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Naming Racism: A Conceptual Look at Internalized Racism in US Schools

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ARTICLE: NAMING RACISM: A CONCEPTUAL LOOK AT INTERNALIZED RACISM IN U.S. SCHOOLS

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LEXISNEXIS SUMMARY:

... Internalized racism describes the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy where whites are consistently ranked above People of Color. ... For this reason, we use a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to re-define internalized racism as the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy in which whites are consistently ranked above People of Color. ... As a first step in locating some potential causes of internalized racism, we examine the racism embedded in three fundamental components to the functioning of schools: 1) Teachers: acknowledging the predominantly white teaching force and teacher education faculty, we highlight examples of pedagogy where educators privilege whiteness and perpetuate racism; 2) Curriculum: because state standards guide textbooks and curriculum, we explore California's K-12 "multicultural" U.S. History Standards to call attention to the lack of representation of People of Color; and 3) School resources: utilizing de-segregation literature, we point to the unequal resources between predominantly white and non-white schools. ... As a result, students are subjected to racism everyday they walk into a classroom and have yet to recognize or name racism because the educational inequalities they experience are explained by the internalizations they have created within themselves. ...

TEXT:

[*183]

Abstract

Internalized racism describes the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy where whites are consistently ranked above People of Color. Although scholars across multiple disciplines have discussed this concept, the role of schools in instilling and perpetuating internalized racism within Students of Color has very rarely been examined. This paper is a conceptual piece that utilizes a Critical Race Theory framework to acknowledge the racialized experiences within classroom pedagogy, curriculum, and unequal school resources. We examine how these factors can negatively affect racial group-identity and contribute to internalized racism for Students of Color. Because internalized racism works to sustain educational and social inequity, this paper also explores ways that schools can function to break this cycle.

A former elementary school teacher in Southern California relayed a story to one of the authors in which she described

an African American ⁿ¹ male 5th grader who began to sob during one of their after school tutoring sessions. After struggling through a math problem, the student proclaimed through tears that he couldn't do the math; that it was too hard and he wasn't smart enough. ⁿ² The irony is that this student blamed himself for his academic struggles. He was not thinking about the fact that neither he or his classmates had math textbooks, that the first few weeks of school they had to strive to learn in the dark because their classrooms had no lights, or that his string of past un-credentialed teachers had allowed him to become two grade levels behind in math. We argue that the lack of resources and low [*184] teacher expectations that this student faced are acts of racism, commonly perpetrated against non-white and low-income students. This young man internalized this racism. Like so many others, he believed that his lack of success in math was due to his own inferior intellectual ability, never realizing that structural injustices within his schooling experience may have contributed to his academic struggles.

Racism is enacted on both individual, as well as institutional levels, and has been studied extensively in social science research. Internalized racism, however, has been referenced within many disciplines, but conceptualized mostly in psychology. This previous scholarship is strong in examining ways to cope with or resist internalized racism; however, it tends to explore it solely as an internal and psychological phenomenon. We feel that the internalization of racism could not occur without racism and in order to more fully understand it, it is essential to acknowledge outside contributing factors. Through a review of interdisciplinary scholarship, our goal in this article is to connect and demonstrate a relationship between racism and internalized racism.

Traditionally, internalized racism has been defined as the internalization of negative stereotypes or judgments of one's racial group. ⁿ³ Although we feel these definitions are useful, they do not capture the complexities of racism. For this reason, we use a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to re-define internalized racism as the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy in which whites are consistently ranked above People of Color. ⁿ⁴ Internalized racism goes beyond the internalization of stereotypes imposed by the white majority about People of Color. It is the internalization of the beliefs, values, and worldviews inherent in white supremacy ⁿ⁵ that can potentially result in negative self or racial group perceptions. This article is an attempt to point out, not just the psychological processes that youth (who we discuss at the beginning of the paper) experience when internalizing racism, but also the factors in schools that may contribute to it. By choosing to focus our efforts on naming [*185] racial hierarchies and racism in education, we hope to call attention to areas that must change in order to move towards racial and social justice.

In the following sections of this article we outline previous theoretical and empirical research on internalized racism in the fields of psychology and education. Next we examine the ways in which racial hierarchies and racism manifest in schools, namely in teachers, curriculum and resources. Finally, we discuss possible consequences of internalized racism in Students of Color, such as low academic achievement and rates of dropouts/pushouts, and recommendations for practitioners and researchers regarding educational reform. We hope that by acknowledging how Students of Color are placed in a racial hierarchy below whites, we can begin to disrupt racism and therefore the internalization of that racism.

Defining Race, Racism and Critical Race Theory

In order to begin a discourse on researching the racialized experiences of People of Color, the concepts of race and racism must be defined. We acknowledge that race is a socially constructed and fluid measure of phenotype that is utilized by whites to differentiate themselves from the "Other." Race is used to include and exclude specific groups from equal participation, resources and opportunity in U.S. society. To define racism, we borrow the definition of Solorzano, Allen, and Carroll, who provide three fundamental premises of racism that include: "(1) one group believes itself to be superior, (2) the group that believes itself to be superior has power to carry out the racist behavior, and (3) racism affects multiple racial/ethnic groups." ⁿ⁶ Thus, Solorzano, Allen, and Carroll frame racism as institutional power that People of Color have never significantly possessed. We emphasize racism as an institutional force that maintains and perpetuates racist ideologies rooted in white supremacy.

