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“Defunding” Race in Field Supervision Contexts: Deconstructing and Responding to White Preservice Teachers’ Majoritarian Narratives

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Abstract

Teachers must robustly understand how race and racism operate both in and out of the classroom to structure inequity. However, the existence of a deeply entrenched majoritarian mindset remains a principal obstacle to preparing such teachers. In this empirical paper, the author draws on the critical race theory construct of “majoritarian storytelling” (Delgado, 1989) to make visible and examine the narratives told by white preservice teachers upon completion of their preparation programs. The author finds that white preservice teachers’ explanations for racially disparate school outcomes align closely with a majoritarian mindset and employ devices characteristic of longstanding majoritarian stories. After illuminating these devices, the author highlights opportunities for field supervisors to support white preservice teachers in recognizing the work that such narratives do to protect racial privilege and perpetuate educational inequities.

Keywords

teacher education; race; field supervision

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Introduction

“None of my students have good moms. My cooperating teacher says I’m like their school mom.”

This fallacy, told by a white preservice teacher (PST) about her predominantly Latinx students, demonstrates that racist ideologies continue to shape the ways that white PSTs position themselves relative to Black and Brown² students and their families. More often than we would like to believe, these racist ideologies live on through the PSTs we work with and contribute to what Ladson-Billings (2018) refers to as the *social funding of race*. Ladson-Billings pinpoints this stark reality, offering, “Prospective teachers come to us with notions about race so well-funded that it seems we merely get closer to, but can never quite reach, the waters of educational equity” (2018, p. 101). Yet, however intractable the task may seem, she calls on teacher educators to “defund” the concept of race by making it visible to PSTs at every turn and by seizing opportunities to deeply interrogate the work that race does both in and out of classrooms.

In this paper, I, a white, female teacher educator, argue that teacher educators must recognize the ways that race is socially funded and seize opportunities to make race and power more visible to the PSTs they support. Overall, this paper supports the project of defunding race by 1) leveraging critical race theory (CRT) to make visible the ways that white PSTs participate in *majoritarian storytelling*, and 2) highlighting possibilities for field supervisors to defund race in and through their daily interactions with PSTs. The following research question frames the analysis: *What devices of majoritarian stories are present in white PSTs’ explanations of racially disparate school outcomes?*

I begin by situating CRT as a lens that is useful to the study of teacher education and to teacher educators’ field supervision practices. Then, I introduce the construct of *majoritarian stories* (Delgado, 1989) and explain how these stories socially “fund” race. After a brief overview of the methods used in this investigation, I present examples of white PSTs’ majoritarian stories and highlight the devices employed within these stories. I close by offering guidance for field supervisors aiming to “defund” race through their work in the field with PSTs.

Literature Review

Since its introduction into the field of education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), CRT has helped foreground issues of race in teacher preparation, drawing attention to the overwhelming presence of whiteness in teacher education programs (Brown, 2014; Matias et al., 2016), the ways in which racism is reinscribed through teacher education policies and practices (Juárez & Hayes, 2015; Marom, 2019), and the challenges of preparing teachers who robustly understand how race and racism operate in their practice (Bennett et al., 2019; Warren & Hotchkins, 2015). In general, this scholarship reveals white PSTs’ limited understandings of the “work” that race does to maintain unequal power structures (Bennett et al., 2019) and the challenges of dislodging white PSTs from a normative universe replete with assimilationist ideas, myths about

² I use the capitalized terms Black and Brown throughout this paper to reflect membership in social and political groups that share specific sets of histories, cultural processes, and kinships. I do not capitalize white because it does not describe a group of people bound by a set of common experiences or kinship outside of acts of oppression.

meritocracy, color-evasiveness, and cultural deficit theorizing (Glenn, 2012; Marx, 2004; Young, 2016).

