Feeling White: Whiteness, Emotionality, and Education

Cheryl E. Matias
University of Colorado, Denver, USA

Discussing race and racism often conjures up emotions of guilt, shame, anger, defensiveness, denial, sadness, dissonance, and discomfort. Instead of suppressing those feelings, coined emotionalities of whiteness, they are, nonetheless, important to identify, understand, and deconstruct if one ever hopes to fully commit to racial equity. Feeling White: Whiteness, Emotionality, and Education delves deeper into these white emotionalities and other latent ones by providing theoretical and psychoanalytic analyses to determine where these emotions so stem, how they operate, and how they perpetuate racial inequities in education and society. The author beautifully weaves in creative writing with theoretical work to artistically illustrate how these emotions operate while also engaging the reader in an emotional experience in and of itself, claiming one must feel to understand. This book does not rehash former race concepts; rather, it applies them in novel ways that get at the heart of humanity, thus revealing how feeling white ultimately impacts race relations. Without a proper investigation on these underlying emotions, that can both stifle or enhance one's commitment to racial justice in education and society, the field of education denies itself a proper emotional preparation so needed to engage in prolonged educative projects of racial and social justice. By digging deep to what impacts humanity most—our hearts—this book dares to expose one's daily experiences with race, thus individually challenging us all to self-investigate our own racialized emotionalities.

"Drawing on her deep wisdom about how race works, Cheryl Matias directly interrogates the emotional arsenal White people use as shields from the pain of confronting racism, peeling back its layers to unearth a core of love that can open us up. In Feeling White: Whiteness, Emotionality, and Education, Matias deftly names and deconstructs distancing emotions, prodding us to stay in the conversation in order to become teachers who can reach children marginalized by racism." – Christine Sleeter, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, California State University, Monterey Bay

"In Feeling White, Cheryl E. Matias blends astute observations, analyses and insights about the emotions embedded in white identity and their impact on the racialized politics of affect in teacher education. Drawing deftly on her own classroom experiences as well as her mastery of the methodologies and theories of critical whiteness studies, Matias challenges us to develop what Dr. King called the strength to love by confronting and conquering the affective structures that promote white innocence and preclude white accountability." – George Lipsitz, Ph.D., Professor, University of California, Santa Barbara, and author of The Possessive Investment In Whiteness

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Cheryl E. Matias, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver. She is a motherscholar of three children, including boy-girl twins.
Feeling White
This book series aims to develop a field of overlapping research that crosses and integrates the domains, disciplines, subjects and themes of cultural pluralism, democracy and social justice. Each theme is taken up individually in many debates but our focus is to bring together advanced and critical analyses that transcend boundaries, languages, disciplines and theoretical and conceptual approaches. We are interested in books that can problematize cultural pluralism in relation to, with and around democracy and socio-environmental justice, especially in relation to education. Our focus on cultural pluralism is intentional, and we aim to move the debate on identity, difference and lived experience forward within a critical lens, seeking to create new, varied and meaningful discussions that go beyond the normative labels of multiculturalism and interculturalism. The literature around education for democracy that underscores political literacy, critical engagement and transformative education is also highly relevant here as is the field of social justice, which examines power relations, laws and policies, structures and experiences at myriad levels. The guiding principles for books in this series include: critical analysis; interdisciplinary; nuanced and complexified thinking; epistemological interrogation; varied research approaches; innovation; openness to international and comparative studies. The books in this series will include case studies, comparative analyses, and collaborations across linguistic, social, ethnic, racial, national, religious and gender boundaries, which may include empirical, conceptual and theoretical frameworks and analysis.

While not an exhaustive or exclusive list, some of the areas that will be of interest for this book series include: Migration, immigration and displacement; Identity and power; Globalization, neoliberalism and cultural pluralism; Critical epistemology; Democracy and diversity; Social justice and environmental justice; Media analyses and studies; Macro-sociological studies; Political ecology; Cultural diversity; Educational change.
Feeling White

Whiteness, Emotionality, and Education

Foreword by Zeus Leonardo

Cheryl E. Matias
University of Colorado, Denver, USA
All chapters in this book have undergone peer review.

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PRAISE FOR

FEELING WHITE

“In Feeling White, Cheryl E. Matias blends astute observations, analyses and insights about the emotions embedded in white identity and their impact on the racialized politics of affect in teacher education. Drawing deftly on her own classroom experiences as well as her mastery of the methodologies and theories of critical whiteness studies, Matias challenges us to develop what Dr. King called “the strength to love” by confronting and conquering the affective structures that promote white innocence and preclude white accountability.”
– George Lipsitz, Ph.D., Professor, University of California, Santa Barbara, and author of The Possessive Investment in Whiteness

“A searingly honest account of the continued traumatization of students of color in our educational system. A must read for those who wish to lift the white veil of pretense and racism that imprisons and diminishes the spirit and dynamism of our students of color.”
– Lee Mun Wah, Director of The Color of Fear

“Drawing on her deep wisdom about how race works, Cheryl E. Matias directly interrogates the emotional arsenal White people use as shields from the pain of confronting racism, peeling back its layers to unearth a core of love that can open us up. In Feeling White: Whiteness, Emotionality, and Education, Matias deftly names and deconstructs distancing emotions, prodding us to stay in the conversation in order to become teachers who can reach children marginalized by racism.”
– Christine Sleeter, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, California State University Monterey Bay

“A frank and fascinating analysis of the mechanisms that connect whiteness and emotion to a sense of innocence and the preservation of ignorance regarding race in and far beyond teacher training programs. Deft use of theory and unflinching autoethnography mark this as a searching contribution to the discussion of liberalism and how schools fail.”
– David Roediger, Ph.D., Foundation Distinguished Professor, University of Kansas
“The racialized state of white emotionalities has been largely invisible to the intellectual prism of teacher education literature and practice. Delivered with passionate and provocative writing, this book addresses this gap and truly opens our eyes to ‘see’ the racist power structures that divides us, and how we submit to them via our words, actions and emotions. Cheryl Matias has written a compelling intellectual and personal account of how white emotionalities never get fully understood. She offers a bold and impressive analysis of the how white emotionalities operate in teacher education and perpetuate racist power structures.”

– Michalinos Zembylas, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Open University of Cyprus

“So many of our racial analyses are focused on what people think about issues of race. In this groundbreaking, and extremely creative work, Cheryl Matias inverts this paradigm and offers a fresh way of examining the intersection of Whiteness and education. Ultimately, Matias challenges us to more critically examine our own racialized emotions if we are to ever move toward the elusive goal of dismantling systemic racism.”

– Nolan L. Cabrera, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Arizona
This book is dedicated to my husband and children. Your presence, patience, and support give me the hope and inspiration to do the work of racial justice every day. I do this for you all.

