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Not 'Fit in More,' I Would Say 'Stand Out Less': Dialogical Learning with a Filipino-American High School Student in a Predominantly White High School: A Case Study

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Introduction

This piece aims to demonstrate the nuanced understandings derived from open, and sincere dialogues between a teacher and student. K–12 students’ voices are important and necessary to educational research if researchers, educators, and school leaders are to make students’ education more enriching, more equitable, and more responsive. Sincere dialogues with students reveal important aspects of their identities that surveys and other data do not (Mansfield, 2014). Nonetheless, students’ own accounts of their educational experiences are too often omitted from studies ostensibly aimed at acquiring a better understanding of these experiences.

Perhaps this omission is derived in some part from educators’ fear that their responsibilities—in acknowledging students’ differences—are too perilous, too fraught with risk to skillfully navigate? This piece is the researcher’s attempt to acknowledge and to navigate. Shields (2004) argues that educators struggle to “distinguish between recognizing difference in legitimate ways and using a single characteristic or factor as a way of labeling” (p. 117). Nieto (1998) dissects the historical rationales for and against omitting student voices, and Freire (1970) famously insists that these voices must not simply be included, but essentialized. He highlights their omission as one more manifestation of educational oppression itself.

This piece extends this idea in using a student’s own voice to essentialize her experiences. The student is Jamie, a Filipino-American girl, in her predominantly White, New Jersey public regional high school. These experiences are not essentialized by comparing hers to those superficially or demographically comparable. While such comparisons are often contextually helpful, her experiences are essentialized by proposing their singularity. In this piece, the researcher engages in ongoing critical dialogues, considering, reflecting, and responding to the ways in which Jamie’s experiences are shaped by the demographic

composition of her school. This piece aims to characterize the nuances that characterize her educational reality.

In the interests of equity and justice: if students' voices need bolstering within K–12 educational literature, then minority students' voices need elevation. This study uses qualitative interviews to uncover links between Jamie's identity and both the quality and substance of her education. By highlighting Jamie's experiences, by valuing her recollections and self-critiques, and by orienting these using a multicultural education lens, this study aims to uncover how minority students' educational experiences are fundamentally distinct.

Review of Related Literature

Schools perform complex cultural functions: they can be incubators of social justice, but they are often tools for shaping the status quo. Shields (2004) laments the extent to which educators are fundamentally uncomfortable with addressing the notion of students' innate differences, suggesting a more cognizant approach to such differences would make for a more equitable education. Apple (1990) suggests that "educational institutions are usually the main agencies of transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity; indeed it is both in the same moment" (p. 6). This oppression is codified by way of "mechanisms of domination" (p. 2), evidenced perhaps most clearly in the manner that students are to learn. Before dominant and dominated cultures, though, it is important to acknowledge the dominance often innate in pedagogy itself. Friere (1970) defines the dehumanizing knowledge-acquisition dynamic of "the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (p. 72). This approach is not only problematic, but legitimized with its continuance. If

students are to be “‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher” (p. 72), students do, indeed and regardless of content, *learn*: they learn that *education* means *submission*.

Once *submitted*, students are to acquire the requisite content knowledge: they are to engage with the algebra equations, term papers, and lab reports that, students must uncritically assume, the school’s community has agreed are *important* for becoming productive members of society. The transmission of this knowledge is to have been vetted before it reaches the students. It is to have been critiqued, edited, and approved for consumption. Pivotal as these processes are, these intentional, prescribed actions only add up to a portion of what knowledge students acquire at school; this portion is only the manifest curriculum that “consists of such factors as guides, textbooks, bulletin boards, and lesson plans” (Banks & Banks, 2016, p. 20). There is also a “*latent curriculum* [...] that no teacher explicitly teaches but that all students learn. It is that powerful part of the school culture that communicates [...] how the school views them as human beings” (p. 20). Unfortunately, an essential piece of discerning *how* the school views students as human beings is discerning *the extent* to which schools view students as human beings.

