

To Lose Is to Win: The Effects of Student Evaluations in a Multicultural Education Class on a Japanese Female Faculty with a Non-native English Accent

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Abstract

Using critical race theory and Asian critical race theory as a theoretical framework, this study investigated how a Japanese female professor who is a non-native speaker of English and teaches a multicultural education class at a predominantly white university struggled with student evaluations for her tenure and promotion. The analysis of student evaluation scores and comments and her personal narratives revealed that she was perceived as lacking credibility as a college professor and her accented English stirred nativistic attitudes among the students, enforcing anti-foreigner sentiments among some students. The professor realized that without providing her students with an opportunity to achieve a sense of empowerment in her class, she would never be successful, and used a power-shift strategy to navigate the students' resistance.

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First introduced in the mid-1920s, student evaluations of instruction are a routine, mandatory part of teaching in colleges and universities in the United States. Algozzine, et al. (2004) argue that student evaluations were originally intended to represent private matters between instructors and students regarding strengths and weaknesses. However, the information that derives from student evaluations has also been used for personnel decisions, such as tenure and promotion. The latter use of student evaluations is controversial due to several issues.

Students' opinions are not necessarily based on objective fact (Sproule, 2000). Further, course characteristics, such as elective courses versus required courses and upper-division classes versus lower-division classes, etc., influence student ratings (Algozzine, et al., 2004). In addition, whether or not a course is oriented towards a multicultural approach or a more traditional approach seems to influence student ratings. According to Cochran-Smith (2004), white preservice teachers demonstrate resistance to multicultural education courses. Sleeter (2001) reported that white preservice teachers tend to be naïve about issues of race, hold stereotypes about people of color, and bring little awareness or understanding of discrimination, especially racism. Teachers of multicultural education courses frequently find that they are awarded lower scores in their student evaluations.

Marsh and Overall (1981), however, contend that who teaches the course is more important in determining the outcome of student ratings than course characteristics. Studies found that instructors' race, gender, and language seemed to impact the ratings. Hamermesh and Parker (2005) found that women instructors received significantly lower course evaluations than male

instructors, and faculty of color received lower course evaluations than white faculty. There was also an intersection of race and gender such that female faculty of color received particularly low course evaluations. Asian American instructors, according to Rubin (1998), are perceived as less credible and intelligent than white instructors. Hamermesh and Parker (2005) also found that non-native English speakers had significantly lower course evaluations. In general, as Stanley (2006) concluded, many faculty of color believe they are negatively affected by student evaluations of their teaching.

Based on the findings above, it is easy to assume that faculty of color who teach multicultural education courses will receive lower course evaluations. It is reported that these faculty of color frequently face strong resistance from white students (Stanley, Porter, Simpson, & Ouellett 2003; Vargas, 2002). Dixson and Dingus (2007) portrayed a vivid description of resistance from their white preservice teachers in which they were perceived as "having an agenda." Ng (1993) described an incident in which she was accused of being "a woman out of control" by her white student. Ladson-Billings (1996) argued that white students use silence as weapons when students of color actively participate in class discussions in multicultural education courses.

What is relatively unknown is how faculty of color who teach multicultural education courses deal with student evaluations in order to obtain tenure and promotion. The purpose of this study is to investigate how a Japanese female professor who is a non-native English speaker and teaches a multicultural education class at a predominantly white university dealt with student evaluations for her tenure and

promotion. The research questions are: (1) How did white students enrolled in a multicultural education course evaluate a Japanese female faculty who was a non-native English speaker? and (2) How did she respond to the course evaluations she received?

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and AsianCrit

Critical race theory is a theoretical approach to the study of race that originally emerged in the field of law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT privileges the experience of people of color in opposition to normative white standards (Liu, 2009) and generally speaks to six primary tenets:

- (1) Racism is commonplace rather than out of the ordinary.
- (2) The dominant ideology promotes the interest convergence or material determinism of whites over people of color.
- (3) Race is socially constructed.
- (4) Minorities are differentially racialized as a matter of convenience.
- (5) It is important to understand the intersectionality and antiessentialism of identity.
- (6) It is important to recognize voices of color. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001)

In summary, CRT challenges “the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 2).