Mahal kita
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When it comes to race, it is a well-researched phenomenon that Whites abandon the cherished tenets they’ve passed down from the Enlightenment. Ostensibly valuing detachment, Whites now dive headlong into the abyss of racial attachment. From classroom to boardroom, they “suddenly” become attached to a racialized orientation, something which they otherwise and usually insist is contiguous with people of Color. When confronted by challenges to their unearned advantages, Whites become possessively invested in identity politics based on race, and cling on to the idea of meritocracy, even as they claim that Whites have deserved their disproportionate share of advantages in social life (Lipsitz, 1998). Formerly elevating reason to the highest achievement a human being could attain since Kant (see Biesta, 2010), Whites now exhibit flights from reason, support illogical statements, and betray discombobulated mental states when asked to engage racialized patterns (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Before such reactions become associated with the uneducated white mind, or the usual alibis of the White working class or White Southerners (see Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013), Mills (1997) reminds us that some of the most erudite White philosophers suffer from such ignorance in classical and neoclassical senses. Whether they display lack of racial knowledge as a form of classic neglect, or assert their ignorance as knowledge, Whites as a group seem unable to grasp the significance of race. They ultimately misunderstand the world they have created, shocked by the lines on the palm of their own hands.

All this leads us to the subject matter of Cheryl Matias’s book *Feeling White*. She captures the panoply of white strategies to deflect their assumption of responsibility, under the analytic of “emotionality.” Her central theme recalls Lee Mun Wah’s (1994) film, *The Color of Fear*, and the White character’s emotional appeal to minimize his co-participants’ experiences with racism. Matias offers educators – White or otherwise – a way into racial understanding that does not underestimate the affective content or stakes when we teach about or research race in general, whiteness in particular. In fact, white emotionality is perhaps the most egregious violation of Enlightenment principles because it represents the gateway practice leading to denial, failure to weigh social science evidence, and, ultimately, violence. Moreover, emo-social white strategies are not emotional practices in general, which critical theories of education do not necessarily reject (see Grumet, 1988; hooks, 1994).
White emo-sociality is precisely what prevents emotional praxis from developing as an educational force to lead to a more accurate understanding of our predicament (Zembylas, 2008). A philosophy of emotional praxis, to borrow a bit from Gramsci (1971), represents an embodied education that does not remove the subject from his or her own subject-making. As a counter-hegemony to the terror of Cartesian mentalism, Matias reclaims the body as part of the feeling, sentient agent within emotional praxis. With the horror associated with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) phrase, “bodies without organs,” interpreted by Kellner (1989) as bodies without regimes of organization imposed on them, we may add that the Cartesian reign in education gave birth to humans without bodies. With Matias’s text, we wrestle with the implications of reinventing education with bodies in mind (pun intended).

With Roediger (1994), we take seriously the idea that whiteness as one of the most formidable obstacles to a clear and concrete understanding of why social life—and education in particular—takes the shape it does today. Because the ideology of whiteness subverts even (or especially) Whites’ apprehension of social relations, structures appear inverted (as if people of Color, even admitting to their fallibilities, were responsible for their lot [Leonardo, 2004]), accumulation seems natural (as if white wealth has little to do with centuries of enslavement, colonization, and dispossession [Oliver & Shapiro, 1997]), and social institutions take on a phantasmagoric form (as if the law, from inheritance to criminal, does not stem from white politics of recognition [Haney López, 2006]). Matias lends credence to Roediger’s (1994) claim that it is not just that whiteness is false and oppressive; it is nothing but false and oppressive. This particular status makes anything associated with whiteness immediately suspect, white emotions included. Seen this way, emotions are not just expressions of feeling, but of politics. Or, to imitate that useful Radical Feminist saying, “the personal is political,” we may argue that “the emotional is political.” On their part, white emotions reflect a selective process of attaching affective reactions to social situations which protect white racial advantage such as crying during difficult conversations about race in classroom settings, and changing the dynamics in those settings by redirecting sympathy away from people of Color (see Leonardo, 2002). Such emotional outbursts as these may be interpreted in several ways including assuaging guilt, admitting wrongdoing, or having certain surprise that people of Color were paying attention to racism all along. That said, white uptake of discussions around racism is never innocent, even if it is at times naïve. Emo-social relations are part of race relations, and whiteness distorts their imbrication by encouraging the absolution—rather than abolition—of whiteness. Matias does not accept this predicament; she insists that educators can do better.

Ultimately, Matias projects hope onto Whites in cases where they have not earned it, or yet, do not deserve it. This gesture represents one of the ironic sacrifices scholars and educators of Color make in order to avoid the vortex of whiteness: resentment, distance, and cynicism (see Leonardo, 2013). And, it is not ironic that Whites may end up resenting and distancing themselves from this gift, thus reconfirming their political cynicism. In other words, Matias’s project more accurately falls within
the category of an “act of love” in the sense that Freire (1993) once described the oppressed’s attempt to speak back to – indeed dialogue with – the oppressor (see Allen, 2004). In a radical moment of engagement (see also Fanon, 2008), people of Color avoid the despair that is the hallmark of whiteness. In our insistence on a radical critique of whiteness, we affirm our commitment to engagement and connection despite that Whites may use it as evidence of everything wrong with race analysis. Radical educators of whiteness do not speak heresy as much as they speak truth to power. They do not look for “safe spaces” for race conversations, i.e., holy grails of safety like protective understanding, and “it’s okay” reactions to white resistance; instead they put everyone at risk because something greater is threatened: the perpetuation of whiteness itself. Safe dialogue around race is misguided because its centerpiece is an unsafe topic. Radical race educators do not seek to reduce the emotions that typically accompany racetalk, but redirect them toward social justice and greater understanding. They do not add fuel to the fire as much as they light a fire under whiteness.

Race emotionality is not the problem – the emotionality of Whites and the whiteness of sanctioned emotions are. On the road to the abolition of whiteness, Whites reclaim their ability to express true emotion borne of uncertainty and ambiguity, even if the goal is clarity. It takes a reconstructive understanding of personal and collective complicity at the level of white family history (in the sense of one’s immediate family as well as the White race [see Sleeter, 2011]). This is diametrically opposed to feigning emotion as a way to mask domination and accountability. Liberatory emotion is yet to be understood fully in a context that downplays the role of emotion in schooling, specifically race education. Although Whites’ emotional strategies are not the lynchpin of racism but play a part in its overall architecture, white emotions are often enough to block progress in racial understanding. They frequently lead to a process of disenlightenment. In Freire’s (1993) sense, they comprise a “limit situation” that must be transcended. Although they are arguably the target of this transformation, it is difficult to imagine Whites leading the movement. However, they are the potential concrete partners of people of Color toward a new regime of emotionality that, while certainly not inevitable, is preferable to the current arrangement. Whites will share in the burden of emotional labor that is partly the undoing of racism, which in turn en/lights the weight of race relations on people of Color. In this task, Cheryl Matias’s work becomes invaluable, not as a manual of sorts, but as an example of the risks educators should consider taking.

