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# Critical Race Feminism: A Transformative Vision for Service-Learning Engagement

Begum Verjee

## Abstract

This article explores the development of service-learning from a critical race feminist perspective. Critical race feminism seeks to understand how society organizes itself along intersections of race, gender, class, and other forms of social hierarchies. It utilizes counter-storytelling as methodology and legitimizes the voices of women of colour in speaking about social oppression. Through counter-storytelling, women of colour students, non-academic staff, faculty, and non-university community members relayed their experiences at The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, which formed the basis for a transformative vision of service-learning engagement. This vision calls for institutional accountability, requiring a critical examination and transformation of hegemonic structures and practices from within before any genuine, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with communities of colour can be developed. Such partnerships would enable the university to create outstanding partnerships to address and solve local, national, and global injustices.

## Background

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of women of colour at The University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada, in a service-learning context from a critical race feminist perspective (Verjee, 2010). The author was interested in exploring the development of service-learning from this perspective based on the proposition that educational institutions, particularly higher education, remain a site of systemic injustices (Henry & Tator, 2010; James, 2010).

Bannerji (2000), hooks (2003), and Razack (1998) maintain that universities are premised on an ideology of whiteness, patriarchy, and classism as the dominant culture, which functions to colonize, marginalize, and silence racialized students, non-academic staff, and faculty. The intention behind the research was to explore the experiences of women of colour at and with UBC and, based on their experiences, to create a vision for service-learning engagement that would foster respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships with individuals and communities of colour. For the purpose of this paper, universities, the academy, and educational institutions all refer to higher education.

## Service-Learning Engagement

Most of the literature on service-learning engagement emphasizes the importance of developing collaborative partnerships with communities that create a common vision for addressing community concerns in addition to improving student learning and civic engagement (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009; Holland, 2001; Marullo & Edwards,

2000). However, little attention has been paid to the role that communities play in enacting the goals of service-learning programs. In addition, only a small amount of research has explored the impact of service-learning programs on communities, and there has been a growing dissatisfaction inside and outside the service-learning movement regarding whether communities are truly being served (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

O'Grady (2000) and Stoecker and Tryon (2009) suggest that the key to service-learning engagement is to maintain the focus on collaboration with communities for the purposes of community development and social problem-solving through the identification of community issues, along with components such as reflective activities for students and the integration of service with curriculum. The challenge remains as how to do this when education, as a reflection of Canadian society, continues to remain a site of social inequities (Bannerji, 2000; Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; James, 2010; Monture-Angus, 2001; Razack, 1998).

There is a deep divide, a mistrust between educational institutions and locally based communities, that stems from a history of exploitation (Campus Compact, 2000). Educational institutions are also a site of struggle between dominant knowledges (e.g., the mainstream knowledge of professional scholars) and the wisdoms of "othered" world views (e.g., the lived knowledge within communities). Enos and Morton (2003) suggest that institutional partnerships with communities are also based on views that perceive communi-

ties as the domain of problems and institutions as the domain of solutions. All of these conditions exacerbate mistrust and power differentials between communities and educational institutions. In addition, the elitist, conflict-driven, and competitive cultures at colleges and universities, versus the more collaborative and less-hierarchical nature of communities, deepens the conflict even further (Jacoby, 2003; Lin, Schmidt, Tryon, & Stoecker, 2009). If service-learning is to truly involve higher education in real-world problem-solving, then communities must be a central and active partner in leading these efforts.

Langseth (2000) suggests that when educational institutions embark on service-learning engagement, their lack of attention to power differentials and to institutionalized Eurocentric values often causes harm. Jones (2003) adds that if such power relationships are not acknowledged and remedied, service-learning partnerships will likely create even more social inequities. Critical race theory offers a useful lens in understanding how social oppression operates; yet this form of inquiry remains on the margins of the community engagement literature. For example, few studies explore critical race theory in health that examine the need for transforming social institutions because of the social, political, and economic struggles faced by people of colour, or the mental health issues resulting from racial stratification (Brown, 2003; Graham, Brown-Jeffy, Aronson, & Stephens, 2011). Surprisingly, there is limited application of critical race theory in education and what it offers to an understanding of race and racism, or, more importantly, in an understanding of the arrangement of power relationships in service-learning engagement.

For these reasons, critical race feminist theory was utilized as epistemology and methodology in exploring the development of service-learning at UBC.

