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Other Learning for Other'ed Youth: An Examination of the US Institution of Education as an
Artifact of Oppression and the Teaching of Something Different to Black Youth

by

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Portland State University

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Abstract

This paper examines the US education system and its persistent and adverse impact on youth of color. I posit that structural racialization in the United States' institution of education subjugates youth of color, promotes whiteness, and blackness through whiteness, and diminishes the education experience of Black youth, including self-perceptions. These dynamics are connected to youth of color in general; however, I place specific focus on African American youth in urban areas between ages of 11-14 years of age, which I refer to here forward, as Black youth. I connect theories and framework from multiple and intersecting disciplines to highlight how white supremacist ideologies and whiteness as performance within the US education system utilizes space, place, and power over, as oppressive agents against Black youth. Through geographies of exclusion, by means of overt and covert application, (Vanderbeck & Dunkely, 2004) space and place are employed in the US institution of education as vigorous components, not only in the marginalization and exclusion of Black Youth, but in the maintenance of whiteness as 'power over' knowledge (Jennings & Lynn, 2005). I also examine and apply critical race theory of education in several locations, in particular, as discussed by Dixson and Rousseau (2005), in their examination of "whiteness as property" a tenet of CRT, and a further developed work originated by legal scholar Cheryl Harris (1993). Harris connects whiteness to power through space and place by reframing whiteness as non-tangible 'property' and connects its relationship with education.

Introduction

Through the ownership of space and place, whiteness is power through domination and normativity. These components within the rigid structure and dynamic mechanism of the institution of education nourish the hegemonic nature and practice of white supremacy and Black Youth oppression. When I discuss the ‘hegemonic nature,’ I not only mean the established beliefs that elevate whiteness and marginalize blackness but the condition of discrimination and inequity as normative so that resistance or dissenting against discriminatory behaviors become regarded as abnormal and problematic. This hegemonic discourse and ideology foster, ‘simply the way that it is’ notions of discriminatory practices and normalizes participation in racism (Duncan, 2005). It is the normativity and acceptance of racial oppression within the institution of education that renders the institution’s generation of oppression a cultural artifact.

Although my emphasis is on how the US institution of education subjugates Black students, my focus centers on the dynamic of oppression when the identity of ‘Youth’ and ‘Blackness’ are combined within the institution. When referring to ‘Blackness,’ I am referring to socially constructed attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes directed at Black Americans; “the blackness that whiteness created” (Duncan, 2005). When referring to subjugation, I apply meaning found in Merriam Webster dictionary (2018) that defines subjugation as follows: “1.) To bring under control and governance as a subject; conquer, and 2.) to make submissive; subdue.” I begin with focus on race and whiteness, the normativity of whiteness and how these dynamics frame the structure US institutions, and are the foundation of our education system. I then highlight the institution of education’s historical, systemized, and oppressive structure, culture, and norms. I examine institutional racism and

the intentional and unintentional participation of actors and observers who marginalize, harm, and subjugate Black youth by performing and promoting white supremacy acts. I draw attention to how the system fosters and supports participant's intentional and unintentional acts that mask and distract focus from the source of harm.

While there are complicit individual actors in discriminatory and oppressive practices against Black Youth in the institution of education, the underpinning of its system is structured racialization which lacks individual actors and deepens the elusive nature of the education system by providing a veil for white supremacy and oppression, making identification of racism and capacity to generate change, functionally difficult and socially anomalous. This cloak of normalcy also serves as concealment of the mechanism's historic harm, incessant marginalization, overrepresentation, underrepresentation, and exclusion of Black Youth as valued or belonging. I draw existing data to support how exclusion and marginalization are personified in policies and decision-making framework and outcomes demonstrated with the dispensation of harsher punishment, lowered expectations for performance and capacity, and in the general approach, beliefs, and attitudes toward Black Youth. The acts of individual harm are performed by dominant and non-dominant identified educators and administrators whose functioning becomes the embodiment of the operation of oppression.

