Majoritarian Stories and Counterstories: Critical Race Theory Approaches for Countering Deficit Discourse in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper employs critical discourse analysis to interrogate rhetorics of academic deficit subtending institutional neglect of equitable opportunity for students of color at U.S. postsecondary institutions. It further reviews Critical Race Theory literature in education, paying special attention to research that foregrounds social class as a discriminate variable distinguishing truly liberatory pedagogies from the merely critical.

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Introduction: Majoritarian Stories and Counterstories

Public discussion of race in educational policy is often framed in terms of an achievement gap between White students and students of color. Framing the issue in this way ignores disparities in educational opportunities and resources that negatively affect poor students of color. Ignoring these disparities displaces public responsibility for the historical effects of race, racism, and White privilege. Scholars approaching the issue from a critical race perspective argue that public and academic discourse needs to shift away from a focus on achievement towards a focus on enhancing inputs of resources for students of color, such as teacher quality and training, challenging curricula, school funding, access to technology, parental employment, wealth and income, access to affordable housing, health care, nutrition, and childcare so they can compete fairly with White students (Milner, 2013, pp. 4-5). The consequences of uncritically discussing student achievement with disregard for the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral "debt" owed students of color in the U.S. ensures that policymakers and practitioners perpetuate inequalities through their policies, curricula, and pedagogy.

Counterstorytelling is a critical epistemology that seeks to loosen the grip White majoritarian interests hold over public discourse and educational policy through the development of new research and pedagogical paradigms that foreground the experiences of people of color in their mundane encounters systemic racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999a; Love, 2004; Morfin et. al, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). As an interdisciplinary framework partnering with such fields as ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, and law, critical race theory in education interrogates and intervenes against the long history of racial ideology and oppression in the U.S. Critical researchers use

narrative scholarship to present experiences of nondominant groups as qualitative

evidence of racial oppression (Morfin et al., 2006, Soler, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso,

2002b, Yosso, 2002). Cook (2013) defines counterstorytelling as:

> the use of grounded everyday experiences of marginalized people coupled with
>
> actual data in contextualized social situations as a way to generate knowledge by
>
> looking to the bottom, thus epistemologically centering those most often rendered
>
> invisible and silent in research (p. 186)

In higher education research, counterstorytelling is often utilized to explain how cultural

deficit discourse contributes to hostile racial climates for minority students at U.S.

colleges and universities, as well as the individual and collective resistance and survival

strategies they pursue within these contexts (Harper, 2009; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso,

2006). Ultimately, this form of scholarship recognizes that higher education has the

potential to oppress and marginalize students of color and to emancipate and empower

them (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 26). In their roles as researchers, educators, and

institutional leaders, critical race scholars seize the "opportunity to be intellectuals who

not only are interested in 'explicating an unjust social order' but will also be active

participants in 'reconstructing a just community'" (Cook, 1995, p. 185).

This paper first addresses how racist assumptions about the cultural deficit of

students of color and the achievement gap insinuate themselves into U.S. educational

policy as a function of majoritarian ideology. The cultural deficit narrative masks the

systemic denial of educational resources to students of color and the failure of

practitioners to recognize and engage with the cultural backgrounds of these students as

sources of socially useful knowledge. The entrenchment of deficit discourse in higher

education creates hostile racial climates for students of color at predominantly White institutions, leading to them feeling marginalized and disempowered.

The second half of this paper turns optimistically towards critical race counterstorytelling as a means of validating the knowledge and experiences of students of color in academic literature and institutions. Specifically, it surveys the resistant forms of knowledge, cultural practice, and community building Chicana/o and African-American students draw on to achieve academic success in college despite facing an ingrained culture of low expectations from White faculty, staff, and peers. Avenues of resistance, including a reliance on "community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005), the formation of counterspaces (Solórzano et al., 2000), and strategies of institutional navigation, are critically examined for their efficacy in debunking majoritarian narratives and creating material improvements for students of color in higher education. A review of the literature indicates that not all strategies of resistance pursued by students of color have the same potential to motivate social change. Students who pursue navigational strategies in particular run the risk of implicating themselves in extant power structures. Ultimately, university faculty and administrators of all cultural backgrounds must work to incorporate insights from counterstorytelling research into their educational praxis. Critical consciousness about race, racism, and intersecting forms of subordination must be continuously foregrounded in the development of curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional structures in order to contest majoritarian narratives and renew visions of a just society.

Race, Racism, and White Privilege

In the opening pages of his 2015 memoir *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates describes how concepts of race and racism are deployed to structure a mythic ethnic order in the U.S., marking impossible distinctions between the White middle-class—inhabitants of what Coates calls "the Dream"—and their imagined Others.

> Americans believe in the reality of "race" as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world…. But the belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes—which are indelible—this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully to believe that they are white. (p. 7)

Coates' book investigates how White paranoia has led to the historical displacement, surveillance, entrapment, and destruction of Black bodies and culture. Social scientists agree that race is a socially constructed category used, along with other categories of difference, to subordinate some Americans and secure privilege for others (Delgado, 2013; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Yosso, T. J., Parker, L., Solórzano, D. G., & Lynn, M., 2004). African-Americans, along with Latinas/os, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ persons, and people with disabilities, comprise what critical legal scholar Richard Delgado (2013) terms "out-groups" in U.S. society (p. 71). Ideologies of race and racism consist of "myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down" (Delgado, 2013, p. 3). The majority culture regulates its own cohesion by suppressing, devaluing, and abnormalizing these groups' bodies and cultures (Delgado, 2013, p. 71).

Scholars adhering to a critical race theoretical tradition argue that the social locations of Whites, men, the middle or upper classes, and heterosexuals have been reified as "natural or normal points of reference" from which American culture is articulated (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). Critical race scholars have termed this White, middle-class, heteropatriarchal perspective "majoritarian" for the way it glosses over differences among its putative constituents and presumes to represent the default attitudes of a majority of Americans. Judging majoritarian culture the norm enables ethnic and minority cultures to be judged inferior by comparison (Morfin et al., 2006; Yosso, 2005, p. 76). In the standard majoritarian narrative, middle-class Whites are assumed to be intelligent, responsible citizens who inhabit safe communities and send their children to good schools, while communities of color are sites of crippling poverty, rampant violence, and educational deficiency (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). Critical race scholars critique this majoritarian narrative from a materialist perspective, showing how racial ideology is diffused through discursive and cultural practices to camouflage and enforce the self-interest, power, and privilege of the White majority (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Theoretical Whiteness allocates cultural and material assets to White citizens, particularly those of the middle-class, based on an absent stigma toward White skin and the knowledge, skills, and abilities they are equipped with for operating within U.S. economic and civic institutions, sometimes manipulating them to their advantage (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 7). This institutional privileging of White people over people of color gives them greater access to networks of "high-paying careers, better neighborhoods (such as majority White suburban neighborhoods), and higher quality schools" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 7).

