**Repressive Tolerance and the ‘Management’ of Diversity**

Inclusion and diversity are some of the biggest buzz words across American education, indeed American society, today (Vavrus, 2014). Pretty much any contemporary organization will make a public commitment to creating an inclusive workplace environment, and to celebrating the diversity of its employees. Diversity is often stated to be the organizational factor that releases the entrepreneurial spirit and the intersection of the different racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of organizational members are assumed to spark some creative synergy (Mendez, 2017). Most educational organizations are proud to document how they are striving to have more diversity of representation at every level. There are student scholarships created for minority applicants, attempts to recruit faculty of color, the creation of multicultural services offices and high profile leadership appointments. The assumption is that having a more racially diverse community on campus will lead automatically to a more anti-racist institution. This effort to increase minority representation is often paralleled in curricular terms where instructors across the disciplines do their best to incorporate resources from scholars of color, integrate an analysis of race into their curriculum whenever possible, and be alert to the presence of racist behaviors and micro-aggressions in class (Wing Sue, 2010).

**Framing Diversity Within White Supremacy**

As a critical theorist, my analytical standpoint is always to view any organizational behavior (such as attempts to diversify curricular and organizational structures) from a particular viewpoint. A critical theory perspective typically analyzes how power structures try to stay intact and deflect challenges to their permanence by using dominant ideologies to maintain control (Brookfield, 2004). Dominant ideologies are the sets of ‘big’ ideas – democracy, capitalism, and individualism are the publicly honored big three – that are embedded within daily institutional practices and habits. These ideologies are the cultural air we breathe without fully understanding just how powerfully the worldviews they represent frame our participation in daily life and construct how we assign meaning to our experiences. They are the giant perceptual confirmation biases we carry around in our heads ensuring that each new set of events we negotiate are understood in a certain way.

Capitalism, democracy and individualism in particular are intertwined around the notion of freedom. Economically, capitalism is proposed as the way of ordering the economy that secures the freedom of anyone to start a business, make a fortune and change the world. Its emphasis on free enterprise is recently best embodied in the rags to riches stories of Silicon Valley CEO’s who become billionaires as platforms developed in their parent’s garage change cyberspace. This capitalist emphasis on the individual economic freedom to manoeuver is paralleled in the ideology of democracy where everyone’s freedom to think and vote however they like is believed to ensure a representative democracy that spans the diversity of political viewpoints and identities. Central to each ideology is the idea of individualism; the conviction that no-one can tell us what to think or how to behave. Stir these three ideologies and you have a heady brew that proclaims the USA as the guardian of liberty threatened by enemies who desire to impose grey, socialist conformity that bleeds the joy from life.

Other ideologies are less overt but still just as influential. We have the ideology of patriarchy that secures male control. This ideology holds that men should be in positions of authority because of their superior intellect. Men are deemed to think more logically, reason more objectively, and therefore to come to better decisions for the good of all than women. Women are viewed as easily swayed by emotion, compassionate and moved by the heart rather than the head when it comes to making decisions. As a result, they are not to be trusted when the tough decisions come around. Those are the province of men who will be guided by objective reason not emotion.

The most overlooked element in efforts to diversify education is the fact that they always take place within the context of the ideology of white supremacy. White supremacy is a set of ideas that is sedimented in institutional practices to ensure that white people stay in control of the systems and structures that control our society. By white supremacy I don’t mean the groups of white nationalists, KKK and Aryan Nation members who openly espouse racial genocide, exclusion, separation or repatriation. I mean instead the idea that whites, because of their superior intellect and reasoning power, should be in control of decision-making for society as a whole. White supremacy perpetuates the idea that whites should naturally hold the most powerful positions in business, the judiciary, the legislature, the military and the media because they can think better. Whites are held to be able to use reason more effectively, think more logically and therefore be more objective in their decision-making processes. This reflects the enduring power of European enlightenment thought and its privileging of reason and objective analysis seen particularly in positivism and scientism.

