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# Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars

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Using critical race theory as a framework, this article provides an examination of how racial and gender microaggressions affect the career paths of Chicana and Chicano scholars. This paper reports on open-ended survey and interview data of a purposive sample of six Chicana and six Chicano Ford Foundation Predoctoral, Dissertation, and Postdoctoral Minority Fellows. There are three objectives for this study: (a) to extend and apply a critical race theory to the field of education, (b) to “recognize,” “document,” and analyze racial and gender microaggressions of Chicana and Chicano scholars, and (c) to “hear” the voice of “discrimination’s victims” by examining the effect of race and gender microaggressions on the lives of Chicana and Chicano scholars. Three patterns of racial and gender microaggressions were found: (a) scholars who felt out of place in the academy because of their race and/or gender, (b) scholars who felt their teachers/professors had lower expectations for them, and (c) scholars’ accounts of subtle and not so subtle racial and gender incidents. The article ends with possible directions for continued critical race theory research with scholars of color.

## Introduction

These [racial] assaults to black dignity and black hope are incessant and cumulative. Any single one may be gross. In fact, the major vehicle for racism in this country is offenses done to blacks by whites in this sort of gratuitous never-ending way. These offenses are microaggressions. Almost all black-white racial interactions are characterized by white put-downs, done in automatic, pre-conscious, or unconscious fashion. These minidisasters accumulate. It is the sum total of multiple microaggressions by whites to blacks that has pervasive effect to the stability and peace of this world. (Pierce, 1974, p. 515)

This 24 year-old epigraph by Chester Pierce speaks volumes about an important, persistent, and underresearched social problem – racial microaggressions. We know little about the racial microaggressions that Pierce speaks of, and yet this subtle form of racism can have a dramatic impact on the lives of people of color.<sup>1</sup> Also, less is known about gender microaggressions and their effect on the career paths of minority women. In order to better understand these microaggressions, I turn to a developing framework in the legal profession, critical race theory, and adapt it for use in an educational setting (Barnes, 1990; Bell, 1992, 1995; Calmore, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1989, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Espinoza, 1990; Harris, 1994; Matsuda, 1989; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993; Montoya, 1994; Olivas, 1990; Williams, 1991; Wing, 1997).<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I will use critical race theory

to examine how race and gender microaggressions affect the educational experiences of Chicana and Chicano scholars.

### Critical race theory

Mari Matsuda (1991) has defined critical race theory as:

... the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination. (p. 1331)

Specifically, a critical race theory in education challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups.

There are at least five themes that form the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of a critical race theory in education.

1. *The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism*: Critical race theory starts from the premise that race and racism are endemic, permanent, and, in the words of Margaret Russell (1992), “a central rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences of the law” (pp. 762–763). Although race and racism are at the center of a critical race analysis, they are also viewed at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993). As Robin Barnes (1990) has stated, “Critical Race Scholars have refused to ignore the differences between class and race as basis for oppression... Critical Race Scholars know that class oppression alone cannot account for racial oppression” (p. 1868).

2. *The challenge to dominant ideology*: A critical race theory in education challenges the traditional claims of the educational system and its institutions to objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity. The critical race theorist argues that these traditional claims are a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society (Calmore, 1992). In addition to challenging the way we examine race and racism, Kimberlé Crenshaw and her colleagues have argued that critical race theory is also trying to “piece together an intellectual identity and a political practice that would take the form both of a left intervention into race discourse and a race intervention into left discourse” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xix).

3. *The commitment to social justice*: Critical race theory has an overall commitment to social justice and the elimination of racism. In the critical race theorist’s struggle for social justice in education, the abolition of racism or racial subordination is part of the broader goal of ending other forms of subordination, such as gender, class, and sexual orientation (Matsuda, 1991; Wing, 1997).

4. *The centrality of experiential knowledge*: Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of women and men of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. Indeed, critical race theory views this knowledge as a strength and

draws explicitly on the person of color's lived experiences by including such methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuENTOS*, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1995a, b, 1996; Olivas, 1990).

5. *The interdisciplinary perspective*: A critical race theory in education challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, 1995; Harris, 1994; Olivas, 1990).