Institutional procedures for inquiring into, sanctioning, and circulating "truth" perpetuate the myth of a culturally homogeneous, legally transparent society (Cook, 2013). In the legal field, inequality between White people and people of color is deemed the result of either a cultural lag or inadequate enforcement of antidiscrimination law (Delgado, 2013, p. 71). The U.S. education system does its best to indoctrinate students of color into believing that the positivistic, liberal-democratic values of objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity that sanction White privilege serve their interests as well (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). However, these ideals contrast so disparately with students' of color own lived experiences of systemic racism that many question the cultural appropriateness of this form of knowledge. In his counterstory, Coates (2015) describes feeling alienated from formal study as a student in the Baltimore public schools of his youth. He figures "the school" as an institution that powerfully mobilizes "rote discipline" to extract "compliance" from the bodies of African-American children:

> Algebra, Biology, and English were not subjects so much as opportunities to better discipline the body, to practice writing between the lines, copying the directions legibly, memorizing theorems extracted from the world they were created to represent. (p. 25-26)

An unsatisfying alternative to oppositional life on "the street," public education involves a series of disciplinary rituals—"always packing an extra number 2 pencil," "working quietly," raising hands, asking permission, and walking single file on the right side of the hallway—backed up by corporeal punishment from his father when he disobeyed the teacher (pp. 25-28). Here Coates (2015) offers a rich description of abstract disciplinary

knowledge being transmitted in a standardized space of classrooms and hallways that emanate the threat of bodily harm. Critical race scholars have invoked similar Foucauldian tropes of power operating through the architecture and discursive practices of modern educational institutions to produce a docile citizenry (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Coates observes that for the aspiring African-American middle class, schoolhouse discipline was seen as a path of escape from "penal warehousing" in a society in which 60% of Black male high school dropouts become incarcerated (p. 26). Coates' depiction of a regimented education system enforcing disciplinary knowledge that is far removed from the lived realities of students of color aligns closely with what critical scholars have said about how majoritarian interests inform educational policy and practice (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

A History of Deficit Discourse

In the year 2000, people of color composed 28% of the U.S. population, but by 2050 they are projected to make up 50% of the country's population (Jay, 2003). The racial demographics of young Americans is even more diverse, with 37% of school-aged children currently identified as non-White and projections indicating that students of color will make up half of the entire school-aged population by 2025 (Jay, 2003). Majoritarian discourse uses a rhetoric of cultural "deficit" to mark people of color as inferior to White, middle-class norms, commonly applying the label "at-risk" to students of color. The cultural deficit paradigm is used to explain the achievement gap between White, middle-class students and poorer African-American and Latina/o students as measured by scores on national standardized tests (Ladson-Billings, 1999b; Milner, 2013). In 2008, White high schoolers scored on average 98 points higher than African-

American students on the critical reading section of the SAT, 111 points higher on the math section, and 94 points higher on the writing section (NCES, 2010). Similarly, White students had higher average scores than Chicana/o, Puerto Rican, and other Latina/o students on the reading (73 points), math (78 points), and writing (72 points) portions of the test (NCES, 2010). Disparities in ACT scores were similar, with White students scoring on average 5.6 points higher than African-American students and 4 points higher than students who identified themselves as "Hispanic" (NCES, 2010).

Other metrics of a claimed achievement gap include the proportion of high school students tracked into special education and remedial programs versus AP and honors programs. School dropout, suspension, and expulsion rates, college enrollment and completion rates, and income and life expectancy indices all favor Whites as well (Douglass Horsford & Grosland, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Love, 2004; Milner, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27; Yosso, 2002). McLaren (2012) calls the kind of knowledge measured by intelligence quotients, reading scores, and SAT results "technical knowledge" (p. 7). The ability for students to acquire and retain technical knowledge is enshrined as the goal of a U.S. education system that rationalizes deficit discourse and the notion of an achievement gap (Love, 2004). As long as students' acquisition of technical knowledge is assumed to be measured through a controlled and objective scientific methodology, the theory of race- or ethnicity-based social distinctions holds up. Once disciplinary claims of truth and objectivity are questioned as merely the self-serving consensus opinion White experts, however, racial bias in educational policymaking becomes apparent (Love, 2004).

Deficit discourse and the attendant notion of the achievement gap entered into the majoritarian narrative through social scientific research of the 1960s that sought to rationalize the social disadvantages of African Americans and Latinas/Latinos in a White-dominated society (Ladson-Billings, 1999b). At the time, this research was seen as progressive in that it replaced earlier pseudoscientific "biological deficiency models," which had sought to justify White supremacy through invented racial categories based on skin color and phenotype (Ladson-Billings, 1999a, p. 9; Love, 2004, p. 236; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 30; Yosso, 2002, p. 97). Belief in race as a biological fact was rampant in the 19th century, even among the Northern social reformers and philanthropists who undertook to educate former slaves in the South after Reconstruction (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). These educators believed that African Americans were "intellectually inferior" to Whites and did not possess the mental capacity to learn anything beyond rudimentary agricultural and industrial skills, skills that also happened to be necessary for reviving the Southern economy (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009, p. 403). By the 1960s, academic science had adapted this old story of the biological inferiority of non-Whites into a cultural deficit discourse that nonetheless continued to uphold White supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1999b). The new premise was that White, middle-class families socialize their children with knowledge, social skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors properly suited to academic success and social mobility (Ladson-Billings, 1999b; Delgado Bernal, 2002). By contrast, African Americans and other ethnicities were presumed to have cultures and family backgrounds that were inadequate, defective, and in need state intervention (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Love, 2004; Roithmayer, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Deficit discourse provided the rationale for federal

initiatives such as Head Start, Follow Through, and Title I, which were aimed at

'compensating' students of color for the cultural lag they were thought to have sustained

during their deprived childhoods (Ladson-Billings, 1999b). Despite these interventions,

public schools attended by students of color remain disproportionately overcrowded and

underfunded and have lower graduation rates than predominantly White schools (Kozol,

1991; Ladson-Billings, 1999b).

      Cultural deficit discourse blames the educational achievement gap on students and

communities of color themselves. Social problems such as the "school-to-prison

pipeline" that incarcerates one in three African-American males and one in six Latinos

are ascribed to cultural factors such as language, neighborhoods, households, work ethic,

or values (Love, 2004). Cultural deficit discourse involves the negative stereotyping of

Chicanas/Chicanos as "backward, unclean, unambitious and abnormal" (Delgado Bernal,

2002, p. 112) and African Americans as welfare recipients, irresponsible parents, drug

addicts, and gang members (Ladson-Billings 1999b; Harper, 2009). When negative

educational and social outcomes for students of color are interpreted as cultural

pathology, rather than as the effect of systemic racism, the state and school are called on

to remove minority youth from their homes and communities and resocialize them

according to White majoritarian norms (Ladson-Billings, 1999b). According to

Roithmayer (1999), school systems

      teach students of color that what they learn in their homes is primitive, mythical,

      and backward but what they learn in their classrooms in objective, historically

      accurate, and universal. Students attend class in an atmosphere of

'professionalism' … which devalues what they bring to the classroom from their

homes and neighborhoods as backward, deprived, and deficient. (p. 4)

The knowledge students of color are equipped with in the home, which they use to

interpret and respond to the adverse life circumstances, is undervalued in the formal

educational setting (McLaren, 2012, p. 7). Yosso (2005) provides the example of a

Chicana elementary student from a working-class background, who has fluency in two

languages and knowledge of how to run errands on the city bus and translate mail, phone

calls, and coupons for a parent, who is not academically rewarded in the same way as a

White student from a wealthier background who developed computer skills using his

family's home computer (p. 76). While both students possess skillsets that are

transferrable to the workplace, only that of the White student is recognized in an

educational system that develops learning outcomes and measures student achievement

based on White, middle-class norms (Yosso, 2005). In light of disparities in income,

wealth, and education between middle-class Whites and many people of color, CRT

scholars have long called for a national educational system, which universally prescribes

"educational 'standards' that detail what students should know and be able to do," to

distribute material assets that support learning such as "science labs, computers, and other

state-of-the-art technologies, appropriately certified and prepared teachers" equitably

between predominantly White and majority-minority schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate,

1995, p. 54). As it is, poor students of color are victims of educational policy twice over

in that they are denied equal access to the material resources that support learning even as

their "histories, experiences, cultures and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or

omitted within formal educational settings" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 106).