REFERENCES


FOREWORD


AUTHOR’S NOTE

For purposes of an in-depth discussion about race and the historical inequality between Whites and people of Color, I capitalize the words “Black,” “White,” and “people of Color” to represent races, much like one would capitalize “Latin American” or “Filipina,” for example. However, since “whiteness” is a state of being that goes beyond an individual’s racial identity – Blacks can express gestures of whiteness – I choose not to capitalize this word or its adjectival form “white.” However, I do capitalize “Blackness” as it indeed represents a particular race-specific state. This sense is also applied in the capitalization of “the Other.”

Further, for purposes of remaining gender-neutral, I utilize the more common first-person structure of “s/he” and “her/him” (and other incarnations) with no intended disrespect to those who identify as transgender or queergender; this is simply a construct in absence of a universal term for the non-gendered.

The English language is an evolving and powerful tool to express myriad points of view. Here, in this book, I seek to explicate the importance of using accurate words to describe specific ideas because doing so is, in itself, an act of humanly love.

– C.E.M.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wrote this book to provide a deeper understanding of how whiteness operates emotionally, especially in the context of recent increased racial tensions in the U.S., not to mention the world. By providing a deeper and different analysis of how race – specifically whiteness – operates, I hope my readers come away with the understanding that we must first do the individual work on ourselves before we can whole-heartedly advocate for systemic change. Race is still a topic that burns in our heart, and thus it causes great emotions to surface. As such, this book is a labor of love, in that as I wrote it, I, like the entire nation, was under the emotional trauma of racial protests, racial profiling, and racial discontent.

Having been influenced by critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, feminist theories, and critical emotion studies, I chose the title *Feeling White* to indicate both a racialized state of emotions and the white racial identity that state attaches to. Although I am not racially White myself, the emotions so felt in whiteness are those I have to deal with in teaching teacher education. These are the strong emotions that make the possibility of racially-just education so hard achieve. Despite increasingly diverse faculty, culturally-infused teaching approaches, and proclaimed commitment to social justice, the topic of racism – let alone whiteness – is blocked simply because it becomes too emotional to bear. This book is an attempt to dig deeply into those emotions that stonewall the hope for racial justice.

Because the topics of whiteness and emotionality are difficult to even mention, I found solace, guidance, and intellectual stimulation from many mentors. To my mentors Zeus Leonardo, Ricky Lee Allen, Christine Sleeter, Dave Stovall, Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Don Nakanishi, and Michalinos Zembylas: my intellectual prowess is cultivated by your scholarship, mentorship, and our on-going, in-depth discussions on race. I appreciate all you all do to support my scholarly development. To scholars and racially-just educators like David Roediger, George Lipsitz, Sonia Nieto, Beverly Tatum, Albert Memmi, Franz Fanon, Derrick Bell, Lee Mun Wah, Thandeka, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, bell hooks, David Gillborn, and many more: it is through your work that I thrive and flourish. Thank you for your contributions to humanity. I hope that my work pays homage to that you have already laid before me.

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To my colleagues in the School of Education and Human Development at UC Denver, especially, Sheila Shannon and Dorothy Garrison-Wade, and my colleagues
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My doctoral students are fierce scholars who encourage me to risk it all while reminding me that we will forever face the hate behind bigotry, racism, and white supremacist thinking. Roberto Montoya, Naomi Nishi, Geneva Sarcedo, Pete Newlove, Sherry Hunter and Lisa Silverstein: thank you for collegiality, trust, and honesty.

A special thanks goes out to a few people who made this book possible. To Tin Hoang, thank you so much for your artistic design. It both scares and entices readers — two emotions so intrinsic to talking about race. To Jennie Cook: your commitment to my work is greatly appreciated. Without you I could not have done this. To my “sista-from-another-mista” Kiechelle Russell: you are a fierce educator in Los Angeles and inspire me to continue to fight the good fight despite the haters; you give me strength to keep on going.

Finally, this book is for my husband, my twins, and my new baby girl, whose presence, support, and love are what make my heart beat every day. I do this for you and for all the families who want a better world for their children.
“BUT I NEVER OWNED SLAVES!”

Intersections of Whiteness, Emotionality, and Education

“Racism isn’t my fault! I never owned slaves!” cried Hayley, tears streaming down her flushed cheeks, smearing the blue eyeliner that matched her eyes. Wiping her eyes dry, she lifted her face so that her college classmates could see her tears, seemingly trying to mask the deep-rooted fear of being labelled a racist by those of Color. She looked frantically at the other White faces in the classroom, hoping they would bail her out of the ideological trap of claiming race is not an issue but crying about it. Some White students in the class shook their heads to display clear opposition to Hayley's attempt to justify her position, one that was nonetheless entrenched as it was in whiteness, the subject we were discussing in class. Almost in unison, these students took a slow a deep breath, as if choking back words that opposed both Hayley's exasperated comment and her behavior. Yet, they did not dare utter a word.

A few other White students nodded their heads in agreement with Hayley, noticeably clenching their fists and shifting both nervously and angrily in their seats. True to the dynamics of masculinity, some White males came to Hayley's rescue. “You always make this about race!” barked Thurston, a 21-year-old straight, middle-class White male who once revealed that the “good community” he had grown up in included only a few people of Color. Directing his comment to Malina, an African American female who often and vehemently averred that African Americans continue to face racism daily, Thurston continued, his face red and veins bulging, “Race is not an issue. You all are being racist for bringing it up!” His outburst stirred him physically, so much so that he loudly thumped his chair to the floor in emphasis. He then turned his face away from the group, crossed his arms, and defiantly checked out of the conversation.

Sitting next to Thurston was Becky, a self-identified “liberal-minded White female,” who announced in class that she planned to teach in an urban school predominate with African American and Latino students. Although she passionately addressed social injustice and educational inequities in previous class discussions – specifically the disparate academic achievement of students of Color – she often found herself at a loss when the topic of white privilege or whiteness was broached. In the moment following her classmates' outbursts, Becky sat motionless and speechless to Hayley's tears, as if emotionally frozen.
CHAPTER 1

Too afraid that taking a deep, noisy breath would redirect the attention from Hayley to her, she took shallow breaths. She didn’t even turn away when Hayley lifted her face, displaying – for all to see – how hurt she was that anyone would insinuate that she was racist – an insinuation that was never stated or implied in the discussion beforehand, yet was one Hayley emotionally responded to.

