

On the “Flip” Side: A Teacher Educator of Color Unveiling the Dangerous Minds of White Teacher Candidates

By Cheryl E. Matias

The dominant narrative dispelled in many films and mass media is a fear of the urban student of Color (Kellner, 1995; Leonardo & Hunter, 2007). Dominant narratives indicate that as innocent, well-intentioned White women enter urban schools, ridden with gangs, promiscuity, and drugs, they themselves become victims of the illness of urbanity that plagues People of Color and in doing so, they become White martyrs/messiahs for taking on the risk of contaminating their inherent purity (Vera & Gordan, 2003a). According to this account, the fears are real for White teachers who are willing to sacrifice themselves in the battle to humanize savage students who cuss at them, disrespect their presence, and cannot even read.

And as this narrative of White *saviority* (a form of benevolence) persists in the recounts of countless films, newscasts, and textbooks, society cries and empathizes with the heroic action of weeping White teachers. Because as society watches tears of anguish roll down the clean White cheek of this harmless White teacher, it can barely survive witnessing how these White knights painfully tolerate the daily aggressive attacks of urban students of Color. Plainly stated, society falls to its knees when White women cry because their pain is felt, similar to how observers of Michelangelo’s pieta sculpture¹ cannot help but pity over the grief of the White Madonna

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clutching to the her lifeless son, Jesus Christ. Their pain becomes real. Their pain is deemed humanized by society’s mere engagement of sympathy.

This narrative is indoctrinated in the minds of my countless White teacher candidates. Each semester my White teacher candidates enroll in our urban-focused teacher preparation program ready to sacrifice and give back to disadvantaged students of Color to change the injustices that pervade urban schools. They are prepared to roll their sleeves up and help close the achievement gaps for urban students of Color knowing that it is not fair that suburban schools have more resources, better buildings, and more qualified teachers. This is similar to how Ricky Lee Allen (2002) relates Neo, the White protagonist in the movie *The Matrix*, to the Chosen One who will “fight the racist Whites” (p. 120). Essentially, my White teacher candidates become the heroic liberal warriors who will save students of Color from failing (Vera & Gordan, 2003b). Then imagine if you will the cognitive resistant reaction of my White heroes when I walk into the lecture hall with my obvious Brown skin and urban mannerisms and introduce myself as Doctor Matias. How will they help me, the embodiment of who they perceive needs saving, if I am the professor for the course?

Anatomy of Colored Pain: My Counterstory

Contrary to popularized notions of the painful lives of Whites who *serve, help, or save* People of Color, this article cries for the need to counter this one-sided account of what constitutes humanizing pain, for in adhering to that litmus of pain, Whites can then elevate their pain above People of Color’s pain. Essentially, our tears become only three-fifths of the pain of a White person’s tears. And as a Brown-skinned, Pinay teacher educator from urban Los Angeles, I painfully attest that teaching in a White institution with White colleagues and White students is a trauma, one that relentlessly terrorizes my heart, soul, and psyche on a daily basis. In order for me to heal my torn soul I developed my pedagogy of trauma.

This article focuses on the conceptualization and operationalization of my pedagogy of trauma as a survival mechanism and as a model for other teacher educators of Color who undertake the grave task of training self-affirmed colorblind White teacher candidates at the expense of our pain. In doing so, we can finally counter the dominant narrative that impacts the learning receptivity of our White teacher candidates (see Matias, 2012a). Just as how People of Color experience racial microaggressions, my experiences with my White teacher candidates become a counterstory of my semester long racial microaggression that subjects me to pain; a pain I must voice in order to counter White narratives of pain (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). I feel it is essential that White teacher candidates know of this pain because in order to foster a mutually respectful learning environment for their soon-to-be urban students of Color, White teacher candidates must first accept their teacher educators of Color.

My pedagogy of trauma first developed after realizing that in order to survive the numerous racial microaggressions maintained by institutional racism and White supremacy, I needed a process to heal myself (see Gillborn, 2010; Lewis & Manno, 2011; Matias, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Tatum, 2003). With respect to critical race theory, I needed a transformational resistance, which not only articulates how I overcame the microaggression but how I endure it (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Paul Willis (1977) describes how the Lads in England endured and resisted school hegemony by creating a counter-school culture. Giroux (2001) describes the necessity for resistance as an oppositional behavior, for such a behavior “becomes the object of theoretical clarification” (p. 110). Therefore, my pedagogy of trauma is the cultivation of an oppositional behavior that emotionally prepares myself for the unceasing flogging of my heart that I am subjected to each time my students see me, respond to me, interact with me, and unknowingly resist learning from me. These are the real fears I am subjected to each time my White teacher candidates scream at me about how race is not important and thus, should not be discussed. When I do not relent they aggressively circulate emails to strategize ways of getting me fired. So, I name this trauma and locate within it my inflicted suffering from the persistent racial microaggressions of my White teacher candidates. However, I do not locate my suffering to relish in a state of victimization (Freire, 1993). Rather, I locate my suffering to demonstrate how I transformationally resist by engaging with my pain to carry out the socially just ideals of racial equity.

bell hooks (1995) corroborates the need to locate one’s suffering when she claims that in order to heal, People of Color must “begin to collectively name and confront this suffering in ways that are constructively healing” (p. 144). As such, my pedagogy of trauma constructively confronts my pain by emotionally anticipating the level of severity within the racial microaggression. Again, I do not let the pain relish in some reservoir of self-pity. Rather, I let the pain from this recurring trauma transform how I understand my pain. Essentially, feeling this pain is a process of humanization. This will be further described below.