### **Research Methodology**

Narratives by dominant groups, such as white, male, and the elite are generally legitimized in the academy and society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Such narratives provide these individuals with a shared sense of identity within society and its institutions. These identities and life experiences are also reflected by dominant discourses and practices, and are viewed as mainstream, natural, and widely accepted as the “truth.” Such reflections of “truth” can determine and limit who gets to speak, heard, and valued (Henry & Tator, 2010; James, 2010). Counter-stories are, therefore, narra-

tives of marginalized persons who speak of social injustice. Such stories are often not legitimized in society and speak against accepted truth. Critical race theory is such a methodology, and utilizes counter-storytelling, which looks at transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

Critical race feminist theory, as a category of critical race theory, puts power relations at the centre of the discourse on gender, race, class, and all forms of social oppression. Anti-essentialist in nature, it involves the examination of the intersections of social oppression and how their combinations play out in various settings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Utilizing critical race feminist theory, we interviewed 14 women (students, non-academic staff, faculty, and non-university community members) for part of this research study. Representative of a diverse range of educational faculties and university departments at UBC, they also included women in non-university community settings who had been involved with UBC in some partnership capacity.

The participants were recruited from posters, electronic postings, and by snow-ball sampling [also known as word-of-mouth or “chain referral” sampling] and ranged in age from 25 to 59. They identified as women of colour and spoke of their identities as being fluid and multiple, Canadian, non-white, non-Aboriginal, immigrant settlers on First Nations land, straight, queer, and lesbian. They described their cultural backgrounds as Chinese, Philippine, Korean, Caribbean, Haitian, Jamaican, Jamaican-Costa Rican, Black, African, Kenyan, South Asian, Indo-Canadian, Indo-Ugandan-Canadian, East-Indian, and mixed race (part European ancestry).

Of the 14 women interviewed, six were UBC students; four were undergraduate students and two graduate. Three of the women interviewed were non-academic staff and two were part-time faculty members. Two of the 14 were non-university community members. One was a part-time faculty member at another institution of higher education in Vancouver who had been a graduate student at UBC.

Two hour-and-a-half, face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with each woman at a time and confidential location convenient to them. Each interview was transcribed and a second interview set-up to review themes and transcripts from the first interview. A semi-structured interview technique was utilized with standard questions and the use of an interview protocol around

their UBC perceptions and experiences and their visions of service-learning engagement that would enhance partnerships between individuals and communities of colour.

### **Experiences of Women of Colour at and with UBC**

James (2010) states that the impact of racism, and the values, attitudes, and ideas they express, is not merely a product of encounters with other individuals, but are structured by the ideologies, ethics, and practices of institutions and society. These very real instances of discrimination are experienced as trauma on one's physical and mental health. Delgado (2000) suggests that race-based stigmatization is "one of the more fruitful causes of human misery" (p. 131).

Racialized students, non-academic staff, and faculty have acknowledged that institutions of higher education are toxic and hostile (Henry & Tator, 2010). The day-to-day reality for women of colour in the academy involves overcoming hurdles, constantly having to negotiate the institutional landscape, mediating confrontations, and fighting to survive a relentless onslaught of racialized micro-aggressions (Bannerji, 2000; hooks, 2003; Razack, 1998). The women in this study spoke of daily micro-aggressions and trauma of being unseen, unheard, devalued, silenced, delegitimized, disempowered, scrutinized, disciplined, and perceived as inferior. Following are some of the themes that emerged from their interviews:

- Racialization as "other"
- Lack of commitment to curriculum and pedagogical transformation
- Low representation of racialized faculty
- Low representation of racialized non-academic staff in management and senior management
- Lack of commitment to institutionalizing diversity in the academy

### **Racialization as "Other"**

According to James (2010), colonialism operates in society today as part of an ideology of social differentiation sustained by political, economic, and social domination of one racial group by another. From this point of view, education is seen as a political and educational site where power relations and social inequality are reproduced (Wagner, 2008). Such sites operate in ways that usually negate the experiences of racialized peoples, and

in doing so reinscribe them as "outsiders," thereby making it difficult to establish themselves as legitimate, equal, and contributing participants within these institutions (James, 2010; Razack, 1998). Racialization is part of this process of domination and subordination through the categorization of physical appearance, in particular skin colour, whereby the racialized are constructed as "other." Stamped with a badge of inferiority, the racialized are denied opportunities and equal treatment and excluded from participation in any meaningful way (Delgado, 2000; Henry & Tator, 2010). A graduate student shared her experience of racialization, of feeling invisible and insignificant. She explained that she often experienced lack of voice at the institution because of her skin colour:

Being a woman of colour is certainly evident. It's not like I can pretend I'm not. I've said before, it's not like that I can come home or go out and take off my skin and blend in... I definitely feel that I'm marginalized. I feel that I'm not present, [that] what I have to say is not valid... .