Amidst the tension, some students of Color and allied White students chose to silently roll their eyes and shift uncomfortably in their chairs. Although they seemed as if they wanted to say something, some chose to bite their lips as if they were physically trapping choice words behind them. Others closed their eyes and, in between their deep breaths, rolled their necks as if trying to self-soothe their way out of the discomfort in the room.

***

As evidenced by Hayley’s tears, Thurston’s fist pounding and Becky’s emotionally frozen “expressionless expression,” a seemingly invisible state of emotionality intoxicates us all when we talk about race. Needless to say, emotions are forever present in the work of race. To not deny or further repress those emotions, and the state of discomfort they create, makes us nothing more than somnambulics, walking through life asleep. Imagine, if you will, the hypocrisy in how one is living a life, proclaiming life, protecting life yet refusing to feel life itself. Is that truly life?

Despite this emotional reality, there are those who still claim we must not “get emotional” when discussing race, claiming that to do so would be counterproductive to any racially-just project. They assert that emotions are nothing but mere distractions, uninformative to the project at hand. Some individuals will tell Whites to “get over it” when it comes to the guilt they feel when learning about race, or “don’t get too emotional” about the hurt people of Color feel when they share their painful personal experiences with race. Either way, this kind of sentiment renders tears as useless, anger as non-instructive, and fear as irrelevant. The supposed uselessness of these often “unwanted” emotionalities then inadvertently renders the “wanted” emotionalities of love, hope, and human connection worthless too. That is the tragedy.

Suffice it to say that, we, as a collective humanity, cannot pick and choose which emotions we consider important and which we consider unwanted, precisely because emotions can never be divorced from one another. Love feels hurt. Sadness feels hope. Anger feels unwelcomed. And these emotions don’t materialize from thin air; indeed, they stem from somewhere deep within us. This plea for apathy persists from naysayers who, in their zeal to repress that which they truly feel, eventually form apathetic identities. These identities have developed a false sense of callousness – one that pretends to be tough but instead is a weakness because it merely avoids the topic rather than face it head on – in order to survive racism by denying racism altogether; in so doing, they cannot be strong, brave, or fierce enough to feel the emotional
process vital to achieving antiracism. The emotional openness so needed to proudly simultaneously resist and endure racism – and find love within a racist state of life – must still be felt in its entirety lest we succumb to an anaesthetic life, forever numb to feel. For that matter, how can these individuals expect to be committed to antiracism – moreover, racial justice in any form – if they cannot: (1) feel their emotions, (2) recognize their emotions, (3) understand from where these emotions stem, nor (4) develop the emotionally ovaries to withstand the ups and downs of discussing race? In this lack of understanding and disregard of our own emotionalities – moreover, our inability to even identify these emotionalities – misconceptions of them arise, tightening the shackles of racism even more. As erroneous as it is to assume that something as terrifying as death does not involve the human emotionalities of survival, despair, and a desire to live, it is equally erroneous to assume that those same emotions are not also present when facing the historical realities of racially-biased lynching, rapes, and the neo-institutionalized extermination of Black men.

This is a state of fear. But, alongside fear is the state of love. Take, for instance, the recent police shootings of unarmed Black men across the U.S. Responding with fear, the national community recognized a state of racial policing. Fearing the safety of their babies, mothers cried for their sons of Color to stay indoors and acquiesce to any officer’s demands, even in the face of police wrongdoing (Matias & Montoya, 2015). These Black boys were once societally deemed “cute” by White society when they were younger, like puppies in a Louis Vuitton shoulder bag; but when these puppies grew up, they were subjected to racial bias and erroneously labelled “thugs” or “dangerous suspects” simply by wearing hoodies.¹ That is, from Trayvon Martin, the African American teenage boy who was stalked, shot, and killed by a security officer claiming that he “looked suspicious,” to Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old African American boy who was shot and killed for holding a toy gun, the moniker of black skin renders a different lived reality for darker-skinned boys in a racist society. Parents responded to this. Some developed strict dress codes for their Black boys,² others were forced to become vigilant in protecting them.³ Regardless of the action, parents who had darker-skinned boys had to take additional precautions to protect their sons from racism.

As a motherscholar⁴ of Color, I too faced the inhumane task of telling my own brown-skinned son about the racial realities of dark-skinned men in the U.S. Despite my decades of training in pedagogy and curriculum, and my international research and lectures on race, racism, and white supremacy, I found myself without words, unable to articulate how fearful I was for my son’s life. I was helpless, like any other mother staring at her seven-year-old child’s eyes, not knowing what to do about an overwhelming threat. Nothing was more unbearable than telling my son he was more likely to get shot by police because he is darker-skinned than his chinita⁵ twin sister.

As my son saw my fear, he feared too and cried out, “Mama? Mama?” He wanted me to hug him, to feel safe again. It was then that I lost all composure. How could I protect my son from a racist world? My voice quivering, I begged him to never
make any sudden movements with the police once he got older. At this his tiny frame shook uncontrollably and with frightened eyes he cried, “But Mama, what if I need my inhaler?” Here was my baby, who just learned how to ride a bike, rationalizing whether he should choose death by asphyxiation or death by police. I sank at both his comprehension and his conflict. I was terrified, too scared to move, too frightened to hold my composure. Wasn’t I supposed to be the strong one? Mothers are supposed to protect and reassure their babies and here was an instance that I could not because the world would not treat him in a way from which I could shield him. I felt angry at this predicament – angry that a racist reality stole my child’s innocence, my right to protect my children, and the belief that all humans are worthy of life.

Yet, fear was not the only response to the institutional extermination of Black youth. Responding with love, the national community banded together to protest such atrocities as the spate of recent police fatalities by insisting that “Black Lives Matter.” In particular, since the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012, demonstrations occurred across the U.S. with citizens of all Colors linking arms in front of gun-drawn police officers, illustrating how we, humanity, come together in solidarity to peacefully protest the unjust murders of unarmed Black men. Little African American boys began wearing homemade T-shirts with slogans like, “Let me live,” Don’t shoot me!,” Isn’t my life important too?,” and “I’m not a thug.” Acts of love responded to racism.

My own family recently participated in Denver’s Martin Luther King Parade with close to 30,000 other participants. During the middle of the walk, a large group “took a knee” and put up their fists à la the Black power movement gestures of the 1970s. These protesters were not all Black civilians; they were White, Asian American, Middle Eastern, and Latino. The group included police officers, the police chief, council representatives, and many other government and community organizers. During this momentary pause, they sang “We Shall Overcome.” Some were crying. Some were vigilant. Yet, regardless of the personal sentiments each used to express his/herself, there was one feeling that united them all: love. That is, they – we – so love humanity that we will forever be vigilant, militant, disobedient, and resistant to anything that attempts to destroy it.

