

Chapter 63

Repressive Tolerance and the “Management” of Diversity

Stephen D. Brookfield

University of St. Thomas, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter uses Herbert Marcuse’s notion of repressive tolerance to examine the ways that higher education institutions manage diversity so as to ensure that the ideology of white supremacy stays in place. 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 appear to be engaged in substantive change whilst still maintaining the status quo. 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. Institutions that create a diversity requirement for students often approve new courses on race and diversity and hire faculty of color to teach these. The problem is that very little changes at a deeper, structural level.

INTRODUCTION

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.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-4507-5.ch063

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 manoeuvre 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,

11 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/repressive-tolerance-and-the-management-of-diversity/296999

Related Content

Working Poor in Decommodification Between Belgium and China

Jinghong Liu (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 32-62).

www.irma-international.org/article/working-poor-in-decommodification-between-belgium-and-china/272583

Fashionable Functions: A Google Ngram View of Trends in Functional Differentiation (1800-2000)

Steffen Roth (2016). *Politics and Social Activism: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 177-203).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/fashionable-functions/139968

Religious Social Movements and Economic Welfare in Modern Turkey

Cemile Zehra Körolu and Muhammet Ali Körolu (2016). *Politics and Social Activism: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 948-969).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/religious-social-movements-and-economic-welfare-in-modern-turkey/140009

Race, Class, and Community Cultural Wealth: Impacts on Parental Involvement Among Black Families in K-12 Public Schools

Evelyn Ezikwelu (2022). *Research Anthology on Racial Equity, Identity, and Privilege* (pp. 689-708).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/race-class-and-community-cultural-wealth/296971

What Causes Balance of Power Restructuring in the International Community

(2023). *Historical and Political Analysis on Power Balances and Deglobalization* (pp. 48-58).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/what-causes-balance-of-power-restructuring-in-the-international-community/329261