AsianCrit, a branch of CRT, emphasizes and critiques stereotypes, language, and immigration as it pertains to Asian people in the United States. Chang (1993) urges the necessity of foregrounding race and racism when addressing issues that

impact Asian Americans, who are informally oppressed through model minority stereotypes and overtly repressed through nativistic-minded violence and discrimination. One way to critically examine the issues Asian people face in the United States is to contest model minority stereotypes, which suggests that “Asian Americans are collectively viewed as an ideal minority group that has overcome significant obstacles to achieve economic and educational parity with whites” (Liu, 2009, p. 5). Criticizing these stereotypes, Yu (2006) notes that the model minority stereotypes overgeneralize the extremely diverse Asian American population and ignore its multiple voices. Kim (1999) contends that these stereotypes result in positioning Asian American minorities against other minorities, such as African Americans and Latinos, thus “serving the socio-political interests of white elites and their larger purpose of maintaining a racial hierarchy” (Liu, 2009, p. 5).

The seemingly positive model minority image reinforces stereotypes of Asians lacking interpersonal skills and not often interacting with others (Lin et al., 2005), leading to another common image of Asians as unassimilated and antisocial. Glick and Fiske (2001) argue that one function of viewing Asians as competent yet unsociable is to justify a system whereby competence is rewarded but some competent groups are rejected on other grounds, such as lack of social skills. The fact that Asians are viewed both positively and negatively indicates that they are strategically positioned by the dominant group in a racial hierarchy with two axes—superior/inferior and insider/foreigner (Kim, 1999). Thus, Asian Americans are racialized both as model minorities and as non-Americans (Ancheta, 2000), and this racial construction extends to the view of Asian Americans as

“forever foreigners” (Tuan, 1998). In sum, Lin, Kwan, Cheung, and Fiske (2005) state, “the dimensions of competence and sociability operate together to determine the stereotypic content that is the source of prejudice and discrimination against Asian Americans” (pp. 35-36).

Studies of Asian and Asian American faculty reveal the complex racialization reality described above. Ng, Lee, and Park (2007) conclude that Asian American faculty are perceived as “model minorities who are passive, hard-working, and non-confrontational, for example, and foreigners whose cultural differences are so great they are incapable of leadership” (p. 117). Asian American women face additional stereotypes and barriers due to sexism and “an image of Asian women as exotic and submissive” (Ng et al., 2007, p. 117). Hune’s (1998) research demonstrated that Asian American female faculty experience lower tenure rates as a consequence of racialized and gendered stereotypes, such as the exotic “Dragon Lady.” Li and Beckett’s (2006) book described Asian American female faculty who struggled with constructing positive identities in the classroom and securing tenure and promotion.

With CRT and AsianCrit as a theoretical framework, this study examines how white students in a multicultural course evaluated a Japanese female professor with a non-native English accent.

Setting and Method

This is a self-study by a Japanese female professor who is a non-native English speaker and teaches a multicultural education course in a predominantly white

university in a rural area of the Pacific Northwest. I came to the United States for my graduate studies, obtained a doctoral degree in multicultural education from a prestigious research institution, am now married to a bilingual (Chinese and English) white American male social scientist, have a bilingual (Japanese and English) daughter, a bilingual (Chinese and English) stepdaughter, and live in the United States as a permanent resident. I am a citizen of Japan, speak Japanese as a native language, learned English as a foreign language, and speak and write English as a non-native.

Procedure

CRT legitimizes “narratives and storytelling that present a different interpretation” (Parker & Lynn, 2009, p. 150). The assembled stories below, derived from the participants’ subjective perspectives became valid research material because it openly acknowledges that “perceptions of truth, fairness, and justice reflect the mindset of the knower” (Taylor, 2009, p. 8).