Naysayers may assume that such “hard-headedness” is a display of hate, but that ignorantly overlooks the deeper meaning of why hateful things, qua racism, diminish the quality of life for all. Take for instance how cancer patients can vehemently hate cancer in vigilantly fighting against it to live: they love life too much. Hate is undergirded by love; when others affected by cancer – be they family members or friends of patients, those who participate in fundraising events to combat the disease, etc. – a love for humanity emerges from that hate. This can likewise occur in fighting racism.

All these vignettes expose the many misconceptions about emotions. For one, although seemingly ontological, the emotionalities of fear and love are not. Instead of viewing sentiments as separate entities isolated from one another, or as entities located on a linear continuum, emotions should be pictorially described as intricate three-dimensional circles that overlay each other on a myriad of axes, depending on the situation. Too often emotionalities are depicted like plots on a linear progression;
take the Kübler-Ross model of the five stages of grief\(^7\) for example: denial → anger → bargaining → depression → acceptance. In the same vein, emotions are also depicted as typologies like Plato’s Eros, Philia, and Agape, personae that describe specific and different types of love,\(^8\) or something that can be capitalistically acquired through a mechanic processes like the “five love languages” (Chapman, 2010). Though I depart from these views of emotions greatly, I still commend humanity’s continued romance with emotions and its eternal quest to understand them. We are always trying to make sense of emotions – in their broad and specific forms, bad to good, personal to universal – and that, in and of itself, is an act of love.

Rarely considered, however, is how emotions can be a state of being; that is, emotions are embedded in humanity inasmuch as life. How we experience them are part-and-parcel both nurture and nature, working simultaneously with our environment and the essence of our humanity. Fortuitous is this perspective in that we need not search for love, for love is already within us. Yet, because of how our environment interacts with us, love becomes redefined, re-felt, and re-interpreted in finite ways. Take for example the desire and need to provide flowers, chocolates, and diamond rings to express a romantic love for another: this is a love redefined under the social spread of capitalism, neoliberal globalization, and strategic marketing practices. Did we not express, feel, and engage with the emotion of love before the advent of the diamond ring? Therefore, love pre-existed the newly socialized world of capitalism, yet has been redefined for the purposes of a changing environment. Love is both nature and nurture.

Positing emotions as both innate and social leads us to ask, what are other social institutions that structure our emotions? If we have a society built around the supremacy of whiteness, patriarchy, capitalism, and heterosexism, then are these the very institutions that structure how our emotions are felt, expressed, and understood about racism, women, poverty, and same-sex love? In fact, Boler (1999) argues that emotions are about “feeling power” because they are framed within the context of power relations. Using the example described above, if love is redefined by the capitalistic accumulation of materials such as flowers and diamonds, then rhetorically speaking, the one who does not receive or give such material gains actually lacks the ability to love. This socialization adheres to the power structure of capitalism and therefore attempts to structure how we feel our emotions.

With respects to race then, if white supremacy, upheld by the ideological beliefs in whiteness, continues to maintain a racial power structure, then the emotions subjected to such a structure will also be impacted by it. Hayley’s tears “outpower” those of Malina’s racial reality because the racial processes that purport whiteness to an elevated social echelon render Whites’ behaviors, emotionalities, discourse, and ideologies as supreme, while socially denigrating the emotionalities of people of Color. This is evidenced when Thurston turns angrily to Malina, blames his feelings on her, and then belittles her feelings by saying, “You always make this about race!” Such a comment places the burden of race back on Malina’s shoulders. The implication – as purposed by the institution of whiteness – is that Malina should not
only continue to survive in a racist society, but she also has no right to talk about it. 
This is how the social environment of whiteness impacts emotions, whether fear or 
love. To succumb to whiteness solely on the nurture argument is to deny the nature 
of our humanity; the innate sense of our emotionalities still lurks beneath our skins.

Take for example how one may respond to seeing a White woman cry as compared 
to a Black woman: the socialization of whiteness becomes a racialized process when 
we consider that a person of one race has more of a right to cry than the other. This 
is the underlying premise in many “White savior” films (Vera & Gordon, 2003) 
like Dangerous Minds, Freedom Writers, and The Blind Side: the White female 
protagonist is depicted as the savior in the midst of the savagery of people of Color, 
whether the environment is an urban school or a college football field. Through her 
trials and tribulations, wrought with tears and well-intentioned behavior, the White 
woman’s tears are deemed worthy of sympathy because of her strength to endure 
people of Color. However, in the same films, the people of Color are portrayed in 
ways where their emotionalities – their tears – are pitied for their weakness thus are 
in need of white saviority. Let me be clear, the tears of White ladies are depicted 
as a symptom of innate goodness which is not mutually recognized in the tears of 
people of Color. People of Color in these films are rendered as nothing more than 
products of an environment created by their own innate volitions. The emotionalities 
of whiteness are given innate humanly status, whereas the emotionalities of people 
of Color are rendered both a symptom of social construction and innately unworthy 
of humanity; White women are Pavlov, people of Color are his dog. Understanding 
racialized emotions is a vital source of what makes us human, and that in itself 
makes it noteworthy for examination.

This book is a project to reaffirm our humanity by recognizing the racialized 
state of our emotionalities, its association with the permanence of whiteness, and 
how education can be one avenue that can lead us down a path that liberates our 
communal heart. Understandably, this is perhaps an insurmountable task; however, 
it is still an initial therapeutic necessity if humanity is to really understand why we 
feel the way we feel. Knowing that social institutions of power continue to influence 
our emotions, it is imperative that we excavate the remnants of our emotionalities 
lest we succumb to a strictly socialized state of emotion.

Although this book is purposely designed for White educators because they make 
up close to 90% of the U.S. teacher force, it is also designed for any educator who 
wants to deeply understand the underlying sentimentalities and emotionalities that 
resist socially-just concepts. That is, in order to truly promote the ideals of racial 
justice, educators and advocates will need to understand what they are up against 
when teaching and learning about race. However, beyond the U.S., this book is also 
intended for White teachers (the colonizers) who teach in colonized countries where 
their student populations are predominately people of Color (the colonized). As argued 
in the proceeding chapters, though the context may be different than what exists in 
the U.S., the elements of whiteness nonetheless manifest themselves elsewhere. So, 
in order to create a global movement towards racial justice, the dynamics of the
emotionality of whiteness – what it is, what it feels like, how it operates, why it is there, what to do about it – is a vital step. Though this book focuses on a U.S. racial context for its unique racial makeup and historical racial violence amidst proclamations of being the “Land of the Free,” I invite the international reader to apply these theories to other countries’ unique racial histories. Furthermore, this book is also intended for White teachers who teach in predominately White communities, those who claim to “not see race” in their pedagogy because, like the films mentioned above, regardless of good intentions, these teachers-in-denial are either unknowingly or knowingly (through passive aggressive racial repression) disseminating the dominance of whiteness ideology and emotionality. That is, similar to Gramsci’s (2012) concept of “hidden curriculum of capitalism” that maintains capitalism by structurally producing the have and have-nots, there is a hidden curriculum of whiteness being taught to students, of Color and White alike. This practice of teaching structurally reinforces white supremacy and denies humanity to people of Color. Finally, this book is for racially-just individuals who fight tirelessly to provide a more racially-just society. May this book help you navigate the intoxications of whiteness that attempt to hinder racially-equitable progress.