A non-university community member shared her experience of racialization, of being present but invisible in white dominated spaces in both educational institutions and community organizations. She spoke of how insignificant she felt in not being seen or acknowledged:

When I've worked within institutions or organizations which have been predominantly white, I've encountered situations where I haven't been acknowledged... i.e. no eye contact, no greeting. At these times I've felt excluded and invisible.

Such experiences of a "chilly" climate is common on university campuses where women of colour experience invisibility and lack of voice as they encounter sexism, racism, and classism (Mazumi & Shahjahan, 2008).

### **Lack of Commitment to Curriculum and Pedagogical Transformation**

Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004) and Calliste (2000) conclude that universities, being state sanctioned and funded, support and reproduce inequities. The ideology of the white settler nation-state is reflected and supported by the academy, where classrooms and interactions

mirror the everyday world (Bannerji, 2000; Razack 1998). Many instructors of colour teaching in the academy have argued that neither their presence nor their histories are recognized in the academy (Henry & Tator, 2010).

In this research, UBC was viewed as an institution that supports nation-building though emphasis on Eurocentric and male-dominated knowledges. Though the women interviewed agreed that there are programs and courses that provide alternate spaces and critical studies, in general education was seen as reinforcing the status quo. A faculty member had this to say:

I don't think our education, as it stands, really does very good justice to non-white groups in this university. I think we really get a very Europeanized history of the world... That's not to say we don't have courses or programs that relate to other cultures and histories, but in terms of what we really celebrate and what is really promoted, I think it is European.

Campbell (2003) suggests that most institutions of higher education in Canada lack a concrete commitment to diversity and inclusion. Diversity is usually responded to by teaching a bit of this and a bit of that as add-on approaches, but there is little rigorous reorganization of the curriculum. Most of the curriculum is still grounded within a dominant framework that disappears or erases "othered" world-views. For many racialized students, universities continue to be a place of disconnection (hooks, 2003), a sense that something is missing and being reminded that they are "outsiders." An undergraduate student spoke of the disconnect she experienced between what was being taught at the academy and her lived experience:

In fact, I was noticing that I was doing poorly as I started to realize that it [education] wasn't working...there was a disconnect between who I am and what [UBC] was teaching.

Mirza (2006) suggests that racialized students are more likely to leave their university before completing their programs because of unmet expectations about higher education. There was a sense from the students interviewed that there were higher attrition rates for students of colour than their white counterparts.

### **Low Representation of Racialized Faculty**

Dei et. al (2004) state that instructors in post-secondary institutions remain primarily white, and that racialized faculty sometimes makes up less than 5% of educators. On the other hand, racialized students often comprise 50% or more of the student population in many post-secondary institutions, and there is generally a lack of commitment to hiring faculty of colour at these institutions (Campbell, 2003). In addition, women make up almost 60% of undergraduate students, 45% as PhD students, but only 18.8% as full professors (Ollivier, Robbins, Beauregard, Brayton, & Sauve, 2006). However, women of colour represent only 3.4% of full-time and 10.3% of all faculty positions in Canadian universities (Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2006). Their numbers are significantly lower than their male counterparts (Henry & Tator, 2010).

Students interviewed expressed a desire for an increase in racialized faculty representation for mentoring, support and guidance. Luther, Whitmore, and Moreau (2001) state that racialized students are drawn to similar faculty members as role models, as experts in mutual areas of interest, as personal advisors, and research supervisors. Students desire to be understood without the need to explain what they are experiencing in the academy. They want to feel comfortable in exploring critical questions in a supportive environment that does not threaten them but stimulates them intellectually and affirms who they were.

Increasing the numbers of racialized faculty would, in fact, advance the standards of education by providing richer and broader learning experiences for all students. Excellence in teaching is not only about competence; it is also about representation (Henry & Tator, 2010). According to Luther, Whitmore, and Moreau (2001), having a critical mass of racialized faculty is a means to equity. An undergraduate student remembered the first time she met a racialized faculty member, and what a surprise this was to her, but also how inspiring this was. She found herself engaged for the first time in her academic program:

And you know, I was stunned. And I double-checked that she has a "doctor" beside her name... [During the course] I found myself asking questions. I found myself engaged, and I found myself really interested... I would never do that before. You know, no way!

