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**EXPOSING WHITENESS BECAUSE WE ARE  
FREE: EMANCIPATION METHODOLOGICAL  
PRACTICE IN IDENTIFYING AND  
CHALLENGING RACIAL PRACTICES IN  
SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENTS**

*Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman, Sarah Mayorga, and  
Eduardo Bonilla-Silva*

The native must realize that colonialism never gives anything away for nothing. ... Moreover, the native ought to realize that it is not colonialism that grants such concessions, but he himself that extorts them.

—Fanon (1963:141)

**INTRODUCTION**

The racist and patriarchal foundations of social science research have prompted numerous critiques of sociology and its research methods over the last several decades. In Laderer's pioneering 1973 book, *The Death of White Sociology*, Albert Murray indicted the social sciences by saying: "[T]he social science statistical survey is the most elaborate fraud of modern times" (1973:112). This statement refers to the ways white social scientists and, in the last forty years, a few conservative scholars of color have used their research to justify social inequality, trivialize the systems that produce it, and misrepresent oppressed populations (Bonilla-Silva 2001).

More recent efforts, such as that of Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008), have argued that these historical tendencies continue in contemporary sociology. In their book, *White Logic, White Methods*, Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva use the term "white logic" to describe not only the "the context in which white supremacy has defined the techniques and process of reasoning about social facts," but also the "historical posture that grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite Whites and condemns the views of non-Whites to perpetual subjectivity" (2008:17). This "historical posture" is part and parcel of the dominant racial ideology that shapes the theoretical approaches as well as the methodological and epistemological orientations of the social sciences, in general, and of sociology, in particular.

Critical to the reproduction of white logic is the training and professionalization process sociologists go through that socializes them to “accept, internalize, and act as though the prevailing norms of the role to which [they are] aspiring ‘has validity for [them]’” (Clanssen 1968:8). The racial practices that accompany the training of scholars into the seemingly neutral yet highly racialized world of the social sciences exert tremendous pressure on scholars of color to adopt a stance of “race neutrality” in exchange for validation and limited success. This affects not only the individual sociologist of color, it also has structural implications for the production of knowledge and resistance against white supremacy.

In this chapter we will not examine how the logic of white supremacy is inscribed in the methodology of the social sciences. That job that has been done very well by many others (Bulmer & Solomos 2004; Lader 1973; McKee 1993; Smith 1999; Stanfield & Dennis 1993; Twine & Warren 2000). Here we address how the same white logic also dictates sociologists’ behavior and perceptions producing a different “opportunity structure” for Whites and non-Whites in academia. Specifically, we are interested in uncovering how *white rule* is expressed, manifested, and more significantly, reproduced in sociology departments at historically white colleges and universities (HWCUs). Bonilla-Silva has argued that most colleges and universities in the United States that parade as “universal” neutral sites of knowledge production and transmission are, in fact, HWCUs. As such, they have a history, demography, curriculum, traditions, climate, and visual and aesthetic ecology that reflect and reproduce whiteness (Bonilla-Silva 2008).

White rule, or the theoretical, methodological, epistemological, and practical domination of Whites in a setting or institution (in our case, sociology departments), can happen without Whites at the helm (having a black president like Barack Obama is perhaps the best example). Thus, even in many HBCUs, white logic and white methods are the order of the day. This should not be surprising, as “the establishment of the [HBCU funding] circuit provided safe, dependable institutions which could be trusted to conduct research on black problems without challenging the dominant racial attitudes of the time” (Stanfield 1982:198). Furthermore, conservative and accommodationist minority scholars (Marable 1983) who work in HWCUs have labored not only within the parameters of white logic, but functioned as gatekeepers and agents of social control disciplining “unruly” scholars of color? Worse yet, many who wish passionately to go beyond white logic are often trapped in the epistemological and methodological prison white supremacy built for them in white-led departments (Scheurich & Young 1997:141).

Accordingly, when we discuss white logic, whiteness, and white rule, we are referring to a system of oppression rather than to skin color. Albeit within this system skin color is an important marker of privilege and marginalization,

the correlation between skin color and racial politics is not perfect. As Lipsitz has observed, “White supremacy is an equal opportunity employer; nonwhite people can become active agents of white supremacy as well as passive participants in hierarchies and rewards” (2006:viii). And, “[w]hite people always have the option of becoming antiracist,” although we, like Lipsitz, lament that “not enough have done so” because of the material and psychological benefits of whiteness (2006:viii).

We write this chapter using our experiences as a dark-skinned black woman, a white-looking Latina, and a black Latino. We draw on the tradition of autoethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997), which uses personal narratives to gain clarity into cultural or institutional factors. Like most in this tradition, we “resist the façade of objective research that decontextualizes subjects and searches for singular truth” (Spry 2001:710). We highlight personal experiences in conjunction with supporting quantitative and qualitative evidence, to effectually “transform the authorial ‘I’ to the existential ‘we’” (Spry 2001:711). However, our experiences and trajectories should *not* be interpreted as anecdotal and *sui generis*; but as emblematic of the collective experiences of minority scholars around the country.

The three of us, but most notably Bonilla-Silva, are connected to local and national networks and associations of minority scholars and receive masses of information about the status and experiences of sociologists of color, both students and faculty, in HWCUs. Thus, our collective experiences reflect the typical circumstances of most sociologists of color and should be seen as reliable data on the various *racial practices* behind white rule in sociology. As Charles W. Mills has argued (1998:28), “hegemonic groups characteristically have experiences that foster illusory perceptions about society’s functioning, whereas subordinate groups characteristically have experiences that (at least potentially) give rise to more adequate conceptualizations.”

We proceed as follows. First, we dedicate the bulk of our discussion to the identification, labeling, and explication of racial practices, with a focus on graduate student life and socialization. We focus on graduate life because “graduate experience is an anticipatory socialization into higher education faculty role” (Weidman & Stein 2003:15). So, what happens to minority scholars once they become professors is preordained and an extension of their graduate school experiences. Whenever necessary, we provide examples of how a practice works for faculty and graduate students and point out practices that affect faculty exclusively. Second, we outline strategies to survive as well as to fight against racial domination (Desmond & Emirbayer 2009) in sociology departments. Finally, we conclude with some perhaps utopian views on how to remake the sociological house and the sociological imagination as truly multicultural, democratic, and progressive.