Embedded within the notion that schools value their students’ humanity to disparate extents is the hierarchical structure of this *latent curriculum* (Banks & Banks, 2016). By its design and its ongoing maintenance, some students are valued more than others. Apple (1990) argues that the currency of this value system is “symbolic property - cultural capital - which schools preserve and distribute. [...] institutions of cultural preservation and distribution like schools create and recreate forms of consciousness that enable social control to be maintained” (p. 3). This allotment of cultural capital, via both latent and manifest curricula (Banks & Banks, 2016), consequentially exerts social control in American schools via its endorsement of “White,

middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of ‘culture’ are judged in comparison to this ‘norm’” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76).

Educators and educational researchers must acknowledge, discuss, and dissect these narratives. Educators must shy away from cultivating the kinds of mutually respectful relationships with students that neglect “even to hear or acknowledge some of the diverse voices that make up our schools and classrooms” (Shields, 2004, p. 117). They must also solicit and value the opinions of those who are marginalized by these narratives to craft a more just educational ideal. Whether it is via the *latent curriculum* or the manifest curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2016), school officials must confront inequality: what Nieto (1998) stresses is “the urgency to diversify the curriculum; and the obligation to transform traditional pedagogy so that it better meets the needs of all students” (p. 205).

Methodology

Problem Statement

As Banks (1993) asserts “[m]ost students in the United States are socialized within communities that are segregated along racial, ethnic, and social-class lines” (p. 7). This reflective single-subject case study concerns the educational experience of a student who falls outside the dominant culture of her school, and specifically the disparate ways that such students identify or reject cultural identities based on contexts. From these areas of interest, two questions emerged:

- 1) To what extent does a first-generation American high school student who is not part of her school’s dominant culture identify with, or feel included/excluded by this culture?
- 2) What effect does this identification, inclusion, or exclusion have on her education?

Student Selection

The researcher chose Jamie for this project partly for her candor: having both taught and

coached Jamie throughout her four years of high school, the researcher was familiar with Jamie's jokes and lighthearted discussion surrounding her cultural identity. She has a dry, keen sense of humor, and she makes regular use of it as she discusses others' (mostly erroneous) assumptions regarding her cultural identity. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE, 2018), Jamie's school is 78.23% White, 02.49% Black, 12.03% Hispanic, 06.05% Asian, 00.03% Native American, 00.13% Pacific Islander, and 00.67% Two or More Races. These numbers correlate with what Jamie noted in preliminary discussions to be an overwhelmingly "Caucasian" educational environment.

This researcher's self-conception also influenced Jamie selection for this assignment. There is a *convenience sampling* element to Jamie's inclusion: an existing rapport, coupled with many discussions focused on the implications of cultural identity in academic, rhetorical, and informal contexts. Despite this familiarity, as a straight, White, cisgender, English-speaking, middle class, male teacher, this researcher's demographic is precisely that which constitutes the dominant culture at the school.

Therefore, in the interest of transparency, there was initial concern that Jamie may have concealed uncomfortable realities of her experiences because of the power dynamics at work. This concern was verbalized to Jamie throughout interviews and discussions. Still, whenever Jamie "corrected" herself in conversation, when she referred to "White people, I mean, *Caucasians*," this researcher became especially cognizant not only of the inequalities Friere (1970) emphasizes in the "banking" (Ch. 2) approach to the classroom dynamic, but also the extent to which, on a daily basis, one can be "aware of the ideological and epistemological commitments [I] tacitly accept and promote by using certain models and traditions" (Apple, 1990, p. 14). Though it was made clear in preliminary conversations the great extent to which

her unapologetic candor was valued, there was a distinct impression that she was using the word *Caucasian* in place of *White* to avoid a perceived dearth of tact, as though the identifier *White* is, in some capacity, derogatory. Nonetheless, while the researcher may have felt especially cognizant of power dynamics, *Jamie's* precocious cognizance was a marvel.

Description of Student and Context

Jamie was born and raised in New Jersey, and she identifies as Filipino-American. When asked to describe her identity at school, Jamie described herself as follows:

I consider myself studious, but I don't think I go above and beyond like other people do. I kind of just do what needs to get done and I do the extra stuff that I need to do in order to get to college and that's kind of it. I don't know where I want to go. I want to go somewhere.