Each of these themes is not new in and of itself, but, collectively, they represent a challenge to the existing modes of scholarship.<sup>3</sup> For this project, I define a critical race theory in education as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of scholars of color. Indeed, critical race theory is critical and different because: (a) it challenges the traditional paradigms, texts, and related discourse on race, gender, and class; (b) it focuses and examines the effect of race and racism from the perspective and experiences of women and men of color; and (c) it provides a guide to transform those oppressive social conditions in which women and men of color find themselves. It should be noted, however, that critical race theory is anything but uniform and static, and I will use as many of the five themes as possible to examine the racial and gender microaggressions of Chicana and Chicano scholars.

### **Chicanas and Chicanos in doctoral education**

Since the doctorate is a key to entering the university professorate, I want to demonstrate how the critical race literature can help us examine the role racial and gender microaggressions play in the lives of Chicana and Chicano doctoral scholars. Indeed, the little we know about the Chicana and Chicano doctoral experience comes from the projects of a few scholars. Patricia Gandara's (1979, 1982, 1993, 1995) dissertation and subsequent research examined the lives of 20 Chicana and 30 Chicano PhDs, JDs, and MDs. Her work provides an important baseline on the positive impact of familial resources generally, and mothers in particular, on their educational lives. Also, Aida Morales's (1988; Achor & Morales, 1990) doctoral dissertation study of 100 Chicana doctorates is the first study of its kind to focus on education doctorates generally and Chicana doctorates in particular. Indeed, her study reinforces Gandara's finding on the importance for these scholars of the family in general and mothers in particular. Gloria Cuadraz's (1993) dissertation focused on the lives of 17 Chicana and 23 Chicano former doctoral students at one institution. Cuadraz's study investigated the barriers and resources on their path to the PhD. Her baseline research is also important because it is one of a few studies to examine those students who did not finish the doctorate. Daniel Solórzano's (1993) examination of 22 Chicana and 44 Chicano Ford Foundation Minority Scholars also examined the obstacles and opportunities to the doctorate and found that racism and sexism were barriers in their career paths. Finally, Raymond Padilla and Rudolfo Chavez (1995) produced the first edited book on the career paths of Latina and Latino administrators and professors.

While each of these studies provides an important piece in the developing literature on Chicana and Chicano career paths, racism and sexism are not central factors in their

analysis. This study attempts to overcome this problem by focusing specifically on the role that racial and gender microaggressions play in the lives of Chicana and Chicano scholars.

### **Racism and racial microaggressions**

This exercise in the use of critical race theory in education must begin by defining race and racism. According to James Banks (1995), an examination of U.S. history reveals that the “color-line” or race is a socially constructed category, created to differentiate racial groups, and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another. This position leads to the question: Does the dominance of a racial group require a rationalizing ideology? One could argue that dominant groups try to legitimize their position through the use of an ideology (i.e. a set of beliefs that explains or justifies some actual or potential social arrangement). If racism is the ideology that justifies the dominance of one race over another, then how do we define racism? For our purpose, Audre Lorde (1992) may have produced the most concise definition of racism as, “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 496). Manning Marable (1992) has also defined racism as “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (p. 5). Marable’s definition of racism is important because it shifts the discussion of race and racism from a black/white discourse to one that includes multiple faces, voices, and experiences. Embedded in the Lorde and Marable definitions of racism are at least three important points: (a) one group believes itself to be superior; (b) the group that believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out the racist behavior; and (c) racism affects multiple racial/ethnic groups. These two definitions take the position that racism is about institutional power, and people of color in the United States have never possessed this form of power.

It is important to note that overt racist and sexist acts are usually not socially condoned, and such examples in the public discourse are rare. However, it is in private conversations and interactions that racism and sexism can exist in subtle and covert ways in the form of microaggressions. Chester Pierce and his colleagues have helped in understanding this phenomenon by stating that:

The chief vehicle for pro-racist behaviors are microaggressions. These are subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms used against blacks often are innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major ingredient in black–white interactions. (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Willis, 1978, p. 66)

More recently, Randall Kennedy (1989) found that “although overt forms of racial domination described thus far were enormously destructive, *covert* color bars have been, in a certain sense, even more insidious” (p. 1752; emphasis in the original). Also, Peggy Davis (1989) defined microaggressions as “stunning, automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of black inferiority” (p. 1576). Finally, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (1992) further described examples of subtle racism as ones where:

Racism's victims become sensitized to its subtle nuances and code-words – the body language, averted gazes, exasperated looks, terms such as “you people,” “innocent whites,” “highly qualified black,” “articulate” and so on – that, whether intended or not, convey racially charged meanings. (p. 1283)

One might add other code- or buzz-words to this list of rhetorical microaggressions, such as “quotas,” “preferences,” “affirmative action,” and “reverse discrimination” (Williams, 1991).