However, demands by colleagues, through requests to be guest speakers to different classes, usually on topics of race, ethnicity, or cultural issues, further exacerbate an already heavy workload for racialized faculty. This additional work leaves little time for activities supporting tenure and promotion, and further marginalizes them. In addition, Kerl and Moore (2001) state that there are huge costs associated with marginalization for faculty of colour, costs that range from having one's research and teaching located on the margins, to being punished for speaking out about inequities. The faculty interviewed suggested that heavy workloads, research on the margins, and demands from students put them at a higher risk of burnout than their white counterparts.

### **Low Representation of Racialized Non-Academic Staff in Management and Senior Management**

It is well documented that the majority of non-academic support staff and service workers in the academy are non-white (hooks, 2003). Many universities have conducted employee workforce audits, and these indicate a significant level of under-representation of women of colour in management and senior-level non-academic administrative positions (Henry & Tator, 2010). A graduate student spoke of her perceptions:

I think the institution needs to have much more representation of people of colour in positions of power because we certainly have lots of people of colour in the institution, but they're not in positions where they're influencing students. They're actually men and women who are bowing down to students, who are picking up students' garbage.

The women of colour in non-academic administrative positions suggested that there are some very real discriminatory practices in place that prevent people of colour from being hired and promoted into leadership positions, and that employment equity policies have mainly benefited white women. They spoke of UBC's lack of commitment to hiring, retaining, and promoting non-academic staff of colour into management and senior levels of management within the academy.

Many of the women spoke of "gatekeeping" practices within UBC that prevent racialized non-academic staff from being promoted. When job vacancies come up, departments are known to hire personnel that they know, people who are

viewed as a "fit." Calliste (2000) states that gaining employment and promotion through the ranks to non-academic positions is often not based on merit. She suggests that one must be a member of a privileged group, to be suitable and supportive of the status quo. In addition, hiring or interviewing committees are also often homogeneous and white in make-up. White people are therefore more likely to be hired and promoted into leadership positions. A non-academic staff member gave an example of this:

...management hire people that they know versus posting positions for short-term positions, one year maternity leaves, etc., with the rationale that it's easier than posting a position, [i.e.] advertising to the broader community for appropriate candidates. The result is that those individuals who are already known get more opportunities than the unknown. White candidates get hired for short contracts, gain valuable on-site job experience and "fit," and then get hired when the permanent positions come up. This is a typical UBC hiring practice and is discriminatory.

As Razack (2002) reminds us the more prestigious and higher paying jobs in post-secondary institutions remain white, whereas the lower levels remain racialized. Economic discrimination occurs through discriminatory practices that limit access and employment of racialized people into desirable positions, including positions of leadership. Because of these discriminatory practices, racialized candidates who are eminently qualified lose employment opportunities and advances in employment (hooks, 2003). Such people, even with educational qualifications who should be positioned within the "meritocratic" circuit and gain returns from their education, experience disadvantages and discrimination. Another non-academic staff member, even though very well qualified, experienced barriers to being placed in a leadership position because her white colleagues claimed that she made them feel uncomfortable:

In the workplace, I'm not seen to "fit in." My presence seems to cause discomfort and mistrust. People have said, "She makes me feel uncomfortable." I'm not perceived to be suitable for leadership positions where I would be giving orders,

or [where] I would have authority over a white person. This is all part of the underground discourse, which translates itself into actuality. You get mysteriously passed over for leadership positions in favour of a white person who is less qualified and less competent. The galling thing is that you are expected to train and prop that person up.

### **Lack of Commitment to Institutionalizing Diversity**

Many of the faculty and non-academic staff interviewed in this study facilitate diversity and social justice training across the campus, including activities that involve internationalizing the campus. They stated that there is much resistance to social justice training and education by senior management at UBC. A non-academic staff member shared an experience regarding a conversation she had with her director in the development of a diversity workshop for students. Her director wanted to focus the content of the workshop on understanding cultural differences and celebrating diversity, and not on social justice. She relayed:

I was told that this approach [social justice] was a dangerous approach, and that I better be careful, that it was “immoral.” Which horrified me! I was shocked.

Such attitudes from people with power, in shaming marginalized individuals, contribute to continued experiences of oppression. Shaming perpetuates dominant values and morals in the workplace and sends messages of how work should be carried out. hooks (2003) states that systematic shaming colonizes the mind and the imaginations of racialized peoples. Those who shame crush the spirit of people who strive for social change; they practice a form of emotional violence. Such management practices are hurtful, devaluing, and degrading and maintain the subordination of “others.”