We utilize a CRT framework ⁿ⁷ to highlight the prominent role of race and racism in education systems. It is a lens

that has been incorporated into educational research to identify the effects of racial subordination on People of Color. Examining these issues through a critical race analysis allows for and enables researchers [*186] to work towards the elimination of racism. Applying this framework also works to eradicate the subordination of groups as defined by class and gender. We use CRT in the context of this article as a lens to help us reconceptualize internalized racism as a phenomenon directly connected to both individual and institutionalized racism.

Internalized Racism

For years psychologists have considered the psychological effects of oppression on the human psyche. Much of this work has found a place in the field of counseling psychology, where psychologists have strived to understand the consequences of racism on racial minorities in the United States. Although it may be an important premise guiding their work, very few scholars in psychology directly name internalized racism as a lens through which they investigate and conduct research. There are even less scholars who have explicitly centered their research on internalized racism.ⁿ⁸

Within psychological investigations, internalized racism refers to the permeation of racism into the psyche. It is often denoted as the internalization of negative stereotypes or beliefs about one's racial group generated by the white majority in the U.S. Some of the earlier works in psychology deal specifically with African Americans and the effects of internalized racism on self-concept. Seminal pieces such as the Clark doll study,ⁿ⁹ established that internalized racism can cause a sense of self-hate among the oppressed, specifically African Americans. Eventually, in the late 1960s, many scholars began to challenge the self-hatred theory, and noted that many African Americans exhibit healthy levels of self-esteem. Additionally, race identity theorists began to posit that African Americans and other People of Color are not homogenous, and therefore do not experience the impact of racism in the same way. We support this theory, and offer a perspective that internalized racism applies beyond the African American community and can have a range of consequences within Students of Color.

[*187] In the early 1970s, new theoretical frameworks were developed in psychology to better conceptualize the impact of internalized racism on racial minority groups. Race identity models, such as Cross' Nigrescence theory,ⁿ¹⁰ were constructed to describe the developmental phases that various racial minorities must undergo to overcome internalized racism. Although race identity models help us to better understand the impact of internalized racism on the oppressed, including symptomatic manifestations, it does little to shed light on internalized racism itself. Race identity models do not extend the underdeveloped definition of internalized racism in psychology literature, nor do they facilitate understanding about how social structures contribute to or infect oppressed individuals with internalized racism. This article extends such work in psychology in order to better understand the transmittable nature of internalized racism in our society through one of our greatest socializing institutions-schools.

Internalized racism, although rarely studied in education, has been identified or alluded to in relation to schooling in the United States for many years. From Carter Woodsonⁿ¹¹ to Malcolm Xⁿ¹² and bell hooks,ⁿ¹³ these important figures are just three of many who spoke both theoretically and personally about racism within the educational system. They all describe school as a place entrenched with white supremacy where Students of Color are socialized towards a negative self and racial-group perception; and although they may not directly name it, they are critical of the school's role in internalized racism.

In 1933, Carter Woodson wrote *The Mis-Education of the Negro* to acknowledge that the racism deeply embedded in schools mis-educates Blacks (and whites) to believe that Blacks are of less value than whites. He claims that education is a tool used to maintain a racial hierarchy. It socializes whites to the notion of superiority while simultaneously, internalizing a self-hatred within Black students. During an era of federally sanctioned segregation, even with an all Black teaching force, the textbooks, curriculum and resources in these schools all told a story of white supremacy. Woodson argues,

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him [*188] feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people ... the "educated Negro" is compelled to live and move among his own people whom he has been taught to despise. As a rule, therefore, the "educated Negro" prefers to buy his food from a white grocer because he has been taught that the Negro is not clean. It does not matter how often a Negro washes his hands, then, he cannot clean them, and it does not matter how often a white man uses his hands he cannot soil them. ⁿ¹⁴

Woodson declares education to be a socializing force in the racial power structures of U.S. society. He argues, in order to maintain a racial hierarchy with whites on top, Black students are taught to view their racial group as having less worth. They are educated to despise and mistrust their racial community; hence internalizing both racism and white supremacy.

Malcolm X describes, in his 1964 autobiography, the role of the school in perpetuating a racial hierarchy and fostering internalized racism. He recounts his junior high school years when he lived with a white family and attended an all-white school. He succeeded academically and was at the top of the school. When asked by his teacher what he wanted as a career in his future, Malcolm explained that he wanted to be a lawyer. The teacher responded by telling Malcolm that because he was a "nigger" his goal was unrealistic and that he should instead consider being a carpenter. The teacher explained to him,

Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer -that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about some-thing you can be. You're good with your hand-making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person-you'd get all kinds of work. ⁿ¹⁵

What Malcolm X describes was a teacher attempting to internalize within a Black student the racist belief that he could not accomplish an intellectual goal. Because of this experience, Malcolm X gave up his dream of becoming a lawyer and left the school. Many other students who are exposed to derogatory and racist teaching, often not as blatant as this, may not successfully reject a blow to their self or racial-group perception. If this occurs, it can have dire consequences on their personal and academic aspirations and accomplishments.

