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Sidelines and separate spaces: making education anti-racist for students of color

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The way in which anti-racist education is currently conceptualized and practiced holds very few benefits for students of color. By using whiteness theory and the politics of identity and difference, many educators have developed pedagogical interventions that are concerned with bringing white students into a consciousness about racism and white privilege, and examining the effect of racial-identity politics on classroom interactions. Their aim to cultivate an anti-oppressive educational environment for all students is undermined by their preoccupation with identity politics, whiteness and white students. Thus, in both theory and practice, students of color are often rendered invisible on the sidelines or their personal stories are used to benefit white students and white educators. Scholar-practitioners in this field have not adequately considered what counts as anti-racist education for students of color. In this paper, I tell stories about my own experiences as a black woman graduate student as a way of 'talking back' to the disjunctures between pedagogical intentions and the disappointing realities of anti-racist classrooms. I identify the pedagogical obstacles that block instructors from positioning students of color as a central educational concern alongside their white classmates, and argue that anti-racist educators must reexamine their principles and practices from the standpoint of students of color. Finally, I turn to black feminist standpoint theory to discuss the importance of racially separate spaces as a pedagogical intervention that can make education anti-racist for students of color.

Keywords: antiracist education; students of color; talking back; black feminist standpoint theory; pedagogy of separation

Introduction

As a black woman graduate student, I have found that although I enroll in courses that claim to proceed from anti-racist intentions, principles and practices, I am constantly relegated to the margins watching white students emerge in the center over and over again. It feels as if there is some gravitational pull that resists as I try to move to the center, creates tensions once I am there, and finally drags me back to the margin as a way of restoring some kind of natural balance. But I know that this phenomenon is not natural or mystical, but socially constructed and therefore able to be deconstructed and re-imagined.

With the movement to incorporate whiteness theory and the politics of identity and difference into anti-racist education, critical educators have oriented their practice towards bringing white students into a consciousness about white privilege and racism (King 1991; Roman 1993; Sleeter 1993; Bailey 1999; Rodriguez 2000; McIntyre

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2002; Thompson 2003; Boler 2004) or towards examining the effect that racial-identity politics have on classroom interactions (Ellsworth 1989; Ellsworth 1997; Razack 1998; Jones 1999; Boler 2004). Many of these scholar-practitioners candidly examine their own classrooms in an effort to apply pedagogical interventions that cultivate an anti-oppressive educational environment for all students. These projects often gauge success by the extent to which white students developed an awareness of racism and the need for social justice. However, when it is noted that students of color are also present in the classroom, their educational experience is not substantially documented (Bailey 1999; King 1991; McIntyre 2002; Roman 1993). They are rendered invisible on the sidelines or their personal stories are used to teach white students about racism and white privilege. Are we to assume that students of color have already reached the pinnacle of race consciousness as a bodhisattva has achieved enlightenment; or that bearing witness to white race consciousness-raising is benefit enough? Anti-racist education, even in its attempt to uncover the subtleties of racism, continues to be preoccupied with white students at the expense of students of color.

In this paper, I discuss the pedagogical obstacles that block instructors from positioning students of color as a central educational concern alongside their white classmates. To promote the centrality of all students in anti-racist education requires educators to reexamine their principles and practices from the standpoint of students of color. This paper models such an examination. Approaches that rely on poststructural notions of race are important because they provide educators with tools for understanding how identity politics and whiteness theory shape cross-racial interactions in the classroom. The insights from these paradigms are particularly valuable in regards to exploring the challenges of teaching white students about race. However, scholar-practitioners in this field do not address what counts as anti-racist education for students of color. I argue that a black feminist standpoint offers theoretical tools such as the educational importance of 'safe spaces' that extend the literature towards considerations of what counts as anti-racist education for students of color.

Method

I used a black feminist approach to collecting data and writing the findings presented in this paper. Black feminism is a standpoint theory that assumes the sociological significance of race, class and gender as a lens for examining the impact of oppression on the lives of black women. Not only does it promote a historical, contextualized and humanized approach to the study of black women, but also positions them as legitimate knowledge holders/producers who can lend their distinct viewpoints to enhancing sociological research. Studies conducted by and about black women from a black feminist standpoint are geared towards debunking negative and controlling images of black women and replacing them with more humanized accounts (Collins 2000). A careful analysis of black women's struggles can demonstrate how oppression works to erode their sense of self, their families, and their communities, and how black women resist subjugation to rebuild themselves over and over again. Black feminism posits that understanding society from the perspective of subjugated groups can offer critical insights that demystify white dominant society's claims of racial superiority. Therefore the narratives of black women both inside and outside of academia are considered valuable sites of knowledge production, and potential sites of resistance.

I stand in the black feminist tradition of 'talking back' by telling stories about my experiences as a black woman graduate student at a predominantly white university.

Bell hooks (1989) explained that in her southern black community, 'back talk' was when a child daringly spoke to an authority as an equal and without permission. This was especially a problem if the child was a girl whose penchant for talking back held no possibility of public good as compared to a boy child whose bold speech may indicate his future calling as a preacher. In my case, I am talking back to anti-racist scholar-practitioners, and to all faculty (both white and of color) in predominantly white institutions whose classrooms are too often the context for oppressive racial dynamics. By being a black woman and a student, I am in a subjugated position even though my access to the university is a privilege that many marginalized people cannot afford. For me, talking back is an act of resistance in which I defiantly speak my truth despite the risk that I might be stigmatized. Bell hooks (1989) writes about the political significance of talking back:

> For us, true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act – as such, it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced. (8)

As a black woman student, telling my story is one way in which I experience personal empowerment. On the other hand, I risk positioning myself as a threat to 'business as usual' in anti-racist classrooms.

Talking back through recounting my experiences in anti-racist classrooms is my way of calling into question those studies that objectify students of color for white students' learning purposes and seek mainly to forward white professors' teaching aims. My observations, experiences and interpretations about the racial dynamics in college classrooms that attempted to decenter white norms of classroom participation and the typical Eurocentric curriculum were initially written down as a way for me to purge myself of angst so that I could participate fully in my own education. Now, I present this story strategically as a way to problematize the principles and practices that undergird anti-racist education. By juxtaposing my personal, qualitative account of confronting and resisting racism in the classroom against previous studies, I aim to illuminate the disjunctures between lived experience and pedagogical principles, good intentions and real impact, and theoretical advancements and educational outcomes. Talking back is my way of presenting a view of students of color as knowledge holders/producers, contributing to academic debates about anti-racist education, and affirming my voice for myself.