Often programs and events that are life-sustaining to marginalized people, such as Black History month, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Women’s History month, Pride Week, etc., are tokenized as one-off [one-time] events, and therefore not institutionalized. These “othered” histories and knowledges are not integrated into the everyday teaching and learning environment. Yet, these very spaces were viewed as life-affirming to students, non-academic

administrative staff, and faculty at UBC, many of whom help coordinate these events on a voluntary basis.

Unfortunately, many of these events take on a multicultural or celebratory approach to promoting diversity. These short, intermittent events are seen as stop-gap measures in education, and such programs do little to challenge systemic inequities. An undergraduate student talked of how degrading and disrespectful “diversity as celebration” was to her:

Let’s enjoy each other’s food, and lets go to the Chinese New Year Festival and then to the Caribbean Festival in July and then go to the Powell Street Festival for Japanese culture and things like that where it’s surface, very tokenizing and quite frankly, belittling. I’m more than that. I’m more than my food and great costumes and dances.

Ahmed and Swan (2006) suggest that in showcasing diversity and holding celebratory events accompanied by happy colourful faces, systemic inequities faced by people of colour remain hidden. In addition, by being the caretakers of diversity, people of colour are repositioned as “outsiders within” as institutions are discharged from doing this work. James (2010) suggests that diversity represents nothing more than a public relations enterprise that yields support and financial benefits for publicly funded institutions to justify their continued claim to government funding and in raising tuition fees, particularly for international students. Mirza (2006) adds that an “inclusion” framework is also a desirable feature in higher education as “good for business.” She argues that diversity statements act as a mechanism for reproducing institutional hegemony and operate in ways that keep the project of diversity stuck and unfinished, as if “saying is doing,” (p. 104). Diversity and social justice mission statements and policies in higher education have little to do with transforming the academy and have fundamentally failed to change the culture of whiteness within academia (Henry & Tator, 2010).

The counter-stories that the women shared regarding their UBC experiences painted a picture of a political, economic, cultural, and educational context which operated in ways that usually negated, minimized, or denied their daily experiences. Such experiences made it difficult for them to establish themselves as legitimate, visible, equal,

valued, and contributing participants of the institution. The women interviewed worried about the development of university-community partnerships for service-learning engagement with all marginalized communities, but in particular with communities of colour. They suggested that such partnerships must be developed from a community development approach, where those most impacted by marginalization and oppression are centrally involved in partnership development. In addition, they suggested that the academy engage in a re-visioning process requiring the transformation of hegemonic structures and practices. Otherwise, they stated, service-learning engagement would likely perpetuate social inequities and injustices.

### **Institutional Transformation**

From a critical race feminist perspective, the following key elements for institutional transformation were recommended for UBC from the women interviewed for this study. Such transformation would support and enhance service-learning engagement with communities of colour. These key elements included leadership in establishing the vision and mission; ensuring faculty representation and employment equity for non-academic staff; curriculum and pedagogical transformation; access and equity for racialized students; anti-oppression education and training; and aligning systems and practices for authentic inclusion.

### **Leadership**

Leadership was viewed as essential in establishing the vision, direction, and goals for institutional transformation to address and remedy systemic inequities. The women interviewed suggested that even though commitment from the top was necessary, it was not the only condition for institutional change. Change, they felt, required the participation of many leaders throughout the institution who “walk the talk,” and who understood that such transformation required long-term commitment. In addition, the women suggested that an advisory committee be established at the presidential level to help guide the project for transformation. They suggested that this advisory committee be representative of the communities the institution partners with. This would then serve to guide service-learning engagement that advances community development goals.

Some of the literature suggests that university-community partnerships should establish advisory boards for service-learning programming.

These advisory groups should be comprised of students, non-academic staff, faculty and non-university community members for the purpose of monitoring partnerships and guarding against inappropriate dependency, power differences in decision-making, and exploitation (Bingle et al., 2009; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). In addition, Lin et al. (2009) suggest that leadership must ensure that their infrastructure meets the needs of all students, non-academic staff and faculty in devoting resources to addressing issues of diversity, ensuring that the necessary resources are made available for systemic change. A non-academic staff member suggested that direction from leadership would pave the way forward at UBC. She stated:

...that message should come from the top down. The president of our institution should say that it's [institutional transformation] important, and that it's mandatory, and that it's to be done, because it's only when the message comes [from] top-down that it gets heard and respected, and everybody comes on board.

### **Ensuring Faculty Representation and Employment Equity for Non-Academic Staff**

All the women interviewed spoke about the few numbers of racialized faculty employed at UBC and the poor retention and lack of promotion of racialized non-academic staff into management and senior management positions. According to James (2010), the homogeneity of faculty members, and the lack of rights and entitlement to equitable treatment and equality of opportunities for racialized non-academic staff are of great concern in many institutions of higher education in Canada. The denial of access to privileges and opportunities otherwise available to white people is characteristic of racial discrimination.

