Beyond the Face of Race:
Emo-Cognitive Explorations of White Neurosis and Racial Cray-Cray

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Interaction with White people is at times so overwhelming, draining, and incomprehensible that it causes serious anguish for People of Color. Take for example when a White colleague abruptly links arms with a colleague of Color and declares, "It's not about race but I have something to tell you" (signaling it is definitely about race). The colleague of Color—whose arm is still being held—is left wondering why in the world a White person would start an interaction in such a manner. *How about a hello? Does she begin conversations with White people like this? And why does she feel entitled to grab me before telling me what is not about race?* In this seemingly simple interaction is a plethora of emotional and mental racial dynamics, which in this article we term emo-cognitions. We use this term to capture the simultaneous interplay between cognitions and emotions. While these emo-cognitions and the behaviors they inform are generated from Whites,[1] they implicate people of color who must navigate them. Thus, a specific racial

co-production is formed. We term this co-production racial cray-cray (cray-cray=an African-American euphemism for utter craziness); the crazy making that results from White denial of racial saliency (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011).

While the White colleague's approach described above is certainly a sign of White entitlement, it is also a sign of racial anxiety; an emotional condition that is routinely produced in interracial conversations that hint to race. In the example above, given that it has been racially framed (through the disclaimer that it isn't about race), it would be reasonable for the colleague of color to offer her racial perspective on the situation her White colleague wants to share. Yet the surfacing of material that Whites recognize as racial appears to be an implicit cue for definitive claims such as, "But it's not about race because I'm not a racist!" People of color are left to wonder what reality Whites inhabit. *What?! What are you talking about? How can you not see this?!* In seeking to understand the emo-cognitions that undergird these dynamics, we ask, "What is the condition that compels whites to so consistently perform these behaviors, and how does it impact people of color?"

We conceptualize the predictability of these White responses as a kind of pre-existing emo-cognitive neurosis that erupts whenever colorblind ideology is challenged. Bonilla-Silva (2006) documents these responses in his study of colorblind 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 that race does not matter.

In this article, we focus on the emotional and cognitive context that underlies whiteness. We employ interdisciplinary approaches of critical Whiteness studies and critical race theory to entertain how common White responses to racial material stem from the need for Whites to deny race, a traumatizing process that begins in childhood. First, we begin with an overview of the interconnected property of race to show how this co-production is linked. Then we offer an emotional-based perspective of White racialization and how such a racialization impacts emo-cognitive behaviors. We then overlay how those expressed behaviors, White neurosis, co-produce racial cray-cray. Finally, inspired by the creative works of critical race scholar Derrick Bell (1987, 1992) who wrote parables to illustrate how mechanisms of White supremacy work their way into the everyday fabric of American life, we also weave a parable, counterstories, and a poetic letter through the article to illuminate how racial cray-cray operates.

We are preoccupied by this topic because both authors are American teacher educators—one self identifies as a brown-skinned Pinay (Filipina) and the other as White—from different institutions and in different regions of the United States. Yet in critically engaging with race in our respective teacher preparation programs, we repeatedly experience similar emo-cognitive responses from our "colorblind"

White colleagues and students. Thus theorizing common White patterns is an instructive way for us—as teacher educators—to understand how race, racism, and White supremacy are reproduced specifically through the institution of education. To this end, when we use the terms White and People of Color, we are speaking in general terms about dynamics that occur at the macro level and are pervasive throughout U.S. and Canadian society (Mills, 1997; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Carr & Lund, 2007). While our work is rooted in the United States / Canadian context and our analysis is specific to that context, Whiteness and White supremacy circulate globally (Allen, 2002; Reid, 2005); in that sense, our analysis may be usefully adapted by those outside the United States and Canada.

