

# The Production of Whiteness in Education: Asian International Students in a College Classroom

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*This study uses a poststructural analysis to explicate the social production of Whiteness in a college classroom. Whiteness scholars define Whiteness as reference to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and intrinsically linked to relations of domination. Using this framework of social production, I analyze a graduate-level college classroom for evidence of Whiteness. More than 50% of the class members were Asian international students. I suggest that Whiteness was operating on multiple levels, which I categorize as: Whiteness as Domination; Resources and the Production of the Other; and the Discourse of Cultural Preference. I argue that Whiteness not only served to deny Asian international students and other students of color an equal opportunity to learn in that classroom, but most pointedly, Whiteness also served to elevate the White students by positioning the students of color as their audience.*

## INTRODUCTION: WHITENESS AS SOCIAL PRODUCTION

This study focuses on the social production of race and racism in educational environments, particularly the social production of Whiteness. Whiteness refers to dimensions of racism that serve to elevate White people over people of color. By using Whiteness as the frame, this study focuses on the White end of the hierarchy of racism. Recognizing that the terms I am using are not, “theory neutral ‘descriptors’ but theory-laden constructs inseparable from systems of injustice” (Allen, 1996, p.95), I use the terms *White* and *Whiteness* to describe a social process operating in U.S. educational institutions, a process that, I suggest, serves not only to deny students of color an equal opportunity to learn in U.S. schools, but also most pointedly, to elevate the position of White students.

The most recent data about U.S. teachers show that the majority of elementary and secondary school teachers are female and White. In 1999, the teacher population was 87% White (American Association of Colleges

for Teacher Education, 1999) and 74% female (Snyder, 1999). Recent estimates indicate that the percentage of White teachers in public schools is increasing (Snyder). It may be hypothesized from these statistics that many White preservice teachers do not interact with people of color in any direct or sustained way in their preparation programs. It is therefore critical that when White preservice teachers do interact with students of color, they are able to recognize the ways in which Whiteness reproduces itself. Although Whiteness is also being reproduced in contexts in which people of color are absent, this article focuses on a context in which people of color were not only present but also made up the majority of students. By explicating racialized dynamics in this context, White teachers may be able to see them more clearly in other contexts as well.

Scholars who examine Whiteness contend that to name Whiteness is to refer to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and that are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of domination (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Roediger, 1997). Frankenberg defines Whiteness as multidimensional: "Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (p.1). Race is conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a bounded entity.

Whiteness is both "empty," in that it is normalized and thus typically unmarked, and content laden, or "full," in that it generates norms and reference points, ways of conceptualizing the world, and ways of thinking about oneself and others regardless of where one is positioned relationally within it (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993). However, because it operates relationally, the interpretation and consequences of Whiteness vary depending on who is interacting and in what context. This definition counters the dominant representation of racism in mainstream education as isolated in discrete incidents that some individuals may or may not "do," and goes beyond naming specific privileges (McIntosh, 1986). Whites are theorized as actively shaped, affected, defined, and privileged through their racialization and their individual and collective consciousness formed within it (Frankenberg, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Tatum, 1992). Traditional solutions to inequitable educational outcomes for racialized groups of students have been directed toward the problems of racialized "others" and to the challenges of implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, rather than to the workings of dominant culture itself. To conceptualize Whiteness not as a fixed and unified "thing," but rather as a set of practices, including the practice of Whites racializing others but not themselves, allows teachers to identify, and begin to change, those practices.

When students of color are also second-language learners, another layer is added to the hierarchical differential in power. Power relations play a crucial role in social interactions between language learners and target language speakers. Language learners have a complex social identity that must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable, social structures that are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction. Norton (2001) challenges the unquestioned nature of these power relations and argued that in order to effectively question (and thus interrupt) these relations in the classroom, we must be able to recognize them as a set of practices that are pedagogically reproduced. Macedo and Bartolome (1999) challenges educators to attend to this task when they state that Whiteness employs sophisticated pedagogical practices that serve to construct dehumanized cultural subjects. These practices are then obscured through the veil of Whiteness, and therefore educators, they urged, must become “cultural brokers” fluent in recognizing and articulating the active dynamics of Whiteness in order to “help create psychologically beneficial pedagogical space for all students” (p. 20). In this article, I attempt to rise to that challenge by explicating what Whiteness looks like actively manifesting in a given college classroom.