This book is different in that it mixes theoretical scholarly research with creative narrative writing so that one comes away with a deeper understanding of whiteness while experiencing the feelings of whiteness: one cannot truly understand the emotionalities of whiteness until one actually experiences them first. Therefore, this book will make the reader feel guilt, shame, anger, defensiveness, dissonance, sadness, and/or discomfort, not to persecute the readers, but rather to show them the manifestations of these feelings and invite them to delve deep into why these emotions so manifest. Essentially, readers will know – and better yet, begin to understand – what happens and why it happens when one is “feeling white.”

The following chapters move from identifying emotionalities of whiteness to deconstructing their psychoanalytical roots, with the final chapters exploring what can be done about these emotionalities for both people of Color and for Whites. Chapter 2 illustrates how whiteness is felt and expressed in everyday university teaching experiences. Chapter 3 theorizes and illustrates how the emotionality of whiteness is sentimentalized and thus masks a deeper disgust for people of Color, as well as how such a sentiment can impact one’s commitment to racially-just education. Chapter 4 deepens the theorization of the emotionality of whiteness by detailing how it connects to sadomasochistic tendencies, and how adopting such sentiments leads one down a dehumanizing path. Chapter 5 explores the role of narcissism in whiteness, and delves into the psychoanalytical roots of this sentiment and how it impacts education. Chapter 6 explores the emotionality of whiteness as racial fetish and how antiracist approaches can be disingenuous if one does not consider why Whites feel the need to befriend (or proclaim false friendships with) people of Color. Chapter 7 landscapes the emotions of grief, melancholia, and loss when dealing with the emotionalities of whiteness; it provides a glimpse into what one will emotionally experience when attempting to let go of whiteness, and why
such an emotional process is necessary. Chapter 8 describes how whiteness can act as a surveillance mechanism which institutionally watches over society à la Big Brother in order to enforce elements of whiteness. Chapter 9 diverges from the previous ideas in that initiates a focus on strategies, i.e., what can be done to resist the emotionality of whiteness as it impacts K-12 classrooms and how to in acts of racial justice amidst standardized curriculum. Chapter 10 follows suit by showing what an antiracist educator will experience when s/he engages in prolonged projects of racial justice; it also reveals pedagogical strategies to use in the classroom, and better prepare educators with what to expect both emotionally and ideologically. Chapter 11 is written specifically for White teachers and examines the emotional steps needed to try to decolonize the mind and heart of a racial colonizer; but, also provides strategies for people of Color who may have internalized the emotionalities of whiteness for survival. Chapter 12 concludes the preceding chapters and provides an urgent call for racial justice.

In all its theorizations, postulations, and considerations, this book can be an emotional roller coaster. Although discomforting at times, I ask the reader to stay committed, for this is just the beginning of an enduring emotional journey toward a fuller, more racially-just humanity; as such, you the reader will never be alone once your heart and mind open to all.

NOTES

1 In reference to the murder of Trayvon Martin whose killer was not indicted due to racial bias: Trayvon was presumed violent, dangerous, and a criminal simply because he was a Black boy in a hoodie.
4 One word, no hyphen; meaning both mother and scholar simultaneously: each term better informs the other identity, and both terms are inextricably intertwined similar to Zeus Leonardo’s concept of “raceclass.”
5 Tagalog and Spanish for “Asian looking.”
7 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%Bcbler-Ross_model
8 See http://www.iep.utm.edu/love/#H1

REFERENCES

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

As this narrative of benevolent white “saviority” persists in the recounts of countless films, newscasts, and textbooks, society cries and empathizes with the heroic action of weeping White teachers. As society watches tears of anguish roll down the clean white cheek of this harmless 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 by society at large in the way we all grieve with the Virgin Mary in Michelangelo’s Pietà. Their pain becomes real through society’s engagement of sympathy.

This White savior narrative is indoctrinated in the minds of countless White teacher candidates. Each semester my White teacher candidates – students who are in teacher preparation programs – enroll in our urban-focused teacher preparation program ready to sacrifice and give back to disadvantaged students of Color with the intention to change the injustices that pervade urban schools. They are prepared to roll up their sleeves 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).

Imagine, if you will, then, the cognitive resistant reaction of my White heroines 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: DEVELOPING A PEDAGOGY OF TRAUMA

Contrary to popularized notions of the painful lives of Whites who serve, help, or save people of Color, this paper cries for the need to counter this one-sided account of what constitutes humanizing pain; for, in adhering to that litmus of pain, Whites then elevate their pain above that endured by people of Color. Essentially, our tears become only three-fifths of the pain of a White person’s. And as a brown-skinned teacher educator from urban Los Angeles, I painfully attest that teaching in a white institution with White colleagues and White students is “traumatic,” an experience that relentlessly terrorizes my heart, soul, and psyche on a daily basis. In order for me to heal my torn soul and shadowbox the racism (see James, 1999), I developed my pedagogy of trauma.

This chapter focuses on the conceptualization and operationalization of this pedagogy of trauma as a survival mechanism and 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 became a counterstory of my semester-long racial microaggression that subjected me to pain, a pain I must voice in order to counter White narratives of pain (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano, 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, 2012b; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Tatum, 2003). With respect to critical race theory, I needed a transformational resistance, a concept which not only articulates how I overcame the microaggression, but how I endured it (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and, in some ways, still do. Paul Willis (1977) describes how the “lads in England” endured and resisted school hegemony by creating an in-school counter-culture, albeit it was never accepted into dominant culture and ultimately led to self-defeating purposes. 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 me 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, these student
aggressively circulate emails to strategize ways of getting me fired, an action which causes me to name this a “trauma” and locate within it my inflicted suffering from their persistent racial microaggressions. However, I do not locate my suffering to relish in a state of victimization (Freire, 1993); rather, I do so to demonstrate how I transformationally resist by engaging with my pain in order to carry out the socially-just ideals of racial equity.