A funds-of-knowledge approach (Moll & Gonzales, 2003) to multicultural education suggests that Jamie's positionality—as a student who self-identifies as different from her school's dominant culture, as a young woman who processes her cultural identity as contextual, fluid, and unduly burdened by school structures—equips her with valuable, desirable assets she may put to use in life beyond her education. Jamie spoke to the value that she places on cultural fluidity when she outlined her vision of a college as a place that is, with respect to diversity, less structured in the way that it regards cultural identities:

Diversity is a factor when selecting a [college to attend]. I don't want another repeat in which I'm one of the only minorities. I feel like at college you can decide what kind of a minority you are or how much of one you want to be. Some colleges are more diverse than others, so if I get into one as opposed to another, I would choose to go to the more diverse one. It would make me feel more comfortable.

It seems natural that any student in a visible minority group could feel an entrenched sense of otherness in educational contexts. Jamie's education lacks what Gay (2002) describes as culturally responsive teaching: her teachers have not been "using cultural orientations, background experiences, and ethnic identities as conduits to facilitate [her] teaching and learning" (p. 614). On the contrary, Jamie's cultural identity has more often been a non-factor or an object of curiosity. It was never an important construct to be taken seriously, let alone *valued*.

Data Analysis

Jamie participated in four interviews over the course of two weeks. These conversations ranged in length from just over 60 minutes to 80 minutes. Jamie was concerned about her family's privacy, so Jamie passed along their answers to the researcher's questions during her interviews. In designing research questions, conducting qualitative research, and coding the data for themes and patterns, the researcher operated within a phenomenological framework (centered on a Filipino-American student's experience in a predominantly White school) ultimately bounded by the parameters of a case study (her accounts of her experiences in a general sense, in a familial sense, in a scholastic sense).

Theoretical Framework

This case study is presented and situated using the framework Shields (2004) proposed for educational leaders aiming to enact transformative educational change toward social justice. This study accepts Shields's simple yet profound verity, that "if strong relationships with all children are at the heart of educational equity, then it is essential to acknowledge differences in children's lived experiences" (p. 110). Within Shields's framework, this study acknowledges Jamie's predominantly White school as a hegemonic space, and Jamie as a person excluded from hegemony within this space. This study seeks and values Jamie's account of her educational

experiences within that space to the extent that it strives for an ideal in which student and educator are equal partners in learning. Shields (2004) encourages educators to continually evaluate their decision-making in such spaces, asking “Who is being included or excluded, whose reality is represented and whose marginalized” (p. 123)? This study’s ending personal reflection speaks directly to the researcher’s own questions of inadvertent complacency.

The study acknowledges power imbalances that exist for students whose identities fall outside of the dominant educational cultural identity. This study accepts Nieto’s (1998) assertion that “there is often a profound mismatch between students’ cultures and the content of the curriculum” (p. 194). Furthermore, this study is aligned to Banks’s and Banks’s (2016) concern for how school systems value their students as human beings. Nieto (1998) notes that critical pedagogy added to multicultural education such high regard for student input via its “insistence that students must be involved in the process of their own education” (p. 191). This study seeks to uphold this assertion by allowing the student’s accounts of her own experiences to dictate meaning-making in the research process. By collaboratively acknowledging, verbalizing, and dissecting the preeminent, extant hierarchy prescribed by public education—through ongoing student-and-teacher dialogues—this study heeds Freire’s (1970) problem-posing education ideal. This ideal is one in which “the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (p. 80).

Findings

Identification, Inclusion, and Exclusion: Home

Two prominent, interlocking themes emerged from examining the extent to which Jamie’s home life impacts her cultural identity. The first is the tremendous cultural capital that both of Jamie’s parents allot to the *American* identity. The second is the minimization of Filipino

aspects of her identity, often via humor, irony, and/or self-deprecation, deployed whenever Jamie is asked about them.

Language

Jamie's mother and father emigrated to the United States from the Philippines in 1998, albeit from different areas of their origin country. Her parents are divorced, and she splits time between their residences. In both contexts, her parents converse with her primarily in English, but Jamie notes that while her mother's first language is Ilocano and her father's is Tagalog, her own proficiency is negligible in the former and satisfactory in the latter. "I can understand Tagalog. I am an average speaker in Tagalog," she says. Notably, after a pause, she adds, "I mean I can, like, formulate thoughts and get them across to people... if I need to," minimizing the utility of her knowledge of Tagalog.

