Title: Voices from Red States: Challenging Racial Positioning in Some of the Most Conservative Communities in America

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Abstract

In this paper, we investigate the story lines and (counter) narratives of people (faculty and staff) of color in two homogeneous, rural American teacher education contexts. Using Positioning Theory (PT, Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) and critical race theory (CRT, Gilborn, Taylor, & Ladson-Billings, 2009), we examine disparate power relations between White governance and people of color by analyzing macro-level documents (race-related historical and sociopolitical data) and micro-dynamics (interpersonal story lines via focus group interviews). We use the positioning triad: position, speech acts, and story lines as well as CRT to interpret and analyze data. The significance of PT as a theoretical lens is that it helps uncover the pattern of the racial hierarchies. We review the macro-level historical data in the U. S. and its potential influence on the institutional-level rural university policies and practices, which in turn affect the micro-level positions, story lines, of people of color. Findings show that the cyclical dynamics between macro-level historical and sociopolitical data has an impact on institutional levels, and, in turn, the institutional practices shape and contribute to the hierarchical power relations and parochial-minded racial episodes/storylines particularly for diverse people (i.e., counternarratives) in the rural U.S. teacher education. We conclude that we, Whites and non-Whites, ought to find ways to cooperate one another to change institutional practices and advance interracial harmony. Our contribution to the diversity scholarship in this area is the combined frameworks: CRT and PT as the CRT authorizes the storylines and counternarratives of experiential knowledge of people of color as PT analyzes the
social positions of social actors. The combination of PT and CRT combine to make an analytical framework that better represents the voices of people of color in U.S academia in remote rural contexts.

Key words- Up to five (5). Diversity-Rurality; Positions and Voices of People of Color; Rural Teacher Education; Historical and Present-Day Race and Racism; Social and Racial Justice

Higher education, particularly teacher training—is in need of urgent critical intervention in regard to racial and social justice (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Grant & Gibson, 2011; Han, 2014; Han & Leonard, 2016; Han, Madhuri, & Scull, 2015; Leonardo & Boas, 2013; Milner & Howard, 2013). Despite the nation’s rapid growth in diversity, many U.S. colleges and schools of education remain predominantly White institutions in teaching content, practices, and institutional governance (Collins, 2009). Historically, White faculty represent the norm and inculcate mainstream knowledge and culture to college students and teacher candidates (Cochran-Smith, 1995; King, 1997; Han et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2013). The policies and practices are established for White students, faculty, and leaders, which can perpetuate disadvantages for people and faculty of color (FOC), particularly in predominantly White institutional spaces.

Literature Review

According to Han (2014) and Han and Leonard (2016), demographic homogeneity (over 90% White citizens) and rurality negatively influence crucial players (college students, teacher candidates, faculty, and administrators) and citizens’ openness to diverse ideas and people. Specifically, rurality in this paper denotes diversity-rurality trends: (a) residents in rural settings are comprised of at least 90% and up to 100% White population (HAC, 2012); (b) citizens often lack experience with and exposure to diverse ideas and peoples in schools and work places; and (c) White teacher candidates (Han, 2013; Marx, 2006; Vargas, 1999), faculty, and administrators in rural regions habitually exude parochial attitudes and resistance toward diversity (Han, 2014, under review; Han & Leonard, 2016). These particular diversity-rurality trends can impose problems on a small number of diverse people in predominantly White academia (Han, under review; Han & Leonard, 2016).
Problems can include: (a) FOC often receive lower teaching evaluations than White counterparts (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008). Since student evaluation is often used as a single most important measure for teaching performance, FOC are downgraded for teaching (Reid, 2010); (b) mainstream epistemology-based scholarship and pedagogy are valued, while ethnic research and diversity teaching are devalued (Han & Leonard, 2016; Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012; Perry et al., 2009). Moreover, a glass ceiling effect (Woo, 2000), income disparities (Lee, 2002), and Othering to FOC (and staff) as FOC/Staff are appraised as something inferior to the White ‘standard’ university male (Collins, 2009; Ford, 2011; Vargas, 1999, 2002; Yang, 2002). These problems tend to be more serious in rural regions (Han, 2014; Han & Leonard, 2016; Han et al., 2015). Diversity in education is largely researched in urban settings (Milner, 2006, 2008; Milner & Howard, 2013; Sleeter & Milner, 2011), and there is, therefore, a dearth of diversity scholarship in rural settings, researchers call for a national focus on college students (Perry et al., 2009), rural teacher training and education (Han, 2014; Han & Leonard, 2016; Marx, 2006), faculty (Merryfiled, 2000), and administrative governance and leadership in rural context for developing a more cosmopolitan citizenry (Han & Leonard, 2016; Han, under review).

