture change within a discipline. While the department at Penn State has welcomed and encouraged women, it’s far from certain whether philosophy as a whole will do the same.

"You’re struggling against the isolating experience that is philosophy, but also against the reputation of philosophy," Ms. Oke says. "Many people realize they don’t have to deal with that pressure, and move on from the discipline."

For the Penn State philosophy department, the past decade represents a rebirth. In 2005 a former department head claimed in a federal lawsuit that he had been removed from his post for reporting the harassment of female graduate students. The suit was settled out of court, several senior faculty members left around the same time, and university officials decided that the department wouldn’t accept doctoral students for two years as it regrouped. That period allowed faculty members to take stock of what kind of department they wanted. One priority, they decided, was a more diverse graduate-student body.

After the moratorium on new graduate students, the department made three key hires: Mr. Bernasconi, Ms. Gines, and Paul C. Taylor, all respected philosophers, whose focuses of study included philosophy of race. In addition, Ms. Gines had founded the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers, a national network, now based at Penn State, that helps connect doctoral students with mentors.

"Having the support of the administration to do that hiring in critical philosophy of race and to diversify the faculty are key for successfully recruiting a diverse set of graduate students," says Amy R. Allen, who began as department head in July. "Not all graduate students of color want to study critical philosophy of race, and not all who study critical philosophy of race are students of color. But there's overlap between those two groups."

Those changes, as well as more-active recruiting efforts, are a crucial part of what attracted the recent influx of black women.

Lindsey L. Stewart, one of the five recent Ph.D. recipients, was not considering a philosophy doctoral program until she visited Penn State when she was a senior at Calvin College. She went for a weeklong philosophy program that was started in 2006 for underrepresented-minority students. Amid the sessions, which resemble graduate seminars, faculty members assured her that questions of race and gender that interested her had a place in philosophy.

"It gave me a feel for what graduate school might be like," Ms. Stewart says. "What stuck with me from that week is that I was surrounded by women who were doing philosophy. It changed my mind a little bit about whether I could do the sort of stuff I wanted to do in philosophy."

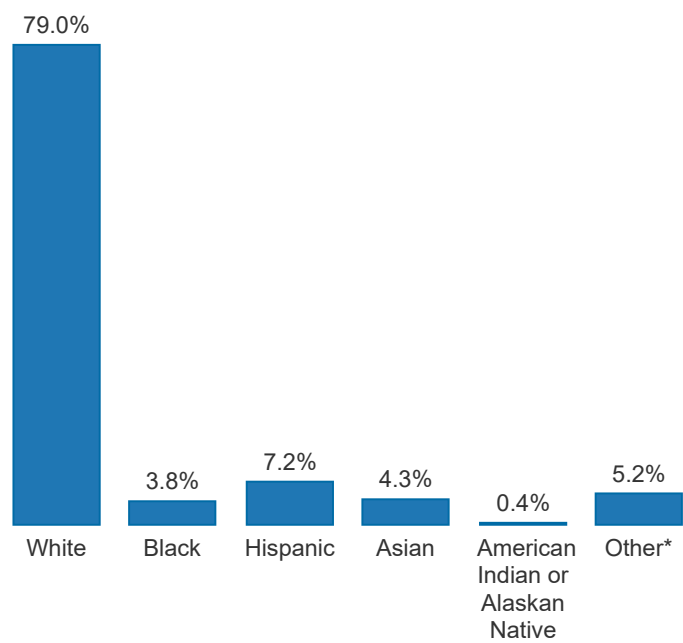
Penn State faculty members continued to develop the relationship after the week ended. A professor asked Ms. Stewart for writing samples and gave her feedback. The department head emailed her. "You really can't underestimate the importance of having an authority figure tell you that you have great ideas and have the potential to do some good in the field," Ms. Stewart says.

In Philosophy, a Dearth of Female and Black Ph.D.s

Like the rest of the humanities, the vast majority of doctoral recipients in philosophy are white. And the discipline falls behind other

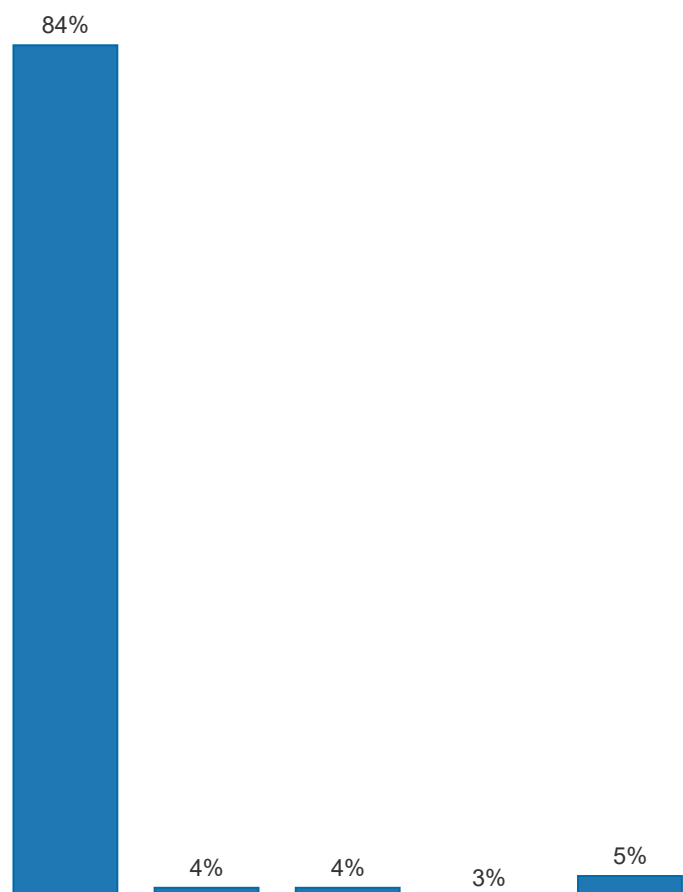
humanities fields in gender equity. Below are the racial, ethnic, and gender breakdowns for those who earned Ph.D.s in 2014, the latest year data are available.