In seeking to analyze Whiteness as a process, I am attentive to the group dynamics involved in its production—the unspoken, unmarked classroom norms and behavioral patterns that bolster the advantageous social position of White students at the expense of students of color. Dyer (1997) suggests that race is “never not a factor, never not in play” (p. 1). To conceptualize race as an ever-present, unbounded process of domination rather than as isolated in discrete incidents necessitates an acknowledgment that race, and thus Whiteness, is necessarily being produced in our classrooms, for it prevents us from locating ourselves outside these dynamic relations. Many scholars of multiculturalism who examine the production of Whiteness in education argue that a structural analysis of racism will not produce less racist institutions as long as the production of Whiteness is left unexamined (Castenell & Pinar, 1993; Powell, 1997; Sleeter, 1993). Therefore, identifying Whiteness in play is critical for teachers invested in multicultural education that “incorporates the idea that all students, regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics, should have an equal opportunity to learn in school” (Banks, 2003, p. 3).

### SEEING WHITENESS

Most classes and texts that focus on race and racial identity formation in education emphasize the impact of racism on students of color (Lee, 1996; Olsen, 1998; Valenzuela, 2001). Teachers may be taught, for example, how

racism is internalized in students of color and how this internalization impacts these students in multiple dimensions of their lives. Understanding that students of color often have very different experiences in the classroom than their White counterparts is critical for White teachers to understand (Delpit, 1995; Lee, 1996; Liu, 2001; Olsen). What this focus leaves unexamined, however, are the political and social privileges and preferences that White teachers and students receive over students of color by virtue of their racialized location. Dyer (1997) argues that “the point of seeing the racing of Whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppressions, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them by undercutting the authority by which they/we speak and act in and on the world” (p. 2). If our goal is to interrupt the production of racial inequity in the classroom so that ultimately no one’s race affords more or less access, we must first racialize White teachers and students, for the unnamings of Whiteness serves to secure its privileged location. Naming Whiteness displaces it from the unmarked and neutralized status that is itself an effect of dominance. The silence surrounding Whiteness creates power differentials that are invariably manifested in interactions between students of color and White students and teachers. Describing the production of Whiteness in the classroom allows White teachers to identify how they have internalized racialized group preferences and how these preferences may impede their ability to teach all their students (Banks, 1994; Powell, 1997).

Some scholars have argued that there are two interrelated components missing in most efforts to address inequity: the existence of privilege and how it shapes those who hold it, and the defining relationship between privileged and marginalized groups (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1997; McIntosh, 1986; Morrison, 1992; Powell, 1997; Tatum, 1997). Powell states, “What may be missing from this literature and from various interventions is a better understanding of the role that Whiteness plays in the knot of minority student failure” (p. 1). By focusing primarily on the academic performance of students of color and ignoring the defining relationship between that performance and the production of Whiteness in the classroom, racial inequity is externalized. This approach reinforces the “otherness” of difference and leaves the operation of power neutralized, unquestioned, and intact. A primary example is when White teachers study multiethnic youth without the critical and corollary study of themselves in relation to those youth (Sleeter, 1996). A revised approach to race relations shifts to the discourse, culture, structures, mechanisms, and social relations that produce racialized subjects, including Whites. To conceptualize Whiteness not as a fixed and unified “thing,” but rather as a set of practices, including the practice of racializing others but not ourselves, is utilitarian, for it allows us to identify, and potentially change, those practices.