Thus, this study employs my personal stories along with the analysis of my student evaluation scores and comments. The student evaluation scores and handwritten comments were collected from the 2005-2006 academic year to the fall quarter of 2009. I taught two multicultural education classes per quarter (except for the first two quarters in 2005-2006 and the summer quarters) and each class included 27-30 undergraduate students in a teacher education program. Approximately 95% of my students were white, mostly monolingual females who took my multicultural education course as a requirement for teaching certification. Their scoring and

comments about my teaching were anonymously recorded.

Data Analysis

The student evaluation scores were averaged out course by course and year by year, and the comments were qualitatively analyzed. The comments were open coded using line-by-line analysis, which involved “close examination of data, phrase by phrase and sometimes word by word” (Strauss & Cobin, 1998, p. 119) to develop categories. Then, I conducted “axial coding” (Strauss & Cobin, 1998, p. 124) in which categories were related to subcategories through statements denoting how they were related to each other. After coding, I chose central categories to which all other major categories were related and conceptualized the whole data. For each coding, I added my personal stories as counternarratives and made a comparative analysis.

Most criticism of qualitative research from a positivist point of view lies in trustworthiness of a researcher’s interpretation because his or her “unconscious intersubjectivity generates huge doubts about the validity of the knowledge generated” (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 79). To enhance trustworthiness, I followed Shenton’s (2004) advice and used peer scrutiny. I had my colleagues review all coding of data to confirm whether or not my interpretations were valid and not biased. For example, my colleagues pinpointed the possibility that I might have selected the data that fit only the model minority stereotypes. My colleagues’ comments helped me to increase trustworthiness of the data by challenging “assumptions made by the investigator,” as “closeness to the project frequently inhibits his or her ability to view it with real detachment” (Shenton, 2004, p. 67).

Findings

The data yielded the following two themes: lack of credibility and foreignness, and the defense of whiteness. These themes will be discussed in this order followed by the impacts of student evaluations on my teaching and the strategies I implemented in response to them.

Lack of Credibility and Foreignness

On the first day of each class, I allow my students to ask any questions about me, and the first question they always come up with is, “What degree do you have and from which university?” This simple question suggests that I do not look credible enough to my students. Their comments on the student evaluation forms scrutinized me on my credibility as a college professor. For example, one student wrote, “Teacher was unprofessional, rude, racist, and showed a serious lacking [*sic*] in knowledge.” – Spring 2008 – 1/1 (4.13/4.00) (this student gave me a score of 1 in course content and 1 in teacher effectiveness out of a perfect score of 5; the scores in parentheses represent the course average for course content and teacher effectiveness). Another student wrote, “This course was atrociously poor. I place little or no confidence in this instructor’s knowledge or professionalism.” – Summer 2006 – 1/1 (4.1/3.80). The image of the highly-competent Asian, popular in the K-12 context, was rarely reflected in their comments.

The fact that the white students were suspicious about my credibility as a college professor teaching a multicultural education course seemed to escalate an array of personal attacks towards my teaching. The students’ comments included:

- “This is not legitimate academic material, it is simply propaganda.” – Summer 2006 – 1/1 (4.10/3.80)
- “You were very subjective.” – Spring 2006 – 3/3 (3.33/3.40)
- “I would have the teacher be more objective in her grading. It shouldn’t be, if we don’t share her particular view, we get marked down.” – Spring 2006 – 4/4 (3.33/3.40)

Obviously, I hold more knowledge and experience in my specialty area, multicultural education, than my white undergraduate students. However, my knowledge and experience did not seem to impress my students, because I was perceived as lacking credibility.

One of the shadow images of Asian Americans is that they are shy, quiet, silent, and passive. Although the image of quiet Asians is not necessarily a reality for all Asians (Amos, 2008), this image is prevalent in U.S. society. I am naturally outspoken to the degree that my white colleagues jokingly describe me as a “nonstereotypical Asian.” My natural assertiveness and confrontational personality seemed to shock my students, who were used to the quiet Asian stereotype. The fact that I counter my students’ arguments and even directly challenge their thought processes and behaviors seemed to irritate and, in some cases, infuriate them. Student comments like, “Don’t have professor telling her opinions as if they were facts!” – Spring 2006 – 4/2 (3.33/3.40), and “She was horribly racist and discriminated against two students in particular. She told us not to tell her our opinions on many accounts.” – Spring 2007 – 4/4 (4.21/4.29), are examples of how many students did not like what I said in class. My opinions were different

from their own and more importantly, I argued against them.