The Deficit Curriculum

Racist attitudes about the intellectual inferiority of students of color led to them being presented with unchallenging and paternalistic curricula. At the turn of the 20th century, a prevailing "social efficiency" model of education ensured that racial and ethnic minorities were trained in only those skills necessary to meet the minimum labor needs of a hierarchically organized capitalist society (Yosso, 2002, p. 96). The social efficiency model drew heavily on principles of scientific management that accelerated industrial processes through the strict division management and labor. To maximize social efficiency, then, schools and universities were expected to provide differentiated sets of "socially useful" information to different strata of students (Yosso, 2002, p. 96). The social efficiency model coincided historically with biological-determinist beliefs about the intellectual inferiority of people of color, leading to a segregated curriculum in which students of color were more likely to receive trade and vocational training rather than liberal education (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). For the remainder of the 20th Century, students of color were disproportionately tracked into K-12 programs that taught them "menial labor skills" and prepared them for working-class jobs (Yosso, 2002, p. 93). White, middle-class students on the other hand were tracked into college preparatory programs, where they are taught decision-making, problem-solving, and leadership skills that prepare them to take on professional and management roles in the workforce (Yosso, 2002). It should be of little surprise then that 75% of college graduates in 2007-2008 were single, White, middle-class young adults in their early 20s, who were largely supported financially by their parents during college (ACE, 2013).

The persistence of the social efficiency model is seen today in K-12 public school tracking. White, middle-class students continue to be disproportionately placed in magnet, gifted and talented, AP, and honors programs, while poor students of color continue to face curricula that prepare them to "take direction without question, memorize without critical analysis, and focus on remedial, manual labor-focused curriculum rather than a college bound curriculum" (Yosso, 2002, pp. 93, 96). According to Yosso (2002), such curricula prepare students of color to literally serve the interests of upper- and middle-class Whites. This sort of "within-school segregation" is most dire for African-American and Hispanic male students, who make up almost 80% of the special education population in the U.S. and who are more likely to be overrepresented in alternative educational and behavioral programs and recruited into the military (Douglass-Horsford & Grosland, 2013; NEA, 2011; Stovall, 2005). A study by Lynn et al. (2010) suggests that teachers of students of color at the K-12 level, particularly those teaching African-American males, have internalized the deficit discourse to the extent that they experience a "crisis of faith" in their own abilities to support these students' learning.

The lack of confidence on the part of teachers and schools evidenced in discriminatory tracking systems and understimulating curricula affects students' sense of self-efficacy. Lopez (2003) found that Caribbean-American students in New York City who were placed in high tracks in elementary school and later switched to low tracks in high school described feeling bored and frustrated by a curriculum they saw as irrelevant, meaningless, or consisting of content they already knew. One male student in the study became so discouraged that he dropped out in eleventh grade, while others, despite

graduating, recalled receiving little support and having negative interactions with teachers (Lopez, 2003). A properly critical reading of the deficit and achievement gap narratives demonstrates that schools systems adversely affect student achievement through teacher disinterest and a failure to furnish rigorous and engaging curricula (Love, 2004).

'Cultural Literacy' and Multiculturalism

As demographics in the U.S. continued to diversify along racial and ethnic lines in the 1990s and 2000s, majoritarian deficit discourse retrenched itself in academia. Humanities and social science curricula in particular tended to elevate the experiences, knowledge, history, and achievements of the White middle class, effectively equating "Americanness" with "Whiteness" (Jay, 2003, p. 3). Majoritarian interests in the public policy arena used deficit discourse to explain what they saw as declining standards in the U.S. educational system, resulting from efforts to accommodate low-income minority students (McLaren, 2012). This reactionary agenda attempted to use federal fiscal and regulatory measures to pressure local schools to adopt a "national standards" based curriculum (Roithmayer, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1999a). Policies such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Common Core have their origin in efforts by conservatives to centralize humanities and social science curricula around a single "canon" of "great books" and the historical achievements of "great men," which are euphemisms for cultural output reflecting a White middle-class perspective (McLaren, 2012, p. 13).

This majoritarian idea of "cultural literacy" seeks to reify White middle-class norms and values as representative of a monolithic "heritage of Western civilization" (Slaughter, 1997, p. 7). From this perspective, minority cultures are deemed "beyond

civilization" (Coates, 2015, p. 43). In his counterstory, Coates describes how as a child he was led to believe that African-American "history was inferior because we were inferior, which is to say our bodies were inferior. And our inferior bodies could not possibly be accorded the same respect as those that built the West" (pp. 43-44). The 1980s saw a renewed valorization of White, middle-class culture sparked by conservative intellectuals seeking to counteract a perceived threat to normative values posed by left-leaning scholars who had entered the academy as part of the social movements of the 1960s and who focused their research and teaching on identarian concerns (Slaughter, 1997). This reactionary agenda aimed to standardize cultural knowledge by pronouncing vernacular speech "unsocialised or deprived" and defining cultural literacy as the ability to memorize "basic information on American culture (dates of battles, passages of the Constitution, etc.)" in numerical fashion (McLaren, 2012, p. 16). According to McLaren (2013), such a narrow definition of knowledge functions as a "weapon that can be used against those groups who are 'culturally illiterate,' whose social class, race, or gender renders their own experiences and stories as too unimportant to be worthy of investigation" (p. 13). Critical race theorists see calls for cultural literacy and biased national standards as a "form of colonialism, a way of imparting white, Westernized conceptions of enlightened thinking" and delegitimizing ways of knowing rooted in non-Western cultures (Roithmayer, 1999, p. 5).

The retrenchment of majoritarian narratives about the ascendency of White, middle-class identity has had the side effect of watering down and ghettoizing knowledge about minority cultures. While schools and universities appear to pay deference to U.S. society's growing "diversity" and "multiculturalism," this process is actually carried out

in only a halfhearted and trivializing way, through "curricular add-ons" (Jay, 2003, p. 6).