Finally, I offer my story to both testify and bear witness to other college students of color who thought that the anti-racist classroom would be a student-centered classroom for them; who eagerly enrolled in a class taught by an anti-racist educator, looking forward to having their epistemic standpoint discussed with integrity, but instead found yet another kind of marginalization; who changed their major, quit their program, or had a nervous breakdown because the struggle for their scholar-identity was too toxic and heartbreaking.

Whiteness theory and anti-racist education

The project of incorporating whiteness studies into critical pedagogy is an effort to get unaware and apathetic white students invested in anti-racism. This focus on white students emerged from critiques of multiculturalism by scholars claiming that most

versions were not only geared towards members of white mainstream society but also organized by 'whiteness'. Furthermore, they insisted that the oppressive elements of multicultural education would persist without a critical examination of the production of whiteness (Castenell and Pinar 1993; Roman 1993; Sleeter 1993; Powell 1997; Diangelo 2006). Whiteness is a notion derived from a poststructural concept of race and racism. Rather than thinking of racism solely in terms of individual attitudes of prejudice or institutional policies that promote exclusion, poststructural theorists conceptualize race as a socially produced discourse that functions through a constellation of practices and processes enacted in a particular time and space. Therefore, whiteness is a discourse that operates through individuals' interactions with one another to constantly reassert the elevation of white people over people of color. Race and whiteness can take on numerous forms because they are processes that have no definite bounds. In educational studies, scholars tend to examine 'the unspoken, unmarked classroom norms and behavioral patterns that bolster the advantageous social position of White students at the expense of students of color' and other classroom participants (Diangelo 2006, 1985). By merging the concerns of whiteness theory with anti-racist pedagogy, critical educational theorists have attempted to disrupt common sense notions of racism by exposing not only how whiteness works as a system, but also how white people are participants and benefactors of this system of privilege and oppression. Scholar-practitioners of critical white pedagogy ultimately seek to bring white students into this consciousness in the hope that they will become advocates and activists of social change (Delgado and Stefanic 1997).

Nelson Rodriguez (2000) identifies three main approaches to incorporating whiteness theory into critical pedagogy: (1) investigating the social construction of whiteness, (2) abolishing whiteness, and (3) re-articulating whiteness. The first project of examining the historical and social construction of whiteness looks at how white identity intersects with issues of power, oppression and domination, representation, the 'politics of gaining privilege', and the politics of performing whiteness. Whiteness is treated as a social location and epistemological standpoint from which whites experience their privilege as normal and not as differential or special treatment. Special concern is placed on how the race practices that whites enact to initiate, build and sustain relationships with members of subjugated groups reproduce inequality. Some theorists incorporate this project into their pedagogy by assigning students the task of critically examining media sources such as magazines and films, for examples of how white people and whiteness is portrayed as compared to representations of people of color (King 1991; McIntyre 2002). This approach gives white students conceptual tools for thinking critically about their own racial identity and the ways in which whiteness organizes mainstream notions of beauty, masculinity, intelligence and success, for example. Whether or not students adopt an anti-racist stance depends upon the extent to which they find these social mechanisms and processes to be a problem. Other versions of critical white pedagogy aim to abolish whiteness and recruit white students to become activists for racial equity and social change.

The project of abolishing whiteness establishes that the route for white students to become anti-racist is one in which they must relinquish their privilege. This approach focuses on the individual by encouraging them to become 'race traitors' that question and otherwise sabotage dominant white ideologies. The underlying premise is that white identity cannot be abolished, only reshaped and wielded as a tool for disrupting social structures and norms. The third project relies on the investigation of whiteness with the intended outcome of creating new, alternative spaces for whites to cultivate

positive identity-formation and engage in activism and coalition-building. Nelson (Rodriguez 2000) advocates for this latter approach on the following grounds:

> Deconstructing and rearticulating whiteness challenges the hegemony of pluralist multiculturalism in at least two significant ways. First, by bringing into multicultural education a critical analysis of whiteness, it becomes almost impossible not to discuss such matters as social inequality, exclusion, racism, and oppression as part of the story of whiteness … Second, by discussing the politics of rearticulating whiteness, especially within the context of deconstructing it, serious racial concerns arise as white students are made aware of the issues at stake in living out their whiteness progressively in the name of racial justice. (17–18)

For Nelson and other theorists, making the racialized identity of whites the subject of pedagogical interrogation makes it impossible for race and racism to remain invisible and unacknowledged. Also important is that discussions of racialized oppression are not reduced to the rare, self-sabotaging problems of racial ethnic minorities, such as preoccupations with 'black on black crime'. Critical white pedagogy attempts to interrogate whiteness, provide white students with tools to critically examine their own identity and mainstream society, and prepare them to become agents of social change and racial equity.

When critical white pedagogy is put into practice, instructors have struggled with the defensive and emotionally charged responses of their white students. For example, some white students have tried to evade identification as a member of a racially privileged group by foregrounding other oppressions they may face as women or working class. They, in essence, refuse to acknowledge that as whites, they benefit from cultural, political and economic power both as individuals and collectively. To counter white students' defensiveness, Roman (1993) proposes that accountability be placed on white students to listen, respond, and engage the voiced experiences of subordinated groups. Using a concept she refers to as *speaking with (rather than speaking for)*, Roman intends to cultivate a space in which white students interact with the testimony of people of color, instead of trying to dismiss, deny, and disengage from the discussion completely.

> Speaking with the interests of the oppressed presents the possibility of educators and students scrutinizing the common ground, as well as the conflicting moral and political stakes of the discourses of multiculturalism and the anti-racism within and outside of educational institutions. (83)

Roman is using this pedagogical intervention to teach white students how to critically examine their own defensiveness and their taken-for-granted assumptions about multiculturalism. The hope here is that critical white pedagogy will prepare white students for the ultimate goal of coalition-building. Other scholar-practitioners are guided by the belief that first-hand experience is the most effective approach to teaching about race, so they rely on service-learning assignments to provide white students with experiential knowledge.

In order to turn consciousness-raising into a real-ized experience, some critical anti-racist educators include opportunities for experiential learning in their pedagogy. This approach presumes that when white students observe and experience the social realities of racial ethnic minorities they will be less resistant to race consciousness-raising. One such proponent, Alice McIntyre (2002), assigns her students a participatory research project in which they are required to '"get to know" a group of

urban youth of color, participate in their lives, and link that experience with course materials and with issues raised in class discussion'. Meeting a person from a racially subordinated group is supposed to provide white students with a transformative educational experience. Yet, there is no mention as to what the benefits will be for the urban youths of color. Members of racially subordinated groups, are assumed to be experts on racial identity and racial oppression, and placed in service to white students' consciousness-raising. There is no indication that white students have actually been prepared to have genuine, meaningful or even productive relationships with youth of color. Nor does McIntyre suggest that urban youth of color have requested to spend more time with white students or volunteered to participate in this project.