People of color, by way of contrast, are viewed as moved more by passion and raw emotion, easily inflamed and therefore not to be trusted with decision-making authority. White supremacy views this emotion in mostly negative ways, suggesting it can quickly be converted into aggression and inflamed mob violence. Various media outlets may highlight mostly African American comedians who poke fun at white rigidity and inhibition, but this push back is only a very small element of the constant image of Black people as struggling, and eventually failing, to hold their essentially emotional nature in check. This duality of white reason set against the uncontrollability of people of color is a central tenet of post-colonialism (Huggan, 2016). Post colonialism illustrates the continued existence of a colonial mentality in common explanatory mechanisms; for example, the idea that the supposed chaos exhibited by newly independent countries in the southern hemisphere is a result of the departure from their territories of white reason. Colonialism holds that when the white imperial nations of Europe were in control everything worked rationally and smoothly in sharp contrast to the civil wars and corruption that descend after whites departed. This all neatly forgets, of course, the fact that the cause of many civil wars was the creation of tribal animosity occasioned by the European practice of hacking up territories with no respect for indigenous history.

When diversity initiatives happen in a predominantly white organization we need to remind ourselves that it happens against the background of the white racial frame (Feagin, 2013). This frame is a white supremacist frame that positions whiteness as the norm. Critical theory (Brookfield, 2004) is particularly interested in how white supremacy manages diversity projects to head off any substantive threat to the authority of whites. As with any effective ideological manipulation this is not done overtly. There is no outright suppression or dismissal of the idea that more diversity is a threat. On the contrary, most organizations are quick to trumpet the strides they are making to ensure a workplace that looks like America. But this is essentially a smokescreen. In reality, the everyday and mostly unnoticed and unchallenged daily workings of white supremacy ensure that structures remain essentially intact and that the result of institutional decisions, even at the highest level, is to underscore the legitimacy of white authority and white control.

How does this happen? One of the most provocative concepts proposed by critical theory to explain the way institutions work to stay the same, whilst trying to present to the world an image of dramatic transformation, is that of repressive tolerance.

**The Concept of Repressive Tolerance**

Repressive tolerance is an idea expounded by the critical theorist Herbert Marcuse in an essay examining the concept of tolerance published in 1965 (Marcuse, 1965). At the time ‘tolerance’ was a much-favored term in the lexicon of progressive politics and education. It was intended to convey a generosity of spirit towards ideas and behaviors that differed from the norm, and to prevent a knee-jerk labeling of anything out of the ordinary as somehow being deviant. For those reasons it sat very well with the ‘do your own thing’ philosophy of the time that encouraged experimentation with multiple alternative lifestyles.

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s there was arguably no more famous American public intellectual than Marcuse. In a text published at the time, Marks (1970) noted that despite death threats from the Klu Klux Klan, contempt from *Pravda* (the Soviet state sponsored newspaper), and attempts by the San Diego post of the American Legion to deprive him of his academic post, “he has nevertheless more general popularity than any other living philosopher” (p. 8). I was one of the millions reading Marcuse in the late 1960’s and it was then that I came across his notion of repressive tolerance.

Marcuse’s analysis of tolerance was like an intellectual explosion in my life. I can even picture where I was when I first read it, sitting in the lounge area of the *Lanchester College of Technology* library in Coventry, England. Suddenly, things that had nagged away annoyingly at me became clear. In a brief essay, Marcuse had nailed the contradictions embedded in the educational urge to hold free, open discussions that actively included the widest range of views, and to withhold judgmental condemnation of ideas that differed from our own familiar beliefs. He had also given me one of my earliest insights into how organizations maintain their power structures when directly challenged. Instead of condemning challenge and trying to repress it head on, organizations in a society supposedly devoted to the project of becoming more open and tolerant were more likely to appear to change whilst still maintaining the status quo.

I was so taken by Marcuse’s essay that when I became a professor of adult education I would scour used bookstores for used copies that I could distribute to students. Typically, a corner of my office would have 30-40 copies of the booklet stacked up ready for me to hand out in class when the notion of repressive tolerance came up. What was it about his idea that was so compelling to me?