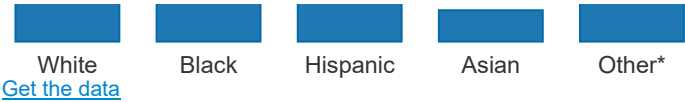
Humanities, by race



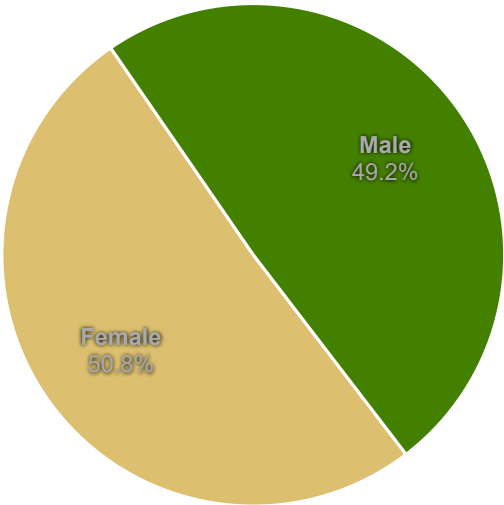
[Get the data](#)

Philosophy, by race



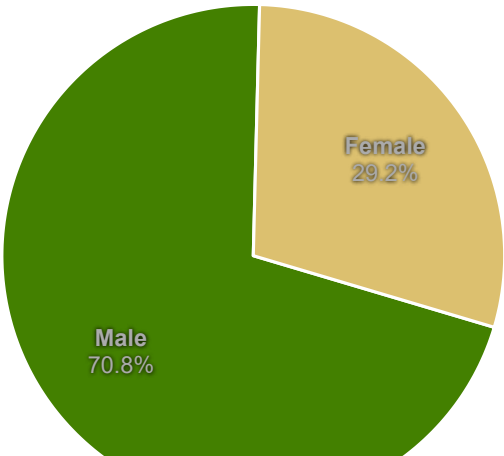


Humanities, by gender



[Get the data](#)

Philosophy, by gender





Note: Includes only Ph.D. recipients who are American citizens or permanent residents

** Respondents who reported more than one race or did not report race or ethnicity*

Source: National Science Foundation and other federal agencies [Get the data](#)

Ms. Stewart did consider other programs on philosophy of race, including ones at American University and at Memphis. The others, however, couldn't match Penn State's financial support. "My main concern at the time," she says, "was figuring out how I was going to pay for graduate school." The stipend at Penn State, plus a fellowship for underrepresented students, provided her with about \$22,000 a year. It was a tight budget, to be sure, but enough to avoid taking on debt for all but two years.

Getting more women and underrepresented-minority students to enroll in a graduate program, of course, is only a first step. Keeping them enrolled and on the path to a Ph.D. is no less difficult.

Several of the Penn State women said the key to retention was faculty commitment to widening access to the discipline. For Ms. Oke, that meant Mr. Bernasconi, who has long dedicated his career to racial inclusion in academe.

Mr. Bernasconi moved from England to the University of Memphis in 1988, mostly because he loved jazz and blues.

But after some time in the United States, he says, he saw how racial disparity affected his social circle: Nearly all of his friends were black, while nearly all his university colleagues were white.

"I realized the level of racism in America," he says, "and I was scandalized by it."

He considered changing careers but decided to change the discipline instead.

Mr. Bernasconi began developing a pipeline of black philosophy Ph.D.s. He visited historically black colleges, pitching the master's program at Memphis, sitting in on undergraduates making class presentations, and building relationships with professors who could serve as talent scouts. That's how he met Ms. Oke, at Spelman College.

Mr. Bernasconi says philosophy doctoral programs, and doctoral programs in general, pay too much attention to a student's résumé and academic pedigree, an attitude that perpetuates privilege.

The question he asks himself while reviewing applications is: With five years of intensive preparation, will the student be as good as any other new Ph.D.?

"I read the writing samples very carefully," he says. "I'm looking for a spark, something that suggests insight."

"You can't teach insight," he adds.

When Ms. Oke, as a master's student at Memphis, expressed doubts about remaining in philosophy, Mr. Bernasconi told her she had that spark. He was convinced that she could land a tenure-track job if she put in the effort.

She told him about how she wanted to explore questions of identity and place, based in part on her own experience as a woman from Nigeria who didn't feel that she fit within any black community in America.

"Robert said to me, 'No other discipline is going to help you understand and move toward answers to these questions like philosophy will,' " Ms. Oke says. "That was the moment I said, 'You're right. You're absolutely right.' "

Instead of quitting philosophy, she enrolled in the philosophy doctoral program at Penn State in 2009, the same year it hired Mr. Bernasconi.

"Professors, and I think it is particularly true for white male professors, often forget just how insecure graduate students feel," Mr. Bernasconi says.

"There are some professors who actually play on students' insecurity to get them to work harder, particularly in a subject like philosophy. You can't do good philosophy out of fear."



Billy Howard for The Chronicle

Jameliah Shorter-Bourhanou perceived an implicit message from other doctoral candidates in philosophy: You don't belong in the discipline. She is now an assistant professor at Georgia College & State U.

While Penn State has built a reputation as supportive of minority and female philosophers, the recent doctoral recipients say that being a black woman in philosophy remains hard.

Jameliah Shorter-Bourhanou, one of the five doctoral recipients at Penn State, says other students in the program openly asked why there were so many black women around. One white male graduate student once said to her that the only reason she was in the program was that Penn State was trying to

diversify. Most such hostility wasn't as overt, and each individual slight could be explained away. But a collective message emerged: You don't belong in the discipline.

Ms. Shorter-Bourhanou, now an assistant professor at Georgia College & State University, says she has developed rules to help her cope. For one, she limits social gatherings with colleagues to a quick drink, wary that a tipsy colleague might say something he could not unsay.

For some of the new Ph.D.s, it was the classroom, not social events, that was a challenge. The often argumentative, even abrasive tone of philosophy discussions is one reason some scholars say women abandon the discipline.

How a Department Diversified: In Brief

About a decade ago, Penn State's philosophy department decided that it wanted a more diverse graduate-student body. Here's what it has done toward that goal.

Changed recruitment: Instead of waiting for applications to roll in, faculty members search for talent at the undergraduate level and have developed relationships with historically black colleges.

Revamped the curriculum: The department focused on critical philosophy of race, which has helped to make the curriculum more attractive to those who haven't traditionally been represented in philosophy.

Hired a diverse group of professors: Five of the 15 faculty members today are women, and three are members of underrepresented minorities, signaling to graduate applicants the department's commitment to diversity.

Provided extra financial support: Students can apply for additional grants for the summer — a crucial step, some faculty members say, in attracting and retaining underrepresented students, who disproportionately come from lower-income backgrounds than their white counterparts do.

Created an intellectual community: Many faculty members conduct research on critical philosophy of race. In 2013 the department started an academic journal on the topic. Within philosophy, Penn State has become known for this specialty, which also helps with recruitment.

Ayesha Abdullah says she chose to remain quiet in her early years in Penn State's program. Today she would have different advice for a young graduate student. "You have to remember that you earned being there," she says. "Being accepted into graduate school wasn't a gift someone gave you, so you have a right to speak in a way that you feel comfortable. You don't have to imitate that white male over there."