[*189] In 2001, bell hooks ⁿ¹⁶ discusses a similarly racist climate within schools, post-desegregation. She describes her education during segregation as lacking in resources, but a place where both students and teachers were committed to the academic success of Black students. She argues that in this all-Black environment there was support and encouragement to excel; however, after schools were integrated, white teachers with 'biased perspectives' were now educating Black students. hooks also comments that white racists kept Black male students out of gifted classes for fear that they would have contact with white female students, and that this created a stigma that Black males were not smart. She describes the U.S. educational system as a place where academic success requires assimilation to the beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, a place where racism is internalized.

Discourse around what we are defining as internalized racism has existed for at least the last 70 years in discussions of educational inequity. All three of these scholars lived and wrote at different times, yet are among many who echoed the same disturbing sentiment. Even so, the school's role in internalized racism has rarely been explicitly or deeply analyzed. We look to, and lean on, the insight and experiences of these important leaders of social justice as we begin to conceptualize a theory of internalized racism. Our goal is to hold schools-the teachers, curriculum and unequal

resources-accountable for internalization of negative self and racial-group perceptions, as well as the acceptance of a racial hierarchy founded in white supremacy.

Schools, Racial Hierarchies, and Racism

As a first step in locating some potential causes of internalized racism, we examine the racism embedded in three fundamental components to the functioning of schools: 1) Teachers: acknowledging the predominantly white teaching force and teacher education faculty, we highlight examples of pedagogy where educators privilege whiteness and perpetuate racism; 2) Curriculum: because state standards guide textbooks and curriculum, we explore California's K-12 "multicultural" U.S. History Standards to call attention to the lack of representation of People of Color; and 3) School resources: utilizing de-segregation literature, we point to the unequal resources between predominantly white and non-white schools. Through a survey of these three factors of schooling, we demonstrate ways in which educational [*190] institutions in this country create and sustain racism and racial hierarchies.

Inadequate Teaching Force, Racist Teaching

Teachers, as an essential part of schools and education, play a large role in the development of how students perceive themselves and the world around them. When considering the school's role in fostering internalized racism, it is important to examine educators, their pedagogy and their sensitivity to issues of race and racism. Ladson-Billingsⁿ¹⁷ reports that 88 percent of 35,000 full time faculty within university education departments are white; thus the majority of teachers in this country are not receiving any teacher education from Professors of Color. When mostly white faculty train teachers, it is likely that new teachers will develop pedagogy that serves the dominant culture. In addition, the National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Forceⁿ¹⁸ collected statistics on the racial demographics of teachers in the United States and found that 90 percent of all public school teachers are white and more than 40 percent of schools do not even employ one Teacher of Color. This means that most youth grow up with few to none minority teachers within their entire academic career. A predominately white teaching force can have adverse affects on a student's self-perception, especially if these teachers have minimal cultural understanding.

Several qualitative studies have revealed that schools reinforce racial hierarchies and that students do internalize this racism. Because teachers might see it as controversial and/or uncomfortable to talk about race or because "standard English" is seen as just that-the standard, many teachers unconsciously perpetuate societal norms of white supremacy. Martinezⁿ¹⁹ interviewed Latina/o student teachers about their personal experiences in elementary school and how some of those events affected their educational ideology. Although many of student teachers are now determined to make culturally inclusive and positive classrooms, we can learn a great deal from their testimony about the culturally alienating pedagogy Students of Color often face.

[*191] One of the student teachers, Roberto, was a Spanish speaker who knew very little English when he was young. He remembers dreading first grade because his teacher used to scream at him in front of his peers. Roberto describes one day in class where the students were playing a word game that, linguistically, he did not have the tools to participate in. Not acknowledging language skills as the reason he could not play correctly, the teacher berated him in front of the class. Roberto said that by doing this she not only humiliated him, but also reinforced the idea that English had more value than his home language or culture.

I remember this one incident where we were playing a game ["Telephone Operator"], and I couldn't do it because I didn't know what the guy was saying. I said something else, and she took me out there in front of-and she started screaming at me ... and then she ... swatted me ... I couldn't relay the [message]-I didn't have that ability yet. It was awful. First grade was awful.

That experience made me want to adopt and conform to Anglo ways ... I wanted so hard to be able to speak English

and to interact with everyone else, and English and Anglo ways were the only way to do that ...ⁿ²⁰

The disciplinary measures used by Roberto's teacher are hopefully not the norm in elementary education. Even so, it is important to note her frustration towards Roberto's lack of the dominant language. His inability to participate in classroom activity is caused by a cultural mismatch, however, the teacher's actions validate a cultural and linguistic hierarchy-placing English above Spanish. As Roberto explains, experiences like these pushed him to internalize the value of Anglo ways, to internalize white supremacy.