Mills (1997) describes White supremacy as "…the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today" (p. 1). He notes that while the system of White supremacy has shaped Western political thought for hundreds of years, it is never named nor identified as a system at all. In this way, White supremacy is rendered invisible while other political systems are identified and studied. Much of its power is drawn from its invisibility. White supremacy then is the overarching system of White Western racial domination, which manifests globally (Allen, 2002). Thus, we do not question whether or not racism is occurring in any specific situation, context, or location, or if any individual White person is or isn't engaged in racism. Nor are we concerned that by generalizing about racism and Whiteness we may be essentializing the race construct. Given that we are all operating under the system of White supremacy—which can and does morph and adapt as needed—we acknowledge that other intersecting identities, shifting boundaries, and regional contexts complicate the workings of Whiteness. Thus the antiracist project is to identify how (but not if) racism is manifesting—morphing and adapting—in any given context, both locally and globally. In this sense we do generalize and essentialize White supremacy.

Racial Interconnections of Whites and People of Color

Whiteness scholars posit that power relations are not fixed or eternal, but are circuits of norms and practices that require maintenance (Fine, 1997; Flax, 1998; Frankenberg, 1997). A major goal of a discourse on Whiteness is to make apparent what is often transparent or obscured, including the circuits of power in racialized intergroup dynamics. This allows an opportunity to track the flow of power, and potentially interrupt it, for Whiteness maintains its dominance in part through invisibility (Flax, 1998). In exposing these circuits of racial power it is important to note that there are normative rhetoric that shape how we think, feel, talk, and behave with regards to race depending on our racial positionalities.

For example Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2006) describe how Whites engage in normative discussions of race without ever uttering the word race. Yet in doing so they still manage to recycle racist discourse. Matias (2013) argues that the form

of discourse described by Bonilla-Silva and Embrick functions as what she terms "White Diss-course" because it ultimately disrespects (disses) People of Color under the guise of racial ignorance (Mill, 2007). Additionally, Yoon (2012) describes how well-intentioned White teachers engage in normative classroom dialogue through a pedagogy of politeness that continues to reinforce Whiteness by defining Whites as the beholders of what is and is not considered polite racial discourse. Matias (2012) details how standardized Eurocentric history curriculum that only heralds the accomplishments of White Americans deleteriously impacts the development of a healthy understanding of White racial identity. Yet, these racial projects are rarely explicitly understood as impacting the emotional disposition of Whites, and are often vigorously denied by Whites when their racial implications are raised.

Conversely, DuBois' (1903) work explains that African Americans (and it can be presumed that other People of Color) have a double consciousness with which they are able to navigate both their own and dominant White norms. He argues that this ability is predicated on the specific positionality of African Americans in the United States. Thus in our current racial context, they are able to decipher racially-coded talk despite living in a society that reinforces colorblind ideology and the denial of White supremacy. Adding intersectionality, Patricia Hill-Collins (1986, 1990) argues that Black females have a greater sensitivity to mechanisms of racism and patriarchy that go unseen by their White female counterparts, due in part to their racial and gender positionality. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) further the importance of positionality by explicating how the counterstories of People of Color are a clearer picture of racial oppression than their White counterparts because of their racially marginalized position in the racial structure. For Whites then, the omnipresence of Whiteness structures their lives in a false reality of colorblindness, whereas the lives of People of Color—who are constantly racialized—are structured in the stark reality of racial oppression, and these two forms of consciousness co-create one another.

Roman (1993) speaks to racial interconnectedness when she argues that simplistic explanations of racist relations need to be abandoned and that this means focusing attention on the variability of racist discourses and the contextual nuances in which they are articulated. She states:

> To ask how race operates in daily practice as a set of complex and changeable meanings is to take one modest step away from the essentialist discourse of race and toward a focus on the *unequal effects of racism* between groups of people. It means drawing attention to the dynamic interconnections between representational practices and discourses of 'race' and the power (or lack thereof) of various groups to voice *oppositional difference from or solidarity with* the racialized hegemonic centers of White power. (italics in original, p. 73)

It is not enough for teacher educators to be aware that Whiteness *does* operate inter-relationally; they need to understand how it operates in ways that are familiar and recognizable.