Before I delve deeper, there are many humanists who so love humanity that they empathetically acknowledge and see, in a Freirean (1993) sense, beyond my Brownness and almond-shaped eyes to recognize that I am a human being complete with rightful emotions in response to coping in a racialized society. Just as Black feminist scholar Patricia Collins (1986) acknowledges how Black women having insightful sensitivity to mechanisms of patriarchy and sexism, humanists acknowledge that my emotional response to racism as a Brown-skinned female is an insightful depiction of how humans subjected to racism survive. In this humanizing revelation, they cry out to me and say, “Sista, this is unhealthy, almost sadomasochistic. Just forget them and move out of teacher education.” But that is not who I am. After years of growing up as a student of Color in an urban public school system and teaching in both South Los Angeles and Brooklyn, I admit that I am a teacher at heart who is dedicated to racially-just education despite taking

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the agonizing racelessness route needed to get there (see Fordham, 1988). Further, I argue that is not who *we* are.²

White feminist scholar Sandra Harding (1998) asserts that in multicultural science, women are medical heroes because their nuanced knowledges of the body "prove[s] more reliable" (p. 106) than medical diagnosis precisely because of our societal subjugation, under patriarchy, to perform roles as nurturers and caregivers. Reflexively, scholars of Color are also heroes who are constantly challenged because of our nuanced knowledge of race and racism, and intimate understanding that hegemonic Whiteness blinds White folks to. We are the warriors that shoulder this agonizing racial burden despite being chastised as not being collaborative, wrongfully accused of being personally mistrustful, or worse, mislabeled the "real" racist when we bravely engage how the ugly reigns of race is manifesting itself. Those are the accusers who whether intentionally or not have repressed issues to a Colored face that symbolically reminds them of their White guilt.

I also strategically use the word "I" to remind my readers that I always account for my positionality, my individuality, and how I personally engage in this pedagogy of trauma. Despite the various mechanisms we employ to survive we must remember we do not do this kind of work without truly believing that change can happen and that our mere increasing presence in the academy does not mean something. We do this precisely because we could no longer bear the inhuman condition of racism that subjugates our pain to White narratives of pain and will be damned to sit by and let another generation go by without hearing and truly humanizing our pain. However, in order to teach White teachers in higher education we first emerged out of the safety of our prideful urban communities of Color that protected us against White aggression to pursue our degrees and teaching credentials. We bravely did so despite knowing that the journey is wrought with institutional racism inside the ivory towers of the academy that so trains us. We, eerily like my White teacher candidates, want to make a change: a change that does not center on the pain of White folks. However, what was missing from the narrative of popularized urban education was the painful process that we, as People of Color, underwent to get here. Because embedded in that painful process is a schooling experience where the pain of White public school teacher after White public school teacher outweighed and ultimately ignored the pains of students of Color. These were the White public school teachers who were not trained to deal with their Whiteness in response to our rich, beautiful Colorfulness (McIntyre, 2003). So, after years of experiencing racism as People of Color, (moreover experiencing racism and sexism, as women of Color) we are forced to develop a seemingly healthy callousness for survival. According to Black, lesbian feminist, Audre Lorde (2001), we develop this callousness for an "illusion of protection" (p. 177). And this callousness works because the hardening of our souls and hearts protects us from the trauma incurred by the endless barrage of racial and gender microaggressions (see Sue et al., 2007).

Sadly, there was a moment in my early career where I too became so hardened

that I lost my feelings. I lost my pain. Yet by losing my ability to feel pain, I inadvertently repressed the painful counterstories needed to offset the dominant narrative of White pain. Notwithstanding, the numbing effect that was detracting from the beautiful emotional human quality, I realized that my pain counts as a whole human experience, one that my White teacher candidates must hear to re-examine their defaulted need to superiorize their pain, a process learned by the unquestioned recycling of dominant narratives. That is, I invoke my pain to offer and remind us that our continually silenced tears³ are genuinely raw and intimately reflect how painful racism can be, particularly to blind exertions of Whiteness. However, in doing so, I recognize that by relocating my lost and repressed pain I also relive the painful experience of the trauma of race and gender all over again.

This article provides a look into a day in my life as a Filipina teacher educator teaching White teacher candidates in a White institution for the purpose of illustrating the “flip” side of how colored pain provides a counter to the grand narrative of White pain. Instead of coding my pain and trauma with masculine concepts such as (a) notions of exile (Said, 2002), (b) dehumanization (Freire, 1993), or (c) responsibility for neo-abolitionism (Allen, 2012; Leonardo, 2009), I center my discourse on pain to remind us that pain is ever present in the work we do and the mission we strive for. Unfortunately, only when society rightfully redistributes the burden of race off People of Color’s shoulders and to those who benefit from our subjugation, can pain be alleviated. As for now, I critically theorize my own pain and bravely express my tears because as LatCrit⁴ scholars inform me, my testimonio⁵ of Colored pain is a powerful emotion that undergirds the heart. This is my pedagogy of trauma.