Creating linguistic hierarchies, however, is not the only way teachers may contribute to the internalization of racism; this can also be fostered through the ways teachers address curriculum. It has been demonstrated that if teachers are uncritical of the Eurocentric standards that schools are centered around, youth may end up adopting Anglo cultural values, while feeling shame or disdain towards their own language and culture.ⁿ²¹ Nogueraⁿ²² interviewed Black high school students in the Bay Area about racial identity formation and schooling. He explains a situation where students, through a teacher's pedagogy around the text [*192] *Huckleberry Finn*, were silenced about race. In working with one student on an essay about the book, Noguera discovered that the student did not have any commentary about the character that was a slave. Through further discussion, the student revealed that although many Black students in the class questioned the depiction of African Americans within the text, the teacher made them choose between continuing this critical analysis and staying in the class. Noguera describes,

After reading what he had written, I asked why he had not discussed the plight of Jim, the runaway slave who is one of the central characters of the novel. The student informed me that his teacher had instructed the class to focus on the plot and not to get into issues about race because according to the teacher, that was not the main point of the story. He explained that two students in the class, both Black males, had objected to the use of the word "nigger" throughout the novel and had been told by the teacher that if they insisted on making it an issue they would have to leave the course. Both of these students opted to leave the course even though it meant that they would have to take another course that did not meet the college preparatory requirements. The student I was helping explained that because he needed the class he would just 'tell the teacher what she wanted to hear.'ⁿ²³

To challenge or look critically at the subordinate role of African Americans within the text was deemed off topic by the teacher and meant that the student did not belong in this college preparatory class. In this classroom, if students wanted to succeed they were forced to accept epithets and negative perceptions about their racial group. By placing the critical examination of racism in opposition to academic success, this teacher has developed a space in school where success is the acceptance of racism; thus perpetuating the schools role in the internalization of racism.

Discussions of race and racism are unfortunately uncommon within many K-12 classrooms. This can have dire consequences on Students of Color, especially because the standards of U.S. schools are often invisibly embedded in whiteness. From predominantly white teacher education and teaching force, to English language norms and declaring issues of race irrelevant in literature class, we cannot ignore the evidence of racial power dynamics in schools. Teachers in the education of minority youth regularly reinforce racial and cultural hierarchies in both overt and underlying ways. This is continually problematic for the self and racial group perceptions of all Students of Color.

[*193]

Bias Curriculum

Curriculum is a foundational component in the transfer of knowledge and information in the classroom. Curriculum not only shapes pedagogy, it dictates the pace and structure of the transmittance of knowledge and skills. Thus, curriculum is an important framework for academic learning. It is imperative that curriculum be evaluated to assure that contents do not perpetuate the ever present force of racism in our society. Unfortunately, in the vast majority of schools in the U.S., this is not the case. Curriculum often reinforces the hierarchical status-quo of white supremacy and renders the race and cultures of non-whites inferior. The constant bombardment of messages embedded in curriculum about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of non-whites (which can be explicit or implicit) can indoctrinate students about their placement on the racial hierarchy in relation to their race. This can contribute to internalized racism, and potentially damage the self-concept of non-white students.

Although in many educational contexts, schools and education agencies claim to reflect multiculturalism and the value of multicultural citizens, this has consistently been lip service and not true practice. The case of California is a prime example. Ironically, the state of California has educational codes which state that all instructional materials in California must be multicultural in nature, reflect the values of all cultures, and "instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage."ⁿ²⁴ We evaluate the California State Standards to reveal racist and non-inclusive instructional content, in the state. Additionally, as California educates a large portion of the nation's K-12 population, an examination of standards in this state can reveal current trends in inadequate racial and cultural representation in curriculum, and what a large part of America's youth are experiencing in the classroom.

Standards are important indicators of curriculum content in California because state law requires all instructional materials to be aligned with state standards.ⁿ²⁵ With such legislation, an examination of California State Standards can reveal exactly the manner in which curriculum in the state reinforces racism in the classroom, and potentially contributes to internalized racism in Students of Color. In this section, the California U.S. History Standardsⁿ²⁶ are evaluated as an exemplar. U.S. History is among the subject-matters in which the values of students in relation to [*194] the racial-hierarchy can be clearly conveyed, and in this sense is a subject which can indoctrinate students about the values of their racial groups.

The California U.S. History Standards are taught in the 5th, 8th, 11th, and 12th grades, and there are hundreds of standards that cover pre-Columbian American history through contemporary U.S. history. The North American continent and the United States has experienced a long continuum of multicultural populations who have contributed to the advancement of human society. The standards however do not reflect this. Despite the constant diversity in the United States, the standards portray the country as a mostly homogenous and white society. Despite the long-standing presence of African Americans, Native Americans, Latinas/os, and Asians the standards present these groups as marginal and almost invisible members of U.S. society. For students who are from the above mentioned racial and cultural groups, the California U.S. History Standards presents them as insignificant and inferior, with only minor to no contributions to the advancement of the country.

African Americans. African Americans are referenced twenty-four times in the U.S. History Standards. In the twenty-four times African Americans appear in the standards, they are considered overwhelmingly within the topics of slavery or civil rights. This dichotomous constraint presents African Americans as merely oppressed chattel slaves or as non-violent Civil Rights protestors. They are not accurately represented as a complex cultural group. The standards in no way capture the realities, complexities, pre-slave histories, or African American contributions to the U.S. Such representations can lead African American students to subscribe to a belief in the inferiority of their racial and cultural group.