Race scholars argue that there are two interrelated components missing in most

efforts that address racial inequity: The existence of privilege and how it shapes those who hold it, and the defining relationship between privileged and marginalized groups (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1997; Powell, 1997). Speaking specifically to Whiteness in the context of educational disparity, Powell (1997) states, "What may be missing from this literature and from various interventions is a better understanding of the role that Whiteness plays in the knot of minority student failure" (p. 1). By focusing primarily on the academic performance of students of Color and ignoring the defining relationship between that performance and the production of Whiteness in the classroom, racism is externalized. This approach leaves the operation of Whiteness neutralized, unquestioned and intact. A primary example is when White teachers study youth of Color without the critical and corollary study of themselves in relation to those youth (Sleeter, 1996).

Levine-Rasky (2000) recommends a revised approach to Whiteness that "…shifts to the discourse, the culture, the structures, the mechanisms, and the social relations of Whiteness that produce racialized subjects including Whites" (p. 271). Therefore, in exploring the interconnectedness of Whiteness and its impact on People of Color, we start with White racial emo-cognition.

The Emo-Cognitions of Whiteness

I am a White woman 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 35 years! A White person can't get a job anymore!" I look around the room and see 40 employed people, all White. Many of them nod along with this man's rant. I look out the training room window into the larger work area, and see 50 more people, virtually all White. 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 and irrational? Why is he being so careless about the impact of his anger? Why are all the other White people either conveying silent agreement with him or tuning out? We have, after all, only articulated a definition of racism.

<div align="right">(Counterstory by Robin DiAngelo)</div>

White people in North America live in a social environment that insulates them from race-based stress. 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). This insulated environment

of racial privilege builds White expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress. This lowered ability has been conceptualized as "White Fragility" (DiAngelo, 2011). 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 by pressuring those who caused the disequilibrium (usually People of Color) to retreat (e.g., via silence, apology, care-taking, agreement, modification of the claim, and above all, conveying "compassion" for the White upset). White racial disequilibrium results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. These interruptions include:

• Suggesting that a White person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (interruption to objectivity);

• People of Color talking directly about their racial perspectives (interruption to White racial codes);

• People of Color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of White people in regards to race (interruption 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 (interruption to colonialist relations);

• A fellow White not providing agreement with one's interpretations (interruption to White solidarity);

• Receiving feedback that one's behavior had a racist impact (interruption to White liberalism);

• Suggesting that group membership is significant (interruption to individualism);

• Acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (interruption to meritocracy);

• Being presented with a Person of Color in a position of leadership (interruption 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 critical multicultural education (interruption to White centrality). (DiAngelo, 2011)

Within the context of White supremacy, each of these interruptions becomes exceptional. In turn, Whites have not developed the emotional skills or mental stamina to cope with them and thus are often at a loss for how to respond in constructive ways (constructive, as we use it here, refers to ways that could *bridge* racial divides.

Of course these responses are certainly constructive if the intent is to *maintain* racial divides).

Drawing from interdisciplinary studies, Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1993) may be useful here. According to Bourdieu, habitus is a socialized subjectivity; a set of dispositions which generate practices 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 maintenance of the social and material advantages of the White structural position.

Another interdisciplinary approach is how Omi and Winant posit the U.S. racial order as an "unstable equilibrium," kept equilibrated by the State, but unstable due to continual conflicts of interests and challenges to the racial order (pp. 78-9). Using Omi and Winant's concept of unstable racial equilibrium, White Fragility can be thought of as unstable racial equilibrium at the level of habitus. When any of the above triggers (interruptions in the habitus) occur, the resulting disequilibrium becomes intolerable and equilibrium must be restored. Conversely, People of Color, who recognize the power of White equilibrium, are coerced to maintain it, lest endure Whiteness amplified.

A large body of research about children and race demonstrates that children start to construct their 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). 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)

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 People of Color. People of Color involved in the same opposition to racism are fully aware of the racial emo-cognitions of their White liberal counterparts. Yet although understood, it cannot be named for the mere mention of privilege is consistently met with a punishing umbrage or resource-draining angst.