## METHODOLOGY

To describe the production of Whiteness in a college classroom, I observed a 3-hour graduate-level course in interpretive research methods at a large research university on the West Coast. This course was interdisciplinary and attracted students primarily from education, social work, women's studies, and nursing. Over half of those enrolled were students of color, and the majority of those were Asian international students. Based on the research literature's description of Whiteness as an unbounded process that is always present in some form, this study assumed, rather than set out to demonstrate, that Whiteness was operating in the classroom. Having made this assumption, my goal was to explore how Whiteness functioned and how privilege was produced and maintained in a common context: a White institution, with White faculty, and a mixture of White and non-White students. I hoped to be able to explicate its mechanisms and nuances in this class.

The session I observed was the second-to-last class in a two-quarter series; the group had been meeting for roughly 16 weeks, much longer than the average one-quarter class, and theoretically the students should have become well-known to one another. Significantly, this class was held in a department of the university that was acclaimed for its commitment to diversity and multicultural education. For these reasons, the classroom I selected seemed well suited to make the operation of Whiteness difficult to detect. This was an exploratory, hypotheses-generating case study and was not intended to be inductive or representative of the course dynamics or pedagogy across sessions. I used theoretically derived coding based on the Whiteness and multicultural literature to guide my observations of the dynamics of Whiteness as social production in a specific classroom situation. I recognize that both my observations and my interpretations of them come from my own frame of reference as a White educator and may not be shared by the participants or instructors.

The day I observed, the class was co-led by a guest speaker. She was an anthropologist, a White woman in her mid-40s who had the dress and linguistic patterns of a White middle-class background (Delpit, 1995; Dyer, 1997). The demographics of the speaker are significant for teacher educators because they match the profile of the average teacher (Banks, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). The speaker's topic was the position of the researcher in relation to the research subjects. She had conducted research over the last 25 years in Southeast Asia and introduced her topic by contrasting her current understanding of the subjectivity of the researcher with her early academic training of the researcher as an objective, neutral entity. I will refer to her as the Speaker. Although she led the discussion, the regular Professor sat next to her and occasionally interjected comments and

answered questions. He was a White male, early 50s, self-identified as being of a middle-class background. I will refer to him as the Professor. The room was set up in a U shape, with the Speaker and the Professor sitting at the front of the room. I arrived early and sat in the right corner of the U.

There were 16 students in the class: 2 White American males, 3 women of color (all American and of Asian heritage), 6 international (all female, of Asian heritage, and non-native English speakers), and 5 White American women. I refer to them as follows: Asian international student (AIS); Asian American student (AAS); White American student (WAS); White male student (WMS); White female student (WFS).

### OBSERVATIONS

In this section, I provide a sampling of my observation notes on the speaking patterns and group dynamics during the class session, followed by a table summarizing key themes. I present a descriptive flow of major patterns of interaction, with selected commentary placed in italics and interspersed throughout the presentation. This commentary is derived from the observation notes and seeks to shed light on what is going on in the classroom.

Three students arrive early; they are all White women. Two sit together and engage animatedly in conversation. A third sits alone. AIS arrives, and greets the third WFS warmly. They talk. AIS arrives, smiles at me. Greets and joins dyad of WFS and AIS. The two WFSs continue talking animatedly. One of the AISs smiles at one of the WFSs, who ignores her and continues talking to her WFS friend. The newly formed triad sits quietly, chatting lightly. WFS dyad continues talking. Another AIS arrives and sits apart. The two WFSs who have been talking now engage the Professor in conversation.

Class begins. The Professor introduces me as a visitor here to observe the class. Once all students are present, the seating arrangements appear to be random based on available seats. (*The Professor tells me later that this is an exception, and that for most classes, all the international students sit on one side of the room, and all the American students sit on the other.*)

Speaker begins her lecture and asks for questions. A pause. WMS asks a question. Speaker responds. WMS asks a follow-up question. Speaker responds. WFS asks a question. Speaker responds. More lecture. WFS asks a question. Speaker responds. WFS asks a question. Speaker responds. Same WFS asks a follow-up question. Speaker responds. WMS asks a question. Speaker responds. WFS asks a question. Speaker responds. AAS makes a comment. Speaker responds.