The central idea of repressive tolerance is that an all-embracing tolerance of diverse views in curriculum, classroom discussions and organizational functioning always ends up legitimizing an unfair status quo. Such tolerance for Marcuse is repressive, not liberating. Broadening the perspectives reviewed in a curriculum makes teachers think they are giving equal weight to radical ideas, when in fact placing them alongside mainstream ones always dilutes their radical qualities. Repressive tolerance ensures that adults believe they live in an open society characterized by freedom of speech and expression while in reality their freedom is being constricted further and further. Because of the powerful influence of dominant ideology Marcuse mistrusts educators’ instinctive preference for presenting students with a diversity of perspectives and then letting them make up their minds which makes most sense to them. The logic of his argument is that students’ previous ideological conditioning will always predispose them to choose what for them are common sense socially sanctioned understandings. The educator’s task, indeed her responsibility, therefore is to confront – even coerce – students into engaging with troubling ideas that they would otherwise avoid.

Repressive tolerance also explains how institutions manage threats to their authority and legitimacy. Instead of trying to oppose the challenge directly by discrediting those issuing the challenge or minimizing the nature of its importance, institutions respond in a far subtler and ultimately more effective way. They appear to take the challenge seriously, creating working parties, task forces and advisory committees to document the grievance being brought to their attention. They then make changes to institutional functioning that appear substantive and important. In the case of being accused of racist practices or a lack of diversity, they strive for greater representation of people of color in the images and materials they present to the world as representing what the institution is about. This is usually followed by an effort to recruit more members of color into the organization. In higher education this means diversifying the student body, staff and faculty. Often there are high profile appointments of one or two people of color to the senior leadership team or the creation of a diversity office.

But repressive tolerance holds that all these measures can be taken without any fundamental change to the structures of power within the organization. Whites will still be overwhelmingly in positions of institutional power and authority and, ensnared by the ideology of white supremacy, will continue to act in racist ways. To take just one small example, faculty of color are often hired specifically to teach the courses dealing with diversity and race in predominantly white universities. Their performance of this responsibility is at least partly assessed via student evaluation of teaching forms that ask students to rate how effective, clear, and responsive instructors have been in delivering content, explaining difficult material, addressing questions and providing feedback. The results of these forms are then factored into reappointment and tenure decisions.

In a predominantly white institution the courses that are often most feared or disliked by white students are those dealing with race and diversity. Yet, to meet a diversity requirement, a certain number of these need to be taken. Faculty members of color show up and are deemed immediately to be ‘playing the race card’ in teaching this content and to be intent on shaming, embarrassing and making white students feel guilty for things they had no control over way back in history. As the class engages with more and more contentious issues, students feel like they are being forced to admit to being racist and that instructors of color are singling them out unfairly. Consequently, on the end of term evaluations of teaching they hammer the instructor for what they judge to be his or her pursuit of an unjustified and unrelenting focus on fictional racism. The faculty of color then has to justify poor teaching evaluations that have been occasioned by them simply doing their job; teaching about the inherently raw and contentious topic of race.

In this situation the institution appears to have taken the challenge of being racist or lacking diversity seriously. It has created a diversity requirement for students, approved new courses on race and diversity, and hired faculty of color to teach these. The problem is that it has not changed things at a deeper, structural level. In the case of the evaluation of teaching process, all the power is in the hands of the white students filling out the forms and the white department chairs or deans reading them. The way white supremacy frames how they interpret events around them means that students will view faculty of color as enemies pushing an agenda and focusing on a topic that doesn’t really exist anymore, and administrators will view faculty of color as ‘failing’ because their teaching scores are poor. They are then quietly counseled to leave before tenure decisions become due and replaced by a new hire who then repeats the cycle.

So nothing substantively changes. On the surface it looks as though a major new institutional initiative has been launched. But the way this is implemented means that ideology is unchallenged and white supremacy continues to frame daily practices, routines and habits.