Chronology of Colored Pain Even Before the First Day of Class:

A Theoretical Precursor

As each semester begins, the surge of fear engulfs me, consumes me, and almost suffocates me. I feel this way because I know that teaching in a White institution with White students and White colleagues unknowingly and knowingly indoctrinated with their repressed emotional, social, and psychological investment in Whiteness will produce a first day that resembles a recurring trauma that I relive each day as Bill Murray does in the 1993 movie, *Groundhog Day*. Yet, almost sadomasochistically, I do it over and over again because beyond my pain of this recurring trauma are the cries of my former Black and Brown public school students that never hush.

bell hooks (1995) calls this pain a psychic trauma inflicted on People of Color by racial aggressors. Although relevant, I posit that such a trauma is also an emotional trauma that so stabs my heart that I find myself waking up periodically throughout the night before class, hoping to cry myself back to sleep. Denying me sleep is a recurring lived nightmare of White teacher candidates resorting to their Whiteness by feigning colorblindness, upon my obvious almond-eyed, Brown-skinned face with a Spanish surname (see Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006). True to nature, after my

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four years in the academy and the piles of literature to support my work in critical race theory and critical Whiteness studies, my White teacher candidates sadly and predictably claim that race is not an issue because they do not see race. I remember one of my White male students exemplified this when he employed a White Diss-course⁶ to adamantly argue in one of my multicultural education courses that he does not see race or gender. I use the term Diss-course because the employment of White Diss-course is tantamount to "dissing" or insulting People of Color behind a façade of innocence or normalize speech (Rodriguez, 2009). While gripping his table and fervently pointing his finger at me he strongly, loudly, and confirmedly assertedly, "The fact is YOU telling me to see race and gender IS racist and sexist! I mean, when you first walked into the classroom all I saw was a beautiful Asian lady." He had it correct. For according to White Diss-course, he had not seen race and sex at all. All he saw was a beautiful Asian lady so dehumanized by the phenotypes that socially construct my presence that it outshined the human essence of who I am. And this White Diss-course masks the saliency of race and racism behind a seemingly innocent ocular of colorblindness while casting a false verdict of what constitutes true racism. This Diss-course is dangerous because Whites then position themselves as the knowledge bearers of race, despite their claims of never seeing it. And when they engage it, it hurts People of Color.

Still echoing in my ears is his comment of "Beautiful Asian lady." Feminist scholar Yen Lee Espiritu (2001) describes this process of Asian racialization and sexualization as never divorced from the Western representation of the Dragon Lady or China doll. That is, she describes that Asian women are bound to racialized and sexualized ideological representations of being both erotized as hypersexual objects of pleasure while also inferiorized as docile submissive servants. These are the "ideological assaults" that I am subjected to; one which Espiritu (2001) claims must be challenged to "transform the existing hierarchical structure" (p. 199). However, in the center of this process to challenge patriarchy and racism is my heart and the fact that robbing me from blissful ignorance is the painful reality of it all. I stay awake almost petrified of the fear of knowing that I will, without a doubt, again experience how the accusing White finger points to my Brownness and the blind White eye denies my humanness.

Tormenting me is how I will continue to give the authentic care that Angela Valenzuela (1999) demands in her examination of the false love of our Mexican American students, which is an authentic love that I, myself, demand my White teacher candidates feel for their future students of Color? Further, how do I continue to give up my authentic love without receiving that same love in return from blinded White teacher candidates? Although I agree that teachers should be ever present to serve the needs of their students, there is a different power dynamic when teaching a course on race when the teacher is the only Person of Color inside the classroom. Schick (2010) outlines the White resistance from White college students she experienced while teaching antiracist pedagogies. However, Schick admits "as

a White woman, it would also be disingenuous on my part to separate myself from my White students” (p. 97). By doing so, she includes herself with the group identification of her White participants and parallels her trauma with her participants’ trauma by virtue of being White. Yet, I am not a White researcher so I cannot parallel my trauma with my White students’ trauma and dissonance precisely because my trauma is an effect of their refusal to feel trauma or to recognize mine. In race dynamics trauma is not only different from a Person of Color’s perspective; it is also more substantiated. Di Angelo (2012) writes about fears of Whites and People of Color when doing interracial race dialogues. She uncovers that in interracial race dialogues, White students feared being called a racist, feeling guilty, blamed, and/or uncomfortable. Essentially, their fears are based upon their White sensibilities or sentiments of discomfort. On the other hand, People of Color feared tangible repercussions (*e.g.*, losing their jobs or houses, physical threats, and ostracism). In her analysis, she argues that the fears for Whites are not equivalent to the real fears of People of Color because the latter fear is produced by the historical surveillance of People of Color under a system of racism. In fact, she points out how Whites believe that racism against Whites is more prevalent than racism against Blacks, which is a mal-informed response to their unsubstantiated fear. So when I ask how I can authentically love my White students who are invested in their Whiteness when they unknowingly or knowingly refuse to return love, I must realize that the race dynamics are so different that it produces a sadomasochistic relationship where I must submit myself to a relationship where I give love despite the onslaught of racialized resistance. It is these painful acts of resistance that torment me because all I want is to be seen as a human being who deserves humanly love.

Amidst the late night bellows of stray dogs I lament over whether or not my heart will no longer beat loving thumps because of my commitment to support humanity by dismantling hegemonic Whiteness. For what is not understood in popularized notions of pain is that teacher educators of Color who continue to day-in and day-out commit to teaching their White students about race incur a great loss too. The emotional toll we pay for our commitment is a restless mind and heart that is constantly bombarded with how we will respond to the eerily predictive and resistive performance of our White teacher candidates.

A Methodological Tactic for Engaging in Pedagogy of Trauma

After years of living this reality and seeking advice from senior colleagues of Color and allies who also experience the daily pain or racism in their own contexts, I decided to draw from my knowledge of Black and Chicano militancy⁷ from my training in ethnic studies. I also utilized my understanding of Black feminist militancy (James, 1999) to mobilize an offensive *counterattack*⁸ that will help me heal from the predictable offensive and defensive attack that victimizes me.