Native Americans. Although Native Americans were the original inhabitants of the U.S. and their political culture informed the birth of U.S. political systems (i.e. the Articles of Confederation), the standards portray them as playing an insignificant role in U.S. History. Additionally, the true nature of the ways in which Native Americans were persecuted and systematically murdered is not revealed. Within the standards, Native Americans are referenced a total of fourteen times. The fourteen references almost solely highlight Native Americans in relation to the needs of white settlers and American land policies. In other words, the standards convey that Native Americans are only significant because they

stood in the way of land attainment by whites. Outside the issue of land attainment, they are only mentioned in standards that focus on pre-Columbian settlements. [*195] It is problematic that Native American societies are referred to as "pre-Columbian." This term not only centers their existence on whiteness and white land attainment (as pre-Columbian refers to pre-Christopher Columbus), but only addressing Native American societies in this time period fossilizes the group. The standards offer no contemporary look at Native American life, culture, or contributions. Such representations send a message to students that Native American culture and peoples are relics of the past, which only matter in relation to whiteness or white needs. This can contribute to feelings of inferiority and internalized racism among Native American students.

Latinas/os. Latinas/os are the majority in some cities in the United States, especially in California, yet there are no standards that reference this group. The only Latina/o ethnic subgroup mentioned is Mexicans. Mexicans have a long history and presence in California. Even so, they are referenced only seven times in the standards and those standards revolve around the topics of Mexican settlers, settlements, and Mexico/U.S. border disputes. Mexicans are frozen in time as migrants and settlers. Like Native Americans, the standards never integrate them as U.S. citizens with significant contributions that have propelled U.S. society forward. The standards consistently portray them as "outsiders" and not as a complex cultural group. The distorted representation of Mexicans as foreign, nomadic, and static beings, as well as the omission of many Latina/o ethnic subgroups from the U.S. History Standards, can be internalized by Latina/o students and contribute to internalized racism.

Asians. Asians are only referenced twice in the History standards. The first reference highlights them in relation to the internment of Japanese Americans. The second reference calls for the examination of "Asian Americans" in relation to the Civil Rights Movement. Groups that have traditionally belonged to the Asian American category are not explicitly mentioned, rendering them invisible in the standards. Their experiences and contributions are not even marginally touched upon. The standards treat them as if they do not matter; that they are so insignificant to U.S. history that they do not need to be referenced at all. Asian students can become indoctrinated with the message of inferiority and insignificance that is tied to their group through the standards, and become victims to internalized racism.

In the California U.S. History Standards, whites are the central focus while People of Color are insignificant backdrops. People of Color are never presented as complex cultural groups who have contributed in great ways to the U.S. Instead, they are side bars to a larger white narrative. Their existence is consistently [*196] portrayed as an extension or appendage to a recount of a white dilemma, need, or desire. Whiteness is presented as the normalized standard, and People of Color are therefore rendered as abnormal. The portrayal of People of Color as inferior in relation to whites in the standards is blatant, and students are in jeopardy of believing in this racial hierarchy. The standards and related curriculum stand as authoritative sources as to who is perceived to be important in U.S. History and society. Such distorted information presented by other standards and curriculum in California, and in other states, can significantly contribute to the internalized racism and distorted self-image of Students of Color. California U.S. History Standards serve as an example of the potential harm curriculum can cause youth across the country.

Unequal Resources

Schools whose student populations are majority nonwhite have been found to have drastically poorer resources, more unqualified teachers, and less adequate facilities than majority white schools.ⁿ²⁷ Court decisions and changing housing patterns have contributed to the resegregation of U.S. schools where low-income Students of Color have little to no opportunities to a quality education.ⁿ²⁸ The consistent unequal distribution of quality resources to Students of Color in the U.S. reflects racist educational practices and policies that perpetuate inequality in Communities of Color. Perpetual educational inequality is a manifestation of a racial hierarchy in which whites are consistently ranked above People of Color. We argue that Students of Color can internalize the racism embedded in the lack of educational resources available to them and as a result, unconsciously accept the racial hierarchy that places them below their white counterparts.

Although we do not argue that desegregation is the answer to educational equality, we utilize segregation literature

to highlight the inequalities that exist between predominantly white and non-white schools. The Harvard Civil Rights Project ⁿ²⁹ reports that 41 percent of U.S. public schools are nonwhite and located in predominately low-income areas. This research also reports that majority non-white schools have less qualified teachers and significantly lower achievement scores. Furthermore, the study [*197] underlines the linkages between racial segregation, poor educational opportunity and poverty. The researchers emphasize the need to view school segregation as a reflection of larger structural inequalities in society.

Through this literature we can see how schools play a major role in perpetuating racial stratification in society by failing to provide quality education to Students of Color. Unequal resources, racial segregation and poverty are intertwined into a complicated system of subordination that results in low educational achievement for Students of Color and perpetuates racial stratification for many Communities of Color. Internalized racism plays a key role in this cycle of inequality. In order for this cycle of subordination to continue, the people being denied opportunities must believe, to some extent, their "failure" in attaining educational opportunities, is a result of their own lack of abilities and effort.