## RACIAL PRACTICES

Weidman and colleagues (2001) categorized the most prominent paradigms for understanding graduate school socialization into three major approaches: linear, nonlinear, or interactive. Irrespective of the sequences detailed by each approach, a successful outcome is always achieved when the graduate student ultimately adopts and replicates the “values and attitudes, the interests, skills, and knowledge, in short the culture, current in the groups of which they are, or seek to become a member” (Merton et al. 1957:287). Given that the values that characterize socialization and solidify “occupational commitment” (Weidman et al. 2001:6) are not neutral, when a graduate student internalizes the required cognitive, ideological, and affective norms, he or she legitimizes white logic and develops scholars unwilling to challenge the status quo.

While many of the barriers that students of color confronted in the 1960s and 1970s continue to play a prominent role in their experience and socialization in graduate school (e.g., exclusion, overt discrimination, minimization of the value of their work, etc.), contemporary socialization and racial practices of the post-civil rights era pose even greater challenges because white rule has become hegemonic and almost invisible (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Orni & Winant 1994). In the next section, we outline a number of the racial practices that help reproduce white rule in sociology.

### Assimilation

Diversity has become an empty ideology (Embrick Forthcoming). In fact, the banner of diversity creates a system that “predispose[s] educated people toward a preference for identifying the common or universal themes in human experiences, which means, in practice, discomfort with approaches that reveal basic, perhaps unassimilable differences” (Chesler et al. 2005:80). Thus, HWCUs, which were totally segregated until the late 1960s, admitted a few people of color in the late 1960s–early 1970s. This occurred without changing the balance of racial power or, more importantly, the way they did “business.” Hence, departments of sociology, pressured by social circumstances, added a few graduate students and faculty of color in the 1970s. By the 1980s and 1990s, patterns had emerged: Although few departments had no faculty or students of color, most had just a few so as not to be seen as racist (Bonilla-Silva & Herring 1999). (This pattern remains, as documented by Bonilla-Silva and Lee [n.d.]) And these scholars of color, used in HWCUs as evidence of “integration,” are partially incorporated into the departments they join. In fact, it is more cohabitation than integration, with the expectation of assimilation (Romero 2000).

Assimilating and “cooling out” students and faculty of color is central to white rule since the mere presence of a few non-whites validates the status quo (Romero 2000). As Feagin and colleagues have argued, “The physical and social spaces of predominantly white colleges and universities generally embody the presumption of one-way assimilation for students of color” (1996:50). Students and faculty of color are expected to internalize the hierarchies of knowledge and research and support its value (Romero 2000). This socialization process is both formal and informal, based on “relatively unstructured experiences that are processed in various ways, depending on individual students” (Weidman & Stein 2003:7). One example is the invited speakers at departmental colloquiums. These gatherings establish the criteria that research students and junior faculty need to be valued and get tenure within elite research institutions. At Duke, as well as all the places Bonilla-Silva has studied, worked, or visited for extended periods (Wisconsin, Michigan, Texas A&M, Washington State University, and Stanford), white males, quantitative methods, and research groups are overly represented at the departmental colloquium. These things are then the intellectual standard against which we should presumably measure our success. Smith and colleagues have defined this as “epistemological racism,”

[which] means that our current range of research epistemologies—positivism to postmodernism—arises from the social history and culture of the dominant race, that these epistemologies logically reflect and reinforce that social history and that racial group (while excluding the epistemologies of other races/cultures), and that this dynamic has negative results for people of color in general and scholars of color in particular. (2002:231)

The assimilation model acknowledges difference without addressing power relations and the dominance of white logic (Simpson 2003:159; Zubert & Bonilla-Silva 2008). Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001) critiqued the liberal assimilation view (espoused by Park) that race is “no longer an important dimension of difference once the members of non-dominant racial groups acquire the behaviors and values of the dominant racial group” (p. 560). While the assimilation model is often presented as an attempt to fully incorporate minority groups, the goal is the control and dominance of minority groups (Glema 2002). The use of individual explanations for structural problems facilitates the subordination of minority groups and validates the privileged group’s position. As Barrera (1979) argued, when a group’s disadvantage is identified, their subordination is assumed to be internally produced because, according to the dominant group, stratification and inequality are aberrations within the current system. Rather than point to structural issues like the ones we present below, faculty understand graduate student performances, placements, publications, and success as a result of their individual ability to complete coursework, choose a suitable dissertation topic, and publish articles. We know, however, that evaluations of performance and ability, opportunities

for publications, and job placement are heavily influenced by race, class, and gender (Madera et al. 2009).

### *Microaggressions*

"Racial microaggressions" refer to "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group" (Sue et al. 2007:274). Microaggressions can take the form of individual statements as well as an oppressive environmental surrounding. With regard to the latter, the "sheer exclusion" of prominent researchers of color (including W. E. B. Du Bois) in graduate-level sociological theory courses (including the limited number of both faculty and students of color in sociology programs reflects environmental microaggression (Sue et al. 2007:274). Indeed, Romero (2000) suggested that despite the lip service and curriculum revisions, "less than 25% [of sociology programs] include the study of race in the required theory courses" (p. 285; emphasis added). Moreover, "the centrality of texts written primarily by white people... immediately establishes all other knowledge as peripheral and as legitimate only to the extent that it does not contradict the knowledge represented in the text" (Simpson 2003:168).

These environmental microaggressions provide the necessary structural setting for interpersonal microaggressions to occur, which, consistent with contemporary theories of color-blind racism, often take the form of more "benign" requests, expectations, or pressures" (Chesler et al. 2005:101). For many graduate students of color, racial microaggressions may go unnamed as a daily part of what it means to be a racial minority in the United States, yet they do not go unnoticed. They have significant consequences for graduate student performance and the production of knowledge. For example, white students interested in confessing their racial sins have often approached one of the graduate co-authors of this chapter. White students usually approach her because they are upset that a behavior or comment they have said has been "unfairly" labeled as racist. Not only do the white students burden the minority student with their racist concerns (despite not being friends with her), but after recounting the scenario (in which they have, in fact, said something racist), they dismiss her critique of their comment. It is as though their willingness to address the incident with an "authentic" person of color is enough to grant racial absolution and permits them to completely ignore her critical response. As Smith and colleagues stated, the difficulty of being ignored is in "some ways harder to deal with than malicious interactions" (2002:131).