The classroom was a challenge for Ms. Stewart, too, but for her it was as an instructor. Stepping in front of a room full of undergraduates can be nerve-racking for any graduate student, regardless of race or gender. But the stakes are higher, she says, for black women, who don't fit the usual conception of a philosopher.

"I'd usually have one or two students in every class period that just tried to contradict everything I said," she says. "It makes you a little angry. You've got two, maybe three, degrees at that point, and this little 18-year-old kid thinks he knows more than you do. It's infuriating."

Ms. Stewart was concerned about more than pride. She mostly thought of other minority students and women in the classroom watching her, and of how their perceptions of the discipline — and their place in it — might be affected if she didn't handle the interaction well.

She gradually learned how to adapt her pedagogy and deal with disrupters. She started classes with a short lecture, establishing her authority, before breaking the students into groups. "If they ask an inappropriate question, or a question that's not in the spirit of trying to understand the material," Ms. Stewart says, "I just tell them we're not going to deal with that question right now."

Having a critical mass of minority doctoral students is key to coping with such stress. Many of Ms. Stewart's phone calls to her peers, she recalls, began with, "You'll never believe what happened to me in class today."

The students, along with supportive faculty members, reminded her not to let bad classroom experiences eat at her. "A major part of getting through graduate school," Ms. Stewart says, "is having people around you who can help you not to internalize these messages. They will wreck you."

Within the discipline, efforts to make philosophy more welcoming to women and underrepresented minorities aren't universally applauded, especially the adoption of a critical philosophy of race and analyses of texts by Kant and other prominent thinkers in terms of race and gender.

Brian Leiter, director of the Center for Law, Philosophy, and Human Values at the University of Chicago and an editor of the blog Philosophical Gourmet Report, acknowledges that philosophers such as Kant held racist views. But Kant also had "some pretty bizarre views on masturbation," Mr. Leiter says, and it might not make pedagogical sense to teach that, either.

Moreover, he says, some diversity efforts reek of consumerism. The discipline shouldn't "try to reshape the curriculum not with an eye to philosophical interest or insight but to 'identity politics,'" he wrote in a 2014 essay. "I hope we can remember that the neoliberal

view of education is pernicious, even when it's enlisted on behalf of the consumer demands of minorities."

For Ms. Gines, the Penn State faculty member who founded the Collegium of Black Women Philosophers, the discipline needs to be more inclusive about what counts as philosophy.

"Many times it gets presented as a false binary, like you have to get rid of Plato or Aristotle to accommodate women or people of color," says Ms. Gines, who along with Mr. Bernasconi edits *Critical Philosophy of Race*, a journal that Penn State began publishing in 2013.

"The fact is, our syllabi and our publications are political choices," she says. "Whom we choose to cite or teach makes a difference in either reinscribing a very narrow, myopic view of what philosophy is, or making it more inclusive and relevant."

The true test of Penn State's approach may be where the recent Ph.D.s end up. Do they stay in academe? Do they land fulfilling jobs in philosophy? These questions come at a time when the academic job market remains tight and some wonder whether universities should be recruiting graduate students into humanities disciplines at all.

With departments trying to diversify, however, several faculty members say the academic job market for black Ph.D. recipients in philosophy is looking better than for the humanities as a whole.

But Ms. Abdullah, who majored in neuroscience as an undergraduate, decided philosophy wasn't for her. She's applying to medical school. "I felt I needed a career that's more relevant in society," she says. "A large part of my dissatisfaction in graduate school was the feeling that when I was writing or publishing papers or talking about a paper at a conference, I was doing it for me rather than some kind of social cause."

The other four students, however, all plan to remain in academe. Ms. Oke, for example, accepted a job in March as an assistant professor at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, justifying Mr. Bernasconi's belief that she would land a tenure-track job.

While she remains committed to philosophy, she still thinks it needs to become more relevant to a broader audience. When the discipline doesn't embrace the ideas of diverse practitioners, she says, it's diminished.

"You don't do philosophy in a box or vacuum," Ms. Oke says. "The most rewarding transition in my philosophical career has been moving away from just studying abstract notions to really committing to answering the pertinent questions in life."

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Democracy Dies in Darkness

How teachers of all races can better support students of color

By **Valerie Strauss**

May 3, 2018 at 11:10 a.m. CDT

This is an excerpt from the new book “The ELL Teacher’s Toolbox: Hundreds of Practical Ideas to Support Your Students.” And it turns out that many of these ideas work for teachers of mainstream students, as well.

The book was written by Larry Ferlazzo and Katie Hull Sypnieski. Ferlazzo has taught English and social studies to English-language learners and mainstream students at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento for 15 years. He has written numerous books on education, writes a teacher advice blog for Education Week Teacher and has his own popular resource-sharing blog. Sypnieski has worked with English-language learners at the secondary level for 21 years in the Sacramento City Unified School District.

This excerpt explains what culturally responsive teaching is, how to do it and why it is important to the growing numbers of English-language learners in public schools.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of ELL public school students in the United States was higher during the 2014-2015 school year (9.4 percent, or an estimated 4.6 million students) than in 2004-2005 (9.1 percent, or an estimated 4.3 million students) and 2013-2014 (9.3 percent, or an estimated 4.5 million students).

In 2014-2015, the percentage of public school students who were ELLs was 10 percent or more in the District of Columbia and seven states. These states, most of which are located in the West, were Alaska, California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas. California reported the highest percentage of ELLs among its public school students, at 22.4 percent, followed by Nevada at 17 percent. The percentage of public school students who were ELLs increased between 2004-2005 and 2014-2015 in all but 15 states, with the largest percentage-point increase occurring in Maryland (4.4 percentage points) and the largest percentage-point decrease occurring in Arizona (13.8 percentage points).

Here's the excerpt:

Culturally Responsive Teaching in the ELL Classroom

Looking at English Language Learners through the lens of assets and not deficits guides what we do in the classroom and the choices we make about how to do it. Instruction that is culturally responsive and sustaining explicitly challenges the “deficit” perspective. Rather, students are viewed as possessing valuable linguistic, cultural, and literacy tools. Recognizing, validating, and using these tools — in our experience — ultimately provides the best learning environment for our students and ourselves.

What Is Culturally Responsive Teaching?

While the majority of students in U.S. schools are students of color from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, the vast majority of educators who teach them are white. Two of the most common philosophies guiding how teachers of all races can be better teachers to students of color are “culturally responsive teaching” and “culturally sustaining pedagogy.”