Indeed, unconscious or subtle forms of racism, while pervasive, are seldom investigated (Delgado and Stefancic, 1992; Lawrence, 1987). Occasionally, scholars of color get a glimpse into the world of unconscious racism as demonstrated in the following comments one might encounter:

- “When I talk about those Blacks, I really wasn't talking about you.”
- “You're not like the rest of them. You're different.”
- “If only there were more of them like you.”
- “I don't think of you as a Mexican.”
- “You speak such good English.”
- “But you speak without an accent.”

Pierce (1974) has maintained that Blacks, “must be taught to *recognize* these microaggressions and construct his future by taking appropriate action at each instance of *recognition*” (p. 520, emphasis added). Also, Sheri Johnson (1988) has argued that “One potentially significant contribution of the race and criminal procedure cases is *documentation* of the phenomenon of unconscious racism” (p. 1032; emphasis in the original). Davis (1989) has suggested that, “The Court was capable of this microaggression because cognitive habit, history, and culture left it [the Court] unable to *hear* the range of relevant voices and grapple with what reasonably might be said in the voice of *discrimination's victims*” (p. 1576; emphasis added). These comments by Pierce, Johnson, and Davis, along with Charles Lawrence's (1987) work on unconscious racism, lead me to posit three objectives for this study: (a) to extend and apply a critical race theory analysis to the field of education, (b) to “recognize,” “document,” and analyze racial and gender microaggressions from the perspective of Chicanas and Chicanos, and (c) to “hear” the voice of “discrimination's victims” by more closely and thoroughly examining the cumulative effect of race and gender microaggressions on the lives of Chicana and Chicano scholars.

## Methodology<sup>4</sup>

### *The sample of Ford Foundation Minority Fellows*

To address the three objectives raised in the previous section, I investigated a group of scholars who were awarded one of the most prestigious and selective fellowships in the United States, the Ford Foundation Predoctoral and Dissertation Minority Fellowship (1986–1991) and Postdoctoral Minority Fellowship (1980–1991).

Although the Ford Foundation had supported other student fellowship programs, it was not until 1967 that they developed and funded the Advanced Study Program (ASP). Initially the ASP supported African–American faculty at private historically black colleges and universities to return to graduate school for the doctoral degree. By 1970, the ASP comprised all institutions in higher education and expanded its scope to

include Chicanas/os, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans. In 1969, the Ford Foundation initiated the Doctoral Fellowship Program (DFP) whose purpose was to support the doctoral studies of African-American students. Once again, in 1970, the DFP was expanded to include Chicanas/os, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans. In 1972, the ADP and DFP Programs merged into the Ford Foundation Graduate Fellowship Program (GFP). Finally, in 1980, the Ford Foundation added to the GFP, the Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship Program. The overarching purpose of each of these programs was to invest the Ford Foundation's limited resources on increasing the numbers of the most underrepresented minority groups in the teaching and research faculties of higher education.

From 1980 to 1991, the Ford Foundation awarded 935 Predoctoral, Dissertation, and Postdoctoral Fellowships to African-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American, and Pacific Island Scholars who were U.S. citizens or permanent residents. The Ford Fellowship is granted in the fields of physical science, engineering, life science, social science, and humanities. For this project, I initially examined the lives of 22 Chicana and 44 Chicano Ford Foundation Fellows working in California during the academic year 1992–93. However, the bulk of the analysis focuses on six Chicana and six Chicano Ford Fellows.