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 a system of racism (Zamudio & Rios, 2006). In so responding, these liberal Whites invoke the power to choose when, how, and how much to address or challenge racism. Thus, whether it is coded in the rhetoric of diversity, cultural competency/relevancy, or urban understanding, White liberals dictate the racial discourse without ever having to name race; a process that operates in teacher education. For example, cultural responsive teaching, multicultural education, and urban education philosophies are proliferating in teacher education programs within the United States. These teacher preparation programs are predominate with liberal White females, thus causing an overwhelming presence of Whiteness (Sleeter, 2001). Yet for teacher educators of Color and race scholars in general, the discussion of race is silenced (Matias, 2013a, 2013b).

This is further illustrated by the fact that if Whites "must hear about" Whiteness, they prefer to hear about it from other Whites rather than listening to a Person of Color. Because People of Color are marked by race and inferiority in the White mind, their intellect and visibility in this context are received by Whites as an affront to White moral order (Orelus, 2011). 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 accusations and attacks while deflecting any recognition of culpability or need of accountability. Yet ironically, as Whites defend their moral codes they are accusing and attacking People of Color of the very thing they are performing. People of Color, who are aware of this projection—if not explicitly then certainly implicitly—are thus burdened to find ever more sophisticated ways to navigate it.

What's This Argument About Again?
Introducing White Neurosis and Racial Cray-Cray

So the readings have no relevance to your learning despite the fact that as the professor who chose them, I clearly see them as relevant? Can you tell me what is relevant to your learning?... Learning about African Americans through the work of DuBois is not relevant to the state of education? On what do you base your argument? Oh, you can't answer that because you haven't read the entire book as instructed [interrupted]. Excuse me, I never said you didn't read it to be defiant.

Please correct me if I am wrong, but you are saying that you didn't read the book—not because it is irrelevant as you initially stated—but because DuBois doesn't articulate a methodology for his claims? Correct? OK, is this still about the book being irrelevant?.... Oh it's not anymore. So the texts could be somewhat relevant, if DuBois had done his research correctly? Can you please articulate what constitutes correct ethnographic research?

I'm having a hard time following what you are saying because you are now introducing several new critiques. I am doing my best to understand what is so frustrating that you requested this "URGENT" meeting, but I'm still confused as to whether or not you have read the text because sometimes you state you have and other times you state you won't because it lacks methodology?.....

Ok, so you have not done the readings. Yet you think the readings are not relevant to each other? Let me rephrase, how do you know they are not relevant to each other if you haven't read...? So why isn't the article on racial dialogue in education relevant?..... Oh it is relevant but does not do a good job of describing critical race theory?.... I got that question because you wrote that on your reading reflection, "Leonardo and Porter (2010) unsuccessfully apply critical race theory to race dialogue in education." Is that right? OK you agree. Yet Leonardo and Porter argue that they are NOT using a critical race theory, rather they are applying a Fanonian analysis. Does that help clarify things for you?... It doesn't? Ok before we go on do you want to have a seat? With your arms crossed and me sitting down....

I did not mean to offend you by implying that you are angry, so let's move on. I am committed to your learning and can see you are frustrated, but as stated on the syllabus, the focus of this class...Yes, I have read my own syllabus and the course catalogue. And as we can see, the course catalogue description is the first item on the syllabus, and this is not a methods course... So now it's the grade you received on the assignment? How about I give you the opportunity to rewrite... Oh, you purposely wrote the paper without referencing the readings because they are substandard, so you don't want to resubmit. Ok, if it's not the readings, the syllabus, the course description, or the assignments, could your frustration be due to the fact that I am a female professor of Color with academic standing over you, and I am addressing race? Because your claims only make sense through the lens of colorblind Whiteness. This cray-cray could have been avoided if you had just said, "I am a White female who has always been told that I am the best and the brightest. Having a professor of Color not affirm that in the same way is too much to bear." Then we could have started from that shared understanding and I'd have been happy to help you work through... [interrupted]. I am sorry to hear that you are dropping the course.