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), also known as culturally relevant teaching, was initially popularized by Gloria Ladson-Billings. CRT isn't a strategy or even a set of strategies; rather it is a mindset that underlies and guides everyday classroom practices. Its focus is on validating the cultural learning tools that diverse learners bring to the classroom and leveraging them to affect positive learning outcomes for all students.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is an emerging perspective which builds on the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. This educational stance was first proposed by professor Django Paris who defines it as a pedagogy that “seeks to perpetuate and foster — to sustain — linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling.” In other words, making sure our educational practices not only *respond* to the diversity of languages and cultures in our classroom, but that they aim to *sustain* these elements at the center of teaching and learning.

Substantial research supports its effectiveness with both ELLs and English-proficient students.

What Does It Look Like in the ELL Classroom?

For us, it is an awareness that we try to bring to everything we do. It is a process we are constantly working on as we learn from our students and their experiences. Have we made mistakes along the way? Many. However, like we tell our students, mistakes are opportunities for learning, and we try our best to model this mindset.

Here are several critical questions we ask ourselves when considering how our work with ELLs can be more culturally responsive and sustaining:

How Well Do I Know My Students?

In order to build upon the rich linguistic and cultural experiences of our students, we must get to know them! This doesn't mean doing interrogations on the first day of school, however. It means building positive relationships with our students so they feel safe sharing their experiences with us. It involves daily interactions with students to learn about their struggles, their joys, and their goals.

It means taking the time to gather information that the school may possess about our students — their English proficiency levels, assessment results, home language surveys, health information, transcripts from previous schooling, etc. It can also be making time to learn about students' home countries, the conflicts that may be going on there, the cities or towns they come from, and the languages they speak.

Of course, a key factor in knowing our students is getting to know their families, as well.

Do My Words Reflect a Culturally Responsive Mindset When I am Talking to My Students and About My Students?

One of the simplest ways to honor students' cultural backgrounds and identities is to correctly pronounce their names. Mispronouncing a student's name and not making any attempt to get it right can cause them to feel embarrassed and can heighten their anxiety. Correctly pronouncing a student's name signals respect and a validation of who they are. It is a critical first step in building strong, trusting relationships with students.

As teachers we also need to be mindful of the words we are using when discussing cultural experiences with students. Characterizing our students' beliefs as "right" or "wrong," through our words or our facial expressions, may sometimes not only be inaccurate, but removes students from the center of the teaching and learning process. We want students to feel comfortable sharing with each other and to build a community of learners where all experiences are valued. As teachers, we can be far more effective in raising questions than in making judgments. At the same time, it is also our job to teach U.S. cultural norms and laws (e.g. equal treatment of women and LGBTQ individuals) and create a classroom environment where everyone feels safe and respected. We can do this teaching in a way that is cognizant of our students' home cultures which may or may not promote different perspectives.

For those of us who work in schools located in high-poverty areas, we can often be asked questions by well-meaning people like, "How do you do it?" "Aren't you afraid working in that neighborhood?" "How can the students learn when their lives are so crazy?" In these situations, one can feel any number of emotions including anger, frustration, or hopelessness. It can be tempting to tell the "stories" of our students (the challenges or trauma they have faced) in an attempt to demonstrate their resilience. Unfortunately, sharing these details can often do more to perpetuate stereotypes than to shatter them. Instead, sharing with others about the rich cultural and linguistic contributions our students make to our school and to the community promotes culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Not only must we be intentional with our words and actions, we must educate ourselves so we truly believe in what we are saying and doing. If we don't, students will see right through us, and we speak from direct experience.

How Are My Instructional Practices Culturally Responsive?

Many of us have tried to engage our students by “dropping” a cultural reference into a lesson (mentioning an important person or event from our student’s culture). While it usually gets students’ attention, it isn’t an instructional practice that can maximize student learning, and it isn’t a culturally responsive instructional practice.

Educators, on the other hand, *can* increase learning outcomes by teaching in ways that build on the cultural and linguistic experiences of their students. These methods, in turn, lead to increased engagement. Zaretta Hammond, educator and author of the book “Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain” explains this when she states:

“The most common cultural tools for processing information utilize the brain’s memory systems — music, repetition, metaphor, recitation, physical manipulation of content, and ritual. The teacher is ‘responsive’ when she is able to mirror these ways of learning in her instruction, using similar strategies to scaffold learning.”

A specific example comes from our experience working with Hmong refugees. While in refugee camps, many Hmong women created “story cloths” (embroidery that told stories about their lives). In a series of lessons, our Hmong students created their own hand-drawn versions of story cloths and helped the non-Hmong students to do the same. We then used their creations as springboards to learn the English words needed to talk and write about these stories. Students were more engaged in this language-learning activity because it mirrored, valued, and respected an important part of their home culture.

We have used the process of building on cultural experiences to create language learning opportunities in many other lessons. These include ones where students have made presentations about their home cultures and done language learning activities related to both their favorite contemporary music and ancient cultural music. In addition, when learning about the elements of feudalism, students questioned the textbook authors’ claim that it ended hundreds of years ago when, in fact, their families recently experienced it in their own lives. This connection led to high-interest studying of the socio-economic conditions of various countries as well as direct student communication with textbook authors.

Culturally responsive instruction is ultimately student-centered. It requires the teacher to help students build upon their prior knowledge and cultural and linguistic experiences as they are challenged to read, write, speak, and think at high levels. For ELLs, in particular, it means using best practices like modeling, instructional scaffolding, and collaborative learning, just to name a few, to build the language, academic, and critical thinking skills they need to be successful lifelong learners.

How Is the Curriculum I am Using Culturally Responsive?

We, like most teachers, want to have an idea of what we will be teaching before we actually start teaching it! However, culturally responsive teachers must be flexible with their curriculum and allow for modifications based on students' interests and experiences. Curriculum that is culturally responsive doesn't mean having to incorporate texts and information about every student's culture into every lesson. It also doesn't mean having a token "multicultural" day once a year to "celebrate" different cultures.

In our experience, culturally responsive curriculum involves the following:

- trying our best to choose materials that represent diverse cultures and perspectives
- encouraging students to share their cultural and linguistic knowledge with each other
- allowing students to choose books they want to read from a diverse classroom library
- valuing literacy in both the home language and English
- inviting family and community members to the classroom to share cultural knowledge
- using digital content to instantly connect students to cultural and linguistic resources
- creating lessons on issues directly impacting students' lives, including ones related to current political dynamics that might affect their immigration status and/or the situation in their countries. Student-driven lessons in our classes have included organizing a neighborhood-wide jobs fair with twenty job-training providers and 300 people in attendance, creating a neighborhood campaign to complete U.S. Census Forms, and writing letters to public officials about government immigration policy.