For these reasons, continued race-central analyses are imperative in teacher education research, and specifically those that make visible the covert ways in which dominant educational discourses function in the contexts of teacher education. While the construct of majoritarian storytelling has been used effectively in educational research to interrogate dominant educational discourses (Love, 2004; Mitchell, 2013; Williams et al., 2020), it remains vastly underutilized in teacher education research. Thus, this project employs the construct of majoritarian storytelling to examine white PSTs' narratives about school success and to highlight opportunities for field supervisors to respond pedagogically to these largely unquestioned narratives. In the next section, I define majoritarian stories, discuss their powerful role in funding race, and unpack the statement made by the white PST at the opening of this paper.

Majoritarian Storytelling

Critical race theorists contend that a principal obstacle to achieving racial equality is a deeply-entrenched *majoritarian mindset*—defined by Delgado and Stefancic (1993) as “the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant group bring to discussions of race” (p. 462). *Majoritarian stories*—also referred to as “stock stories”—are narratives that either overtly or subtly promote and maintain majoritarian perspectives, values, and beliefs. These stories serve to justify and reinforce the unequal power relations between the dominant group and subordinated groups, offering the dominant group “a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412). However, such narratives are not typically seen as “stories”; they are passed off as “truths,” making the current state seem fair and natural, and because of this, these narratives go largely unquestioned (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Majoritarian storytelling is one mechanism used—knowingly or not—by the dominant group to justify their power and perpetuate a particular social reality which maintains their power and racial privilege (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Such stories are able to do this work by effectively de-emphasizing and obscuring the historical and structural realities of race and racism. As a result, white normativity and white racial privilege evade scrutiny and remain intact as a source of power for the dominant group. Simultaneously, these narratives work to place the responsibility for social inequities squarely on subordinated groups by promoting and sustaining assimilationist ideologies, myths about meritocracy, and cultural deficit theorizing (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

What Makes Majoritarian Stories So Powerful?

Quite formulaic, majoritarian stories gain their strength from host of common devices. They quietly carry assumptions about what is *normal and universal* and they name dominant social locations (e.g., white, heterosexual, middle-class) as points of reference (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Relative to schooling, this positions the experiences and performances of the dominant group (i.e., white, middle-class, monolingual) as the norm by which every other student and family should be compared. Moreover, these stories carry the assumption that what is in the best

interest of the dominant group is in the best interest of everyone. Often, the storyteller suggests that those who are experiencing subordination should adapt to be more like the dominant group (e.g., talk differently, do different things in their homes). In this way, majoritarian stories support assimilationist thinking in a manner that is quite subtle and readily accepted as “the natural order.”

Majoritarian stories also position social institutions (and their policies and practices) as *neutral and objective* and they emphasize certain “facts” without examining their truth (Delgado, 1989). Positioning institutions as neutral and objective allows those in power to de-emphasize the structuring effects of race and racism and shift the blame for social inequities to the groups and individuals who experience their ill effects. For example, when curriculum or assessment measures are purported to be race-neutral and objective, the problem of underachievement can be pinned on the “struggling reader” or the “uninvolved family,” rather than on a racially biased system of assessment and instruction that ultimately works to reward and protect racial privilege. Additionally, when classroom norms and expectations are presented as race-neutral, the “misbehaving child” can be easily identified as “the problem,” leaving the normative expectations of the classroom unquestioned and intact.

Meritocratic reasoning is another device of majoritarian storytelling that works to shift the responsibility for social inequity from systems to individuals. Often majoritarian stories promote the fallacy that every individual has an equal opportunity for success and, as such, they focus attention on individual efforts rather than system failures or race-based privilege. In schools, this looks like positioning a student as “not working hard enough,” rather than considering how the school’s racialized practices or policies might actually be denying the student opportunities for meaningful learning. Alternatively, high-achieving students might be positioned as “hardworking” and “deserving of their success” because they and their families “did things the right way” and “followed all the rules.” Such narratives obscure the structuring properties of race by focusing attention on individual merit rather than on racial privilege and the material resources and powers afforded through such privilege (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).