In this way, she relegates what could be perceived as a rich, valuable fund of knowledge to a base vehicle for transferring sentiments. When asked whether she keeps in touch with relatives in the Philippines or the extent to which she uses Tagalog in these contexts, she once more values this language proficiency, at best, merely as a means by which she makes herself situationally understood. "Yeah, we remain in touch with family," she says. "It's very important to us." Jamie then adds, "[My father] wants me to speak English well, and to articulate myself in a manner that is intelligible." A rhetorical analysis of this quote suggests Jamie positions Tagalog as unintelligible and English as intelligible (with some input from her father) to that end.

When directly asked if she would consider her knowledge of a second language to be an asset, she shrugs before replying: "At Red Lobster, where I work, we have a surprising amount of 'those of Filipino descent' [she makes air quotes with her hands], and *they* notice that *I* am of that descent, so they speak to me in Tagalog. They won't even talk to their actual servers... just

me.” Here too, Jamie seems to be poking fun at the idea that her knowledge of another language, one that is spoken by millions around the world, would be any more than a mild annoyance.

Race and Cultural Identity

When asked how important her understanding of *race* is to the way that Jamie sees herself, she did not know how to respond. When asked if, perhaps, her understanding of race is different from that of her parents, she opened up a great deal about the ways that race and cultural identity intertwine. Notably, while she never directly returned to the topic of race, she talked at length of how her identity is distinct from that of her parents. To convey the considerable premium that her parents place on American identity, Jamie offered her first name¹ as evidence for her parents’ belief in the positivity of assimilation:

My family tried to raise me as Americanized as possible to acclimate to life here. My dad named me my name because it sounded more American, rather than some type of name that could be more associated to my ethnicity.

That Jamie, an articulate and witty high school senior, did not know how to respond to a question about race until she considered how differently she perceived herself from her parents conveyed a sense of cultural displacement. Interestingly, Jamie only once actually used the word *Filipino* to refer to herself in any context. Here, it seems that “...rather than a Filipino name” is the economical ending to the previous quote. If this marked the only moment in which Jamie seems to avoid tying herself to *Filipino* identifiers, its absence here would likely not be as meaningful as it felt.

Goals and Aspirations

While Jamie’s stated goal is simply “getting into college,” her family’s strong appraisal

¹ *Jamie* is not this student’s real name, but *Jamie* was chosen with the student’s input and consent, as she agreed this name would be similar enough in Anglo-American origins to accurately convey the sentiment here and elsewhere.

of the American identity is evident in Jamie's mother's and father's stated expectation: Jamie ought to be successful, because they both uprooted their lives to offer Jamie the opportunity for a "better" one. Jamie's father (who is a physical therapist) stresses academic achievement in the United States as a viable, worthwhile vehicle for sustained success in accordance with Apple's (1990) critique of the liberal ideology of education: "[t]he education system is seen as providing a ladder and an avenue for social mobility, implementing objective selection procedures for the establishment of a meritocracy, in which the only qualification for personal advancement is 'ability'" (p. 19).

Her father's responses stressed the general availability of "opportunities" in the United States (both as his principal reason for emigrating to the US and as the primary rationale for why Jamie needs to academically apply herself), while her mother (who is a nurse) has specific career expectations for her daughter. "My mom wants me to be in the medical field," Jamie says. She opens on her phone the transcriptions of her parents' responses and begins reading. "It puts a bit of pressure on me when [my mom] says, 'you know, my coworker went to *Princeton*,' or 'He [*Jamie points*] graduated from Johns Hopkins; now he's a *neurosurgeon*.'" Jamie laughs, then says to me, "that's great, Mom. I work at Red Lobster."

Identification, Inclusion, and Exclusion: School

While Jamie repeatedly expressed discomfort at those Filipino aspects of her identity when compared to those of her family, she was critical and occasionally acerbic in her characterization of the minimal extent to which her school valued her cultural identity. An examination of Jamie's experience within a funds-of-knowledge framework (Moll & Gonzales 2003) yields a pattern of deficit-based treatment at the hands of her teachers and students.