*The Speaker's topic seems ideal for engaging the international students; she is discussing the experience of being completely immersed in a foreign culture. Yet no*

*international students are asked about their experiences. None offers them. It is now 40 minutes into the class, and no AIS has spoken.*

WFS asks a question. Speaker responds. Speaker says something funny and American students laugh out loud, engaging with comments such as “oh come on!” and “yeah!” AISs do not respond vocally, although some nod and smile. WFS asks a question. Reengages with comments after Speaker answers. WFS asks a question. Speaker responds. WFS reengages. WFS comments. Reengages with the Speaker’s response. American students nod along with the speakers; AISs do not. AAS asks a question.

*The Speaker directs her presentation to the students who are asking the most questions. She looks directly at them. She leans toward them. She makes linkages with their previous comments. In noticing this, I realize the degree to which the White students are directing the class. There is more going on here than how many times an individual speaks; there are myriad other benefits accruing to the White students. Not only are they directing the course the Speaker takes, but they are also working their research questions into the topic and using the Speaker to meet their research needs. They are also being affirmed and reinforced in their presence and participation style.*

WMS asks a question. Reengages with the answer, adding his own commentary.

The Professor comments that he wants the Speaker to be able to finish this part of the presentation so that there can be a break in 10 minutes. Jokingly, he says, “We’re running short of time so shut-up and stop asking questions,” evoking laughter from the American students.

*I wonder about the effect this comment has on the AISs. Research has indicated that although these students are often willing to speak in class, they need more time before they venture into the discussion (Liu, 2001). If there is a tendency to wait longer to speak, and they might have been close to participating, could this serve to further silence them?*

WFS adds her experience to something shared by the Speaker. This experience is incorporated into the talk, once again redirecting the Speaker.

*One hour has now passed. No AISs have spoken. I look around the room. The AISs on one side are nodding and smiling along with the Speaker. The AISs on the other side do not respond.*

WFS asks a question, and she and the Speaker engage back and forth. WMS makes a joke. The Professor jokes back.

Someone on the left side of the room makes a motion that she has a question. The Speaker turns toward this side of the room. A WFS is sitting between an AIS and an AAS. Although the AAS is the one who motioned that she had a question, the Speaker looks at the WFS and asks if she has a question. The AAS says, “No, that was me.” She then asks her question. Speaker responds.

*It is significant that the Speaker assumes that the White woman had a question, particularly because the White woman had not previously spoken, and the Asian*

*American woman had. Even so, in this interchange, the Asian American woman's participation is projected onto a White woman. I believe that although this AAS has been speaking in the class, her Asian heritage triggers a racialized response from the Speaker that renders her less visible.*

WMS makes a bridge to something discussed earlier. WFS makes a comment. Speaker keeps talking, and then refers back to something a WMS had said earlier. "It was a situation like the one you raised before." She gestures to the WMS.

Ninety minutes have passed. The instructors call for a break.

*Again, this is a class that has met for two quarters or approximately 16 weeks. It is the second-to-last class. At this point in the current session, not one AIS has spoken, nor have any attempts been made to include them in the discussion.*

A moment before class resumes, an AIS makes a brief comment (one sentence) to the professor related to logistics. There is no response. Class resumes.

Speaker asks for questions. WMS asks a question. Speaker responds. Same WMS continues to ask three more follow-up questions, and the Speaker responds to each one. WFS makes a comment related to WMS's question. WMS repeats the question. The Professor asks the Speaker to address the WMS's question in greater detail, and the Speaker complies. AAS asks a question. Speaker addresses her answer to a WFS who talked previously, pulling the WFS's experience into her talk.