Other forms of microaggressions take the form of more explicit casual comments. For example, white sociology students' casual use of the term "ghetto" to jokingly describe foods, clothes, and any other object that is dirty or poorly made is common in casual conversations. In another instance, unaware

of the black student working in the adjacent office, two white sociology graduate students had a conversation where one woman expressed dislike for her body, lamenting "I have a body like a freakin' African woman." The power of these interactions is that their oppressive results are not predicated on malicious intent. In fact, it is the "benign" nature of these comments that betrays the racist structure and culture of the "white habitus" (Bonilla-Silva 2009).

These slights continue as students of color become faculty of color. Bonilla-Silva, for example, was told by white colleagues after his 1997 article appeared in ASR that racism had no conceptual standing, that they had no clue he was talking about, and that he was racializing issues when race was declining in significance. The worst offender was a somewhat prominent white female colleague, who after congratulating him on having a solo piece in ASR, told him, "I did not know ASR had an affirmative action program." Those slights have continued throughout his career even now that he is a senior scholar with national visibility. He may have achieved and accomplished many things, but he is still a scholar of color, thus most white sociologists see his accomplishments as the product of preferential treatment. As he writes these lines, he heard through the grapevine that a colleague tells his students in a seminar that the work Bonilla-Silva and other race scholars do is not research but "ME-search!"

### *Differential Response and Expectations*

Graduate students of color enter programs where faculty members already have preconceived notions or expectations about student performance, and their responses to student difficulties and/or progress reflect this. These expectations lead to differential treatment, lowered expectations for academic performance, unclear norms, and unsatisfactory advising (Feagin et al. 1996).

The notion that "minorities must work harder and be smarter" because they are "judged at a higher standard" (Bowen & Bok 1998:131) can be partially attributed to the differential expectations of faculty members. The graduate student coauthors provide several examples where important achievements and successes are dismissed entirely or challenged as undeserved. For example, one of them was awarded a competitive fellowship in her first year; when she shared this news with a white faculty member, she was told, "You should reevaluate your reasons for being in graduate school." When she was awarded another fellowship the following year, instead of offering congratulations, this same faculty member expressed regret and frustration because it meant he had to reorganize RA positions.

The faculty presumes, often paternalistically, to know the graduate student of color better than the student knows herself (see Romero [2000] for additional examples). Even when faced with contrary information (high achievement and fellowships), the student of color is presumed to be misdirected or off-track.



Similarly, a male graduate student of color was awarded a prestigious national fellowship available to graduate students of any race/ethnicity. A faculty member in the department assumed, however, that the student's fellowship was a minority fellowship, directly challenged the student about the validity of his racial identity, and asked the student to ponder whether he should have been awarded the presumed minority fellowship. The faculty's racist assumptions and his attempt to police the racial identity of the graduate student reflect dominant notions about minority students' capabilities and paternalistic assumptions about racial categorization. Finally, an excited student of color completed his dissertation proposal defense and informed a white faculty member of his new ABD status, to which the faculty member responded snuggly: "Well, you know levels of attrition are the highest at the dissertation stage."

When success is not trivialized, it is dismissed as random. In one cohort of students taking the comprehensive exams, only two students (both students of color) earned high passes. In discussing the exam results with the other white students (none of whom earned high passes), the white students described the grading system as "random," as though the students' expertise and effort were not responsible for their high performance.

At the same time, faculty responses to minority students are problematic, even when seemingly positive because, as Feagin and colleagues noted, "a white gesture that might be seen as complimentary if it were solely based on achievement criteria is taken as offensive because of the racial stereotype implied in the white action" (1996:66). For example, at the end of a statistics class, a faculty member showered the sole black student in the course with overwhelming praise, calling her overall performance in the course "great" and "impressive." The professor's excitement reflected his surprise at her performance and, hence, his initial low expectations for the student's performance, as he made no comments about the A performances of other students in the course. Bonilla-Silva can attest that this practice continues as one becomes a faculty member. He has pondered many times why he has to work to make sure his awards are mentioned and forwarded to all the faculty in his program, or why he sometimes is not congratulated after receiving a national award (such as the 2007 Coser Award for Theoretical Agenda-Setting) or acknowledged for being cited in the *New York Times*. And we, as graduate students and faculty, see the differential treatment when we observe how white students and faculty react when "good things" happen to them.

### *Disengagement of Faculty*

Weidman and Stein's (2003) study found that "socialization of doctoral students to the scholar role is directly related to student perceptions of departmental faculty encouragement for students' enoasine in such activities" (p. 653).

Therefore, differential expectations (noted above) have ongoing consequences for network-building, collaborations, and professionalization. Collaborative projects are a central avenue for graduate students to gain research skills and build relationships with faculty. These projects lead to conference presentations, access to research networks, and publications. Recommendation letters for fellowships and employment opportunities are largely based on these informal professional relationships. We know the opportunities for these collaborations with faculty are not equitably distributed and the subsequent benefits are then disparately distributed. Turner and Thompson's (1993) study of 200 graduate women found that white women report more mentoring experiences and apprenticeship experiences, both student- and faculty-initiated. In fact, upon entrance into the program, many faculty seem to have made decisions about which students are worth investing in, and students of color typically are not part of this group (Romero 2000). A respondent from Turner and Thompson's study recognized that at her institution some students are tapped as "special people . . . mostly the white men. They're the ones that start getting everything right from the beginning" (1993:364).