According to Jay (2003), multicultural education in U.S. school systems is a site of

contestation between majoritarian and liberal-reformist interests:

> Multicultural education becomes incorporated as a terrain on which those in
>
> power attempt to negotiate the "oppositional voices" of multiculturalists and
>
> multicultural educators, securing for themselves a continued position of
>
> leadership…. Multiculturalists' "oppositional voices" are effectively channeled
>
> into 'ideological safe harbors,' where they cannot disrupt the system. (p. 6)

Despite the sometimes benign intentions of those who implement them, multicultural

initiatives are "sucked back into the system, preventing them from offering any

substantial changes to the current order" (Jay, 2003, p. 5). In primary school,

multicultural education takes the form of exposing students to diverse cultures merely by

"eating ethnic or cultural foods, singing songs or dancing, reading folktales, and other

less than scholarly pursuits" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 61). Likewise, in

secondary school, African-American or Native-American histories may be treated

occasionally, in specified units, but are usually examined from the perspective of White

colonists or abolitionist saviors (Yosso, 2002). Coates (2015) describes how his school

curriculum championed the historical achievements of Whites and minimized the

contributions of African Americans: "Everyone of any import, from Jesus to George

Washington, was white…. [H]istory books that spoke black people only as sentimental

'firsts'—first black five-star general, first black congressman, first black mayor—always

presented in the bemused manner of a category of Trivial Pursuit" (p. 43). Ladson-

Billings (1999a) remarks on the way mainstream curricula have "sanitized" narratives of

civil rights icons such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., by ignoring Parks' long

history as a civil rights organizer and King's radical commitment to economic justice and

opposition to the Vietnam War (pp. 21-22). Coates (2015) describes how as a child he

was presented with a neutered and pacifistic rendition of Civil Rights Movement in

school during African-American History Month: "Our teachers urged us toward the

example of freedom marchers, Freedom Riders, and Freedom Summers, and it seemed

that the month could not pass without a series of films dedicated to the glories of being

beaten on camera (Coates, 2015, pp. 31-32). Coates explains feeling confused and

humiliated by the depictions of passive resistance celebrated in officially sanctioned

versions of African-American history:

> The black people in these films seemed to love the worst things in life—love the
>
> dogs that rent their children apart, the tear gas that clawed at their lungs, the
>
> firehoses that tore off their clothes and tumbled them into the streets. They
>
> seemed to love the men who raped them, the women who cursed at them, love the
>
> children who spat on them, the terrorists that bombed them. *Why are they showing*
>
> *this to us?*

Despite the liberal intentions of those who implement it, multicultural education as a

curricular add-on can produce feelings of insult and inferiority in the students of color.

As such, rather than achieving the transformative goal of alleviating racial injustice,

multicultural education is subverted to the benefit of the White elite.

    The situation is no better at supposedly enlightened institutions of higher learning.

Often, campuses that tout numerical diversity fall short of the ideal of pluralism. A

pluralistic campus is one where "students of color are not just tolerated, but their

experiences, histories, and contributions are incorporated as valuable assets into the curriculum and pedagogy of the university and as an integral part of the campus" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, p. 162). Instead, courses dedicated to examining knowledge of and about people of color continue to be relegated largely to ethnic studies departments (Yosso, 2002, p. 94). Official programming for incoming students, student groups, and employees often restricts discussion of racial issues to a "single, time-constrained social justice," imitative of multicultural instruction at the primary and secondary levels, rather than being incorporated broadly and holistically into training addressing the many intersections of cultural difference (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 82). Teacher education programs provide a largely White, middle-class teaching force with workshops, institutes, and courses in multiculturalism as mere "appendages" to core curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1999b, p. 218). At universities, the admission of minority students is often rationalized on the basis that their presence will help White students become more racially tolerant, energize class discussion, and prepare White students to get jobs in an increasingly global workforce (Yosso et al., 2004, p. 16). The insincere adoption of multicultural education as an adjunct to core curricula at all levels of schooling further marginalizes students of color within the educational system and public sphere (McLaren, 2012).

Deficit-Based Microaggressions

At purportedly enlightened U.S. higher education institutions, unconscious doubts about the educability of students of color among a largely White pool of faculty and administrators often lead to the perpetration of microaggressions. Microaggressions are conscious and unconscious acts of racial hostility that isolate students of color, trivialize

their experiences, discredit their ways of knowing, and diminish their psychological wellbeing and quality of life (Solórzano et al., 2000). In the same way that the K-12 teaching force consists largely of White, middle-class individuals, who may hold deficit-based biases against students of color, the racial composition of faculty at U.S. colleges and universities is also largely White. As of 2008, 78% of the 675,624 full-time teaching faculty at degree-granting institutions were non-Hispanic Whites, while people of color represented only 16.5% of faculty (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Whites composed 84% of tenured faculty (those who had achieved the rank of associate professor and above), while African-American scholars composed only four% of this group. Furthermore, the number of African-American faculty at institutions whose student bodies are predominantly White institutions is in decline (Patton & Catching, 2009). Meanwhile, as of 2004, 88.1% of all African-American students in higher education were enrolled at predominantly White institutions (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). The dearth of faculty of color at U.S. colleges and universities is thought to be a contributing factor in the prevalence of microaggressions perpetrated against students of color.

In line with cultural deficit discourse that informs thinking about the academic abilities of African Americans in U.S. society at large, the academic abilities of African-American students are often questioned at predominantly White higher education institutions (Solórzano et al., 2000). White students, faculty, and administrators have been shown to "persistently stereotype and hold low expectations" of students of color, particularly African-American men, while higher education researchers continue to publish "deficit-laden scholarship" that depicts students of color as "at-risk" and

disengaged (Harper, 2009, p. 709). Microaggressions perpetrated against students of

color by White faculty and staff come in forms of ignoring and maintaining low

expectations of them in classroom and administrative contexts (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Microaggressions are also perpetrated by White peers, who engage in racial

discrimination in study group formation based on the presumption that African-American

students were admitted to university because of affirmative action, not because of

intellectual capability (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 67). Research cited by Harper (2009)

confirms that African-American male students are often "met with suspicion from

professors who doubt their intellectual competence as well as White peers who pass them

over in selecting group members for collaborative work" (p. 70). Solórzano et al.'s

(2000) study found that certain campus spaces such as business schools, science

departments, academic offices, and even libraries can be especially unwelcoming to

African-American students. Students of color who enter these spaces often receive verbal

and nonverbal cues that their presence is unwanted or inappropriate (Solórzano et al.,

2000).

　　　　To illustrate how microaggressions work, Solórzano et al. (2000) offer the

example of a White professor, who, upon encountering an African-American female

student in a suite of faculty offices, exclaimed: "'Oh, I should have locked the door. My

purse is in [my office].'" The professor's statement reveals a conscious or unconscious

stereotyping of the student as likely commit property crime based on the fact that she is

African American (Solórzano et al., 2000). Another African-American student cited in

the study described the experience of a friend who chose to transfer to a historically

Black university after being subjected to the arbitrary grading practices of a graduate

instructor, who informed her that he had "'not really been around Black people'" (p. 70).

In this example, just as alarming as the behavior of the graduate student is the fact that

supervising faculty and administrators either dismissed the student's complaints or

suggested she withdraw from the course taught by the offending instructor (Solórzano et

al., 2000). A third, STEM-focused African-American student cited in the study faced a

microaggression from an academic counselor, who tried to dissuade her from taking

challenging coursework necessary for a pre-med track. This student described the

counselor as "very discouraging" and "not supportive at all" of her aspiration to become a

doctor she suspected because of the counselor's belief that African-American women

were unfit for careers STEM (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 68). Many students of color are

forced to adopt a "defensive" posture towards institutional authorities when those

authorities allow their prejudices to inform their direction of students' academic

trajectories (Solórzano et al., 2000). One student interviewed for Solórzano et al.'s (2000)

study stated that:

> [I have] to be on my guard every time I go in to talk to a professor, every time I
>
> go in and talk to the advisor, every time I go and talk to anybody. I'm like, are
>
> they really here to help me or are they going to lead me down the path I don't
>
> want to go down? (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 69)

In response to widespread pejorative racial stereotyping at predominantly White

institutions, many students of color develop an ethic of self-protection when dealing with