Additionally, majoritarian stories *obscure responsibility* for social inequities by denying or disputing the lived realities of those experiencing subordination. In reality, there are rules, policies, and everyday procedures (e.g., red-lining, dress codes, zero-tolerance policies) that work to subordinate nondominant groups; however, majoritarian stories deny these realities and instead suggest that something about nondominant communities needs to be “fixed.” This allows the storyteller to avoid consideration of racial privilege and suggest that groups experience subordination as a result of their own cultural deficits. In school communities this happens when certain groups of parents are labeled as “uninvolved” or “not doing the right things at home.” Shifting the blame for poor school outcomes to families allows white normativity and white privilege to go unexamined and unquestioned (King, 1991). As a result, mainstream policies and practices that disproportionately advantage those with racial privilege remain intact and the system continues to confer power and opportunity upon those who hold such privilege.

Lastly, because they are seen as “the truth” or passed off as “statements of fact,” majoritarian stories *render certain realities invisible* (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Blaming an individual for their own experiences of subordination not only obscures the power of racial privilege, but it also

hides from view the resiliency, the fortitude, and the ingenuity that those experiencing subordination have carried with them in the face of such adversity. Such narratives also render invisible the cultural wealth, contributions to society, and histories of survivance held by these groups. But this is certainly no accident; casting such groups as inferior allows the dominant group to maintain power and falsely justify it with stories of their own superiority and worth.

How Majoritarian Stories “Fund” Race

Majoritarian stories very effectively “fund” race by *de-emphasizing* its centrality and significance. Consider, for example, the story told by the white PST at the opening of this paper. Without any mention of race, she passes along a decidedly raced and classed narrative about who is (and is not) a good mother. Simply omitting race from her story does not take away its racial meaning. It does, however, allow her to position some as superior to others while protecting her racial privilege from any scrutiny. Moreover, this majoritarian story—purported to be objective—works to silence and distort the histories and experiences of her predominantly Latinx students and their families. But because majoritarian stories are readily accepted as “natural” parts of everyday life, it is quite unlikely that she—nor any of her peers—was conscious of the real “work” that such stories do to protect and solidify racial privilege and to reproduce racial inequality. In all likelihood, she had encountered similar versions of this same story countless times, simply by virtue of being born into society that so fully *funds* the concept of race. And because she is not yet able to recognize the fallacy and harm perpetuated by such narratives, she passes this story along herself—an unwitting contributor to the social funding of race.

Methodology

This analysis results from a qualitative study that examined PSTs’ perspectives on school success and academic achievement. The study was conducted within a teacher education program at a large public university in the midwestern United States with a publicly stated social justice mission. At the time of the study, the teacher education program expressed a strong commitment to preparing teachers who can think critically about how their backgrounds and life experiences shape their teaching philosophies and actions. In this paper, I examine white PSTs’ explanations for racially disparate school outcomes and identify the majoritarian devices employed in their explanations.

Data Collection

Teacher candidates from two elementary education cohorts were recruited during the final semester of their teacher preparation program and interviewed near the completion of their 20-week student teaching assignments. The data for this analysis was drawn from audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with 12 white PSTs. The semi-structured interviews focused on the PSTs’ sensemaking about their students’ schooling experiences and academic achievement. PSTs were asked to describe their student teaching placement, talk about their experiences in this placement, and discuss any observed patterns in achievement. PSTs were asked specifically about their awareness of any school-wide racial disparities in achievement and whether they saw these same patterns reflected in their assigned student teaching classrooms.

Additionally, PSTs were asked their opinions on why some students were “falling below” benchmark standards in the classroom and what might be done to remedy this. Although the PSTs were offering explanations for racially disparate outcomes, they often omitted students’ racial identities when telling stories about them and their families. In these instances, I asked the PSTs about the social identities of the students they were speaking of. In the analysis, I have included the PSTs’ presumptions of students’ racial and gender identities to provide context to their explanations and stories.