Sense of Cultural Self

A sense of cultural displacement was evident, as it was when examining Jamie's life at home, but the displacement that she felt at school seemed to come from a different place entirely. As Gay (2002) notes, "[c]ulture simultaneously anchors and blinds us" (p. 617). To that end, at home, Jamie clearly and consistently distinguishes her identity from that of her parents in a particular manner. At school, she was more prone to adaptation, and occasionally, contradiction.

When Jamie was asked if she can "be herself" at school, she immediately said, "no," but added:

Aren't there several versions of yourself? The one that you display to others, the person that you want to be, and the person that no one sees? Being in this school specifically, a predominantly White school, I would find myself thinking 'maybe I would fit in more if I were not Asian?' Not 'fit in more.' I would say 'stand out less.'

Her response reads as a tacit acknowledgment of how necessary it is as a minority student to adapt one's identity situationally. When asked for an example of a moment like this, Jamie said, "so say you're reading about Imperialism in the 1800s, and then you see the Philippines pop up—you feel people staring at you. I hate that feeling." While Jamie noted that her reaction to this moment and others like it was one of silence, her resultant academic achievement is due in part to a certain navigational capital derived from Jamie's maintenance of "individual agency within institutional constraints" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

Once Jamie used the word *Asian*, she was asked how strongly she identifies with this term. Perhaps because of how regularly she has been asked as a minority student to speak on behalf of others who superficially resemble her, Jamie's response was characterized by the pronouns *we* and *them*. Notably, her response did not include the word *Filipino*. "It's complicated," Jamie said. "Because we don't know what we are. Like for the SATs, I don't think

I identify with an Asian culture. I don't think I look how an Asian person looks. 'Asian' is an identity given by other people to me, not one I would use for myself." Tellingly, when asked why she thinks people repeatedly give her an identifier that does not accurately identify her, she said, "I don't think people care; it's not important to them. I don't even know who 'them' is. The majority, maybe?"

Here, Jamie's cultural identity in school seems to be neither anchor nor blinder (Gay, 2002), but an entity made insignificant by repeated acts of carelessness. While Nieto (1998) notes that "Even under the best of circumstances, the secondary school experiences of most students are characterized by uncertainty and tension" (p. 191), Jamie's experiences seem to fall into a pattern of submission to the dominant White, middle class culture. McLaren (2003) acknowledges that "[a] dialectical understanding of schooling permits us to see schools as sites of both domination and liberation" (p. 70), but Jamie's experiences suggest that the latter is the exception to, and only in spite of, the former.

Academics

Two of Jamie's teachers—an environmental biology teacher and a US history teacher— informed the analyses of Jamie's classroom-based recollections. Both were complimentary when asked about Jamie's academic performances. Both described her academic efforts as "earnest," and both also used the word "quiet" to describe her classroom demeanor. The history teacher described Jamie's writing skills as strong, and the science teacher remarked that Jamie "was proactive whenever she required extra help" and that she "flourished in a 1-on-1 context rather than the full class."

A clear theme that emerged from Jamie's classroom experience was the cultural alienation that she felt, particularly in her history class. This is separate from and more drastic

than the rudderless sort of displacement she feels in social or familial spheres. This alienation seems derived from not only the exclusion of those like her from the course content, but also from the discourse of her peers and one teacher's cursory, flawed attempts at culturally inclusive pedagogy.

Jamie noticed ingrained cultural biases built into teacher/student dynamics (Friere, 1970). When asked if she can recall any examples in which she has felt that her identity was a disadvantage, she alarmingly listed several with relative ease. "In my psychology class, we were on the five senses," Jamie says, "and the teacher said, 'I don't know how Asian people can eat rice because it has no flavor.'" This is obviously an offensive statement for many reasons, but when Jamie was asked specifically about the nature of the statement's insensitivity, she noted that she "wasn't offended. I was just there, and I was one of, maybe, two people who weren't Caucasian in the room." The means of suppression, domination, and cultural marginalization here are many and complex, but what stood as most distinguishing (aside from the stupefying ignorance of the teacher's comment,) was that Jamie, who does not identify as Asian, seemed convinced other people saw her as Asian in this moment, and thus a target. In this way, Jamie internalizes the dominant culture's oppression.