The Harvard Civil Rights Project reported that in 2004, California was one of the most segregated states for Latinas/os and African Americans. ⁿ³⁰ University of California, Los Angeles' Institute for Democracy, Equity and Access (IDEA) reports that California schools remain separate and unequal. ⁿ³¹ As a result, racial gaps in educational resources and graduation rates are pronounced in schools located in predominately Latina/o and African American communities in California. For example, in California's largest school district, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), 90 percent of the total student population are ethnic minority students. LAUSD has an overall graduation rate of just fewer than 50 percent. ⁿ³² Researchers at UCLA/IDEA report that in predominately non-white schools in California, 33.3 percent of teachers are non-credentialed compared to just 5 percent of teachers in predominately white schools. This study further reports that predominately Latina/o and African American schools suffer from lack of essential instructional materials like textbooks, math and science tools and equipment. ⁿ³³ These schools also lack safe and adequate school facilities that are free from overcrowding and the presence of vermin. This report clearly demonstrates the disparities that exist in predominately white and non-white schools and the disparities in educational attainment as a result of these inequalities. Studies also reveal [*198] that unequal resources in schools are not exclusive to California; they persist within schools throughout the U.S. ⁿ³⁴

It may seem reasonable to assume that low-income Students of Color may not be aware of educational inequity. Because Students of Color are consistently exposed to inadequate resources, it may seem likely that they are not aware of the privilege of their white counterparts and therefore, are immune to the possibility of internalizing a racial hierarchy. While this might be true for some, for other students the manifestations of racial and class injustice are clearly recognized.

Margarita L. and Anna L., two seventh graders from Southern California, attend a public charter school that is 97 percent Students of Color and 91 percent free-lunch eligible. For an art class, they were asked to construct a poster about a social issue and they chose inequality in education (See figure 1).

[SEE FIGURE IN ORIGINAL]

Figure 1: Artists Margarita L. and Anna L. (2005) How big is the difference? Big! The poster they created demonstrates their awareness of the educational inequality they experience. The poster includes two classrooms. The classroom on the left shows white students seated individually at large desks, each with their own book, a full bookshelf and papers with "A" and "B" grades. The classroom [*199] on the right depicts Black and Brown students sharing desks, with few textbooks, an empty bookshelf, with "D" and "F" grades on their papers. Even the apple on the teacher's desk has a worm in this classroom. When interviewed about the message behind this poster, Margarita L. commented, "We are just saying that Latinos and Blacks don't get a good education, and most of them don't go to college. So the white students, or the rich students, have a good education and most of them DO go to college. They have a better future than we do." ⁿ³⁵ This middle school student clearly articulates in both her drawing and her words, that she is aware of the unequal quality of education and resources of schools. Although Margarita L. has knowledge of some of

the structural factors that contribute to the educational underachievement of Latina/o and Black youth, not all students who are exposed to unequal schooling have this understanding.

Youth often unfairly accept responsibility for the lack of their educational opportunities without any critique of the system that has failed them. When Latina/o and African American students believe that they have failed due to their own inadequacies, rather than inadequate schooling, they have internalized racism. Without the acknowledgement of racism in our schools, Students of Color cannot be prepared to confront or thwart the injustice that oppresses them. On a societal level, we must begin seeing beyond the notion that educational and economic inequalities are the "problems" of People of Color. We must recognize that there are larger social institutions, including education, that work to maintain a hierarchy that ranks People of Color below whites. We also have to create spaces in schools for Youth of Color to understand this, so that they can become empowered to counter racism, rather than internalize it.

Consequences of Internalized Racism

The internalization of racism can result in Students of Color unconsciously accepting sub-standard conditions in education. Racist ideologies and beliefs in schools are translated into the normalization of unequal opportunities. Although there are many consequences of internalized racism, we examine low academic achievement and the high dropout/pushout rates of many Students of Color. Often, the blame for low academic performance and the decision to discontinue school has been placed on the students. Theories and explanations grounded in culturally deficit perspectives have enabled such issues to be normalized [*200] within schools, causing Students of Color to accept their lack of educational opportunity.

Academic Performance. Academic performance is a multifaceted process, in which many factors contribute to the achievement or underachievement of students; however, it is important to explore how internalized racism can play a role in the low achievement rates of Students of Color. Students of Color who underachieve academically are consistently labeled as being intellectually or culturally deficient. Such deficit perspectives do not encompass genuine pursuits to uncover real factors that affect Students of Color who are struggling in school. These perspectives only rely on racist ideologies embedded in American society, which consistently position People of Color as inferior beings.

Outside of racist explanations for why a significant number of Students of Color are struggling academically, internalized racism offers compelling insight. Although not the sole factor in understanding underperformance, it asserts itself as an important ingredient in the recipe for academic achievement. As stated earlier, internalized racism is the unconscious or conscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy in which whites are consistently ranked above People of Color. To be plagued with internalized racism can translate into believing in one's own inferiority. The racism in schools consistently transmits the message that individuals who are non-white are intellectually inferior to those who are white. Theoretically, Students of Color are plagued with internalized racism and can develop an inferiority complex in relation to their academic pursuits, and therefore can negatively perceive what they are capable of achieving and academically underachieve.