Some of the women reiterated that there was no method at UBC for tracking the hiring and retention of racialized non-academic staff. The lack of records on where racialized people are employed within the institution conceals their economic marginalization and supports the denial of economic injustices. The women interviewed stated that such findings must be reported annually and an action plan implemented to remedy this.

Ensuring faculty representation and employment equity for racialized non-academic staff was seen as a means to equity, and a much needed measure for creating credible partnerships with marginalized communities. In addition, having such



representation as part of service-learning engagement and programming might provide valuable learning “insider” perspectives on the histories and lived experiences of these communities (Sleeter, 2000). It is suggested that these perspectives assist in developing capacity for engaging in meaningful collaborations with communities (Ogden, 2001). A non-university community member spoke about the importance of community representation on the ranks of faculty and management at UBC. She said:

I think if you want to operate in a manner that is going to engage the community at some level, you need to be reflecting the community within the structure and community at the university.

The women interviewed noted that faculty and non-academic staff involved in service-learning development at UBC were primarily white. They spoke of the importance of diverse representation, students, non-academic staff and faculty in developing service-learning partnerships with marginalized communities. More importantly, they suggested that people involved with the development of service-learning have a critical understanding of the histories of social oppression, and how these inform the reality of unequal social relations. This would only take place once the institution committed to a vision for transformation; otherwise service-learning partnerships would likely replicate social inequities.

### **Curriculum and Pedagogical Transformation**

All the women interviewed stated that curriculum across the academy required de-colonization, by which they meant integrating alternate and ‘othered’ perspectives into the curricula. Not engaging in curriculum transformation, and maintaining Eurocentric worldviews, amounts to intellectual racism (Bannerji, 2000).

The students also spoke of the need for instructor training on dealing with conflicting worldviews in the classroom, yet such training at universities is not mandatory, and faculty who desire such training do so for their own professional development. They suggested that faculty teaching service-learning courses should be required to take some form of anti-oppression training to provide them with the skills to develop inclusive classroom strategies utilizing different sites of knowledge that draw all students, including students of colour, into conversations. Some service-learning literature does

speak to the need for curriculum to be structured around critiquing the structures of oppression and engaging in educational strategies for social transformation (O’Grady, 2000), but little is said about faculty education and training.

A faculty member spoke to these issues:

I’m afraid that even after thirty years of discussions on multiculturalism, we still find many courses where the syllabus is as if these discussions had never really taken place. Where there are no inter-textual conversations or whatever, so that we still read the one Euro-text. In my way of thinking at this point, we should be reading many texts simultaneously so that we get a healthy talk and response, or writing and response....

A non-university community member stated that she often encountered UBC students with little or no understanding of the history of colonialism or social oppression in Canadian society. For example, some students she encountered had never heard of the residential school system, others wondered whether sexism or racism still existed, and some did not know what heterosexism meant. She spoke of the enormous responsibility placed on the shoulders of non-university community members to decolonize the minds of students sent to them through university-community placements. Another non-university community member spoke of a need to broaden the curriculum by integrating alternate worldviews that speak back and challenge dominant ideologies of Eurocentrism. She suggested that in preparing for service-learning engagement, curriculum must address political, economic and social injustices:

In preparation to partner with communities of colour, the academic environment should provide a forum that would enable faculty and students to examine, analyze, and address their own issues around oppression. The curriculum content would be diverse enough to include non-Eurocentric, feminist, and anti-oppression pedagogy and analyses.

### **Access and Equity for Racialized Students**

All the women felt that the university had a role in promoting access and equity for all students desiring a higher education. They were concerned, however, about escalating tuition costs and the

high level of student indebtedness. Many of the women interviewed felt that these posed a huge deterrent for many students, mostly for those from poor socio-economic backgrounds, primarily gendered and racialized.

The women worried about which students would be afforded an education and which would be left out. They pointed out that, once in the system, racialized students also tended to have more difficulty than white students in securing scholarships, and even graduate assistantships. They felt that lack of institutional support in terms of the provision and allocation of specific scholarships and graduate assistantships put students of colour at a further disadvantage.