**How Repressive Tolerance Works**

Marcuse argued that repressive tolerance exhibits two central dimensions. First, it is the tolerance, in the name of impartiality, fairness or even-handedness, of intolerable ideologies and practices. Marcuse was highly critical of the liberal impetus behind calls to diversify for diversification’s sake. In his view, this mistakenly framed diversity as a value-neutral practice that correlated the number of viewpoints studied with learners’ intellectual development. Taken to extreme it justified students giving equal weight and consideration to perspectives that were racist and that advanced the interests of an unrepresentative and coercive minority, alongside their consideration of ideas that were inherently more democratic. Those who proclaim tolerance for all viewpoints in Marcuse’s opinion only served to reinforce an unfair status quo. To Marcuse, “what is proclaimed and practiced as tolerance today, is in many of its most effective manifestations serving the cause of oppression” (1965, p. 81). This is because “tolerance is extended to policies, conditions and modes of behavior which should not be tolerated because they are impeding, if not destroying, the chances of creating an existence without fear and misery” (p. 82).

A number of contemporary higher education debates in the United States are examples of the dynamic Marcuse describes. One is the call for creationism to be given equal weight in the curriculum alongside the theory of evolution, with the implication that both have roughly equal scientific credibility. Such a position implies that a valid choice exists between one or the other argument and that it is fine for students to choose which to believe is the more scientifically accurate. Another is teaching about climate change that analyzes global warming as a contested theory, a viewpoint that is supported by some scientists but dismissed by others. A third is the idea of the bell curve as applied to the study of intelligence, in which the innate superiority of Europeans is proposed as an intellectually tenable proposition. In all three cases the logic of diversity requires that we frame classroom discussions of these issues in terms that give equal and serious consideration to both, or multiple, sides of an argument. Marcuse’s point is that in giving equal consideration to views that reinforce the interests of White supremacy, global capitalism and religious fundamentalism, teachers end up undercutting their own intention of developing students’ powers of critical thinking.

The second dimension of repressive tolerance is the way it marginalizes dissenting views and efforts for democratic social change whilst appearing to support them. How does repressive tolerance work to achieve this? Essentially it ensures the continued marginality of minority views by placing them in close, comparative association with dominant ones. When a curriculum is widened to include dissenting and radical perspectives that are considered alongside the mainstream perspective, the minority perspectives are always overshadowed by the mainstream one. This happens even if the radical perspectives are scrupulously accorded equal time and space. As long as the dominant perspective is included as one of several possible options for study its presence inevitably overshadows the minority ones which will always be perceived as alternatives, as others – never as the natural center to which students should turn.

Irrespective of the educator’s viewpoint (which may be strongly opposed to dominant ideology) the mere inclusion of that ideology as one option ensures its continued dominance. This is because mainstream ideology has so seeped into our neural pathways that it operates at a preconscious level shaping our responses to alternatives that are proposed to it. The only way to promote real tolerance – liberating or discriminating tolerance in Marcuse’s terms – is to deny learners the chance to consider mainstream perspectives as one possibility among many. Instead of exposing people to a smorgasbord of mainstream and radical perspectives, educators practicing true tolerance will allow students exposure only to alternative views, to dissenting traditions.

Marcuse argues that repressive tolerance is hard to detect because it masks its repressive dimensions behind the façade of open, even-handedness. Alternative ideas are not banned or even censored. Critical texts are published and critical messages circulated. Previously subjugated knowledges and perspectives (Africentrism or Queer Theory for example) are inserted into the curriculum. The defenders of the status quo can point to the existence of dissenting voices (such as Marcuse’s) as evidence of the open society we inhabit, and the active tolerance of a wide spectrum of ideologies. But the framing of meaning accomplished by hegemony is all. Sometimes the meaning of radical texts is diluted by the fact that the texts themselves are hard to get, or incredibly expensive. I have often thought about this when I buy books exploring radical ideas that cost over $100.

More likely the radical meanings are neutered because they are framed as the expressions of obviously weird minority opinion. As Marcuse writes; “other words can be spoken and heard, other ideas can be expressed, but, at the massive scale of the conservative majority … they are immediately ‘evaluated’ (i.e. automatically understood) in terms of the public language – a language which determined ‘a prior’ the direction in which the thought process moves. Thus the process of reflection ends where it started: in the given conditions and relations” (Marcuse, 1965, p. 96). Marcuse cites Orwell’s analysis of language in illustrating how the meaning of peace is redefined so that “preparing for war *is* working for peace” (Marcuse, 1965, p. 96).