A FEMINIST LOOK INTO IDENTITY AND EMOTIONS

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 languish in some reservoir of self-pity; rather, I let this recurring trauma transform how I understand my pain. Essentially, feeling this pain is a process of humanization.

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 the agonizing racelessness route needed to get there (see Fordham, 1988). Further, I argue that is not who we are.4

White feminist scholar Sandra Harding (1998) asserts that in multicultural science, women are medical heroes because their nuanced knowledges of the body “prove 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 constantly challenged heroes who, because of our nuanced knowledge of race and racism, and intimate understanding, know that hegemonic whiteness blinds White folks to us. We are the warriors that shoulder this agonizing racial burden despite being chastised as being non-collaborative, often wrongfully accused of being personally mistrustful – or worse, mislabeled as a “real” racist – when we bravely engage how the ugly reigns of race manifests itself. These accusers, whether intentionally or not, have repressed issues to a colored face that symbolically reminds them of their white guilt.
WHY THE “I” AND “WE”?

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 that we do not do this kind of work without truly believing that change can happen. We understand that our increasing presence in the academy in itself does not mean that change has been wholly achieved. We do this precisely because we can 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 grow up without hearing and truly humanizing our pain. However, in order to teach White teachers in higher education, we must first emerge from 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 – and do – so despite knowing that the journey through the ivory towers of the academy that trains us is wrought with institutional racism. Eerily like my White teacher candidates, we want to make a change, though one that does not center on the pain of White folks.

However, what is missing from the narrative of popularized urban education is the painful process that we people of Color underwent to get here. Embedded in that painful process is a schooling experience wherein White public school teacher after White public school teacher outweighed and ultimately ignored our pains as 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 Audre Lorde (2001), a Black lesbian feminist, we develop this callousness for an “illusion of protection” (p. 177) 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, within the numbing effect that detracted from a beautiful, emotional, human quality, I realized that my pain counted as a whole human experience, one that my White teacher candidates must hear in order to re-examine their defaulted need to superiorize their pain, a process learned by the unquestioned recycling of dominant narratives. This is to say that I invoke my pain in order to offer and remind us all that our continually silenced tears’ 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 chapter 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 notions of exile (Said, 2002), dehumanization (Freire, 1993), or responsibility for neo-abolitionism (Allen, 2012; Leonardo, 2009), I center my discourse on pain to remind us that it is ever-present in the work we do and the mission we strive to fulfill. Unfortunately, only when society rightfully redistributes the burden of race off of the shoulders of people of Color 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 LatCrit scholars inform me, my testimonio 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, consumes, 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, like Bill Murray in Groundhog Day. Yet, almost sadomasochistically, I do it over and over again because beyond my pain of this recurring trauma are the never-hushed cries of my former Black and Brown public school students.

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, 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 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-course” to adamantly argue that he does not see race or gender. While gripping his table and fervently pointing his finger at me, he strongly and loudly asserted, “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 was correct. 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 her presence that they outshined the human essence of who she is/I am. This young man’s white diss-course masked 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. When they engage it, it hurts people of Color.

At times, “beautiful Asian lady” still echoes in my ears. Feminist scholar Yen
Lee Espiritu (2001) describes this process of Asian racialization and sexualization
as never divorced from the Western representation of Asian women being dubbed
either the “Dragon Lady” or “China Doll.” She describes that Asian women are
bound to racialized and sexualized ideological representations of being both erotized
as hypersexual objects of pleasure and inferiorized as docile submissive servants.
These are the “ideological assaults” I am also subjected to, which Espiritu (2001)
claims must be challenged in order 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 of 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 will point to my brownness and the
blind white eye will deny my humanness.

In her examination of the false love of our Mexican American students, Angela
Valenzuela (1999) demands an “authentic” love. Tormenting me is the question of
how I will continue to give authentic care to Valenzuela’s authentic love that I 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 she experienced from
White college students while teaching antiracist pedagogies and 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 both feel their trauma and recognize mine.

In race dynamics, colored trauma is not only different from a person of Color’s
perspective, it is also more substantiated. DiAngelo and Sensoy (2012) write about
fears of Whites and people of Color when doing interracial race dialogues. They
uncover that, in interracial race dialogues, White students fear being called racist,
feeling guilt, being blamed, and/or becoming uncomfortable. Essentially, their fears
are based on their white sensibilities or sentiments of discomfort. On the other hand,
people of Color fear tangible repercussions (e.g., losing their jobs or houses, physical
threats, and ostracism). In their analysis, DiAngelo and Sensoy (2012) argue that the
fears held by Whites are not equivalent to the real fears of people of Color because
the latter’s fear is produced by the historical surveillance of people of Color under a
system of racism. In fact, the authors point out how Whites believe that racism against
Whites is more prevalent than racism against Blacks, a mal-informed response to
their unsubstantiated fear. So, when I ask how I can authentically love my White students, invested in their whiteness, when they unknowingly or knowingly refuse to return love, I realize that this race dynamic produces a sadomasochistic relationship wherein I must submit to the difficult relationship in love despite the racialized resistance. These painful acts of resistance torment me because I simply want to be seen as a human being who deserves humanly love.

Amidst the late-night bellows of stray dogs, I lament over whether my heart will no longer beat loving thumps because of my commitment to supporting 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 a heart that is constantly bombarded with how we will respond to the eerily predictive and resistive performance of our White teacher candidates.

UNVEILING THE PAIN BEHIND WHITE DISS-COURSE: A COUNTER ANALYSIS

Example 1

Although there may not be any malintent in the verbal or written responses of White teacher candidates when learning about race, racism, and whiteness from a teacher educator of Color, pain in what is said and/or written by White teacher candidates entrenched in whiteness exists. To clarify, this chapter is not about excavating white sensibilities of White teacher candidates; 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 an IRB9-approved study on the pre-course student surveys 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 Color. In order to gauge their familiarity with interactions with people of Color, I asked 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 how and why certain
knowledges are superiorized 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 knowledges (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). 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 it. So, when my student says “respect is key,” what I fear most is what definition of respect is referred 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.” In saying “it won’t change or anything,” I fear I am witnessing one of those racializing moments wherein Whites refuse to hear because they do not want to hear. Yet, if asked if this is true, I fear they will become violent, aggressive, accusatory, and/or relish the guilt. So, as a teacher educator who teaches about race for the hope of antiracism, what is the point of all my expertise (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 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 racialized issues so described in countless literature (Cleveland, 2004; de Jesús, 2004; Matias, 2012b; Stanley, 2006; Williams & Evans-Winter, 2005). Hence, as critical race theory so asserts, the dynamics of race did not just disappear with changing, modern times.