According to the students, racialized students often find themselves working at multiple jobs, usually in low paying positions, in order to financially support their education and every-day living. These multiple jobs are necessitated because of economic inequities, which, in turn, negatively impact their academic performance. The students interviewed stated that many instructors are inflexible with assignment extensions related to economic difficulties, thereby forcing them to withdraw from courses and putting their academic programs in jeopardy. An undergraduate student shared just this experience:

[Professors] not understanding that as a woman of colour, there are pressures that I have. Like whether that's economic – women of colour aren't always in the best economic positions. So for me that meant that I was on student loans, that I had to work 30 hours a week [during] my first 2 years at UBC, while being a full time student....

Having to work multiple jobs, racialized students are sometimes unable to take advantage of career development opportunities, such as presenting at conferences or attending career fairs. It has been well documented that without institutional support, students of colour face a constant struggle for survival (Thomas-Long, 2003). Lin et al. (2009) and Stoecker and Tryon (2009) also point out that in Canada it is primarily white students who are involved in service-learning placements. Could it be that students of colour are otherwise preoccupied with everyday social, political, and economic realities that leave them little or no opportunity to get involved?

Again, women interviewed for this study raised

questions and concerns around the lack of demographic information about the student population at UBC, particularly the racial demographics of students. These key questions were posed: Who are the students at UBC? What are their needs with regards to education and services? Why are so few students of colour involved in service-learning programming? Participants also noted that there was no data regarding the retention or attrition of students. There was, simultaneously, a high level of suspicion that the acquisition of these demographics would reveal higher rates of attrition for racialized students. The need for this demographic information was seen as important in determining where the institution might be failing these students. As a non-academic staff member suggested:

First, the institution would have to know who their students are. Exactly what their needs are, where they're coming from, and I don't think we're there yet. My understanding is the university doesn't even track equity groups, the visible minority groups.

### **Anti-Oppression Education and Training**

The language of diversity is prominent in universities like UBC, both in administrative and pedagogical spheres (Henry & Tator, 2010). This discourse on diversity claims neutrality and a level playing field. Bannerji (2000) suggests that diversity sensitization or training has displaced equity-related programs that specifically address sexist, classist, and racist social power relations. The women interviewed expressed concern about the status quo, and suggested that education and training needed to be founded on anti-oppression principles in addressing the social organization of unequal power relations. Cultural diversity training does occur, but takes the "cultural differences" approach, where difference is thought to reside in the individual rather than the system. This does little in promoting systemic change as it does not examine how the treatment of subordinate group members are socially organized to sustain existing power relations (Razack, 1998), suggesting that racism and oppression are a result of attitude, behaviour and individual ignorance.

The women stated that there was no question that changes in employment composition were important steps to institutional transformation. However, hiring individuals from marginalized groups, they felt, could not occur in a vacuum. They suggested that hiring, retention, and promo-

tion of people of colour in the academy had to be supported by anti-oppression education in order to foster inclusive working, living, and learning environments.

In addition, the women also suggested that UBC must become knowledgeable about the communities it wished to partner with, particularly the histories of those communities. Maurrasse (2001) suggests that students, non-academic staff, and faculty are not automatically knowledgeable or skilled in the dynamics of community engagement. Education and training are also necessary for university members to become familiar with their community partners and ethical practices around community development. Without these knowledges, the institution would be unlikely to develop meaningful relationships. A community-member shared her view:

I think the institution would need, whether they were students or they were the instructors themselves or administrators, they would need a lot of learning. There's a lot of stuff that they don't know about communities, communities in general and then about particular communities, communities of colour.

### **Aligning Systems and Practices for Authentic Inclusion**

In order for UBC to create a welcoming and inclusive working, living, and learning environment, the women in this study suggested that the institution needed to ensure inclusion in all its diversity efforts. They argued that this would involve the alignment of all institutional systems, and ongoing assessment and evaluation of these systems, to create authentic inclusion.

It was repeatedly noted in the stories that were told by the women interviewed that systemic discrimination, in particular racism, is often viewed as the exception and not the rule at UBC. Razack (2002) states that viewing racism as the exception is a rejection and denial of these everyday encounters and practices. Under these conditions, power and unequal relationships continue to be perpetuated, particularly in spaces created to promote diversity and "inclusion" where people of colour are invited to participate, but tokenized in not being heard, valued, or respected. Authentic inclusion values "othered" voices and engages their perspectives into decision making.

According to the women interviewed, aligning systems and practices for authentic inclusion

would require an integrated systems approach, along with an ongoing process for assessment and evaluation: How well are we doing? What needs to change in order to improve? How do we continue evolving? Assessment and evaluation would require the experiences of those marginalized to inform the evolving transformative process. From this, dominant ideologies, ethics, and practices would start to shift. Such a transformative endeavour requires organizations to become learning organizations which constantly evaluates and adjusts operations in line with goals and changing contexts. Institutional transformation, as systems shift, must occur all the way to the core of institutional culture (Kofman & Senge, 1995). Again, the women interviewed spoke about the necessity of having leadership establish policy and practices regarding institutional transformation for inclusion and educational transformation.