White faculty and administrators. These students are said to have said to have cultivated

"academic invulnerability" for their or maintaining academic achievement in the face of

microaggressions and deficit thinking posed by White students, faculty, and staff (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

Just as frequently, however, feelings of voicelessness, personal diminishment, intimidation, isolation, exhaustion, and helplessness characterize the emotional state of students of color at predominantly White institutions, as a result of having their academic abilities persistently questioned by authority figures (Solórzano et al., 2000). Solórzano et al. (2000) observed that students of color are accustomed to their "voices being silenced in the classroom discourse or with having their personal and/or group experiences and beliefs discounted" (p. 71) Causes of minority voicelessness in the classroom range from students internalizing dominant deficit discourse in the form of self-doubt, to feelings of isolation and invisibility amid a room full of different-race peers, to a principled refusal of "spokesperson pressure" that redounds on minority students at times of racial crisis on the campus or in the nation at large (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 69). This constant suppression of minority voices in the university classroom due to microaggressions and deficit discourse is a major obstacle to remaking these spaces into incubators of knowledge the rich cultural heritages of students of color. It is within this oppressive structure that conscientious students must somehow "strive to maintain good academic standing while negotiating conflicts arising from disparaging perceptions of them" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 69).

Often feelings of voicelessness and personal diminishment lead to negative educational outcomes for students of color. According to Solórzano et al. (2000), the "sense of discouragement, frustration, and exhaustion resulting from racial microaggressions left some African American students… despondent and made them feel

that they could not perform well academically" (p. 69). When students of color face deficit-informed words and actions of students, faculty, and staff, they may succumb to poorer rates of college persistence, graduation, and transfer to graduate and professional school (Harper, 2009; Solórzano et al., 2000). Since college persistence and graduation rates are among those measure used to rank the performance of students of color in relation to their White peers, the cycle of low expectations and lowered educational performance becomes self-reinforcing.

Critical Approaches: Counterstorytelling

Critical race theorists believe that overturning dominant racial narratives requires new tactics of argumentation. Whereas mainstream social scientists continue to ground their research in positivistic standards of measurability and assessment (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 69), critical race theorists revel in the rhetorical power and pleasure of the literary. They employ an innovative qualitative research method known as counterstorytelling, which values the experiences of people of color as a topic worthy of scholarly investigation because of their capacity to illuminate the position of raced individuals within structures of institutional power such as the legal and educational systems. The practice involves researchers asserting and acknowledging individual and collective experiences of people of color as valuable sources of knowledge (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Acknowledging that the "form and substance of scholarship are closely connected," researchers who compose counterstories implant previously neglected genres of autobiography, biography, narrative analysis, revisionist histories, stories, chronicles, parables, poetry, and fiction into their writing (Delgado, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate,

1995, p. 57; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). In order to give readers a clear subjective

window into the way inequality manifests in raced individuals' brushes with institutional

power, counterstorytelling walks a fine line between questioning the claims of objectivity

and rationality underlying mainstream social scientific research, and maintaining its own

scientific credibility by embedding evidence and data culled from qualitative research

into its stories (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

     Solórzano and Yosso (2002b) classify three types of counterstories: personal,

other people's, and composite. "Personal counterstories" recount a researcher's own

experiences with racism and other forms of subordination. Often these stories take the

form of autobiographical reflections juxtaposed with a review and critical analysis of

extant literature (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 32). Counterstories that relate other

people's experiences with racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination are

narrated in the third-person voice and generally juxtapose biographical depictions with

critical analysis of U.S. history and institutions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 33).

Solórzano et al.'s (2000) investigation of microaggressions at predominantly White

institutions is an example of a counterstory that documents other people's experiences.

Finally, the "composite counterstory" compiles information collected through various

means to create "composite characters," who are then placed in fictional contexts where

they discuss issues of racism and subordination from personal and historical perspectives

(Cook, 2013, p. 182; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 32). Ladson-Billings (2006) notes

that critical race scholars are not simply "making up stories," rather they are constructing

narratives that highlight the abusive historical, socio-cultural, and political conditions

marginalized individuals face on account of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity,

religion, or national origin (p. xi). Counterstorytelling engenders data through focus groups and in-person interviews (Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). Delgado (2013) contends that counterstories must be based on careful empirical observation in order to build credibility with the skeptical or "defensive" reader (p. 79).

In education research, counterstorytelling gives students of color the opportunity to present their lived experiences to elite academic audiences in hopes of transforming educational theory and pedagogy (Cook, 2013). Counterstories attempt to make their readers "question whether any person should be subjected to the treatment detailed in the story" (Morfin et al., 2006, pp. 252-253). The "destructive function" of counterstorytelling lies in its ability to shatter complacency and challenge the status quo by depicting majoritarian narratives as "ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel" (Delgado, 2013, p. 72). Counterstorytelling, then, is a multipurpose "strategy of telling stories *and* an analytical tool for examining stories," particularly those told that perpetuate deficit discourse (Patton & Catching, 2009, p. 716). The twofold function of the counterstory is often summarized by critical scholars as empowering the "voice" of people of color while also demanding "hearing" from institutional authorities.

The principle of "voice" in counterstorytelling provides for the empowerment and "psychic preservation of marginalized groups" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57). As was seen with many of the African-American students in Solórzano et al.'s (2000) study, a pervasive atmosphere of deficit discourse at predominantly White institutions results students of color facing a continuous assault of microaggressions. This assault can lead to the "self-condemnation" among students of color, when they internalize the deficit labels assigned to them by majoritarian discourse (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57).

Through the self-reflexive process of narrating their own life experiences, students of color can be awakened to the historical causes of their subjugation and oppression and cease inflicting mental violence on themselves (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Love, 2004).

Counterstorytelling also allows people of color to create bonds of "cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings" among themselves, cultivating solidarity and empowerment (Delgado, 2013, p. 71). As stories circulate among those who have been injured by racism, they discover they are not alone in their suffering, and, moreover, they are part of shared legacy of resistance to racial discrimination (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Yosso (2005), counterstorytelling helps people of color become "empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves" (Yosso, 2005, pp. 75-76). At the same time, counterstorytelling is careful to avoid representing people of color as a homogenized group whose stories lack distinctive personality and nuance (Cook, 2013; Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). By using voice to fully represent the complexity of people of color's experiences, including their "contradictions, tensions, hopes, fears," counterstories create realistic and humane portrayals of individual and collective experiences within racial structures (Cook, 2013, p. 191).

In addition to empowering and solidarizing people of color, counterstorytelling prompts those who hold majoritarian perspectives to reconsider their belief in the social and cultural inferiority of people of color. Delgado (2013) suggests that counterstorytelling opens up a "dialectic of competition and rejection" between the

majoritarian narrative to which majority-race readers subscribe and experiential knowledge the raced subject shares through the counterstory. This dialectic can cause the majority-race reader to experience the social reality of the storyteller as his or her own (Delgado, 2013). The "reality-creating potential" of the counterstory lies in the movement "back and forth between two worlds"—that of the majoritarian narrative and that of the minority storyteller," which the majority-race reader undergoes (Delgado, 2013, p. 79). The process of "hearing" a counterstory requires not only that members of dominant social groups listen to counterstories told by people of color, but also that they cultivate an ethic of receptivity to the stories as valid and legitimate forms of knowledge from which changes in their own personal and public behavior may emanate (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). For majority-race individuals, truly hearing the counterstories of people of color involves a "deliberate, conscious, and open type of listening" that leads to self-reflexivity and transformative praxis (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 116).