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Pedagogically speaking, I circumvent my fearful anticipation by emailing out a student survey before I even begin the course so that instead of walking unarmed into hostile grounds passing off as innocent raceless classroom contexts, I enact pedagogical ways to gauge the level of attack I will be subjected to. Simply put, I protect my heart by emotionally preparing myself in what to expect from my students; many of my White students whose normalized dispositions as White folks intentionally or unintentionally enact rituals of racial microaggressions against me. For what is silenced inside the grand narrative of what constitutes pain when teaching urban education, is the reality that teacher educators of Color who teach White teacher candidates need only to step inside their classrooms to begin the racialized battleground. This hostile space is where Whites entrenched in Whiteness verbally profess colorblindness despite resisting our obvious Coloredness by either consciously or subconsciously assuming we are (a) “marked intellectuals” (Orelus, 2011, p. 33) (b) a token or affirmative action hire which connotes lacking qualifications, (c) and/or, specific to my case, a petite, Brown girl expected to serve and support the entitlement of White teacher candidates. Ultimately, anything I say or do will be subject to suspicion because my expertise in race is never divorced with how my race displays itself and how Whites respond to that display. So, to be prepared with knowing the degree of hostility I strategically send out a pre-course survey to make my pedagogies culturally relevant, so to speak, for hostile White teacher candidates.

Embedded in the ten-question survey is a spectrum of questions that ultimately digs right to the crux of their Colorblindness and Whiteness (see Figure 1). After conducting a critical race study of our teacher candidates and graduates from our urban teacher education program, I noticed that candidates were using the socially just words for racial equity yet continuing to engage in White Diss-course. As such, I strategically used racially coded questions to unveil what deep-seated ideological constructs were my White teacher candidates drawing from. Therefore, I spoke with other faculty of Color to survey what types of resistance do they experience and documented their counterstories. In fact, I used those counterstories to inform my survey design (see Matias, 2012b). I then used critical Whiteness studies to hypothesize the ideological schemas found in White racial identity that may enact racial microaggressions. Finally, I created questions that used normative White discourse to see whether or not students subscribed to that ideology or if they refute such an ideology.

The survey begins with forcing the students to identify their race and ethnicity. I strategically separate the two to decipher whether or not my students are cognizant of the difference. However, despite examples of the two terms, many of my White students so predictably and resistively⁹ wrote “American” as their ethnicity. By knowingly dismissing my examples, they exerted their Whiteness in assuming they have every right to dismiss them. They are not aware that boldly claiming American as an ethnicity associates with nativist racism because inher-

ent in that claim is the fact that Whites normalize themselves such that they are never forced to see themselves as other (see Huber, Malagon, Velez, & Solorzano, 2008). Although there is no mal intent, this is a scary situation for me because as they determine what is American they simultaneously intuit what is not American regardless of birthright. Therefore, despite being a U.S.-born citizen myself, I constantly get asked where I am really from which aligns a racial phenotypes with citizenship (for example see director, Lee Mun Wah's *Color of Fear*). And the right to citizenship and American-ness has a historical legacy¹⁰ that continues to leave an ugly socially constructed stamp of who deserves humanness. And in realizing this, I am scared as to how my students will see me. Will I be less human because I am not allowed to be ethnically American? Now that I am aware my students lay proprietary claim over the use of ethnic American-ness, I lay in bed scared straight on how to address this such that I do not hurt their White sensibilities to a point

Figure 1
Student Survey

Name:

Race: (circle the one you best identify with)

Caucasian/White African American/Black Latino/Hispanic
Asian American Native American Other _____

Ethnicity: [you may name many]

(i.e. Irish, Vietnamese, Jewish, Nigerian, Mexican, El Salvadorian, etc.)

Age:

Please answer to the best of your knowledge.

1. Who are you? Tell me about yourself.
2. How do you like to learn?
3. What languages do you speak? Which language do you prefer for learning?
4. How many teachers/professors of color have you had while growing up (elem, middle, hs, college)? What courses? How did the prevalence (or lack thereof) of educators of color impact you? Please describe.
5. Have you had experiences with people of color who are in authority? How about one who was not in authority? Please describe the circumstances.
6. What do you hope to learn? How do you hope to get there in your learning?
7. Have you talked about race and racism before? Who do you feel most comfortable in talking about this topic? Please describe.
8. What can a teacher do to make you feel she/he is committed to your learning?
9. Do you believe yourself to be an antiracist educator committed to racial equity? What does that mean to you?
10. How might the learning be different for you when learning about race, class, and gender from a female, professor of color who came from poverty as opposed to a male, White, middle class professor?

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where they engage in a White lynch mob mentality and target me. This mentality will aggressively denigrate anything I say that problematizes who has access to be American and thus produces a real fear. From feeling they have the right to email the dean to fire me because they feel learning about race and racism in an urban teacher education program is unimportant to feeling entitled to collectively silence me by engaging in verbal violence in class until I change topics, White lynch mob mentality scares me so that I find myself praying to God begging to spare me.

The survey also asks my teacher candidates’ their race and strategically limits their options so that they are forced to group identify. I do this because so often in critical Whiteness studies, Whites who resist seeing how Whiteness is exuding will opt for a different racial marker (see Matias, 2012). However, by choosing to opt out of being White as a racial identity they are also marking their privilege in Whiteness, precisely because People of Color cannot opt out of being marked as Colored. For example, instead of racially identifying as White/Caucasian one White male argued that he no longer wants to be known as White and opts to now be racially identified as Irish or Pink. A few other students argued that they are also a Person of Color (a co-optive move that belittles the true racialized experiences of People of Color). In this White Diss-course Whites almost mock race and aggressively choose to refuse their acknowledgement of how their racial marker impacts how People of Color experience race. Since I am an able-bodied, now middle class, Brown-skinned female, I acknowledge how race, class, gender, abledness, and hetero-normativity mark my life. To simply mock race or aggressively refuse it altogether denies a huge part of how I have had to live my life. When our White students who are racially privileged assert that the lives of People of Color are not about race, it is tantamount to saying that as an able-bodied person there is no issues of disabled-ness or able-ness that impacts a person with a disability. To circumvent the same reiterative White Diss-course of how People of Color in high positions are not qualified (the same Diss-course our very own Black president could not escape) I opt to offer my qualifications beforehand. I do that because race is relevant to how my students will perceive me and thus behave accordingly. To illustrate this better, one of my White teacher candidate’s response was so entrenched in White Diss-course that she engaged this same qualification argument.