— facilitating open classroom dialogue about the role of race, racism, and religious prejudice (e.g. Islamophobia) in our students' daily lives, including at school.

How Does My Physical Classroom Reflect Diversity?

When students enter our classrooms each day they receive critical messages about the learning environment and their place in it. Students feel more safe, supported, and valued, when they see themselves reflected in the classroom — Do the posters on the walls reflect multiple cultures and languages? Is student work displayed? Are the books in the classroom library written by diverse authors? Do students have access to bilingual dictionaries and books in their home languages? How are the seats arranged? Can students easily move into groups? Considering these questions and others is an important step toward creating a learning environment that values student diversity.

A Note of Caution

We are not martyrs, nor are we saviors. If you think you are, perhaps you should consider seeking a different profession. We still remember the time one of our former colleagues who lived in a predominantly white, middle class suburb of Sacramento spoke to students at a school pep rally. He exhorted the students to work hard in class. He continued “People ask me why I drive all the way down from Roseville to this neighborhood to teach you. It’s because I want to help you!” This is not a culturally responsive mindset. However, it is a mindset that we have probably had during different times of our career. The important thing is to be aware of our biases, work towards overcoming them, and be open to having them pointed out to us.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to help our students; that’s why we are teachers.

What is wrong is when we educators believe that students need to be fixed and that only we can fix them because *we* are already fixed.



Navigating the Ivory White Tower: Experiences as a POC in Academia

Tri Keah S. Henry* and Alondra D. Garza**

Introduction

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education (2016), among degree granting post-secondary institutions, 77% of tenured faculty identified their race/ethnicity as White, 9% identified as Asian, 5% identified as Black, 4% as Hispanic, and 4% as Other race. Among criminology and criminal justice doctoral programs, 83.73% of faculty identified their race/ethnicity as Non-Latino White, 5.85% as Non-Latino Black, 5.21% as Asian, 2.37% identified as Latino, and 2.84% as Other race (Association of Doctoral Programs in Criminology & Criminal Justice, 2018). These disparate racial breakdowns mirror that of doctoral students across disciplines, such as the social and behavioral sciences (American Psychological Association, 2016). Furthermore, a recent report by the Council of Graduate Schools noted that racial/ethnic minorities account for 32% of first-time graduate students seeking a degree in the social and behavioral sciences (including criminal justice and criminology), with African American (12.6%) and Latinx (13%) students accounting for the majority (Okahana & Zhou, 2017). Although racial diversity among doctoral graduates is slowly increasing (see National Science Foundation, 2017), the current

data speaks to shortcomings in the pipeline for PhDs among people of color (POC).

In this article, we discuss several challenges that come with being a doctoral student of color within criminal justice and criminological academia. We also provide tips and considerations for successfully navigating institutions of higher education. Our goal here is to highlight the nuances of the graduate experience from the perspective of students of color who face unique challenges.

Navigating the Academic Social Scene

Tip 1: Find Non-POC Allies

There is no better personification of the “fish out of water” analogy than graduate school. Indeed, this feeling may be further exacerbated for POC graduate students who may not be able to immediately establish community with individuals who share POC status and who are attending predominantly White institutions, given the lack of representation of POC within the discipline (Green, Gabbidon, & Wilson, 2018). To build your community, we suggest finding non-POC allies. These individuals may be members of your cohort, peers from other departments, and/or faculty. Non-POC allies have the ability to both be a form of social support and serve as accountability advocates for others, especially during early periods of uncertainty in the program. Allies can listen and empathize with POC. They are educated about issues affecting marginalized communities and can hold peers accountable for microaggressions and

other forms of discrimination experienced by POC (Hollingsworth et al., 2018).

Tip 2: Find a POC Mentor

Research shows mentorship is essential to succeeding in graduate school (Paglis, Green, & Bauer, 2006) and although perhaps difficult to acquire, a POC mentor is invaluable. A POC mentor will guide you through moments of frustration and self-doubt, institutional bureaucracies, and will be a constant reminder that you are not alone. This is not to say that you cannot succeed without a POC mentor (Thomas, Willis & Davis, 2007). Research suggests that when non-POC faculty mentors engage students in a manner that recognizes and supports cultural differences, mentoring relationships can be very successful (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). In our experience, having a POC mentor has been an undeniable asset. Your department may not have a POC mentor. Indeed, Greene and colleagues (2018) highlight that 6.2% and 2.8% of criminal justice faculty are Black and Latinx, respectively. Do not constrain yourself to seeking mentorship only within your department. We encourage POC graduate students to seek mentorship across other departments on campus or in other institutions. Additionally, becoming an active member of the ASC Division on People of Color & Crime or the ACJS Minorities and Women section are great places to start networking with POC criminologists and obtaining mentorship.

Tip 3: Protect Your Time and Energy

As current doctoral students, we empathize with sometimes having the inability to say no to joining a new research project or committing to an extra service opportunity. Although you are a graduate student, it is important to remember that you need to establish boundaries. Protecting your time and energy may be even more difficult for POC graduate students who may feel the need to overcompensate if they are the only cultural representative in their department. The consequences of not protecting yourself are detrimental, leading to burnout and fatigue, which can lead to attrition in the program. Give yourself the permission to say no.

Conquering the Classroom

Tip 4: Study What You Want

Criminology and criminal justice provide students a variety of different areas of study. This is evidenced by the number of divisions and sections available for students to join through ASC or ACJS. Choosing an area of interest can be daunting, so make sure you pick a subject area about which you are passionate. Four to six years is a long time to study an area of criminology, particularly if you lack interest. Mentors and advisors are there to offer advice and help direct you in creating a research agenda, but their research area will not always match the trajectory you envision for yourself. Be careful not to allow people to pigeonhole you into research that is not what you want to study. Find

your niche in the vast array of research areas and do not be afraid to focus your attention on what you want. As a graduate student of color, you can provide a unique perspective on criminal justice and criminological issues, and your voice is needed to diversify our field.

Tip 5: You're Not the Expert on All Things Race

We've all been there before. You are sitting in class and the discussion turns to race. Everything is fine until you get the eerily familiar feeling that your classmates are waiting for you to give your opinion on the topic. These uncomfortable experiences do not stop once you have reached graduate school. In fact, it may be even more burdensome because the responsibility of speaking on these topics may no longer be shared between a handful of graduate students of color. You may now be the sole minority voice in the room. In instances such as these, do not feel pressured to state your opinion on the topic. If you have something substantive to add to the discussion, say it. Otherwise, not having an opinion is also an appropriate response. You are not obligated to be the cultural liaison in your courses. Instead, we suggest challenging your non-POC colleagues to think more critically about issues related to race and criminal justice/criminology. It may lead to a more meaningful and nuanced discussion.