The model minority stereotypes treat Asians as forever foreigners. The perpetual image of foreignness was automatically aggravated by my accented English. I am not a native speaker of English and as a result I speak English with an accent. However, my non-native English is competent, and sometimes strangers mistake me for a native speaker of English. However, the most frequent complaint I receive from students concerns my accent, such as, “Teacher was hard to understand.” – Fall 2005 – 1/1 (4.17/4.17), and “Speak clearly. People can’t understand her.” – Fall 2006 – 2/3 (3.79/3.90). These comments, written by monolingual students, show little respect towards people who have largely mastered a foreign language. A more thorough analysis and critique of this common practice among my white students will be addressed in the “Discussion” section.

Whenever my students complain, “I’m confused because I don’t understand your English,” it is most likely not my English that poses a great difficulty for them, but their own careless moments in class in when they don’t pay attention to my utterances. However, students can still claim that my English is the cause of their difficulty. My English is automatically inferior due to my foreignness. This is the power white native speakers of English hold over non-native speakers of color: They can transfer their own weaknesses or mistakes onto others. Lippi-Green (1997) noted that when members of a dominant language group interact with people with nonstandard accents, they often feel that it is legitimate to blame the other for any communication difficulty.

My foreignness, triggered by my non-native English and my Asian appearance, raises extremely patriotic attitudes among my students. This is when I become fixated as a racialized non-American. As a person who experienced the Japanese education system and visited and lived in several other countries other than the United States as an educator, I use comparative analysis of the education systems, classrooms, teaching, and student behaviors of various countries. My comparative comments may sometimes include critiques of the United States. Whenever students hear my critiques of their own country, some always accuse me of anti-American biases in their student evaluations. They write comments such as, “Attitude towards culture is biased. Too much American bashing” – Summer 2006 – 3/3 (4.10/4.80). I am indeed a foreigner according to my legal status, but it is not my real legal status that makes me a perpetual foreigner. My Asian appearance and accent perpetuate my foreignness. Foreignness necessarily accompanies the image of profound cultural differences, thus legitimizes nativistic attitudes.

The Defense of Whiteness

After writing complaints about my teaching, some white students resorted to defending their race when they felt unreasonably attacked by me. Some white students claimed that the multicultural education course I taught was basically a white-bashing class. One student wrote, “Make sure she doesn’t hate white students. We are CULTURAL [*sic*] and aware of other cultures. Also she called every other race by their ‘PC’ but white people were ‘white’ and not ‘Caucasians’” – Fall 2005 – 4/5 (4.17/4.17). Another said, “I felt like the whole course was about how the white cultures [*sic*] is awful!” – Winter 2006 – 3/4

(3.86/4.00). Others wrote, “I hate that I was made to feel guilty for being white.” – Spring 2006 – 2/1 (3.33/3.40) and “Less white male beatings. I am sorry for things I didn’t even do.” – Winter 2008 – 3/3 (4.62/4.69). By portraying themselves as victims these white students must have felt relieved. However, the fact that they needed to defend themselves clearly indicates an awareness of power held as members of the dominant group. The strategy of positioning one’s self as the victim will be further addressed in the “Discussion” section below.

Some of the students adamantly claimed, “I’m not that kind of white!” One student wrote, “This class can generalize white people, which can be upsetting to students.” – Fall 2007 – 3/4 (4.27/4.31), while another said, “I felt like I am the bad guy or discriminated against because I am white” – Fall 2007 – 2/2 (4.27/4.31). As was evident, these students did not seem to “realize the privilege, presumption, and entitlement that are embedded in using their personal outsider knowledge and limited experiences to outrank the cumulated scholarship and extensive experiences of scholars” (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, pp. 183-284) delivered in my class. The students’ comments illustrate their strong desire to be seen as good white individuals. However, their comments also lack any understanding that even good whites still benefit from a system that historically and currently denies non-whites the same privileges.