Analytic Techniques

I did not begin data analysis with a priori codes or categories in mind; rather, I approached the data with a curiosity about the white PSTs’ perspectives and explanations. I began by reading through all 12 interview transcripts, paying close attention to the white PSTs’ explanations for racially disparate outcomes in their placement classrooms. I then generated *in vivo* codes (Charmaz, 2006) to closely reflect the perspectives and explanations offered by participants. Next, I identified themes in the explanations they were offering (e.g., behavior problems, not reading enough at home, etc.) and I grouped these themes into categories and subcategories (e.g., problems with the child, problems with the family, socioeconomic factors, etc.). I then returned to the full interview transcripts and identified segments of data that contained the white PSTs’ explanations for disparate outcomes and the stories they told about students and families. Lastly, I utilized analytic memoing (Charmaz, 2006) to explore the ways that white PSTs’ stories and explanations aligned with or countered typical majoritarian stories. In the section that follows, I draw upon these analytic insights to illustrate the majoritarian nature of their storytelling.

Findings

With very few exceptions, white PSTs offered explanations for underachievement that largely align with a majoritarian mindset (i.e., the beliefs and attitudes that those in the dominant group bring to discussions about race and inequality), and they told stories that employ devices typical of longstanding majoritarian stories. In the subsections that follow, I draw on interview data to illuminate the often-subtle manner in which these devices are employed.

Obscuring Responsibility for Poor Outcomes

By and large, the white PSTs attempted to explain racially disparate achievement outcomes in their classrooms without mentioning race or implicating racism. Instead, they assigned responsibility for poor school outcomes to a variety of factors outside of race and racism. PSTs suggested that the underachievement of Black and Brown students was due to certain incompetencies (e.g., an inability to self-regulate) or problematic attitudes (e.g., being resistant to correction, avoiding schoolwork). For example, one PST attributed the underachievement of a Black male in her first-grade classroom to his tendency to leave the classroom multiple times each day. She explained:

He was out of the room at least fifteen times a day, just running out. Like, he doesn’t know how to calm himself down so his escape route was to just run out of the door. And

he is below benchmark on reading, any literacy things, math, and we attribute that mostly to being out of the room.

On the surface, her sensemaking is somewhat reasonable; we cannot expect a student to make growth in any subject area if they are not present for classroom instruction. However, absent from her story is any mention of what is prompting the child to seek an “escape route” from the classroom upwards of fifteen times in one day. Instead, she focuses solely on what the child is not able to effectively do (i.e., “calm himself down”) and she does not mention any aspects of the classroom environment (e.g., racialized, gendered) that may be contributing to his urgent need to escape. For example, if some aspect of his being (e.g., a culturally specific communication style) were regularly devalued during classroom instruction, the student may grow to feel as though he does not belong in the space (Souto-Manning et al., 2021) or he may experience a “fight or flight” response (Hammond, 2014). However, the white PST’s explanation simply positions the child as deficient (i.e., arriving to school with barriers to learning) and their behavior as aberrant (i.e., having meltdowns, running out of the classroom) while omitting any mention of the structuring properties of race and racism. This eclipses the stark reality that traditional learning environments often withhold opportunities for success, well-being, and belonging from Black and Brown students (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Additionally, many white PSTs also suggested—without mentioning race—that Black and Brown students’ underachievement could be attributed to their families’ poor values (e.g., “it’s not valued at home”), lack of knowledge or involvement (e.g., “they don’t know that they should be more involved”), or refusal to cooperate (e.g., “there isn’t a lot being done at home”). For example, one white PST suggested that some parents do not value education and therefore do not encourage their children to achieve in school. She explained:

I just think a lot of them don’t have positive school experiences or it’s not valued at home—where they would want to be achieving at school. It’s not something that their parents are talking about, so they’re like, ‘Ugh, school.’ Where like, when I grew up, I got home and my mom made me do my homework and we would talk all the time and I think there’s a lot of kids that don’t have that conversation at home.

In this explanation, the PST falsely claims that education is not valued by the Black and Brown families in her classroom. Not only does she make assumptions about what families are doing and not doing in their homes, but she also positions these families as value-deficient as compared to white, middle-class families like her own. Positioning families as anti-intellectual or framing them as simply uninvolved or uncooperative reinforces cultural deficit notions and supports the notion that people get the outcomes that they deserve. Here again, staying silent on race effectively masks the work that race does to structure these outcomes.