(Monologue created by Cheryl E.Matias)

In exploring the emo-cognitive performance of White neurosis we draw from the interdisciplinary approach to critical Whiteness studies. For example theologian, Thandeka (1999) argues that Whites have cultivated a deep shame about anything racial because since birth they have been reared to claim they do not see race when in fact they do. Acknowledging this, Thandeka (1999) argues that raising White children to be White is a form of child abuse because "the child learns to silence and then deny its own resonant feelings towards racially proscribed others, not because it wishes to become White, but because it wishes to remain within the community

this is quite literally its life" (p. 24). Therefore, not only is the White child forced to deny race despite seeing race, but she is also reminded that if she ever claims to see race, then she will be ostracized from the community for which she grows up in. If Whites are reared in this manner, then emotional and psychological damage on the White psyche results. The need to maintain that racial lie inculcates a kind of neurosis, akin to an abused child being told to never talk about or admit to the abuse, and having everyone around them complicit in this rule. However, the lie becomes so convoluted by what is required to enforce it that everyone participating becomes confused (see Matias & Allen, 2014).

Further, consider a child who has been through prolonged trauma that has never been addressed therapeutically. Would we expect her or him to be free of the trauma's emotional, psychological, and sociological effects? Not seeking therapy to address the realities of what they are continually forced to deny produces a state of repressed dual subconsciousness, in contrast to DuBois' (1903) double conscious-ness for African Americans. That is, Whites are aware of race yet are continually pressed to repress that awareness, lest be ostracized from the White community; they must maintain the facade of colorblindness in ways that trap them in a false reality. In this repressed state, Whites' racial rationality is undermined, yet through White supremacy, that rationality is crowned hegemonic Truth (Gramsci, 1971). Just as Memmi (1965) asserts that in a state of colonization, the colonizer not only understands the oppressive nature of its enterprise, but constantly finds explana-tions to justify its domination, so too do Whites in a racial enterprise. Seeking self-protecting, Whites forge various rhetoric (often contradictory) to legitimize their racial superiority. And it is this constant need to rationalize irrationality that creates the emo-cognitive condition of white neurosis on the White psyche.

We are concerned with the psyche of the White "abused child"—now grown— and how this condition forces upon People of Color the need to placate the irrationality of White neurosis, lest they be subject to unceasing displays of the guilt, shame, loss, and anger that stems from the original condition of abuse. This is particularly interesting when noting that the majority of teachers in the United States are White females who display these behaviors to their urban students of Color. White neurosis and the need for Peoples of Color to placate White neurosis due to real fears of White supremacy is the interplay of racial cray-cray, a process that plays out in the racial dynamics of urban classrooms. Under the power of Whiteness, the racial cray-cray becomes a socially-sanctioned process of engag-ing in the lies of White neurosis that everyone is forced to perform. For example, Yoon (2011) shares a story of how one student of Color asked her whether or not she spoke Spanish. Having overheard the racial implications of this question, the White teacher quickly silenced the student. In doing so, she forced White cultural norms of what is considered polite discourse on him. The student, now confused, ended up opting for silence.

To be clear, White neurosis is not benign, while it may appear so to well-intentioned Whites; it functions as racial microaggressions for People of Color.

Microaggressions are the everyday subtleties and insults perpetrated by Whites that People of Color endure and often go unnoticed by Whites (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Yet, there are times when White neurosis is so charged that People of Color become fearful about what extent it will take and what its lingering consequences will be (Matias, 2013a). *Will it just be crying this time or will it slide into a passively aggressive violence with lasting effects such as ostracization from future meetings and projects? Will I be targeted as the cause of racial angst (we didn't have these problems until you came)? How will their need to maintain White solidarity manifest; on which fronts and which levels?* And worse yet, the fear of awakening the latent mob mentality wherein Whites join together to aggressively refute race while emotionally, socially, and intellectually lynching the only Person of Color in the room (Matias, 2013a). *Will I be able to escape to safety or be pinned down by the unconvincing screams of "I'm not a racist" and forced to serve as the representative of all People of Color (pinned perhaps through the linking of arms)?*