Q: How might the learning be different for you when learning about race, class, and gender from a female, professor of Color who came from poverty as opposed to a male, White, middle class professor? (Question #10)

A: Both professors would be equally qualified and educated to teach the course. (Student Survey Entry, 1/12)

The question was not about qualifications, but in response to seeing the descriptors, this White teacher candidate invoked normative discussions of qualifications found in White Diss-course. Although she professes that each professor will be “equally qualified and educated to teach the course” she also inherently invokes the

false ethos of we are all the same and that subjective positionality does not shed light into a normalized understanding. Last, she never answers the question, “how might the learning be different for you.” By not answering the question about her own learning from the course she inadvertently revealed her lackluster personal investment to learning those topics needed to begin change.

Therefore, when my students dismiss answering topics of race in the survey I become better prepared with what type of resistance I will be subject to. For example, one semester a few students refused to circle a race and one student offered an explanation as to why she refused to circle a race.

After taking Sociology of Race and Ethnicity last semester, I concluded that race is only a concept, not a visible or genetic characteristic. Generalizations and categorizations based on appearance (which is what “race” is) are usually inaccurate, so I have chosen to ignore them. (Student Survey Entry, 1/12)

Although my White student chooses to ignore the saliency of race, it is something I do not have the option to ignore. As she concludes that generalizations of race are inaccurate and merely a concept, I know her Whiteness will refuse to hear me say, “race is not salient to you because you are White, but for someone who cannot wash the Brown off their skin race is a concept that produces real effects.” Although this teacher candidate may have deduced this from her past instructor, I am still left with having to engage with that ideology in this class.

So, the night before the first class I never sleep that night because echoing in my mind is how I will protect myself once again from the barrage of racial microaggressions substantiated by the excruciating manifestations of Whiteness that ultimately dehumanize me and the community of Color that I come from. Yet, in the countless minds of many teacher educators of Color, we stand up despite being constantly slapped down to remind society that we too incur pain; but we do it because we so love society that we refuse to give up on it.

Unveiling the Pain behind White Diss-Course:

A Counter Analysis

Although there may or may not be any mal intent in the verbal or written responses of White teacher candidates when learning about race, racism, and Whiteness from a teacher educator of Color, there still exists pain in what is said or written by White teacher candidates entrenched in Whiteness. To clarify, this article is not about excavating White sensibilities of White teacher candidates, but rather it is about unearthing a professor of Color’s emotional pain behind the verbal, written, and behavioral expressions made by White teacher candidates, regardless of their intent. Below are selected answers from the pre-course student survey I administered to gauge resistance. I employ them to help teacher educators, at large, understand how such answers invoke a pedagogy of trauma for me as a teacher educator of

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Color. In order to gauge their familiarity with interactions with People of Color I ask the following question.

Q: Have you had experiences with People of Color who are in authority? How about one who was not in authority? Please describe the circumstances. (Student Survey Question #5)

A: I have not had experiences with People of Color in authority. I do not think my view on not having People of Color in authority will change or anything. Respect is key no matter what my view. (Student Survey Entry, 1/12)

To better contextualize, just like pain there is a social construction of what constitutes respect such that it becomes a contested knowledge set. Michel Foucault (1980) documents this in his discussion of power and knowledge where certain knowledges are superior-ized above other knowledges in a process of power. Applicably, my White students come into class with a White fund of knowledge that through racial hegemony has superiorized itself above People of Color’s funds of knowledges¹¹ (Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). And specific to my emotions, such a hegemonically powerful White fund of knowledge will continue to resituate itself above my Colored knowledge despite the qualifying degrees that substantiate my Colored knowledge. So when my student says “respect is key,” what I fear most is what definition of respect is she referring to: the one that merely caters to her needs or the one that rightfully distributes the power embedded in respect? As a teacher educator of Color coping with daily racism that Colorblind Whites will not even give credence to, how respectful is it to state “I do not think my view on not having People of Color in authority will change or anything.” By saying it “won’t change anything” I fear it is one of those racializing moments where Whites refuse to hear because they do not want to hear. Yet if told, I fear they will become violent, aggressive, accusatory, and relish in guilt. So, as a teacher educator who teaches about race for the hope of antiracism, what’s the point of all my expertise (my twelve years of higher education, three degrees, seven years teaching in the urban classroom, and a lifetime of racialized experiences) if all that work won’t change anything? Although critics may argue that this disrespect is more pervasive due to modern times I continue to question whether or not its ubiquity negates the relevance of racial positionings. That is, the normative mantra to claim that this type of disrespect happens to all professors totally ignores the specificity of racialize issues so described in countless literature (Cleveland, 2004, DeJesus, 2004; Matias, 2012; Stanley, 2006; Williams & Evans-Winter, 2005). Hence, as critical race theory so asserts, the dynamics of race did not just disappear upon changing, modern times.