The Impacts of Student Evaluations on My Teaching

In the first year (Fall 2005–Summer 2006), my course average score was 3.96 out of 5 in course content, and 4.10 in teaching effectiveness. My lowest score was 3.33 in course content, in Winter 2006. At that time, as a non-tenured assistant

professor, I needed to score at least a 3.75 average in both course content and teaching effectiveness to be promoted to a tenured associate professor. My department evaluated faculty members' teaching strictly through student evaluation scores. Because of this strictly numerical policy, I frequently experienced a stomachache and a headache caused by extreme anxiety at the end of each quarter when my students did evaluations of their teachers.

Although receiving above a 3.75 average score, I was alarmed for two reasons. First, as Hune and Chan (1997) found, Asian faculty, particularly Asian female faculty, struggle with lower tenure rates. I was the only Asian faculty at that time, which motivated me to accomplish twice as much in terms of student evaluation scores and publications as white faculty at a department with almost all whites. In addition, I had noticed that my colleagues and department chair(s) always pinpointed my lowest score rather than seeing the average score. Second, faculty of color who conduct research on their own ethnic groups and other groups or gender studies fields must face the reality that such work is not seen as objective or rigorous (Chan, 2005; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Once, I was bluntly criticized by the department chair and informed that my scholarly work lacked variety because I wrote only on multicultural education and that this was evidence of a lack of rigor. The mere thought that my scholarship could be evaluated as poor because of this institutional prejudice caused me to take my scholarship and my student evaluation scores very seriously.

To improve my student evaluation scores, I carefully analyzed the comments my students made in student evaluations. There were two categories they suggested

for improvement. First, the students did not want to focus on race and ethnicity only. For example, one student wrote, "I thought she should research different ethnic groups and expand but besides, just race. Talk about sexism, poor vs. rich. Variety!" – Winter 2006 – 2/2 (3.86/4.00). Another wrote, "There should be more information on different cultures. We weren't really taught about how to address different cultures and their needs" – Spring 2008 – 3/2 (4.13/4.00).

Second, the students wanted to know how to do multicultural education. The following comments represent their voice in this category:

- "Emphasize more what strategies and methodologies could be used to overcome racism rather than just talking about it." – Fall 2005 – 3/5 (4.17/4.17)
- "More time needs to be focused on actual teaching multicultural students. This was more of an ethnic studies class than a teacher education class." – Winter 2006 – 2/2 (3.86/4.00)
- "You could teach us how to teach multicultural students not just explain what multicultural education is." – Winter 2006 – 3/4 (3.86/4.00)
- "I was expecting to learn more about ways to teach multiculturally, not about ways people are racist." – Spring 2007 – 3/4 (4/21/4.29)

Kubota (2002) says, "One cannot assume that the power relation between the teacher and students is universally alike. The unique challenges confronted by women teachers of color require different teaching strategies" (pp. 302-303). As an instructor who encountered unique challenges and obstacles due to my background, I needed to

create my own unique teaching strategies that were different from my white colleagues.

Strategies

To accommodate my students' first set of suggestions that can be bundled as seeking a broad expression of culture and diversity, I changed the main textbook to Gollnick and Chinn's (2012) popular textbook, *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society*, which covers not only race and ethnicity, but also class, gender, language, religion, and other topics. I also adopted a supplemental textbook, Dresser's (2005) *Multicultural Manners*, which concisely describes traditions, customs, and taboos of various cultural and religious groups. Moreover, I stopped requiring my students to read Gary Howard's (2006) acclaimed book, *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, whose content on white privilege seemed to stir resentment and fury among my white students. Once, a white male student yelled at me in class after reading this book, "Why are we required to read this stupid book at college? Are you insane?"

The decision to withdraw Howard's book may be seen by some as surrender to white supremacy. However, Tatum (1997) explains that she tries to avoid discussing affirmative action with her white students because it tends to end in futile discussions. I believe that without adequate knowledge of and experiences in race and ethnic relations, my students will continue to deny the existence of white privilege, particularly if we focus only on it. I believe that a detour sometimes is the shortest way to reach the destination.