The omission of race in white PSTs’ explanations prompts wonderings about how the teacher education program engaged PSTs in learning about race and its structuring properties. Notably, many of the PSTs spoke about how well they felt the program had prepared them to navigate issues of race and effectively teach diverse populations. One white PST shared:

I feel comfortable talking about my background as a white female educator. I feel comfortable having those conversations with people of color and especially when you are in a community that you are serving that's mostly people of color. So, I feel like I know how to have those critical conversations, and I feel like I know strategies to be a culturally responsive teacher.

This PST's comments suggest that the teacher preparation program had—at least to some degree—focused the PSTs' attention on issues of race and aimed to develop their race-consciousness. Yet, the majoritarian nature of their storytelling seems to indicate otherwise. It is possible, however, that despite having engaged with the topic of race in their teacher preparation coursework, many white PSTs remained unable to conduct a race-central analysis in the context of their student teaching classrooms without the scaffolding and support of a race-conscious other. As a result, they remained silent on race and their explanations worked to obscure responsibility for poor school outcomes.

Promoting Normativity and Universality

The white PSTs' explanations and stories both overtly and subtly carried normative assumptions and notions of universality. One clear example is how the white PST quoted above compares the families of underachieving Black and Brown students in her classroom to her own family experiences. Aside from making assumptions about families' activities and priorities, she positions her experiences within a white, middle-class family as the “standard” or the “norm” by which all families should be compared and held to. She assumes that what was in *her* best interest as a child (i.e., having a mother at home with her after school to discuss her school day) is universally in the best interest of *all* children. While this home arrangement very likely afforded her certain privileges, such arrangements are certainly not necessary for learning or in any way superior to other types of home arrangements.

Similarly, another white PST used her own family experiences as a point of reference to explain the racially disparate achievement outcomes in her first-grade classroom. She explained, “They just haven't been exposed to reading as much. I know I grew up with my parents reading to me. Some children might not have experienced reading a book when they come into school.” Here again, the home activities of this PST's upbringing (i.e., early exposure to dominant, school-based literacy traditions) likely contributed to her academic success; however, book reading in the home simply cannot explain persistent disparities in achievement outcomes and, moreover, should not be a determining factor in school success. Ultimately, positioning white, middle-class families as the standard for comparison, in the way that these stories do, carries the suggestion that Black and Brown students would experience greater success if their families simply adapted to be more like the dominant group. This type of assimilationist reasoning is common in majoritarian stories and allows members of the dominant group to position themselves as superior and deserving—justifying their racial power and protecting racial privilege without ever mentioning race.

Espousing Neutrality and Objectivity

Also absent from the white PSTs' explanations was any suggestion that a teacher's approach or the conditions of the learning environment could be a factor in the racially disparate outcomes they were seeing. Such omissions could be read as an underlying presumption that learning environments are inherently neutral and objective, as are teachers' pedagogical approaches. In reality, notions of race-neutrality in schools and classrooms could not be further from the truth (Ladson-Billings, 1998; McKinney de Royston & Nasir, 2017). Yet, the white PSTs largely positioned themselves as objective, recounted their students' difficulties, and characterized them in deficit ways—all while appearing to leave the learning environment itself unexamined. For example, one white PST recounted the difficulties that she and her cooperating teacher experienced when attempting to get an underperforming Black male to participate in daily reading groups. She explained:

It's [a lack of] confidence in pretty much anything he does. His first instinct on anything a little bit hard is 'I can't.' When he starts getting frustrated, it elevates. He doesn't do well with the "Take a Break Chair"—he actually needs to leave the room, so he goes to the "Buddy Bench." The problem is if you go to the "Buddy Bench" and you miss reading workshop for 15 minutes, you've just missed your group. And so, I don't know how we're going to move forward with him. He's gonna stay where he is.

There is an air of objectivity and neutrality in this PST's explanation. The white PST characterizes the student's underachievement as simply a problem of low confidence resulting in daily frustration and escalating behaviors. Not only is this a likely oversimplification of the problem, but this explanation also allows the PST to implicitly position the learning environment as neutral—that is, as having no influence on the student's behavior or underachievement. There is no consideration for how the student—a Black male—might be experiencing a predominantly white classroom and how aspects of the learning environment (e.g., the use of mainstream, exclusionary discipline practices) might in some way be contributing to his difficulties participating successfully in his reading group.