We examine diverse people’s lived experiences in advocating for social justice in rural White university communities and contribute to diversity scholarship in rural contexts. We posed one research question: In what ways have historically disparate power dynamics between dominant groups and people of color shaped the story lines and counternarratives of people of color in rural teacher education contexts?

**Theoretical Frameworks**

We use: (a) critical race theory (CRT); and (b) Positioning Theory (PT, Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). CRT emerged in the 1970 in critical legal studies into the 1990 (Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The tenets of CRT are: (a) acknowledging that race/racism are pervasive in America; (b) challenging dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, and merit; (c) advocating for social justice; (d) legitimatizing the experiential knowledge of people of color, thus supporting counterstories aimed at uncovering master narratives that dominant groups historically twist to justify the racial hierarchy; and (e) recognizing interest convergence (i.e., Whites support advancement of non-Whites when and only when it
promotes their interests (Bell, 1980). PT is based on the premise that the type of positions a member occupies in a social context are relevant. The positions come with sets of duties and rights. We use the positioning triad (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003): position, speech and other acts, and story lines or counternarratives. Analyzing the large scale and historical data, we examine if macro-level racism and xenophobia have affected institutional practices in the rural regions, in turn, could have influenced micro-level interactions with and experiences of people of color. We combine CRT for activism and voice for marginalized groups; PT for analysis of intricate social interactions between dominant and subjugated groups.

**Methodology**

**Data Analysis Procedure**

Data sources include: (1) U.S. census figures, news releases, and historical/sociopolitical scans (e.g., Huff Post Politics, 2009; King, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2012); and (2) we conducted focus group interviews (FOC: n=6) and one-on-one interviews (diverse staff: n=1) when group interviews were not feasible.

**Data Analysis**

We used nexus analysis and critical discourse analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), which enabled the analysts to explore the linkage between contemporary diversity-race discourses and historical trajectories of race/racism within the rural contexts. Our goals are to: (a) “open up and make visible” the connection among the many trajectories of historical bodies, discourses in place, and interactions” social actors and the current cycles/patterns of a social issue of diversity-race; and ultimately (b) “to alter trajectories for yourself and for others….in producing social change” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 178).

**Findings**

Our findings show that the U.S. teacher education particularly in some rural locales. The rural university communities remain predominantly White in their demographic make-up and university crucial actors (White faculty, students, and governing leaders) often hold fast to Whiteness and White ignorance (Leonardo, 2009). As shown via positioning triads, the differential power dynamics based on the racial hierarchy (White at the top and African American at the bottom, and differential treatment of immigrants per sociopolitical situation (e.g., Arabic as terrorists) is clear in teacher education in the U.S. Furthermore, interest convergence
undermines policy change for racial and social justice for all, as governing policies and administrative practices are established to benefit Whites. Rural academia is seriously ill-prepared for respecting diversity, often operates to ensure White interest and privilege with its grudging and incremental efforts toward diversity.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In discussion we first share practical implications and recommendations per the findings of this study. We point out why and how diversity matters in rural teacher education and the urgent need to incorporate diversity courses and racial theories, and racial identity works (Sleeter & Milner, 2013). Second, we theorize how PT can be used for future research on diversity-racial relations in teacher education in conjunction with CRT. CRT and PT is powerful combination of theoretical frameworks for this study and future research because: (a) CRT legitimates experiential knowledge of historically marginalized people and empowers their voices in countering often twisted master narrative of diverse folks; and (b) PT allows the analysts to examine social interactions and relations between dominant and subjugated groups by sorting out duties, jobs, activities, and rights indicating power-based hierarchical positions. As such, CRT and PT compliment voice research and analyzing racial relations respectively and offer possibility for future diversity research. Finally, we conclude that we should cooperate with one another as White and non-Whites to move humanity forward (Du Bois, 1940).

**References**


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