To accommodate the second set of suggestions that can be described as an

interest in doing multicultural education, I followed Gunning (2000), who stated that instructors using the student-centered approach experience a shift in power away from themselves when they invite students to participate actively in the learning process. I had noticed that the real reason for my students' complaints about my multicultural education class was basically a power issue. The students and I were entangled in a futile battle over which of us had more authority and credibility. Rong (2002) discusses her experience of this struggle as follows:

[W]hen students recognize that I intend to empower them and invite them to share power, the line between instructor and students in the class becomes blurred, students tend to take a closer look at the materials selected for class, and they tend to listen more thoughtfully because their own insights have been valued. They also tend to see the instructor's input as a contribution to the shared learning process rather than an authoritarian "lecture." (p. 135)

A Japanese proverb says, "To lose is to win." If the students were concerned about their own authority and credibility over me to that extent, I should use their sense of power for my advantage and let my students imagine they hold power in my class.

The following were the changes I made:

- Case studies/videos analysis. Instead of lecturing, I used many hypothetical cases that may happen in real classrooms and short videos that really happened at school. The students were first to discuss each

case/video in a small group to prepare for a whole class discussion. Some examples of these cases and videos included the use of Ebonics in the classroom, religious rights at public school, racially profiled drug raids at high school, and gay parents. The students freely discussed their opinions, but I also counter-argued against their opinions with perspectives buttressed by data and research at the end of the discussion time. When the counter-perspectives were presented with data and theories, the students seemed to take those perspectives not as an imposition by an authority but as constructive suggestions to better their ideas. The analysis of these cases and videos provided the students with a vicarious experience of “doing” multicultural education.

- Teaching demonstrations. J. A. Banks’s (2009) *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies* contains lesson plans pertaining to the major minority group. The students taught a lesson to their peers as if they were real teachers. This was a good opportunity for the students to practice a whole-class teaching and feel “doing” multicultural education.

- Debates. The students were separated into two sides, cons and pros, and argued against each other over controversial topics, such as bilingual education; the use of Native American mascot logos at school; whether Asian students are inherently smarter than other groups; whether African Americans are inherently better than others at sports; and whether we should hold a separate prom by ethnicity, race, religion, and sexual orientation. This assignment required research—reading and deep thinking, but the students gained deeper knowledge on each subject and were able to see both sides of the arguments, which led to critical examinations of what it really means to be different. As with the case studies, at the end

of the debate time, I provided the students with theoretical perspectives and empirical data to navigate their thinking more constructively.

- Self reflections. Instead of verbally expressing their thoughts on race and ethnicity in class, I made my students write about it. Writing is a safer site than the classroom to discuss controversial issues and also provides my students with critical exploration about the topics they usually do not wish to discuss. Guided by several questions on whiteness and white privilege, this assignment gave my students an opportunity to think about themselves racially and ethnically and how their privileged racial status has affected their lives, which they had rarely thought about. The students particularly appreciated my lengthy comments on their writings.

The above changes were all student centered, and I intentionally shifted my role from an authority to a facilitator.

After the changes above, my student evaluation scores increased. In Fall 2006-Summer 2007, my average was 4.64/4.70, in Fall 2007-Summer 2008, it was 4.52/4.54, in Fall 2008-Spring 2009, it was 4.68/4.78, and in Summer 2009-Fall 2009, it was 4.67/4.71. These scores were far above the required score for tenure/promotion. Moreover, my sections of a multicultural education course frequently had a waiting list and students visited my office and emailed me about their desire to be enrolled in my class.

I was finally granted tenure and promotion in the year 2011 after I was denied the same a year earlier in 2010. Later, I learned that my student evaluation scores were on the top end of all faculty members’ scores in my department, yet a white male faculty member whose student

evaluation scores were lower than mine was granted early tenure and promotion.