### **A Critical Race Feminist Vision for Service-Learning Engagement**

From a critical race feminist perspective, the project of service-learning engagement must be led by communities affected by systemic marginalization in their desire for societal transformation. It is imperative, therefore, that educational institutions recognize the ideologies and practices of domination that structure how we relate to one another daily in maintaining subordination of others, and commit to institutional transformation. Institutions, therefore, need to invest in understanding the histories, social relations, and conditions that structure groups unequally, as much of the work that underpins service-learning engagement involves remedying and alleviating multiple sites of oppression.

A non-academic staff member suggested that service-learning engagement with communities of colour would likely be unsuccessful if the institution neglects to recognize and remedy the many forms of social injustices embedded within its structures. She commented:

Looking at oneself and seeing marginalization within academia, right? I mean, how can it understand outside, when you know, there's no movement at all for racialized people within academia.

A non-university community member added to this in suggesting that successful collaborations with any marginalized community must involve institutional accountability through transforma-

tion from within:

An institutional environment that would make education accessible to all, including marginalized groups; model and promote race, class, and gender equity; encourage and sustain diversity; create and sustain political, social, and cultural awareness and sensitivity; maintain the right of freedom of association, speech, and expression; and provide a safe, comfortable, and respectful learning space.

Razack (1998) suggests that in order for any sort of trust to be established between educational institutions and marginalized communities, institutions would be required to be accountable, “a process that begins with recognition that we are each implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another. That is, we come to know and perform ourselves in ways that reproduce social hierarchies” (p. 10). Once we are able to recognize this, we can become accountable to communities we desire engagement with. Maurrasse (2001) adds, if social responsibility to communities is not seen as essential, communities will remain marginalized and will likely not embrace such engagement.

Mohanty (1997) suggests, therefore, that any collaboration across social hierarchies must involve a critique of hegemony. The long-term preparedness of higher education to develop lasting service-learning partnerships with marginalized communities is dependent upon its ability to change internally (Maurrasse, 2001). Monture-Angus (2001) and Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) suggest that structural and systemic change is the only way in which meaningful and substantive long-term change can be secured in any type of community development engagement. Critical race theory offers an emancipatory pedagogy in understanding the lived experiences of people of colour with oppression and systemic exclusion. With such an understanding begins the work of reorganizing institutions for service-learning engagement that would enable colleges and universities to create outstanding partnerships to address and solve local, national, and global injustices.

Practices and policies of oppression, discrimination, and disregard continue to plague institutions of higher education in Canada (James, 2010; Henry & Tator, 2010). This research utilizing critical race feminism was an attempt to address systemic inequities experienced by women of colour

in and with the academy, and in doing so adds to the gap in the discourse on university-community partnerships for service-learning engagement. Educational institutions must recognize the reality of systemic injustices and oppression in society, and within education itself. Doing so would necessitate transformative systems change in order to support service-learning engagement in redressing societal injustices.

A critical race theory approach studies the voices and experiences of people of colour in understanding how structures, laws, policies, and practices discriminate and are set up to exclude. This study utilizing critical race feminism interviewed 14 women of colour and their counterstories explored their experiences with regard to multiples forms of social oppression at and with UBC. Given the limited sample size, this study was exploratory in nature; however, the counterstories of the women of colour interviewed relay a political, social, and economic affiliation with the stories of racialized students, non-academic staff, and faculty in the academy as outlined in the supporting literature. There is limited application of critical race theory and what it may offer in understanding race, racism, and the arrangement of power relationships in education and service-learning engagement. Other studies utilizing this approach may add further depth and breadth to this body of knowledge.

### Summary

This article has illuminated the ways in which the political, social, and economic contexts of The University of British Columbia operates in ways that usually result in negative experiences for women of colour. Through a critical race feminist methodology and analysis, this study has put forward transformative solutions to racial, sexual, and class subordination, which, if left unaddressed, could result in the development of harmful service-learning partnerships and engagement with communities of colour. A transformative vision for service-learning engagement from a critical race feminist perspective was developed from this research, calling for institutional accountability and transformation of hegemonic structures and practices from within before any genuine, respectful, and authentic relationships with communities of colour can be developed. Such endeavours would only serve to support and grow service-learning engagement in redressing systemic injustices that plague our communities and nation.

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