*Although 3 Asian American women were in the class, only one ever spoke. All references here are to the same woman. This Asian American woman was of Korean heritage. Although after the first hour passed, she was fairly outspoken in class, dynamics occurred that I believe were based on her racialized identity as an Asian female, regardless of her position as an American. These dynamics include the earlier incident in which the Speaker assumed that a White woman had asked her question, and this incident, in which the Speaker addressed the question raised by this Asian American female to a White female. I will address these dynamics in more depth in the discussion section of this article.*

WMS makes a comment. WFS makes a comment. Class laughs. Speaker continues, addressing her talk to the questioning WMS.

*There is much camaraderie in the room, as evidenced by the joking, laughter, linkages to previously made statements, and incorporation of individual students' research interests. However, the AISs are not included in the camaraderie in either a verbal or physical way.*

Professor comments on a point of discussion. WMS raises an objection. Speaker responds.

Speaker resumes lecture. AAS makes a comment. WFS asks a question. Speaker responds. WFS clarifies. Speaker responds. WFS asks a question. WMS answers it. Speaker continues.

WFS asks a question. Speaker responds. WFS asks follow-up question. Speaker responds.

WMS responds to the WFS's question. Speaker responds to him. WMS replies.

*The interchange is often extended between the Speaker and the White American students. Most questions are followed by two to four follow-up questions and comments, making for prolonged, more detailed interchanges. These interchanges are often connected to questions pertaining to the students' research interests.*

Speaker and Presenter both tell WMS that he is right and that he has made a good point.

AAS comments. Gives an example from her field. The AISs are watching or taking notes.

Professor makes a point. AAS continues with her points, clarifying and elaborating.

*Although there are only 2 male students in a class of 16, they are key participants in the discussion. Table 1 indicates that they took up at least half of the student air-time and were more likely to be involved in lengthy interchanges rather than asking one question and accepting the answer.*

WMS asks, "Can we go back to . . ." and brings the discussion to another point. Asks a question. Speaker responds. WMS asks a follow-up question. Speaker responds. Professor says, "I think this goes back to a comment that [WMS] made earlier." Final points are made. Class ends.

*Not once in 3 hours did any international students of color speak during class time, nor was any attempt made to bring them into the discussion. The Asian international students essentially played audience to the White American students.*

Table 1 provides a summary of what has been presented discursively in the preceding section (it should be noted that the percentage of participation is based only on the number of turns taken and not the amount of time that these turns actually took; if the amount of time had been represented, the White male students would have played an even more dominating role in the classroom interaction).

## DISCUSSION

### WHITENESS AS DOMINANCE

Being able to observe the group dynamics without having to lead the class or engage as a participant, I realized that much more is going on in classroom learning than the material being presented. Domination in the classroom is more than just a matter of who speaks and how often; those who speak have the power to direct the course of the discussion. The White students essentially controlled the class and tailored the learning that took

**Table 1. Summary of Student Participation**

Student	Questions related to topic	Comments related to topic	Question related to student's own research	Instructors' references to previous questions or comments*	Follow-up questions to original question	Number of students	Percentage of population	Percentage of participation
White American Male Students	7	5	3	6	9	2	12.5	44.44
White American Female Students	16	3	2	3	3	5	31.25	44.44
Asian American Female Students	3	1	1		1	3	18.75	11.11
Asian International Students	0	0	0	0	0	6	37.5	0

\*Instructors' references to previous questions were not included when calculating participation percentages.

place. This learning met their needs as they directed the material to their own research questions and interests. Furthermore, they were affirmed as learners on multiple levels; their participation style was affirmed, their research interests were affirmed, their questions and comments were affirmed, *and ultimately, their lack of any attempt to include the perspectives of the international students of color was affirmed.* According to Frankenberg (1993), “Whiteness signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage” (p. 236). This affirmation indicated that no loss was experienced by the White students or instructors in not hearing the thoughts, questions, experiences, or research interests of the international students. This ease of loss suggests an internalized sense of entitlement to classroom resources for White students and teachers and reinforces a message that there is nothing of significance to learn from students of color, either intellectually or personally (Castenell & Pinar, 1993; Dyer, 1997; Macedo & Bartolome, 1999, McIntosh, 1986).