  Self-reflexivity on the part of education researchers and practitioners opens the possibility of transforming methodological and pedagogical practices (Cook, 2013; Delgado Bernal, 2002; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). In order to compose effective counterstories researchers must acknowledge their own positionality within structures of racial subordination and oppression (Cook, 2013; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Soler, 2013). They must not remain aloof from the "distress, heartache, joys, and pain of the people who share their stories and experiences" (Cook, 2013, p. 190). Neither should they allow their own authorial voices to overpower those of the subjects from whom they derive data (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Instead, researchers must remain attentive to the intentions of their subjects in collecting, unfolding, analyzing, interpreting data (Soler,

2013). Practicing self-reflexivity, critical race researchers detail their own social positions and identities to alert their audience to the ways personal biases may have informed the research process (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Critical race researches may apply three theoretically robust approaches to qualitative inquiry to ensure their counterstories meet disciplinary standards of scientific rigor. The first of these, the phenomenological approach, allows the researcher to access "lived experiences" of subjects, by documenting "what participants have experienced, how they have experienced it, and their sensemaking regarding various effects relative to the phenomenon" (Harper, 2009, pp. 702-703). In addition to this approach, researchers often apply "theoretical sensitivity," which enables them to reference their own personal and professional experiences to process, interpret, and generate meaning from data. Theoretical sensitivity gives researchers insight into the situations they describe and allows them to distinguish important information for their readers (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). Finally, "cultural intuition" extends the idea of personal experience beyond the individual to include communal experiences, community memory, and intuitive knowledge derived from eclectic sources such as fiction, poetry, folk wisdom (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 33-34).

Once the data raw data on people of color's experiences with racism has been collected and analyzed, researchers compose stories based on that data using techniques of plot development, characterization, and tone. Many counterstories feature plots that progress logically, sequentially, and linearly through time from beginning to middle to end (Soler, 2013). Delgado (2013) explains that the purpose of plot is to "beguile the reader and get him or her to suspend judgment" (p. 79). The strategic deployment of an

ironic or satiric tone is often used to reveal the absurdity of racist beliefs (Delgado, 2013). Humor has a long lineage in the African-American and Hispanic folk traditions, which contain stories of "humble folk piquing the pompous or powerful and bringing them down to more human levels" (Delgado, 2013, p. 72). In addition to satire, heroic stories about figures such as Paul Robeson, Gregorio Cortez, and John Brown, each of whom fought for human rights in the face of unlawful authority, circulate in vernacular folk traditions (Delgado, 2013). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state that marginalized groups have traditionally used storytelling as "a kind of medicine to heal the wounds caused by racial oppression" (p. 57). A unity of form and substance is visible in the relationship between the modern-day counterstories told by critical race theorists and the traditional storytelling practices of vernacular cultures. Lawrence (1992) notes that:

> African Americans have … used storytelling to mask their most radical thoughts and aspirations. From the Negro spirituals that disguised their quest for freedom in the stories of the Old Testament heroes to the Brother Rabbit stories to the work of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, blacks have often told their most compelling truths in fiction (pp. 2273-2274).

Thus, counterstories produced by critical race theorists join a tradition that has long been a source of strength and inspiration for people of color.

Critical Approaches: Cultural Community Wealth

Critical race theorists have developed terms to describe the traditional educative role of storytelling in vernacular cultures, including "community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005). Delgado Bernal (2002) and Yosso (2005) document the role of storytelling in the early education of Chicana/o youth in family and community contexts, arguing that

mainstream pedagogy would benefit from validating and adopting some of these practices. In Chicana/o communities, adults transmit household knowledge to youth in the form of myths, folktales, *cuentos* [stories], *dichos* [proverbs], *consejos* [advice], kitchen talk, autobiographical stories, family histories, scenarios, and parables (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005). This storytelling tradition equips Chicana/o students with knowledge, abilities, and social contacts necessary to navigate and resist the racism, sexism, and classism that confronts them in school environments (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The content of these counterstories is often at odds with the sanitized and hegemonizing version of U.S. history Chicana/o students receive in public schools and at universities in that they emphasize neglected themes of conquest, segregation, patriarchy, homophobia, assimilation, and resistance (Delgado Bernal, 2002). For instance, a Chicano may take his son to his job to show him the difficulties of manual labor and stress the importance of education, or a Chicana may make financial sacrifices to put her daughter in sports to emphasize principles of time management, fitness, teamwork, self-discipline, and dignity (Yosso, 2002). Counterstories like these unfold in the home or community rather than at educational institutions, strengthening bonds of kinship between Chicana/o youth and their broad extended families of relatives, friends, and neighbors (Yosso, 2005). Chicana/o college students who are supported by kinship networks and lessons learned at home have been shown to exhibit higher levels of altruism, stronger commitment to family and community, and stronger interest in serving others in their careers than White students (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 1996).

Participating in interactive storytelling traditions also enables Chicana/o youth to develop strong communication skills such as memorization, attention to detail, dramatic

pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme, as well as the ability to express themselves in different vocal registers (whispering, whistling, and singing), languages (English and Spanish), and media such as visual art, music, and poetry (Yosso, 2005). Ladson-Billings (1999b) observes that "good communication—intercultural or intracultural—requires healthy respect for the forms and varieties of communication styles that people use to express themselves" (p. 225). In this sense, bilingual, bicultural Chicana/o students demonstrate a level of language competence and communicative facility that surpasses many of their teachers. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2010) found that 83.5% of K-12 teachers identify as non-Hispanic Whites, confirming Ladson-Billing's (1999) assertion that the vast majority of public school teachers have led "monocultural, ethnically encapsulated lives that have not afforded them the opportunities to broaden their linguistic and communicative repertoires" (p. 225).

Community cultural wealth can effectively be harnessed to "specific navigational goals to challenge (resist) oppressive conditions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Delgado Bernal's research (2002) indicates that while Chicana/o students regularly draw on home-based resources to persist in hostile racial climates in school, advance to and graduate from college, and make positive contributions to their communities. Mainstream educators can transform educational research and praxis by aligning its methods with the storytelling practices of vernacular cultures. Delgado Bernal (2002) proposes that educational researchers adopt the *trenzas y mestizaje* methodological approach, meaning the "braiding of theory, qualitative research strategies, and a sociopolitical consciousness," in order to validate the community cultural wealth of Chicana/o students as knowledge

(Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 116). Delgado Bernal (2002) offers strategies for making the educational system more hospitable for bilingual students, including having universities employ them as tutors in language departments and having primary and secondary schools share information with the parents of bilingual students in languages other than English. By studying the experiential knowledge Chicana/o students gain through participation in their families and communities, the work of Delgado Bernal (2002) and Yosso (2005) is in line with the narrative turn in educational research. The storytelling practices of Chicana/o communities prove to be a productive source of scripts that resist majoritarian knowledge and history (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Critical Approaches: Counterspaces