I agree that respect is “key,” but respectfully speaking, a comment like this only respects the White writer’s 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 my White students 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 things like “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 an 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 when they say “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 whether I will have them understand that respect is not, \textit{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” onto 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, \textit{feel} it. Therefore, 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 also 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 to whiteness and feel it is okay to disrespect me. I relocate my pain to empower and remind myself that it is not okay that my White students see me as another subordinate person of Color who is expected to submit to their masterly needs.

\textit{Example 2}

Q: Have you talked about race and racism before? With whom 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 response, fear builds in my heart because it sounds like an exasperated comment in the context of this White female candidate preferring \textit{not} to discuss 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 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 that the entire course is about, a course she enrolled in, and by her own admission only feels comfortable with “like-minded thinkers,” then certainly she will be uncomfortable with me: 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 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 that people of Color face daily; or, (b) act aggressively, symbolic of the repressed pain of lying about a colorblind stance (Matias, 2012b). Emotionally terrifying is deciphering which response will I be subjected to the next day and how will I emotionally prepare in response to these disturbing performances of whiteness. These routine performances constitute “ripping off the Band-Aid” from my heart, a Band-Aid that I carefully placed a semester ago to heal from the last trauma of 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 because I must engage in this trauma every semester.

My pedagogy of trauma relates to Gloria Ladson-Billings’s (1998) documentation of how the colonized education of urban African American males is like an ongoing psycho-cultural assault. However, unlike daily racial microaggressions experienced 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 one in, say, apartheid 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 (racism) is not only a numbers game, 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 outpowered by whiteness. My White students’ whiteness is shown through their interactions with me, which thus produces a tangible fear to be careful not enrage a white mob. 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 I will be one of the people my student is uncomfortable with because I will accuse her/him of racism despite her blindness to understand when it’s really there.

This White female teacher candidate leaves me with the haunting disclosure of “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 in 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 right out threatens to be uncomfortable with me. 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, so 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
ON THE “FLIP” SIDE

in their whiteness that they superiorize their discomfort above the daily discomfort people of Color experience. What leaves me so baffled is, don’t my White teacher candidates understand that, by elevating their discomfort above mine, they hurt me? Just as they cry out, “Why are you blaming me? I didn’t do anything to deserve this,” I cry out the same words. In professing their 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 while they continue to scrutinize and tally my every word.

Example 3

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-in 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 further describes, the embodiment of a spectacle “which has become objectified” (p. 118). This is no different than when Filipinos were placed in cages during the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904,11 or falsely heralding the accomplishments of a few people of Color12 as representative of all people of Color. Although it is absolutely odd in and of itself that this White female admits to never having had a professor of Color, feels compelled to say that encountering one (like an object) 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 morning hours, I couldn’t help but contemplate why these White students see me as the odd one in this relationship. bell hooks (1995) describes this odd relationship quite clearly when she reflects on why Black and White feminists had difficulty building coalitions 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, whereas White women were positioned higher. hooks expands on this by stating that White feminists had a hard time letting go of their “mummification” of Black women, wherein the purpose of Black women’s
presence in the workspace was 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, while my needs are not even considered.

This sentiment was confirmed when one of my White teacher candidates claimed that she had never met any person of Color in authority, but regularly meets with people of Color who serve her:

*Example 4*

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)

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 pairing of law enforcement with people of Color. What causes me pain is knowing that, given that her only experiences with people of Color have been within the service industry, she believes thinking and saying that “they were nicer to me” than White folks is a positive statement. 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. This turned out to be quite true because later in the semester she barraged me with emails about how each reading brought her discomfort because “focusing on whiteness was not right.”

What I need my White teacher candidates to understand is that, for people of Color, our funds of knowledge are *not* a spectacle, not a metaphoric salsa that one can add to Latinize whiteness at whim. Rather, they are formed by the daily lives we live as human beings. Metaphorically speaking, we cannot add the salsa when we want to it is the context in which we must survive.

In the end, I am not the odd one, for in teaching White teacher candidates who sadly and 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 for the end goal that they can learn, even at the price of my racialized humiliation. Until a White person truly sees the dehumanization process of investing in their whiteness, standing before them will always be a person of Color who is demoralized by it.
HUMANIZING COLORED PAIN: HONORING MY FLIP SIDE OF TRAUMA

Eight night hours go by and the midnight moon fades behind the 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” — meaning, appearing suitable under the white scrutinizing gaze— for my first day of class. Buried within my petite five-foot frame and 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 nor necessarily want it, but because it is my duty to humanity to provide this knowledge for my children and the generations thereafter.

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 order to simply “pay it forward.”

NOTES

1 A reference to the “Three Fifths Compromise of 1787” in which slaves were counted as 3/5’s of a person in order to establish population for legislative representation. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three-Fifths_Compromise

2 Colorism in the U.S. context is significant in that the pigment of one’s skin color leads to societal consequences from racial categorization to one’s legal right to citizenship. Being darker-skinned thus has a noteworthy social and racial significance. Additionally, Filipinos range from light-skinned chinitos (Asian-looking) to meztizas (Spanish mix). The U.S. racialization process responds to the racial phenotypes of Filipinos in vastly different ways.

3 Pinay is a slang term for a Filipina. After hundreds of years of Spanish colonization, the Philippines underwent U.S. colonization after the 1898 Spanish-American War. Having had U.S. national status, many Filipinos enlisted in the U.S. armed forces, attended U.S. colonial schools, spoke English, and traveled freely to and from the U.S. for migrant labor work. Therefore, the U.S. has had a long colonial history with the Philippines. American-born Filipinos, like myself, are remnants of that colonial history.

4 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 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). 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.

5 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 that my tears are my brave engagement.

6 LatCrit refers to Latino Critical Theory. See http://www.latcrit.org/

7 Testimonio is adapted from LatCrit scholars Delores Delgado-Bernal, Rebecca 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.

8 I use the term “diss-course” because this type of communication “disses” or insults people of Color behind a façade of innocence and/or normalized speech (Rodriguez, 2009).

9 IRB: Institutional Review Board.

10 This phenomenon connects to Yosso and Garcia’s (2007) articulations of “culture of wealth” found in communities of Color. Namely, since knowledges (or what constitutes cultures or capitals of
wealth) subjugate through a process of power, communities of Color in a racist society are then forced to combat dominant narratives that depict them through a deficit lens by asserting their funds of knowledge or capital. 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 (first African American U.S. president), Kobe Bryant (famous African American U.S. basketball player), Sonia Sotomayor (first Latina U.S. Supreme Court Justice), J Lo (Latina pop singer and actress), Jeremy Lin (famous Asian American U.S. basketball player), and Oprah (famous African American actress, entrepreneur, and talk show host).

REFERENCES


 CHAPTER 2