An understanding of Whiteness as socially produced dominance must include dimensions that are less tangible and not necessarily seen, heard, or felt by those benefiting from them. It is what is not noticed, questioned, or considered that defines and reinforces dominance and shapes White consciousness. This is the quiet power that Fine (1997) identifies when she asks “how Whiteness accrues privilege and status; gets itself surrounded by protective pillows of resources and/or benefits of the doubt; how Whiteness repels gossip and voyeurism and instead demands dignity” (p. 57). The White students in this class were not penalized by the dynamics of exclusion but rather were bounded, insulated, and elevated by them.

#### THE DISCOURSE OF CULTURAL PREFERENCE

In her study of Asian students in a U.S. high school, Lee (1996) found that many of the problems faced by racial minorities were interpreted by the teachers as due to cultural differences. She said, “For example, the ESOL teacher, Dr. Rafferty, believed that many of the problems faced by Asian students were due to cultural differences between Asian and non-Asians” (p. 87). Yet as my observation illustrates, Asian and non-Asian students are not constituted in the same ways in the classroom, which has tangible consequences for educational opportunity. In the classroom I observed, the White students were brought into focus while the Asian students were tuned out, regardless of whether they were international. Yet even though Asian and international students are often ignored in the classroom (Lee, 1996; Liu, 2001), White students and teachers are still responding to them. They are first seen (racialized) and then not seen (ignored and rendered invisible upon the assumptions that come with that racialization). Two in-

cidences observed in this case are cogent examples of this process: the Speaker's inability to see an active Asian American woman as having asked a question, and the Speaker addressing her answer to one of the Asian American woman's questions to a White woman. In the case of international students, particularly those of Asian heritage, the framework of model minority—passive, feminine, preferring to be quiet—is set into motion (Lee, 1996; Liu, 2001). That framework then sets into motion behaviors on the part of Whites that reinforce internal perspectives that are then externalized into behaviors and actions that support a particular worldview. Sleeter (1996) writes that “the questions surrounding racial discourse should focus not so much on how true stereotypes are, but on how the truth-claims they offer are a part of a larger worldview, and what forms of action that worldview authorizes” (p. viii). The model minority stereotype serves Whiteness in that it allows Asian students to be grouped together, rendered invisible, and dismissed, all under the pretext that this is an Asian cultural preference.

The discourse of cultural preference is particularly relevant here, wherein classroom dynamics such as these are attributed to differences in cultural socialization patterns. The discourse of cultural preference is problematic for several reasons. At its base, it merges all Asian groups together and erases profound historical, cultural, linguistic, and economic differences between and within groups. Furthermore, this discourse cannot account for instances wherein White educators are unable to see the participation of Asian students when it occurs. Constituting these relational patterns as cultural relieves educators from the responsibility of inclusive pedagogical practices by shifting responsibility for gaining access onto those who are marginalized by current practices. At the same time, this discourse shifts focus from the impact that these dynamics have on those centered by them, in essence leaving the processes of Whiteness unnamed, a key indicator and linchpin of its operation.

A corollary of the cultural preference discourse is the “language barrier” explanation, which assumes that these international students were silent because they could not speak English, or at least could not speak it well. Although this is a common assumption, upon further reflection, it is highly problematic. First, there were 7 international students in this class, and none of them spoke during the session. Are we to assume that none of the 7 was proficient in English? Why assume a lack of proficiency when all 7 students were well into a Ph.D. program—a program that requires passage of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), an intensive test of English language proficiency for non-native speakers—and had been attending this class for 16 weeks? It may also be useful to note where this explanation focuses our attention. In positioning the international students as culturally deficient rather than exploring how they might have been silenced, the problem is located with them. This explanation does not