The contemporary discourse of diversity, of opening up the field of higher education to diverse voices, perspectives and traditions, can be analyzed quite effectively using the idea of repressive tolerance. An honorable and emancipatory position to take is that higher education research, theorizing and practice needs to include alongside the grand narrative of Eurocentric rationality work that draws on other cultural traditions and represents different racial perspectives. Providing an array of alternative perspectives and sensibilities seems to be a major step in moving away from a situation in which White, male, European voices dominate.

Yet Marcuse alerts us to the possibility that this apparent broadening of voices can actually reinforce the ideology of White supremacy that it purports to undercut. By widening curricula to include a variety of traditions we appear to be celebrating all positions. But the history of White supremacy, and the way that language and structures of feeling frame Whiteness as the natural, inevitable conceptual center, means that the newly included voices, sensibilities and traditions are always positioned as the exotic other. Higher educators can soothe their consciences by believing progress is being made towards racial inclusivity and cultural equity, and can feel they have played their small but important part in the struggle. But as long as these subjugated traditions are considered alongside the dominant ideology, repressive tolerance ensures they will always be subtly marginalized as exotic, quaint, other than the natural center.

The logic of liberating or discriminating tolerance would require an immersion only in a racial or cultural tradition that diverged radically from mainstream ideology; for example, a higher education graduate program that allowed only the consideration of Africentric ideas and perspectives. The logic of repressive tolerance holds that as long as Africentrism is considered as one of many possible perspectives, including Eurocentrism, it will always be positioned as the marginal alternative to the White supremacist center.

**Repressive Tolerance and Diversifying the Curriculum**

Repressive tolerance warns that an apparent opening up of the curriculum to include a wide array of intellectual traditions is often done in a way that serves chiefly to underscore the legitimacy of mainstream ideas. When an alternative idea is included alongside a mainstream one, people’s prior familiarity with the mainstream ensures that the alternative, oppositional perspective is seen as an exotic option rather than a plausible natural center. In classroom discussions repressive tolerance allows, and even encourages, participants to express the widest possible range of views. In the manner of this apparently free expression of views, however, certain centrist views are always given greater credence. They are subtly favored, presented by both participants and leader as more ‘reasonable’ or ‘balanced’. So while alternative interpretations and opinions are pursued, the fact that they are framed as alternatives only serves to support the implicit legitimacy of the center.

One way to illustrate this is to think about what happens when those whites who can afford it travel abroad. Typically, when you get to a foreign country you are enraptured with the different aspects of the culture – the cuisine, the music, the clothing, the street rhythms, the language, and so on. You sample the food, go enthusiastically to street festivals, dress like a local – all the time reveling in celebrating the exotic diversity you are experiencing. But your enjoyment comes from precisely the awareness that this is not ‘normal’ not ‘reality’. You know you are on a temporary excursion into another perspective and that lurking behind your engagement is the ‘real’ life you inhabit. So the engagement is not with a truly viable alternative that might displace the center, but a temporary flirtation with an exotic diversion. In this way celebrating the diversity of your alternative experience serves only to reinforce the enduring legitimacy of your ‘normal’ way of life. In much the same way inserting the discussion of an alternative idea, concept or text into the consideration of familiar, mainstream materials serves only to emphasize the alternatives as exotic others and to underscore the normality of the center. Learners see their engagement as a temporary flirtation with an exotic intellectual (rather than tourist) locale, an enjoyable diversion before returning to the security of mainstream thought.

I was reminded again and again of Marcuse’s notion of repressive tolerance during my time as an adjunct in National Louis University’s (Chicago) doctoral program in adult education. I had helped design the program in the early 1990’s and for most of its 15 years of operation I was also an adjunct instructor. One of the elements of the program that became very distinctive was the existence of a theoretical thread of Africentrism woven throughout course work and dissertation processes. This was not anything I had planned. I did not know of the existence of such work within adult education when the program was planned. But the program was smart enough to hire Dr. Scipio Colin Jr. III and her groundbreaking work on the Africentric paradigm within adult education paved the way for adding a module on Africentrism to the other introductory modules (such as workplace learning, transformative learning, humanistic adult education and adult basic education) students encountered as they entered the program.