#### *Instrumentation and data collection*<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this article is to listen to the voice of Chicana and Chicano scholars and their experiences with racial and gender microaggressions. To accomplish that task, I borrowed Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln's (1994) description of "the qualitative researcher as *bricoleur*" or "jack of all trades" (p. 2) and applied a range of data-gathering methods (from closed-ended and open-ended survey items to in-depth interviews). In a three-stage process, I initially used a survey to gather baseline information on these 66 Chicana/o scholars. Comprehending the benefits and limitations of such positivist methods in understanding racial and gender microaggressions, I moved to a more multimethod approach. Next, I examined each scholar's open-ended responses to questions on racial and gender discrimination to gain further insight into their experiences. At the final stage of data collection, I conducted interviews with six Chicana and six Chicano scholars to collect in-depth information on racial and gender microaggressions. I used this three-stage data-gathering process to begin to tell a lesser told story of Chicana and Chicano experiences with racial and gender microaggressions. By utilizing these methods, I tried to follow Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) lead for qualitative researchers to "deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods, always seeking better ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience that have been studied" (p. 12). It is the goal of this project to use whatever methods will help make the varied worlds and voices of these scholars more accessible and understandable.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Data analysis*

Using critical race theory as a basic framework, I analyzed the open-ended survey and interview data looking for examples of race and gender microaggressions. In the first stage of the data analysis, I examined the handwritten responses from the open-ended

questions in the surveys and the written transcripts and research memos from the 12 in-depth interviews. This was accomplished by an immersion and systematic sifting and resifting of the data until patterns emerged (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Specifically, this was accomplished by (a) identifying all the examples of racial and gender microaggressions that emerged from the data sources, (b) determining whether patterns of race and gender microaggressions could be found, (c) deciding if certain forms of race and gender microaggressions could be collapsed into similar categories, and (d) finding examples of text or “autobiographical moments” that illustrated the different forms of racial and gender microaggressions (Culp, 1996). In this process, examples of text from the written responses and interviews that depicted various forms of racial and gender microaggressions were identified, compared across subjects, and used in the Results section. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, certain identifying information is excluded from the text.

## Results

### *Background information*

In this study, the majority of the 66 Chicana and Chicano Ford Fellows were from working-class origins. Indeed, the vast majority of their parents had less than a high school education and worked in low-status occupations (see Appendix 1 for a description of the Fellows). However, while this group of scholars has slightly higher social origins than the Chicano population in general (see U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991), they had a much lower socioeconomic status than similar samples of non-Chicano academics (see Berger, 1990; Bowen and Rudenstine, 1992; Neumann and Peterson, 1997; O’Connell and Russo, 1983, 1988; Pearson, 1985; Pearson and Bechtel, 1989; Riley, 1988; Zuckerman, 1977). The data seem to show that as far as intergenerational mobility is concerned, these scholars have more formal education than their parents, and the vast majority will have higher status occupations than their parents.

While the sample of 66 surveys and 12 interviews is atypical, it is important to note that the atypical narrative, example, or life history can provide important insight into a particular sociological question or phenomenon in the same way that the atypical or outlier case in physics, biology, and chemistry can lead to important path-breaking discoveries (Kuhn, 1970). The lives of these twelve scholars can provide such a case. Their stories can (a) be used to illustrate and make the analytical categories more clear, (b) produce a depth of understanding and afford greater insight into the analytical categories, and (c) be a guide to further research on the impact of racial and gender microaggressions on the career paths of Chicana and Chicano scholars.

### *Experience with racial and gender discrimination at the undergraduate and graduate levels*

These scholars were asked to respond to a variety of open-ended and interview questions on racial and gender discrimination, harassment, and barriers. When I examined and analyzed the open-ended survey and interview data, I found at least three patterns of racial and gender microaggressions. First, there were scholars who felt out of place in the academy because of their race and/or gender. Second, there were scholars who felt their



teachers/professors had lower expectations for them. Third, there were scholars' accounts of subtle and not so subtle racist and sexist incidents. The following quotes from the interviews serve as lived exemplars of "discrimination's victims" in each of the three areas (Davis, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 1992).

*Feeling out of place:* Since the scholars were raised in predominantly working-class backgrounds and they self-identified with a racial/ethnic group that is marginalized in U.S. society, it should come as no surprise that some felt out of place in higher education institutions, many of which have an elite status and were predominantly white. In fact, feeling and/or being made to feel out of place in an institution can be viewed as a subtle form of race, gender, and class discrimination as shown in the following examples. A male Postdoctoral Fellow made a comment that reflected the title of this section: "There is this sense of feeling out of place. Not fitting in. It is a coldness that made an indelible mark on my graduate experience." Still another male Dissertation Fellow explained it this way, "I felt alienated from the other students and faculty. They would avoid me, ignore me. It's as if I wasn't even there... sort of invisible." A female Dissertation Fellow also responded:

In all my undergraduate and graduate years, I never had a Mexican American professor. Deep down I knew there were qualified Mexican Americans but I also began to wonder. There was that seed of doubt that was always there. Maybe I'm not good enough. Maybe they'll find me out. Maybe I shouldn't be in a doctoral program. This kept haunting me until I attended my first Ford [Fellows] Meeting. I was 27 years old. I knew then that I and others like me belonged in the academy.