Though my observations highlight social and academic burdens, disadvantages, and the broad implications of harm imposed on Black students by the institution of education, I also point toward Black youth's ability to resist, persist, and push through these unjustified injuries caused by whiteness as white supremacy. Whiteness can be discussed in multiple ways. For this discussion whiteness refers to value, privileges, power, and benefits assigned

to the social location of Euro – American and Caucasian people and the conveyance through dominant ideologies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) in Western American culture, specifically the United States.

Discourses of whiteness underpin comprehensive systems of power; the system has established and maintained a status quo of whiteness as a dominant and superior location. Discourses of whiteness are large ideological structures that influence behavior and beliefs (Mooney and Evans, 2015). Whiteness within the dominant discourse is structured as normative, valuable, and establishes non-whites as “other” and less valuable (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). These hegemonic structures are mechanisms of social and economic stratification that binds “other” into locations that marginalize and dehumanize perceptions of their existence.

Structured mechanisms operate systematically to defend devices in the system, the assignment of power to whiteness, and to the system as a whole, makes the US system of power through whiteness complex, dynamic, and intangible. I will further discuss operating mechanisms of the system of power; in particular, oppressive communicative messaging and behavior toward Black youth in the US education system. I will examine the deep, lasting, and adverse impact of whiteness and the narrative of blackness through whiteness, addressing how whiteness as an artifact of the US culture of oppression causes harm to Black youth through its explicit and implicit perpetuation and reinforcement of negative stigmas, beliefs, and attitudes about blackness and through its indoctrination of whiteness as valuable and normal impose negative, invisible, and debased self-reflection imagery for Black youth toward their assigned blackness.

Significance

Social and communicative devices infiltrate beliefs and behaviors (Mooney and Evans, 2015), education is one such device. Beliefs and values of right and wrong, beauty, trustworthiness, and values are all framed in our culture by discourses of whiteness. Norms of socially acceptable behavior, gender, sexuality, and class are set by dominant ideologies. The institution of education since its inception has disseminated verbal and non-verbal messaging that reinforces dominant discourses of whiteness. The propagation of whiteness through the education system is a complex dynamic that uses knowledge as a dividing tool of oppression, knowledge as control and power, knowledge as compulsory, and outcomes of inequitable knowledge access as reinforcement and evidence of white supremacy. This convolution serves multiple purposes, one dominant purpose is the protection of the education system through making its structure and direct source of harm impalpable. The distribution of knowledge favors whiteness, and as with other forms of information distribution such as mediated mass communication, in particular television the messaging reflects perceptions of the “valued” population and whiteness as normativity. Media messages influence beliefs and behaviors with limited resistance (Moyer-Guse, 2008) making it a powerful messaging device, similar is the case with messaging provided through the institution of education. The power of education institution messaging raises the need for deeper investigation into discourses of whiteness and its impact on this messaging, as well as those that benefit from the constructs that serve as its foundation.

Societal changes generated by 21st century social and technological developments also influence the need for increased evaluation of the impact of discourses of whiteness in education. The systemic withholding of information becomes more challenging with the advancement of technology. As technology and access to information has increased, we have and continue to experience a shift and increase in individual awareness around oppression, equity, diversity, and

systemic barriers that generate social injustices. These changes are generating new and salient layers in our society and culture which require deeper and broader investigations of dominant ideologies, in particular, the system of education and its complex network of oppression transmission.

Discourse Community

For many years education has been researched and observed in regard to race and diversity, only recently have researcher begun to study and generate discourse around whiteness and the impact of whiteness and white supremacy as the cause of harm. In addition to education studies, several social science fields observe education and the intersections created by social injustice and human harm by and through the institution of education: communication, social justice, youth studies, psychology, social work, organizational behavior, African American studies, and other fields related to race, class, gender, and power.