I agree respect is key, but respectfully speaking, a comment like this only respects her own viewpoint and emotions on what constitutes respect. To better illustrate, would it be respectful of me as a professor with power over my students to say, “I am the professor and although I never really worked with students, I know

that learning about your needs as students won't change my views on anything. Ipso facto, respect to me is key." Simply put, by not acknowledging the processes of power, we cannot respect each other.

However when I do accept this perverted version of respect I deny myself respect from them because their need to feel respected goes beyond my need for respect as their professor. As such, I end up getting emails from my White teacher candidates that say "Hey, print this out for me, yeah?" without an ending signature; "It's been a week and you haven't graded my paper" (Sent from iPhone), or "I don't mean to be disrespectful but did you really read my paper? I don't deserve a B." Is this what my White teacher candidates mean about respect is key?

Hence, dangerously accepting my White teacher candidates' definition of respect denies my human right to a respect that is not self-serving or self-catering to one group over another. Although the survey prepares me with knowledge of how my students will engage in a White Diss-course of what constitutes respect, I am left feeling embarrassingly disrespected and hurt. Shamefully, I ponder over how I will have them understand that respect is not *ipso facto* my submission to their need to feel respected. Cheating me of sleep the night before class is an overwhelming feeling of shame and humiliation because I know I will have to convince my White students of the simple human fact that I deserve respect too. I know the Diss-course must be flipped on them, so amidst my agony and self-shame I evolve to find a rudimentary source of healing in knowing what I must do. Instead of denying the reality of my pain, I learn that it is because of my pain that I must forcibly engage it, moreover feel it. So, I assert that they call me Dr. Matias because there's a different power dynamic when all my students are White and I am the only person of Color in a course on race. I show them how to email me in a respectful way. Finally, I realize I have to be actively ready to call out their aggressive offensive attacks each time they resort back to Whiteness and feel it is OK to disrespect me. I relocate my pain to empower and remind me that it is NOT OK that my White students revert back to seeing me as another subordinate Person of Color who is expected to submit to their masterly needs.

Q: Have you talked about race and racism before? With whom (sic) do you feel most comfortable in talking about this topic? Please describe (Question #7)

A: In my Sociology of Race and Ethnicity class, that's all we talked about. I feel most comfortable talking with like-minded thinkers. I am uncomfortable around people who are racists or people who accuse people of racism when it's not there. So I guess I'm uncomfortable around people who don't actually know what racism is. (Student Survey Entry, 1/12)

When I read this fear builds in my heart because it sounds like an exasperated comment. That is, simply hearing how exasperated this White female candidate feels about discussing race in a sociology of race and ethnicity course. Let me restate that. Indulge me if you will on my feelings. How do you think I feel as a scholar of

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Color who does race-related research when a White female student claims that all they talk about is race in a sociology of race and ethnicity course? If this student is exasperated by discussing a topic for which the entire course is about, a course that she enrolled in, and by her own admission only feels comfortable with like-minded thinkers, then conversely, she will be uncomfortable with me. For, typically I am the only Person of Color in my courses—courses that explicitly employ a critical race and critical Whiteness lens to interrogate social foundations of urban education.

Again, draining me from strength is my pondering over whether or not this student will think, as many White folks do, that I am “pulling out the race card” when simply analyzing operations of race. Further, when modeling how to dialogue about race and racism in an academic manner, what is scary for teacher educators of Color is that our White teacher candidates will either (a) cry, which is symbolic of the normative story of how People of Color are the ones who cause Whites pain which both stifles conversation and elevates White emotionality above the pain People of Color face daily; or (b) act aggressively, which is symbolic of the repressed pain of lying about a Colorblind stance (Matias, 2012). Emotionally terrifying is deciphering which response I will be subject to the next day and how I will emotionally prepare in response to these disturbing performances of Whiteness. These mere routine performances regularly rip off the Band-Aid from my heart, a Band-Aid that I carefully placed a semester ago to heal from the last trauma that regularly performed Whiteness. Although I understand that White racial identity (Helms, 1990) can take some time, I on the other hand, have no time to grieve, as I must engage in this trauma every semester.

My pedagogy of trauma relates to Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1998) documentation of how the colonized education of urban African-American males is like an ongoing psycho-cultural assault. However, unlike daily racial microaggressions experiences in interpersonal encounters, Ladson-Billings’s psycho-cultural assaults are like an ongoing systemic racial slap in the face. The onslaught of Eurocentric curriculum, deplorable schooling conditions, and the refusal to interrogate one’s own culpability in recycling dominant ideologies force our African-American students to experience a colonized education no different than in Soweto. In applying this notion of psycho-cultural assaults, the tables are no different when the context is flipped; for race and its disparaging corollary (that of racism) is not only a numbers game. Rather, it is also about power. Despite the fact that I am the professor of the course, I am still outnumbered by White folks; more detrimental is that I am out powered by Whiteness. Their Whiteness is shown in their interactions with me, which thus produces a tangible fear for me to be careful to not enrage White mob mentality. As defined by the litany of critical race research and my own experiences as a Brown-skinned racialized being, I cannot help but mull over whether or not I will be one of the people my student is uncomfortable with because I will “accuse people of racism” despite her blindness to understand “when it’s [really] there.”