require us to take responsibility for developing pedagogical practices that meet the needs of a range of learners. In addition, this discourse hides the multiple ways in which Whites benefited from the silencing of the international students. Even if we grant that, as second-language speakers, these students may have needed more pedagogical time and encouragement to speak, why was that absent? What values were being communicated by that absence, and whose interests did it serve? Ultimately, this focus on the language barrier positions the international students as different (and thus racialized) and positions the White students and instructors as neutral (and thus unracialized). It is significant to note that there were 3 Asian American students in the class I observed—all U.S. born and first-language English speakers—and only one actively participated. Still, this was the same student “not seen” more than once by the Speaker. The multicultural literature suggests that it is not the responsibility of students whose cultural patterns or appearance may differ from dominant norms to figure out for themselves how to gain access in the classroom or be left behind; rather, it proposes that an equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial and cultural groups (Banks & Banks, 1995).

#### WHITENESS, RESOURCES, AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE OTHER

The ability of dominant culture to know, define, place, and categorize itself is dependent on its ability to know, define, place, and categorize the Other—in this case, international students of color; they tell us who we are as powerfully as they tell us who we are not. The rendering of international students of color as not interested in attention is a prerequisite for the normalization and exaltation of the White students and the attention that they receive. “White” and “color” do not exist outside relations of domination; they are social, not biological productions, and thus constitute each other (Castenell & Pinar, 1993; Frankenberg, 1993; Morrison, 1992; Powell, 1997). This identity process is seldom conscious but profound and embedded nonetheless.

Norton (2001) discusses this identity relationship in terms of the post-structuralist rearticulation of subjectivity. She defines subjectivity as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p. 15). I suggest that the international students provided a necessary backdrop for White students, a backdrop that gives White students more cultural capital in the educational environment. White students are set against this backdrop, and it is through the contrast between the two groups that they maintain their position and status. The backdrop of Asian international students and other silenced students of color brings White students

into relief and sets the stage for the normalizing of their position and the monopolizing of the classroom capital. Reflecting back on the casual interchange between a few of the international students and two of the White students before class, it appears that the international students are addressed when they are positioned outside the “play.” In this capacity, the Asian students provide the White students with the social capital of appearing “tolerant of diversity.” But once class begins and the resources of the classroom are distributed—resources that will be exchanged for very real economic advantages—the Asian students are repositioned as audience through the normative practices of Whiteness.

This is another benefit accrued to White American students in a classroom such as this: the ability to represent themselves as functioning successfully in a diverse environment without ever accommodating or learning from that diversity. In describing these educational environments as “diverse,” White American students are able to position themselves as progressive while never actually interacting with these “diverse” Others in any authentic or accommodating way. Although the classroom I observed was mixed racially in terms of two major racialized groups (White and Asian heritage) and thus could be described as diverse, with students of color even outnumbering White students, there was no true integration. Thus, in practice, this was a completely segregated classroom in which Whites dominated every aspect. There is neither anything new nor progressive about this arrangement.

Members of dominant society often assume that much of what they have been granted by virtue of privilege is accessible to everyone. This is a discourse of meritocracy, and White teachers’ articulation of it has been well documented (Lee, 1996; Olsen, 1998; Valenzuela, 2001). At the same time that teachers often insist that they do not see differences and that there is racial harmony at their schools, they also insist that minority students who struggle are not trying hard enough (Banks, 2003; Lee, 1996; Schofield, 2003). Yet as this classroom illustrates, so much more is going on in classrooms than simply whether individual students are trying. Untold benefits accrue to those who share (and are encouraged to share) in the dominant discourse. Fine (1997) asks, “What if we took the position that racial inequities were not primarily attributable to individual acts of discrimination targeted against persons of Color, but increasingly to acts of cumulative privileging quietly loaded up on Whites?” (p. 57). The international students of color couldn’t be receiving *less* in the classroom if the White students were not receiving *more*. From this framework, receiving benefits at someone else’s expense is participation in inequity, regardless of individual intentions. That these dynamics were so unexceptional and occurred without note is evidence of their normative operation. It is on this level, just below conscious awareness, that the continual reinforcement of superiority

and worth take place; the experience of dominance is as continual as the marginalization. In essence, the White American students used the international students of color, albeit unconsciously, to affirm their identity and their place (Dyer, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Powell, 1997; Tatum, 1992).