I find that many scholars have an unreasonable expectation that white students will be more receptive to learning about race experientially, and can be trusted to build and participate in respectful, non-harming relationships with people of color. White students refusing to examine their own racial identity will need more time and diverse modes of instruction to be able to work collaboratively with people who are conscious of their racial identity, clear about the implications of being racialized in U.S. society, and committed to race-radical projects that promote social change. Furthermore, it risks placing defensive, reluctant, and unaware white students in the care of people of color. The preoccupation with bringing white students into race awareness and coalition-building renders students of color invisible in classrooms that employ critical white pedagogy, and otherwise positions communities of color in mentorship roles to white students. Critical of the project to incorporate whiteness theory into anti-racist education, Rosa Hernandez Sheets (2000, 17) writes:

> The creation of white teachers with an 'activist and transformationist White identity' (Howard, 1999, p. 121), while admirable, may make White individuals feel good, and may even create 'change agents' and 'social activists', but will it produce skilled teachers who participate competently and responsibly in a reciprocal, complex teaching–learning process with our children?

The same question can be posed about critical white pedagogy – what exactly does it have to offer students of color? White students are being taught conceptual tools for examining whiteness, developing a critical lens for understanding racism, and being encouraged to take active roles in social-justice movements. However, there is no evidence to suggest that whiteness-centered pedagogical interventions fulfill the educational needs and activist aims of students of color. In fact, anti-racist scholar-practitioners have made assumptions about what kinds of pedagogy benefit students of color but have rarely, if ever, asked students of color what empowers them in anti-racist classrooms and what marginalizes them. In the next section, I share my own experiences and views about how the focus on white students is an obstacle for students of color in classes that aim to decenter whiteness.

Experiencing whiteness in the anti-racist classroom

In the beginning of the term, it was exciting to hear the candid contributions of white students speaking about coming into consciousness about race and racism. They spoke about the painful experience of discovering their complicity in racism and the alienation they felt from their families, friends and colleagues who rejected their racial enlightenment. Initially, I listened sympathetically about their struggles. I admired

their courage in pursuing race consciousness, and their willingness to share freely with the entire discussion group.

These kinds of disclosures by white students continued throughout the weeks. Occasionally, they took on a more academic focus. For example, one classmate tried to work through the problematics of being a white woman scholar using black feminist theory in her project to develop research methodologies and critical race pedagogy for white teachers. This coincided with the texts we were reading which debated the appropriation and misuse of scholars of color and their scholarship. Jennifer[1] asked us, the students of color, what we thought. We raised concerns and questions as a way of brainstorming with Jennifer about her dilemma. The whole class seemed actively interested and engaged in this dialogue.

Although the syllabi indicated that the themes of discussion would change in response to guest lecturers, selected readings and other classmates' concerns, white students consistently re-routed the group towards their various dilemmas. They spent weeks on the issue of using the work of scholars of color in their research, and then devoted a couple more weeks to describe how talking about racism outside of class had alienated them from family and friends. It became clear to me by the persistent focus on these dilemmas that white students desired a resolution to their conflicts but could not find one. It also became apparent that students of color had been identified as the keepers of the validation they required. They bypassed the texts and the instructor's facilitation to make direct appeals that we address and otherwise resolve their concerns. Often these were posed in desperate, confused and sometimes pleading tones.

In this and other anti-racist classrooms in which I have been enrolled, white students would step outside the bounds of whiteness and into a space of negotiating their identity and privilege as whites in a racist society. Ashleigh had begun to question how to proceed as a white scholar in the field of social justice education, and to what extent she could define herself as an anti-racist. This type of self-examination by white students is exactly what anti-racist educators strive to achieve. They are seen as precious, rare moments compared to the typical response of white students' defensiveness towards both students and instructors. McIntyre (2002) writes about the relief from white student defensiveness that these epiphanies offer:

> Fortunately, the resistance is offset by the many 'aha' moments that occur during a semester when a white student has an awakening of sorts – a point of recognition that shifts his or her way of thinking about themselves for just long enough to 'see' whiteness and want to 'do something' to address the consequence of whiteness within their personal and professional lives. (44)

Anti-racist educators often get seduced by white students' epiphanies, and then distracted from efforts to consider what would count as race consciousness-raising for students of color. Precisely because the anti-racist educator can not demand or even expect for white students to develop a race consciousness, it is treated as a momentous occasion when they do. White students' willingness to acknowledge the pervasiveness of racism, in the world and in their own lives, is a welcome relief from the tension and even hostility demonstrated by some white students when they refuse to accept or vehemently debate with the race lessons put forth in the anti-racist classroom (Roman 1993; Sleeter 1993).

Unfortunately, the epiphanies of white students and the good pedagogical fortune of anti-racist educators can work to the detriment of students of color. One problem is

that the testimonials of students of color about the racist experiences they have encountered often serve as the impetus for white students' epiphanies. This is tantamount to converting students of colors' candor, vulnerability and pain into mere sites of learning in which white students are given the opportunity to examine their own racial awareness. Debbie, a Navajo Dine woman and participant in the film *Last Chance for Eden* (Wah 2002),[2] states to a multiracial group during a dialogue about racism and sexism:

> Whenever there is an 'aha' by a white person, it almost always is at the expense of people of color, almost always. They [people of color] are having to share things that white people don't have to share in order to be understood … It is at the expense of my personal stories and at the expense of my pain that white people get to 'get it' [the impact of racism].

After Debbie makes this comment about how the stories of people of color are used to spark epiphanies for white people, she tells her own story. Debbie recounts how a Navajo girls' basketball team won a championship against an all-white girls' team. The Navajo team was accused of having won the game by an unfair advantage – as boys disguised as girls. The game officials ushered the girls into the locker room and ordered them to strip off their clothes in order to prove that they were female. Debbie's story exposes the humiliating costs of disclosure for people of color. In anti-racist classrooms, the telling of personal stories is often treated as a liberatory opportunity to 'give voice' (Maher and Tetrault 2001). However, when the testimonies of students of color are used to dehumanize them and dispute the existence and effects of racism, then the pedagogical intervention of 'giving voice' is not liberatory for students of color. It can be damaging. On the other hand, leaving the testimonies of students of color unacknowledged, unexamined and undeveloped is unproductive.