Diversity and equity research has and continues to increase as American workplace population continues to increase in racial and cultural diversity. This diversity begins at the education level and in many ways, the education population models the social demands of diversity and equity, though there is significant difference generated by the lack of “Youth” agency. Human language and communication are powerful tools of power and social navigation that are broadly studied. Critical Discourse Analyst Norman “Fairclough argues that to understand power, persuasion and how people live together, a conscious engagement with language is necessary” (Mooney and Evans, 2015). For many years’ scientists and discourse

communities have examined, discussed, and debated behaviors of “others”, only recently are we beginning to see examinations of whiteness (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012) and its effects on social engagement, media, social equity, and social justice. I have found in excess, studies and literature on the underrepresentation of Black youth. There is a lack of specific focus on the impact of discourses of whiteness on education with whiteness, and the performance of whiteness as the center focus of harm. I found an abundance of research on the brokenness and deficiencies of youth of color, in particular, the framework of Black youth as “at risk”, and a focus on how Black youth should or don’t overcome harms of oppression which backgrounds focus on white supremacy as the core issue and places responsibility on the social locations that hold the least amount of social power. These holes in discourse communities that study related and aforementioned matters produce need for increased studies on the US education system as an institution of harm and a cultural artifact of US oppression as we cannot fully understand the interconnectedness, and related effects and dynamics of diversity, race, power, and influence without examining locations and intersections created by power and dominant discourses from the location and through the lens of power and dominance. When we only study dynamics of oppression through the lens of oppressed groups and identities we exclude large amounts of salient information and influences. We must work to be comprehensive in research by studying the social impacts of discourses of whiteness as thoroughly as we have studied impacts of locations of other.

I found agreement in discourse communities about the lack of diverse examination of white supremacy. I have however found disagreement in public perceptions of discourses of whiteness in education which are influenced by dominant ideologies.

Proposed Research and Methodology

I focus on the US institution of education as a subjugating force but found little research outside of the field of psychology to support the subjugation of Black Youth by the institution of education, with whiteness and white supremacy as the focus. Instead, I found an abundance of articles that refer to and focus on African Americans as ‘the subjugated group.’ I focus on the psychological term and phenomenon of internalized racism’, which is not a result of inferiority or psychological defect of oppressed identities or groups (Pyke, 2010). The term draws on psychology and takes a sociological approach that highlights subjugation and can be applied to youth studies (Pyke, 2010). My research focuses on intersections between education, communication, societal power, psychology, and sociology.

I will draw from existing research that details and statistically distinguishes the application of education and educational expectations, processes, and outcomes. I will how synthesize dynamics, research and literature from aforementioned discourse communities.

Complete methods section.....

Power and Race

Complete

Institutional Racism

Mainstream discussions and initiatives on racism often focus on individual behavior and discrimination, and though the individual behavior is harmful, feeds the overall system, and needs to be addressed. Individual behavior does not hold the penetrating and self-sustaining force held by institutional racism (Gillborn, 2006).

Institutions are reflective of societal norms, laws, and practices, and there are several societal institutions in the US, a few being education, religion, government, legal, medicine, economy, family, gender, and mass media. US institutions directly operate as a core component of social and economic power and are part of the larger system of racism, power, and oppression. Their structures, functions, and messages work to drive, mask, and maintain racism.

Racism and white supremacy are not only components of US culture they are deeply embedded in historical practices and are established as societal norms. This historic normalization of racism supports the flow from institutional structures and practices to roles, beliefs, and behaviors performed by individual actors (Gillborn, 2006). These individual actors perform personally mediated racism (Jones, 2000) through discriminatory behavior, communication, and decision making. These discriminatory decisions and practices facilitate the maintenance of systemic racism, promote white supremacy, and provide a distraction from the core location, which is the system and structures. This interconnectedness and entanglement between structural, institutional, and individual racism represent racism's dynamic and complex nature (Gillborn, 2006; Duncan, 2005).

Identity and White Supremacy in the US Education System

The US education system as an institution embodies racism and whiteness as normativity. However, oppression within the school system is not limited to race; as an active part of the system of oppression it marginalizes several identities that fall outside of definitions of 'whiteness as supreme.' These identities include but are not limited to race, age, gender, sexuality, economics, health (ability), and religion. US institutions are reflective of these notions of superior and inferior social locations through their performance of white supremacy. In 1989

Kimberle' Crenshaw coined the term Intersectionality, today addresses the relationship between multiple oppressed identities. However, its original focus was through a feminist lens and addressed issues and oppressions between the intersections of 'womanhood' and 'blackness.' Intersectionality has evolved, is applied across multiple disciplines. Intersectionality addresses intersections of oppression and how these intersections collectively work to marginalize and oppress groups and individuals (Bhambra, 2015).