The intent here was to open students up to culturally grounded ways of learning and to consider different forms of adult education practice that were responsive to different racial heritages. What seemed to happen all too often, however, was that African American students would disproportionately be represented in the Africentric group. On one level this was totally understandable. After all, the logic of the Africentric position is that it addresses the experience of members of the African diaspora and one of its central concerns is how racism is experienced. For many African American students discovering this idea was a powerful ‘coming home’ experience, one in which they took pride and in which they found a sense of identity.

My concern was that the Africentric position was sometimes not as seriously engaged by some White students compared to the way that Eurocentric streams of thought such as transformative learning and humanistic adult education were engaged by the Black students. Part of this had to do with resources. The best text for the Africentric module - *Philosophy Born of Struggle* (Harris, 1983) – was out of print and hard to obtain. In contrast, students in the module on transformative learning had easy access to any number of recently published and readily available texts.

As different cohorts engaged in a direct discussion of ideas covered in the different modules an interesting dynamic developed. Practices derived from humanistic adult education and transformative learning were discussed at length as participants found it relatively easy to provide numerous examples of how these did, or did not, fit their own work contexts. Connections were drawn, contradictions pointed out, and students spent plenty of time considering the practice implications drawn from these perspectives. When ideas drawn from the Africentric paradigm were discussed, however, the emotional tenor sometimes seemed to change. Even though there was no direct challenge from White students regarding the need to explore this tradition – after all, the full weight of professorial authority was behind the need to do this - Africentric concepts and practices were too often regretfully dismissed by students as inapplicable to the primarily White contexts within which they worked.

Now it may be that my perceptions of this experience are totally skewed and that students who I felt were mentally disconnected from the module were actually highly engaged. I have often warned that equating student silence with disinterest or lack of commitment is wrong, and that silence can represent deep mental engagement with difficult new material. But many times during Africentric module discussions Marcuse’s idea of repressive tolerance came to mind. I would often ask myself about the effect that mandating this as a core model in the doctoral program was having. Was it really stretching White students who, like me, had no knowledge of this paradigm before encountering it in coursework, or was it being dismissed in the way Marcuse outlined? Was it being superficially accorded an equal level of respect with the other modules whilst internally being dismissed as a quaint or exotic alternative that lacked the full weight of scholarly legitimacy?

A Marcusean analysis would warn that serving up a smorgasbord of theoretical positions that were drawn mainly from European traditions, and then adding a position drawn from Africa, will always lead to the African position being viewed as an exotic other. Like the tourists visiting foreign locales mentioned earlier, students can visit this position but its very difference will always remind them of home. They may stay awhile and enjoy the different ideas they encounter whilst staying at the Africentric resort, but the fact of its uniqueness keeps reminding them that this is a temporary diversion before they return to their home.

This left me in a contradiction I still have not resolved. In one ear I heard my Marcusean voice saying ‘students are not taking this as seriously as they should; in fact studying this module may perversely be strengthening their perception of Eurocentric traditions as the legitimate mainstream’. In the other ear I heard my pragmatist voice saying ‘you should be proud that this is a program where engaging with the Africentric tradition is required. If the faculty didn’t insist that this happen, students could go through an entire doctoral program without ever encountering this work’.

**Diversifying the Institution: The Repressive Tolerance Jog**

In this final section I want to turn outward from the classroom and consider instead how repressive controls the way institutions stay intact in the face of challenge to leave white supremacy in place. This process is exemplified by the repressive tolerance jog, an active physical manifestation of how repressive tolerance works. I described this activity in *Powerful Techniques for Teaching* *Adults* (Brookfield, 2013) as one of several power calisthenics exercises I developed after reading Clover, Jayme, Follen and Hall’s (2010) book on environmental adult education. In the repressive tolerance jog I ask students to get out of their seats and run in place staying in the same spot. At the end I tell them that this is what repressive tolerance feels like. You put out a lot of energy that looks as though something purposeful is happening but the end result is that, apart from you being wearier than at the start, nothing has really changed.