When one of the authors first started graduate school, she met with several white faculty members to discuss her research interests. During and after these meetings, she was surprised at the limited interests white faculty members expressed, especially when she saw the enthusiasm they had for other incoming students and their interests. Now an advanced graduate student, she sees her colleagues reaping the benefits of these initial and subsequent meetings: grant funding, publications, and the psychological benefits of knowing you have been supported by your department since the beginning and believing that this is because you are great. Even students of color who have been praised as top students are not brought in on these more informal, yet resource-rich relationships. Turner and Thompson (1993) offer a revealing excerpt from faculty correspondence, which states blatantly that racial minorities, women, and disabled students are the least desirable graduate students for faculty, particularly when a white male student is available. These initial encounters are fundamental to the entire graduate student experience because, "Given the power differential between professors and students, few students have the psychological and social resources to alter dramatically the social position crafted for them by professors" (Feagin et al. 1996:15). Moreover, these ties work in a cumulative manner, wherein one network leads to inclusion into another project; therefore, patterns of exclusion lead to cumulative disadvantages for students of color.

Minority students must constantly be aware of the "white gaze" and be particularly attuned to how their social ties and racial identity may influence the labeling process. Labeling students and their projects as "high risk" has been discussed by Chesler and colleagues in their book *Challenging Racism in Higher Education*. They remark that students of color felt "they were perceived

as high risks by professors, teaching assistants and students," who would subsequently lower their expectations of the minority students (2005:114).

This process of disinvestment is something both graduate student authors have experienced. We were enrolled in the same dissertation proposal development course and were called "high risk" and "ambitious" by the faculty course advisor. Although at first glance they may seem like benign comments, these assessments led to minimal feedback from the faculty member and the other students. The central purpose of the required course is to give and receive feedback while constructing the dissertation proposal; essentially, we were excluded from that process. We were seen as "beyond help" because we wanted to collect our own data and study micro-level racial stratification processes. Although ambition can be a positive trait, here it was used to indicate that we were on our own. The dismissal of student interests and lack of advising are themes presented in prior studies of minority experiences in higher education (Feagin et al. 1996:90, 120; Smith et al. 2002:27). Other aspects of the labeling process are discussed later in this chapter.

Disengagement from faculty also has implications for the graduate school process. Students of color are often instructed to include strategic white faculty members on our committees to give our work validation or the white seal of approval. We are encouraged to develop ties with white faculty who will vouch for our potential and accomplishments, while facing simultaneous disengagement from many. Moreover, we often edit our language and claims in our research (dissertation proposals and projects) to make our arguments more palatable for white audiences who may feel discomfort with strong statements about white supremacy and racialized power relations. Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001) argued that:

With the scarcity of mentors in graduate school who are knowledgeable about culturally appropriate ways of guiding women and students of color, these students are likely at greater risk of (a) not receiving sufficient training in research and specialized content areas, (b) not completing their degree programs, and (c) not being well positioned to readily succeed in their postdoctoral careers. (p. 550)

Almost every professor of color can attest to how the disengagement and labeling that begins in graduate school continues when one becomes a professor. Few sociologists of color are incorporated into projects, added to grants, made to feel they belong in sociology departments, and treated as equals in both interpersonal and professional interactions. Bonilla-Silva has been a professor for eighteen years and, except for his tenure at Texas A&M (the department was chaired by a Mexican-American sociologist and had ten scholars of color), has never felt included, appreciated, or respected. He has never been asked to work on a grant or a paper with a white colleague. He has never been considered for any administrative post in departments except at Texas A&M, although he had

held important national positions in the ASA (as a member of the association's council and chair of the section on racial and ethnic minorities).

Over the years, Bonilla-Silva has been labeled "controversial," "political," "one-sided," "racial," "not methodologically rigorous," and many other things. Although he most often learns about these labels from others, colleagues occasionally have told him so. Once, the director of NSF called Bonilla-Silva to let him know that he was not going to receive a grant. After informing Bonilla-Silva that his proposal was in the bottom tier, the person said: "You need to decide if you want to be a scientist or a sociologist."

### *Expectation of Uncontrolled Emotion*

Not only are our intellectual arguments controlled by the racial structure, but our emotions and bodies are as well. Often students of color are seen as hypersensitive and overly emotional. These characterizations have been well documented (Bonilla-Silva 2010). When we bring up issues related to racial inequality or injustice, we are told it is just a joke and that we need to lighten up. White students and faculty fail to see that "black students' individual and collective experience with whiteness is the foundation on which they base evaluations of recurring white actions and motives" (Feagin et al. 1996:65). Past experience guides the reactions of students of color, not "shoot-from-the-hip paranoia" like it is often perceived by white observers (Feagin et al. 1996:65). Feagin and colleagues further stated, "Ironically, although blacks are often accused of being overly sensitive, it is white hypersensitivity to blacks, rather than the reverse, that is at the heart of most racial difficulties in white 'home territories'" (Feagin et al. 1996:65).

An extension of this process is the expectation that we are incapable of controlling our emotions. One of us has been complimented twice by a faculty member and a university administrator for reacting to less-than-positive news with restraint and professionalism. Their comments betray the presumption, most likely influenced by gendered expectations as well, that if something does not go the way she wanted, she would be angry and defensive as opposed to open-minded and professional. The idea that a graduate student would lash out against two white male superiors is an absurd premise that makes these compliments more insult than praise.

Sociologists of color know very well about the importance of handling emotions. For example, Bonilla-Silva counsels young sociologists of color on the importance of smiling in job talks, as Whites prefer those of us who, to use their term, do not have an "attitude." This speaks volumes about white normality and how they expect people of color to behave. White sociologists can express emotions, but we must "keep it together" or we are labeled "angry," "anti-white," and many other things.

### **Labeling: Racial Stereotyping and Grouping**

Two major ways that nonwhite students are labeled and marked by Whites as Other are racial stereotyping and group-based identification. Racial stereotyping can take place along both academic and behavioral dimensions (Chesler et al. 2005:102). By group-based identification, we mean that white students see nonwhite students as parts of a larger whole, as opposed to individuals with independent identities, histories, and issues.

Racial stereotyping includes multiple elements, but we want to highlight a handful of characteristics that influence how students of color are perceived by white students and faculty: gender, class background (real or imagined), substantive interests, and methodological ability. These cues are used to label students and predict the relationship they will have with the department's white habitus (Bonilla-Silva 2009). In other words, these labels help white students and faculty navigate people of color: Are you hypersensitive or racialist? Are you colorblind or racially conscious (read: political)? Are you subjective or objective? How white colleagues answer these questions influences how they interact with scholars of color.