A more productive approach towards their narratives would be to engage students of color in how to apply a critical lens to their own experiences, thus helping them to define what counts as race consciousness-raising for them. In other words, instruct them in how to use their own stories as sites of learning for their own educational purposes. Educators can explore what critical conceptual tools will help them build a social-historical context for their experiences so that they do not internalize racial inferiority. For example an Asian American student in McIntyre's (2002) class spoke candidly to instructor and classmates:

> I was born in Boston. I remember being in school and I had to check off 'other'. We created a system where I wanted to be white because I hated being 'other' and I used to get kidded on that because I had to check the 'other' box before they came up with Asian American on some forms. I mean what is it we are looking at here? Is it just being American? I look at these pictures of white people making it and here I am in my Polo shirt and argyle socks. I'm Asian, right? So, it really makes you think. What am I falling into? Do I want to be white? My friends say to me all the time, 'You're white. You're like us'. (40)

This story told by an Asian American student expresses underlying currents of internalized racism, as well as openly referencing issues related to positive and negative identity-formation, socioeconomic status, and his negotiating his identity among white peers. In her article, McIntyre takes up this student's disclosure by discussing the varied ways in which white students responded. However, as a scholar-practitioner, it is important to consider how to make this moment educational and

transformative for the Asian American student. I suggest that the anti-racist instructor affirm the validity of the student's experience. Then she could go on to identify the various forms of racism – individual, institutional, societal, and internalized racism and how they shape experience and identity-formation. By modeling for students how to honor their experiences and providing them with a critical conceptual framework to help them make sense of their experiences, an anti-racist instructor leads students of color to tools they will need to navigate through society and academia. Since the Asian American student disclosed information that may be very sensitive and personal, he should be addressed first by the instructor before the responses of white students are taken up – even if that means temporarily holding white students at bay. This order of operations is important not only as a way of de-centering white students for one moment, but also so that the instructor can model for the class how to both thoughtfully and critically engage in dialogues about race when difficult and strong emotions arise.

Anti-racist pedagogy and the politics of identity and difference

Many of the scholar-practitioners who have contributed to this area have formulated pedagogical interventions from their own efforts to negotiate dynamics between students and the different social identities they bring into the classroom. Poststructural feminists have been particularly candid in sharing the successes and failures of their classrooms. Informed by notions of multiple identities and the politics of difference, their theoretical contributions are based on the trials of working through the politically and emotionally charged dynamics of cross-racial classroom interactions. These educators have reported that applying anti-oppressive aims, the pedagogical principles of critical pedagogy have produced results that were more troubling than empowering for students (Gore 1992; Kenway and Modra 1992; Lather 1992; Lewis 1992; Luke 1992; Luke and Gore 1992; Orner 1992; Walkerdine 1992). Dialogue about race and inequality often erupts in hostility, conflict, and disengagement between students of color and white students. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) described how she carefully planned her pedagogy in accordance with Freirean and anti-racist principles. The students enrolled in her course were a mixture of men and women from both the U.S. and international backgrounds, including Asian American, Chicano/a, Jewish, Puerto Rican, Anglo-European, Asian, African, Icelandic, and Canadian. Ellsworth's students reported the following litany of reactions to a critical pedagogy that was designed for their empowerment through dialogue:

> Things were not being said for a number of reasons. These included fear of being misunderstood and/or disclosing too much and becoming too vulnerable; memories of bad experiences in other contexts of speaking out; resentment that other oppressions (sexism, heterosexism, fat oppression, classism, anti-Semitism) were being marginalized in the name of addressing racism – guilt for feeling such resentment; confusion about levels of trust and commitment surrounding those who were allies to another group's struggles; resentment by some students of color for feeling that they were expected to disclose 'more' and once again take the burden of doing the pedagogic work of educating White students/professors about the consequences of White middle-class privilege; and resentment by White students for feeling that they had to prove they were not the enemy. (108)

Ellsworth concluded that it was the lack of knowledge about the social-historical context of identity and relations of power that make it impossible for students to engage each other in dialogue from positions of equality. As indicated by the above

excerpt, there were constant power struggles between students in terms of whose voice got to speak authoritatively and which oppressions were spoken about most often. In the end, Ellsworth was convinced that her expertise and intentions as an instructor had not prepared her to address these tensions, and the principles and practices of critical pedagogy were not effective in helping her resolve them. She also realized that her own racial identity contributed to the classroom dynamics. Ellsworth concluded that 'as an Anglo, middle-class professor in C&I 607, I could not unproblematically "help" a student of color find her/his voice as a student of color' (101).

Like other poststructural feminists educators, Ellsworth recommended that the frameworks for anti-racist pedagogy should reconceptualize the notions of identity and difference that undergird it. Rather than treating identity as fixed, monolithic, and complete, Ellsworth advocated for a stance that acknowledged identity as 'unfinished, imperfect, limited projecting the interests of "one side" over others' (97). In other words, students and instructors are understood as speaking partial narratives that emphasize certain social positions and political interests over others. This opens up a space for student voices to be made problematic and interrogated, not because they do not live up to an ideal of authenticity, but because they hold implications for other social movements and definitions of self. For example an African American woman may speak from a position that concentrates on her racial group identity. This may raise question as to how she understands gender oppression and how it intersects with racial oppression. How would she determine which political cause to support if she had to choose between racial or gender oppression? The acknowledgment of the complexities and multifaceted construction of identity allows for the examination of how multiple oppressions are at work simultaneously, and how they create both possibilities and limitations on our ability to communicate and coalition-build.

Critical feminist pedagogy provides a close and careful examination of how students and instructor relate to one another as a result of identity-based politics and racial positioning. However, rather than coming to conclusive findings and prescriptions for easing cross-racial tensions in the classrooms, these theorists often suggest that educators and students should let go of their desire to know 'the Other'. *Pedagogy of the Unknowable* (Ellsworth 1989), *Politics of Disappointment* (Jones 1999), and *Incommensurability* (Schutte 2000), are all approaches recommended by critical feminists seeking to find possibility in seemingly impossible situations. There is consensus among them that critical anti-racist educators working in multiracial contexts should (1) give up the belief that they can plan a pedagogy based on critical educational principles and practices that empowers all students equally – regardless of their racial ethnic background, (2) abandon the presupposition that students and the instructor enter the classroom with simple, tidily packaged social identities, and (3) let go of the desire to have students develop a comprehensive understanding of one another through dialogue. Critical anti-racist pedagogues are instructed to problematize their claims about 'what we can do for you!', and examine their strong desires for cross-racial dialogue.

Alison Jones (1999) comments on why giving up the desire to know the Other is likely to be met with a lot of resistance from white professors and white students:

> For dominant groups, particularly scholars and students accustomed to knowing and to have access to knowledge, a recognition (even acceptance) of one's *not knowing*, or of *limitation*, seems extremely difficult, even dubious. The usual twin of ignorance is prejudice, and the longing for knowledge within a radical educational context has been

> understood as a desire for an enlightened acceptance of multiplicity. But the insatiable desire for knowing also has its imperialist moments, as I have argued. Dialogue in the multiethnic classroom is fraught with such dangers. (315, emphasis in original)

From Jones' perspective, the desire to know masks an arrogance that undermines the anti-oppressive aims of anti-racist pedagogy.