Tip 6: Confronting the "Exceptional Minority"

Stereotype

U.S. citizens with doctoral degrees comprise 1.8% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). As previously noted, racial and ethnic minorities account for an infinitesimal percentage of this population. This fact alone can sometimes lead students to place undue stress and unrealistic expectations on themselves. Not only do graduate students of color have to prove that they can compete with their non-POC colleagues, but they have the added burden of being their cultural representative, going through graduate school feeling that if you fail, your entire community fails. Indeed, Shavers and Moore (2014) refer to this as the "part of a bigger whole" or "prove them wrong" syndromes, in which minority doctoral students view their "doctoral-degree pursuit as something that was greater than themselves and part of a bigger whole or as a way to give to their community" (p. 23). In their study, they find that minority doctoral students who ascribe to these beliefs can sometimes experience stress and harmful pressure to be successful (Shavers & Moore, 2014). We believe the best way to address these syndromes is to confront the notion early on in your graduate studies. We suggest using this potential problem as a motivational technique or affirmation as you grow into a capable scholar. In the alternative, you can choose not to subscribe to the label at all, making

your successes and failures yours alone. Either way, make sure your response is healthy and stress free.

Considerations for the Job Market and Beyond

Tip 7: Work at a Place that Works for You

As doctoral students, the goal is to land a position at an institution of choice. Though navigating the job market in and of itself can be a daunting task, doctoral students of color should keep certain considerations in mind when applying for jobs. It is imperative to ask, “How does this institution provide support for me as a scholar of color?” “Are these same or similar services provided to POC students at the graduate and undergraduate level?” “How diverse is the campus and institution?” Perhaps location will be a determining factor for you; do not compromise. Your happiness, ability to cope, and life outside of academe could be dependent on accessibility to cultural foods, a sense of community, and family. These issues are no less important than any other factors when considering where you would like to apply.

That said, some POC in academia feel an added responsibility to increase their visibility as faculty of color for students who desire to pursue careers in higher education. Recently, scholars at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Drs. Kevin Nadal and Silvia Mazzula, launched a social media campaign across various platforms, promoting the hashtag #ThisIsWhatAProfessorLooksLike, with the goal of showcasing diversity among people of

color in academia (Nadal, 2018). Through powerful initiatives like this, undergraduate and graduate students of color may be able to envision themselves as a professor.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed several tips and considerations for successfully navigating institutions of higher learning as a graduate student of color based solely on our personal experiences that may not be the same for *all* students of color. To our fellow POC peers, we hope that this article brought a sense of community through shared experiences. To our non-POC peers, we hope that this perspective provided some insight and self-introspection regarding yourself as an ally.

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Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom:

A Resource for Educators

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This resource is intended to help educators understand how they might address the interplay of race and trauma and its effects on students in the classroom. After defining key terms, the guide outlines recommendations for educators and offers a list of supplemental resources. This guide is intended as a complement to two existing NCTSN resources—Position Statement on Racial Injustice and Trauma and Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators—and it should be implemented in accordance with individual school policies and procedures.

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1

What Are Trauma and Child Traumatic Stress?

Traumatic events involve (1) experiencing a serious injury to oneself or witnessing a serious injury to or the death of someone else; (2) facing imminent threats of serious injury or death to oneself or others; or (3) experiencing a violation of personal physical integrity. Child traumatic stress occurs when children's exposure to traumatic events overwhelms their ability to cope with what they have experienced. Traumatic events can have a wide-ranging impact on children's functioning and can cause increased anxiety, depression, symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, difficulty managing relationships, and, most important for educators, difficulty with school and learning. The traumatic event is what the child perceives as dangerous to himself or his caregiver. This perception varies by age and developmental stage and is particularly important in young children whose sense of safety is closely linked to the perceived safety of their caregivers.

When children and youth experience traumatic events, they often adopt strategies to survive these difficult life situations. Known as "survival coping," these strategies provide a context for understanding youth's behaviors following exposure to traumatic events (Ford & Courtois, 2009). Some strategies are adaptive and foster a sense of safety, for example, avoiding a route home where gun violence is likely to occur. However, a similar strategy in a different situation may instead be maladaptive, such as avoiding going to school for an extended period of time because school has become a reminder of gun violence. This strategy, if continued for a long period, can result in other consequences, such as losing contact with peers and falling behind in school.

2

What Is Historical Trauma?

Historical trauma is a form of trauma that impacts entire communities. It refers to cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, as a result of group traumatic experiences, transmitted across generations within a community (SAMHSA, 2016; Yehuda et al., 2016). This type of trauma is often associated with racial and ethnic population groups in the US who have suffered major intergenerational losses and assaults on their culture and well-being. The legacies from enslavement of African Americans, displacement and murder of American Indians, and Jews who endured the Holocaust have been transferred to current descendants of these groups and others. The result of these events is traumatic stress experienced across generations by individual members of targeted communities, their families, and their community. The impact is not only about what has happened in the past, but also about what is still happening in the present to target a group of people or reminders of historical targeting (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Historical trauma is best understood from a public health perspective as it has implications for the physical, social, and psychological health of individuals and communities (Sotero, 2006). Patterns of managing stressful life events are highly influenced by the environments that shapes us. When caregivers' environments have been threats to their safety due to past traumatic experiences, they transmit implicit and explicit social messages to their children in an attempt to ensure their safety. Social messages imparted range from preparing children for discriminatory experiences to bolstering their pride in their ethnic/racial identity (Mohatt et al., 2014). Caregivers whose family members were directly exposed to historical traumatic events such as slavery and the Holocaust may have inherited biological changes in response to trauma in the form of heightened stress responses (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Furthermore, experiences of historical trauma within a community coupled with individual traumatic experiences can contribute to survival coping strategies that both reflect a community's resilience in the face of continued difficult life circumstances and heightened risks for experiencing community-level stressors such as community violence. Historical trauma provides a context for understanding some of the stress responses that children from historically oppressed communities use to cope with difficult situations.



3

What Is Racial Trauma?

Traumatic events that occur as a result of witnessing or experiencing racism, discrimination, or structural prejudice (also known as institutional racism) can have a profound impact on the mental health of individuals exposed to these events. Racial trauma (also known as race-based traumatic stress) refers to the stressful impact or emotional pain of one's experience with racism and discrimination (Carter, 2007). Common traumatic stress reactions reflecting racial trauma include increased vigilance and suspicion, increased sensitivity to threat, sense of a foreshortened future, and more maladaptive responses to stress such as aggression or substance use (Comas-Diaz, 2016). These traumatic stress reactions are worsened by the cumulative impact of exposure to multiple traumas. This is particularly important for youth in low-income urban communities where there is increased risk for community violence and victimization (Wade et al., 2014).