The labels can vary within institutional contexts, but from our experiences we generally see three archetypes: the militant minority, the meek minority, and the overachieving minority. The militant minority is the most potentially dangerous for white colleagues and she is often framed as subjective, irrational, hypersensitive, political, dangerous, and self-segregating. The response to students seen as militant is often disengagement or punishment. Punishment and sanctions embarrass students as well as socialize them. The meek minority is typically a term attached to female graduate students, but can also be attached to international students with limited English-language proficiency. These students are generally read as apolitical, safe, and vulnerable. As a result of their vulnerability, students are seen as needing protection. This can lead to extremely paternalistic relationships between graduate students and advisors. The third archetype is the overachieving minority. This student is also seen as apolitical and reasonable as well as a guaranteed success. This view often leads overachieving minorities to receive minimal mentorship and faculty support.

Often, white students and faculty respond to minority students based on the assumptions of these archetypes. Knowing a few details about the person (e.g., where they went to college, what they are interested in studying, and the like) is often enough to place someone in a category. Sometimes assumptions about a person's background are made based on the archetype he or she is placed in. One of the graduate student authors, who has been placed in the overachieving minority group, had a conversation with a white faculty member during which the professor incorrectly assumed she had an upper middle-class background without ever asking her about her

life history. The important element here is not whether she was middle class or not, it is that whites can assume they know people of color without ever talking to them. This pattern is seen in sociological research as well, where policies and theories about minorities are created without ever talking to non-whites but rather based on problematic assumptions about culture and behavior.

In addition, when students of color do not fit into the prescribed archetypes or phenotypic expectations of non-whiteness, whites challenge their racial identity. One of the authors, who is a light-skinned Latina, has been told on multiple occasions that she is not *really* a scholar of color because she looks white. The need to authenticate and validate one's racial identity is a function of a limited understanding of whom these identities refer to. Also, telling someone who she is and challenging her history is another way of labeling and asserting dominance over non-Whites. Although it is important to acknowledge the privileges afforded to those with light skin, we must also be aware that light-skinned minorities come from groups whose presence in academia is negligible and whose interests are secondary to those of the dominant group (Vega 2010).

When scholars of color create groups to respond to the intellectual shortcomings of their departments they are also subject to labeling. For example, the authors are all founding members of a race and ethnicity workshop in their department. The students who started this workshop are mostly students of color and have been described by our colleagues as the anti-social and exclusionary "race faction." This label illustrates whiteness at work. We are considered a faction, while other groups are simply friends, colleagues, and classmates. Additionally, students of color are seen as part of a larger contingent, rather than as individuals with particular histories, interests, personalities, and issues (Feagin et al. 1996:14, 93). Recognition and misrecognition are central to cross-racial social interactions in predominantly white universities (Feagin et al. 1996:15). As Smith and colleagues argue, however, "The concept of a critical mass has significance for the retention of African American and other underrepresented students. These students provide support for each other, and the saturation also encourages the continuation of support services provided for these students" (2002:38).

The racist labeling that begins when we are graduate students continues as we become professors. Bonilla-Silva has been labeled a "militant minority" since his days in graduate school at Wisconsin and that label has remained affixed to him. No matter his accomplishments and success, this label has severely limited his academic life chances. For example, after receiving a verbal job offer at a prestigious midwestern university, the offer was rescinded. Later he learned that senior faculty had gone above the chair of the department and sabotaged the hiring. More recently, he learned that a certain latino sociologist from an Ivy League university called colleagues at Duke and urged them "not

to waste a line on this fool." This same sociologist had referred to Bonilla-Silva in an ASA meeting as "the Hispanic terror."

### *Psychological Cost/Isolation*

The costs and benefits for minority students who attend HWCUs have been well-documented (Feagin et al. 1996). Although HWCUs tend to have better resources (e.g., funding, training opportunities), the resources and rewards are not equitably distributed. Similarly, Chesler and colleagues have discussed how scholars of color, particularly African Americans, "succeed more" and "enjoy it less." They have explained that "blacks find it more difficult to maintain the view that if only one does everything 'right' all will work out for the best" (2005:190). The differential treatment of minority students (discussed in more detail above) emphasizes the disconnection between what the department says students need to do and how the department responds to student achievements. This creates a situation where departmental norms are unclear, producing what Feagin and colleagues labeled "anomie" (1996:98). The resulting confusion and psychological distress hinders students' emotional health as well as their physical and professional health.

Exclusion from peer and professional networks is another psychological cost that can lead to isolation. Sometimes "students feel that dominant student networks are closed off, that a set of informal boundaries to acceptance is difficult to cross, or even that they are not wanted" (Chesler et al. 2005:104). A recent study at MIT indicated that 40% of black students felt "a sense of racial isolation" (Chesler et al. 2005:104). As a result, "in the face of such feelings of discomfort and alienation many students of color seek out members of their own racial/ethnic group and develop their own associations" (Chesler et al. 2005:104). Attempts to cope with this exclusion, however, are often read as self-segregation. At the same time, complete separation from the dominant group networks is not feasible if we want to complete our degree, get a good job, and receive the training we need to be successful. No wonder some students describe a sense of being trapped (Feagin et al. 1996:71).

This psychological cost is accentuated as one becomes a professional sociologist. As bad as things look when we are in graduate school, our isolation and alienation increases exponentially as faculty. We enter departments with one, two, or sometimes no people of color and still have to operate so as to make Whites feel comfortable. Bonilla-Silva, for example, has become the "lone ranger" in race at Duke. The Sociology Department claims to have a "race area," but it only has *one* professor teaching in the area. Thus, if Bonilla-Silva were to leave, the area would disappear. The overall racialized stress one endures in white spaces produces what Smith and colleagues (2007) aptly label "racial battle fatigue."

### *Nondepartmental Ties*

Hurtado (1994) defined the racial climate of a university as the "perceptions of interaction and trust between minority students and predominantly white faculty or students at the graduate school" (p. 347). She argued that when this trust is lacking or nonexistent, minority students have successfully identified strategies that allow them to "maintain their feelings of self-worth in adverse racial climates" (p. 348). Graduate students of color are constantly negotiating faculty expectations, striving to meet department requirements, while also trying to develop a semblance of friendship networks with other graduate students. Early on, students of color usually recognize that even the most liberal white students have views that are "embedded in a vague rhetoric" that seldom highlights white privilege (Chesler et al. 2005:79).