Similar to the way Chicana/o students turn towards their homes and communities to receive the affirmation denied them in public schools and universities, African-American college students who feel disaffirmed in White-dominated spaces on university campuses may retreat to "counterspaces," or hybrid academic/social sites where "deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). Counterspaces can be either informally networked peer groups, such as student-organized academic study halls, or they can be formally embedded within the institutional diversity infrastructure, consisting of diversity offices, multicultural centers, student organizations, and fraternities and sororities (Solórzano et al., 2000). With the backing of faculty of color, these counterspaces may spearhead further consolidation of diversity infrastructure as friendship and study groups evolve into friendship groups and community outreach groups (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Solórzano et al. (2000) link the formation of counterspaces to practices of counterstorytelling when they explain how counterspaces "allow African American students to foster their own learning and to nurture a supportive environment wherein their experiences are validated and viewed as important knowledge" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). Counterspaces materialize practices of counterstorytelling, fixing the circulation and celebration of the experiential knowledge of students of color within institutional venues and routines. Counterspaces can help ease transitions of students of color from their homes and communities to predominantly White campuses where they may feel marginalized. Counterspaces also serve as sites where students of color develop agency through mentorship, networking, and the sharing of study techniques and career advice (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). While the Solórzano et al. (2000) maintain that creating counterspaces is generally an "important strategy for minority students' academic survival," they concede that there is a slight tendency for the peer socialization function of counterspaces to impede students' academic progress. As an African-American female student remarked of well-attended African-American study group:

> I go to study with the 'homies' all the time. Go to [a certain student lounge] and you're going to see a million African American faces, and it's going to be cool…. You might not get that much studying done but it's a cool little network that's created because classes are so uncomfortable. (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 71)

Minority students who experience isolation from same-race peers in predominantly White classrooms may choose to socialize at loosely organized study groups. This socialization may bolster the psychological wellbeing of minority students but may also adversely impact their study habits and academic performance (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Unfortunately, recent declines in funding are forcing some predominantly White universities to shutter physical counterspaces or subsume them within larger departments (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). These institutions may turn to inclusivity programming at first-year orientation and throughout the school year to help create a welcoming atmosphere for students of color (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Cultural centers and student groups are also using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to extend their reach to students of color. New "virtual" counterspaces also include online chat services offered through official cultural center webpages where prospective and current students can have their questions and concerns addressed in real time (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Critical Approaches: Navigational Strategies

Navigational capital is an additional resource students of color draw on in responding to majoritarian deficit discourse at U.S. colleges and universities (Yosso, 2005). This term refers to a set of psychological and social strategies people of color use to maneuver through social institutions not designed to cater to their needs, such as the job market, the health care and judicial systems, and schools, including predominantly White universities (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Some students of color at racially hostile White campuses are able to adopt a "set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events" known as "psychological resilience" (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 229). A composite character named "Corey" in research by Harper (2009) displays such resilience by responding proactively to a microaggression from a White professor. The narrative depicts Corey calling out the professor, who was described as being

"offensively shocked" by a thoughtful contribution Corey had made to the class

discussion:

> Instead of leaving class with the psychological burden of wondering if the
>
> professor was so surprised because he didn't expect a Black man to have anything
>
> smart to contribute, Corey said he asked the faculty member right then and there
>
> why he was so visibly astonished. (Harper, 2009, p. 707)

The fortitude Corey showed in challenging the professor's doubts about his intellectual

ability enabled him to avoid the psychological damage that may have been sustained had

he not confronted the professor in such an immediate and public way. In doing so, Corey

potentially transformed the power dynamic that exists between White faculty and

students of color in the university classroom. Corey's positive self-assertion also likely

entailed personal academic risk given the discretion White faculty and administrators

exercise in evaluating students of color who inhabit the same institutional spaces they do.

Navigational capital can be crucial to the academic and social success of students

of color at predominantly White universities, but it can also precipitate the unbinding of

community ties and loss of cultural distinction. Harper's (2009) study sought to

counteract deficit views of African-American male college students by highlighting the

experiences of the exceptionally engaged "black male achiever," who he defined as an

honors student possessing a cumulative GPA above 3.0, a history of leadership and

engagement in student organizations, "meaningful relationships" with faculty and

administrators, participation in enriching study abroad, internship, service learning, and

summer research opportunities, in addition to the receipt of merit-based scholarships and

awards (p. 704). Harper (2009) used in-person interviews with students matching these

criteria to construct a composite counterstory charting how high-achieving African-American male students navigate institutional spaces. Harper's (2009) research found that students follow a "multifaceted navigational strategy," which includes leadership of both minority-interest and White-dominated student organizations, support and mentorship of same-race peers, "strategic publicity" of educational achievements in defiance of deficit viewpoints, and outspoken opposition to racial stereotyping and microaggressions (Harper, 2009, p. 709). However, the research also indicates how some strategies of institutional navigation fall short of transforming the university into a site of sociopolitical contestation.

Although Harper's (2009) study points to several educationally and socially purposeful activities students of color can engage in to secure personal visibility, leadership, and institutional influence with the ultimate goal of achieving academic success and a profitable career after graduation, their behaviors also serve as a reminder of the way even individual agency is implicated in structures of inequality. The characters, who achieve personal success in college by maneuvering among patrons, constituencies, and powerbases, continue their pursuit of that success into their post-collegiate lives (p. 706). As freshly minted college graduates, the achievers are said to have already accrued "social and political capital," which they will use to "collectively advance Black communities and strengthen Black male representation at the highest levels of leadership and policymaking in various sectors" (Harper, 2009, p. 706). The sociological theory of "social capital" explains how education, language, social networks, and connections acquired through "formal schooling" arrogate social mobility to some individuals and social groups while excluding others (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). The story hints

that liberal fantasies of meritocracy and individualism can induce even well-intentioned social actors to lean opportunistically on levers of power and participate in institutional reward systems for personal gain. It can be argued that Harper (2009) overstates the extent to which his characters demonstrate "politically effective navigation of predominantly White educational environments" (p. 702). They seem at times to evince an apolitical self-interest in their pursuit of social capital and mobility that critical race theorists who hold tightly to the neo-Marxist roots of critical race theory may find troubling (Brimhall-Vargas et al., 2012; Jay, 2003; Yosso, 2005). These scholars express worry that the uncritical application of counterstorytelling may erode its integrity as a critical practice.

According to Brimhall-Vargas et al. (2012), a lack of critical rigor in scholarly counterstorytelling can lead to the creation of "watered-down" counterstories that differ from authentic counterstories in the way they "embody neoliberal perspectives that lack the critical consciousness to effectively trouble dominant ideologies" (pp. 7-8). These uncritical counterstories offer seductively fresh "perspectives on dominant narratives without revealing their absurdity or the real-life perils of the hegemony they promote" (Brimhall-Vargas et al., 2012, p. 5). The concept of hegemony derived from neo-Marxist theory prominent in legal and cultural studies explains how majoritarian interests obtain the consent of subordinate groups through "on-going negotiations, with concessions granted to subordinate groups to secure their compliance" (Jay, 2003, p. 6). Hegemony creates consensus between the White majority and subordinate racial groups when "resources, social awards, and the power to shape the norms and values of society, usually afforded to Whites" are paternalistically transferred to token members of a

subordinate group to win their consent (Jay, 2003, p. 6). From this perspective, some of the navigational strategies Harper (2009) promotes, such as leveraging "leadership in mainstream clubs and organizations to foster relationships with White administrators" (p. 706), although they may initially appear to be "forms of oppositional behavior," can in fact be understood as "self-defeating or conformist strategies that feed back into the system of subordination" (Yosso, 2005, p. 81).