Leonardo and Porter (2010) provide a relevant analysis of White neurosis in the context of violence and fear in race dialogue. They argue that the White desire for safe space is a falsity precisely because there exists a repressed White violence that compels a state of White surveillance. In this state of surveillance (Foucault, 1977), White sensibilities or fragility must remain intact lest they unleash the repressed violence that lays dormant. Relating to Thandeka, this dormancy is needed because it serves to sustain the lie of Whiteness and spare Whites the shame of their abuse. Leonardo and Porter point out that whenever this shame is exposed White reactions and behaviors become so psychically violent that People of Color retreat or tread carefully in order not to incite it in the first place. Thus the "safe space" in interracial dialogues is "a misnomer because it often means that White individuals can be made to feel safe" and usually at the frustration and suppression of People of Color (p.147). Thus metaphorically, to speak up about race to Whites is to immediately place a noose over one's own neck, however to not speak up is to slowly tighten the chains around the Brown body.

A related dynamic in race dialogues occurs when Whites position themselves as victimized, slammed, blamed, and attacked (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014). This discourse of victimization enables Whites to avoid responsibility for racism and mask the abuse they enact on People of Color. In fact, these moves are considered classic within the abuse literature (Engel, 2004; Hegstrom, 1999; Mills, 2009); wherein the victim of abuse grows up to be a perpetrator, while projecting his own shame onto his victims. Within U.S. teacher education, these victimized reactions are institutionally produced when White colleagues and students who refuse to talk about race enact abusive behaviors towards professors or students of Color who break with White silence (DeJesus & Ma, 2004; Matias, 2013a; Williams & Evans-Winter, 2005).

Whites who engage in deflecting their racial shame by emotionally and verbally abusing People of Color in race dialogues pervert the cycle of abuse. When

these Whites employ terms that connote physical abuse, Whites tap into the classic narrative of People of Color (particularly African Americans) as dangerous, confrontational, and violent (DiAngelo, 2012). This discourse perverts the actual direction of danger that exists between Whites and People of Color because it denies the historical reality of White supremacy (e.g., history of brutal, extensive, institutionalized and on-going violence perpetrated by Whites against People of Color; slavery, genocide, lynching, whipping, forced sterilization, profiling, police shootings, and medical experimentation to mention a few). The cycle of abuse is thus projected onto People of Color as a mechanism to distort reality.

However, this presents a deeper problem that goes beyond White shame, abuse, and neurosis, for it forces People of Color to enact abuse upon themselves in order to keep White violence repressed. That is, if a sane person is compelled to change the way she or he lives because their abuser holds institutional power and can manipulate the system to support the abuse, then the abuse becomes socially sanctioned. It is this cycle that causes serious racial cray-cray. This punishing cray-cray also serves as a kind of bullying to push People of Color who break White racial codes back into a subordinate place. Thus, White neurosis undermines the sanity of People of Color, which in turn produces a state of racial cray-cray that everyone has to navigate. In undermining the sanity and clarity of People of Color, we lose the only remedy we have to White racial toxicity. Below we offer a parable and a poetic letter to illustrate what is at stake in ignoring racial cray-cray.

"Poor White Man": A Grandiose Parable of White Neurosis

Upon the historical election of the first Black president in 2008, racial life in America was forever altered. White males were undone by the success of Black and Brown people. They could no longer hide behind their colorblind rhetoric as business slogans changed to "Nike. WE finally just did it," "RAW Entertainment: A New Colored World Order," and "Disneyland: the most Colorful place on earth." Amidst these vibrant displays of Colorful pride, White men could not shield themselves from the explicitness of race. But I thought it didn't matter?!