Intersecting oppression overwhelmingly impacts Black Youth. As with race, the social identity and meaning of youth are constructed and excluded. In the US school system, the combined identities of 'youth' and 'blackness' create tremendous disadvantages for Black Youth. These disadvantages reflect and reinforce societal injustices against Black people and Youth.

Addressing racism in education has been approached several ways, and Critical Race Theory is a relevant tool for unpacking oppression and institutional racism within the education system (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Some specific tenets of CRT are directly applicable to education; the systemic nature of racism and the need to address its structural quality, color blindness, and the US myth of meritocracy as hiding places for oppression in education. Also, as mentioned earlier, and related to CRT, 'whiteness' demonstrated as property and its use of space and place as a component of oppression generates geographic exclusions (Vanderbeck & Dunkely, 2004) for marginalized and targeted identities. These dynamics in the institution of education overtly and covertly imposes (Vanderbeck & Dunkely, 2004) discriminatory and exclusionary practices over and against Black Youth.

Relevant to intersectionality is the construction of childhood and its operation with 'blackness.' Youth construction set expectations for child performance, and how they are

regarded as social ‘actors,’ though these expectations shift based on time and social location (James, 1998). The social location of ‘blackness’ and ‘youth’ deepens the level of oppression experienced by Black students in education. Though white ‘youth’ is an oppressed identity, their whiteness maintains a level of advantage over Black Youth. Their whiteness claims space and generates visibility and presence of white ‘voice’ (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Conversely, Black Youth own no property in the institution of education which results in invisibility, lowered expectations for performance (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005), and acts of violence against their bodies and minds. Lowered expectations are set by the larger system of oppression and performed by educators of all social locations.

Response to the mere presence of Black Youth in schools is a reflection of the devaluing of ‘blackness’ and injustice imposed on Black students. Severe punishment for minor infractions, low expectations for performance, and diminished credibility for schools with high Black populations are all symptoms of structured racialization, intersectional oppression, and white supremacy in the US institution of education.

Intersectionality and the Identity of Black Youth

Educators and Racist Authority

Educators and administrators act as mediators of racism, both individually and through systemic performance resulting from authority positions and roles of ‘power over’ as actors for the institution. As noted in the article by Jennings and Lynn (2005) “schools operate as an agent in the regeneration and solidification of existing political, social, and economic arrangements by preparing students for predetermined roles in the labor force.” As such, educators, administrators, and agents within the institution of education operate as facilitators in the

perpetuation of marginalization of blackness, and in the systemic ‘railroading’ of Black Youth. These discriminatory and racist acts are both intentional and unintentional, and mutually harmful to Black students.

Educators and authority within education hold a high level of cultural capital within the institution, while Black Youth lack socio-cultural capital school entrance, and often leave with equal or increased gaps in capacity or desire to navigate the culture and norms of whiteness. For Black Youth to gain currency in cultural capital within the institution of education, the development white normative behavior is necessary. Assimilation to whiteness for Black youth is not without cost and is compounded by internalized racism (Jennings & Lynn, 2005).

The Subjugation of Black Youth in Education (Communicative messaging and internalization)

Black Youth internalize racism and must at some point spend energy to manage internalized racism and oppression. W.E. B. Du Bois talks of ‘double consciousness, a phenomenon where Black people grapple with viewing themselves through the lens of their oppressor and the lens of their lived experience (Pyke, 2010).

The noise of internalized racism is amplified for Black Youth. Internalized racism, also referred to as ‘internalized domination,’ (Pyke, 2010) has a detrimental and lasting influence on Black Youth, though youth lack legal decision-making power, which separates and increases their level of oppression in comparison to marginalized adult identities. For Black Youth, this absence of decision making power and oppression of blackness render the oppressive conditions of the education environment crippling. This subjugation places them in positions of submission to their oppressor.