Accordingly, research has confirmed that perceptions of lower racial status can lead to feelings of negative self-worth;ⁿ³⁶ that the failure to achieve academically can be a function of self concept;ⁿ³⁷ and that self-concept is positively correlated with academic achievement.ⁿ³⁸ Ethel Mayo-Bookerⁿ³⁹ provides more concrete [*201] evidence by demonstrating that racial group identity is positively correlated with academic achievement. Combining these findings, we can postulate that internalized racism, which negatively impacts racial group identity, can lead to negative self-worth, which can cause low academic achievement. We can further postulate that, internalized racism does cause Students of Color to doubt their academic ability based on the belief of racist theories about their intellectual abilities and that this does lower academic achievement and self-esteem.

Dropout/Pushout. The term "dropout" is most commonly used to describe students who are not enrolled in school and do not have a high school diploma or equivalent certificate.ⁿ⁴⁰ This term often is characterized by a student's choice to leave school, rather than by the factors that influence a student's decision to leave. Research has found that for

Students of Color, the decision to leave school is a result of a long process of disengagement and sense of alienation that is reflected in the negative perceptions of Students of Color by teachers, staff and school administrators.ⁿ⁴¹ Thus, a more appropriate term for many Students of Color that leave school is "pushout." We argue that students internalize the racism connected to teachers, curriculum and resources, which lead to the disengagement and alienation in schools. Accordingly, these students consciously or unconsciously believe that because of their racial background they will not be able to succeed in school and, as a result, do not continue their education.

[*202] The U.S. Department of Education reports that 29 percent of Latina/o students and 13 percent of Black students were pushed out of schools in 1999, compared to just 7 percent of white students.ⁿ⁴² As we reflect on these disappointing numbers, it becomes apparent that for many Students of Color, graduation day is an unattainable goal. A common explanation and drastic misconception of the large segments of communities without high school degrees is that it is the student's lack of motivation, disinterest, and laziness that has led to their academic failure. However, the issues that need to be examined are the institutional and social factors that lead a student to believe that their only viable option is to leave school.

Listening to the voices of Students of Color as presented in educational research offers some important insight to the "pushout" phenomenon. In a study by Quiroz, we hear high aspirations and goals from Students of Color that unfortunately become stifled in their schooling experiences. The following is the voice of a Latina/o student at a predominantly Latina/o high school in an urban city with very high pushout rates, "I wanted to be a zoologist. I like animals. But I have one science course. My counselor told me I didn't need anymore science. Instead I took a typing class to graduate."ⁿ⁴³ Throughout this high school, students shared their aspirations of becoming successful college students or business people and having these aspirations disregarded by teachers and administrators who expected little of them academically. Many students, similar to the student above, were misled to believe these low expectations would translate into the success they had envisioned for their futures. Studies such as this demonstrate that Students of Color hold high aspirations for themselves; however, teachers and administrators stifle these goals by imposing deterrents on Students of Color like low expectations and incorrect information. As a result, despite these high aspirations, students begin to accept the negative perceptions of teachers and administrators. Thus the internalizations of these racist perceptions leads to an acceptance of being tracked into lower level classes that do not prepare them to achieve their aspirations, contributing to high pushout rates.

Michelle Fine describes one New York school serving predominately Black and Latina/o students practice the "silencing" of students and their communities.ⁿ⁴⁴ Fine describes how this school used classroom pedagogy, curriculum, and discipline to [*203] make students feel invalidated, as their communities and lived experiences were silenced. Fine found that the school administration was able to mask racist policies, procedures and practices through avoiding critical discussion in the classroom. Fine presents the response of one teacher when asked why he doesn't discuss racism in the class when discussing issues like Equal Opportunity Employment, he responded by stating, "It would demoralize the students, they need to feel positive and optimistic-like they have a chance. Racism is just an excuse they use not to try harder."ⁿ⁴⁵ While many teachers may feel that Students of Color use race as their "excuse" to escape hard work, this statement demonstrates two important ideas. The first is that race is somehow connected to underachievement and underperformance, where students utilize race to justify their lack of success. The second idea is that race and racism is somehow connected to Students of Color, rather than all students. What is especially problematic in this statement is that the teacher refuses to acknowledge race and racism as oppressive constructs, but simultaneously chooses to acknowledge them as factors in the underperformance and achievement of the students.

In many classrooms, racism is hardly discussed while the institutional structure of the school itself maintains a racial hierarchy where Students of Color are placed at the bottom. Racist practices in the classroom devalue the cultural backgrounds and experiences of Students of Color and support the notion of white supremacy where Eurocentric ideologies dominate schools. What is disturbing about the racist schooling practices many Students of Color experience is that students have internalized the negative perceptions of the school to the point that they are no longer able to see racism unless it is in the overt form of racial epithets.

Unable to identify or name racism, except in the most obvious forms, is problematic to all Students of Color who internalize the negative perceptions of themselves and/or their racial ethnic groups to explain why so many of them do not graduate. Research has found, as previously described, that schools consciously silence students in an effort to disable them from naming racism in their schools. As a result, students are subjected to racism everyday they walk into a classroom and have yet to recognize or name racism because the educational inequalities they experience are explained by the internalizations they have created within themselves.