High wage jobs were offered to Black and Brown folks who possessed the skills and knowledge needed in an interracial workplace. White males found themselves at a real disadvantage, and the unmooring that resulted triggered new forms of mental illness. These illnesses ranged from catatonic shock to aggressive violence, making it difficult for them to learn or succeed in school. In turn, this made employers wary of hiring them, creating a large population of unemployed White males. In order to help the poor White males, non-profit organizations attempted to increase awareness of their mental health issues. Yet very few People of Color were interested in dealing with the problem of White men. Social and medical service training programs did not require courses on meeting their unique needs, and few students chose the occasional elective on the topic. The cost of therapy shot up due to high demand and low supply. Thus, White males had virtually no therapeutic

outlet to address the mental and emotional incapacitation caused by being raised colorblind in a society in which the need for colorblindness had become obsolete. A few random missionary-type programs emerged, such as Therapy for America, which appealed to the guilt of wealthy communities of Color. These programs recruited college students of Color on route to becoming the next generation of leaders, offering loan forgiveness if they served a two-year term in public mental health for White males. However, despite these programs, chronic unemployment forced White males into deeper emotional and mental instability. Many took to illegal means of securing economic viability, while others engaged in violent killing sprees, lashing out at each other rather than at People of Color. Lower police surveillance in White communities and less public outcry from People of Color fueled the cycle. White males were so enraged about the lie they have been told that they punished those that reminded them of their own condition. Fearing their safety, droves of the White refuges descended upon communities of Color, who graciously allowed them to rent suburban housing in the outskirts, and to come into the cities to provide custodial services.

People of Color were interested in the pathology of White males, and they studied White biology and culture. These studies led to an ordinance requiring White males to undergo mental health treatment. Once completed, they would be issued a certificate of mental stability, which granted them access to gated communities of Color.

The few White males who were successful in obtaining the certificate were required to submit to annual reviews, standardized racial knowledge testing, drug testing, and analyses of transcripts and documentation of credentials for workplace. Any behaviors that conveyed hostility to Browns were grounds for revoking the certificate. Having isolated Whites, communities of Color grew in wealth. Property values rose and brought more tax revenue to cities of Color. Life was good and the ideology of opportunity was upheld.

(Parable by Cheryl E. Matias)

Infection of Racial Cray-cray and the Death of Reason: An Obituary to My Brown Sanity

Dear Brown Sanity,
How I love you so, your capacity to feel, to know, to bear witness to;
And with those sensory inputs you critically deduce;
What is laid before you in the real time of Obama,
Yet never forgetting historic times and hoping for future times,
You filed the historic remnants of an eon past the settlement of Jamestown
1865, 1960s, Great Migrations, Pigtail Ordinances, Thind and Ozawa, Yellow
     Peril, Treaty of Hidalgo and the hate
You remember the pictures of hate so venomously captured in Little Rock
A hate of water hosing, stake burning, and Japs Move!
Thank you for not having historical or reality amnesia

Because what you capture is a colorful landscape plastered on the humility
        of a Brown canvas
Rich with bittersweet strokes of vibrancy and sullenness
Trials and tribulations
A picturesque lens of reality soon to be marred by White lies and White
        hallucinations
And it is this ever-dominant White blindness that denies the very real picture
        drawn upon the canvas
For what is often unspoken but is felt, understood, and known;
Is the reality that shall not be uttered aloud;
For in its mere mention you know all too well
The onslaught of Colorless atrocities, berating, and ostracism
That you will bear as White markers upon your Brown back
From "How dare you speak of what I cannot see" to
A lasting pain that denies you the mere space to cry aloud
A forever branding that silences the beating of a true Brown heart
All because you dared attest to what was real
As real as the table placed before you
And the Brown child you bore from your body
As real as the collective sadness found in the false hope for Afrolantica
And the real tears shed upon awaiting the late night count of Barrack Obama
Despite its realness you are asked to betray yourself
Deny yourself a sense of place
Assume you are not real
Regardless to the fact that you are burdened with it each and every day
        of your life
And you do this….
Because you are forced to placate the blinded White heart,
Less be trapped in a forever illogical argument
An argument that drives you to the brink Othellian or McBethian madness,
For as you clearly see the White spot upon the Brownness of your hands
The evil Iago acts as if it were not there
Why are you washing your hands? He questions.
A question you cannot help but ask of him.
Therefore in order to live in a world where hallucinations and false premise
        run free
I must bid you adieu
And upon your exit leave no trace of your lucidity
Because such clarity is not welcome in an insane world
As much as it pains me to see you go
Alas there is nothing I can do
For as the White hole slowly sucks up this here Alice
I am at the mercy of a queen who is a braggart of her own narcissistic heart