This air of objectivity was also present in instances where PSTs attributed their students' underachievement to a lack of family involvement. In these explanations, PSTs asserted certain "truths" about their students' families. One white PST explained:

It has a lot to do with family life and what is coming in from home. If their parents are a little less engaged in their academic life because they have other things to worry about—like work and providing for their family, finding places to live, things like that—that can make it really difficult to engage in your child's learning and realize that 'Oh, yeah, I'm part of this too.' And even some of the parents' upbringings. They didn't get that either, so they don't know. They don't know that they should be or could be more involved.... I'd say mostly home life contributes to how they perform in school.

While this PST does demonstrate some awareness of the socioeconomic realities that families face, she also attempts pass off "truths" about parents' upbringings and the knowledge they do or do not possess as a result of these assumed upbringings. To speak with such authority about what

people have experienced (i.e., “They didn’t get that...”) and what they do or do not know (i.e., “They don’t know...”) seems quite audacious. Yet, majoritarian stories gain their strength from such devices—they emphasize certain “facts” without any real examination of their truth.

Promoting Myths of Meritocracy

Additionally, many of the white PSTs characterized underachieving Black and Brown students as “not working hard enough” and told stories about students who “would do anything to avoid work.” Others suggested that students would experience greater success if they did a better job following the directions and meeting classroom expectations. These stories centered mainly on students’ perceived lack of effort and noncompliance, suggesting that if they only worked harder and followed the rules, they would experience success on the level of their white peers. One white PST attributed a Black male’s underachievement in her third-grade classroom to his “resistant” attitude. She characterized his attitude and reactions in the following way:

He just is resistant to like pretty much any correction or like redirection or like telling him that he's not following the directions related to a certain task. He shuts down and like freaks out. He's had a lot of meltdowns just because we're just like, "You're not reading the math directions. You should be reading that," and he doesn't. Or he'll be off task and you redirect [him] and he gets really mad.

This PST expected the student to respond to feedback and direction in a certain way. When he did not, she situated him as the sole problem. Like many of the white PSTs, she did not mention other dynamics (e.g., racialized, gendered, etc.) that might be influencing his responses or shaping his classroom experience. This positioning effectively diverts attention away from racial privilege and toward one’s individual efforts and their degree of compliance. As a result, such stories promote the fallacy that all students have an equal chance for school success. Alas, by promoting this type of meritocratic reasoning (e.g., ‘those who work hard deserve to reap the rewards’), the dominant group is again able to justify their power without having to examine or acknowledge racial privilege.

Rendering Certain Realities Invisible

Protecting the privilege and power of those in the dominant group requires the construction of a particular social reality—one in which some people simply are not hardworking enough, capable enough, or deserving enough to be afforded certain rights and powers (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Constructing and maintaining this reality requires that other realities be silenced and distorted. When PSTs tell stories about students and their families—and pass those stories off as statements of fact—they contribute to this silencing and distortion. For example, one white PST characterized an underachieving Latina student in her fifth-grade classroom as a student who “would do anything to avoid reading” and was “constantly disruptive.” When asked why the student was underperforming, she responded:

The child’s mother is a strong advocate for her daughter and will make angry phone calls whenever negative information about her kid is talked about and so there isn’t a lot of

progress being done at home.... [The teachers] don't really want to push her too much because then you'll get angry phone calls from mom.

Her story characterizes the child's mother as "angry" and uncooperative, and she cites this as the main reason that the child is unable to make academic progress in the classroom. Like many of her peers, she does not mention any classroom factors that may be contributing to the student's underperformance. She instead positions the mother as the problem and blames the child's lack of academic progress on the mother's refusal to simply accept teachers' negative assessments of her child. Undoubtedly, this student and her mother have experienced raced, classed, and gendered realities that the PST has failed to capture in her rendering. In doing so, the PST leaves no space to consider the mother's advocacy for her child a liberatory endeavor or the child's "avoidance" a reasonable form of resistance (Robinson & Ward, 1991; Rogers et al., 2020). Stories such as these—those that silence and distort nondominant realities—work to maintain a reality where it seems both reasonable and acceptable to blame individuals for their own experiences of subordination.