Does the presence of similar race/ethnic/gender faculty and students lessen the sense of feeling out of place? One answer to this question was given by a male Postdoctoral Fellow. He commented that "Role models are important because you need to see someone like you in the position that you hope to attain. Otherwise you began to wonder, to doubt, to second guess yourself."

In what ways does feeling out of place manifest itself? One female Postdoctoral Fellow responded:

You can feel out of place in so many ways. For instance, having equal access is not only sitting in the same classroom with Whites, hearing the same lectures as Whites, reading the same books as Whites, or performing the same experiments as Whites. This is not equal opportunity because the content of these varied experiences validates the experiences of White men and ignores or invalidates the experiences of women and men of color and to a lesser extent White women.

Clearly these five examples provide evidence that, for some of these scholars, not feeling a part of the undergraduate and graduate school environment was a subtle form of racial/ethnic and gender discrimination. In fact, most of the scholars felt the importance of sharing these experiences (however negative) with peers and younger graduate students.

*Lower expectations:* From the teacher expectation literature in the K-12 sector, we know that lower teacher expectations for students can affect teacher behaviors toward those students. In turn, these different behaviors can impact on the educational achievement and attainment of the students (Oakes, 1985; Persell, 1977). However, little is known about the role that faculty expectations and related behaviors can have on the educational lives of undergraduate and graduate students. As undergraduates, a

number of the Fellows mentioned the experience of being stigmatized as a minority student and the resultant lowered expectations. Indeed, a female Postdoctoral Fellow disclosed:

As an undergraduate, when I walked on campus there was this stigma attached to being a minority student. It's as if I had this "AA" pasted on my forehead for affirmative action student. Some people would say "oh, you're being too sensitive about race." But I would respond, "I know what I'm feeling and how I'm being treated." I can't ignore it. I don't have the luxury of ignoring or rationalizing other people's treatment of me and my feelings as being too sensitive... It's a constant battle, it has to be fought, and it continues to this day.

Another form of lower expectations focused on the lower social status of the undergraduate institutions that some of these Fellows attended. For instance, a female Dissertation Fellow mentioned:

Money limited my options after high school. Therefore, I attended [a comprehensive public university in Southern California] as an undergraduate. Later, when I attended my graduate seminars at [a more prestigious graduate university] and mentioned to my professors and other students that I went to [a less prestigious undergraduate institution], their whole demeanor changed. It was as if I couldn't possibly add anything to the discussion. You would not believe how people's attitudes changed once they found out where I did my undergraduate work. It took its toll and it sickens me.

The lower expectations and related behaviors of graduate faculty can be an important experience in the life of a graduate student. One of the male Predoctoral Fellows made the following comment:

Sometimes I got the impression that many of my professors felt that I shouldn't have been in graduate school, that I shouldn't be taking a place that someone more qualified should have. This feeling occurred more often than I want to remember.

Another very sensitive finding of lowered expectations focused on the language and accent of some scholars. A male Postdoctoral Fellow recalled:

I have a Spanish accent and it is pretty pronounced. When I spoke in class, it's as if I was speaking another language or worse, that I wasn't saying anything important. People wouldn't listen to me. But, when someone without this accent mentioned the very same thing, people would respond, "oh that's so profound." These people didn't even hear me and it continues to this day.

In a related example of lowered expectations based on gender, a female Predoctoral Fellow commented:

I feel that my answers are discounted in discussions. I feel strongly that they are not taken seriously because I'm a woman. How can I say anything of any importance for the classroom discussion? Some professors and students act as if I'm not in the classroom and there are only five or six students in the seminar.