## CONCLUSIONS

I have suggested that the Asian international students in the class provided a necessary backdrop, a backdrop that reinforced the rightful place of the White students in the classroom and their sense of entitlement to all the space and resources available in that context. Whiteness manifested in this class as a dynamic relation between the White students and students of color, a relation supported by institutional, cultural, structural, and social processes and practices. The White students were thereby invested in this relationship because it both produced and legitimized their accumulation of resources. This accumulation could only occur at the expense of the international students of color. A common White view of racial inequality assumes that racism is not in the best interest of those who ultimately benefit from its production, and denies that there might be rational and self-interested reasons for investment in these inequitable arrangements. Besides allowing White students to monopolize the resources without penalty, Whiteness also provided a framework within which the voices and perspectives of the international students were deemed irrelevant. I contend that if those perspectives had been seen as valuable, they would have been sought.

We interact within a sociopolitical context. Discourse is not neutral; dynamics of inequality are a complex mesh of practices, institutions, assumptions, and beliefs that have the overall effect of giving more power to some groups and less to others. Groups have dynamics that are independent of the individual members' intentions; in other words, these patterns aren't "personal." Starting with the assumption that dynamics of inequitable social power are always at play compels us to practice pedagogical strategies that might interrupt them. I will briefly outline a few possible strategies for teacher education.

Video recordings of group interactions wherein Whiteness is explicitly named and identified can be helpful. It is important to keep in mind that people of color do not have to be present to explicate Whiteness in operation. Lack of attention to the absence of people of color is one way that Whiteness is reinforced in racially homogenous learning environments, and naming that absence and exploring its impact can begin to make it visible. I have found that small-group and paired discussions encourage wider participation. Periodically going around the room and asking each person for his or her perspective on a specific point will elicit comments that would

otherwise remain unheard. Asking to hear from someone who hasn't spoken and then waiting is effective, as is posing questions that function to mitigate the monopolization of resources by dominant group members by diplomatically calling attention to it and making space for others. These questions may include, "Do we have any perspectives on this issue that are different from what we've heard?" "Does anyone else have a similar or different experience?" "Whom haven't we heard from?" It is also important to occasionally be more explicit about the group dynamics through statements such as, "I am noticing that more than half of our group hasn't had a chance to participate in the discussion" and then offering a way for them to do so.

I have found it effective to occasionally state that I am going to check in with those we haven't heard from, and then move around the group, asking each person who hasn't spoken if he or she has anything to add. I allow them to pass if they choose, while giving everyone who hasn't spoken a clear space in which to do so. Claims that "anyone can speak if they want to" and conclusions that if they don't, it is simply their preference, are common whenever patterns of unequal group dynamics are pointed out, whether attributed to race or gender. It is my observation that these claims tend to be unfounded; there is a limited amount of time in any class, so "air-time" is a limited resource. If we don't ration air-time capital, it is most often monopolized through the patterns of dominant group members. In a case such as the class discussed here, putting people in groups based on research interests and allowing time for each group to pose a question might have been helpful in getting more research interests on the table. However, I do not assume that these same dynamics will not be operating in small groups as well. Thus, assigning specific tasks to group members and reminding them to get everyone's input can be helpful. All these techniques are basic group facilitation techniques, making them useful in general and for interrupting some of the patterns of Whiteness discussed here in particular.

The class discussed in this article was made up of approximately 50% students of color and took place after 16 weeks of engagement at a large West Coast university that prides itself on its commitment to multicultural education. If we can see the production of Whiteness in this environment, it follows that we should be able to see these relations elsewhere. And if we can see them, we have an opportunity—indeed an obligation—to interrupt them.

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