Discussion and Implications

The foregoing analysis demonstrates how white PSTs participate in majoritarian storytelling—showing, as well, that majoritarian mindsets persist despite programmatic intentions toward social justice. This is a testament to the power of majoritarian stories and the enduring challenge of preparing teachers for antiracist work. However disconcerting, these stories reveal much about the knowledge and mindsets of our white PSTs, and when deconstructed through a critical race lens, these stories present opportunities for teacher educators—in particular, those who supervise PSTs in the field—to act purposefully and pedagogically. In the subsections that follow, I highlight the opportunities field supervisors have to support PSTs in noticing and interrogating these narratives and developing robust understandings of the "work" that race does.

Model Race-central Analyses

As demonstrated in the foregoing analysis, white PSTs tend to explain racial disparities in school achievement without mentioning race or implicating racism, white normativity, or race-based privilege. Instead, PSTs tend to position students and their families as deficient without leveraging what they may have learned about the intersections of race, class, or gender in their coursework. Fortunately, field supervisors have abundant opportunities to model for PSTs a race-central analysis. This should begin with a situating of race, not only as a social construct, but as a deeply pervasive ideology that is woven into both institutional policies and everyday ways of knowing, communicating, and behaving in social contexts (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Field supervisors can support PSTs' sensemaking by illuminating the structuring properties of race and helping them recognize the work that race does to structure achievement in their placement classrooms. For example, when PSTs talk about student achievement, parent involvement, or even socioeconomic factors without also talking about race and racial privilege, field supervisors must attend to the "unseen" (Milner, 2007) and step into the discussion in order to make race and its structuring properties immediately visible to PSTs. However, teacher educators themselves must understand the pervasive nature of race and racism; recognize its veiled, fluid, and

changing shapes across time and space; and be willing to talk plainly about it (Ladson-Billings, 2018).

Challenge Notions of Objectivity and Neutrality

Also characteristic in white PSTs' responses is an underlying presumption that classrooms are inherently neutral and that teachers' actions and decisions are soundly objective. These assumptions of neutrality and objectivity need to be challenged in the contexts of PSTs' field placements. This requires that teacher educators themselves understand classrooms as inherently racialized spaces (McKinney de Royston & Nasir, 2017; Souto-Manning et al., 2021) and recognize the ways in which classroom instruction is shaped by teachers' raced, classed, and gendered subjectivities. In situations where PSTs blame students for poor outcomes, it is quite likely that they are operating under a false presumption that learning environments and instructional approaches are neutral and therefore cannot be the primary cause of a child's difficulties. Noticing these assumptions of neutrality and interrogating them creates opportunities for PSTs to newly examine the classroom as a racialized space. Within the context of field placement classrooms, supervisors can guide PSTs to assess their interpersonal interactions with students and seek feedback directly from those students who they perceive to be "lacking self-control" or demonstrating "resistance." Such reflexive forms of perspective taking (Warren & Hotchkins, 2015) can lead PSTs to recognize their own subjectivities and tailor their pedagogy toward more equitable and just outcomes.

Make White Normativity and Universality Visible

As evidenced in the data, white PSTs' stories carry normative assumptions and notions of universality. Specifically, their explanations position white, middle-class experiences as the norm by which all groups should be compared to. Field supervisors must listen closely for such positionings and mediate discussions in ways that first help PSTs in recognizing how their own race and racial socialization has largely influenced their social and cultural frames of reference. Then, they can help PSTs see how these frames of reference—when left unexamined and unquestioned—promote assimilationist thinking and work in covert ways to support dominant agendas. In the context of field placement classrooms, supervisors can guide PSTs to examine traditional classroom norms and expectations and prompt them to consider the kind of "work" that these norms and expectations do, who benefits and who is marginalized by their use, and how they might be assimilationist and harmful in nature. For example, in a classroom where individualism and competition are valued over cooperation and shared success, a student belonging to a racial or ethnic group with an orientation toward collectivism may experience ongoing "cultural conflict" and have greater difficulty excelling in such an environment (Hammond, 2014).