Discussion

Amplifying minority students' voices in educational research is a proactive, critical step toward understanding the myriad ways that educational systems disserve minority students. When researchers (and, in practice, educators) fail to adequately confront, understand, and ameliorate minority students' experiences, the consequences are neither limited to the sufferers nor to the sufferers' immediate educational confines: Jamie noted, for instance, that her high school experiences as a minority student informed her desire to seek a postsecondary academic

environment that is more diverse. To this end, it is critical to understand the extent to which education is a fundamentally *different* endeavor for minority students. It is equally critical that researchers do not mistake *subtle* injustices for *insignificant* injustices.

Worth noting in this distinction between *subtle* and *insignificant* is Jamie's recollection of her psychology teacher's ignorant stereotype. This recollection was offered in response to a question requesting an example of her identity being used against her. Jamie was not specifically targeted in this situation. Even if she had been targeted by the teacher, she noted that she does not think of herself as Asian. Though the teacher's ignorant stereotype was not subtle, there is *subtle significance* in Jamie's observation that though she did not take any direct offense to the comment, she was "just there," as "one of, maybe, two people who weren't Caucasian in the room." This case study demonstrates that a minority student need not be directly targeted to be marginalized.

The *significance* of this moment (and several similar instances) is that it demonstrates how education is a fundamentally different endeavor for minority students. It demonstrates how, as a minority student, her self-conception is less important than others' conception of her identity. The *subtlety* lies in that she is marginalized even when she is not directly targeted. This recollection is amplified when combined with her separate comments: "'Asian' is an identity given by other people to me, not one I would use for myself," "I don't think people care [about accurately describing Jamie's identity]; it's not important to them. I don't even know who 'them' is. The majority, maybe?" Jamie's encompassing characterization of "them, the majority," is a testament to the totality of schools' enforcement of Banks's and Banks's (2016) "*latent curriculum*" (p. 20). Taken together with others' characterizations of Jamie, this makes for systemic and dehumanizing reciprocity: the majority does not distinguish the individual's

identity; the individual does not distinguish collective's identity.

Implications

Jamie's commentaries should not only be regarded as another instance of the countless, sobering testaments to the systemic injustices educational institutions perpetuate toward minority students. Jamie's words should also serve as compelling evidence for minority students' perseverance and resilience in the face of these systemic educational injustices. The use of this term, *systemic educational injustices*, merits clarification: if one insists that students have an equal right to the opportunities provided by a high-quality public education, Jamie's account of her high school experience is unjust. If one also insists that "educational institutions are usually the main agencies of transmission of an effective dominant culture" (Apple, 1990, p. 6), this unjust *educational* experience is *systemic*.

How, then, do stakeholders restore educational justice to minority students like Jamie? Such restoration needs to originate from a place of sincere honesty, an origin well-found via one's equally well-calibrated educational compass. Shields (2004) offers a framework for cultivating this place underscored by four ideals, which "taken together—these four terms—just, democratic, empathetic, optimistic—offer strong support for educational decisions that are socially just" (p. 125). From here, sincere dialogues between students and teachers are necessary, and the stakes could not be higher. Chapman (2014) notes that when students of color in predominantly White spaces must "make daily decisions that impact their college readiness and limit their future prospects based on adult treatment, the status quo of White academic superiority is re-instantiated and racial justice thwarted" (p. 322). To understand and to ultimately be responsive to the individual value of minority students' circumstances within schools' educational cultures, educators can proactively seek to uncover students' unique

educational circumstances through ongoing dialogues.

Jamie noted that she could not be herself at school. It remains to be seen how this self-perception will affect her educational trajectory. Zirkel (2004) noted the effects of peer relationships and the school's social climate in shaping minority students' "achievement-oriented identities" (p. 72). In contextualizing Jamie's experiences as those of a student of color being educated within a predominantly White school, especially poignant is the modest, telling perception with which she hypothesized how her life would be if she looked more like others: she would not "fit in more," but "stand out less." To ensure that hegemonic spaces do not encourage a worldview in which one wishes to look more like others for the luxury that comes with anonymity, minority students must not be commodified or "reduced to things" (Freire, 1970, p. 103). Researchers and educators must go further than, for instance, a policy of inclusion. *Inclusion* is, obviously, beyond necessary. Still, Jamie did not explicitly recount within her educational experiences any instances of outright exclusion. In this sense, she was included. Jamie was, however, unjustly marginalized. This researcher would consider himself *inclusive*, but these interviews with Jamie marked a first step toward any kind of authentic understanding of Jamie's experiences' nuances.