The selection of a dissertation topic is an important stage in the doctoral process. Although we know little of this procedure, some of the experiences of the scholars with their advisers raised the issue of lowered expectations. For example, the one female Postdoctoral Scholar stated:

When I decided to work in the area of Women of Color and Sociology, the demeanor of the professors in my department changed. They asked me why I wanted to work in such a “narrow” area of sociology. I knew that other white students were working in equally “narrow” topics. But a “narrow” topic of race and gender was not supported. This lack of support from my department was difficult to overcome, and I still feel the effects.

When another female Postdoctoral Fellow in the social sciences discussed her dissertation topic, she recalled the following conversation with her adviser:

I remember my adviser telling me to justify my wanting to look at Chicanos exclusively. He kept pushing me to include a white comparison group. When I suggested as a compromise a Black comparison group he said, “What good would that do?” I went out and gathered up all the research I could find where a White sample was studied without a minority comparison group. I then told him “How should we justify these studies? These are classic studies in the field.” He became really annoyed with me. We finally came to some agreement, but I’ve always felt that he never really viewed my work as significant as some of my other graduate colleagues in the department who worked on questions where Whites were the sole group or where minority group studies had a White comparison sample.

These seven examples, then, are further evidence of microaggressions in the form of lowered expectations, expectations that resulted in stigmatization and differential treatment. Indeed, this differential treatment had its origins in the racial, ethnic, and gender background and experience of these scholars.

*Racist/sexist attitudes and behaviors:* A final pattern that emerged from the data focused specifically on the racist and sexist attitudes and behaviors of faculty and fellow students. A male Dissertation Fellow explained it this way:

There are these slips of the tongue that seem to happen all the time. The one that really gets me is “You’re not like the rest of them.” I usually say, “the rest of what?” These constant slips of the tongue can really take their toll.

Although most of the women experienced some form of gender and racial discrimination, a female Postdoctoral Fellow felt that not everyone has had to experience discrimination to understand its impact. She indicated the following:

I don’t need to be raped to be scared of walking in certain areas at night. Likewise, I don’t need to be called a greaser to wonder what my professors or fellow students are thinking about regarding the quality of my answers or my work. Something doesn’t necessarily have to happen directly to me to know that sexism and racism exists.

Another female Postdoctoral Fellow had the following experience with sexist attitudes:

I experienced gender discrimination when I got pregnant and had a baby. My adviser, other department faculty, and some of my fellow students felt that I wasn’t serious about graduate school or my professional career since I brought this “burden” on myself. It was so subtle.

While in graduate school, a female science Dissertation Fellow commented on her experience at a professional conference:

As I began to attend science conferences, my experiences with gender discrimination became more and more pronounced ... Less than 10% of the attendees were women, and I was a young single woman. I became a “commodity,” and males competed with other males for my time and attention... I found that they were seldom interested in the work that I was doing and more interested in what I was doing after the conference proceedings.

Many of the Fellows mentioned that sexist and racist comments were common. Indeed, a female Predoctoral Fellow recalled that, “In undergraduate and graduate school male students would constantly make sexual comments or make sexual jokes. It seemed that racial and gender joking was fair game among the students where I went to school.”

How many times has one heard, “I thought I was the only one who felt that way or went through that?” One of the transformative elements of the stories of these scholars’ “feeling out of place,” encountering “lowered expectations,” and being exposed to “racist and sexist attitudes and behaviors” is that the reader can relate to or have empathy with these experiences. In that space or moment when one connects with these experiences, these stories can be the catalyst for one’s own coming to voice, of not feeling alone, and knowing that someone has gone before them, had similar experiences, and succeeded on to the doctorate. In fact, the seeds of resistance to racial and gender microaggression can be found in the words of these scholars. In an area for further research, we must examine the ways in which scholars of color navigate around and through these macro- and micro-barriers by asking the question: How do scholars of color respond to and resist these racial and gender microaggressions? In fact, as the words of these scholars show, the naming of racial and gender microaggressions as problems is an important first step. However, acknowledgement as a problem has to be followed up with analysis, reflection, and action. Indeed, in the final analysis, one needs to take individual or collective steps to resolve the problem of racial and gender microaggressions (Solóranzo, 1989). We know the least about this final step.