To counteract white professors' and white students' tendency to ask students of color to disclose their personal stories, Razack (1998) proposes that all students' narratives be subjected to critical examination. In this way, Razack hopes that students will begin to build a social-historical context for understanding how their own stories fit into the dialectical relationship between subjugated and dominant groups. I argue that this pedagogical intervention may curb desires to know the Other, but it may also open the door for white students to use talk about gender and class oppression as a substitute for seriously engaging racial issues. In turn, classroom dialogue may deteriorate into 'oppression Olympics'(Martinez 2003) in which students try to prove that their respective struggles are more legitimate than everyone else's. Also, white students may try to equate their fleeting experiences of being in the minority to the ongoing marginalization experienced by many students of color. For example, it is not unusual for a white student who has traveled to Nairobi, Taiwan, or East L.A. to express a deep understanding of racism based on their experience of being a racial minority during their travels. Interrogating student narratives may be a productive pedagogical intervention, but it is not clear who in the classroom is qualified or trained to do this. Conversely, the *pedagogy of unknowability* relieves the critical educator of accountability for finding interventions to curb white students' tendency to downplay racism. This then places the responsibility on students of color, and does so as if it were a benefit to them.

Alison Jones questions the benefits of cross-racial dialogue for students of color. She discusses her attempt to not only give up the desire to know the Other, but also put it into practice as a pedagogical intervention. Jones, a white Pakeha woman and her Maori colleague decide to separate their class along racial ethnic lines with white Pakeha students meeting one day and Maori/Pacific Islander students meeting on an alternate day. Students responded to their experience through written journals. Pakeha students expressed hostility towards the division, while Maori/Pacific Islander students appreciated the experience. The following are comments made by three Maori/Pacific Islander women:

> Not realizing that we would be split up into cultural groups, I prepared myself to argue any point I felt at odds with, with anybody not of a brown skin tone, to enlighten them upon the cultural ideals, values, and beliefs that didn't correspond to their own. It was with audible relief when I realized we were dividing into cultural groups. Brown and white.

> I felt validated or even vindicated. Being in a class of Maori and Pacific Island students, I stopped feeling like I was the other. Instead I felt as though I had moved towards the center and stepped into the center where white people normally reside. It felt good.

> The different streams also allow Maori and Pacific Island women to identify the issues of feminism amongst their own, as too often the discussions are taken over by… Pakeha women.

Two contrasting remarks from Pakeha students:

> It doesn't seem right. Could we not learn from each other? Wouldn't it be valuable to share our differences in experience? … It is different reading about it in books, or having it taught by teachers. It is better to hear it straight from the women who are having the experience. It is easier to relate to.
>
> Nothing can be changed unless 'we' know and are aware of what needs to be changed. Behind closed doors doesn't help the process change. (Jones 1999, 300–1)

The students of color expressed relief at the separation because it prevented them from having to defend the legitimacy of their viewpoints and the issues that impact their communities. Also important is that Maori/Pacific Islander women felt the freedom to dialogue in racially separate spaces. These women of color commented on how in their own classroom they were able to move into the center. In other words, racially separate spaces became a rare opportunity for them to initiate inquiry into their own culture, identify issues of importance within their community, and indulge in sustained engagement 'as too often the discussions are taken over by Pakeha women'. Although this is one of the few accounts available that discusses how students of color experience the anti-racist classroom, the overwhelming implications are that what counts as anti-racist for white instructors and white students may in fact reify racism for racial ethnic minorities. In the next section, I discuss my experiences as one of several students of color and how we came to be positioned both for the benefit of and against white students.

Experiencing the anti-racist classroom as a student of color

In a graduate-level course led by an anti-racist educator, one third of the students came from a racial ethnic background other than European American. We were diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language, nationality and citizenship. Yet I noticed that when the issue came up about whites doing research on marginalized communities, white students posed their questions directly to the black and Latino students. In the most earnest of voices, Jackie told the group that she recognized that she was white and her understandings about race were very limited but that she was trying to find her place in the academic field of social justice. Jackie wondered if it was appropriate for her to research a community of color. I refused to comment. It was not that I thought her question was unimportant – on the contrary. However, from numerous past experiences, I knew that if I responded to Jackie's dilemma I would be perceived as volunteering to be a resource and an ally for her. I did not want to do this because the consequence of consent has meant having my attention redirected towards white students' crises and away from using lines of inquiry to think through my project or the interests of other colleagues. It turned out that Jackie did not need me. Two other colleagues of color responded. Although they discussed the problematics of white researchers studying people of color, they granted Jackie permission. I thought to myself how nice it would be for all research dilemmas to be absolved so quickly – especially the ethical ones.

It is not unusual for students of color in anti-racist classrooms to find themselves in roles other than that of student. Often these roles require multiple layers of responsibility. In the situation described in the opening narrative, white students often petition students of color as if they were representatives of their own or all racial ethnic minority groups. There is an appeal for students of color to grant white students permission to proceed with their research agendas as if students of color are members

of the institutional research review board for studies involving racial ethnic minority communities. If this cross-racial phenomenon is not made transparent to students and critically examined, then the anti-racist educator becomes complicit in making students of color bear responsibility for negotiating what could be an important educational moment for everyone. When played out in the classroom, these situations look as though students of color are being placed in a position of respect, privilege, and even power. Paradoxically, asking students of color to serve as an on-the-spot racial governing body is another way in which students of color are sidelined in anti-racist classrooms.

The decentering of students of color in the anti-racist classroom does not leave them without a role to play. In fact, they have distinct roles, but seldom that of student. Generally, their roles can be delineated into three categories: cultural experts, aides and witnesses. These are roles they play in relation to both white students and the anti-racist educator. As the cultural expert, students of color are encouraged to offer up testimonials that capture the authenticity of their racial ethnic heritage and convey their everyday experiences of racism to white students. As aides, students of color assist the anti-racist educator in penetrating white students' defensiveness so that they may be led towards developing a critical race awareness. Being an aide to a white student often means serving as their confidante and cheerleader throughout their struggle to become race conscious. Finally, the role of witness is often taken for granted as it casts students of color as observers of white students' race wrestling (Pollock 2004). While this position offers insights into the racial logic and processes of white students, it is yet another way in which students of color are diverted from using the anti-racist classroom to forward their educational goals. The primary concern here is in examining the dialectic between choice and positioning in the classroom. If a student is positioned as a racial spokesperson by the instructor, what are the consequences for refusal or critique? If there are only three students of color in a predominantly white classroom and questions are raised about whether or not it is appropriate for a white researcher to do research within communities of color, who will speak to this issue if they choose to remain silent? Students of color are often pressed to choose from a confining set of racial roles to play in college classrooms.