[*204]

Recommendations

As presented by this article, it is evident that internalized racism is a pervasive and destructive phenomenon. It is one in which all educational stakeholders need to recognize, learn about, and incorporate in their quest to improve the academic achievement of all students. There is much that all parties interested in the wellbeing and academic success of students can do to not only recognize the severity of internalized racism, but to combat and thwart its existence as well. We suggest several recommendations for both researchers and practitioners.

Researchers. For academics and researchers in education, the first step is to conduct further inquiries into internalized racism overall. Within the discipline of education, the phenomenon is understudied and under acknowledged. The authors maintain that the integration of the study of internalized racism into research, which examines race in education, can be greatly enriched by recognizing those factors which allow for racism to become internalized. Specifically, further research must be conducted on factors in schools which contribute to internalized racism, such as curriculum, teacher pedagogy, teacher beliefs and worldviews, school culture, and school funding. Additionally, there is a need for further research that examines behaviors that can manifest from internalized racism, especially those which are self-defeating. Moreover, research must examine psychological aspects of internalized racism which can affect student cognitive ability and processes, along with personality development and self-esteem.

Practitioners. For practitioners of education, the onus must be placed on combating internalized racism in educational contexts. Specifically, educators need to incorporate into schools and classrooms mechanisms which combat and thwart the perpetuation of internalized racism. In this sense, Students of Color must have their cultures incorporated and reflected in a positive light in educational settings on a consistent basis. To make this a reality will take the cooperation of teachers, school leadership, local and state educational agencies, and in this era of No Child Left Behind, the federal government.

Students of Color must have teachers who are knowledgeable about their cultures and willing to incorporate them into the classroom. This cultural knowledge should extend beyond knowing the famed food dishes and musical heritage of a culture. Culture is inclusive of worldviews, language, religion, traditions, as well as historical memory. Teachers must be required to become as proficient in the cultural knowledge of Students of Color as [*205] possible, and reflect this back in the classroom through interactions with students, as well as through pedagogy.

Classroom practice must therefore be culturally relevant. It must be compatible with the cultures of Students of Color. Their cultures must be mirrored in decorations, homework assignments, games, lessons and all other facets of the classroom in a positive and affirming light. Curriculum must also be culturally relevant, and respond favorably to the cultures of Students of Color. Local and state education agencies must work together to ensure that culturally relevant curriculum is the standard in the classroom. Furthermore, states must set forth academic content standards, which support the development and furthering of culturally relevant curriculum.

Conclusion

In this article we utilize interdisciplinary scholarship and a CRT framework to define internalized racism in the context of education. We demonstrate how institutions can maintain and perpetuate racial hierarchies in which whites are

consistently ranked above People of Color. Extending internalized racism literature in psychology, we demonstrate that Students of Color can internalize the racism they are exposed to in their schooling experience, which in turn can have negative impacts on the psyche, perceptions, and academic performance of these students.

Specifically, we identify and discuss how racism is perpetuated in an inadequate teaching force and racist pedagogy, biased curriculum and unequal resources at schools within Communities of Color. The goal of this article is not to provide a comprehensive review of the many ways racism penetrates U.S. school systems, rather our goal is to focus on specific components of schools that must be reformed in order to accomplish educational and social justice. Although there can be many possible consequences of internalized racism within schools, we highlight poor academic achievement and high dropout/pushout rates as two educational outcomes in which Students of Color are severely overrepresented. These outcomes are important to acknowledge as they are closely related to academic and economic opportunity.

Students of Color have historically and continue to have limited access to educational opportunities. We acknowledge that school systems are in dire need of reform to change these unequal outcomes. Furthermore, this article only begins a discourse to understand how racism, racial hierarchies and internalized racism shape the schooling experiences of Students of Color. We [*206] offer several recommendations for practitioners and researchers to begin thinking about ways we can eliminate racism in U.S. schools. We hope that this article makes a positive contribution to CRT and education literature, and instills in scholars and educational stakeholders the drive to change schools and move towards racial and social justice.

Legal Topics:

For related research and practice materials, see the following legal topics:

Education Law Instruction Instructional Materials Books Education Law Students Bilingual Students

FOOTNOTES:

n1. In this article we use the terms African American and Black interchangeably.

n2. Interview with Erica Lee, Teacher, in L.A., Cal. (Oct. 15, 2003). (Name and location have been changed for purposes of anonymity).

n3. Most works on race identity in psychology have definitions of internalized racism that include or acknowledge (explicitly or implicitly) that it is the internalization of negative stereotypes or judgments about one's racial group.

n4. " People of Color" is intentionally capitalized to reject the standard grammatical norm. Capitalization is used as a means to empower this group and represents a grammatical move toward social and racial justice. This rule will also apply to "Students of Color," "Communities of Color" and the term "Black" used throughout this article.

n5. We use "white supremacy" as a term to reference both the overt and subtle ways in which whiteness is deemed superior within our society. We include the KKK, lynching and other aspects of the white power movement, but we do not limit it to such. We feel that white supremacy is ubiquitous in society, and therefore we must use this term to name also its daily and less blatant manifestations.

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n16. Hooks, *supra* note 13.

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