### Conclusions

The twelve-year-old, now adult, wonders: “my life is so surprising to me, so unexpected. It makes two things easier to believe: there are very few others like me, and because there are so few, my success must be a mistake, an aberration.”... Racism disempowers us by inflecting individual consciousness with self-doubt... Minority scholars struggle to find a place in a world to which they were not invited and in which they did not anticipate living. The twelve-year-old knew where she belonged. The adult may fight for and follow a different path. The stigma of prejudice, however, leaves a residue of self-doubt in the adult, no matter what her achievements. (Espinoza, 1990, pp. 1884–1885)

Leslie Espinoza’s (1990) reflections as a Chicana law professor are additional and powerful evidence that racism and sexism, and their subtle and not so subtle forms, can have a profound impact on the lives of minority scholars. Her comments on self-doubt add further support to the examples of racial and gender microaggressions of the Chicana and Chicano scholars who participated in this project. Many of these scholars’ encounters with “feeling out of place,” encountering “lower expectations,” and feeling “invisible” were similar to Ralph Ellison’s (1990) experience as an African-American in the Prologue to his book, *Invisible man*. Ellison argues that “invisibility” is a negative

experience for African-Americans because people do not acknowledge them since people do not expect them to know anything. In fact, Ellison states, "I am an invisible man ... I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (p. 3). Yet, Ellison also suggests that, "I'm invisible, not blind" (p. 576). Indeed, many of these scholars were "not blind" to the more subtle forms of racial and gender microaggressions, even though others told them they were being "too sensitive about race" or that they were not "seeing" what they thought they were "seeing." We need to continue to search for and document additional voices and other subtle and unrecognized forms of racism and sexism throughout the educational pipeline.

Critical race theory places race and racism at the center of the analysis. But as the experiences of these scholars point out, we must also focus on that place where race and gender intersect (see Hurtado, 1996; Neumann and Peterson, 1997; Wing, 1997). It is that space where being a woman of color is quantitatively and qualitatively different than being a man of color or a white woman or man.

Critical race theory challenges us to view race and racism through the lenses of these Chicana and Chicano scholars. For example, a critical race analysis in education can provide a framework to reexamine the way we view and respond to the critics of race and gender affirmative action. Indeed, the experiences of these scholars has shown that even at high levels of accomplishment (i.e., doctoral education), where educational conditions might on the surface appear to be equal, the forms of inequality and discrimination can be more subtle and harder to see. Perhaps the cumulative impact of racial and gender microaggressions at each point in the educational system is further evidence of the very different road that scholars of color must travel and the strength they must have to overcome both macro- and micro-barriers along that road. Two questions that the experiences of these scholars might raise in the affirmative action discourse are: Is the educational playing field level for students of color as they make their way through the educational system? And, should one's determination and persistence in the face of racial and gender discrimination be a factor in the undergraduate and graduate admissions process? The descriptions of racial and gender discrimination in this study helps us answer these questions by challenging the anti-affirmative action ideology of an "equal," "color and gender blind," and "race and gender neutral" educational system.

These stories also reinforce the notion that the traditional Black/White paradigm in examining race and race relations is too narrow and that the experiences of other racial/ethnic groups is critical to understanding the lives of scholars of color (see, for instance, Valdes, 1996). Although the racial, gender, and class experiences of African-Americans and Chicanas/os are similar in some areas, there are very important differences in the historical and contemporary lives of these two groups that cannot be ignored. Therefore, in order for critical race theory to advance, it must recognize, utilize, and analyze the multiple voices and experiences with racism and sexism.

In conclusion, in a 1970 article, Chester Pierce (1970) first introduced the concept of "offensive mechanisms" or microaggressions. In the article he made the following comment: "It is my fondest hope that the day is not far remote when every black child will recognize and defend promptly and adequately against every offensive microaggression" (p. 280). Twenty-eight years later, I'm afraid that Pierce's hope has not come to realization. Indeed, we know very little about by whom, where, and how these microaggressions are initiated and responded to. Without careful documentation and analysis, these racial and gender microaggressions can easily be ignored or downplayed. It is my hope that further research into these subtle forms of and responses to racism and

sexism will advance the study of scholars of color and move toward making Professor Pierce’s hope a reality.

**Notes**

1. For this study, the terms “people of color” and “scholars of color” are defined as those persons or scholars of African-American, Latino, Asian-American, and Native American ancestry. Also, Latino is used as another pan-ethnic term that is inclusive of all groups of Latin-American ancestry in the Western Hemisphere who are living in the United States. Finally, Chicanas and Chicanos are defined as female and male persons of Mexican ancestry living in the United States. It should be noted that each of these terms has a political dimension that this paper does not discuss.