Interracial friendships can be tenuous, as students of color often are required to compartmentalize relationships with white students in order to stay in good social standing and build networks (see Hurtado [1994] and Turner & Thompson [1993] for examples of superficial interracial relationships). For the black female coauthor of this article, this has meant visiting a country bar with Confederate paraphernalia and white patrons who stared at her with unwelcoming expressions. While happy hours may seem like innocent meeting times, some students of color refrain from these events to avoid alcohol-induced racism.

Given the pressure that these relationships create, it should come as no surprise that minority graduate students and faculty proactively pursue avenues to protect their mental health and build a sense of community. Students of color have to be resourceful in their search for ways to combat the alienation and discomfort that they experience in the university setting. For several students of color, it has meant taking elective coursework in African and African American Studies, Women Studies, and Latin American Studies and developing close ties with minority-based organizations. Participation in minority groups serves as "an attempt at self-determination and cultural maintenance in a sea of whiteness" (Chesler et al. 2005:104; Feagin et al. 1996:72). Moreover, the creation of formal workshops reflects efforts to construct spaces for in-group bonding that validate their experiences and offer spaces for more critical theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, and substantive concerns.

Despite the extra energy and time these activities take, which Romero has called the "double day of graduate work" (2000:302), participation in outside groups has been an important source of fulfillment for racial minorities. For example, civic participation of college-educated men from prestigious colleges is significantly higher for Blacks than for Whites. The level of civic participation is roughly equal for white women and black women, although college-educated black women are more likely to be working in full-time positions



(Chesler et al. 2005:160). Moreover, having an advanced degree is correlated with civic leadership for Blacks (Bowen & Bok 1998:167). Minority students often find that they can “achieve a sense of balance in their lives by being part of a broader ethnic/racial community” (Turner & Thompson 1993:101).

Some Whites, demonstrating white racial myopia reinterpret the presence of these spaces as examples of self-segregation (Elfin & Burke 1993; Tatum 1997). They criticize minorities’ behaviors, without recognizing how “demeaning behaviors and various organizational pressures or norms promoting separatism” are largely responsible for this occurrence (Chesler et al. 2005: 86).

Many professors of color, like graduate students of color, seek refuge outside sociology. Bonilla-Silva, for example, has benefited from joint appointments in African American Studies and, more recently, from a deep network of scholars of color across the nation in the social sciences and the humanities. He has created and participated in this community and benefits from the support he receives from minority peers. That said, he has to navigate daily life in sociological spaces where few of his colleagues understand and appreciate his work, style, culture, traditions, and the like.

### *Racial Innocence/Naturalization of Racial Expertise*

The groups of white students who work and socialize together are not likely to acknowledge exclusions but are likely to profess racial innocence and superficial progressive politics when their liberalism is questioned. When one considers the classroom, we can observe that interracial encounters are “sporadic and hesitant, and reproduce prior hierarchies of racial advantage and disadvantage” (Chesler et al. 2005:80). That is, white students are vocal on issues that do not directly relate to race and they look to Blacks or students of color to talk about race (Feagin et al. 1996:86). This occurs because white students understand themselves to be “outside of race” or “unraced” (Simpson 2003:47), while students of color are singled out as natural racial experts (p. 115). The naturalization of racial expertise is highly problematic because it undermines the extensive training that many minority students have received, supports the false assumption that race only impacts minorities, and ultimately leads to the devaluation of our work as subjective and secondary.

At the same time, there are several white students who conduct research where race is central to their arguments, yet they actively avoid enrollment in race coursework and do not directly engage with scholars of race and ethnicity. In fact, one of the coauthors was approached in a hallway by a white student interested in race and asked to “explain the origins of race and how race is different than class.” This question is an important one that cannot be fully explained in a casual hall conversation. She recommended a few books for him to read and the graduate-level course on race, neither of which seemed

to be of interest. Because race theory is not viewed as objective or valuable, white students do not invest time in developing their expertise. Instead, they tend to construct questions about race that do not highlight power or white privilege, focus on the “race effect” instead of racial stratification (Zuberi 2001; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva 2008), or ask a minority student when they have a pressing question.

Some white students do have a sincere interest in race, but these efforts are stymied because they are also “seeking the illusion of peace and harmony, [while] often withdrawing from or even denying uncomfortable racial relations” (Chesler et al. 2005:106). In our department as in many others, the unwillingness of students of color to politely ignore race leads whites to claim that they are made to feel as “walking on eggshells.” Whites attribute their discomfort not to their own racism, but to the alleged “hypersensitivity” of racial minorities. The critical perspective that minority students offer on race is consistent with the standards of intellectual rigor, but when applied to race, it is dismissed as combative.

The ability to selectively accept or discount racial criticisms relates closely to the Feagin and colleagues argument regarding “selective white amnesia” about U.S. racial history (1996:17). White students pick and choose which aspects of the comments and criticisms to take seriously and dismiss the most critical ones. If a white student’s self-assessment is that he or she is not racist, then “that is the end of the issue for that person and the end of her or his responsibility” (Smith et al. 2002:221). In perhaps one of the most explicit examples of both racial innocence and superficial ties, the black graduate coauthor was leading a group of white graduate students back to a dark parking lot after a day at the state fair. A group of young white men drove by and yelled “Niggers!” Shocked, the black student responds, “I can’t believe that just happened.” Others looked at her cluelessly, saying that they thought the white men screamed “Indians” and “canned food.” Once a white woman in the group confirmed that she too heard “Niggers,” another white woman says: “Oh, so they actually did say it. Well, they are idiots. Who do they think I am? I mean look at me.” Not only was the experience viewed as subjective and unbelievable until the unbiased white observer confirmed it, but the white student failed to problematize the racist event and rather focused on the fact that the plural racist epithet should have only applied to her black “friend.” White students are eager to list students of color among their group of friends, but this does not translate into inclusion in private parties, hang outs, or other events. These friendships are nominal at best and used to merely “affirm their liberalism” (Romero 2000:284).