This White female teacher candidate leaves me with a haunting disclosure by

stating, “So I guess I’m uncomfortable around people who don’t actually know what racism is.” She has already predetermined that she is the bearer of knowledge when it comes to race and racism, a discussion that exhausts her so. If her exasperation of studying race in a course about race is indicative of her self-proclaimed knowledge of race and racism then I have something to fear, precisely because she out-rightly threatens that she will be uncomfortable with me. And within our normative experiences of White discomfort in discussions of race and racism, her discomfort is tantamount to the uncomfortable exasperations of, “Do you know how much it hurts to be called a racist” or “I never owned slaves. Why are you blaming me? I didn’t do anything to deserve feeling bad for being White.” By adhering to this mentality, White folks are then so invested in their Whiteness that they superiorize their discomfort above the daily discomfort People of Color experience. What leaves me so baffled through the night is: don’t my White teacher candidates understand by elevating their discomfort above mine they also hurt me? Meaning, just as they cry out “Why are you blaming me? I didn’t do anything to deserve this,” I cry out the same thing because as they profess victimhood they are fervently pointing their finger at me. They stare at me as the sole embodiment of their own emotional racial angst and thus misappropriate their projection of guilt onto a false mistrust of me. All this happens while I sit silently as they continue to scrutinize and tally my every word.

Q: How many teachers/professors of Color have you had while growing up (elem, middle, hs, college)? What courses? How did the prevalence (or lack thereof) of educators of Color impact you? Please describe. (Question #4)

A: I have had no professors of Color...During my first semester, I noticed a few professors of Color and it struck up a certain emotion in me. Not that I didn’t think they were capable of being professors, rather I simply found it odd. (Student Survey Entry, 1/12)

Odd? As a professor of Color I never found myself odd. I admit to feeling odd not by my self-infliction. Rather, I feel “oddened” by White teacher candidates like this who unintentionally or intentionally misplace a racialized label on me as if I am a commodity as spectacle, as critical theorist Guy Debord (2006) claims. A bewilderment of some sort that abnormally manifests itself within the normative realms of Whiteness or as Debord describes, I become the embodiment of a spectacle “which has become objectified” (p.118). This is no different than the odd spectacle of placing Filipinos in cages during the St. Louis World Fairs during the early 1900s. This is no different than falsely heralding the accomplishments of a few People of Color.¹² And although it is absolutely odd, itself, that this White female who admits to never having a professor of Color yet also admits that when encountering one (like an object), it will produce “a certain emotion” in her, the oddity is placed on the professor of Color rather than on herself.

As the cold rocky mountain breeze passed over our little city in the early morn-

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ing hours I could not help but contemplate as to why they see me as the odd one in this relationship. In fact, bell hooks (1995) describes this odd relationship so clearly when she reflected on why Black and White feminists had difficulty in coalition building in the early stages of radical feminism. She states that one of the major barriers was “the servant/served paradigm” (p. 218) since Black women occupied lower echelons within a workspace where White women were positioned higher. She expands on this by stating that White feminists had a hard time letting go of their mammification of Black women. This process develops a stilted relationship between Black women and White women because in this view, the purpose of a Black women presence in the workspace is to serve the needs of White women. Pondering this notion, I cannot help but feel trapped by how my White teacher candidates expect me to be a mammy (or more appropriately, a Filipina nurse) to their needs when my needs are not even considered. This sentiment was confirmed when one of my White teacher candidates claimed that she has never met any Person of Color in authority but regularly meets with People of Color who serve her.

Q: Have you had experiences with People of Color who are in authority? How about one who was not in authority? Please describe the circumstances. (Question #5)

A: I have not had experiences with People of Color in authority as I don't have a boss who is of Color and haven't had to deal the law enforcement. However, I have had experiences with People of Color who were not in authority. This includes people where I get my hair done, my doctor's office, and shopping in many stores. The circumstances were normal and nothing unusual. They were just like the people of non-Color and in some places, they were nicer to me. (Student Survey Entry, 1/12)

So predictively, this student (like my many other students who come from White, middle class suburbia) admits to not having had experiences with People of Color who are in authority. Even more telling is her comment on law enforcement and how she subconsciously paired it with People of Color. What causes me pain is knowing that her experiences with People of Color have always been in the service industry for which she says “they were nicer to me” than White folks. This just-serve-me-and-we're-all-good attitude scares me because I know she will expect me to serve her needs despite my position of authority. And this is true, because later in the semester she felt I was not serving her needs and opted to revert back to Whiteness by surveilling me with constant emails about how each reading brings her discomfort because focusing on Whiteness is not right. Sadly, I knew this would happen because it is so predictable yet in engaging my pedagogy of trauma I am prepared to deal with it.

What I need my White teacher candidates to understand is that our funds of knowledge are not a spectacle—a metaphoric salsa that one can add to Latinize Whiteness at whim. Rather, our funds of knowledge are formed by the daily lives we live as human beings. Metaphorically speaking, we cannot add the salsa when we want to. Rather, this the context in which we must survive. In the end I am not

the odd one, for in teaching White teacher candidates who sadly characteristically perform their Whiteness to a point where they regularly and sometimes apologetically cry or shout at me, I am the loving one who continues to stand there and take it so that they learn even at the price of my racialized humiliation. For once a White person truly sees the dehumanization process of investing in their Whiteness, standing before them is the Person of Color who was demoralized by it.

Humanizing Colored Pain: Honoring My Flip Side of Trauma

Eight night hours go by and the midnight moon fades behind the basking of early morning sunlight. I get up, get my twins to their urban public school, put on my suit and look at the mirror to make sure I am presentable for my first day of class. Buried within my misleading petite five-foot frame and barely hundred pound stature is the heart of a woman—moreover, a motherscholar—who relentlessly engages in a pedagogy of trauma not because I need it to survive or necessarily want it. Rather, I engage it for it is my duty to humanity to provide this knowledge for my children and the generations thereafter.