Black Youth's submission to acts of oppression is not born out of weakness or Black inferiority, but are responses to oppression which vary and are impacted by context (Pyke, 2010), including risk, danger, and future harms. This increased injustice on Black Youth and their response to institutional oppression, as mentioned before, feeds the cycle of stereotypes and places blame on Black Youth for their response or lack of response to the system. The dimensions of intersecting identities make dominant youth oppression unparalleled to Black Youth oppression and subjugation.

According to Jennings & Lynn (2005), a "leading cultural reproduction theorist, provided the notion that students who lack the cultural capital or the requisite knowledge and skills with which to successfully navigate the parameters of middle-class culture inevitably fail at school." Therefore, White Youth enter school with an inordinate amount of cultural capital in comparison to Black Youth. White youth can forecast potential change in oppressive conditions, on the contrary, Black Youth's forward forecast provides a view of increased levels of oppression and risk.

Though Black Youth experience spatial exclusion demonstrated in many previously mentioned ways, they are also excluded through an absence of cultural artifacts, marginalization of their existence and their value as beings living in 'blackness,' and denial of space for 'voice.' Though great harms are caused by the subjugation and injustices imposed on Black Youth in the institution of education, Black Youth are not rendered powerless and lost. Instead, they develop social skills and strengths in ways that exceed their dominant identity Youth peers. Black Youth develop resilience and a deeper understanding of the social world. According to Vanderbeck & Dunkely (2004), youth establish geographies and create their own forms of belonging and inclusion for themselves. Black youth in being given no space engage these same tools but in

more complex ways. Vanderbeck & Dunkely (2004) also note that exclusion is not the only experience of youth; such is the case of Black Youth in education. In spite of socio-spatial exclusion, higher levels of surveillance, and restrictions of spatial mobility, Black youth have diverse and complex experiences in education.

Data – Juxtaposition – Foundation for Future Barriers

The Institution of Education as a Cultural Artifact

Conclusion

The pervasiveness of US racism and the complexity added by context such as scale, space, and identity make a remedy for structural and institutional racism slippery and difficult to formulate or grasp. Meanwhile, lives continue to be harmed for the economic benefit of others. Oppression is a natural component in a capitalist society and to decrease, remove, or minimize oppressive conditions, the entire structure, and economic system would require a shift.

In preparation for this project and in approaching my work in general, I am tasked with constant observation of the institution education as an operating system and for the impacts to people and groups of people. The work of generating change cannot happen without addressing harsh and uncomfortable truths about the harms and inefficiencies of ‘whiteness’ and capitalism.

The binary of good/bad person interferes with individual’s ability to see the system and to own their unintentional and intentional complicity. As an individualistic culture, ‘Whiteness’ promotes arrogance which further exacerbates the issue of owning one’s own subjection and victimization to a system designed to serve and maintain itself. ‘Whiteness’ is a constructed identity and property, and as such, can be lost or changed though, a multidisciplinary approach that invites more voices from oppressed identities would be required.

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Unpacking the complexity of diversity. Examines in-group /identity and perceptions of diversity initiatives.

Bell Hooks

Lynn Weber

Michel Foucault

Jonathon Kozol

Omi & Winant

Title and topic change framework

Oppression and the Teaching of Something Different to Black Youth

1. Introduction: Education as an institution. The structural difference between organizations and institutions. Institutions as the underpinning structure of oppression. Terms
2. Prospectus: (move current introduction to prospectus and merge original prospectus with new framework. Communicative messaging through behavior and policies.)
3. Power of Race (What is it?)
4. Intersectionality and the Identity of Black Youth
5. Institutional Racism
6. Educators and Oppressive Authority
7. Subjugating Minds (The foundation of self-oppression)
8. Data Sets (Measured exposure to marginalization and its impact. Level of exposure based on social location. Punishment and messaging. The impact of low expectations on outcomes. Students of color outcomes in PWI and variances.)
9. Backwards in the Starting Blocks (Positionality, youth blame, and accountability. The impact on adult transition.)
10. Cultural artifacts as Barriers to change
11. Research as a barrier and cultural artifact
12. Data: Cultures less focused on race
13. Conclusion

Clean up citations