Chops the head off of those who do not bow to her White supremacy
And it is within this suffocation that I watch you die
And before your last breath,
And in the clutch of my heart
for as I say,
"Good bye" to reason.....I also say goodbye to my Brown self.

(Poem created by Cheryl E. Matias, dedicated to A.D.)

Breaking Racial Cray-cray: A Conclusion

The parable and the poetic letter above are illustrative models to document the manifestations of White neurosis and the emotional damages that racial cray-cray produces. Although the parable parodies what it would look like to flip-the-script on the pathology of White men and the letter painfully details the emotional abuse People of Color endure, both are emo-cognitive depictions of how Whites and People of Color respond to race, racism, and White supremacy. Regardless of which role one is assigned, all participants are dehumanized (Freire, 1993). The emotional battle scars left by this cray-cray are noteworthy in that they signify a prolonged battle for one's life, a life too precious to be dismissed. The co-production of racial cray-cray has implications for education, particularly for the U.S. context where there are a majority of White teachers in urban classrooms, perpetrating cray-cray on students of Color, the results of which are well-documented (see Valenzuela, 1999; Blanchett, 2006; Kunjufu, 2005).

In her book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love Black* feminist scholar bell hooks (2004) describes the daunting and painful task of dismantling patriarchy inside the hearts and minds of both men (who self-enlist in it) and women (who hegemonically support it). She writes, "clearly we cannot dismantle a system as long as we engage in collective denial about its impact on our lives" (p.24). Just as hooks asserts that the first step in dismantling patriarchy is to stop denying its impact in our lives, breaking denial is also the first step in interrupting racial cray-cray. Therefore, we hope to offer a new approach to racial healing by affirming Thandeka's (1999) postulation of Whiteness as a form of child abuse and tracing what happens when that abuse goes unchecked. That is, the denial of the child abuse not only produces White neurosis, it also fuels the irrationality of racial cray-cray. To stop racial cray-cray, we need to seek out ways to break it, lest be doomed to its repressed reality. However the first step in disrupting this abusive pattern is to recognize its existence.

In stopping the abuse, White norms of rationality should not be the standard for which change is measured, for as we have argued, the current state of White emo-cognition and rationality are incompatible and produces the White neurosis we are so concerned about. Rather, as CRT posits, the emo-cognitions of People of Color are a legitimate starting point for measuring progressive changes to White emo-cognitions. This is precisely because People of Color's experiential knowledge of race, racism, and White supremacy give them a nuanced understanding of the intricacies of racial oppression (Matias, 2012).

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Through literary forms we hope we have illustrated the interconnectedness of White neurosis and how such a neurosis impacts People of Color through the collective racial cray-cray. We can, of course, continue to ignore its saliency because it keeps the current racial order intact. Yet, we hope that by entertaining abuse, neurosis and emotionality we enhance the radical possibilities of liberating our humanity from racism and White supremacy. And upon this painful yet therapeutically necessary moment, we courageously name our condition in order to break racial cray-cray and begin a collective healing.

Special Note

To true antiracist educators and faculty of Color who face the ever-present neurosis of Whiteness in the academy and survive it everyday.

Note

[1] Recognizing that the terms we use are not "theory neutral 'descriptors' but theory-laden constructs inseparable from systems of injustice" (Allen, 1996, p. 95), we understand that race is a deeply complex socio-political system whose boundaries shift and adapt over time. As such, "White" and "People of Color" are not discrete categories, and within these groupings are myriad levels of complexity. However, for the purposes of this limited analysis, we use these terms to indicate the general, macro level division of the racial binary under White supremacy.

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