Armed with this new knowledge I have strategically included three phases into the course so that my White teacher candidates can learn how they might be exerting their Whiteness that ultimately hurts People of Color. First, because racism hurts it is imperative that I reintroduce how to emotionally invest in anti-racist work. That is, instead of strictly focusing on anti-racist rhetoric, language, and pedagogies I begin the class by teaching my students how to feel again; for if feelings are not addressed they will lack the emotional investment so needed to change a racist structure. I do this by strategically inserting work from scholars of Color who describe the dehumanizing effects of racism so that my White teacher candidates re-learn the hurt in racism.

Second, I structure the class by including a phase two. After students demonstrate emotional investment they must prove how they are beginning to share in the burden of race so that such a burden does not fall solely on the shoulders of People of Color. Since most People of Color who are raised in a racist society had to learn not only the dominant narrative but also, a counternarrative, I ask my White teacher candidates to finally burden themselves about learning all narratives. That is, instead of always accommodating the dominant White society I ask my teacher candidates to learn how to mutually accommodate their lives to People of Color by learning historical facts silenced in the Eurocentric curriculum (see Nieto & Bode, 2008). This strategy of burdening one's self to learn about others will support my teacher candidates when they enter urban schools populated with students of Color whose culture is unfamiliar to their own. It will teach them that they must share in the burden to continually understand their students in order to be effective teachers.

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Last, no class on diversity, multicultural education, or social foundations of urban education would be complete if the majority of White teacher candidates never learn about Whiteness itself. However, instead of a White privilege approach captured in McIntosh’s (2001) prolific knapsack article, my class focuses on Critical Whiteness Studies which, like Critical Race Theory, uses an interdisciplinary approach to show my students how Whiteness was historically, politically, and socially created through historical events, court cases, and suburbanization. Essentially, my White teacher candidates need to learn how did they become White. Furthermore, if race is not a problem for *just* People of Color, then it is essential that White teacher candidates learn about how their emotional investment in Whiteness creates the conditions for which People of Color suffer. Race is a two-sided coin; one that represents the plight of People of Color and the other that represents how normalized exertions of Whiteness interconnects with the pain of racism. Therefore, just as White racial identity scholar Janet Helms (1990) asserts that in order to do work on racial identity development, that person “will first have to take the journey herself” (p. 219) so too should White teacher candidates learn about their White identity beyond a mere recognition of being White.

In the end, this is my story of pain and the pedagogy of trauma I use to heal myself. This pedagogy stems from the deep humanizing love that I (and I recognize that others do as well) self-enlist in in order to simply pay it forward.

Notes

Behind every word is the burden of a painful memory; a burden I nonetheless recognize I must share for racial justice. Special thanks to my first role-model of a motherscholar, my mother Lina E. Matias. Also, thanks to Drs. Ricky Lee Allen, Sheila Shannon, Dorothy Garrison-Wade, Christine Sleeter, AERA 2012 co-panelists, and my UCD allies and supporters who bravely stood outside a door that denied them entrance.

¹ A sculpture inside St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City.

² By using the pronoun *we*, I speak directly to teacher educators/scholars of Color who proudly endure this cyclic trauma to ensure that humanity wins over the dehumanizing social constructions of racial separatism, despite being subjected to racial dehumanization themselves (see experiences of faculty of color in Berry & Mizelle, 2006; Stanley, 2006). I also speak to true antiracist White allies who work through their own pain on a daily basis without erroneously misplacing their feelings of White guilt and shame on People of Color and self-invest in shouldering the emotional, political, and spiritual burden of race precisely because it is the human thing to do (see Sleeter 2001 and current familial project). I specifically engage the word “we” because I want to remind us that we are not alone in this painful work: a work tied to a higher duty to humanity.

³ And although tears are socially constructed as signs of weakness (an unfortunate popularized connotation that stems from a sexist depiction of a woman’s weakness instead of her strength to survive painful trauma) I attest my tears are my brave engagement.

⁴ LatCrit refers to Latino Critical Theory. (See <http://www.latcrit.org>).

⁵ Testimonio is adapted from LatCrit scholars Dolores Delgado Bernal, Rebeca Burciaga,

and Tara Yosso, to name a few. It refers to the intimate testimony of Latinos that counters the dominant narrative under a system of race and racism.

⁶ Personal communication with Dr. Ricky Lee Allen.

⁷ For examples see Alex Haley's (1965) *Malcolm X* and Carlos Munoz, Jr.'s (1989) *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*.

⁸ I strategically use the term "counterattack" because White resistance is already an offensive and defensive attack rolled up into one. Drawing from my training in Critical Race Theory and its methodological employment of counterstories, my counterattack is a description of how I counter the seemingly innocent attacks of my White teacher candidates who invest in their Whiteness.

⁹ The word choices here exemplify the ritualized behaviors of Whiteness that People of Color clearly understand that they strategically avoid true conversations of race and racism with White folks less be subject to these behaviors. In White allyship as conceptualized in CWS, these behaviors are not only understood as normative but experienced among White allies who also engage critical discussions of race.

¹⁰ E.g., justification for slavery, Treaty of Hidalgo, 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, DREAM Act.

¹¹ This phenomenon connects to Yosso & Garcia's (2007) articulations of culture of wealth (specifically capitals) found in communities of Color. Namely, since knowledges (or what constitutes cultures or capitals of wealth) subjugates through a process of power, communities of Color in a racist society are then forced to combat dominant narratives that depict communities of Color in a deficit lens by asserting their funds of knowledge or capitals. As such, to simply argue that a culture holds beauty is to also recognize that a dominant culture has denied that characterization in the first place.

¹² Such as President Obama, Kobe Bryant, Sonia Sotomayer, J Lo, Jeremy Lin, and Oprah.

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