The cultural expert

The positioning of students of color in the role of cultural expert can sideline their educational experience in the anti-racist classroom. They become responsible for instruction by virtue of their presence and their testimonies about racism. Their narratives are directed towards white students as a type of first-hand learning experience about race and racism. Encouraging students of color to give voice to their experiences functions as a way for the anti-racist educator to model engagement and respect for the realities of racial ethnic minorities. When positioned as cultural experts, it may appear as though students of color are being cast in positions of privilege. In fact, they are being tokenized by standing in for an absence in curricular focus and texts and the relative low enrollment of students of color in predominantly white colleges and universities. By being invited to talk about their racial ethnic communities or race issues, students of color may perceive that there are certain benefits in fulfilling this role.

As a person of color, the role of cultural expert is seductive because it places us in positions of control over whites, albeit momentarily. They must come to us for affirmation, authentication and absolution. Our otherness is treated as property that

can be owned only by racial ethnic lineage holders. When whites ask for permission to use critical race theory or to do research on Latina high-school dropouts, we are positioned as representatives of an imagined governing body that is responsible for racial academic standards and procedures. At the same time, there is something strongly hopeful about whites having enough humility to fathom that they may be a burden rather than an automatic blessing to racial ethnic minority communities. Yet it feels wrong to resolve the ethical dilemmas between researchers and subjects, as historically complex and politically loaded as they are, among individuals who have not necessarily been invited by communities of color to research them or be their spokespersons.

The teacher's aide

As aides, students of color assist anti-racist educators by tending to white students' defensiveness and dilemmas around race. When white students express disbelief about the pervasive realities of racism, the anti-racist educator often leaves it to students of color to make counterclaims. In this way, the instructor gets credit for creating a space where these issues can be discussed. This allows them to personally avoid controversy by setting students of color up to argue that race matters and offer up evidence to prove it. As an aide to white students, students of color are often asked to assuage guilt and grief. The process of developing a consciousness about race, privilege and oppression has been noted by many scholars as an emotionally painful one (Frye 1983; McIntosh 1988; Tatum 1992; Bailey 1999). In the anti-racist classroom, initiating such a growth process for white students has become a marker of pedagogical success. While anti-racist educators may be able to guide students into race consciousness-raising, they often do not know what to do with students' emotions once they get to that place (Boler 1999). White students will then turn to students of color for the affirmation and absolution they are not receiving from the instructor. Taking in knowledge of racism and white privilege often creates in them a strong desire to know that they are still 'good' people, and this confirmation is seen as valid if it comes from people of color (Thompson 2003).

Whites seeking affirmation and absolution can be seductive to both the anti-racist educator and students of color. Once white students take up the project of race consciousness-raising for themselves, they pursue these issues relentlessly in the classroom. Their urgency is compelling which makes it easy to allow their agenda to usurp that of students of color. The irony is that white students who become concerned with being an advocate for people of color fail to realize how their insistence that their own dilemmas and desires be addressed derails students of color from using the classroom as a space of inquiry. The anti-racist educator is also seduced by the urgency with which white students take up the project of 'despising an identity they taught me to claim' (Bailey 1999, 86). Although, rather than stage an intervention that would shift the focus to concerns more inclusive of the entire class, the instructor often concentrates on white students as a critical educational moment.

The witness

Students of color are positioned in the role of witness when the anti-racist educator becomes preoccupied with tending to the race consciousness-raising and crises of white students. When anti-racist educators employ a pedagogy that is both anti-racist

and student-centered, then white students' preparedness to talk about race determines the depth of discussion. This is limiting for students of color who want to make inquiries that go beyond a basic knowledge about racism. However, in a classroom that is organized by the educational needs of white students, a silent decision is made that 'the whole class' is not yet primed for advanced academic explorations into race.

Other times, when students of color try to use the classroom as a space to examine race-based issues, white students' defensiveness as a kind of intervention disallows race as a valid point of discussion. One example of how this happens is when white students insist that other forms of oppression, for example, gender and class, are equally or more harmful than racism. Evaluating oppressions on a hierarchy is a slippery slope that white students often revert to as a way of avoiding race-talk. In the anti-racist classroom, this tactic often places students of color in the position of defending their concerns abut racial oppression instead of being able to explore how race impacts their academic project and identity as a researcher, for example. Students of color become witnesses, as a result of the anti-racist educator's permissiveness, and are pressed to the sidelines to watch as white students work through their dilemmas.

As a student of color, I have not discussed with my peers of color what it is like to be positioned as witnesses. I can say that the best view is on the sidelines. I watch week after week, year after year, as white students go through the painful process of coming into consciousness about their racial identity and complicity in racism. I have seen the pre-beginning stages, the beginning stages, midpoints, and those who have presumably reached racial enlightenment. I have seen them resist, surrender, struggle and come to terms; listened to their academic queries and personal confessions; watched as they expressed disbelief, sorrow, remorse, resentment, anger, optimism, and zeal. My education in the anti-racist classroom has functioned more like participant observation in the field of whiteness. What I have learned in these classes has overwhelmingly been how white students experience the process of race consciousness-raising. I have wondered if there is a classroom space in which we, students of color, can be transformed and guided in our intellectual endeavors as opposed to being unofficially trained as experts on whiteness.

I refer back to a scenario excerpted from McIntyre's class in which an Asian American student tells his story of having to check 'white' on a school form because 'Asian' was not an available category. He began to speak about his struggle between the desire to be white and the discomfort of being granted honorary white status by his friends who say, 'You're white. You're like us'. According to McIntyre (2002), white students in her class responded to his story with remarks ranging from racist to color-blind. McIntyre describes how she mobilized these remarks into a discussion about the model minority stereotype. After this discussion, the white students began to develop insights into how racism impacts Asian American students (40–1). This scenario was presented as a successful pedagogical moment.

While it is important that white students gained a new understanding about the negative impacts of race, students of color too often pay the cost for it. Notice how it is the Asian American student's disclosure that provides a platform for white students to purge their old racist ideas, then reform and shape new racial perspectives. It makes me wonder, was this a critical learning moment for the Asian American student also? If it was beneficial for him to discuss the model minority stereotype, why was that not included as part of the success story? When the anti-racist educator makes the examination and deconstruction of whiteness central, the pedagogy unfolds around white students. While the resulting dilemmas of white students may be troubling to me as a

student of color, they are markers of a successful teaching approach for the anti-racist educator. Even if I choose to serve as a cultural expert or a teacher's aide, I am brought into the center for just long enough to perform my duty and then out again. Many students of color, in this particular class and others in which they thought that the instructor would provide an inclusive environment for them also, have testified that instead they have shut up, been shut out, as well as counseled and consoled both white students and instructors.