2. For comprehensive annotated bibliographies on critical race theory see Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (1993, 1994). Also, for a theoretical introduction to critical race theory in education see Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995), William Tate (1997), and Daniel Solórzano (1997).

3. Yvonna Lincoln (1993) has stated that we need to develop “theories of social transformation wherein knowledge is generated specifically for the purpose of addressing and ameliorating conditions of oppression, poverty, or deprivation” (p. 33). Lincoln goes on to state that “Presenting ‘situational’, historical, or case study data can often help respondents and research collaborators identify ways in which they have been marginalized, silenced, or discriminated against” (p. 35). One of the goals of this study is to meet Lincoln’s challenge and to show how racial and gender microaggressions have silenced, marginalized, and discriminated against these scholars and the ways this knowledge of racial and gender microaggressions can begin the process of transformation in the way scholars of color view themselves and each other.

4. In her often cited essay, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” Audre Lorde (1984) takes the position that “survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (p. 112). However, in the day-to-day struggles that people and scholars of color engage in, we sometimes need to use the “master’s tools” or any other method or tool we can find in our “researcher’s toolbox” to challenge the educational conditions and related outcomes that students of color encounter (see for example, Laura Angelica Simon’s award winning documentary “Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary School”).

5. James Scheurich and Michelle Young (1997) have argued that “epistemological racism means that our current range of research epistemologies – positivism to postmodernisms/poststructuralisms – arise out of the social history and culture of the dominant race, that these epistemologies logically reflect and reinforce that social history and that social group (while excluding the epistemologies of other races/cultures), and that this has negative results for people of color in general and scholars of color in particular” (p. 8). As researchers, we must realize that most of the methods we use as social scientists are rooted in these “racist epistemologies.” However, it is our responsibility to acknowledge these epistemologies and, where appropriate, use them for transformational purposes while continuing to move toward more antiracist and antisexist epistemologies and related methods. Critical race theory is one such antiracist and antisexist epistemology.

6. John Stansfield (1994) has argued that “the purpose of creating the new baby is not to bury the old one, but instead to create a family of qualitative research paradigms and derived theories, methodologies, and of data interpretation that more adequately reflects the plural character of American society and the global community... [W]e need to be about the more complex task of creating paradigms grounded in the experiences of people of color” (p. 185). Again, the objectives of critical race theory and this study are to meet Stansfield’s challenge.

**Appendix 1. Demographic and family characteristics**

	<i>Males</i> ( <i>N</i> = 44)	<i>Females</i> ( <i>N</i> = 22)
Percent	66.7 %	33.3 %
Age (median)	33.0	37.5
Age range	22–53	24–45
Household size (median)	6.0	5.5
Two-parents households	88.1 %	81.0 %

*(continued)*

Birth order:		
Only child	6.8 %	13.6 %
Oldest child	25.0	36.4
Middle child	47.7	31.8
Youngest child	20.5	18.2
Religious affiliation:		
Catholic	88.4 %	90.9 %
Protestant	2.3	—
Other	4.7	—
No church affiliation	4.7	—
Nativity:		
Immigrant	9.3 %	13.6 %
First generation	23.3	13.6
Second generation	67.4	72.7
Lang. spoken in home (elementary years):		
English only	4.7 %	18.2 %
Bilingual:	81.4	63.7
Spanish/English		
Spanish only	14.0	18.2
Mother's education:		
Less than High School	36.4 %	42.9 %
High School diploma	38.6	33.3
Some post H.S. schooling	13.6	—
B.A. and above	11.4	23.8
Father's education:		
Less than High School	40.5 %	31.8 %
High School diploma	19.0	36.4
Some post H.S. schooling	11.9	4.5
B.A. and above	28.6	27.3
Mother's occupation:		
Blue collar	14.0 %	27.2 %
Clerical	14.0	9.1
Professional	14.0	13.5
Homemaker	48.8	45.5
Unemployed	4.7	—
Student	2.3	—
Deceased	2.3	—
Father's occupation:		
Blue collar	46.3 %	50.0 %
Clerical	4.9	—
Professional	29.3	20.0
Sales/tech	9.7	25.0
Military	2.4	—
Unemployed	2.4	—
Retired	—	5.0
Student	2.4	—
Deceased	2.4	—

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