Discussions

This study investigated how white preservice teachers evaluated me, a Japanese female professor with a non-native English accent who taught multicultural education courses, and how I responded to student evaluations and comments. The findings revealed that I was perceived as lacking credibility to teach college classes and my accented English stirred nativistic attitudes among the students. In response, I successfully used a power-shift strategy to navigate the students' complaints about my teaching.

Henry (1993) stated that many white preservice teachers harbor feelings that faculty of color are not qualified to teach college-level classes and, therefore, are devoid of pedagogical, epistemological, and content-area knowledge that may inform their future classroom practices. It seems that white students are generally suspicious about faculty of color's educational level and credibility. However, from the AsianCrit's perspective, the fact that my students perceived me as lacking credibility is noteworthy because this contradicts the image of Asians as highly competent. How and why does this contradiction occur? Fujimoto (2006) made the following observation:

The Asian American minority is constantly being judged with these two lenses. When they are compared to other minorities, they are seen as the "model minority." However, placed in competition with the mainstream group, there are still negative judgments made, most of them not so obvious. Power, both blatant and subtle,

influences the lives of members of minority groups in the United States. (p. 40)

Asians could be highly regarded as model minorities as long as they do not enter into competition with whites. Ho and Jackson (2001) explain that individual whites feel that Asian Americans constitute a realistic threat because they possess too many positive qualities. In other words, in the higher education context, Asian professors are perceived as threatening competitors, not only by fellow faculty members but also by students. It seems that this is why the students felt compelled to find fault with my credibility. The sudden disappearance of a positive image of Asians in higher education suggests that the dominant group conveniently racializes Asians differently at different times and contexts. This point supports CRT's tenet that race is a social construct and "the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8).

My students also targeted my accented English when they complained. Rong (2002) has argued that the main reason why an accent makes immigrant faculty unpopular is that it inconveniences the listeners because the students have to make an extra effort to understand what the instructor is saying. This could be true. An accent makes listeners focus on what is uttered, while standard English flows smoothly into the listeners' ears. However, it seems that who speaks English with an accent is more important than the accent itself. This is where CRT's tenet of intersectionality becomes a helpful tool to analyze. Solórzano and Yosso (2009) contend that CRT acknowledges "the intercentricity of racialized oppression—the layers of subordination based on race,

gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality” (p. 133). My accent cannot be separated from my Asian appearance. They are intertwined. This intersection necessarily triggers the image of foreignness and difference about me among my students. That is why, it seems, that many students automatically perceived that my English must be hard to understand regardless of its actual comprehensibility.

Although Brutt-Griffler (2002) observed, “English has become a world language to the extent that it has been stripped of any simplistic association with Anglo-American and Western culture” (pp. vii-viii). However, the ultimate authority over the English language still rests with “native speakers who are tacitly assumed to be white, and of a certain social class and educational level” (Nero, 2006, p. 28). In other words, the English language is perceived as white property, and not an intellectual tool that can be effectively borrowed and wielded by an East Asian female. If the English language belongs to whites, it is understandable why my students made negative comments about my English: They were entitled to criticize any kind of English besides their own. Schmidt (2002) states, “The common associations of language with race and national origin create an ideological context in the U.S. where Americans speaking languages other than English, and whose origins lie in continents other than Europe, are racialized as alien outsiders, as *Others*” (p. 142, emphasis in the original). The image of others is frequently equated with inferiority. For example, Pennycook (1998) argues that white English native speakers are conceptualized as civilized, rational, logical, and thus superior, while non-whites and non-native speakers of English are

conceptualized as uncivilized, irrational, illogical, and thus inferior.