At the same time, some white students and faculty members are important allies and supporters of students of color. In fact, some of the white faculty who may have originally made racist comments or had racist expectations eventually begin to act in ways that support student success. White allies are

important and have been historically valuable in efforts to accomplish more revolutionary objectives. Even when white allies do not completely understand the experience of being a student of color in a HWCU, they often understand that students concerns are valid and need to be heard. The challenge students of color and faculty face push white allies to observe and articulate the problem with the white racial structure and participate in efforts to dismantle it.

The racial innocence of white graduate students is typical of post-civil rights racial discourse (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Bonilla-Silva has dealt with this practice as a professor, too. In his fourth year as a professor at the University of Michigan, after giving a talk on race and methodology in the departmental colloquium, several white colleagues who had never asked him to "do lunch" with them asked him to join them. He quickly learned the reason for the lunches was that his white colleagues wanted to scold him for his talk and accuse him of calling them racist. When he told them he had made a structural rather than an individual claim about race in sociology, they dismissed him and one even said: "Despite this, I guarantee you that this matter will not affect how I vote on your tenure case." Veiled threats have been part of Bonilla-Silva's career since he became a sociologist in 1993.

### *After Graduation*

Once students graduate and begin their careers as faculty members, the white logic of sociology departments continues to reproduce racial practices that marginalize them within their new environment. This process has been well-documented by researchers, including Turner et al. (1999), which indicated the following about faculty of color:

Most acknowledged continuing racial and ethnic biases in their colleges and universities ... [and] repeatedly mentioned the handicaps of isolation, lack of information about tenure and promotion, unresponsive work environments, gender bias, language barriers, lack of mentoring, and lack of support from superiors. They identified racial and ethnic bias as the most troubling challenge they faced in the academic workplace. (p. 41)

In essence, the racial practices of isolation, microaggression, and disengagement continue, as do the psychological and economic costs.

As professors, faculty of color are often not a part of the informal networks of power where decisions are made. Being excluded from departmental in-groups costs more than potential companionship. Friendships lead to nodes of power, especially since important matters are often discussed and decided outside of faculty meetings. Therefore, not being invited to informal gatherings birthdays, dinners, picnics, games, and the like has serious implications (Bonilla-Silva 2011).

Tenure, perhaps the most important process for any faculty member, is also dictated by departmental white logic. During tenure reviews, minority faculty seldom receive the benefit of the doubt. Fenelon (2003) explains:

Tenure, when conferred or denied in politicized systems like those described previously, is rather like affirmation systems, with an increasingly higher bar for performance by those who may disagree with the dominant meritocratic ideologies, and an increasingly lower set of standards for those scholars in alignment with the official and informal explanations for the general lack of diversity. (pp. 91–92)

Bonilla-Silva has observed the benefits of whiteness during tenure reviews throughout the years and has seen that these benefits can even include promotion through two ranks, with one book as the foundation for the promotions (Bonilla-Silva 2011). At the same time, the type of scholarship scholars of color produce continues to be heavily scrutinized, and assimilation is still the name of the game. As Bess explained, "The heavy informal controls and sanctions laid on the struggling untenured assistant professor serve to orient him toward the path of valued activities and constrain him from deviating too obviously from accepted standards" (1978:297). Therefore, while some of our work is praised as worthy scholarship, other projects are designated "political" explorations based on identity politics. Our publications are regarded as lesser ones, our books are minimized, and the journals we tend to publish in are treated as second-class.

All of us are the product of a discipline that is racialized. And sociologists ought, but do not, accept this point without reservations. They may argue the extent and character, but few would dispute nowadays the idea that organizations are shaped by class, status, and gender. If sociologists accept that the state and civil society are fractured by these social categories, why do they balk at the idea that sociology itself is racialized? The answer lies in the way dominants react to discussions about their role as dominants (Bonilla-Silva 2011). In the sage words of William Ryan: "[N]o one [wants to think] of himself as a son of a bitch" (1976:20). So whites who rule sociology want to "fake the funk" and thus see sociology with Panglossian eyes as "the best of all possible worlds."

### **ON THE POLITICS OF RACIAL EMANCIPATION WITHIN SOCIOLOGY**

In this chapter we have identified some of the major racial practices and socialization processes that stifle the development of graduate students of color and continue as they become professors. Among others, these barriers include assimilation pressures, racial microaggressions, stereotyping/labeling, and

differential expectations. While these practices have immediate psychological consequences, their most far-reaching consequence relates to the continuation of epistemological racism (Mills 1998). Accordingly, we must deconstruct how white rule functions through our professional socialization if we wish to change the racial structure and practice of American sociology. Challenging domination is always risky. Faculty and students of color pay dearly for the public positions they take that challenge whiteness in American sociology. But we also know that there is “salvation through struggle,” so speaking up against domination is not only liberating, it is also central to the kind of sociological praxis we wish to exhibit (Bell 1993:98).

The notion that one can just “do work” and let the work “speak for itself” is silly, cowardly, and counterproductive. Minority scholars who successfully assimilate into mainstream values, norms, and epistemology may get rewarded by “the man,” but in addition to not sleeping well, they ultimately embarrass themselves and their people. At this curious racial moment in American history, when we have a black man in the still very White House, we believe it is imperative to demonstrate how white rule is accomplished and how that affects the lives, research trajectories, and careers of sociologists of color. By doing this, we hope others can understand this reality and develop the necessary skills to survive and fight back.

Although we are deeply embedded in the white racial structure, our presence need not represent the legitimacy or reproduction of white logic and methods. As Lipsitz argued, we may not choose our color, but we do choose our politics (2006:viii). Accordingly, the challenge we pose to the sociology of race relations is preeminently a political one, for white and nonwhite scholars alike. Here we outline strategies for a broader, political strategy in the struggle against white supremacy and offer suggestions about how students can negotiate the daily verbal and interpersonal assaults that emerge in class and peer relationships throughout graduate school and beyond.

1. Scholars should become familiar with the classic canons, but also identify important sociological works that were strategically erased from sociological memory. By doing so, we effectively challenge the trivialization of the contributions of women and students of color and destabilize the position of white men as the founders of “civilization and culture” (Jordan & Weedon 1995:11). This motivation should drive the articulation of our research questions and lead to new theoretical orientations and innovative methodological approaches.