Indeed, schooling at all levels is cited by critical race theorists as a hegemonic device for "acculturating students to the interest of the dominant group" (Jay, 2003, p. 7). In this sense, the school joins other hegemonic institutions such as the mainstream media, the church, or the heteronormative family in "perpetuating the myth of individual achievement and entrepreneurship" that ensures that those who "fail at school or who don't make it into the world of the 'rich and famous' will view such failure in terms of personal inadequacy" (McLaren, 2013, p. 11). By transacting navigational capital acquired in college into social and political capital in their careers, Harper's (2009) characters access middle-class upward mobility with the potential of also adopting its attendant cultural values and mores. Thus, social mobility can have the effect of socially distancing the achievers from other members of their subordinated racial group whose pursuit of navigational capital through higher education was stymied. Witnessing the successes of high-achieving African-American individuals is of small comfort to same-race peers who do not achieve equal levels of academic and social success. It is a function of hegemony, then, that these students would "blame themselves for school failure–a failure that can certainly be attributed to the structuring effects of the economy and the class-based division of labor" (McLaren, 2013, pp. 11-12). In these cases, the

structural basis of widespread inequalities in wealth, power, and privilege between groups remains obscure and unchallenged (McLaren, 2013).

Statistical evidence indeed shows that despite the exemplary performance of high-achieving students such as those Harper profiles, most African-American men do not successfully access navigational capital in college. For instance, Harper (2009) himself notes that African-American male college students as a whole spend less time studying, note-taking, essay-writing, and participating in class and groupwork than their same-race female classmates (p. 700). The fact that many African-American male collegians do not develop the skills necessary to effectively navigate institutional spaces likely contributes to the fact that 67.6% of those who start college do not graduate within six years—the highest attrition rate of any racial, ethnic, or gender demographic in the U.S. (Harper, 2009, p. 700). In his eagerness to defy majoritarian discourses of African-American male underachievement in higher education by depicting the navigational strategies employed by a group of select high-achievers, Harper (2009) neglects the counterstories of those who for whatever reason are unable to cultivate navigational capital in college, a factor that leads to less optimistic academic and life outcomes. When a counterstory such as Harper's (2009) focuses only on the experiences of an elite group of students of color to the exclusion of others, it becomes complicit in suppressing the stories of those who are systemically deprived of society's benefits. This suppression can sow seeds of within-group disidentification that are at odds with the collectivizing aims of more radical approaches to social justice.

Coda: Toward Social Transformation

The ultimate goal of critical race theory is to create and impart transformative knowledge that leads to social justice for all of society's participants (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; McLaren, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Whereas navigational strategies of resistance exhaust their usefulness at the point at which they encourage an individualistic pursuit of social prestige that divides rather than unites subordinated peoples, transformative knowledge asks people of color and others to scrutinize the institutional contexts that reward or marginalize them. Transformative knowledge cultivates in scholars, practitioners, activists, and citizens a "recognition of the structural nature of oppression and the motivation to work towards social and racial justice" (Jay, 2003, p. 8). Such knowledge has the power to expose liberal discourses of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, equal opportunity, and incremental change as hidden tools of indoctrination (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Yosso, 2005). Through intentional questioning of liberal discourses, holders of transformative knowledge can gain insight into the way hegemony operationalizes "cooperation and consensus, and the subsequent downplaying of conflict as a basic social force in society" (Jay, 2003, p. 8). Transformative knowledge is thus resolutely "conflictual" rather than accommodationist in its approach. As such, it "poses a serious threat to the dominant power structures operating in American society that privilege Whites over all other racial groups" (Jay, 2003, p. 8). Transformative knowledge has the potential to enlighten and empower minority students by revealing how majoritarian discourse cynically disguises racial subordination (Jay, 2003).

At its best, counterstorytelling not only critiques oppression and raises consciousness but also spurs social transformation (McCoy, 2015). For social

transformation to occur, critical race scholars must not simply be "passive producers of knowledge." They must also be "*active* participants in the struggle for justice and equality" (Cook, 2013, p. 185). They are called to take up the mantle of leadership in a social justice movement that seeks to bring about:

> full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. (Bell, 2013, p. 21)

Transformative knowledge aspires to equitably redistribute social, political, economic, and cultural resources in a way that abolishes liberal civil society and replaces it with a more egalitarian one (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; McLaren, 2013). From a critical perspective, the redistribution of educational resources at every level of schooling is the surest path toward the "qualitative and material improvement of the educational experiences of people of colour" (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005, p.13). This vision can only be accomplished through coalition building among subordinated groups, a "deliberative, collective action" that rejects the ascendency of one social group over others in favor of the "general rights of society" (McLaren, 2013, p. 7). Critical race theory observes that systems of subordination are organized at intersections of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and ability (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, Yosso et al., 2004; Yosso, 2005). Thus, it is impossible to fight racism without also standing against sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, and other forms of oppression or injustice (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

Scholars situated in the academy can be agents of social change through activism, curriculum development, pedagogy, and institutional steering. Slaughter (1997) remarks on the tremendous power vested in the "norming" function of the professoriate:

> Every time we select students, grade, evaluate masters' theses, dissertations, junior colleagues and peers, we are 'norming'.... When we do research, we engage in discursive practices that shape the narratives that constrain our lives as well as the lives of others. (p. 18)

History has shown that the work of progressive academics is reinvigorated through close ties to grassroots activism. For example, the creation of 500 African-American studies programs by the early 1970s was directly tied to the demands of civil rights, Black Power, and student activists (Slaughter, 1997). Similarly, in 1993, a hunger strike by a professor, students, and community members, supported by large-scale demonstrations and sit-ins, prompted UCLA's chancellor to elevate the school's Chicana/o studies program to departmental status (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Disciplinary revolutions such as these continue to attract minority faculty to the academy, where they contribute to the creation of new knowledge that foregrounds the experiences of people of color (Slaughter, 1997). Increasingly, universities have sought to broaden the intellectual experience of all students by requiring them to take classes dedicated to non-Western cultural traditions as part of the general education curriculum (Slaughter, 1997, p. 7). Faculty must continue to hold themselves and one another accountable for maintaining healthy campus racial climates by implementing faculty orientations, seminars, and professional development training that focus critically on race and racism in curriculum design and delivery (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 70).

It has already been noted how physical and virtual counterspaces provide comfort and validation to underrepresented students at predominantly White institutions that may be otherwise racially hostile. The geographic or architectural isolation of these spaces may impede the more thorough integration of students of color into academic culture and student life (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). One way faculty and administrators can work toward reforming campus culture is by consciously attending to inclusivity and accessibility in the spatial arrangement of classrooms and student life centers and in the design of online teaching modules (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 70). Educators must also be self-reflexive about promoting pluralism and equity in their curricula and pedagogy. Rousseau and Tate (2003) have observed that teachers often have a restrictive understanding of equity as an "equality of treatment rather than outcomes" (p. 212). In this view, as long as they believe they are measuring minority students by the same standards as other students, they fail to notice the differential effects their instructional practices may have on the achievement of minority students (Rousseau & Tate, 2003). This focus on treatment as opposed to outcome does nothing to compensate for the opportunity gaps students of color may have encountered before entering the university (Rousseau & Tate, 200). To better advance equal educational outcomes for students of color, instructors can create writing assignments and exams, and host classroom discussions, that engage students of color in counterstorytelling practices that permit them to share personal and experiential knowledge with the instructor and others (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

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