Dialogues reveal these nuances. It is important to note how Jamie's experiences are shaped by the interactions between her identity and that of her school. At the same time, her experiences must not simply be valued only as those of a minority student within a White school. Jamie's experiences must be Jamie's experiences. Shields (2004) offers a roadmap for developing understanding, warning against "pathologizing" difference; educators must come "to understand it by placing dialogic interactions and positive relationships at the center of moral practice" (p. 128). This article is a dialogic interaction toward that moral understanding.

To prevent marginalization, to truly liberate minority students like Jamie from systemic educational injustice, is to require proactive intervention from all educational stakeholders. Such actions must include robust, ongoing efforts preemptively and continually seeking to understand minority students' educational experiences as distinct from the students who comprise educational institutions' dominant culture. True humanization, though, goes still further: true humanization must (additionally) be individual and reciprocal: school officials, at all levels, must dispense with occupational hierarchy and position themselves as learners. They must engage and seek to understand individual students' identities. For justice's sake, these efforts must yield an educational paradigm in which all students confidently, comfortably engage their educators. This work will not be complete until the magnitude of this reality is such that it is, itself, the "effective dominant culture" (Apple, 1990, p. 6) of educational institutions.

Personal Reflection

This project taught me a great deal, but its most profound lessons were those relating to the silent struggle for decency and legitimacy that students feel when their cultural identity is outside of the dominant one. That Jamie's understanding of her cultural identity is informed by her experiences is a given, but these experiences' palpable effects on the nature and quality of Jamie's education are important to unpack. While Jamie can accurately be characterized as academically successful, this has come (at least in part) in lieu of feeling excluded and devalued within the school's collective culture. That Jamie sees cultural identity as evolving, situational, and perhaps as a construct to be evaluated in relation to the evaluator seems at once admirable pragmatism and conversely a repressive compromise.

Either way, my final reflection comes by way of Jamie's self-evaluation: examining her experiences through the lens provided by the literature and my findings is asking myself how

complicit I am in perpetuating the narrative that oppresses Jamie and those others who fall outside the bounds of the dominant culture. I do not shy away from class discussions focused on race, identity, and the intersectional nature of each; I have also tried to cultivate the specialized knowledge, experiences, and openness required (Lac and Diamond, 2019) for sincere discussions to transpire in my classrooms. I have always thought of myself as an accepting, inclusive educator, but am I practitioner of critical multicultural education? I taught Jamie twice. I coached her twice. I admittedly lacked the foresight, courage (or, optimistically, perhaps I knew her profound decency to the extent that I was not sure that she would answer honestly if her opinion was not in the affirmative) to ask if I was an effective multicultural educator. I was, however, curious to know how she, a 12th grade student, regarded the degree to which she enjoyed a multicultural education during her four years of high school.

“To what extent have you experienced a multicultural education here?” I asked. She looked as though she was going to respond, but she hesitated.

“What would multicultural education entail?” she, perhaps tellingly, asked in response. I offered a definition from the literature, but when she still seemed unsure how she ought to respond, I offered her an off-the-cuff colloquial substitute.

“Multicultural education, as in teachers and students were sensitive to who you are as an individual, sensitive to your identity. The extent to which they were thoughtful on a day-to-day basis, about who you are as a human being, a person. Considering all aspects of your identity in a serious and respectful way. How much you got to see people like you, represented, or stories about people who are like you in a recognizable way. In the books you read, in the media you consumed at school,” I said. She laughed.

“Here? Like out of 10? Like is 10 being ‘I’m *so* culturally inclined?’” she asked. I

nodded. She thought for a moment. “I guess, like, let’s say a strong 3? Yeah, a strong 3.”

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