2. Be willing to sacrifice white (mainstream) validation in exchange for research that is heavily self-directed and unapologetically critical of mainstream research. This work is vital because critical social scientists on race matters can provide data, arguments, counter-narratives, and other

intellectual ammunition against dominant representations of racial groups and racial inequality. And to provide better ammunition for the movements against white supremacy, the sociological and social scientific efforts in this field must be race-conscious and engaged in a systematic analysis of racial stratification and its effects. In addition to “mental” liberation from the tentacles of white sociology (Ladner 1973), we have to remain committed to conducting research without regard to external validation and incorporating this praxis in our daily lives.

3. Speak up in class and in social interactions to counter racist assumptions and comments of peers. Pressures to assimilate and desires to avoid labeling and faculty disinvestment are palpable factors that could easily compel a graduate student to develop a so-called neutral stance on race. Race neutrality is never truly neutral and always supportive of white rule. Indeed, liberal sociology at best fosters charitable views of people of color and reformist policies on behalf of the “problem people” (Du Bois 1903/1996). We must avoid neutrality and take a clear stance. If social sciences are going to assist in the emancipation of people of color, their efforts must clearly be on the side of the racially oppressed, for “If there is a hell for social scientists, it is precisely that they only manage to be objective if they are directly involved in a struggle, and that they have no way of escaping, even through wishful thinking” (Casanova 1981:3).

4. Refuse to give in to assimilation pressures and normativity in race research and strive to identify alternative paradigms, develop new projects, orientations, approaches, practices, and knowledge about racial stratification. There is a history of accommodation by sociologists of color in which “several major foundations perpetuated a status quo approach to racial inequality by selective sponsorship of the development of black social scientists” (Stamfield 1982:200). Minority scholars who support and validate the existence of this system and its racial practices will be compensated in the short term for their loyalty. In the end, however, because their spaces and positions are “bestowed” on them, they do not escape the consequences of its white logic. Although they may be positioned as exceptions to the rule, under white supremacy they are still vulnerable and subjected to oppressive racial practices (Bonilla-Silva 2011).

5. Decolonize your sociological imagination (Gutthrie 2004; Oliver 2004) to unlearn received truths about race, race relations, race research, and even ourselves and our own potential. The new generation of race scholars must do their work without much concern for “*el que dirán*” (what others will say). We must do a “For-U’s” social science (Mendoza 2006:155) on racial affairs and let the representatives of whiteness continue finding, again and again, that race is “declining in significance.” The race rebellions of the future will awaken them from their dream, just as the race

- rebellions of the 1960s forced many of them to admit they actually knew very little about racial matters in America.<sup>3</sup>
6. Instead of the superficial ties that are often encouraged, we suggest continued participation in community and political organizations as a means to address some of the negative psychological consequences of microaggressions and intense isolation. Moreover, we believe civic participation is important because the movement we hope to inspire within sociology and the social sciences must be *directly* related to social movement efforts outside academia. This parallels the efforts of older social analysts through organizations such as the Association of Black Sociologists and the Association of Black Psychologists. We know that “professionals will not empower anyone” (Berkowitz & Wolff 1998:299). But we are also aware that in this age when social science data on race have become crucial (maybe even more important than data from the biological sciences) for the reproduction of racialization and racism (Dunn 1993), critical social scientists<sup>4</sup> must do whatever they can to be active in the various social movements against white supremacy. Even if our engagement with these movements is only as supporters (but we plead with social scientists to become scholar activists), we should not evade our historic responsibility<sup>5</sup>; we cannot continue business as usual and act as mere reporters of racial matters.

Our committed practice for people of color and for the elimination of white supremacy in the social sciences (the need for outing the institutionally dominant white, male, heterosexual *hominus academicus*) is still urgent.<sup>6</sup> We believe this will help lift the veil that has prevented Whites (and some people of color) from truly seeing and understanding how racial stratification affects the life chances of people of color. As Fanon writes, “Come, then, comrades; it would be as well to decide at once to change our ways. We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged, and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent, and resolute” (1963:310).

## NOTES

1. We use the term “racial practices” because the notion of discrimination, married to the limiting prejudice problematic (Bonilla-Silva 1997), does not allow us to capture normative, seemingly non-racial, kinder, and gentler forms of reproducing racial domination. Accordingly, by racial practices, we mean behaviors, styles, cultural affectations, traditions, and organizational procedures that help maintain white rule. Because many of these practices become routine (“That’s the way things are”), they are not necessarily carried out with animosity and intent, that is, hostility and explicit expressions of racial cognitions and feelings about the Other need not be at the core of these practices. In fact, they tend *not* to be Jim Crow-like

and are more in line with the hegemonic nature of post-civil rights racial domination (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Oni and Winant 2004): with the “now you see it, now you don’t” way that race matters in contemporary America.

2. The 1999 controversy about the editorship of the American Sociological Association (ASA) was illustrative of this point, as several notable minority sociologists signed a document supporting the white side on the controversy. Readers interested in details of this case can see the pertinent documents in *Footnotes*, the newsletter of the ASA, late 1999 and early 2000.
3. One of the few sociologists who openly acknowledged the limitations of how social analysts saw race matters in the 1960s was Everett C. Hughes. His insights and commentary, many of which we believe are still valid, can be read in his 1963 presidential address to the American Sociological Association, which is titled “Race Relations and the Sociological Imagination.”
4. The critical tradition has been deeply connected to the work of Frankfurt School scholars such as Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Horkheimer among others. But that tradition has been safely expanded and revised to include the work and ideas of many in the black radical tradition. For efforts in expanding the former, see Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2000). For a magisterial work on the latter, see Cedric J. Robinson (2000).
5. This point reminds Eduardo of discussions with fellow minority graduate students and junior colleagues when he was a junior professor. They insisted they would not do “politics” until they were “safe” (i.e., had tenure). I pointed out to these colleagues that such an approach was a betrayal of those who struggled for our right to be where we were and led to accommodation and, ultimately, cooption by the system that had excluded us for so long. Now, twenty years or so later, these colleagues have become part of mainstream sociology and have still not done anything political (that is, they have not raised concerns about racism in academia).
6. This point was well made referring to queer studies by Joshua Gamson (2000).

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