This is the same way that repressive tolerance functions to keep structures from having to make fundamental change. On the surface it looks as though significant and visible change is happening. In reality, however, nothing is altered in any substantive manner. As I read Marcuse’s analysis of how institutions appear to cede ground to external and internal challenge while ensuring that their basic ways of working are left unaltered I began to understand a lot of what I was seeing round me. Over the past forty years, particularly as the need to introduce diversity has come more and more to the forefront, the accuracy of Marcuse’s analysis has only strengthened for me. Again and again, the same five or six strategies are deployed to convince an internal and external audience that fundamental changes are being made, all the while leaving a white supremacist worldview intact.

*Change Your Public Image Regarding Your Identity*

The easiest change to make is that concerning the bodies that appear on your public documents. Find the minority of students and faculty of color at your institution and plaster their faces on your website, publicity materials and billboards. Make sure you have a nicely balanced racial equation of African, Asian, Latinx and indigenous faces on your brochures so that your student body looks like a rainbow coalition. In the alumni magazine make sure you disproportionately profile students and faculty of color who have achieved something of note so that it looks like you devote considerable institutional resources to ensuring their success. Playing this game of representational identity politics is the cheapest and most immediate move in the repressive tolerance jog. In a very short time with some simple photo shopping and image manipulation you can present to the world a dramatically altered version of what kind of institution you say you are. But the manipulative beauty of this strategy is that you don’t actually have to do anything of importance. The numbers of students and faculty of color can stay exactly the same, even as it looks like a relative equity of representation is in place.

*Conduct Staff Training and Faculty Development Workshops*

A typical response to the commission of hate crimes on campus, or to complaints of racist behavior expressed by students and faculty of color, is to institute a vigorous program of workshops and training sessions designed to bring an awareness of race to the forefront. I have often been asked to run such sessions and am always ready and willing to do so. But I am under no illusion that any structural change happens as a result. Certainly individual faculty and staff can resolve to be more aware of racist behaviors they enact themselves or they see being enacted around them, and they can also commit to an altered and expanded vision of their professional responsibilities as being to combat racism.

But workshops are, by definition, one-off, short-term encounters, so the likelihood of a sustained and significant change in behavior is usually low. Moreover, workshops are often oasis moments in institutional life, a temporary reality you enter before returning to the mainstream. A study of nurses attending a communication skills workshop found that without subsequent clinical supervision very little transfer of these skills into patient occurred (Heaven, Clegg and Maguire, 2006). To institutions, however, announcing an upcoming series of diversity workshops looks like something purposeful and significant is happening and that a deliberate, sustained effort is being made to address the problem. Workshops and training are public, visible and bounded and can be presented as clear evidence that the institution is responding conscientiously and seriously to the need to combat racism.

*Create More Diverse Representation*

When institutions are critiqued for their unfriendliness to certain racial, cultural and ethnic groups, when they are accused of institutional misogyny, homophobia or transphobia, and when disabled students complain about the lack of attentiveness to their situation, a predictable response is to increase the representation of these groups as members at all levels of the institution. Money is allocated specifically for scholarships to encourage a higher proportion of students from racial minorities to apply and search committees are urged to ensure that people of color are well represented in the candidate pool.

Creating more diversity of representation is indeed a crucial first step. After all, you can hardly have a greater diversity of voices at institutional decision-making tables if those voices are not already present in the institution. Having more faces of color allows you to change materials more easily and show the outside world that real change is happening. The problem is that without addressing the ideology of white supremacy and attempting to uncover its presence at all levels of institutional functioning, members of minority racial groups find themselves negotiating what they perceive as a hostile and unfriendly environment. The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2006) reported national data a decade ago showing the 42% graduation rate for African American students compared to the 62% for white students, citing the unfavorable racial climate at some institutions as the first of several possible explanations for this statistic. An even worse twenty-four-point difference was recently reported by *The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center* with African American students demonstrating a 38% graduation rate compared to the 62% rate of whites (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017).