Re-thinking the anti-racist classroom from a black feminist perspective

Some of the most progressive versions of anti-racist education have been proposed by scholar-practitioners who conceptualized race through a poststructural framework. Thus, they have focused on how race works in the classroom as white privilege and the politics of identity and difference. Their work has uncovered how racial dynamics can interfere with even the best pedagogical intentions. However, examining these issues through the lens of black feminist standpoint theory goes further to consider the educational needs of students of color by examining the anti-racist classroom from the perspective of marginalized students.

Black feminism is a standpoint theory that asserts the importance of examining social phenomena from the perspective of members of marginalized groups. This framework establishes a powerful link between racial subjugation and consciousness. Racial subjugation describes the social and material forms of oppression that black women face on a daily basis. It also points to an epistemic position from which black women have witnessed the operation of white mainstream society from behind its veneer of racial superiority. Seeing the mechanics of racism unveiled puts black women in a position to 'claim' the knowledge available to them from this standpoint. Those black women who choose to do so have recognized that they are victims of racial subjugation, and even as they struggle to ward off the material constraints of oppression, have opened their awareness to the politicized knowledge available to them from this social precipice. Bell hooks (1990a) speaks of the difference between acquiescing to racial subjugation and claiming it as an epistemic standpoint:

> These statements identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation; in fact I was saying just the opposite, that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse … that space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor, is located in the margins. (149–50)

In hooks' view, defining the margins solely in terms of poverty and lack, mark it as a place without value. Hooks reconstitutes the significance of the margins by demonstrating how its habitants embody a wealth of knowledge – knowledge that is self-reflexive and marked by social critique – that helps them navigate mainstream society and protect their communities against dehumanization. From the black feminist perspective, the subjugated position is a place of struggle and resistance that holds the possibility of personal empowerment. Furthermore, viewing social phenomena from this perspective reveals critical insights that when employed can promote equity for all members of society. As such, black feminism supports my project to place students of color at the center of analysis to consider how their educational needs might be met in anti-racist classrooms.

Separate spaces: a productive pedagogical intervention?

When I reach the sidelines of the anti-racist classroom, I realize that I am not alone. Joining me there are other students of color. We exchange stories about our experiences in the anti-racist classroom. Together we work through our frustrations, and testify to each other's struggles with whiteness and anti-racism. These moments are the ones that remind me that the problem is not mine alone. Or rather that the problem is not me. Like graduate students everywhere, I have gathered both informally and formally with peers outside of class. The irony is that, my fellow classmates of color and I met to debrief about our experiences in anti-racist classrooms. Initially, we were simply walking with each other to and from class. In the course of conversation we began to discover that many of us had withheld a lot of our remarks to avoid getting tangled in the tense racial dynamics among white students, students of color and instructors. Without prior planning, several of us would talk for hours piecing into a meaningful puzzle the experiences we were having in class discussions.

One semester, I called upon several students of color to meet prior to class so that we could discuss the assigned material. Those meetings were productive in several ways. First, they served as sites of collaborative learning. We clarified the readings for one another, teased out main arguments and contextualized the readings with material we had been studying in our respective disciplines (history, literary studies, communications, sociology, and anthropology). Secondly, we used this space to pursue questions regarding our academic concerns and queries. For example, fellow classmates of color and I inquired into what counts as an 'authentic' African American project; how we might reconceptualize the notions of 'the margin and the center' in a way that does not reify the binary of the oppressor and the oppressed; and how Cornel West defined 'love' in his notion of prophetic pragmatism. Thirdly, because these meetings were exclusive, meaning white students were not invited to join, we were able to pay more attention to the diversity of our perspectives as students of color.

Among us alone, there was a lot to talk about and negotiate in terms of ethnic, regional, economic, gender, sexuality and linguistic differences. The black-identified students were both African and African American, and hailed from the northern, western, southern and midwestern regions of the United States. One student was born and raised in Mexico, and had been living in Texas for many years. She identified as Mexicana. There was one gay male student and a male student whose project involved deconstructing masculinity. Our differences were exciting and some of us were eager to explore them. Other students assumed a coherent group identity either as 'students of color' or only among black-identified students. This was a challenge because our objective as a group was to decide on what issues we would raise for discussion in class. Our diversity became more apparent each time we met. The group disassembled when the course ended and before we had addressed our differences.

Our reason for forming the separate discussion group was to carve out an academic space that was free from the hostile, restrictive racial dynamics in class. When the class ended so did our urgency to form an alternative educational space. After that semester, we enrolled in our next set of classes. Our critical mass became dispersed. We continued to see each other on campus, in the hallways and in the graduate student office. We met for dinner in restaurants and at each other's homes. Several of us black students formed the Black Doctoral Student Collective which met monthly to share information and materials with one another regarding the various phases of doctoral research and dissertation writing. However, the discussion group I described earlier

had a distinct purpose. It was borne out of a need to protect our academic selves and otherwise build a resistance against a class that claimed to decenter whiteness (via the curriculum and pedagogy) but instead reified white norms of participation and allowed the complicated racial desires of white students to dominate the course of discussion. Academically, we needed a space to discuss the implications that course readings held for our research projects. We had discovered that the anti-racist classroom was not that place.

Black feminist standpoint theory offers insight into the educational significance of our separate discussion group. Black feminists recognize that education can be acquired in spaces outside of any formal institution or academic curriculum. Scholars point out that black women have responded to oppression and exclusion by 'teaching critical consciousness in domestic spaces'. For example, bell hooks (1990b) posits the 'homeplace' as a site of resistance from the oppression that black people face in their daily interactions with white mainstream society (47). Hooks uses the situation of black women domestic workers, her own mother being one of them, to illustrate her point. Throughout history, black women would leave their own family, often located on the outskirts of town, and travel to the neighborhoods and homes of wealthy white families in order to earn wages as domestic workers. There they cooked, cleaned and tended to white children. These women would then have to travel out of white communities back to their own home at the end of a long day with very little time and energy to give to their own children. Nonetheless, some women found ways to reserve a bit of time, energy, and affection for their own children. For example, Frederick Douglass wrote about his mother who worked as a field hand. Forced to work away from home and labor in the fields from sunrise to sunset, Douglass' mother would walk 12 miles at night to see her son. She would tuck him in bed, lay with him until he fell asleep, but by the time Douglass woke up in the morning she would have already returned to the fields. Although Douglass says that he felt affection towards his mother much like he had towards a stranger, hooks theorizes the importance of those rare and few night visits. Hooks states that Douglass' mother returned home to be with her son and by showing him love and tenderness contributed to his developing sense of being human in a society that was set up to debase him.