Racial trauma contributes to systemic challenges faced by groups who have experienced historical trauma (Lebron et al., 2015). For example, according to a recent report from the US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, racial disparities persist in our education system: youth of color have disproportionately lower access to preschool, higher rates of suspension from preschool onward, and limited access to advanced classes and college counselors as compared to their white counterparts (US Dept. of Education, 2014). The racial achievement gap, which refers to disparities in test scores, graduation rates, and other success metrics, reflects the systemic impact of historical trauma and ongoing impact of racial trauma on communities of color (Lebron et al., 2015). Strategies for addressing racial trauma have centered on affirming and validating individuals experiencing traumatic stress reactions (Comas-Diaz, 2016). This is most effective when clearly identifying racism as a contributor to distress and supporting student's constructive expression of feelings and healthy self-development (Hardy, 2013).

4

Why Is This Important for Educators?

As students are exposed to the issue of racism through media, daily experience, and history, they need adult guidance to navigate all of the information and experiences. Students need avenues of discussion and information that are factual, compassionate, open, and safe. Youth's resilience and resistance to systemic oppression can be increased by creating an environment that acknowledges the role of systemic racism inside and outside of school, and how that is perpetuated by intergenerational poverty, current community unrest, and intentional targeting of young people of color by those in power.

While all students can be susceptible to distress from direct experience or viewing coverage of traumatic events related to racism, students from racial minority groups may be more likely to experience distress from acts of violence and aggression against people of color (Harrell, 2000). Repeated exposure to trauma-related media stories focusing on perceived racism can impact the student emotionally, psychologically, and even physically. Stories in the media may fail to acknowledge students' history, communities, or shared narratives of resiliency.

What Are the Effects of Racial Trauma by Age Group?

As noted earlier, responses to traumatic events vary according to the child's age and developmental stage. The Toolkit for Educators lists characteristics of trauma responses for children and youth of different ages. The effects of racial trauma add additional layers to these characteristics and are summarized here.

Infants and Toddlers (0-36 months):

Although young children lack the cognitive abilities to identify and understand discrimination and racism they are not spared from their effects (Brown, 2015). These adverse conditions affect young children's development directly and by the deleterious environmental conditions that are created. Infants and toddlers experience developmentally appropriate fears and anxieties (separation, loss of parents, loss of body parts) (Van Horn & Lieberman, 2008). They are aware of sounds and sights in their environments and of their caregivers' emotional states. For young children, their perception of safety is closely linked to the perceived safety of their caregivers (Scheeringa and Zeanah, 1995). Being exposed to racially-motivated traumatic events toward them or their loved ones can be perceived as threats by young children who might respond with physiological or emotional difficulties. In addition, caregivers' own stressors, including the effects of racial trauma, can impact their emotional availability for their children and ability to protect them from danger and stress (Brown 2015, Van Horn & Lieberman, 2008).

Preschoolers (Ages 3-5):

Children in this age range may exhibit behaviors in response to trauma that can include re-creating the traumatic event or having difficulties with sleeping, appetite, or reaction to loud sounds or sudden movements. In addition, if they are exposed to media reports of racial trauma (such as a police shooting), they tend to focus on sights and sounds and interpret words and images literally. They may not fully grasp the concept of an image being repeatedly replayed on television and may think each time that the event is happening over and over again.

School Age Children (Ages 6-11):

Children in this age range often exhibit a variety of reactions to trauma and to racial trauma in particular. Much will depend on whether they have directly experienced an event or have a personal connection with those involved. School-age children tend to view media coverage in personal terms, worrying that a similar event could happen to them. This can lead to preoccupations with their own safety or that of their friends, which in turn can lead to distractibility and problems in school.

Older Students (Ages 12-17):

Youth in this age range typically have a better understanding of events and the implications of issues such as racial trauma. They are also often still forming their identities and their views of the world and their place in it. High school-aged students may become fixated on events as a way of trying to cope or deal with the anxiety that they are feeling as a result. Older students may be exposed to a wide range of images and information via social media as well. They may benefit from discussing ways that they can promote positive changes in their communities.

6

What Can Educators Do?

Students cannot divorce themselves from events in their homes or communities simply by stepping into the classroom. This is especially true for students of color who come from communities that experience the effects of historical trauma and ongoing racial injustice. Educators are in a unique position to open up discussion about these issues, to provide guidance and modeling for constructive expression, and thus create the space for a trauma-informed classroom. Below are recommendations about how to proceed.

1

Learn about the Impacts of History and Systemic Racism: In order to constructively engage with students, educators must commit to foundational work to meet students' needs for honest discussion. Recognize that communities of color have had previous negative experiences with "helping systems," such as law enforcement, social and child protective services, mental and physical health care providers, and school systems, and that these encounters can result in significant distrust and be distressing for some students (Vaught & Castagno, 2008; Sotero, 2006). Learn about and prepare to discuss historical traumas perpetrated within the United States as the context for systemic racism in this country, including genocide, forced displacement, colonialism, slavery, Jim Crow laws, boarding schools, segregation enforced through terror, medical "research," etc.



- Understand the culture in which you are working and find cultural references that will resonate with your students. Be aware of your connection to the communities you are discussing. Recognize that even people who are members of the same racial or ethnic group may have very different life experiences, emotions, and responses. Be careful not to generalize about groups of people.
- Understand yourself and your own beliefs, biases, privileges, and responses, because this is an essential foundation for facilitating discussions with students. Take time to do the Implicit Association Test (Project Implicit, 2011) and reflect on what the results might mean about your own personal beliefs, biases, privileges, and/or responses.

2

Create and Support Safe and Brave Environments: Establish a safe and brave environment for discussing emotionally charged issues. This provides opportunities to first acknowledge the impact various traumas may have on students' academic experiences and then to create a safe space to engage academically (Bloom, 1995). A "safe" environment is one that promotes feeling safe both within oneself and from the risk of physical or psychological harm from others. In a trauma-informed classroom, psychological safety is clearly defined for students; potential triggers or trauma-reminders that may undermine psychological safety are identi-

fied; and plans are in place to help youth re-establish psychological safety when being triggered or experiencing traumatic stress reactions (see NCTSN Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators). A “brave” environment is one in which everyone is willing to take a risk in order to authentically engage. You can help students honor both safe and brave environments by doing the following:

- Highlight that all students need to have a sense of psychological safety and trust so that they can express their perspectives and listen respectfully to others’ perspectives, even when there are disagreements.
- Prior to engaging in the discussion, set up options and provide clear directions for managing overwhelming emotional responses related to the discussion. These options could include permission to leave the room or to have a buddy to rely on for debriefing, processing, or support.
- Validate and de-escalate emotions when possible, but also realize that some students, especially those who have experienced complex trauma, often have difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions.
- Check in with students periodically throughout the discussion, to ensure that they are managing emotional experiences in a healthy manner and that they continue to feel safe.
- Learn to recognize when a student’s emotional responses can no longer be managed safely in the classroom setting and know how and to whom to refer for clinical intervention.