Admitting larger numbers of students of color without a corresponding investment in administrative and academic support services for those students only serves to set many of them up for failure. If there is no effort at curricular change, and if faculty continue to work in a mostly color-blind way, then students of color will feel isolated, strangers in a strange land. There will need to be an institution-wide effort to identify practices and policies framed by white supremacy and a willingness by those in the most public positions of institutional authority and power to model their own commitment to examining how they too live out aspects of this ideology and how they will struggle to fight it.

The same dynamic pertains to hiring faculty of color, especially at predominantly white colleges and universities. Myers (2016) analysis of the racial identities of professors at all higher education institutions found that only 5% were Black, 4% were Hispanic, and 0.4% were Native Americans. An analysis of how faculty of color experienced college and university campuses across the USA and UK reported widespread feelings of alienation, of being an outsider drowning in a sea of whiteness and assailed on all sides by practices and policies steeped in white supremacy (Bhopal, 2016). Women faculty of color are particularly disregarded, often initially assumed by white students to be secretaries or administrative assistants (Cole Robinson and Clardy, 2010) with their appointment to the faculty typically being viewed only as a response to the mandatory imposition of affirmative action. Consequently, they have to work twice as hard to establish their academic legitimacy. Both male and female faculty of color are also expected to take on a second unpaid teaching job of teaching white faculty colleagues about the nature of racism (McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2003).

*Appoint a Person of Color to a High Profile Leadership Position*

The final strategy is to make a high profile appointment of a person of color to the leadership team. The most common strategy is to create a diversity office, staffed by a chief diversity officer or senior vice-president for diversity. That person is often the only person of color on the leadership team and is assumed, by virtue of his or her racial identity, to have the authentic experience of being on the receiving end of racism. This is taken to qualify him or her as someone who is uniquely positioned to address white supremacy.

But chief diversity officers are often set up to fail. The fact that no other high level leader is a person of color makes it harder for them to develop the network of personal relationships that whites enjoy. They are positioned as the exotic other, the voice of authentic experience whom presidents and provosts can turn to and ask ‘how does diversity play into this decision?’ If the strategy developed to address the need for diversity is essentially to ‘add, mix and stir’ people of color into a mostly white environment, then difficult questions of racism and white supremacy can be kept at bay. But the real experts on how white supremacy as an ideology is learned and deeply internalized so that it frames daily actions, interpretations and decisions, are whites. We are the learners and enacters of this ideology so instead of turning to the only person of color in the senior leadership team, the white members need to be examining the way that whiteness as the unquestioned norm and standard of legitimacy can be identified and challenged.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have tried to show how one particular analytical construct drawn from critical theory can be used to understand the dynamics of how institutions respond to challenges to their authority and legitimacy regarding their practice of racism and lack of diversity. The utility of the concept of repressive tolerance has only been confirmed for me over the five decades since it first appeared. But I need to end this chapter by acknowledging that Marcuse did not focus his analysis only on the ways this mechanism works. He also set out the contrasting idea of liberating tolerance, those practices that, if implemented, would be more likely to bring about significant change. For example, in an argument preceding contemporary ‘hate speech’ policies, Marcuse stated that it was important to stop privileged groups preaching hateful intolerance, but using the umbrella of tolerance of diversity as cover. A full and proper consideration of disallowed ideas can only happen by “the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements which promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism, discrimination on the grounds of race and religion, or which oppose the extension of public services, social security, medical care” (p. 100).

As can be imagined, Marcuse’s vigorous assertion of the need to censor conservative viewpoints proved highly contentious and was responsible for much of the notoriety he created. But he points out that his own life has suffered the consequences of repressive tolerance. He writes that “if the Nazi movement had not been tolerated once it revealed its character, which was quite early, if it had not enjoyed the benefits of that democracy, then we probably would not have experienced the horrors of the Second World War and some other horrors as well” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 99). For him the example of Nazi Germany provides a powerful illustration of “an unequivocal position according to which we can say: here are moments that should not be tolerated if an improvement and pacification of human life is to be attained” (Marcuse, 1970, p. 99).

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