It is apparent that by being suspicious about my credibility and attacking my accented English, my students subtly claimed their superiority and my inferiority, and thus demonstrated their own whiteness. Their demonstration of whiteness was, however, camouflaged by their defense of whiteness. My students either defended their whiteness by portraying themselves as victims of a social system that unfairly favors people of color, or by asserting that there are two categories of whites: good and bad. Studies suggest that many liberal-minded whites are highly motivated to maintain an image of themselves as egalitarian individuals who are not prejudiced and do not discriminate against others on the basis of race (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Sue & Constantine, 2007). In McIntyre’s (1997) study, the white participants positioned themselves as “good whites” who were open-minded, better educated, and trying to be better people as opposed to “bad whites” who were rednecks with a Ku Klux Klan mentality. The victimization and the good white image my students demonstrated seem to be two ways to protect their sense of worth as persons and to circumvent any discourse that will make them confront the reality of their racial privilege. The defensive arguments my students made represent “whiteness as disadvantage” (Tatum, 1997, p. 114), a subtle but pervasive form of racism called “aversive racism” (Dovidio, 2001).

In summary, the study suggests that Asians are racialized fundamentally differently from the ways other racial minority groups are racialized. Kim (1999) stated that Asians are racialized with two axes—superior/inferior and insider/foreigner. It seems that my being an

Asian woman posed a threat to many white students who felt superior because of their race. In addition, the students perceived that I was profoundly culturally different, a perpetual foreigner. This underlined the tendency of many white students to disparage, fear, and discriminate against me and anyone who is perceived as Asian.

Reflections

I believe that I have become a better teacher because of the unique challenges and obstacles I encountered at a predominantly white university. I learned that successful teaching depends on the selection and application of appropriate procedures, derived in part from an awareness of the characteristics of the student population, recognition of a school's physical and human environment, and familiarity with the learning resources available at the university and in the community (Rong, 2002). I realized that although my arguments were truthful and righteous, my students would never get the points I made if I had continued to use a confrontational approach. Without providing my students with an opportunity to achieve a sense of empowerment in my class, I would not get through to them. I learned that relinquishing power and not getting myself caught in a power battle with my students was a wise way to teach multicultural education. It is ironic that a Japanese way of thinking, "To lose is to win," was the key to my successful teaching in a U.S. college.

However, I also keep asking myself a question, "Why do some faculty have to make an extra effort to reach out to students, while some do not?" The answer to this question, it seems to me, lies in the institutional nature of racism, which is "usually entrenched in an institution's history and is systemic and habitual"

(Stanley, 2006, p. 724). The strictly numeric system my department used to evaluate each faculty member's teaching ignores the weaknesses that the system of student evaluation carries, such as validity of students' opinions, the characteristics of the class, and the instructors' backgrounds. My white colleagues often say that because it is numeric, it is fair to all. However, this argument presumes that each faculty member is positioned on an equal playing field from the beginning. It ignores the fact that each social group has been historically racialized and positioned in a hierarchy where white males are on the top of the ladder. I have a hard time thinking about how equal I am compared to a white native-English-speaking male faculty member. The fact that a white male faculty member was granted early tenure and promotion in my department but I was not suggests that there is a different numeric system for different people.

Rong (2002) mentioned that not many American students have had any contact with any Asian person in their entire life, producing ignorance about this racial group. After I was granted tenure, the college of education hired two women from Taiwan. Although the three of us do not look alike, both students and my colleagues frequently mix us up and do not seem to be able to differentiate us, feeding into the Othering discourse. To them we are the same: short, petite, black-haired women from East Asia. A more troubling attitude, however, is that both students and colleagues do not seem to have any interest in trying to differentiate us because they make the same mistake over and over again. A majority of my students and colleagues express their desire to study Spanish, but not Chinese or Japanese because Spanish is more familiar to them and Asian languages are, according to them, "too foreign."

Ignorance can be fixed, but it is a lack of interest in fixing ignorance that perpetuates it. A lack of interest derives from the sense of superiority the dominant group holds, and this cannot be easily changed. Institutional structures encourage this lack of interest, maintaining unfamiliarity with and social distance from Asian people and cultures. It can be asked if courses about Asia as well as minority cultures and history are required for all preservice teachers in a teacher education

program. Does the university encourage and honor students who choose to study Asian and other languages besides English? Is the university recruiting and retaining minority faculty members and students? I hope that someday students and colleagues in our college of education will express an interest in differentiating us three Asian female faculty members and cease perpetuating the essentializing notion of “the Asian.”

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