Hooks and other black feminist scholars theorize the herculean efforts of black women to reserve some amount of time, energy and nurturance towards their families and communities as an act of resistance that provided black people with a sense of themselves as valuable human beings. These relationships and interactions often took place in homes in which black women played a central role within the family, therefore, hooks posits that the 'homeplace' is a site of resistance:

> Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside public world. This task of making a homeplace was not simply a matter of black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many wounds inflicted by racist domination. (42)

Located on the social and geographic margins, homeplaces were considered safe because they were not under surveillance by white people. Additionally, they were safe because black women cultivated home into a place where men, women and children were free to define themselves outside of oppressive racial myths and practices.

Homeplaces and other 'safe spaces' are crucial because they offer members of subjugated groups a site in which to develop a critical consciousness. Such spaces have been central to black women cultivating a definition of self that is self-defined as well as a critique of both mainstream society and African American institutions. O'Neale (1986) elaborates that safe spaces are used by black women to:

> …observe the feminine images of the 'larger' culture, realize that these models are at best unsuitable and at worst destructive to them, and go about the business of fashioning themselves after the prevalent, historical black female role models in their own community. (139)

Thus, black women gain an alternative and affirmative view of self which they can weigh against the negative and controlling images of black womanhood portrayed in the mainstream media (Collins 2000, 123). By critically reading the negative stereotypes projected onto them by white dominant society and by reaffirming their humanity in safe spaces, black women begin to build an epistemological ground in which questioning dominant society transforms survival into resistance. They become free to problematize dominant ideologies, and in turn this dialectical process contributes to black women's sense of themselves as legitimate knowledge holders/producers and intellectuals. Armed with a critical consciousness and a self-defined standpoint, black women become active agents of empowerment in their own lives and in the lives of others.

Racially separate spaces have served a similar purpose for students of color in predominantly white universities and colleges. Villalpando (2003) found in a longitudinal study of Chicana/o college students that same-race peer associations were instrumental in helping Chicana/o students navigate racialized institutional barriers. His study counters dominant discourses that blame the tendency for racial ethnic minority students to congregate with one another as the cause of *racial balkanization* on college campuses (Bloom 1987; D'Souza 1991). In fact, Villalpando found that Chicana/o students who participated in same-race peer groups were more likely to get involved in campus-wide events and organizations. He writes:

> Gloria and Cuahutemoc's participation in their peer group helped them maintain their strong commitment to their Chicana/o communities. Their peers shared in their commitment to improving the social conditions of other Chicana/os and, thus, together they nourished and nurtured this mutual goal for each other. For example, to provide tangible contributions to their communities, they participated in students organizations that strove to improve the educational conditions for Chicana/os (through tutoring activities) and promoted a more positive depiction of Chicana/o cultural norms and practices (through the student newspaper). (638)

Gloria, Cuahutemoc, and other Chicana/o students in the study were able to successfully achieve their academic goals, serve their communities, and participate in campus organizations because their same-race peer group helped them build a critical consciousness. The development of a critical consciousness led Chicana/o students to form a cultural identity that was 'positive, empowering, and grounded in an awareness of the influence of oppressive racist ideologies and social structures in U.S. society' (638). Thus, these students were able to resist internalizing negative images and beliefs about Chicana/o students, and better equipped to navigate any institutionalized racial barriers they encountered. Villalpando's study exemplifies how self-segregation for Chicana/o and other students of color can be an integral part of their academic and social success on predominantly white college campuses.

Other scholars have found that racially separate dormitories are integral to academic achievement for students of color on predominantly white campuses. Since 1991, colleges such as Cornell, Amherst and Syracuse have designated certain dorms, floors and wings to historically marginalized student groups. For example, Stanford University sponsors a variety of ethnic-themed houses including Casa Zapata (Chicano/Mexican American), Muwekma-tah-ruk (American Indian/Alaska Native), Okada (Asian American), and Ujamaa (Black/African American). Stanford's statement of intent for these residential centers is as follows:

> Members of the ethnic groups living in the houses have an opportunity to be a part of a supportive community as the educational program emphasizes and values the cultural identity of the group. The programs enable all students in the house to learn about and appreciate the ethnic group's history and culture. (Stanford University 2008)

Although, the houses are open to students who are not members of the ethnic group, it is made clear that the environment will be an ethnocentric one. Both social and academic programming will be oriented to the respective culture. In addition to immersing students in an environment that decenters whiteness (in the midst of a predominantly white campus) ethnic-themed housing offers 'minorities a safe space to discuss race, among other things' (Lum 2008). In Lum's report, a black student who was at the time in his third year in a major in policy analysis and management, and concurrently in residence at the African American themed dorm at Cornell University, remarked on the benefits of living in 'family-like atmosphere': 'This dorm is Cornell's best retention tool for Blacks. I couldn't achieve as much academically if I wasn't in a place where I felt so easily accepted' (1).

Like the homeplaces discussed in black feminism and same-race peer groups described in Villalpando's study of Chicana/o college student success, racially separate housing is a potential site in which students of color can develop a critical consciousness about race, and garner the specific kinds of support they need to meet their academic goals.

Although bound to be met with defensiveness from white faculty, white students and even students and faculty of color, there is a real value in the formation of racially separate spaces in predominantly white classrooms. They may trigger outrage and suspicion from white students and white professors who treat the candid disclosures of students of color as one of the educational benefits of being 'exposed' to members of racial ethnic minority groups. Conversely, faculty and students of color may fear that forming a separate space will be seen as relinquishing their hard-earned rights to mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, they may fear that racially separate educational spaces will be ghettoized as sub-standard academic spaces. This is a valid concern because a discussion group comprised only of students of color may be internally free from white interference but is still vulnerable to white surveillance from without. Yet, when students of color have formed separate spaces to develop a critical consciousness they have been successful both academically and socially on predominantly white campuses. Anti-racist educators must seriously consider using separate racial spaces as a pedagogical intervention. In doing so, they would have to ask themselves if they are willing to carry the burden of white student defensiveness and stigmatization in order to make education anti-racist for students of color.

Notes

1. All names used in this article are pseudonyms. All individual references represent composite stories based on a pattern of experiences involving students and professors.
2. *Last Chance for Eden* is a powerful film in which nine men and women – two African Americans, two Latinos and three European Americans – engage in candid and emotionally charged conversation about how racism and sexism have affected their lives and families.

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