Likewise, a classroom literacy program that values the production and consumption of written texts over oral traditions and oral performances might leave some students with fewer opportunities to leverage their cultural assets toward academic learning. However, after decades of socialization into whiteness and white normativity, we should expect PSTs to find it difficult to eschew notions of universality and be able to recognize the racialized and normative nature of mainstream classroom practices and traditions. For this reason, PSTs are likely to need ongoing

support in critically examining classroom norms and assessing whether and how such norms align with their students' familial and cultural values.

Question Meritocratic Reasoning

White PSTs' positioning of underachieving Black and Brown students as "not working hard enough" or "avoiding work" presents opportunities for field supervisors to examine and interrogate meritocratic reasoning with PSTs. While such explanations might hold up in isolated situations, these positionings should be wholly rejected on the grounds that they simply do not explain persistent racial disparities in school outcomes. Instead, field supervisors can guide PSTs to consider how meritocratic beliefs and practices work on a large scale to mask hegemonic interests and benefit the dominant group. In classroom settings, field supervisors can guide PSTs to examine the ways that traditional practices and policies promote meritocratic ideals and shift PSTs' attention away from students' individual efforts and toward other "unseen" factors that structure opportunities for learning and classroom success, such as white normativity and racial privilege.

Privilege Nondominant Realities and Knowledge

It is relatively unsurprising that white PSTs tell stories that deny, distort, and silence the perspectives and histories of Black and Brown students and families. This is because they have been socialized to believe that their voices and frames of reference represent the "truth" and should be privileged over others. To counter this, field supervisors can provide opportunities for PSTs to learn *how* to listen to the stories of the students and families they will eventually serve. Listening to counternarratives (Chapman & Bhopal, 2013; Pennington et al., 2019; Solórzano, 2019) in field supervision seminars can help white PSTs understand the ways that racism and other intersecting forms of oppression differentially shape people's schooling experiences and outcomes (Author, under review). In the context of field placements, field supervisors can guide PSTs to notice what is passed off as "truth" (e.g., some families don't value school) and question the "facts" about students and families that are presented to them by other school professionals (e.g., he can't self-regulate, they don't read at home). They can support PSTs in choosing to reject dominant narratives and in developing the capacity to understand and value the experiences and knowledge of the students and families they serve. However, because majoritarian stories masquerade as fact and are readily accepted as truth, those who support PSTs must be keen to their pernicious subtlety and have the political clarity themselves to recognize how these stories work to uphold white supremacy and perpetuate racial inequality.

Conclusion

From a critical race perspective, it is unsurprising that white PSTs' explanations for racially disparate school outcomes align closely with a majoritarian mindset and employ devices characteristic of longstanding majoritarian stories. This is precisely what we would expect in a society where the concept of race is so well-funded that it evades scrutiny and appears as "natural" and "normal" to those who live there. On the whole, it is also unsurprising that racially disparate school outcomes persist in the United States, despite decades-long efforts by school districts and teacher preparation programs to prioritize issues of equity and diversity. Amid this

complexity, one thing is quite clear: we simply will not reach the waters of educational equity without a full-scale effort to *defund* the very thing that has produced and maintained these disparate outcomes—the concept of race (Ladson-Billings, 2018).

As I have shown in this paper, teacher educators are in a prime position to support the project of defunding race. At nearly every turn, teacher educators have opportunities to unmask majoritarian devices and strip them of their power. They can do this by modeling race-central analyses, challenging assertions of objectivity and neutrality, questioning meritocratic reasoning, highlighting the workings of white normativity, and choosing to privilege the experiences and knowledge of nondominant groups. Field supervisors, in particular, are uniquely positioned to respond to the majoritarian narratives that PSTs bring to their field experiences and support them in recognizing the “work” that race does in their placement classrooms to structure students’ experiences and outcomes. In sum, *this* is the work of defunding race, and if we—as teacher educators—are not working aggressively to defund race, what *are* we doing?

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