3

Model and Support Honesty and Authenticity: Be truthful and acknowledge that exploring and discussing race and experiences related to historical and racial trauma can bring up emotions for all students. Supporting students’ ability to manage these emotions involves helping them develop skills to authentically express themselves (Singleton, 2014; Dickinson-Gilmore & La Prairie, 2005). Help students define racism, bias, privilege and inequalities so they can develop common language for discussion. (See the Definitions Sidebar.)

- As an educator, remember you don’t have all the answers. That’s okay. Learn to say “I don’t know” or invite others to share their own answers instead.
- Be authentic and respectful with your students. It is natural to worry whether you are saying “the right thing.” However, respectful authenticity is often more important because the chief contributor to a psychologically safe classroom is learning to have honest, albeit hard, conversations in healthy and constructive ways.
- Use processes (such as restorative or dialogue circles) to facilitate and support authentic discussions, even when conflict may be at the core.
- Practice by having conversations with other colleagues or staff before

YOUNG CHILDREN

Helping young children process racially traumatic events will require practicing different skills, some of which are summarized below. For educators working with young children,

Consider that changes in behavior and mood might be the result of exposure to stressors, including instances of racial trauma affecting the child’s family.

Provide a physical space for the child to feel safe

Support predictability in routines.

Help to connect behaviors with emotion by verbalizing possible feelings.

Support the children’s caregivers.

Provide opportunities for emotion and body regulation by helping children calm their bodies and minds when they become upset.

Create developmentally appropriate and welcoming environments that impart messages of inclusion and diversity to children and their caregivers.



attempting dialogue with students. Get comfortable modeling the ability to have – and stay in – hard conversations. Differences of opinion, expression of real emotions, or challenging perspectives do not need to signal an end to conversation. Hearing others speak their truth can be painful, but this often means you are likely having honest conversations.

- Offer a variety of ways for students to deal with their emotions in productive, constructive, and meaningful ways. Consider devoting time to physical activities, art, music, and/or quiet time following these discussions.
- Honor and respect differences in emotions and responses just as you do differences in perspectives. Remember that no one has control over the impact their words have on others. Avoid responding angrily or defensively if someone interprets your – or someone else's – words differently than they were intended. As best as possible, attempt to clarify.

4

Honor the Impacts of History and Systemic Racism: Recognize that some students may be triggered when learning about or studying historical events related to racism. Honor their emotional responses and permit them to connect with support when needed. If discussing their perspectives will promote greater classroom psychological safety, leave time for discussion. In this case, students can be invited to share their own family and community stories, especially when learning about or studying this history in the classroom. Acknowledge that the impact of historical racism does not live in the past, but is an active part of the present.

- Help students and colleagues understand the connection between historical trauma, systemic racism, and community trauma in communities of color.
- Understand the culture in which you are working and find cultural references that will resonate with your students.
- Give students opportunities to share cultural stories and experiences in a variety of ways, such as using art and music, to validate their worldviews and give them an opportunity to develop their own interventions for coping and healing.
- Offer empathy and understanding to students who express distrust and distress, as these emotions are key to acknowledging the past hurt. Validate and honor students' experiences and emotions rather than trying to convince them that they no longer have a rational reason to feel that way. Avoid telling them that their past experiences should not affect their current beliefs.
- Use local and/or national issues to highlight the pervasive harms of racism on individuals and on communities.

5

Encourage and Empower Students as Leaders: Support students in their efforts to become engaged and promote healing in their school and home communities. Helping students feel empowered can promote wellbeing and counteract traumatic stress reactions that increase feelings of helplessness (Hardy, 2013).

DEFINITIONS

Racism

The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to another race or races.

Institutional Racism

A system of privileges or disadvantages placed on one group by another group supported by such entities as government institutions, laws, policies, etc.

Discrimination

Action for or against an individual or group by an individual based on group membership.

Bias

Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

Privilege

A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people.

Inequities

Lack of fairness or injustice.

Stereotype

A real or imagined trait of an individual applied to a group.

Prejudice

A conscious or unconscious assignment of positive or negative value to the (perceived) traits of a group.



Merriam-Webster's dictionary (11th Ed.). (2016).
Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

- Study various movements in racial and social justice history to illustrate how individuals can make a difference.
- Help students think broadly about their options and opportunities for leadership. Some options might include organizing dialogues, small gatherings, or school events to discuss race and trauma, and to advocate for equity and inclusion; volunteering with local grassroots organizations; or helping to make messages of equity and inclusivity visible on school grounds, such as designing and displaying posters.



- Engage students directly and support student-led activism to help students experience teachers as allies. This can further enhance the learning experience, applying lessons learned in a meaningful manner as well as deepening trusting relationships.
- Create and support student-led activities and organizations that teach leadership skills through action. Make sure the activities are truly led by students and give them space and permission to be creative and heard.

6

Care for Yourself: Be introspective and reflective to better understand your own beliefs, ideas, and responses. Working with students who exhibit traumatic stress reactions in response to historical and racial trauma can be emotionally and psychologically draining for educators. Seek out assistance and secure support for yourself when needed (Keengwe, 2010; Carter, 2007).

- Reflect on your own identity and worldview, regardless of your race or cultural identity. Consider sharing reflections with other staff or colleagues and discuss about how your identity and worldview may impact your beliefs, biases, experiences, and responses.
- Keep in mind that these conversations about race and historical trauma, whether with colleagues or students, are often challenging, regardless of your race. Working to maintain a safe and brave environment for students while facilitating these discussions can add additional stress, difficulty, and exhaustion.
- Seek out various allies to help you process and grow as you address race and trauma in the classroom. Consider identifying allies who are of different races and cultures as well as those with whom you share racial or cultural experiences.
- Do what you can to process the stories, experiences, and images that bother you most with your colleagues and peers before engaging your students. Make sure you're emotionally ready to hear students' perspectives.
- Be ready to consult with parents, mental health staff, and community partners for assistance when addressing these types of issues in the classroom.
- Form a staff or colleague "buddy system" to practice using trauma-informed and culturally- responsive language and creating a safe and brave environment for students to discuss race.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources may also be useful to educators, although they do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the NCTSN.

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